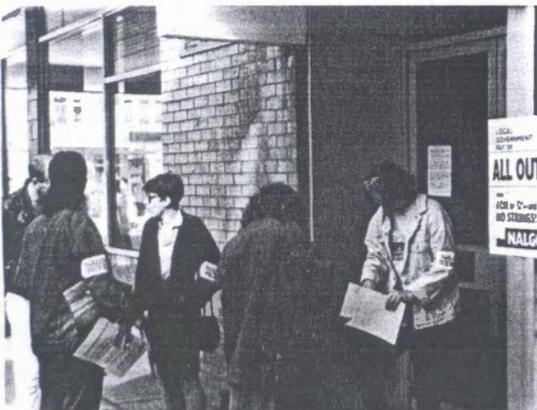




## BRITAIN ON THE DISSECTING TABLE

# HEADS MUST ROLL!



NALGO members picket for more pay. Photo: The Worker.

## Honda buys a Trojan horse

THE ANNOUNCEMENT by Honda that it is taking a 20% stake in the Rover Group is another nail in the coffin of British motor manufacture. With predators currently sizing up Jaguar, it will only be a matter of time before this country ceases to have an independent volume manufacturer of motor vehicles. Even most of the exclusive marques of sports cars have now been taken over by the likes of Ford. Will Reliant Robins soon be the only British motor car on the road?

### Short term jobs

The latest Honda/Rover deal is supposed to herald a short term increase in jobs, but at what price? Collaborative projects will inevitably lead to a greater outside input at the expense of engineering and design skills here. The rationale from the Japanese side is simply an easy route into Europe in 1992.

In Denmark and Ireland, which have no local motor industry, the Japanese have already achieved import penetration of 30% and 40% respectively. Nissan intends to produce 200,000 cars here by 1992, Toyota's new plant in Derby has a planned output of 100,000; while Honda has similar plans for its own plant which it is building at Swindon in Wiltshire.

### Horrendous losses

Analysts are predicting that Renault, which has only just returned to profitability after years of horrendous losses, and Fiat, which is suffering from a lack of capacity to meet demand, could be early victims of this onslaught once their relatively protected home markets are opened up to the chill wind of competition. Fiat, in particular, is very

weak in markets outside Europe, compared with international combines like Ford and General Motors.

While the Japanese lack dealer networks to make the most of their advantages in productivity and quality, experience of other markets shows that this will not hold them back for long. If Europe's leading manufacturer, Fiat, with 60% of its home market could be threatened what are the prospects for the survival of Rover with a static 15% share of the British market and tiny exports?

### More collaboration

The answer is more collaboration, which will in effect be a creeping takeover. British Aerospace, which bought the group from the Government is not averse to asset stripping. The closure or rationalisation of plants like Cowley in Oxford will release valuable land for redevelopment, just as the Royal Ordnance factories it has earmarked for closure.

Similarly, a progressive sale of chunks of the company to Honda, once the Government's time limit on foreign takeover has expired, will simply provide more cash for acquisitions elsewhere. The company is currently in the top ten companies for cash assets, with around £800 million sitting in the bank. It has already shown itself willing to profit from sales of its shares in joint ventures with Dutch manufacturer DAF. What makes Rover so different?

## Editorial

### BREAKING UP BRITAIN plc

THE RECENT takeover bid which threatens to break up tobacco to papermaking combine BAT, is only the latest in a series of similar deals by corporate raiders and financiers that are changing the face of British industry. Nowadays it seems that no company, no matter how large, is safe from the attentions of these dubious gentlemen.

Try to borrow money from the bank to start a business, and you get a stony response. Borrow £13 billion, and they are only too happy to oblige. But BAT is no walkover. It has over £1.5 billion of current cash assets, and annual profits of £1641 million. The attractiveness to predators like Goldsmith and Kerry Packer lies in the spread of its assets which form convenient blocks to be cut up and sold off to finance the deal.

### MODUS OPERANDI

This is the raider's classic modus operandi. One only has to look at Hanson's recent £3.5 billion takeover of the mining combine Minorco to see this in action. Hanson will sell off the mining interests that make up the bulk of the group; ironically this will probably be to Consolidated Goldfields, which failed in its bid for Minorco.

The company will keep the profitable quarrying company ARC, which dovetails with other Hanson holdings and has considerable potential. Overall, the deal will be paid for by these asset sales, so that Hanson will end up with a profit and a useful addition to his company portfolio for his trouble.

Other large companies are also being lined up for the same treatment. Names like Reckitt and Coleman, The Rank Organisation, RHM the food combine and Cadburys are all potential targets, while the electronics and defence contractor Plessey is still trying to fight off GEC's unwelcome embrace.

Of course the Government just sits back and allows 'market forces' to take their course. So company after company is falling into the hands of foreign capitalists. Suchards, the Swiss company is said to be stalking Cadburys after its bid for Rowntree failed last year.

### THE HOME FRONT

While British capitalists ignore the home front and seem intent on buying up the United States, the City acquiesces. But this blinkered view has dangerous implications.

