

BIRMINGHAM

No. 1

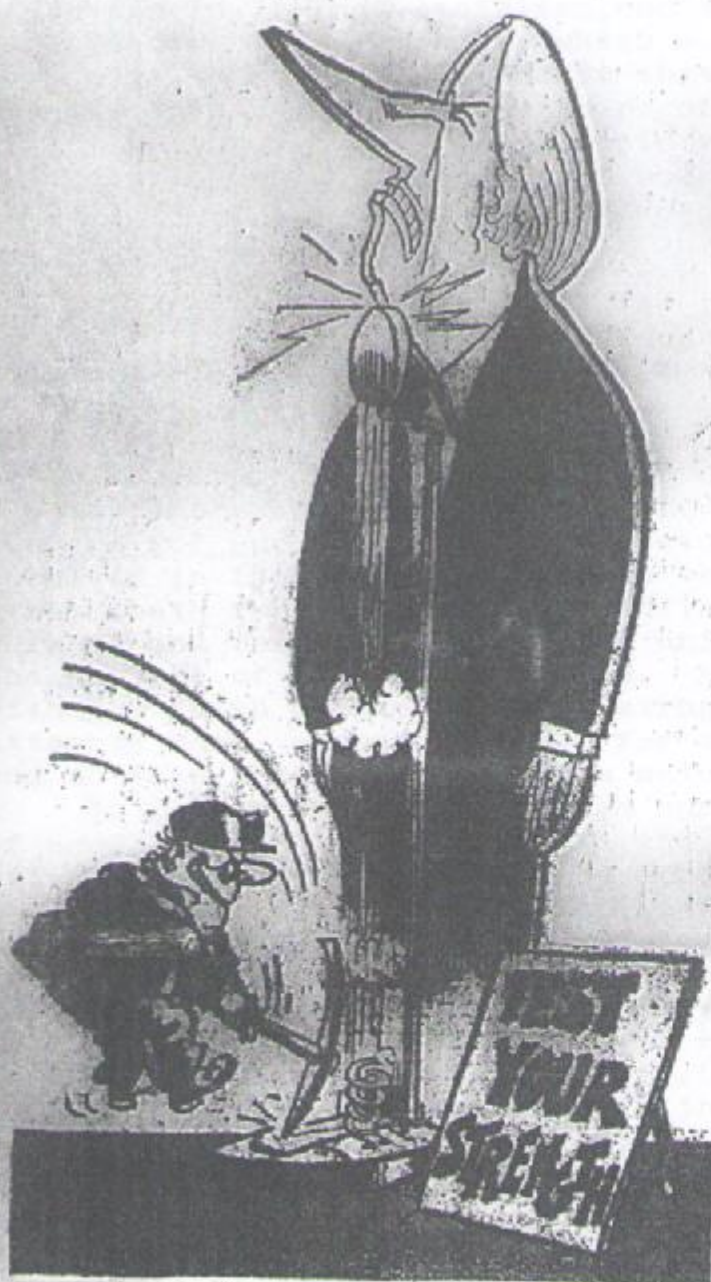
# RED

## NOTES

### MINERS STRIKE

### UNEMPLOYMENT

### CLAIMANTS UNION





# EDITORIAL

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## INTRODUCING OURSELVES

This magazine, which will appear monthly, is produced by a number of International Marxist Group militants who are members of the South Birmingham Claimants and Unemployed Workers Union. We are engaged in building a union of activists which will fight through the Trade Union movement against unemployment and for a socialist society.

As a group we see the evils of present society, unemployment, the situation in Ireland, racialism, and the poisoning of the environment as aspects of the system under which we live, namely capitalism. We see no end to these problems except that of a socialist society. To achieve this we see the need for a revolution in which the working-class will take power and organise society in its own interests. To further this aim the group is organised both nationally as the International Marxist Group and internationally as the British section of the Fourth International, an organisation founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938. This is the only international revolutionary organisation in the world today and is dedicated to achieving a social revolution in the capitalist countries, to restore workers democracy in the stalinized countries, and to further the anti-imperialist struggle in the colonial countries.

