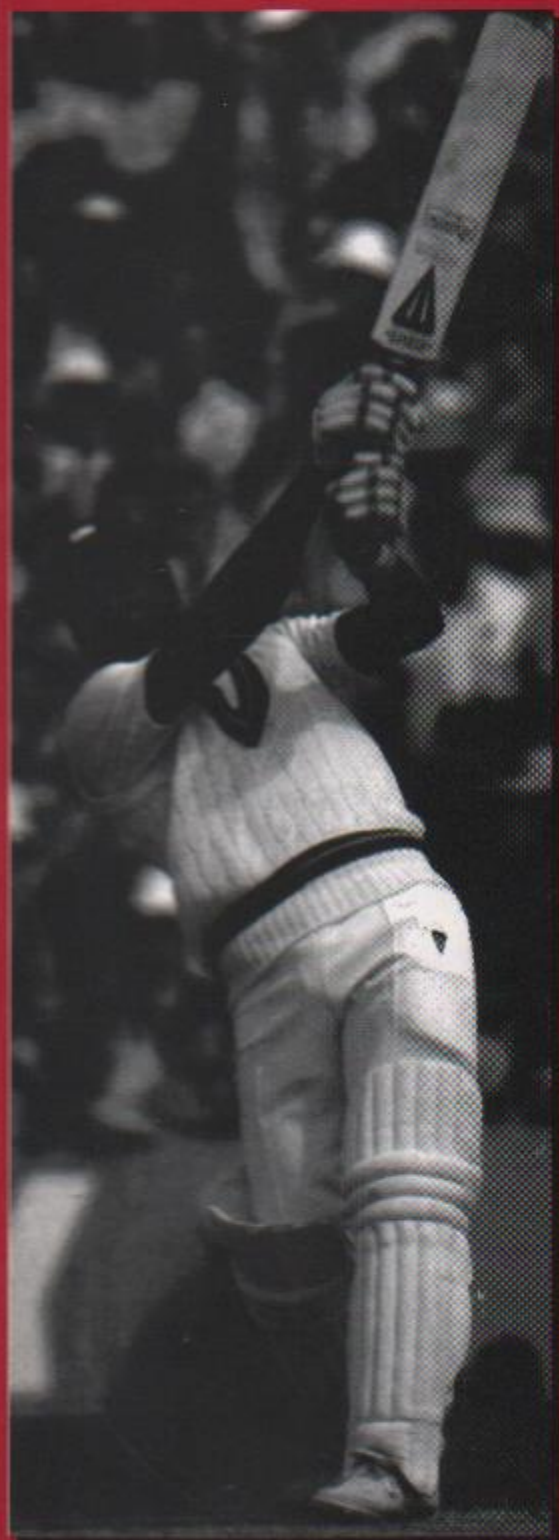


FIGHTBACK

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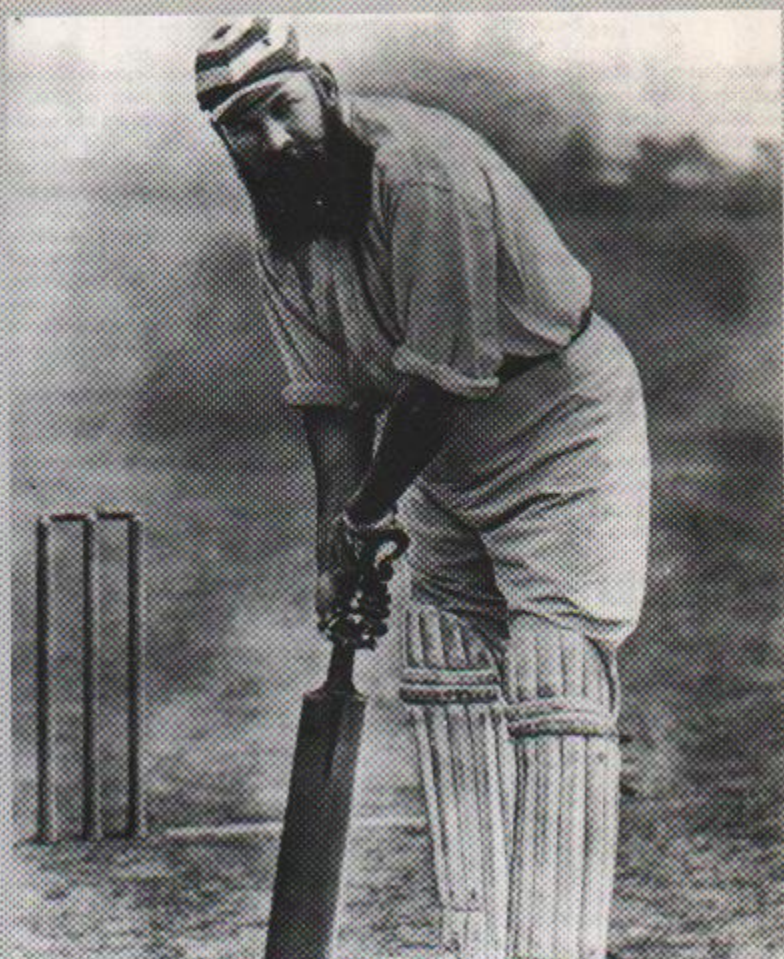
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Natfhe Executive elections

Standing candidates in the National Executive election has been a very useful exercise. The *Fightback* campaign platform 'No cuts in jobs, pay or conditions' has reached parts we otherwise would not reach. Our platform was circulated to every single member in the country. Within 48 hours of the manifestos landing on the doormat we had interested responses from Gloucester, Maidstone, Darlington as well as bigger places such as Sheffield and East London in which we already have supporters.

We are not surprised that there was such a ready audience for what we have been arguing. We think it makes sense. It is encouraging that there are people all over the country, maybe isolated now, but crying out to come into contact with others who are ready to think through a new approach to collective struggle.

Our aim is to set up a series of open meetings with as many of these people as we can in order to establish a wider and stronger network of activists that will become the springboard to a new outlook and new possibilities for all Natfhe members.

Natfhe election results (Public Sector Fightback Campaign candidates)

Alec Turner	Vice President	3002	21.45%
Jim Butcher	Treasurer	1766	12.45%
Shirley Lawes	Southern region women's officer	314	31.75%
Denis Hayes	Higher employment sector south east region	44	35.5%
Jon Bryan	Further and adult education northern region	120	16%



● The old pattern of workplace relations and the language in which they were cast are gone. The experience of the Public Sector Fightback Campaign has confirmed the intuitions of many of us that we need a whole new agenda of struggle.

At first sight this seems an overwhelmingly ambitious project. It appears that we start from a position of weakness and retreat. A recent TUC conference confirmed what we had known for some time: that as an organisation it rejected the notion that it represented any collective or class interest. No more would it talk even in rhetorical fashion of 'this great movement of ours'. Rather the TUC would compete in the marketplace to sell insurance and credit cards, even though the level of expertise available seem more suitable for double glazing and mobile phones.

The individual unions which make up the TUC are themselves under intense pressure. Despite its desperate and demeaning attempts to cling on to a national negotiating structure at whatever expense to its members, Natfhe has been left out in the cold. The local renegotiation of terms and conditions is now a reality for thousands of lecturers around the country. Many of them must be questioning what benefits their membership brings.

The final stripping away of the old relations of collaboration between man-

Working to live or living to work?

agement and union has exposed workers to a much more coercive blast. As we detail in the special section on flexibility, job intensification may be dressed up as empowerment, responsibility or just adapting to new terms, but intensification it remains. Behind the velvet glove which presents us with choices and invites us to become involved in the reorganisation of our working lives is the iron fist of coercion. For those who are not flexible enough, and for many who are, the only choice given is lower wages in worse conditions or redundancy. This is a choice familiar to generations of workers and a reminder that although the landscape of workplace relations may change, there is a certain bedrock that you can always rely on.

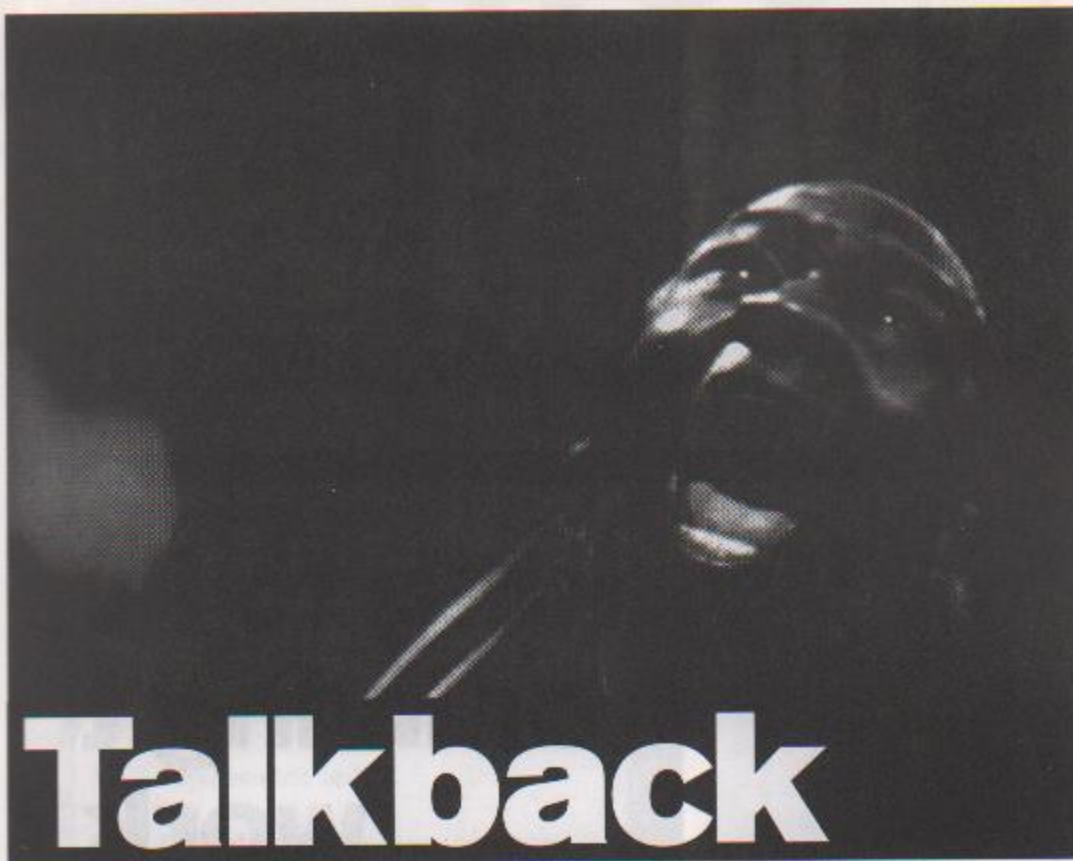
One further development should give us food for thought. Not only are we more under the cosh, we are now expected to dish it out to our fellow workers. If there is one thing which will preclude us being able to fightback, it is the acceptance that this is a legitimate part of our jobs and working lives. However often we are knocked back, as long as we preserve the sense that we have a collective interest not only with our own workmates but with all our fellow workers, then we have the possibility and the potential to come back. Workers who set out to discipline and deny their fellow workers are beaten before the fight has begun.

It is as well to state the position baldly

and not to put a gloss on it. We can then look at the more positive side of the present situation. The old methods do not work. Many who espoused them may not have admitted as such but they have given up the ghost. We already know that this will force many workers into passivity, but thousands of others perceive the downgrading of their lives and are prepared to tackle the forces set against them.

Many workers, often in small ways, have had the experience of both collectivity and of victory. They have discovered that their power is at least the equal of what is set against them. In our campaign we have been part of this rediscovery. It has confirmed our knowledge of the potential of working class solidarity. It has also confirmed the necessity for this to come across in new fresh ways which address both the experience and preoccupations of workers.