It might help boost invisible earnings to offset the massive trade deficit in the short term, but what happens when these companies fall victim to takeover themselves? Will the profits continue to flow here, or will they flow in turn to Tokyo or Zurich? Very soon we could find ourselves with no British industry, and no invisible earnings. Even the City itself is increasingly being snapped up by the Japanese.

These macho deals, where each financier or junk bond bandit vies to create the latest, biggest mega deal of all time benefits no one. Companies will be forced to spend huge amounts of time and effort in protecting themselves from unwelcome advances instead of getting on with the business of creating things people need and want. The economy suffers from soaring imports, and of course way down the line it is always the working class that has to pick up the tab for all this wheeling and dealing anyway.

## Downturn causes job cuts at mining engineers

ANDERSON Strathclyde has announced job cuts of 450 mainly skilled workers over the next 18 months. The cuts pay little heed to the so called North-South divide, hitting workers in Motherwell, East Kilbride and Buckinghamshire.

The company makes cutting tools and material handling equipment for the mining industry. Jobs will go mainly in East Kilbride, while the Hoy division in Buckinghamshire will be sold with two hundred workers there worried about the future. Another 90 jobs are to go

at the company's main Motherwell manufacturing site.

The company blamed the losses on the need for "radical restructuring to maintain a market edge", but the majority of workers can translate the jargon into more realistic terms. The privatisation threat to British Coal (nee National Coal Board) has led to a lack of investment in new plant. Many of the items produced in the mining materials handling and extraction markets are complex and expensive, with many single pieces of plant involving skilled

## Nalگو strike success boosts confidence in pay claim

ANY illusions that the employers had that their refusal to negotiate would demoralise NALGO members has been refuted by solid action.

Branches throughout the country maintained the strike and while in some places a few returned to work, the number of picket volunteers and branch organisation has strengthened.

### Members understood

Members have also understood that the three day action on 18, 19 and 20 July must be maintained before a new longer term strategy is developed to bring back the employers to negotiations.

Among the employers divisions are growing, with fifty already having written to their side, insisting on an improved offer and the dropping of the 'strings'. Many have offered separate deals to branches which have been rejected to keep national unity.

### Need to change

Most significantly, the need to change from indefinite strike action to a long term sustained strategy of single day strikes, work to rule and selected strikes is now gaining ground.

The campaign committee will recommend such a strategy to the national local government committee which will receive motions along these lines from districts at its meeting on 21 July '89. Solid action and a sustainable strategy for the future must be achieved next week.

## NALGO LATEST

The National Local Government Committee will meet on Friday July 20 to discuss further action.

They will be recommended by the Campaign Sub Committee to take the following action

1. Ballot 5% of members in branches for selected indefinite action
2. Branches to step up withdrawals of non contractual goodwill
3. Members to be balloted for four days of strikes in any one month.

input from numerous workers.

The other traditional markets for British mining engineering expertise are the developing countries, including India and China, but in many cases British firms are rendered uncompetitive by Thatcher's monetary and industrial policies. These leave British firms struggling

The resurgence of fight among many sections of British workers should not blind anyone to the continued destruct destruction of Britain's industrial base, which, if anything, seems to be speeding up again.

In this issue

RAIL STRIKE

SEE PAGE 4

# The French Revolution : A turning point in Time

THE FRENCH Revolution is one of the great events of world history. Two hundred years ago this week the Bastille was stormed by the people of Paris to prevent the King using force against their representatives in the Third Estate who had decreed the end of royal absolutism.

Rioting on the night of 13 July, 1789, accompanied the search by Parisians for arms. From dawn on July 14 ironworkers made pikes. The crowd attacked the Invalides, took 32,000 firearms and marched on to the Bastille which surrendered when five cannon were drawn up for use against the notorious prison. It was a symbolic act.

The provinces heard the news between 16-19 July and the 'municipal revolution' followed the lead of Paris. "There is no longer a King, a parlement, an army or a police force", remarked one contemporary. Those aristocrats fearful of the consequences fled France within days.

Three orders or estates marked out the population. The First Estate was the clergy, the Second the nobility, while the Third was everyone else. Those who prayed, those who fought, and the Third Estate that worked to keep them. Contempt for manual work, with a King on top.

In a famous pamphlet of 1789, Sieyès had asked, "What is the Third Estate? Everything. What has it been up until now? Nothing. What does it ask? To become something".

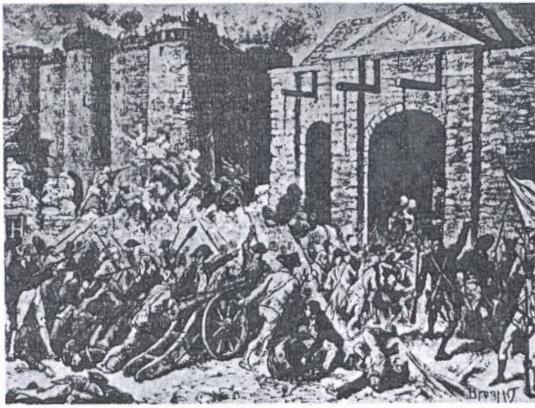
## Buckled

Historian Albert Soboul remarks, "The legal structure of society bore no relation to the social and economic realities". France buckled under the strain of this 'Ancien Regime' as revolution moved closer.