The day to day activities of the group in Britain are centred around supporting working-class struggles while at the same time trying to expose the political forces at work within those struggles and to pose a socialist way forward. This can be seen in the group's support for such unions as the Postmen and the Miners whilst they were involved in long strikes. Within the working class movement our members strive both for militant union action to defend the interests of the workers and for democratic trade unions where the leaders are subject to the control of the rank and file. Also the group is in full solidarity with the Irish people in their struggle against British imperialism and attempts both to build support for the Irish people in their struggle and to show that struggles true nature to the British people.

In particular in Birmingham our activities are centred in the fields of unemployment and work within the Trade Union movement. In the field of unemployment we hope, by the production of this bulletin, to create a Claimants Union which will fight against unemployment and support strikes. In the unions, our members are active in fighting to democratize certain unions in this area and we are represented on the Trades Council. We are also engaged in supporting the activities of the Birmingham branch of the Irish Solidarity Campaign in their attempt to gain the right of self-determination for the Irish people. Our women comrades are also involved in the struggle for women's rights through an organisation called Socialist Woman. There they fight equal pay campaigns and for a socialist attitude to women.

The group nationally publishes a fortnightly paper called "The Red Mole" which represents our views on the current situation. "The Red Mole" is sold every issue at the bottom of New St. Station ramp on Saturdays. If you would like any more information about the group or its aims please fill in the slip on page 9 and return it to us, or come along to a Red Circle meeting (see details on page 9).

# UNEMPLOYMENT

The latest official figures show over a million unemployed, the highest number out of a job for 30 years. The figure of 1,023,000 is itself a gross underestimation for it fails to account for the large number of workers particularly women who do not register, and for the large number of school leavers forced back to school because they could not get work. We are living in a society in which despite the chronic housing shortage, large amounts of land are unused and building workers are laid off. In industry the wastage is similar, with machines standing idle, whilst workers join the dole queue. The 'Times' reported last month, that were it not for the loss in production due to unemployment, every man woman and child in this country could receive an extra £2 a week free of tax.

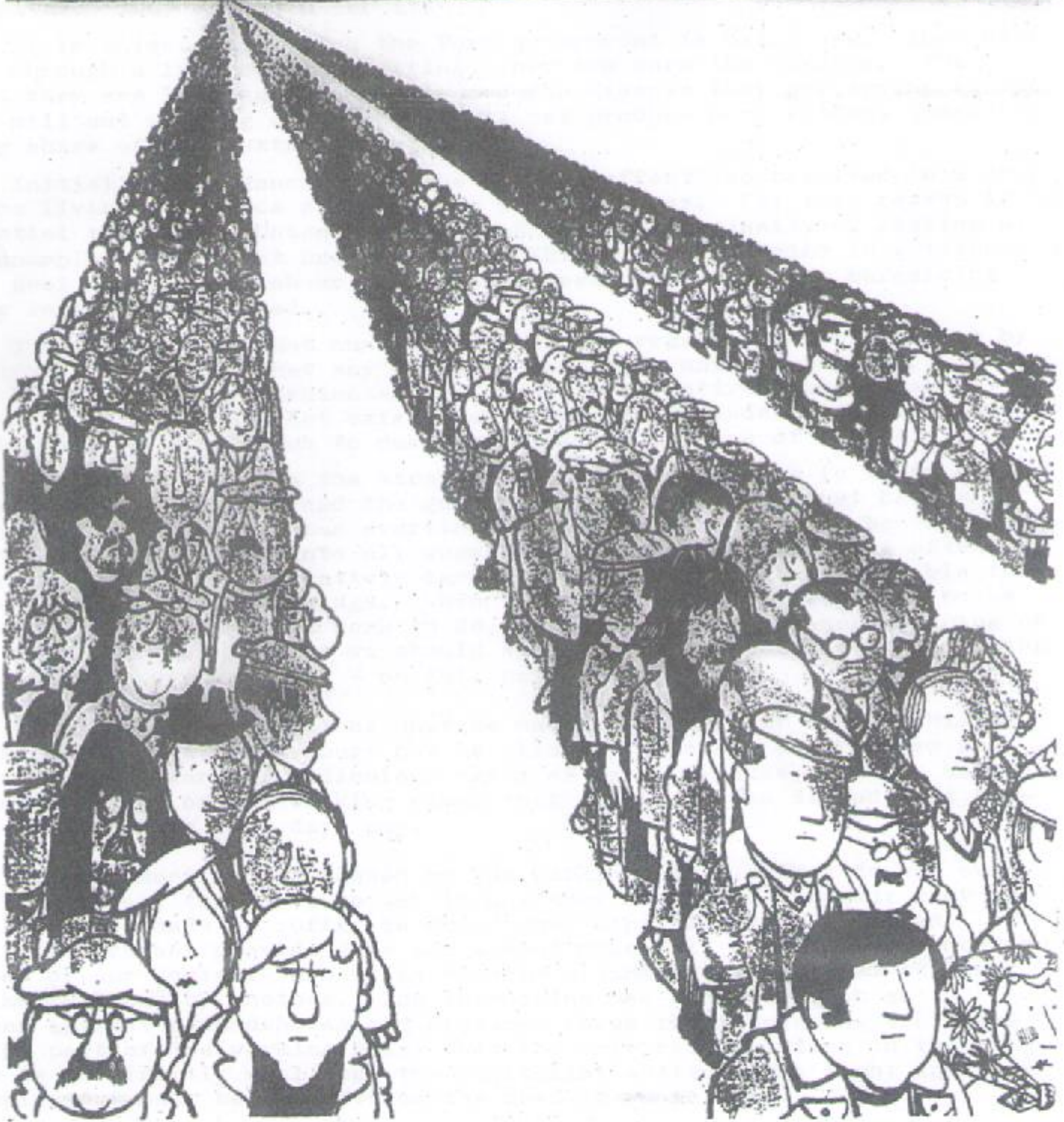
This appalling situation is not a creation of Heath and Co., under the last Labour government unemployment rose from 400,000 in 1964 to 600,000 in 1970. The Labour government also decided that Arnold Weinstock, the man who merged G.E.C. and English Electric and in the process kicked thousands of men out of their jobs, deserved a knighthood for his efforts. The fact is that the Labour Party was trying to manage the capitalist system, as is the Tory Party at the moment, and it is this system, with its sole aim of making profits, at the expense if need be of your job, which is the basic cause of the present waste of resources and of the misery accompanying it.