This is why this issue of *Fightback* is organised around the theme of Working to Live or Living to Work? We want many more workers to consider what the role of work is in their lives and what is happening to them in their workplace. We know that this is way of reaching and reinterpreting the concerns of workers. This bulletin is therefore the first contribution in a series of discussions that will lead up to our first public conference in June. We hope you will be part of that discussion and with us in June.



Talkback

What is to be done?

Reading your article 'Nafthe: an albatross around our necks' (*Fightback*, Autumn 1993), I thought you did not really do justice to the differences between those of us who are in colleges where we have the new contracts, and colleges where the 'silver book' still holds, even if it is effectively dead.

In my college everyone is on new contracts. We have to report in to our curriculum leaders at 8.30am or we are disciplined. If we do not work hard enough curriculum leaders are disciplined. We are going to be further disciplined by having our non-teaching time timetabled by management. This is so that we won't spend what they consider is too much time filing or preparing lessons. Management tells us what we can do and when. All professional autonomy will be destroyed. There is a dress code—jeans and leggings are out. The union has been derecognised. No posters can be put up anywhere without management's permission. Staff are encouraged to report on one another if they want to get on. As a result disciplinary letters and threats abound. If you step out of line you will be told in writing that you should look for a job elsewhere or if you are on a temporary contract that it will not be renewed.

There is a climate of fear and passivity. The students hate the atmosphere but can't leave. Many of them need travel grants which only allow you to attend your local college.

It is as if all the examples in your article have been amalgamated and put into

action in a single college. The result is that no one dares raise their heads and even criticise what's going on. What I'd like to know is what can anyone do in such a situation to even begin to get people opposing what's going on without immediately being fired?

A lecturer

Appraising appraisal

I work in a medical research centre. Management have just introduced appraisal schemes. The union is supporting appraisal as a way of fostering staff development. We don't have a performance-related pay system and no one will be made redundant. What is happening is that we have been asked to set targets to achieve within the next year. Management have agreed to give us what support they can to reach these targets.

People know I'm a bit political and asked me whether they should boycott the appraisals. I think if we go through with the appraisals we will end up working harder than ever before. We might end up doing the equivalent of several extra jobs between us. This effectively means job losses as they won't have to employ extra staff.

I called a meeting and we are writing a leaflet exposing what we think the appraisal scheme means. I would appreciate the views of the Public Sector Fightback Campaign on such issues as appraisal and quality processes. Aren't they just intellectual forms of the old fashioned 'speed-ups'?

Tony, Hammersmith

Services we need

I just bought a copy of *Fightback* and read it while I waited and waited and waited for a train to come on the 'misery line'. That's London's Northern Line to any of your provincial readers. That's an example of a 'system that doesn't work' I thought. It's certainly a service I need to maintain my dignity or at least to get home. I'd like to 'move forward', but how exactly are we going to get the services we need?

Adam, Barnet

SATs: where teachers are at

In 'Unions fail the test' (*Fightback*, Summer 1993), you argue that a victory over SATs will lead to the demoralisation of teachers. What rubbish! Teachers won a victory over SATs which has given them more confidence. They fought and won. This shows that the government's weak spot is precisely those educational and other issues, such as the state of the health service, where you can win popular support for a fightback.

Having beaten the Tories on this issue, not only teachers, but workers throughout the public sector will be encouraged to go forward and tackle issues like pay and conditions. You can't separate issues out in the way your 'teacher' did. We need to fight on every single issue as it arises in the workplace. The Public Sector Fightback Campaign appears to stand on the sidelines refusing to take up anything but bread-and-butter issues. Teachers were willing to fight on SATs but you argued that they have to fight for something else. Is this how you hope to build a real fightback? It's this sort of ultra-left posturing that puts off ordinary workers. You have to start where people are and not preach for collective action only on 'pure' issues. There was a collective response to SATs and it did help to rebuild union strength. What's wrong with that?

Denis

Anti-union Fightback?

In *Fightback*, Autumn 1993 your anonymous writers attack the NUT, CPSSA, RMT, FBU, NATFHE and the TUC. You appear to be anti-union. Yet you are organising what you call 'Networks' within or around unions. This is a contradictory state of affairs. I suspect that most of your readers are union activists and have a right to know just what your position really is on unions and their role in building a fightback.

Mike, Romford

We welcome readers' views and criticisms. Please keep your letters as short as possible and send them to *Fightback*, BM PSFC, London WC1 3XX or phone (071) 278 9908/fax (071) 278 9844

Co-operating with the cops

State activities have always had a hard and a soft aspect—consensus and coercion—but it was usually possible to tell them apart. Times have changed. Below, a housing worker describes how her department now plays the role of policing the working class in tandem with the constabulary. While social provision is restricted, the police and prison services want to be considered as ordinary trade unionists. The second article in this section restates a few home truths about what the state is and highlights the dangers to us all in considering the police and prison officers as anything other than our enemies. ►

'We've moved from the days when housing staff would not give the police the time of day to a co-operative partnership approach.' This comment comes from a senior member of the Greenwich Housing Department at a meeting earlier this year. It is an understatement.

At this meeting were senior police chiefs from Greenwich and Plumstead police stations, the head of Greenwich Legal Services for Housing, the Community Safety Officer, Area Directors of Housing and the Assistant Director. A cosy little group brought together to discuss new initiatives for co-operation.

The Head of Legal Services was eager to get started. He explained to the police chiefs how Greenwich housing was having great difficulty obtaining court orders to evict problematic tenants. He went on to suggest that where tenants have a 'history' perhaps the police could help the council by providing details of previous convictions to support possession proceedings.

The police response was most accommodating. They felt 'very enthusiastic to improve the quality of life for residents, especially where persistent offenders are not reformed by repeated arrests'. The police chiefs were particularly keen to provide evidence where there might be cases of drug dealing, brothels and properties being used for the passage of stolen goods. They would even consider 'waiving some internal rules', but this last statement was confidential, of course.

In return, the council officers declared themselves to be more than willing to

co-operate in matters of surveillance. Moreover, through the exchange of information, the council would initiate civil action where the police could not take criminal proceedings—'you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours'.

A local authority housing department has always been part of the state machinery, but in soft focus. The police and the law courts were the hard edge, but now the distinction has become blurred, to say the least.

In the seventies and even into the early eighties hostility between housing workers and the police was par for the course. When senior officers in the council tried to promote closer working relations, non-cooperation from housing staff was the order of the day. Housing workers refused to liaise with the police or any other agency and invoked policies which forbade such disclosure of information on tenants. Housing workers often had a commitment to the relief of deprivation and to giving help to beat the system.

Today, while every housing officer would probably still describe themselves as having a social conscience, for the most part they are conscious-stricken about different issues. And when it comes to police involvement in their day-to-day working practices things are very different.

It is now quite normal to have police participation in every council working party from domestic violence to racial harassment. The police regularly attend management team meetings where an



Co-operating

'exchange of information' takes place. This usually entails a line manager arriving with files of 'problematic' tenants. Outside the meetings PC Plod regularly drops into the office to pick up keys to vacant properties in order to carry out surveillance work. Housing officers often persuade tenants to invite the police to their association meetings to explain Neighbourhood Watch, advise on security and tackle crime. The really proactive plods in Greenwich have even set up a 'Police Sector Working Group' to 'provide a forum where representatives of the local community can raise concerns of a local nature'.

Today, the old roles are often reversed. At local tenants' meetings the police come across as caring community workers. The housing officer is cast as the officious bureaucrat putting obstacles in the way of progress.

On the other hand, where the traditional distance between housing officer and police officer has to be preserved, it is for form's sake, not because of real distaste. One housing worker in Greenwich complained when plainclothes men called her by her first name on a difficult estate. It put her credibility in question. Friendly relations were alright for the office but not when it gave the tenants the correct idea that she could be a grass.

The housing service is fast becoming an espionage service. Some officers may feel uncomfortable with the new working arrangement but few have real objections to 'co-operating with the cops' or could put their finger on what is wrong with this approach.

Cuts, the pressure of work and the insidious erosion of the idea of a collective attitude to problems have worked to facilitate the new attitude. Left to tackle a mounting set of insoluble cases on their own, each worker has come to see the individual client as the source of the

problem, rather than an inadequate system. To get a result, housing officers act in a more and more coercive manner, resorting to the police, social services, child protection teams and other state bodies to sort out individual tenants who are deemed anti-social.

As little as 10 years ago housing workers would blame the restrictions placed on them doing the job or insufficient resources for their problems. Now they blame the 'client group'. A tenant blows up in the office. He has had no heating or hot water for two weeks, his housing benefit has been cut because his income support has been stopped, he has been charged full rent and faces eviction for rent arrears. Once the housing worker would have seen their way to help this person get round the system. Now the tenant will be condemned for failing to sort out his benefit.

For losing his rag, the same tenant will be put on a list of 'abusive and aggressive' tenants. Often the tenant will be banned from the office and an injunction slapped on for potentially 'violent and threatening' behaviour.

It is part of housing officers' daily workload to investigate residents who they suspect are not the 'real' tenants. The HO will telephone the gas board or electricity company to find out in whose name the bill is registered. They will check the use of fuel to see if the tenant is in residence. They will sift housing benefit claims and council tax payments and check against the Tenancy Agreement. If the details do not match, the fraud team will take over. The really zealous housing officer will check the immigration status of an apparent defrauder just in case!

Once the awesome inadequacy of housing provision is regarded as the result of individual frauds and malingerers, then it makes perfect sense to act not with the tenant, but with the police, social workers, counselling service, whichever or whoever can be drawn in to disciplining recalcitrant individuals.

Of course, many HOs co-operate with the police and other state agencies simply because it is council policy and these days everyone is fearful of losing their job for not meeting quotas or carrying out policy, however objectionable. Without a collective response, housing officers are not going to become individual martyrs. But it is the absence

of a collective response that engenders the conservative outlook in which it makes sense to hold individual victims, instead of a decrepit system, accountable for problems.

That January housing meeting in Greenwich was another step down the road of increased state control over the lives of ordinary people. It had an interesting finale. The Assistant Director explained to the police chiefs that Greenwich Housing Department had set aside a budget of £200 000 (funded from tenants' rents) for a 'community safety strategy'. 'You might have some ideas on how to spend it', he suggested obsequiously and then went on to suggest that perhaps it could even be used by the police to employ more officers on specified estates. It was only an off-the-cuff suggestion, of course.

In the interests of sharing experiences it can only be a matter of time before housing officers don police uniforms. At one recent management team meeting, the police did indeed suggest such a job swap opportunity. A housing manager could be seconded to the police and in return a representative of the police would be seconded to the housing service. Is there a difference any more, I ask myself anxiously? ●



with the cops

Are these forces

'The fight will go on all summer....We'll show them...biggest ever rally....We expected 14 000 and 23 000 turned up....only a small beginning....step up the pressure....Say NO!'

This sounds good. The sort of militant activity we need. The report goes on:

'Everyone getting together has got to show the government we mean business. Look at these people, they're angry and very worried. You have to do something, show support. You can't just sit back.'

You would be hard put to guess that this article appeared in the *Police Review* of 23 July 1993. The police were responding to the recommendations of the Sheehy Report: fixed-term contracts, performance-related pay and management restructuring. The police were not alone in regarding themselves as an ordinary set of public workers under attack. The Labour Party declared that 'law and order is a socialist issue' (*New Statesman*, 23 September 1993). The Democratic Left invited the Police Federation to discuss the future of the trade union movement.

The bizarre notion of the filth being just like you and me has even intruded on to picket lines where you can hear workers casually chatting to the police. 'They're trying to do to us what they tried to do to you, mate.' When have the police ever taken the side of the workers against their bosses? Never. It's not their job. It's as simple as that. They enforce the law, and the law is the bosses' law.

The confusion about the role of the police is in part a product of confusion about trade unionism. The Police Federation may take the form of a trade union organisation but that is where the similarity ends. The political task of trade unions is the defence of the working class. This is not simply irrelevant to an organisation of the police but antagonistic to their role in society—enforcing the authority of the state and its laws.