A country of peasants and artisans, France had 25 million people in 1789, when the average life expectancy was 29 years. Growing overseas trade and big industrial concerns were transforming a traditional economy based on agriculture. The economic power of the nobility was in decline. The social position of the aristocracy was now under threat. They would not give up their power without a very determined fight: counter-revolution.

The bourgeois, on the other hand, held back by feudalism, were inspired by the Age of Reason. It had given philosophical expression to their class frustrations. The Revolution's basic aim, said Alexis de Tocqueville in 1856, "was to sweep away the last vestiges of the middle ages". The bourgeoisie led the Third Estate into revolution, in the bourgeois interest.

The peasants carried on their backs the 350,000 nobles, the 1 1/2% of the population that owned one-fifth of all the land. This was not a homogenous class. The 4000 aristocrats of the court nobility lived in luxury at Versailles as part of



## Storming the Bastille, July 14 1789

the King's entourage. Provincial nobility lived among the peasants, on feudal dues set centuries before, in run-down manor houses. Hated by peasants, despised by the court aristocrats, and resentful of thriving middle classes in the towns.

The clergy numbered 120,000 and owned 10% of the land, their economic strength resting on the tithes levied on peasants and on landed property. They took a considerable proportion of the harvest and resold it. The lower clergy, however, was poorer than those higher up. In 1789, all the 139 bishops were of noble birth. There were very deep divisions.

The Third Estate numbered 24 million in 1789. All the popular classes were within; there were the artisans and traders of the lower and middle bourgeoisie as well. The liberal professions were in the Third also, and the financiers and big bourgeoisie.

The middle classes owned between 12% and 45% of land, according to region, especially near the towns. When property rights were later challenged by the Revolution this section of the Third Estate would fight its former allies.

The popular classes in the towns knew hardship. Half their income went on bread, but general inflation by 1789 meant that 88% of their income on bread slashed what they had left to spend on anything else. Thus urban unemployment rose dramatically on the eve of the Revolution. When they worked, 16 hours a day was not unusual. They hated aristocrats whose prices were beyond them.

Says the historian Soboul, "...the aristocracy was cutting itself off from the nation by its uselessness, its pretensions, and its stubborn refusal to consider the national good".

## Aristocrats

The peasants numbered 20 million. Although they owned 35% of the land - often poor quality and in strips - a landless peasantry formed a rural proletariat dependent solely on wages. And in 1789 there were still 1 million serfs. Peasants were important by sheer weight of numbers in the

war on the aristocrats.

The aristocrats were attached to their feudal privileges which burdened the popular classes. The nobles refused compromise when reform was pressed. Hence their downfall when with the King they plotted counter revolution and caused bourgeoisie in alliance with urban and rural populations to drive them out.

The destitution and misery of the countryside turned many against the landowners in July 1789.

The 'Great Fear' spread as the rural poor heard the many rumours of their aristocratic enemies who

castle on October 1. On 4 October, outraged Paris gathered in the streets.

Having demanded bread in Paris, 6000-7000 women left for Versailles on October 5. They were ahead of 20,000 men of the National Guard who set off to intervene. The effect of this direct action was that the King signed the decrees. The crowd accompanied him in a huge procession to Paris where, with the Queen and the Dauphin, he was put into the Tuileries where his 'loyal subjects' might honour his presence in their midst. The royalists conceded defeat, and some joined the second wave of emigration.

## Authority

These people, when the term 'people' was held in contempt by aristocrats, did not behave as loyal subjects any more it seemed but rather as citizens.

The Assembly was being petitioned regularly by those who wanted change. The public present in the galleries heard debates every morning and evenings after 6 o'clock.

Peasants had stopped paying taxes, and no authority could compel them. The Assembly put pressure on King and Catholic Church. The Decree of September 29 called for all of the silverware that was not necessary 'to maintain the decorum of religious

distinction, and to be armed for the defence of the nation is the right of every citizen. Does this mean that those who are poor are to be treated as foreigners or as slaves?"

Citizens feared France was to be invaded, assisted by emigres and rebellious nobles within. Nobles led attempts at insurrection.

## Alarm

Anti-clericalism spread through popular societies organising the citizens, notably among the Jacobins. They denounced Catholicism. Printers, blacksmiths and carpenters in Paris tried for guaranteed minimum pay. In spring 1791 there were agrarian disturbances. The 'new feudalism' of the merchants and businessmen was denounced by citizens.

Louis XVI looked to his fellow monarchs in Europe to invade. They were very alarmed at the spread of revolutionary ideas. It was Edmund Burke who from England called for a counter-revolutionary crusade. Pope Pius VI condemned the principles of the French Revolution.