Anybody who has been unemployed and 'signing on' will be fully aware of the attitude displayed by the bureaucrats at their Labour Exchange; they go out of their way to make you feel guilty and the pittance you receive is paid over grudgingly and contemptuously. It is necessary to stress therefore, that the guilt is not yours, it is societies, the crisis is not an individual's crisis, but a crisis of capitalism.

The central characteristic of this crisis has been the decline in the rate of profit; since 1964 the share of profits in the national income has dropped from 21.2% to 14.2%. This means that in order to restore profits to their 1964 level there would have to be a 3% annual increase in productivity between now and 1974 with no increase in real wages. Behind this crisis in British capitalism lies a world crisis which results in part from the ever increasing scarcity of world markets.

It was with the advent of the Tory government that we began to see most clearly the capitalists reaction to this crisis. There has been a return to the barbarism of old style capitalism, with its total disregard for all long term considerations such as the economic and social welfare of backward regions like Scotland, N.E. England and the North of Ireland. If a concern is not profitable in the short term, it is labeled a 'lame-duck' and is allowed to go to the wall. Hence we see the closure of U.C.S., Rolls Royce and B.S.A., on the basis, not of their long term uselessness, but simply because the decline in profit rates means the unavailability of sufficient spare cash to keep them open in the short term. The owners of industry know of no loyalty towards their employees. While profits continue to roll in at an acceptable level they are kind enough to provide jobs for the workers; when profits fall below this level however, they have no conscience about kicking their employees out of a job, closing down their factory and waiting until they can make 'a decent profit' out of the labour of others.

The Tory government, for reasons we shall make clear later, are quite willing to allow this process to continue and the results have been disastrous. If 6,500 workers are laid off at U.C.S., 20,000 workers in the supply industry also lose their jobs. If 26,500 workers cease to draw a wage, then there is a proportional fall off in consumption, which leads to cuts in production and thence to redundancies in



“LETS GET UNEMPLOYMENT  
IN PERSPECTIVE.”