To clarify these points perhaps we should look at another occupation, prison officers, whose association (POA) is already an affiliate to the TUC. When Lord Justice May granted an injunction outlawing POA strike action, proposed as a response to government plans to privatise prisons, it was greeted by unions and left alike as a dramatic attack on workers' right to organise. 'One of the most serious for the trade union movement as a whole' said one radical newspaper.



On 2 December the Council of Civil Service Unions (CCSU) carried a resolution condemning the legal constraint.

For their part, prison officers are anxious to normalise their image. The *Prison Service Journal* (Summer 1991) makes this ambition clear. 'Here and there it does seem possible for the occupational identity of prison officers to edge towards integration with other public service professions.' By association, prison officers hope to be regarded in the same way as health workers, local government workers and civil servants.

Like the new attitude to the police, this issue throws up important problems regarding our independence as workers and our ability to win unity in the face of government attacks. The government

injunction is not the problem, it is the defence of the POA which should be opposed. The POA is not a trade union. We must be careful to distinguish the formal apparatus from the content of the work these people do. Prison officers are responsible for maintaining one aspect of the state's coercive relationship with the working class—the prisons. Treating the POA as just another union establishes a dangerous precedent for all public sector workers.

During 1993 the Broad Left within the civil service unions held two conferences on the issue of market-testing. The POA sent representatives to both. The POA now has a candidate standing in its national elections on a Broad Left platform. Due to the confusion and insecurity caused by the government's privatisation programme, there is a good chance that the Broad Left candidate may win a position on the POA's national executive. The left will hail this as a triumph. The POA has become an exemplary trade union.

There are many similarities between the POA and other civil service unions. The POA is organised like a union. The POA uses the same arguments to fight market-testing and privatisation. Throughout the campaign against cuts, civil service unions have argued against the government onslaught by invoking our status as civil servants. We are asked to put up with worse conditions and wage cuts to retain the nominal privilege of state employees. Our unions ask us to identify with the very apparatus of the employer which makes our lives hell.

Like the health unions and the civil service unions, the POA is keen to emphasise its close relationship with the state. It bases its case on the irrationality

with us?



of prison privatisation. Prison officers are warning the government about the damage that is being done to the prison service and the dangers of overcrowding. They are saying that the POA is a special case.

In the pages of *Fightback* and in the workplace the Public Sector Fightback Campaign has consistently argued against the idea that workers in different sectors should present themselves as a special case, deserving of special treatment. Such a strategy is divisive. It sets worker against worker in the face of the same attack. Despite this I want to emphasise that the POA is indeed a special case.

As a low-paid civil servant, I am an employee of the state, but that's as far as it goes. Having the state as the boss means nothing more to me than lousy wages, lousy conditions and oppressive and coercive management practices.

But it's different for a prison officer (or police officer for that matter). I became a civil servant because I needed a job and

a wage to survive. My decision involved no particular political allegiances. Cops' and prison officers' jobs, on the other hand, are by definition about enforcing the laws of this country and protecting the state from those the authorities deem to be the enemies of good order.

Coercion is playing a growing role in

the jobs of many public sector workers (see 'Co-operating with the cops', p5). It is more and more important to underline the coercive nature of the state and continually to review our own position, as public sector workers, in relationship to this. There are many grey and difficult areas but being a screw is not one of them.

If we equivocate on this point and remove the distinction, it will have disastrous consequences for our own ability to resist the government's attacks. To advocate that prison officers are workers just like you and me is dangerous. If we are like them then we too are direct coercive instruments of the state. We surrender our necessary position of antagonism towards the government that is attacking us, and, of necessity, the freedom to act freely in our own interests.

The government justified the High Court injunction against the POA on the grounds that prison officers have the powers of constables and are therefore not workers. Too right. Prison officers and police have no claim to be independent of the state.

We could do worse than recall the comments of Frederick Engels on this score:

'It is because the English bourgeois sees his own image in the law, as he does in his God, that he holds it to be holy and that the policeman's club (which is really his own club) holds a power for him that is wonderfully reassuring. But for the worker it certainly does not. The worker knows only too well, and from too long experience, that the law is a rod the bourgeois holds over his head, and he does not bother about it unless he has to.' (*The Condition of the Working Class in England*)

Remember this next time a member of the force chats with you on the picket line or a prison officer sits down next to you at a rank and file conference. ●

The Labour Party considers the health issue a vote-getting election winner. It thinks it has won the argument that the NHS is safer in its hands. Yet its policy document *Health 2000* has the same message of cuts in a different language. While Labour and Tory exchange plans to make the health service more efficient, the hospital worker and the patient share the misery

The lesser of two evils?

● Did you know that Virginia Bottomley is an anagram of 'Main vile Tory bigot'? A recent *Daily Telegraph* poll suggested that the Secretary of State for Health is considered to be Britain's most insincere politician. For a member of a cabinet that can't keep its pinstripes on long enough to say 'Back to basics', this is quite an indictment. Recent opinion polls also show that the profound and widespread misgivings about the Conservatives' health reforms makes Labour the party that most people trust with the National Health Service.

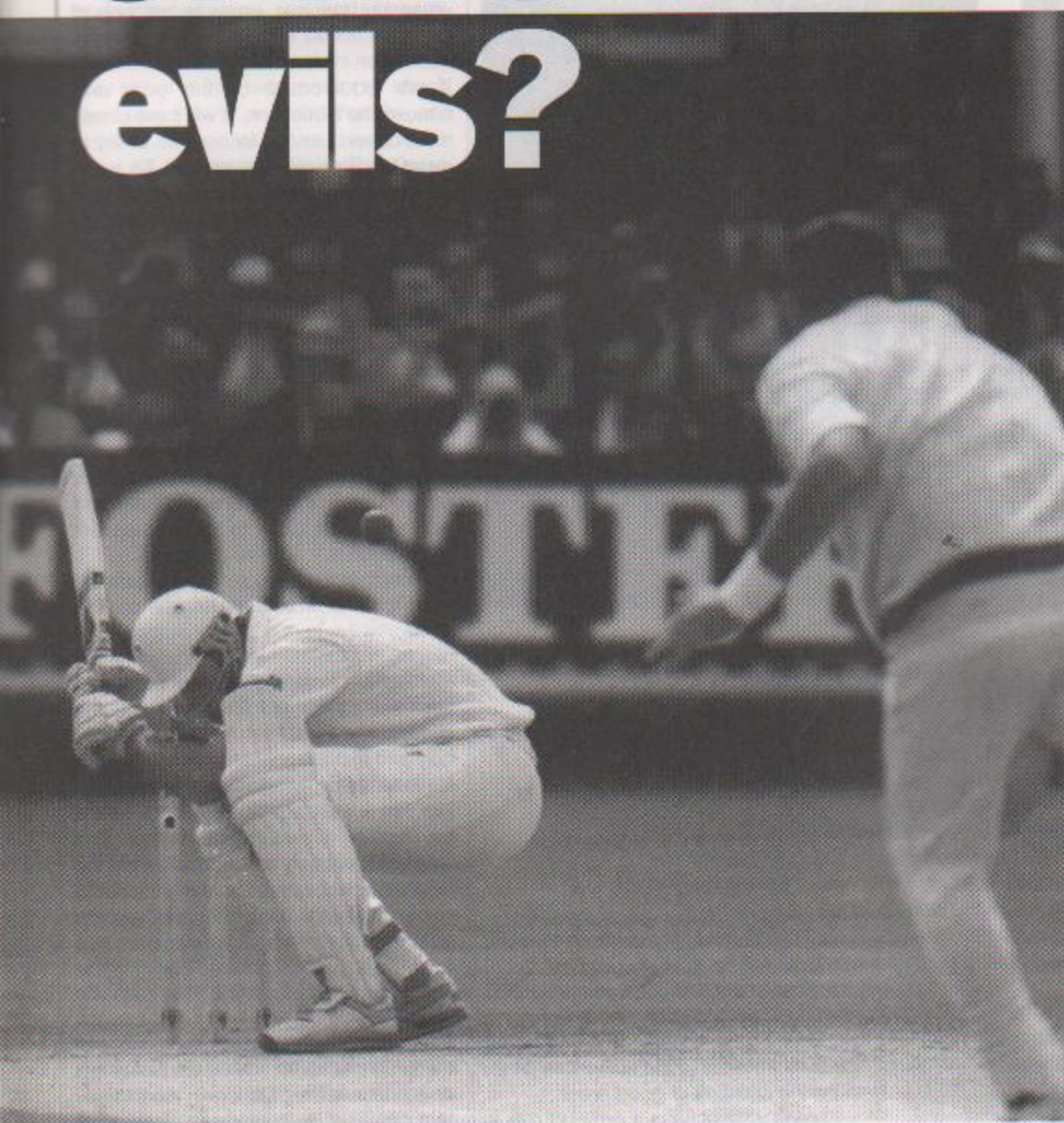
I went to Sheffield where David Blunkett, the shadow health secretary,

addressed a conference to launch Labour's *Health 2000* policy document, to discover whether Mr Blunkett will win the award for the most sincere politician of the year.

Labour's key objective is to abolish the internal market and the infamous GP fundholders and replace them with 'service level agreements' and 'joint commissioning agencies'. Exactly where the distinction lies between market contracts and service level agreements was the subject of some controversy at the conference. The overall message of Labour's document, however, was clear: the NHS must be made more efficient. *Health 2000* argues that 'increased efficiency would enable additional treatment or care to be offered which would supplement the basic level of service for each category of work'. Contrary to the popular myth, therefore, Labour is not planning to put more money into the NHS. The proposition is that the main problem with the health service is not underfunding, but the 'misuse of resources'. Hence the internal market is to be replaced by a more effective efficiency drive.

Health 2000 proposes that the Department of Health establish an Efficiency Unit to monitor the costs, performance and effectiveness of community and hospital health services. 'This would assist us in determining the pattern of future investment and appropriate programmes of rationalisation for the years ahead.' We could be forgiven for thinking that the Department of Health is already putting efficiency (read cuts) before health needs. *Health 2000* provides no evidence that Labour's abolition of the internal market will do anything to reverse the cost-cutting rationalisation that is running down the health service.

Labour's argument against Conservative reforms is that they are not in the best interests of patient care. 'In a market there are winners and losers but in the NHS the losers are the patients....The current system puts the purchaser's perspective on cost-cutting before the interests of the patient.' Labour scores points in contrasting the 'obscene misuse of resources' such as the hike in chief executive salaries with the closure of accident and emergency wards because



they 'cannot afford' to employ enough nurses to run them. But the more sensitive language cannot obscure the similarity between Labour's concern with 'value for money' and the cost-cutting Tory agenda.

Both parties agree that anything above the bare minimum must be paid for out of efficiency savings. The rhetoric is different, the content is the same. While the Tories invoke the market as an invisible hand which pushes aside bureaucracy, Labour's document talks about 'empowerment' and patient choice, in pursuit of efficiency.

Under Labour, the Tory placemen at the helm of the flagship NHS trusts would be replaced by democratically elected officials more receptive to the patients' views. *Health 2000* is full of reassuring but empty phrases such as 'hospitals and community services would readopt friendly and familiar titles which make sense to patients'. Tory policy has butchered hospital budgets, stripping provision to the bone in the name of efficiency and value for money. Labour responds by giving the same strategy user-friendly names with a national network of patient associations 'strengthening the voice of the patient at local and national level'.

It can't even be said that Labour is innovative in its rhetoric of empowerment. John Major's very own Patient's Charter has launched a thousand patient satisfaction surveys pledged to give a voice to patients in the new NHS—but they turn out to be voices of pain since you can't get thousands of necessary operations in the caring NHS.

Almost nobody is inspired by participating as a worker or patient in a decrepit health service. Yet Labour's programme for government is waged on the theme of empowerment in just such discredited institutions.