At midnight on 20 June, 1791, disguised as a manservant, the King fled Paris with his family. But at Varennes on 21-22 June he was recognised, and his intrigue foiled. The return to Paris through reatentful villages was ominous. He had plotted against France.

National fervour reigned among the people. But for the Assembly stocked with bourgeois, all they would recognise was a nation of property owners. The King was one of them. However, Varennes had split the bourgeoisie: middling elements rejected the King while big bourgeois more and more talked like the aristocrats of old.

When war came the much despised people of France were needed to fight it for the bourgeois. They won many concessions as a result. The King, who had wanted war as his only hope, lost not only monarchy but his head.

## Smelling a rat

Robespierre opposed the war, smelling a rat. He saw danger for France so ill-prepared for war. "Start by taking a long look at your internal position here in France; put your own house in order before you try to take liberty to others elsewhere."

The intrigue of months led to Louis XVI himself in April 1792 calling successfully on the Assembly to declare war on Austria. War only came to an end in 1815, rather longer than intended.

Officered by nobles, the army suffered military reverses. Officers had a vested interest in defeat.

But the national crisis stimulated revolutionary feeling. It was known that Queen Marie-Antoinette was keen for Austria's success. The whole country rose on 10 August, 1792, against the monarchy.

Regarded as the second revolution, August 10 was associated with universal suffrage and the arming of passive citizens. Democracy was now present in the politics of the Revolution.

Part Two to follow in next issue of The Worker.

# HISTORIC NOTES

were said to be planning a bloody revenge. There were six outbreaks of panic between July 20 and August 6, affecting most regions, such that peasants armed themselves with pitchforks, scythes and hunting rifles.

## Burning castles

Peasants burned castles and piles of documents that had legally burdened them under the Ancien Regime. In some places they hanged landowners and their families. The feudal order was being overthrown. The peasant committees and the village militias took power. The bourgeois militiamen sent to 'keep order' in several places fought some bloody clashes with bands of armed peasants.

In the National Assembly of bourgeois landowners an alarm was being sounded.

Throughout August they discussed what should be put in place of the old order. On August 26 the Assembly adopted the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, inspired by Enlightenment ideas, which condemned aristocratic society and the abuses of the monarchy.

The King refused to give the royal assent to certain decrees of early August and disagreed with the Declaration of Rights. Louis XVI should have the right of veto argued monarchists in the Assembly but were defeated 849-89.

Louis XVI was expected to counter-attack. The white Bourbon cockade replaced the tricolour trampled at a banquet of his royal bodyguard at Versailles

worship'. The Decree of November 2, decided in the Assembly 568-346, put Church-owned property at the nation's disposal. Crown lands: ditto.



Louis XVI lost his head

From March 1790 these lands were sold off in a huge transfer of property that only the bourgeois had money to buy. There was profit in Revolution. Poorer peasants looked on.

Land confiscation made necessary reorganisation of the Catholic Church in France. In February 1790 Monks could leave cloisters or form communities under state sponsorship. Then on April 13 the Assembly refused to recognise that Catholicism was the State religion. On April 20 the Church was deprived of the right to administer lands. The Civil Constitution of the Clergy was adopted by the Assembly on 12 July.

Royalist Catholics were active plotters of the counter-revolution through 1790, into 1791 and beyond.

Defenders of Revolution in hundreds of thousands rallied in Paris on July 14 but the National Guard on parade was a bourgeois militia. In April 1791

Robespierre, who in 1789 had demanded universal suffrage without success, argued, "To be armed for self-defence is the right of everyone without

# Channel Tunnel: time is money, so safety takes a back seat

THE CHANNEL tunnel, due to open in exactly four years, is the world's largest underwater tunnelling project. It is a testament to the engineering and construction skills possible in this age.

Yet like every other enterprise it contains capitalism's fatal hallmark, and under Thatcher this appetite for private profit has been turned into an orgy.

The £6 billion cost of the channel has been raised entirely by private investment. But in order to be a commercial success, the tunnel must have a clear advantage over competition from ferries and hovercraft. Time is 'serious money'. As a result, the proposal is for passengers to remain with their vehicles on the shuttle trains making the journey, with each train carrying up to 250 cars and 1000 people. In this way the private operators, Eurotunnel, aim to load 250 cars in 13 minutes, and unload in 10.

The proposal is against the advice of many fire experts, because of the increased risks involved. It is also in direct contradiction to the Department of Transport's existing regulations for car ferries, which state: "The presence of large numbers of passengers on a vehicle deck would make it unlikely that all could escape from

this area without loss of life in the event of a fire."

In fact, Eurotunnel's own secret tests showed that a serious fire developing in a five car compartment would be unsurvivable after 130 seconds, and that one in four passengers would fail to evacuate in time. Those tests did not include very young children, babies, or disabled people. Furthermore: "For coaches only, the evacuation times are typically longer than the fire development time...It would not be possible for everyone to escape...Only 50% of single deck coach and 35% of double deck coach passengers will escape."