JOHN DAVIES  
(MINISTER OF TRADE)

The truth is that the creation of this situation is part of the Tory strategy to remove surplus value. It is a common economic theory that above a certain level of unemployment, wage rates stop increasing. This is not really surprising as men faced with the prospect of the sack and months, perhaps years, on the dole do not easily go on strike. They are so anxious to remain working that they are not too concerned about the pittance they are paid for it.

It is this tactic which the Tory government is using now. They hope that through a little blood letting, they can cure the disease. The blood they are letting is our jobs and the disease they are trying to cure is a militant working class which will not produce more without demanding a big share of that extra output.

Initially redundancies had the desired effect and resulted in a drop in the living standards of the whole working class. For this reason it is essential that Trade Unions should recognise the necessity of linking with the unemployed to fight unemployment. Whilst there remains in existence a vast pool of surplus labour the effectiveness of Trade Union bargaining power is greatly reduced.

The first thing that must be stressed as regards possible action by the Trade Unions, is that any campaign must be a united campaign. It must be nationally co-ordinated and involve the entire Trade Union movement. If this did not exist there would be a tendency for sections of the working population to make gains at the expense of others.

What then should be the strategy of the Trade Unions in their fight against the capitalists and the government? First there must be a campaign to restrict or ban overtime. Secondly there should be 'no-redundancy' clauses written into all wage agreements. Employers are often prepared to pay out a relatively large wage increase if they are able to get unions to accept sackings. When they complain that the order books are empty and there is no work to do, we should insist on work-sharing on full pay. Further to this we should seize the opportunity of campaigning for a shorter working week - on full pay of course.

Finally the Trade Unions must be made to face their responsibility to the unemployed. They must not be allowed to become demoralised and forced back to work at ridiculous rates of pay. Because, if this happens, it is the whole of the working class that suffers. The demand must be - five days work or five days pay.

Unemployment is not caused by the working class. They do not own the industries; they have no say in how they should be managed; they should not be made to suffer in order that capitalism may be saved. If capitalism cannot provide jobs and cannot make full use of the productive forces of our society then it is clearly a bankrupt system and it time it was replaced by another. The increasing use of occupation as a weapon against redundancies and closures shows the increasing awareness on the part of the working class that the only real solution in the long term is to directly challenge the capitalist system. The fight against unemployment must be one step on the road to socialism.

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The problems outlined in this article can be solved. One of the organisations working on that solution is the South B'ham Claimants & Unemployed Workers Union, the aims of which are outlined in an article on page 10. This union meets every week at:- 122, Gough Rd., Edgbaston, 15. on a Monday evening at 7.30 p.m. All are welcome.



# THE MINERS STRIKE

A VICTORY FOR ALL THE WORKING CLASS!

The strike which has just finished was one of the most bitterly fought industrial struggles for many years. The cost to the N.C.B. was some 100 million pounds, and the strikers themselves were living on strike pay and Social Security for six weeks.

In the event the determination of the miners to strike until victory was too much for the Government. Still Edward Heath and his cabinet had gone to great lengths to win a struggle which they could easily have avoided if they had been prepared to compromise earlier.

The militancy of the miners is understandable. They have slipped from being the best paid section of the working class 15 years ago to being tenth today. In real terms they are paid less today than they were at the end of the war despite having increased productivity by %. Many miners swore that they would rather spend their whole lives on the Dole than go back on Heath's terms. No-one who spent any time on the picket lines would care to argue with that.

But what about the Government? Why were they so determined to win? Was it because they couldn't afford to give the N.C.B. the extra cash - No, the strike cost the economy enough to pay the claim for the next few years. The real reason - which they themselves admit - is as a strategy for "putting the economy back on its feet".

This strategy is attempting to increase the profit levels of British industry to those of its foreign competitors:(a necessity for British industrialists but NOT for British workers). This is to allow prices to rise while holding

down wages by controlling the unions. This was to have been done mostly through the Industrial Relations Act. But this could only be introduced slowly, and would be likely to increase rather than dampen industrial militancy at the moment. The workers had to be softened up first, so the Tories deliberately let unemployment rise. However this did not have as great an effect as desired, and after passing the million mark, became too dangerous for comfort. Thus Barber was grudgingly forced to put more money back into the economy in his last budget.

