



NALGO helps to turn the tables on Thatcher

ON AUGUST 22 delegates representing NALGO's half-a-million local government members will vote to accept a pay increase worth 8.8%. Not only was a settlement in line with inflation won for the first time in nearly ten years; but also, and more importantly, the employers were forced to drop all the 'strings' attached to the offer.

From an initial 6% offer, to 6.4% to a "final" offer of 7%, to a revised offer of 3.8%, NALGO's tactics of a mixture of general strike action of one, two and three days by the entire membership followed by indefinite strike action by key groups of workers mostly in finance departments, have paid off.

Victory

There are some who are uncertain of the extent of their victory. Any such doubts will be quickly allayed by the hysterical reaction of the Government: the poll tax, it would seem, was not Thatcher's invention but NALGO's! Their rage is prompted less by the financial aspects of the settlement, but by the fact that NALGO has preserved its national agreements and machinery completely intact. As the National Local Government Committee puts it in its report to delegates: "This dispute leaves NALGO in a very strong position to face future challenges".

Seething

The Government is seething over the settlement claiming that it will only serve to push the rate of inflation even higher. But as Allan Tuffin, the General Secretary of the Union of Communication Workers said, "We are chasing inflation, not creating inflation".

Exemplary

The tactics employed by NALGO throughout the dispute can only be described as exemplary. They adopted a strategy aimed at dividing the employer, increasing pressure through selective action, sparing the members of hardship and avoiding the trap of all-out indefinite strike action.

Buyers face impossible prices

FIRST TIME house buyers are now faced with more problems when looking for somewhere to live. That is the finding of Bristol University's School of Advanced Urban Studies in research carried out for the Conservative controlled Association of District Councils. Only in Greater London, Surrey and Buckinghamshire have high interest rates made no perceptible dent in first time buyers' house purchases. But past statistics compiled by the

BREAKING THE PAY BARRIER



Four out of five people in Britain oppose the sell off of the water industry to private interests.
Photo: The Worker

WATER SELL OFF BOGGED DOWN

THE GOVERNMENT are green alright. Politically green to think they could attempt to privatise water without a sapping fight and widespread loss of popularity.

Getting the privatisation legislation through Parliament may prove to have been the easiest part. The actual flotation of the water authorities on the stock exchange is looking a very tough enterprise indeed with difficulties mounting daily.

Luke warm

City opinion polls have already revealed that there is an extremely lukewarm attitude to the water sell-off. At the heart of this reluctance is a general feeling that there are too many uncertainties involved. Would you be investing in assets or liabilities?

A central role in all this is being played by the European

Commission. They have been dealing a number of aces to unnerve the City slickers.

Firstly the EC is threatening to take the UK Government to the European Court over failing to meet the drinking water directive. Secondly the Environment Commissioner, Carlo Ripa di Meana, has refused to agree to the Government's proposed timetable for compliance. All these issues raise the spectre of extra costs, difficult to identify in advance and liable for even more change as environmental improvement moves up the political agenda.

Uncertainty

Others are busy piling on the uncertainty too. Eight local authorities are now actively drawing together a legal challenge over the ownership of the water industry assets transferred from municipal control to the water authorities in 1974. Birmingham alone claims its ratepayers have invested more than £500 million in assets. The challenge is being timed to cause maximum concern during the flotation period.

Doubts

Further doubts are being raised by a series of court cases where water authorities are charged with pollution offences. Derbyshire County Council are prosecuting Severn-

Trent Water for 17 alleged offences under the Control of Pollution Act. South West Water have been summoned by Bodmin Angling Club for polluting rivers with aluminium sulphate.

These cases underline the liability of the private companies for pollution incidents and all outstanding cases will have to be included in their prospectus. Would you invest in a potential criminal?

Sharebuyers

Not surprisingly, the Government is looking for sharebuyers anywhere they can get them. Contingency arrangements are being made to offer shares to Japan, USA, Canada and Europe. Such is the chaos, however, the deadline for applying for a US share listing was missed!

The Government is so desperate, that in reality the water sell-off has been cancelled. What we now have before us with the debt write-off and 'green' dowry is a give-away.

It is surely a measure of the depths to which the Thatcher Government has sunk that so many punters are nervous about accepting the freebie on offer. The green faces of the five blues are getting redder by the day.

Bosses win historic pay battle against themselves

MERCHANT BANKS Robert Fleming and Baring Brothers last year saw to it that senior directors paid themselves £1.2 million. Since September 1983 the top rate of pay at Robert Fleming has risen 1,356% while at Baring Brothers it has increased 1,298% in those five years. These stunning rises are noted by Monks Partnership compiling figures on top executives' pay for The Guardian.