## Firing line

To help deal with this slight problem, Eurotunnel is aiming to install automatic fire extinction or suppression systems using the gas Halon 1301 (which incidentally destroys ozone). However, there are serious problems here too, for Halon 1301 is not designed to be used with people present. It is effective at 6% concentration in air, but above 7% it causes light-headedness, and from 12-15% causes asphyxiation. Because the size of vehicles on the shuttle trains will vary so much, the dangers of the gas disorientating or harming passengers trying to escape,

or failing to suppress a fire, are very real ones.

Finally, in the event of the train having to stop in the tunnel because of a fire, passengers will have to evacuate into a central service tunnel. The main tunnel's ventilation system will be capable of blowing smoke either way, but because cars and people will be spread throughout the length of the train, some people will be bound to suffer exposure to smokelogg and heat when trying to escape.

Fire experts also believe that the conditions created by a serious fire in the tunnel would be far worse than anticipated, as illustrated by King's Cross.

Eurotunnel insists that no final decisions have yet been made on the safety features that will eventually be incorporated into operating procedures, and that in any case they will all have to be ratified by the Anglo-French safety authority set up at the launch of the project. This is composed of "public officials", and the British section is based at the Department of Transport. But it hardly inspires one with confidence. All of its meetings are confidential, and until recently it refused even to disclose its membership. It has not put out one piece of public information in its

three years of existence, though it now intends to publish an annual report. On June 29 it began to decide on some of the key issues concerning train construction.

However, the chairman of the authority says that the decisions will not be open to public debate because of the very tight project timetable. The timetable has been set by Eurotunnel, to take account of "commercial considerations".

He insists that if this timetable meant that safety was put at risk then it would be delayed. The fact is, however, that well in advance even of the safety authority's present meeting, Eurotunnel had issued specifications to manufacturers tendering for the train construction. The underlying premise that people will travel with vehicles is not to be challenged at all. If it were, it might cause the financial collapse of the whole project.

Meanwhile, the Fire Brigades' Union has publicised warnings several times (once to coincide with the findings of the King's Cross inquiry) that a serious fire in a shuttle train will lead to many deaths. In the aftermath of so many other preventable disasters, just how criminal will it be if the knowledge to avoid a catastrophe in the channel is ignored?

# Education will survive through the confusion

THE MANAGEMENT and status of schools are confusing issues for those who work in them. Undoubtedly they are even more confusing for parents and interested onlookers. Yet not to be lost sight of is the fact that the vast majority of schools are remaining in the state sector dedicated to the survival of the service.

The financial destabilisation of schools, prompted by the Government's 'Local Management of Schools' in which all schools are to see themselves as separate entities with their own budgets to spend as they wish (in competition with all others) is an issue being tackled by the profession.

The general approach shared by both is to ensure as far as possible that Governors, headteachers, and staff do not see themselves as individuals but as parts of a whole.

## Greed

Those who are motivated purely by self interest and greed always assume everyone else is too. Clearly much will be lost and marred in the process of change the schools are undergoing, but not as much as Thatcher, and to a lesser degree Baker (who maintained some degree of detachment) expected.

Around 20 schools will have 'opted out' of the state system by the start of the new school year, far fewer than many feared and fewer still than the 'majority' Thatcher predicted. More may yet do so in the future but an analysis of the 46 which have held ballots (with 15 voting against) shows that most are schools which never really 'opted in' in the first place, often grammar schools viewing themselves as superior.

Opting out can only occur after a ballot of parents (a third of those conducted so far have voted against). Baker was originally prepared to accept the result even when only a minority of parents had voted. In the case of the Government's City Technology Colleges, now funded centrally, since local sponsorship hasn't been forthcoming, ballots are simply an embarrassment.

In a number of London schools, parents and teachers have conducted vigorous campaigns against their governing bodies' complicity in CTC takeover plans. The case of Sylvan High School in Croydon where 97 per cent of parents voted against was reported in issue 23 of The Worker. In Haberdashers' Aske Girls' parents voted 365 to 257 against the plan with the boys' school voting in favour, but in a 60% turn out, not gaining an overall majority of parents in both schools.

Nobbled governors, the shortsighted and stupid, vain heads mistakenly seeking their own interests aside, the rest of the education world is digging in for a long struggle to survive. It will be long in this uncultured and unlettered atmosphere but it will succeed.

# Rough ride for ministry on BAe deal

THE 'MARKET price' of £190 million accepted from British Aerospace for the sale of Royal Ordnance Factories interested the Public Accounts Committee when it questioned the chief civil servant at the Ministry of Defence last Monday. Sir Michael Quinlan got a rough ride.

Through property development it is projected that BAe has made £300 million on two of the ROF sites at Enfield and

Waltham Abbey. In other words the taxpayer, through the privatisation of Royal Ordnance, has been fleeced. But never mind the civil servant; he hid behind ministerial decisions. The minister who should be questioned is George Younger the political chief at MoD who argued for the sale of ROF to the private sector, with the loss of many jobs as it turned out.