'Labour is developing a strategy for government in the late 1990s. It is a vision of a new health service built from the bottom, with primary and community care as the focus of our thinking...public health, the prevention of ill-health and the empowerment and protection of the patient are central to our strategy.'

In other words, it is a vision which does not include any commitment to providing the necessary funds for the nurses, beds and kidney machines that the health service needs. The best that can be said of *Health 2000* is that Labour has an acute case of hot air.

David Blunkett may think that talking about healthcare will improve his sincerity rating, but few people are going to be taken in by the idea of being empowered in a health service that is falling apart for lack of resources. The Labour Party's policy looks more like a sick attempt to empower itself, and at our expense. ●

A week in the life

An average week for an E-grade staff nurse working on a busy paediatric medical ward in a London teaching hospital

Monday: late shift 1300-2130

Arrive for late shift to find that I am the only qualified member of staff on duty. Four of our staff nurses have left and their replacements cannot start till after 1 April, almost two months away. The unit cannot afford to pay for extra bank or agency staff so I am unable to leave the ward for a break during the entire shift.

Tuesday: early shift 0700-1530

It seems all I do is work and sleep. Arrive home from previous shift at 2230 only to leave the next morning at 0600 to reach work for a 0700 start. Thankfully there are two staff nurses on duty and the day seems to be going relatively smoothly. At 1100 our unit manager visits and asks one of us to do a split shift, as the staff nurse on a late is sick. This means going home and returning at 1600 to work till 2100.

Wednesday: day off

Seriously considering a new job. I buy the latest edition of the *Nursing Times* to scan the job adverts. The special feature is an article on how to cope with redundancy. I quickly reassess my position, remembering the recent loss of 2000 nursing posts at Guy's Hospital. Our trust is one of the few left in London which seems to have a relatively secure future, and is still offering permanent contracts to its staff.

Thursday: day off

Woken at 0900 by a phone call from our unit manager begging me to come into work for a late shift, as there are no staff to cover the unit. I won't get paid overtime, but I will be able to claim a day off in lieu. I remember the article I read yesterday and reluctantly agree.

Friday: late shift 1300-2130

The ward is like a madhouse. All our beds are full and booked admissions

arrive for overnight blood transfusions only to find there is no space. The other wards on the unit are having similar problems. The unit manager decides to extend our capacity by four beds to accommodate the demand. With no extra staff to assist, the standard of care each child receives deteriorates to dangerously low levels. I eventually leave the ward an hour late without having had a break.

Saturday: late shift 1300-2130

Yet again there are only two staff covering the ward, which means that neither of us can leave the ward for a proper break. Thankfully most of yesterday's patients have gone home and the ward is fairly quiet. The tube on the way home is full of people going out for the night. I'm going home to bed so that I can get up for my early shift tomorrow. Shift work ruins your social life.

Sunday: early shift 0700-1530

The ward is quiet and there are three staff nurses on duty. I plan to go home early and take some of my time owing back, however one of the other wards needs cover so I have to stay. I eventually finish late. I'm due back on duty tomorrow for a night shift. The consolation is the boost to my meagre paypacket to compensate for the unsocial hours that I have to work. I wonder how many nurses will agree to work weekends and nights if the government stops extra duty payments, as they have suggested.

On Monday my ward manager phones me at home to tell me some 'good news'. I am being considered for a promotion to F-grade senior staff nurse. Great, until I realise that the extra responsibility of the new post goes hand-in-hand with an effective pay cut. The increase in my salary would be less than the supplement I receive for being an E-grade on a paediatric ward. My manager thinks that I should accept this as a 'career move'.



Casualisation

The characteristic feature of work in the nineties is the demand for flexibility. In this special feature we look at the different forms this takes in different areas of the public sector. But from school-based teacher training to quality control the impact is the same: the intensification of work and the degeneration of the service. We focus on the biggest flexibility of all—psychometric testing—changing your personality to fit the job description

I was one of those who worked during last November's one-day civil service strike against market-testing. All 250 casuals in the Employment Department headquarters in Sheffield were isolated by the union campaign and left open to management victimisation. In the week before the strike management issued the threat that any casual supporting the strike would be dealt with accordingly.

Management did not have to spell it out. We knew what this meant and it had the desired effect. The CPSA assured us casuals that we would be defended but this was an idle boast. Management does not have to sack casuals to get their own way—they just don't have to renew our contracts.

My colleagues and I found ourselves in the position of either ignoring the strike call or being victimised by management.

Casualisation of the workforce is one of the most useful weapons in management's armoury. Take my case. After working for nearly two years my contract was terminated. I was forced to take four weeks' unpaid 'holiday'. I was then re-employed in the same department. My job can be reinvented or disposed of on a daily basis. My statutory employment rights go out of the window since employment has to be continuous for two years to qualify.

In our department there are eight casuals. Two came up to the two years and were dropped and then re-employed. Another four are coming up to two years' employment and will be kicked out. All of us are filling full-time

permanent posts but we know we will never achieve permanent status.

The personnel handbook issued by the department states that casual appointments 'must be regarded as an interim measure to cover short-term needs and emergencies only'. Two years seems to be a long time to be having an emergency!

The advantages to management of casualisation are obvious. It permits the maximum flexibility in hiring and firing. And casuals can be used flexibly to cover cutbacks in staff or departments that are running down for closure. As a casual I have been shunted around four sections covering reorganisations, cutbacks in staffing, short-term sick leave and annual leave. There is also a pay-off on the salaries budget—no superannuation or redundancy pay for us.

A recent survey of casual employment in the civil service highlighted the trend. The number of casuals increased from 12 631 in April 1991 to 15 828 in October 1992, an increase of 25 per cent. Casuals now comprise 3.1 per cent of non-industrial civil servants. It may seem a small percentage but it is the thin end of the wedge. Temporary workers are a daily reminder to all how tenuous their own jobs could become.

The leaders of my union, the CPSA, have maintained a formal opposition to casual appointments and a formal commitment to achieving permanent status for casuals. However, it was the Council for Civil

Service Unions, of which the CPSA is a member, which negotiated the 1991 national agreement with management which entrenched casualisation. This agreement extended the possible period of casualisation from 51 weeks to 103 weeks. Under the agreement management are supposed to have a specific short-term task to justify a casual but in practice management use casuals for anything they see fit.

The national agreement has only increased management's control over workers. It has given them greater flexibility over the type of appointment offered, the method of recruitment, the period of employment and the conditions under which casuals have to work. At present the unions are all hot under the collar about the issue of market-testing. While they manoeuvre to maintain their negotiating rights, our rights have been handed over gift-wrapped.

Offices have been closed and jobs slashed. The unions have allowed management to use casuals to implement the closures and make redundancies smoother. The union campaign has been divisive and eroded any chance of solidarity. Three months on from the November strike nothing has changed except a deeper sense of isolation and demoralisation. To be effective we must cut through the divisions that management has established and the union leadership has rubber-stamped. Permanent jobs and decent conditions for all civil servants are the only realistic position that we can adopt if we are to make effective resistance possible.

● Psychometric testing is one of few booming sectors in today's slump. Its increasingly widespread use in the job market is proving controversial among occupational psychologists. Public sector workers have different reasons to be wary of the current popularity of psychometric testing.

Psychometric testing rests on the assumption that there are stable job-related differences between individuals. The tests are designed to measure these differences with sufficient accuracy to further the selection of applicants for jobs and for seniority.

Psychometric tests measure these 'individual differences' under two categories: ability, subdivided into attainment and aptitude, and personality. The results of a series of tests are profiled on a scale from very high to very low for ability and in types of personality. The ability tests will normally measure how much a person has of one or more of the following abilities: verbal, numerical, reasoning, perceptual, mechanical. The personality type is a measure of extraversion/introversion, dominance/submissiveness, suspiciousness/guilelessness, and so on. A person who scores high on verbal abilities with an added dash of extraversion may be advised to become a sales rep; a person with high scores on verbal, reasoning and numeracy but who is deemed submissive would be steered away from management posts.

The anguished current debate among occupational psychologists turns on their lack of control over the application of their beloved tests and their hijacking for the job market. This issue was focused when the fairness of the tests was called into question by black railway guards. In 1990 eight such guards at London's Paddington station took BR to court with the support of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) over alleged racial discrimination.

The guards all failed the train driver assessment process which included psychometric aptitude tests. A review of the test performance of white and ethnic minority applicants showed an appreciable test score difference between white and ethnic minority candidates. The CRE had already identified the same phenomenon in the published aptitude tests used in the assessment process for management appointees for London Underground Limited. Both British Rail and London Underground settled out of court rather than go before a tribunal. But the controversy remains.

For all the fuss about the validity and independence of this procedure, it remains a massive growth industry. For many bosses the objectivity of the testing is secondary to the coercion the examination enables them to apply in recruitment. This is especially important in a recession.

The pressures of economic stagnation force bosses to look towards wage cuts,

Psychometric testing

the intensification of work and multi-skilling. Every manager with their neck on the line must look to how they can get the most out of their labour resources. Each and every employer looks at staff recruitment and deployment as a massive investment of the company's resources with huge risks involved. Aside from the average £500 000 they have to pay us in wages over the years, there are the start-up costs of recruitment and training.

Looked at in this light the supposed objective superiority of testing over the CV and interview is secondary to the disciplinary pressure that can be exerted when a desperate jobseeker tries to conform to the model of an ideal employee as designated by the boss through the testing procedure.

Central to psychometric testing is the notion that certain abilities and personalities are best suited for jobs and promotion. The clear implication is that if you want to get on, you had better be like the model. If you can work out what it is. If you speak out of turn, forget it. But even if you don't, a personality aversion to compulsory unpaid overtime would mark you out for the chop. No objective examination would be presented so crudely but what are you supposed to think when you go into a 'test scenario' aware that there are 50 workers competing for 30 jobs under the new regime.

Southwark council recently sacked employees whose personality profiles failed to fit the designated profile for jobs in some of their departments. Just before Christmas 1993, all staff in housing benefits and on the council tax were subjected to a series of tests called California OP1 run by consultants from the Waltham Group.

The tests followed the usual pattern of ability and personality. Ability tests looked at shape identification, maths, speed, comprehension and grammar.



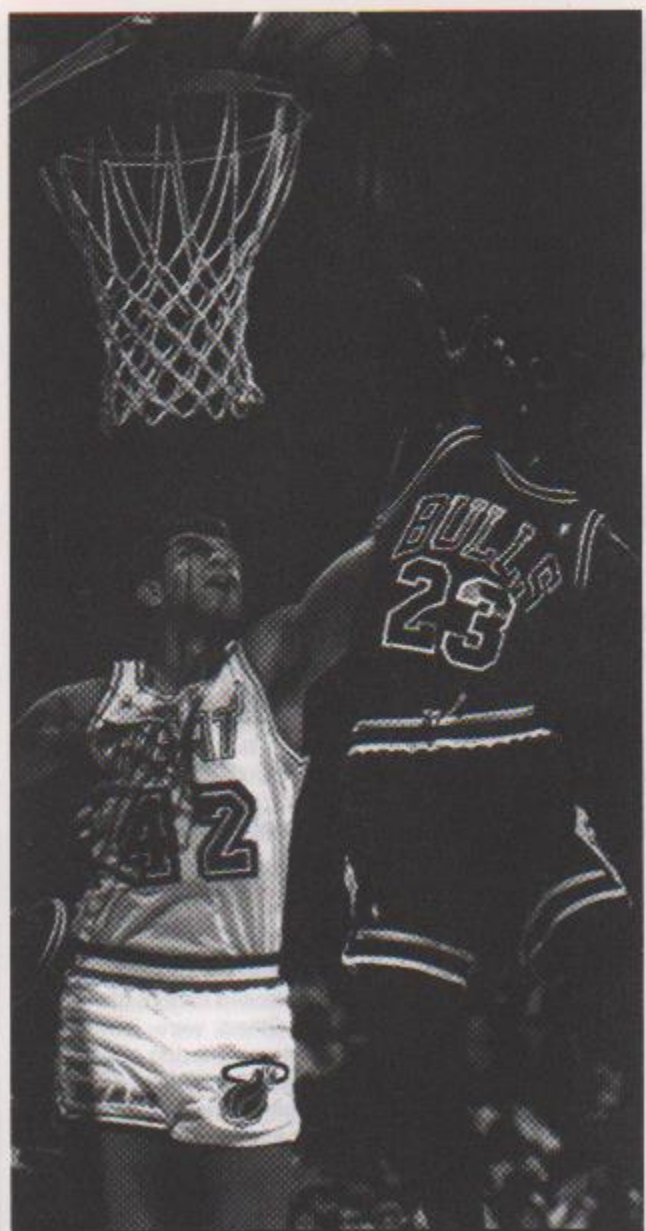
The personality test comprised 462 questions, with such illuminating enquiries as 'do you like tall women?', 'did you look up to your father' (presumably not a question for the tall women), and 'do you sometimes feel nervous in a crowd?' (of psychometric testers?).