Cost of Living

The cost of living in the same period rose by a quarter, while average earnings went up by about 45%. Workers, please note.

On average, according to Monks' league table, top executives in merchant banking had seen pay increase by 546% in the five years from September 1983. In insurance companies it was 293%, in the clearing banks 245%. Building society directors, bottom of that league table, had gained 103% more. Of particular interest to engineering workers will be the 183% increase enjoyed by directors in mechanical and electrical engineering.

Statistics

Statistics should always be treated with caution, of course. Where pay increases are concerned it is worth asking about the sums of money at the beginning and end of the calculations.

In early summer a survey by The Guardian of the highest paid executives in the top 100 companies showed average pay rises of 28% in the last year.

Upset

Now we have the Confederation of British Industry upset that in the quarter April-June of this year, workers in manufacturing have been winning pay settlements of 7.5%, the highest since the third quarter of 1981. And upset too that 8.3% pay settlements were reached in the same quarter of 1989 for workers in private sector services, the highest since 1983.

But who cares what the CBI thinks? And the ministers who denounce workers trying to settle at somewhere around the official inflation rate; who cares what they think either?

* IN BRIEF

A POLL by Gallup for the Daily Telegraph among more than 1,000 voters, has put Labour's lead over the Conservatives at 10½ points. Thus Labour is slightly down on July and now has 44.5% to the Tories' 34%. Greens are put at 9% and the SLD at 5½%. This opinion poll was taken after the Cabinet reshuffle.

A 1,430 sample by ICM for The Guardian on August 11-12 put Labour's lead at 8 points on 44, a steady improvement since its April poll when Tories led Labour by 44-40.

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Multiculturalism : reactionary from roots to fruit

WHEN he was asked what the legacy of the French Revolution was, it is said that Chou En-Lai, the great Chinese communist replied: "I don't know. It is too soon to say".

Chou was well aware that revolutions and the ideas that help shape them can have the most profound and strangest of consequences.

The French Revolution swept two ideas to the forefront of men's minds. In revolt against the feudal view of society obsessed with rigid orders of class, rank and status, the revolutionaries proclaimed the universal brotherhood of man. And, against those who declared that the existing order of things is pre-ordained and fixed for all time, they argued that man can reshape his own society according to a rational programme.

Reactionaries have always hated these ideas. Thatcher, for instance, insists that any attempt by people to order the economic affairs of society is doomed to failure. The markets must be 'free', chaos must rule.

Interestingly, a new book by French author Alain Finkielkraut reflects a growing need to defend the ideals of the French Revolution. And significantly, his book, which appeared for the first time in English last year, sees the main threat coming as much from the 'left' as the 'right'.

The French Revolution, Finkielkraut points out, created its own "ferocious counter-revolutionaries". In the face of the universal brotherhood of man brought together by reason, the German romantics argued that the culture and spirit of their particular nation was unique. And, anticipating Marx's idea that being determines consciousness, used this idea to stress the message: we are separate, different, and even our reason and our thoughts reflect this uniqueness. Says Finkielkraut: "They repudiated universalist feelings and glorified various particularisms." A train of thought picked up and used by Adolf Hitler.

Now in one of the stranger

ironies of history, the same ideas are being revived, but this time by the "multiculturalists". The multiculturalists recreate racism through their anti-racism, says Finkielkraut, "With the substitution of the cultural for the biological conception of collectivity, racism has not been abolished, it has simply returned to its starting point."

The word 'culture', he continues, has been seized by the multiculturalists to serve as a standard to "divide the human race into collective, inaccessible and irreducible entities". And while preaching the values of 'toleration' between cultures, they breed the opposite. Their whole theory assumes that one 'culture' cannot understand or accept another: they live on separateness

and division. "They carry notions of differences to the extreme, vitiating any community of nations or cultures between men".

Finkielkraut stresses that the motive of the multiculturalists has been to expiate a fault: to restore to other people what had been stolen or destroyed by Western imperialism. In reply to imperialists who prated the superiority of their culture, the multiculturalists replied that while cultures may be different, they are equal.

But by insisting that all cultures are 'equal', the multiculturalists, who like to think of themselves as radical and progressive, end up defending the indefensible - cultures that are narrow, reactionary and oppressive. Cultures, for instance, "that cast out barren women,

where the witness of one man counts for two women".

Such a train of thought goes further than the absurdity of branding people who attack such ideas as 'racist' or 'imperialist'. It is an attack on thought itself, charges Finkielkraut. Hence the title of his book, "The Undoing of Thought".