This only left the Tories with one choice. To demoralise the trade union movement by taking on and smashing individual sections in head on confrontations.

This the Government had succeeded in doing against the postmen and power-workers. Unfortunately the employers in private industry were not so "patriotic", and were not prepared to lose profits in order to inflict a political defeat on the working class. Thus the Ford workers won a considerable victory through last May's strike.

Thus, at the outset of the struggle things were very much in the balance. If the Government won, the chances of any other trade unions lining up for a repeat performance were very slight indeed. The bosses would have become more and more confident, the unions more and more demoralised, and the Government would have been able to

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use this occasion to bring the Industrial Relations Act into use, and so make sure that the trade union movement stayed beaten and demoralised.

However, the Government did not win; the miners did - and with them, the rest of the working class.

#### WHAT WAS ACHIEVED

The strike was, above all else, a trial of strength and the Government lost. It is no use Heath and the capitalist press continually bleating that the miners were a special case - this will cut no ice at all. The trade union movement understand perfectly well that the Government did not concede to the miners because they were sorry for them, or because they are a special case. They conceded because the miners forced them to through the effectiveness of their strike. If the miners can do it then the railwaymen and engineers must also stand a good chance. From now on the attitude of trades unionists in every industry must be - WE ARE ALL SPECIAL CASES!

It is this prospect - of a flood of a series of strikes - from the many unions with claims in the pipeline which so depresses the press, and put share prices falling on the Stock Exchange.

#### UNION LEADERS NEARLY SNATCH DEFEAT FROM THE JAWS OF VICTORY

Before we become too complacent, it must be remembered that the miners are in a much stronger position than most unions for fighting the Government. They produce a commodity without which the economy cannot function, and they live in tightly knit communities which can't be so easily isolated and demoralised by the propaganda of the mass media. Were it not for the incredible behaviour of the union leaders the outcome of the issue would never have been in doubt.

At the very same time as the miners were out on strike, the power workers also had a pay dispute. A work-to-rule had already been called to start in the course of the miners strike, and if it had gone ahead this would certainly have brought the crisis to a head almost immediately. Under these circumstances, with the Government at their mercy, the

Executive of the Electricians and Plumbers Union voted by 7 votes to 6 to accept the Government's offer of 7% - 9% and return to work.

Frank Chapple, who had had the casting vote, explained his scabbing on the miners by saying that had the power-workers taken solidarity action, they might have toppled the Heath administration. This, thought Chapple, would have been unacceptable to the Electorate.

Joe Gornley, for his part, never requested help from the power workers and explained that he was glad the nation had not been "plunged into industrial chaos, which nobody really wants."

As socialists, we should not be surprised by the craven attitude of these men. Only a few months ago Jackson refused to ask for help for the postmen's strike, and the trade union movement sat and watched the postmen get slaughtered. This was also at a time when nothing could have been more obvious than for the railwaymen to come out on strike in pursuit of their own claim which was being contested at the time.

The truth is that the super-annuated leaders of the trade union movement find such struggles a little too far-reaching for the safety of their own bureaucratic positions, and will always sell their members out if possible rather than allow such dangerous actions to take place.

#### SOLIDARITY IS THE KEY

Nothing demonstrated the forces arrayed on either side better than the battle of Saltley coal depot.

Despite the importing of miners from all over the country, and some really determined picketing, the police succeeded in keeping the depot open for six days.

However on the seventh day, the workers of Birmingham intervened. Ten thousand workers from British Leyland, S.L. Carbs, Rover, Salisbury Transmissions, Valor, Lucas, G.E.C., Dunlop and Pressed Steel Fisher came out on strike and marched down to the picket line. By quarter to eleven, the gates at Saltley were closed.

The power of the Birmingham labour movement was instantly decisive.

## MINERS FIND OUT WHO THEIR FRIENDS ARE... AND THEIR ENEMIES

It's only in times of trouble that you really find out who your friends are..and your enemies. Students, militant trades unionists and revolutionary organisations all rallied round the miners strike - while others whose conduct was not so helpful, the police, the press and the union bureaucracy were anxious to advise the miners to avoid such undesirable company.