# History at stake in War of the Rose

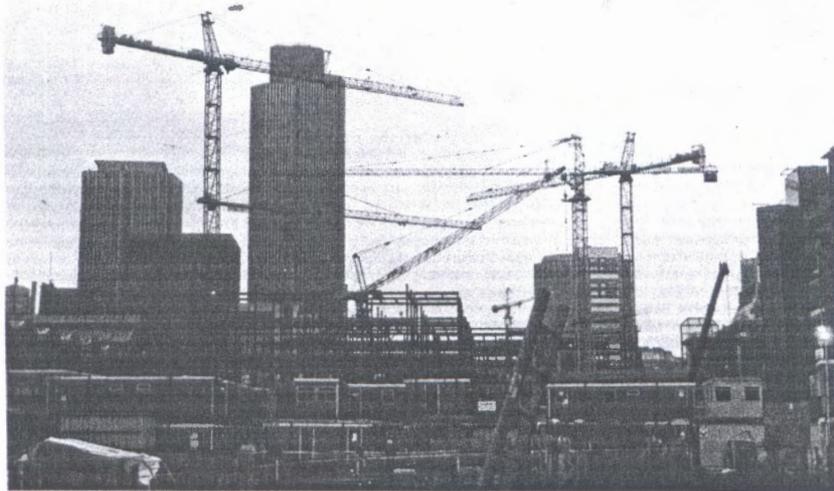
STROLL from Southwark Cathedral along Clink Street on the south embankment of the Thames, past the giant inflatable gorilla inviting passers-by to 'Save the Rose' and you will find the site of the 16th century Rose Theatre; discovered by developers of a ten storey office block (not in short supply in London).

Near to the site of the Globe and one of four Tudor/Jacobean playhouses which pulled the crowds to hear the works of Shakespeare, Marlow and Webster, the Rose can still pull the crowds from Britain and abroad.

## Compensation

Not to be found among the crowds is Nicholas Ridley the Environment Minister. He has refused to schedule the site as an ancient monument claiming that this would render the Government liable to vast sums in compensation. Relying on the advice of the tame 'English Heritage', responsible for historic sites, he has declared himself satisfied with the developers' plan to build their office block over the site.

The campaigners object since part of the site yet undiscovered will be disturbed and maybe destroyed as the stilts' foundations are



Building for profit: as the landscape of London changes, enormous sums of money are changing hands. of the deals are at the taxpayers' expense. Photo The Worker

sunk into the ground. Neither are they happy with the sand covering being applied to protect the stone remains from the heat, preferring a lighter medium such as peat which would hold water.

The sacked Museum of London archaeologists who uncovered the site say the excavations should take six months as opposed to English Heritage who say three weeks. Raising the office block on stilts might seem to many of us a reasonable compromise under Thatcher. Thankfully the protesters do not agree.

# Have you sent your form back yet?

IT SEEMS that many of the poll tax forms sent out at the end of May to addresses in England and Wales have yet to be returned. There are probably very good reasons for this. However, it does mean that in the coming months we shall be hearing a great deal from the junior minister responsible, Mr John Selwyn Gummer, who will be chivving us all along.

It is said that the government may put in £1 billion initially to cushion the blow, but it is the very principle of the poll tax (euphemistically called 'community charge') that causes

offence not just the scale of the tax. Scotland has been imposed upon first and payment is due about now, the cause of seething resentment north of the border.

Tory backwoodsmen who never usually take an interest in the House of Lords turned up en masse, it will be recalled, to push the poll tax through for their own benefit. It means that they no longer pay rates on the stately home but pay the same per head as their much poorer neighbours. Come to think of it, isn't this how landowners got to be so wealthy in the first place?

# Commons committee exposes true cost of property dealing

PROPERTY dealing at the taxpayers' expense has been criticised by the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee. Large sums of money are involved.

The committee of MPs criticises the London Docklands Development Corporation and the Merseyside Development Corporation. These two UDCs, set up by Michael Heseltine, were the precursors of the urban development corporations established by Nicholas Ridley in other major cities since 1986.

In one deal in London Docklands, the consortium developing Canary Wharf was able to pay less than half the market price for its 200-year lease on the land. In another deal, land purchased 18 months before was resold for ten times the original price. Poor management on Merseyside caused the UDC to let the Liverpool Garden Festival site to a firm which went into liquidation owing £2.6 million to the festival.

Why were UDCs ever set up? To 'cut through red tape' and speed up development of

sites 'held up by planning restrictions'; they were the reasons advanced by the free marketeers. Lack of planning has caused London Docklands to be likened by angry local residents to an 'architects' jumble sale'. Local councils have been pushed aside, local democracy being an impediment to decision-makers. They have staggering personal powers.

Only recently, according to the committee report, has there been enough money spent on local jobs and housing, years after the LDDC was set up.

## Rail unions force BR back on pay

THE REJECTION OF British Rail's revised pay offer by the three rail unions is the latest move in a war of nerves between employer, government and unions. The solid response to the one day strikes by NUR members and the recent escalation of the dispute with ASLEF members voting for an overtime ban, has forced the BR Board into a corner.