These are the same people, he points out, who argue that man's thinking cannot transcend his cultural background. It is quite a common ploy nowadays, to use the line of argument that "you cannot understand this question because you are white, or because you are a man". But, says Finkielkraut, that is a rejection of thought and reason. I no longer think because I am; my 'culture' or race merely "thinks in me".

When Shakespeare is dismissed as a "dead, white, male", when all cultural creations are declared to be of equal validity (when, as he puts it, a pair of boots is declared equal with Shakespeare) there can be no greatness, there can be nothing to aspire to, no purpose in intellectual or moral effort, no concept of progress.

Capitalism, Finkielkraut points out, has already seized on this idea. In its drive to turn all human creations into commodities, it has blotted out the line between culture, and "entertainment" that can be marketed. Sport, fashion and leisure now all count as "culture".

Non thought

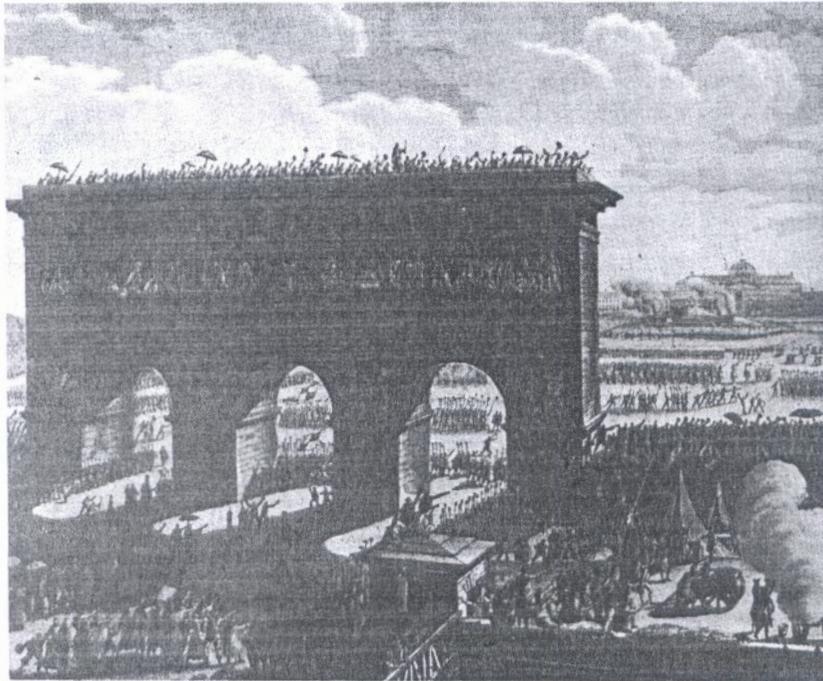
But, he adds, when this phony egalitarianism equates the highest intellectual activities with betting or rock and roll, "non-thought", as he calls it, has "donned the same label (i.e. culture) and enjoyed the same status as thought itself". "This is the first time that those who in the name of high culture, dare to call this non-thought by its name are dismissed as racists and reactionaries."

"When hatred of culture becomes itself a part of culture, the life of the mind loses all meaning."

Finkielkraut himself does not suggest many solutions. His own appears rather weak after 200 years, and that is simply to praise the values of the Enlightenment, of liberty and reason. But he avoids the question of what is "liberty", or how to reason with the unreasonable.

But the strength of his book is his acute analysis. The multiculturalists and the anti-racists are still regarded today as being "left wing". But Finkielkraut shows how their entire thinking, from its roots to its fruit, is deeply reactionary.

One year on: celebrating Bastille Day. Two hundred years later the ideals of brotherhood and reason are under attack from the 'left' as well as the right.



Bonn hypocrisy over German re-unification

AFTER Mikhail Gorbachev's visit to the Federal Republic of Germany, political commentators are speculating about relations between the German Democratic Republic and the USSR and calling loudly for the Berlin Wall to be demolished. Talk of German reunification is left, by-and-large, to reporting West German politicians' calls for such a move, as no-one else is quite sure if they are in favour. The GDR has been criticised in the past few years for failing to wholeheartedly go along with glasnost, and accused of trailing in the rush to democracy seen in Poland, Hungary and the USSR.

Propaganda

But why is it that the Western media has so patently failed to drum up popular opposition among the GDR population to socialism, despite pouring their propaganda into the country via television in quantities far outstripping their broadcasts to any other Eastern European country?

The reason is simple: good economic management in the last forty years means that investment has been concentrated in developing industry, not squandered on imports of consumer goods from the West. The Democratic

Republic has a negligible foreign debt, no unemployment, no poverty, strict price and rent control and a stark absence of any significant number of people wanting a reintroduction of capitalism.