On the basis of the answers given to these questions, 19 people were recommended for redundancy and 25 were offered the poisoned chalice of voluntary redundancy. Others were downgraded and a handful upgraded to middle management posts. Significantly neither the results of the ability tests nor the employees' work records were considered. Many of those who were sacked were described as quiet, hard working individuals. Like lambs to the slaughter we can conclude that however meek you may be, you do not guarantee a job, let alone inherit the earth.

This is far from an isolated example. The January 1994 issue of *The Psychologist* ran a series of articles on testing in the workplace. The authors expressed concern at the prevalence of the sole use of personality tests in local government. They blandly concluded:

'...evidence...does not strongly indicate that such questionnaires [personality] are especially effective as predictors of job performance or work group compatibility. Local government users would appear to be unrealistically optimistic on these matters.'

While professional psychologists pursue the chimera of objective testing we should be more realistic. Psychometric testing is a device for making us work harder and longer for less while claiming we like it. Even more destructively we are forced to compete with our fellow workers for the pittance on offer. Maybe I wouldn't pass the bosses' test if I said that that just doesn't make sense.



Student teachers

When PGCE (Post Graduate Certificate of Education) student Maria Foster exclaimed 'I'd rather be here in school than in college' (*Guardian Education*, 23 November 1993), I couldn't help agreeing with her. After almost a term of attending boring lectures, I couldn't wait to get into school to start teaching. By this time anything involving some level of thought and activity is more appealing. It is not that I am not interested in the theoretical side of teaching. On the contrary, what I had expected was an environment of debate and discussion about different

policies, education acts, and current issues. This, however, is not what greeted me.

Even trying to stimulate any kind of debate was strictly limited either by time or by a lecturer thanking you for your opinion but stressing that it was only one opinion. This idea of everyone having an equally valid opinion with none having any more consequence than any other infiltrated every part of the course. You ended up with lecturers saying 'you can't be taught how to teach'. This leaves you thinking 'why am I here then?', and 'get me into a school quickly so I can start learning'.

An attitude which presents itself as let it all hang out is in fact a recipe to thrust you into a difficult work environment equipped with nothing more than the nous you already had and with nothing to offer the pupil at all.

This general failing in teacher training institutes has set the scene for the introduction of the Teacher Training Agency (TTA)—the government's proposals for future teacher training.

At present most Initial Teacher Training (ITT) is divided into two parts. First college-based training which takes place in a Higher Education college or ITT institute. Then school-based training which takes place in a school chosen by the college or institute. Already there has been a shift in the ratio between school and college-based training in favour of school-based work. For the moment we are in schools for 24 out of each 36 weeks.

The introduction of TTA means the further devaluing of college-based training to the point where academic input is at the discretion of the schools. No longer will the placement be organised through your own college. Through the Graduate Teacher Training Registry (GTRR) you will be placed directly at a school. Placements and their funding will cease to be a function of your own education through a college; they become the directive of central government.

So why in response to such blatant government diktat are both students and schools heralding the introduction of the TTA as a good initiative?

In the case of students the sentiments of Maria Foster give us the answer. What we are taught in colleges with no intellectual stimulation and no material resources hardly measures up to the scale of daily practical problems we know we are going to face us when we perform live. In fact, the whole teacher training course attunes you to the same absence of resources in the classroom: get used to keeping the class in check; have no presumptions that you can educate.

As far as the syllabus goes, it is enough to be one chapter of the textbook, or one

scam, ahead of the crowd in front of you. When you think about it, teacher training today resembles nothing more than the Victorian schoolroom when discipline was the order of the day and older children imparted what they themselves had learned by rote the year before.

The reason for school authorities welcoming the TTA is simple: financial gain. Under the present system it is the training college which receives the training money for each student teacher and hands on a proportion to the school. The new system gives the school all the money for training. Since schools now manage their own finances, this extra money in the pot enables schools to compensate for the cuts in resources they are already facing. At the same time, TTA offers no additional funds to the teaching institutes, so that resource cut backs and job losses in this sector are inevitable.

One sophisticated justification offered for the change is that under the new regulations it will be the teaching profession itself, full of practical experience, which will now direct the training of the new generation of teachers. This naive hope founders on the reality of the government's control of funding.

The reality of government control was demonstrated when Graham Powell, an OFSTED (Office of Standards in Education) registered inspector, laid down the law in no uncertain terms in the case of a school where a student had been used as a supply teacher: 'We have been in and left management in no doubt what is expected. If it is not working they know we can pull the rug out.' (*Guardian Education*, 23 November 1993) While it appears that where the teaching lobby argue that a bit of supply work makes the student a better all-rounder, the very government which is curtailing the education of teachers is protecting student teachers by stopping the abuse of making them stop-gap teachers. In reality, the government is reaffirming its right to dictate the terms of training while it carries on with cuts in training provision and in the school environment itself.

While educationalists in both wings of the profession are busy with abstruse discussions about how best to train a new generation inculcated with professional values, the government runs rampant denying both our own education and the tools to practice our limited trade. I want to teach but first I need to know something myself. As it stands, at best I will pass on my own ignorance and communicate my own cynicism. At worst, and this is the nub of the problem, I will be a production line worker with the special task of keeping my charges not with their noses in a book, but with their eyes focused on an uncrossable line of limited opportunity.

Quality focus in the NHS

● The changes introduced into the NHS in 1991 have had a major impact on the way the service is managed and on the lives of those who work in this sector. The purchaser-provider split is forcibly brought home to us because, as the competition between providers heats up, we are acutely aware that our jobs depend on proving to the purchaser that we are the most efficient around. It is drummed into us that the 'episodes of care' in which we engage ultimately have to be costed. On this are we judged.

The notion of the clinical audit was first posed by the government in the 'working for patients' document of 1989. This embraces the activities of all health-care professionals. It advocates the systematic collection and evaluation of workplace data, establishes standards, calls for peer review—all under the auspices of management with the patients asked to put their views in as well.

It sounds good if you presume that it is aimed to analyse and improve the dodgy old service we work in. It sounds good if it will reconfirm how hard we all work. But it is easy to see that this is not the point.

The government is highly committed to the audit. It has spent £18 million since 1991 merely setting up a three-year project to help establish a framework for audit in each provider unit. Since 1989 £200 million has gone on a variety of other audit initiatives. Every Family Health Services Authority (FHSA) had to set up a Medical Audit Advisory Group (MAAG) by April 1991—£42 million went on this. Regions have had to submit plans to provide annual reports to the NHS Management Executive on progress with medical, nursing and therapy audit programmes. This is an awful lot of auditing.

Let's have a look at what all this means by looking at the measurable income of one small audit. Let's take the target of 100 per cent immunisation of all children against diphtheria, polio, whooping cough and tetanus. Except

how do you take into account the parents who either don't want immunisation for one reason or another or don't get round to it?

The worker charged with the primary responsibility of achieving an uptake of 95 per cent or over is a Health Visitor (HV). It seems obvious that the performance and effectiveness of any HV can be measured accurately through such a performance record. Regular reviews of this statistic reinforce its importance. If uptake is low, management quickly initiate an investigation. Anyone with a lower uptake is immediately called into question. Any criterion other than one piece of raw data doesn't get a look in. It doesn't matter that parents themselves are too busy, or that clinic times are inconvenient, or that there are just too many people trying to see the GP. None of this matters—the individual HV takes the responsibility (carries the can).

The purchaser is of course very interested in such demonstrable outcomes. No provider can hope to have a contract renewed if they don't compete along these simple lines. The pressure therefore lies full square on each and every healthworker to perform and outperform. In this apparently rational scenario everyone works harder to achieve the target. Everyone has the motivation to query the results of our fellow workers. Any work which cannot be quantified in such a simple fashion just goes by the board. We no longer think of helping a mother to find a nursery place for her child.

Customer satisfaction surveys are employed in the same way. The laudable end of asking the customer their view is now commonplace. They go like this:

- Is the service accessible, convenient, suitable?
 - What were waiting times like?
 - Are the staff friendly, helpful?
- The customer's opinion is constantly being sought, but it is not the service but the individual worker which is under scrutiny. The come back is:
- Why did this person wait so long?

It must be your fault. You must work harder. In fact you don't need a caring survey to know that the problems arise from scarce resources getting scarcer and fewer workers working harder and longer for less. But health workers also appreciate that there are no more resources on offer—they can only be redistributed either towards their job and a temporary breathing space or away from them and redundancy.

Fear of losing a job forces workers to comply, conform and be seen to be involved in taking responsibility. In this scenario management and workers work together to provide customer satisfaction. The reality is different workers cut corners and work ever harder to hold on to that all-important contract.

A DSS benefits office

● The local managers are under pressure from higher up to implement their 'quality framework' programme. This is presented to us as an open-ended package of initiatives designed to restructure working practices along the lines of the private sector, which the argument goes is driven by 'better customer service'.

The ineptitude and lack of enthusiasm of management is a barrier to implementation. This is understandable because their cosy position is also threatened. There is therefore no mechanism through which this programme of far reaching change can acquire any dynamic and so it remains a series of isolated, piecemeal, largely unsuccessful initiatives.

The real dynamic is the insecurity of the workforce. They feel under perpetual pressure to accept heavier workloads as 'greater responsibility' and to adopt the language of quality in order to secure their jobs. Pay is now linked to performance and management now use the threat of market-testing as an all-purpose threat.

Ordinary workers are falling over each other to get on to focus groups and working parties with management. They have picked up the lingo and talk about empowerment while at the same time agreeing that all it means is more work for less money. This isn't a contradiction and isn't seen as such. In the first place no one sees a practical alternative. And more cynically some argue that at least being on the staff development party is more interesting than sitting at a terminal all day.

In all the texts which explain test quality management (TQM) the driving force is supposed to be management. However, in my workplace management's own conservatism has meant that many workers both understand it better and in some cases are more enthusiastic about it. They pick up on the empowerment, equal opportunity aspects and run with it.

This is while management already sense that they are not in control. This would be more than just interesting if more of us recognise it and take advantage. In the meantime, however, management are attempting to reimpose some measure of control by adopting some of the initiatives taken by the more enthusiastic staff and claiming the credit for them.

Such workers then feel their 'creative input' is being disregarded and begin to see management not as an opponent but as the barrier to change. This is a further reason why there seems to be no contradiction between being for quality and knowing that as it stands it is an attack on jobs and conditions. The circle is squared by the belief that while they can get a bit more variety in their working lives with their creative input, nothing will come of it because management doesn't know what they are doing. This means that workers think they are having a go at management through helping to initiate attacks on themselves!

In this strange bluff and double bluff the real dangers and changes proceed if not unnoticed then at least unremarked on. Cover for absent staff has gone in the name of teamworking. Many staff have had their workloads doubled. New team targets mean workers are supervising and disciplining each other. All this happens without leading to a challenge to the concept of quality as a whole. The issues as they come up and the attitude to the work exist in separate spheres. In fact talking about quality engages workers directly in a way that traditional trade union matters do not.