It has become increasingly clear that the negotiating position adopted by BR is dictated by the Government. Its belligerent and clumsy stance has done little to shift public opinion against the striking rail workers. Most regular users of the transport network see the justice of their claim only too clearly. All down the line, the BR Board's inept handling of the negotiations has been trumped by the rail unions' clarity and steadfastness. Their astute tactic of causing maximum disruption with minimum cost to themselves is clearly paying dividends.

### Beaten by the facts

Whichever way the Thatcherites try to attack the railways they are beaten back by the facts. For instance, the subsidy received by the railways has fallen by half from £1.2 billion in 1982-3 to £660 million in 1987-88, and continues to fall. This represents less than a third of that received by a continental rail system.

In the last five years BR has increased passenger miles by 10% to more than

20 billion, while cutting staff numbers by 20,000 to 134,000. It is moving 90% of the freight carried in 1983 with little more than half the rolling stock.

BR's operating profit, including the Government's grant, will be £500 million for 1988-89 - almost double the figure for the previous financial year. Rail freight, which lost £281 million in 1984-85, made £43 million profit in 1987-88, and is the only rail freight network in Europe to make a profit.

### On target

Similarly, the Intercity Network is on target for a £24 million profit this year, compared with a £100 million loss two years ago. Even Network South East, which has traditionally been a heavily subsidised commuter service is on target for self financing by 1993.

So with this success story, who can seriously challenge the justice of the rail workers' claim for better pay and conditions? Their efforts and dedication in the most difficult of conditions have made this success story possible.

The continued chronic

shortage of drivers, brought about in part by BR's failure to recruit and train new staff over many years, and the question-marks over safety, highlighted by recent accidents and the enforced working practices which led to them have only strengthened the unions' hand.

Their solid collective response to the call for action has forced the Board to confirm the offer of 8.8% recommended by independent tribunal last week. The conditions attached to the offer are clearly only a tactic to try and save face, both for the Board and the Government.

### Pay to the fore

But while the immediate issue of pay is to the fore, the longer term threat of privatisation is only just below the surface. That is why the issue of maintaining national bargaining rights is also a major area of contention. The Government and BR Board clearly see the abolition of these rights as prerequisite for selling off the system division by division.

For the rail unions to emerge from this dispute not only with a pay rise above the rate of inflation, but with bargaining rights intact, would truly be a great victory against the battered reputation of this Government and its friends.

## Dockers dig in for hard battle

NOW YOU see them - then you don't. The disappearing act performed last week by NAPE, the National Association of Port Employers, fooled no one, least of all the dockers now in the second week of what will be, in the words of Ron Todd, "a long and bitter dispute".

Remember the name NAPE for you will be hearing from them again before the struggle concludes. The fact that these employers have abdicated responsibility for the running of the Port transport industry only shows what most knew all along, that it was dock unionism which civilised work practices, and brought logic and organisation (in the form of training and the operation of the Labour scheme).

### Maturity

The unions have given the industry the maturity of a national industry. Contrary to popular opinion, casualisation was only finally eradicated in 1967. Now it is set to make a grand re-entry.

Reports are already with the TGWU that shifts in the Humber/Ouse/Trent area are 12 hours long. This is the price that an unorganised worker will pay across the country unless workers fight now. Wages are low and the crucial training factor so important in a mechanised and technologically advanced industry, is no longer to be provided. Since the strike started, for example, the 15 registered dockers in the ABP Port in Ayr have taken redundancy. But the port is still operating - still the same

machinery, the same cranes, the computerised loading bays for cargo - run by unskilled operators in a very dangerous job.

ABP, the Associated British Ports, owns a range of ports such as Immingham, Swansea, Southampton, Plymouth, Grimsby, Barrow, Cardiff, and many others. It is a growing and profitable company. Following its privatisation in 1983, the company has reported profits of £26 million in 1986 £38 million in 1987, and a 55% increase in profits for the first six months of 1988.

### Holding back

So much for the argument that the Dock Labour Scheme was holding back business. Indeed, Tilbury and Liverpool are two of the most profitable and swiftly growing ports in Europe.

The TGWU is realistic in the way it has conducted the struggle to date. Financially maintaining the strikers will not be a problem. A hardship fund has already been set up, but that is not the issue. The point is for the dockers and those in related industry to strike firm and hard to avoid splits in their ranks, especially between registered and non-registered ports and between the local and national. This is a new front against Thatcher - it must be a steadfast one which in conjunction with the other groups of workers in struggle, will keep Thatcher at bay and bring the supposedly-disbanded employers back to the negotiating table. Dockers want a national agreement on wages, conditions and job security.

## Asset stripping funds BR investment programme

THE CURRENT rail disputes have highlighted the importance of public transport in Britain, and in particular how massive investment is needed in both staff and infrastructure. As anyone who uses London's overcrowded tube and rail network will testify, the network is almost at bursting point.