Berlin Wall

Sure, no-one likes the Berlin Wall, but there is an almost universal recognition that if it had not been built in August 1961 the country would have been bled dry of its skilled craftsmen, engineers and doctors by the greedy ex-Nazis in power in West Germany. They were determined to ruin the Democratic Republic because they could not forgive the people there for having voted in 1945 and 1946 to expropriate Hitler's collaborators and run the country for the common good.

Private greed was what lured so many of East Germany's graduates to the West in those days of the open border. The freedom to be educated and trained and then spit in the faces of those who had paid for that investment by going West to earn a fat salary and bolster the 'economic miracle' was subordinated to the common good with the closing of the border in 1961.

As long as West Germany

fails to recognise that the GDR is an independent country there can be no question of normalising relations. The Federal Republic's "Basic Law", the preamble to its constitution, declares that the government in Bonn represents all Germans (even Poles with one German-grandparent and Volga Germans whose families have lived in Russia for generations). To recognise the GDR as a sovereign country would put paid to dreams of unification, and so there is an impasse. No federal politician calling for reunification wants a united socialist Germany, and the people in the GDR are unlikely to be foolish enough to welcome back capitalism and exploitation.

If the West German Government were serious about wanting to ease restrictions on visits to the West by East Germans, it would grant the GDR full diplomatic recognition and repeal the "Basic Law". The ball is in their court.

Cubans clamp down on corruption Elsewhere it is called enterprise

READERS will have been surprised to read in other papers of the arrests and punishment of senior Cuban official, Division General Arnaldo Ochoa, charged with international drug dealing. The circumstances of the case have been fully and openly reported in the official newspaper *Granma* of which this article is a precis, and subsequently re-published as a booklet, a copy of which has been sent to *The Worker*.

The brief circumstances of the issue seem to be that Ochoa became involved with the Mafia in a money-laundering scheme. Although this came to nothing, it brought Ochoa into contact with a Colombian, Fabel Pareja, who worked for a leading drug cartel in Colombia. At a meeting, some fantasy ideas were discussed, including setting up a cocaine processing factory in Africa and counterfeiting dollars. In May of last year, one of Ochoa's associates travelled to Colombia to set up a cocaine trafficking route

via Cuba. If discovered, it was to be said that the trafficking was being done with official backing.

The original plan was to import it by sea, but when that fell through, it was then decided to use an aircraft to drop the cocaine in Cuban territorial waters. The drugs would then be collected by speedboats operating out of Miami. It was aimed to make one drop per week. That plan also eventually failed when the drops were discovered by the Cuban authorities. Investigations led to the arrest of Ochoa and his Cuban associates.

The reason for giving this issue such wide publicity lies in an editorial published in *Granma* in June of this year. "Although these events are extremely surprising and bitter to our (Cuban) people, they should show that, although grave moral and physical problems may develop in some individuals, in our country (Cuba), absolutely nobody, no matter how great his merits or high his rank, can violate the principles and laws of the Revolution with impunity."

What a contrast with Thatcher's Britain where financial scandals, even when publicised, go unpunished, and where transport undertakings can be responsible for the death of their customers and continue business unimpeded.

The Worker

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Thatcher: the South East starts to turn against its own ghastly creation

THE SOUTH EAST, that huge region that is supposedly solidly and forever Thatcherite is turning against her.

Evidence for this comes from a new document produced by the region's local authorities looking forward to the turn of the century.

The fact of the document is a political challenge in itself. For a start its message is unanimous - ranging from 'left' wing London boroughs through to solid Tory county and district councils in the stockbroker belt. Second, the whole idea of these councils getting together is a smack in the face for Thatcherism. Planning for the future is a threat to the free operation of market forces, and yet we have need to plan.

Pouring in

Then there is the message over Thatcher's dismantling of the region's infrastructure, especially in transport. We need such services, they say. The long suffering public who have to use the transport system in London and the South East can only guess at the sheer scale of the damage Thatcher has already done. SERPLAN, the body that's produced this latest broadside against her, documented some of this damage in a separate document published last year. Over 1.1 million workers pour

into central London every day from the city's outskirts and from the rest of the south east. Over the last four years, the rise in British Rail's South East Network traffic is equivalent to the total of all Manchester and Liverpool's rail commuter traffic.

Passenger miles on London's tube went up from 2,700 million in 1983 to 3,862 million in three years later. The average train load rose from 93 people

to 128. No wonder London's tube users have begun to feel like sardines. Bus passenger miles were up 11%.