The police - who only became friendly when they were outnumbered by the pickets - did their best to pick out students and known revolutionaries from the pickets with "snatch squads". They then explained to the miners that these people were the real troublemakers and were only there to provoke trouble. The miners knew otherwise. They had not taken long to decide that the real troublemakers were none other than the police themselves. They had been the first to put the boot in. It was they who were prepared to provoke any amount of trouble in order to help the scab lorries through the pickets.

The union leadership - who could have made the strike much easier by calling for solidarity actions from the power-workers and others - were also hostile to students and revolutionaries. The union leaders proved themselves to be no friends to the rest of the working class or to the miners themselves by using the special case argument - allowing Carr and Davies to pretend that they had not been beaten, and that the rest of the trade union movement would stand no chance of winning the same victories. Yet these same bureaucrats were able to tell their members who they should and who they should not be friendly with. Unfortunately at Rougeley they succeeded in keeping the I.M.G. from addressing a union meeting to which they had been invited by rank and file members. A circular was sent to all branches warning them that Trotskyist agitators were using the strike for their own ends and should not be fraternised with. This will surely rebound on the bureaucrats. Actions speak louder than words, and the miners will judge for themselves who is really on their side.

The Birmingham Evening Mail wrote of "students, building worker strikers and Maoists using the miners bitterness for their own political ends". On other pages they ran their usual sob stories of old age pensioners freezing to death, and the plight of women in kidney machines. Again they made a bad miscalculation in believing that the miners were so stupid as to be impressed by this anti-red propaganda - especially when they only had to turn over the page to read anti-strike propaganda.

So while trades unionists everywhere, and especially the miners themselves, are celebrating this victory, it is to be hoped that some lessons have been learnt. We hope that the trade union bureaucrats are no longer allowed to divide one struggle from another, and that the spirit and unity of Saltley will be shown in future battles. We are confident too, that as time goes by, the trades union movement will come to trust the capitalist press less and less, and the ideas of revolutionaries more and more.





THE SOUTH BIRMINGHAM  
CLAIMANTS AND UNEMPLOYED WORKERS UNION

The South Birmingham Claimants and Unemployed Workers Union is a recent development in the Birmingham Claimants Unions. And, as our name indicates, we see ourselves as having more in common with the organised Trade Union movement than with the Claimants Unions as they have so far existed in Birmingham.

We came into existence to fight unemployment and also to fight for a higher standard of living for the unemployed. We believe that the individual who finds himself unemployed should not be penalised for it. We consider that unemployment should not be followed by a drop in income; if society cannot or will not provide a job of work then it should provide five days pay. It was during this initial period that we developed our special skills and knowledge in fighting claims at the Social Security Office and at the Labour Exchange. With these we have been able to assist both the unemployed and strikers in claiming their correct entitlements.

As an organisation we intend not only to fight individual claims but also to fight politically the system that makes claiming necessary. In other words we do not see unemployment as a separate issue but as an integral part of a system based on production for profit rather than for use. And, in order to fight this system, it is necessary to link with other forces struggling in our society. Link with the Trade Unions and fight unemployment at source:- stop the redundancies and 'rationalisation' that cause unemployment in the first place.

At least as important as anything else we do is the assistance we can give to people on strike. The whole point of the governments strategy, in allowing unemployment to rise unchecked, is to defuse industrial struggles before they occur; to allow the employers to use the unemployed as a weapon with which to break strikes and destroy militancy. But, if the unemployed are organised, they cannot be used as scab labour and moreover they can place at the disposal of the strikers and Trade Union Branches their special skills in claiming Social Security benefit. And, in this way, turn the governments strategy against them.

Currently we are involved with trying to gain representation on the Trades Council and attempting to link with individual Trade Union Branches. The Union, if able to speak at those branches and to put our assessment of the unemployment situation to the majority of Trade Unionists in Birmingham, would then be in a position to participate in challenging a system which creates unemployment.

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off and send to:- 122, Gough Rd., Edgbaston, Birmingham 15.

\*I wish to know more about the South B'ham Claimants & unemployed Workers Union / International Marxist Group,

NAME: .....

ADDRESS: .....

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\*Delete where inaplicable.