This may seem an impossible situation. Not so. The opportunity to relate the practical experience of the working day with the philosophy in which it is dressed up provides a much better way of reposing the relationship between workers and bosses, and our own teamwork against the bosses, than I've been used to.

In the previous issues of *Fightback* we have stood out and said that the anti-SATs campaign was not a victory. As time goes on this becomes more clear. Here we update the situation and give a case study to show how the strategies of both the union leadership and more radical elements have combined to leave teachers exposed to management victimisation

The pitfalls of professionalism

● The government and teachers are still arguing about who has the best interests of education at heart. In the middle, as the supposed honest broker, stands the Dearing Report on Assessment and Testing.

Dearing recommends slimming down the Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) and reducing the curriculum that teachers have to deliver. Many commentators claimed that this represented a government climbdown over the question of workload. The National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers (NAS/UWT) and the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) duly lifted the SATs boycott. The NUT, which opposed SATs on educational grounds, is to maintain its boycott, and in line with the teachers' professional associations is calling for a moratorium on testing and assessment.

The professional associations representing teachers of English, maths and science criticised Dearing's Interim Report for failing to address the 'fundamental educational issues'. They also criticised Dearing's division between a reduced statutory 'core' National Curriculum and optional extras, for not living up to the promise of the entitlement to a broad and balanced curriculum in the 1988 Educational Reform Act. Similarly, the focus on basic skills at key stage one was also opposed for its 'narrowing effects'.

The professionals claimed that they never wanted the curriculum to be slimmed down. Their workload problem was more to do with the constant changes to the National Curriculum and the preparation and administration involved with SATs. They argued finally that teacher assessment was better and fairer than SATs.

The professional associations' response summarises the outlook of

teachers taking responsibility for the provision of state education. The government says standards are falling and fingers the teachers. The professional responds by saying that the SATs are unsound and that teacher knows best. But teacher assessment is nothing short of a rod for our own backs. When you examine the number of statements on attainment and programmes of study orbiting the National Curriculum the workload begins to assume nightmarish proportions.

The English Orders consist of 10 levels with 159 statements of attainment for teachers to trawl through. There are also 85 programmes of study each consisting of up to 20 components. Teacher assessment is not a fun option. Moreover, the National Curriculum now being defended against Dearing is the very one imposed upon us as a result of the defeats of the mid-eighties. This curriculum strengthened centralised state control and increased the workload.

The Dearing Report suits the government fine. Slimming down the tests has allowed the Tories to neutralise the more effective ATL and NAS/UWT workload arguments. Teachers as a whole are now more divided than ever over our response. But the real victory lies in the continuing acceptance by teacher organisations of the Tories' terms of discussion—testing and educational standards. Instead of books and better pay and equipment being the means to raise standards, everyone is talking about which particular form of testing is the best. If we have accepted these parameters to the discussion and accepted our responsibility for education through teacher assessment or any other means then we are stymied.

The Teacher Appraisal Scheme is a good example. While the storm over

testing raged, the Tories introduced a monitoring scheme designed, they claimed, to enhance our 'professional development'. This involves being watched in the classroom by another teacher—the appraiser. Management wanted appraisers to be line managers. The NUT negotiated that appraisers should be 'colleagues'. But the union has accepted the appraisal. The appraiser submits a written report to the head. This is the direct result of the union's commitment to enhancing professional status. Professional development equals appraisal and paves the way for performance-related pay. Thanks Doug.

Teacher professionalism is part and parcel of the postwar settlement. For the first time, the establishment presented education for the majority as a right; as part of the common venture of the new Elizabethan age rather than a means of instilling religion, discipline and respect into the Great Unwashed. Many teachers felt themselves to be professional leaders in an egalitarian project. Education was the key to individual advancement—regardless of class. Everyone would have a bite at the cherry, so everyone had an interest in making it work.

For a while the establishment talked in the same terms but from the early seventies it came to identify egalitarian pretensions and so-called progressive teaching methods as the cause of economic decline and the lack of respect for traditional values permeating society. Responsibility for the decline of educational possibilities was displaced from the chronic shortage of resources on to the teaching profession, which sadly took the rap.

Indeed it is the traditionally most left-wing union, the NUT, which has been most susceptible to these arguments. The NUT and especially its more left-wing activists are the most committed to the postwar attempt to reshape society through education.

It was the NUT which adopted the most professionalist stance on SATs. The more conservative associations just didn't want the extra work. More than the others, the NUT negotiated the intensification of our work to the tune of its vision of professional responsibility for educational standards. The NUT continues the boycott alone but has done nothing to impart a sense of dynamism and direction through this action. This is not surprising, because for the NUT the boycott is not a tactic of collective action, but a cry of professional outrage.

For teachers it makes sense to reject outright any responsibility for the state of education. It is the government which is responsible and must take the blame for the underfunding of education and the consequent demoralisation of teachers. If we don't do this we will continue to be the scapegoats for the system, with even worse to come for everyone concerned. ●

'You can't dock our pay—that's not fair!'



● In the autumn term of 1992, Waltham Forest NUT Association (WFNUT) embarked on an unofficial boycott of the government's new appraisal scheme. The review was pushed by the government and headteachers as an essential part of our professional development. NUT activists smelled a rat and pointed to the indisputable link between appraisal and the government's longer-term wish to introduce PRP (performance-related pay).

At last year's NUT National Conference, Waltham Forest won a majority on a motion to hold a national ballot to oppose appraisal. A mini-conference in opposition to appraisal was convened which attracted support from other associations in and out of London. However, in spite of the growing potential, the national executive ignored the democratic mandate and called no ballot. It didn't need to be spelled out that Doug McEvoy wanted to concentrate on SATS, and not be distracted by a campaign which, by focusing on such grubby concerns as teachers pay and conditions, had the potential to sully the professional image of the NUT which he had been trying to cultivate.

Since the end of the academic year 1992/93, ordinary NUT members have heard little about the local appraisal campaign—it went to ground. That is until 8 March when the Chief Education Officer of Waltham Forest council sent a letter to all teachers asking them if they were intending to participate in appraisal. Everyone who did not participate would have their pay docked. The docking was worked out on a sliding scale, but on average teachers would lose about £100 in April alone. It had taken nearly a year and a half, but the Education Officer and the headteachers had bided their time and known when to up the stakes.

Nobody was ready for this. Already divided because the boycott was only a local NUT initiative we were now faced with a sharp offensive when we had had no preparation or involvement. We were given until Friday 18 March to come to a decision. An Extraordinary General Meeting of the Waltham Forest Association was called and a majority of the activists agreed to carry on the boycott in the face of the wage-docking threat. But the only action to back up the bravado was to send a letter to our headteacher asking him not to supply names of NUT members to Lockhart, the Chief Education Officer, and to hope our headteacher would agree to a delaying tactic.

'...we wish to draw your attention to the fact that the problems over appraisal in this borough will, in effect, be decided by the outcome of our National Conference, which will be taking place over Easter, and a mere five working days after the 'deadline' indicated in Mr Lockhart's letter....We would appreciate your understanding in delaying this procedure until the beginning of the new term. It seems quite unreasonable of Mr Lockhart to threaten punitive fines in advance of a national decision.'

We called an emergency meeting of the NUT group at my school to discuss the situation. It was obvious that we were faced with a situation where many ordinary NUT members felt vulnerable and way out of their depth. There were three basic problems that had to be addressed:

1 The strategy voted for at association level, to continue the boycott and hope that we could appeal to the better nature of our headteachers, meant nothing more than asking NUT members to walk like martyrs into a pay-docking situation and accept the consequences.

2 The idea proposed by Waltham Forest officers that we should put our faith in everything being changed at National Conference seemed ridiculous. If the executive had ignored the Conference decision last year, they would do it again.

3 The problem all along was that although the boycott of appraisal was a reasonable tactic, without further action involving ordinary NUT members, it was a very passive form of protest. NUT members were to boycott something they had never done in the first place! Imagine boycotting the eating of caviar.

I argued at our special school meetings that to appeal to our headteacher's better side was fatalistic at best, and more likely wishful thinking. At the same time, there was no virtue in meekly accepting the dock in pay. We could up the action and reply to the threat of a wage-cut with some form of counter-action, removing goodwill or refusing to do cover, for example. Or we could decide as a collective to tell management that we would do appraisal, avoid the wage cut in the short term and reassess our position after Easter. Whatever we did, we had to do it together. Unsurprisingly there was little support for us to raise the stakes with retaliatory action, and a vote was carried for the latter option.

The lesson I have learned from all this is that, whatever we do as teachers, it is important we argue for a collective response. We weren't ready for upping the action, so we decided to take stock of the situation. The strategy argued for by the WFNUT officers is empty and depends on the goodwill of a leadership that has put us where we are today. ●

Many readers of *Fightback* are impressed but still left looking for an answer. One thing we've learned as trade unionists is that posing the right question is half way to getting an answer. We posed a lot of questions in the course of the stillborn Natfhe dispute which will stand us in good stead for the future. Other readers find our criticism of union leaders confusing and jump to the conclusion that this makes us anti-union. We've used the discussion round check-off to make our attitude clear and to put the responsibility for our difficulties fairly and squarely where it belongs: with the union leaders through their subversion of what a union really is.

The questions having been asked and the follies of the past cleared out of the way we are confident that we can fight back. We make no grand claims for what has been achieved so far, just a request to look and see what is possible

The Natfhe experience

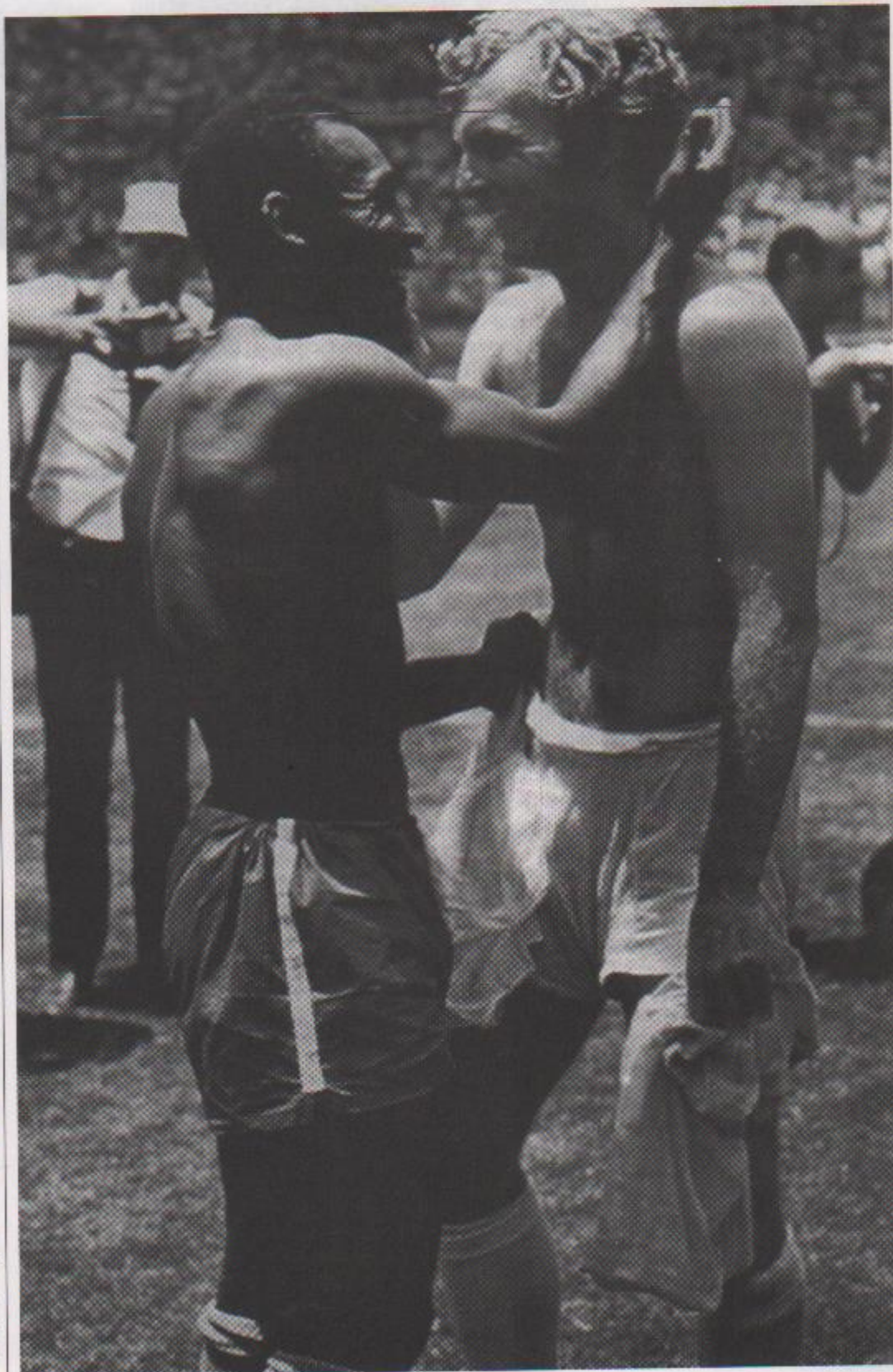
● In the course of the long drawn out and confused events around the imposition of new contracts in FE colleges, *Fightback* supporters in Natfhe were forced to respond to many a sharp turn of events and shifts in mood. It can be difficult to preserve both a sensitivity to the pulse of a dispute and take a necessary step backwards in order to avoid being pushed and pummelled into unthought out responses to any and every little twist. Tactical sense and invention can only develop from a strategic view of what is going on and what we want to achieve. There is no definitive answer to this.