Yet, in the same period, Thatcher abolished the GLC and, with it, all effective regional planning of the capital's transport. And she put the financial boot in. Between 1983 and 1986 British Rail's overall revenue support was cut by 27%, with a further cut of 25% planned by March

1990. The cuts have been targeted on the South East, however, with the South East Network's financial support down from £302m to £196m. A further cut of 24% by 1990 is planned.

On London's buses and tubes the picture is the same. Government revenue support was down from £175m in 1983 to £95 million in 1987. While the passenger mileage on the tubes was rising by 43%, the number of maintenance staff employed by London Underground was cut by 48%, from 12,200 to 6,320.

Docklands. Priced beyond people's pockets, this is the epicentre of a new property crisis.

The one mistake SERPLAN makes, is to describe the transport, housing and other needs of the region as being the result of its 'prosperity'. This is not the case. As they themselves point out, the South East region has more unemployed people than Scotland and the north of England combined, and London has the largest concentration of unemployed in the advanced industrialised world.

And as the table shows, London's employment has been falling despite the dramatic rise in employment in financial services. And the rise of commuting pressures does not reflect a boom in the number of jobs overall, but the fact that local workplaces have been closed and thousands upon thousands of people are fleeing the pressures of London life and travelling back to work in the city. The exodus of population from the metropolis reached a record last year.

This is the chaos that Thatcher's policies have created. Now, from within her very heartlands, Conservative councillors in Conservative councils from regions that have never voted anything but Conservative, comes the message: enough is enough.

LONDON JOB CHANGES

The changes in London's employment, 1981 to 1987 (official figures)

Industry	Total employment		change %change	
	1981 (000s)	1987 (000s)	(000s)	
Agriculture, forestry, fishing	2	1	-1	-50
Energy and water supply	56	48	-8	-14
Metal manufacturing and chemicals	72	57	-15	-21
Metal goods, engineering, vehicles	300	205	-95	-32
Other manufacturing	309	255	-54	-17
Construction	158	123	-25	-16
Wholesale distribution, hotels, and catering	366	370	+4	+1
Retail distribution	318	333	+19	+6
Transport and communications	372	334	-28	-7.5
Banking, insurance, finance	568	722	+154	+27
Public administration, defence	375	385	+21	+6
Education, health, social services	670	674	+4	+1
TOTAL	3,567	3,517	-50	-1.4

Ring roads

As desperate commuters pile into their cars, the capital and surrounding ring roads like the M25 have been turned into a perpetual snarl up. Average peak hour traffic speeds have fallen by 13% and are now slower moving than horse-drawn carriages in late 19th Century London.

Such are the absurdities of Thatcherism. In housing there is a similar picture. Despite all the talk about the region's housing 'boom' and development pressures, total new house building in London has collapsed by two thirds from a rate of 38,000 dwellings a year in 1970 to 13,500 in 1987. And of these 13,500 about a third are accounted for by the so-called 'yuppie' flats of the

* IN BRIEF

"IF I CAN'T pay my loan of £1,000, that's my problem; if I can't pay my loan of £1 billion, it's the bank's problem." Never was this banking saying more true. Massive loans to Latin American governments in the 1970s have proven impossible to repay, and are expected to cost the big four banks £2.3 billion this year.

Lloyds has now been forced to assume that half its foreign debt will not be repaid, which has produced a net loss to June this year of £88 million. Domestic lending however, has produced a profit of £80 million, so it's no coincidence that personal lending has been pushed so hard during this government's administration, and that Lawson's policy has been not to restrict lending but to force up interest rates, all good news for the banks.

There are no write-offs on personal debt, as escalating house repossessions show, and now the Office of Fair Trading estimates that 4.5 million people in Britain had debt problems over the last 5 years. Showing a spasm of anxiety over last year's 21% rise in personal lending, the Governor of the Bank of England recently sounded a warning to the banks to ease off a little. With rich pickings in store and the need to foot the foreign debt bill, though, finance capital will never relax its grip.

Awkward

NOW YOU see it...now you don't. Thatcher and her newly promoted Party Chairman, Kenneth Baker, having waved a magic wand to make the Metropolitan Counties disappear, performed a vanishing act on teachers, pulled so-called "Education Reforms" out of the hat; have now deftly palmed onto the British public a new Education Secretary, John MacGregor (listed pastime: magician).

Bring on the Sorcerer's Apprentice! Wishful thinking that he could cut the lady in half? Not likely, just the same old confidence tricks.

Pay and staffing the key issues for nurses

THE GOVERNMENT'S White Paper on the NHS threatens the continuation of a free, comprehensive Health Service. It has also distracted attention from the central problem of underfunding in the NHS. Other existing difficulties facing the NHS have also taken a back seat. The problems of nursing manpower and nurses' pay that were raised in the dispute in 1988 have not gone away.