Over the last five years, the numbers of commuters arriving in central London between 0700 and 1000 has increased by 25% and the roads are saturated. The average speed on London's roads is 11mph, the same

as a century ago.

What investment has taken place on BR and London Underground has been done by 'land sales (asset stripping like 'eating your own leg' as one commentator put it), massive redundancies which have compromised safety, and by paying low wages. BR workers have seen their pay decline in real terms almost every year since Thatcher was elected.

Thatcher's BR management are now preparing for privatisation and the current dispute is a result of that policy. Successful privatisation depends

upon fragmenting the negotiating process as proposed by BR, and a subservient workforce.

Privatisation will mean further asset stripping, and there is no prospect of the massive investment in infrastructure that London in particular needs if the railways are in private hands.

The future of London depends largely on its transport network. The battle now being fought by the rail workers is one which is aimed not just for better pay, but privatisation and the collapse of the industry. It is a fight for the future.

## Unions united in response to tribunal findings

ASLEF joined the BR battle last week as their overtime and rest day working ban cancelled 25% of rush hour trains on Southern Region, with nationwide effects.

ASLEF's action complements that of the NUR who, along with the AEU and EETPU, are striking for one day per week, the next one being this Tuesday.

The white collar union TSSA took the case for more money to BR's own arbitration tribunal, and was awarded an 8.8% increase instead

of the 7% imposed by BR. The tribunal specifically stated that rail workers' productivity had improved dramatically over the past few years and that therefore there should be no strings attached. There is little doubt that the tribunal was generous because of the action by the other unions, who refused to take their case there because they feel that pay should be linked to the issue of negotiating rights.

Nevertheless, negotiations took place between BR and the unions at ACAS around

the tribunal award. BR attached conditions to the award and the unions promptly walked out. Since then BR has been more conciliatory.

During the negotiations, all the unions have been united, including the TSSA which has not taken action, and attempts by BR to split them have failed.

The NUR's fourth strike last Wednesday was solid, and there is growing determination that BR and the Government will be defeated on both issues.

## Oil workers fight for safer working conditions

THOUSANDS of offshore construction workers plan to renew their series of strikes on North Sea oil platforms. The offer from their employers which seemed enough to call of the strikes has turned out to be much worse in practice.

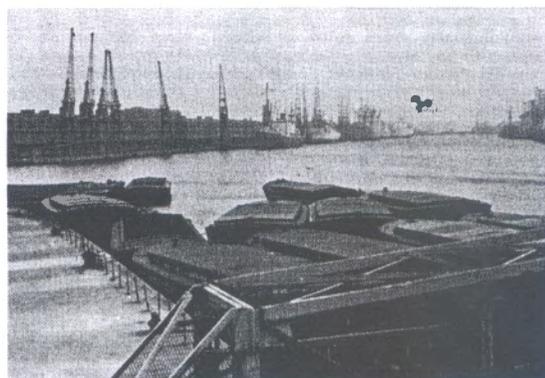
The Oil Industry Liaison Committee (OILC) has put out a call to prepare for further stoppages after talks with the Offshore Contractors Council consisted of union officials listening to a prepared statement from the employers. The men were offered a wage increase of 80p an hour, but no hope of union

recognition or extra safety.

An AEU spokesman said 'We were told we would not be given trade union recognition. They then told us they intended to pay the wages, on which we have been negotiating, into the men's pay packets. Obviously by doing so they hope the men will ignore the claims on trade union recognition and extra safety.'

If that is the employers' hope then the OILC feel they will be disappointed: 'Even if they had offered us £2.00 an hour increase it would have been neither here nor there. They can

only take this stance either thinking the dispute is over and the will of the men has eroded, or that the men's attitude is still there for a fight. They must anticipate a conflict, and I would expect it to be a rough ride the second time around'.



Silent docks in the seventies.

Photo: Pat Mantle.

## Telling it like it really is

SO NICHOLAS Ridley thinks the Government should at last give us the real facts about environmental matters. All this time, he has been getting it right, and we haven't, but the poor chap hasn't been able to get it across to us, don't you know.

This is probably because the Green's massive use of the publicly funded propaganda apparatus has filled our empty minds with rubbish. The Government's puny publicity machine of three people in a South London office just couldn't cope with the deluge of misinformation. So if you see rubbish in the street, or your water is full of worms, or your

food is dangerous, or your rivers and beaches are foul, don't believe your senses, no really, the environment is in very safe hands, Nicholas is and it is in tip top shape.

Because, of course, the Government has been fighting to keep open the institutions researching into food safety and pollution - if they have been closed, presumably it's their own fault.

Of course the Government has always wanted to ban chemicals which destroy the ozone layer, and emissions which produce acid rain: but somebody else has always held them back.

Of course, Thatcher, by selling off water, gas and electricity to unregulated private companies, is assisting the development of public control of, and investment in, the safe uses of energy resources.

And of course whoever told Le Monde last week that 'You don't have the right to a good environment', it couldn't have been Thatcher could it?

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