We are reprinting the conclusions we drew as the last stage of the national negotiation drew to a close with the further humiliation of the union and the intensification of workplace isolation. Later on in the bulletin ('Organising in a right-wing college') we give an example of how our ideas can operate to make important gains.

The two open letters from *Fightback* supporters to their workmates form an important point to finish with, because they show that we are not finished. If we learn the lessons that each conflict with management throws up, even when we are beaten, we are better equipped to realise our potential and strikeback in the future.

Reports from *Fightback* supporters all over the country suggest that in many workplaces management are in disarray. Sometimes this is the result of the scale and irrationality of the changes they are expected to impose. Sometimes, as is the case in the FE sector, it is because they are out on their own as discrete management units rather than part of a huge apparatus.

In these circumstances it is possible to take them on, make them fear their own isolation and lack of strategy and beat them. We have nothing to fear except fear itself and nothing to reject except the idea of taking anything on trust.



Better late than never— take action now...

A phoney war that we can only lose

Ten months ago, FE colleges were incorporated. We knew then that each new corporation would try to force us to accept new contracts.

Ten months later Natfhe leaders still insist that the CEF remains amenable to the old-style negotiations that keeps union bureaucrats in business. Geoff Woolf insists 'the employers have a responsibility to the further education service to negotiate' (Natfhe press release, 23 January). Wrong, Geoff. The employers' only responsibility is to their paymasters in the government. Their brief is to expand FE student numbers by 25 per cent while spending the same or even less money.

The idea that the employers feel responsible for the quality of education is absurd. Natfhe's willingness to be flexible about professional standards and reasonable workloads is an open invitation to rewrite the terms and conditions of every worker in the sector.

While the bosses have pursued a clear objective to achieve the maximum cost-effectiveness, the union has prevaricated and pleaded to be allowed to negotiate the impoverishment of its members. This has already happened on attendance time, a 24-hour teaching week, and an eight-day cut in holidays.

Ten months on, this means:

- Cuts take place anyway—already 90 colleges have new contracts in place. Emboldened by the weakness of the union, management have pushed ahead—new arrangements for appraisal, averaging and cover amount to new contracts in many other colleges.

- The union threatens strike action and then at the first opportunity rushes back to the negotiating table to offer more concessions. This has led first to cynicism and then to demoralisation and confusion

which inhibits our own capacity to organise resistance.

It ain't what it's called, it's the way that you do it.

The frustration of activists came to a head when the National Action Committee announced on 28 January that the content of the action now being balloted for would take the form of two one-day national strikes in March, on dates yet to be determined. Months of putting pressure on the leadership have come to nothing. The response of some members has been to call for indefinite strike action. This is all well and good but the counterposition of 'one-day/bad, indefinite/good' misses the point.

As long as we are content to leave the direction of strategy in the hands of the leadership, ringing calls for action amount to nothing. The leadership has set its face against our involvement. It wants to retain control over the range and scope of action. We need to recognise the facts. Management's day-to-day offensive means that we are already in dispute. We need to work out the most effective forms of opposition now. This means getting to grips with what management is doing to each of us in our own situation at the first opportunity. Being preoccupied with making the leadership fight will simply detract from our ability to organise ourselves. We don't need the leadership to tell us what to do, just to release the money and resources we need to win.

National negotiations and local fightbacks

One response to our demand for grassroots initiatives has been the argument that we are undermining the union. What nonsense! We should accept no restrictions on our capacity to organise resistance. When we are forced into disputes locally we should all argue for the widest possible support where and when we do confront management. In fact, just

as the bosses created a benchmark at Southend, success at one college would become the marker of what we can achieve everywhere.

But local disputes are not the same as the call for local negotiations, however well-intentioned this call may be. Everybody knows that the union's national strategy is a loser, so why replace it with hundreds of smaller versions. The tactic of local negotiations is based on the idea that some colleges are better placed to give a decent deal and that some principals are nicer guys and girls and want to do right by their lecturer mates. Some principals are human but let's get real. College authorities are dictated to by the market. What individuals worry about in the privacy of their own homes will not make policy.

Each FE college management must now respond to market pressures. Far from extracting sweetheart deals, local negotiations will plunge us into a whirlpool of declining standards since our local management will argue that we have a common interest in making 'our college' the most competitive around. From management's point of view the sole purpose of coming to a temporary local arrangement would be to get their hands on the two per cent presently held back at the DfE.

Local negotiations, whatever the immediate result, are even worse from our point of view. They line us up with our own management in competition with fellow workers in the college next door. In contrast we should look to an attitude and method of organisation which responds to management by saying 'no way', and goes out to gain the maximum level of support. Nothing is won at the negotiating table which has not been won on the battlefield.

Grasping reality—taking the fight to them

When we look at what we have to do to win, the prospect may seem daunting. But if we pursue the present strategy we have no chance of winning and management's advance will be remorseless. We can give ourselves a fighting chance only if we set off on the understanding that collectively we have the potential to win and it is only ourselves that we can trust.

We all know, whether we like it or not, that we are in dispute now. Management is not playing by the Queensbury rules but is taking what it can get on a day-to-day basis. In this situation, it's no good waiting for a strike ballot which the union leaders will only use as an expendable bargaining pawn anyway. The best way of winning support for national action is to engage in organising resistance now.

- Today there are genuine fears about taking strike action. Too often we have been asked to fight with our arms tied behind our back by leaders who see strike action as either a token ►

resistance or as a way of preserving their negotiating position. We need to recapture the idea that strike action, whatever form it takes, is a way of imposing our collective strength on the boss in order to gain what we need. It is confrontational. It demands a degree of self-respect and a measure of collective identification which union strategy has taken from us.

● Even many who support strike action don't really think it can work but think something should be done to show the flag. This is not surprising when strike action has come to mean giving management long notice of your intention to withdraw your labour for one day. One day possibly just after half-term when you can take a holiday anyway, and when it's impossible to organise effective action because you haven't seen anyone for a week...

Going on the offensive through strike action means maximising disruption and hitting them where it hurts. Nothing is sacrosanct. Closing down a careers day with the implications for college funding would be more effective at putting the wind up management than passive action, however long it lasted.

● We have to recognise that if we want to stand still, let alone get the better pay and conditions we all need, then this is the only way. We have no friends in government, management or the union leadership. We have only ourselves, our fellow workers and students to rely on.

Take control!

We cannot afford to underestimate the scale of the management offensive and the urgency of the task confronting us. As the gap between the union leadership and employers narrows to a coat of paint, the erosion of our conditions continues apace. Collective organisation in our own hands is the only way of building national resistance.

To instil this sense of urgency and the necessity of organising now, we are arguing for the formation of college-based strike committees. These can be elected through the branch with a mandate to call for any action they think is necessary to stop management now. If the branch does not function, use an ad hoc arrangement. The committee can be recalled at any time; the important point to grasp is that we must organise a fighting machine now.

We are in dispute. Take the fight into our own hands and organise to win. This bulletin is the platform of the Public Sector Fightback Campaign supporters who are contesting the NEC elections. If you want to find out more about what we are doing contact Alec Turner on (071) 278 9908 or write to us at BM PSFC, London WC1N 3XX. Fax (071) 278 9844.

An open letter to all Southgate Natfhe branch members

Since incorporation, almost a year ago, the dispute over new contracts has rumbled on. Most of us have had little or no involvement in a process which could dramatically worsen our terms and conditions. Our decisions through ballots for national action have been ignored, which has led to a more cynical attitude to the possibility of achieving anything.

From this sombre position it is time to reassess where we stand, since many of the issues which have served to confuse the position and to unsettle our own reactions have been clarified in recent weeks.

At national level the union completed its negotiations with the CEF in January, and in February resolved to instruct branches to negotiate locally. This was before the CEF won an injunction to declare the 1 March strike unlawful. The NEC also fought against and put off resolutions from representative bodies like sector conference to escalate strike action.

The most recent sector conference has lowered its own horizons. It decided to abide by the new national position. Negotiate with management on the basis of the new Natfhe contract. If negotiations are refused approach your regional official for authorisation to strike. A national position to abandon national responsibility. Anyway who mandated national negotiators to reinterpret the 'silver book' at our expense?

Down home Bagden has put his contract offer on the table and said it is non-negotiable. This contract is shortly to be imposed on four of us on 0.5 contracts. Meanwhile management and department heads are using intimidation to get individuals to sign new contracts.

There is no national strategy to safeguard our working conditions and there isn't one pending. We therefore need to confront reality and some difficult questions. Control over the determination of our working conditions has been left in our hands. Only we can do anything about it.

We need collective action. We have the same interests and can achieve them if we stick together. We all know that no one can be forced to sign a new contract but what does that mean if individuals are isolated?

We can't work under the conditions on offer. The cost of living and our self-respect preclude it. Bagden should not be allowed to even think that we will take what is on offer.

We must use all possible avenues to inform our tactical decisions. Faculty meetings, open branch committees, a working action committee and branch

meetings. It's essential that everyone's arguments are voiced and heard.

Through collective action we can establish what we are defending. Unless we have the broadest possible consensus on this proposals for action will be divisive. From that point we can decide the appropriate action to defend our agreed position according to our strength at the time.

We will stop responding to every threat in a panic and chasing shadows. If we instead adopt a position we are all agreed upon we can reasonably expect the support of others. Not only will students, other Southgate workers, and those in other colleges back us, but we can really start to build the structure and action we need—and on a national scale.

Alec





Open letter in West Herts

We all face difficult decisions in FE colleges as the 1 April deadline for the new contracts looms. Now that Natfhe seems to have abandoned even the pretence of a national strategy how should we deal with plant or regional bargaining? Should we tear up our union cards and go it alone? Should we sign the new contracts and retire gracefully? Should we organise college-wide pledges of non-signers? Should we continue to organise strike ballots?

Let's consider the events of the past few weeks. The 1 March strike was cancelled by the law courts in an unprecedented attack on trade union democracy. Natfhe officials would have us believe that it was the courts that scuppered our fightback. We know better. A one-day strike was only ever a symbolic gesture and we were to be the stage army executing it. Natfhe had already made it known that local negotiations could start on 2 March. Even so, for many activists the one-day action provided a focus for involving usually passive members, and its cancellation led to many organising meetings, rallies and in some instances unofficial action.