In the wake of the Clinical Grading Review nurses accepted, in April this year, a 6% pay settlement. This looks a bit sick now with inflation running at over 8%. Nurses and their trade union organisations were heavily preoccupied dealing with the casualties of the Grading Review. Many nurses had received a pay boost, many others had their expectations dashed, and were angry and embittered at what was

perceived as a degrading rather than regrading exercise.

Huge backlogs of appeals continue at District level. Nationally there is a similar picture with 1500 Regional appeals lodged. Even if 10 appeals were heard each week, there is 3 years' work and a very limited prospect of success. This is clearly bad news for the individual nurses concerned. It is also a process sapping of energy and morale for the whole profession. Another way of addressing the situation is needed.

This year has also seen the introduction of 'Flexible Pay Supplements', designed to improve retention and recruitment in specific areas, such as Intensive Care or Mental Handicap. The £5 billion involved is a relatively small sum, but it represents a significant step down the

road to the fragmentation of national bargaining, especially given the Government's recent pressure on BR and local authorities to jettison national agreements.

If nurses make no murmur the Department of Health will take this as a sign to proceed apace and push forward Regional Pay plans next year. The current pay supplements add insult to injury for many nurses who fared badly from Clinical Grading. They also have the effect of eroding differences and deterring professional development. Above all, these local pay "bonuses" do not solve the national problem of the recruitment and retention of nurses.

In 1988, the numbers of newly qualified nurses

joining the Professional Register fell by 13% (compared with 1987). Among staff nurses registering for psychiatry and mental handicap the decline was 25%, for Intensive Care 21.5% and in Special Care of Newborn Babies the figure was 26%. This fall in recruitment was partly due to a reduction in the number of school-leavers, and partly to cuts the health authorities have made in training intakes.

Not enough nurses are joining and many are still voting with their feet. The Clinical Grading Review has to some extent improved the nursing career structure, but it has also caused a feeling of being devalued among many and added to the exodus. Probably the most significant factor, for both student and qualified nurses, is the chronic short staffing on wards. The result of understaffing is stress and frustration, often leading to "burn-out". Teaching and support for junior nurses suffers, as does patient care.

Collective problems

The problems of recruitment and retention, like the problems of grading and pay, are collective problems for all nurses. Not least of which is the difficulty many nurses have to pay the bills and survive. The central question is one of resources, and focusing all these grievances into a fight for better pay. We have become bogged down in Grading Appeals and there is little future in that.

The autumn can be a period for regrouping and determining our own agenda. The government's White Paper deliberately ignores the problems of funding and does not address the problems facing the future of nursing. A collective reassertion of the need to improve pay and to improve staffing levels, loudly and forcefully, would move us off the defensive. It would also move us towards a unity of interest and spirit, and away from looking vainly for solutions at an individual level.



BT comes down on the side of shareholders!

MILLIONS of households have received British Telecom's "Report to Customers" with their quarterly telephone bill. What a gem of a document it is.

Packed full of cute pictures of old grannies and little children, sweetie hedgehogs with broken legs; serious tables about repairs and reliability and earnest photos of "our skyphone" and "our research scientists."

Did you know that you can have your telephone bill "improved?" No, not reduced - itemised - so

you can check up how long members of your household spend on the phone. But you don't have to have an itemised bill, the choice is yours! Isn't that wonderful?

BT has been really honest, too, and answered those awkward little questions that customers sent in: "Why don't we provide free phones for pensioners or the handicapped?"

"We do sympathise," say Telecom. "But we cannot. It would be unfair to our shareholders and all our

other customers, who would have to carry the cost." Furthermore, "it [is] extremely difficult to waive charges for one group of customers without doing it for similar groups. How could we decide which to choose?"

Your heart really goes out to them doesn't it? Imagine the ghastly choice, or, worse, failing the shareholders. Funny how Telecom showed so little interest in us when we all owned it. And a pity the choice wasn't ours.

Central Americans reject interference from US

FIVE Central American presidents have again stood up to US interference in their affairs, and signed demobilisation plans for the Nicaraguan Contras. This marks a significant victory for the Nicaraguan Government, and a further stage in the isolation of the US administration over the band of rebels which it created and which now no one is willing to have operating from their soil.

Money

Though the demobilisation was to be voluntary, Honduran troops quickly moved to prevent the Contra from moving further into Honduras. Lacking the assurance of more American money the Contras are a spent force, asking their paymasters for admission to the US.

There will be further humiliations for the US next month when a proposal for an international border patrol in Central America comes before the UN security council. The US will have to decide whether to veto it.

Spent force

Three of the five signatories to the Tela Agreement signed in Honduras are close US allies, reliant on US money and heading reactionary regimes. Nicaragua, however, has successfully broken down their reluctance to co-exist peacefully, which is a major achievement. The idea has begun to grow that perhaps one can take the money but go one's own way on some important matters. Who knows where that might end? Certainly the even greater sums of money flowing back to the US (and Europe) in interest charges on earlier

loans are not so safe when such independent behaviour begins in Central America.

After ten bloody years the Nicaraguans, through a mixture of diplomacy and jungle warfare have destroyed the hated Contras.

Founded by ex-Samoan National Guardsmen and funded by the American Congress and the CIA through its covert operations budget, the Contras have waged terrorist war against the Sandinista-led Nicaraguan republic. With tactics ranging from the assassination of local leaders, the destruction of farmland and industrial machinery, the extermination of farmers, doctors, teachers and other workers to the mining of Nicaraguan harbours by the US Navy this bloody conflict has been aimed at terrorising the population and destroying

the economy with subsequent loss of support for the Sandinistas.

Despite huge sums of American money (and some from the Sultan of Brunei, via Colonel North) the Contras failed. The Nicaraguan people though worn down by the war would not capitulate to those who had terrorised the country under Samozoa.

Contras

Although the economy was distorted through having to fight the Contras after a devastating civil war the people of Nicaragua knew who to blame and that fighting the Contras was the only way to a better future. With the people motivated and armed the hit and run tactics of the Contras were slowly thwarted when they crept out of the mountains to find the workers and peasants.

Greener Gummer

JOHN SELWYN Gummer, small but perfectly formed Minister of Agriculture, has returned to Whitehall Place, headquarters of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, to a less than rapturous welcome.

As his first 'green' action, he instructed staff responsible for arranging accommodation to ban the use of products made from wood from tropical rain forests. Trade unionists at MAFF think it would be more appropriate if his office were furnished with two rustic benches and a toadstool.

Nat West privateers

COUNTY NATWEST, of recent Blue Arrow notoriety that ended in resignations, has some interesting connections with the Thatcher Government. Apart from advising water authorities and electricity boards how to privatise, County NatWest has been advising the Home Office on the art of shedding some of its enterprises.

The Home Office assists the police by running the Police National Computer, providing a forensic science service and providing a communications support service. After a somewhat cursory investigation, County NatWest recommended that the forensic science service become an Executive Agency, the Police National Computer be serviced by private industry, and the communications support service be privatised and sold off to the likes of Philips of Motorola.

Dockyard action

DEVONPORT DOCKYARD craftsmen are taking action over pay. Over 2,300 members of the AEU, EPTU and MSF have launched an overtime ban and withdrawn goodwill after twice voting emphatically to reject a basic pay of 7 per cent.

A union spokesman said that the action had already been very effective and that the private employers - Devonport Management Ltd - are unlikely to be able to complete key projects. The submarine refit complex has been particularly hard hit.

"The deal devalues the craft skills of our members", he said, "the craftsmen feel their position is being totally eroded".

Plastic bullets keep killing

A FEW weeks ago when the British army announced its intention to issue plastic bullets to the RUC many suggested that far from widening their use plastic bullets should be phased out altogether. Sadly, as a fitting anniversary present from the army, all our fears have been vindicated by the death of 15 year old Seamus Duffy on the night of August 9.

As with every other death from these weapons confusion and controversy are the aftermath. Different accounts of the incidents are always given at the inquests. The only thing which is common to all is that a death has occurred, and no one is brought to trial. As usual it proves mysteriously difficult to find out who actually fired the fatal round.

It is difficult to see how a four inch cylinder of PVC fired at 170 miles an hour can do other than maim or kill, but still the authorities claim that the 'baton round' is perfectly safe if used properly. The 17 dead, eight of whom were children, and 100 maimings have done nothing to dent this pig-headed complacency. Each death is an ineradicable tragedy. The tragedies will continue for as long as the use of plastic bullets continues.

COMPUTER COWBOYS

IS YOUR social security safe in their hands? Do you even know who 'they' are? During the next decade British social security payments are likely to be controlled from four or five 'Area Computer Centres' (AACs).

Eric Caines, the Director of Social Security Operations, announced to staff on 21 July that the contract for the Livingstone AAC which will cover Scotland has been awarded to the US-based Electronic Data Systems (EDS).

This is a major step down the road of destroying the support systems for those who need social security benefits. It is the first time that the payment of benefits has been contracted out. EDS has a reputation for anti-union activity, and has used illegal immigrants to run its work.

Eric Caines has the cheek to advertise to staff at the current Livingstone unemployment benefit computer centre jobs with these cowboys. He says that they will be 'free to apply'. They were anyway, of course, but it can be taken for granted that any CPSA or NUCPS member who has taken part in industrial action has little chance of a job with EDS.

Caines has to say that this is not a first step towards privatisation of the Department's work. How many believe him?

The fact is that, whatever the cost to the taxpayer, it is clearly government policy to remove from the influence of Major Service trade unions most computer operations.

It is likely that all the ACCs will be in private hands producing fat profits for multinational companies, while the 'benefit shops' will be staffed by poorly paid civil servants having to face the wrath of even worse paid claimants.



HISTORIC NOTES

LANCASHIRE was buzzing with the expectations of a new age at the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815. The cost of the wars had been off-loaded on the British people in the form of indirect taxation. A weaver, for example, lost 50% purchasing power through tax burdens. Bread itself became a delicacy against the backdrop of the Corn Laws and soaring prices.

John Bull's glorious return from the bloody wars was greeted by misery, high unemployment, and starvation for himself and 300,000 other unemployed soldiers.

Manchester was in the grip of a cholera epidemic when, in March 1817, 30,000 weavers assembled, each armed with a blanket for the march to London to demand reform. The 'Blanketeers' got no further than the assembly point at St Peter's Fields where magistrates ordered in the light cavalry with their new unlimited powers; one man was killed and there were several injuries.

The British ruling class had become obsessed with the notion of insurrection, more so, in fact than the British working class

PETERLOO... A MASSACRE REMEMBERED

who actually needed revolution. The bourgeois class feared a repeat of the events in France thirty years earlier and had improved the organisation for suppression.

By July 1817 the local mill owners, cotton merchants, shopkeepers and publicans began to form the Manchester Yeomanry, an armed organ dedicated to the suppression of 'insurrection'. They recruited from the most bigoted scum and lowlife from the thousands of alehouses around the town.

Strength sapped

The summer of 1818 saw the textile workers starved back to work after a long and weary strike. In order to evade the Combination Acts, cotton workers conducted trade union affairs under the guise of debating societies or independent clubs. The Lancashire cotton workers organised in their thousands.

By 1819, rallies as large as 20,000 were a regular occurrence in the cotton mill towns of south east Lancashire. Captain Chippendale advised his superiors at the Home Office

that 'The minds of the lower order in these parts is exclusively occupied with ... expectations of an approaching explosion which is to produce a complete change in the present order of things.'

August 16 was set aside for a rally on St Peter's Fields to demand universal suffrage for adults and for the Corn Laws to be repealed. Henry Hunt, a leading would be reformer, would be the main speaker. The day before the rally the Manchester Yeomanry sent their sabres to get sharpened.

Bloodthirsty

Come the morning of the rally, there were reports of gangs of Yeomanry thirsting for blood in the city's pubs. By lunchtime 80,000 workers had assembled in St Peter's Fields, attracting the esteemed presence of the capitalist press, the first political event of its kind to do so; they sat alongside the speakers. Stationed out of sight, a troop of Hussars, hardened veterans of the Napoleonic Wars.

Magistrates had made a good vantage point of a house

overlooking the rally and, watching the carnival, became more and more frustrated at not being able to call in the troops. They gave an order for Henry Hunt to be arrested. The Deputy Constable was reluctant to walk through the mass to the speaker's stand without a military escort, the chivalrous Sir Hugh Hornby-Birley, a local mill owner, was all too happy to oblige by offering the services of his Manchester Yeomanry. Before his gallant men had even reached the crowd they had knocked down a young woman, killing her child.

Riot Act

Despite the incursion, the crowd remained peaceful and patient, unaware they were being read the Riot Act. Sixty mounted Yeomen drew their sabres in order to hack their way through the human forest towards the speakers' rostrum.

In the havoc that followed, special constables and cotton workers were slashed indiscriminately. Watching from their window, the magistrates convinced themselves that the

Manchester Yeomanry was in grave danger, thus the order was given to unleash the Hussars, who merely swept the whole bloody morass of carnage from one end of the field to the other, the butchery being so bad that even the Manchester Yeomanry fled in blind panic. St Peter's Fields had been cleared in minutes, only the badly injured and the litter of corpses remaining.

Regrouped

Ragged hordes were seen fleeing in their thousands away from Manchester back home to Lancashire as swiftly as possible. One large contingent did not stop till they reached Harpurhey, at the time a village some distance from the city, where they regrouped for a silent march back to Oldham.

Dedication

Those early days of trade union activity took place without telecommunications, public transport and the modern media we take for granted, and it is important not just to commemorate their suffering, but to learn from their dedication.