Having to take over organisation has given some colleges a new focus—strike committees or action groups—and activists have been forced to reconvene and start some serious discussions about 'what now?'. We have identified the need to assess politically how we retain a sense of our own collectivity and potential. An awareness that we cannot sit around and wait for the Natfhe leadership any longer has galvanised new forms of organisation. These groups must continue to meet. We need an honest assessment of the balance of forces in each college.

Are we strong enough to take on management locally? If not how can we get more and more people committed to the need to fight to defend ourselves? How can we overcome college isolation? How can we work with our local 'competitors', that is our colleagues down the road in a 'competing college'?

We must be careful that, with new contracts being all but forced upon us, we do not resort to posturing about fightbacks that we have not convinced a majority to support. It is demoralising when branch meetings simply become talking shops for a minority and then pass militant motions that have no positive consequence. Neither must we conclude that as we have lost the fight against new contracts we should give up

defending ourselves at all. A greater disaster would be to conclude from the present debacle that a collective does not work.

If we learn the lesson that the union strategy was flawed from the start, we can rebuild our strength and prepare for the day-to-day battles that will confront us in future months.

For many of us, the signing of contracts is merely a formality—albeit an important one. In reality we are all working more hours in worse conditions and the contracts rubber stamp this. There is therefore no need to fetishise the act of signing. The contract is a piece of paper. We can tear them up at any time. We need to start working out now how we can get to a position where we and not the employers dictate the terms of our working lives.

Losing the fight against new contracts is not the end of the story unless we allow ourselves to conclude that this is the green light for management to walk all over us for ever. The paralysis of the official union might lead us to conclude that the bosses have all the trump cards. In the absence of an opposition they look strong. But scratch the surface and you find frightened and confused men and women. Let's give them every reason to be just that, only more so.

Claire

Check-off: check out

● If you're in a union there's a good chance you pay your membership dues through the check-off system. This means your employer deducts the money from your wage or salary at source—just like income tax. At the last count, around 80 per cent of TUC-affiliated unions used this scheme to get hold of members' dues, but not for much longer. In the long postwar period of collaboration between bosses and union leaders the check-off was a cosy arrangement for both sides. The unions got the money without having to talk to the membership; and for a minimal administrative task the bosses got interest on our money before passing it over to the unions.

But times have changed. Section 15 of the Trade Union and Reform Act 1993, which comes into effect in August, states that employers must have written authorisation from each union member before they can make any deduction for union dues. The individual worker can sue the employer if deductions are made without authority. Union complicity in the bureaucratic check-off system has permitted the government to present this change as empowering the individual against the

overbearing union.

Of course, the last thing the government cares about is whether individual members have control over the unions. Over a decade of legislation on picketing, strike ballots, union indemnity, etc, has attacked unions and protected the employers. The new law, by making the employer entirely responsible for administering the check-off, increases management control over union funds and adds not one iota to the power of union members.

The government no longer needs nor desires a practical relationship with the trade unions. Establishment policy-makers appreciate that there is no longer any point in talking to the unions as either the representatives or even the policemen of ordinary workers. The unions do not represent any collective strength, however passive, as the union leaders themselves admit. At the recent conference to relaunch the TUC, the platform explicitly rejected the idea that the union movement should represent a collective interest. Rather the unions presented themselves as insurance brokers and

credit card dispensers.

The unions are understandably worried about losing their customers. If Unison loses just one in 20 members, it will lose about £5m in revenues each year. The TUC has set up a special unit to deal with the legislation and there is a desperate scramble to find ways to remotivate unions to members, who have suffered years of neglect, in order to avert financial disaster.

To understand what the change means for union members it will help to get an idea of what the check-off has meant up to now.

The basis of the check-off is close cooperation between employers and the union bureaucracy. In the postwar period of near full employment and economic expansion, the union movement was strongly placed to win concessions. It was in the employers' interest to regulate their relations with the workforce through cultivating a close working relationship with the bureaucrats. The effect of this was to incorporate the union leadership into the management machine.

Negotiation procedures over grievances, pay and conditions became

formalised and far removed from the shop floor. They took place behind closed doors between union leaders and managers. Government bodies such as the Donovan Commission 1968 laid down guidelines as to how this should happen. The decision-making process was taken out of the hands of ordinary members, and shop stewards became the means of policing working agreements without the input of the majority of the membership.

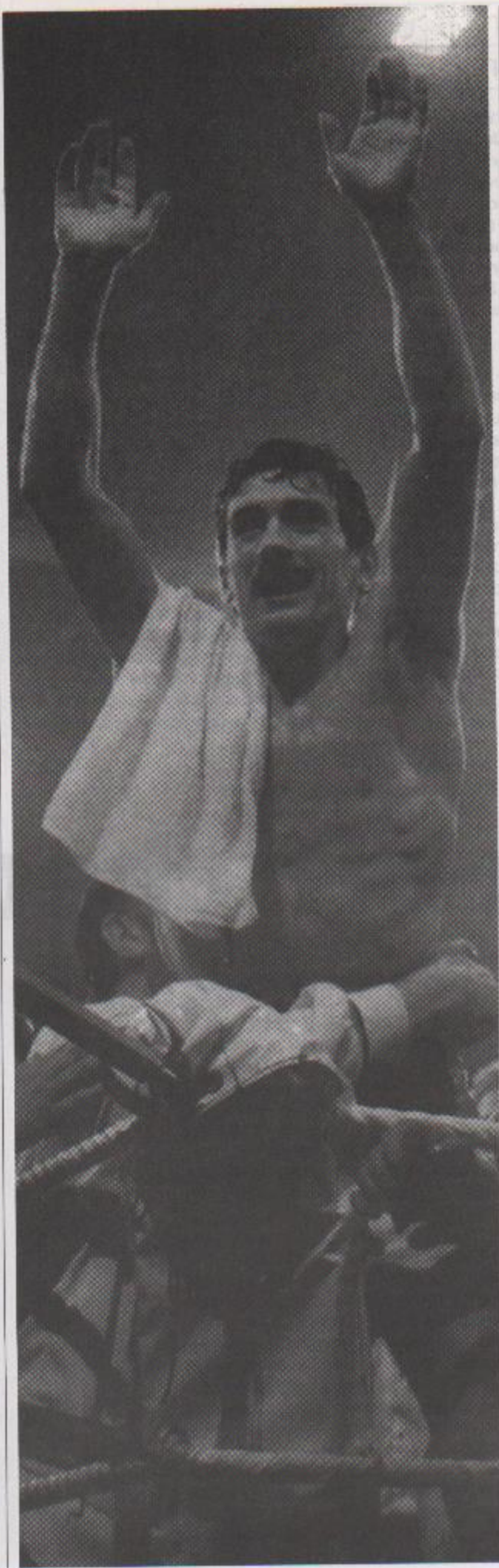
This state of affairs has traditionally been represented as the source of strength of British trade unionism. There was a high density of union membership. The unions were a respected institution. But the character of the relationship which was perceived as strength was in fact the major weakness of the unions. Far from representing an independent weapon of working class collectivity, the unions were part of an apparatus which decided policies for the state and the bosses before workers came into the picture.

This weakness remained obscure in the period of economic boom and has been further mystified as the union movement has retreated over the past 20 years. It appears to most people that a once-powerful trade union movement has been humbled by the frontal assault of the Tories. In fact, the rotten structures of British trade unionism have collapsed because the Tories undermined the foundation of collaboration on which the unions had come to depend.

The evolution of check-off reflects this development. The check-off system started in the nationalised industries such as the post office. It quickly spread through the public sector to cover 90 per cent of public sector union members by 1973. This is not surprising since unions such as Nalگو and the CPSA had developed a much closer relationship to the state through formalised bargaining procedures such as Whitley than had the great industrial unions such as the TGWU and the AUEW. But where the public sector led the private sector followed.

For the union bureaucracies, check-off meant financial security and some insurance against potential falling membership. The unions paid a fee to the employer, sometimes up to 5 per cent of the sum collected. The problems are obvious; the employer in effect controls the union's fund; the traditional mechanism of collection by shop stewards, through which there is at least the possibility of collective discussion, is overridden; when the money does get to the union, it is in the hands of a leadership which can pull the plug on strike funds any time it sees fit.

The new legislation demonstrates how much has changed. In the current climate, employers no longer need unions to negotiate their relations with workers and the old pattern of co-operation has been replaced by employers by-passing



the old structures and imposing new terms directly on the workforce. The withdrawal of the check-off facility has been a useful way for employers to underline this point. In 1991 Wandsworth Council refused to collect union dues on behalf of 2000 Nalگو (now Unison) members. British Coal and British Rail followed suit with the NUM and RMT respectively.

The union response has been a mixture of self-interest and panic. Unions such as the NUT are persuading members to pay by direct debit which assures the financial security of the union. Unison, on the other hand, has launched a 'sign up' campaign in an attempt to perpetuate the old system. Since the new arrangements require even greater employer co-operation—they make it happen, not the union—Unison has emphasised how important it is to have good relations between bosses and union leaders!

The lengths to which Unison is prepared to go would be farcical if they were not so serious. Unison in one of its glossy publications has cited Sheffield Council as a model employer because it sent the sign-up forms out quickly. Sheffield Council last year imposed a wage cut on Unison members and this year is planning to make several thousand of them redundant.

The Sheffield example clearly illustrates the different question posed to union members, as opposed to union officials by the current changes. How do we get the kind of workplace organisations that we need? The experience of the past reaffirms the need for independence and control. Independence from employers and union bureaucrats. Control over our money and what it is spent on. The old check-off system didn't give us this, and the new legislation, for all its talk of individual power, simply consolidates the bosses' control.

There is bound to be a fall in union membership. The union leaders will blame apathy, individual greed and the Tories. We must spell out that if our fellow workers don't fill in their forms, it won't be down to laziness, but because the unions have been so ineffective. Check-off raises wider issues than just simply how our dues are paid. It gives us the opportunity to talk about how we must organise to get what we want.

Below we print a number of contributions from *Fightback* supporters on how we should respond to this discussion. Some refer to *Taking Control*, a handbook for trade unionists published in the mid-eighties, and we reprint two short sections of the book which sum up its critical approach to the check-off at that time. The important point to remember is that we are concerned not primarily with the check-off issue itself, but a general attitude to workplace organisation. We welcome the contributions of our readers in this discussion.

From Taking Control

The check-off ought to be abolished. Alright, it's made for an easy life for the trade unions to collect subscriptions. But it has destroyed branch life. Branches were never that well attended but they were always better attended. And there was a more direct contact between shop stewards and members. Now shop stewards don't have to contact members on a regular basis because management is doing the job for them, taking dues from the wages that should be paid by workers to the trade union movement. It means we've lost control over our own money. Immediately a dispute starts if there is no payment of

subs members could run out of benefit. In the past immediately a dispute started everybody would turn up at branch meetings. (From an interview with Bill Walker, former AUEW convenor in Sheffield, p93)

To ensure control over workplace organisation, workers should repudiate the check-off system. Shop stewards should maintain close contact and regular discussion with workers through regular dues collections. The end of the check-off system would give workers direct access to the resources necessary to fund industrial action. (p96)

ical climate as a whole which need to be taken into consideration.

Taking Control attributed the blame for lower attendances at branch meetings to check-off, but this attributes too much importance to an organisational question. Surely if people were enthused by the unions and convinced of their ability to promote change they would turn up to branch meetings irrespective of whether or not that involved paying dues in cash. Surely the main thrust of our argument should be to place the blame on the ineffectiveness of the trade unions.

People now more than ever tend to see the unions as a form of individual insurance against something going wrong. To raise the issue of control and independence from the employer needs more careful treatment than in the past because it will not be self-evident to people that there is a need for these things if they don't see unions as collective organs of struggle in the first place.

If the unions lose any members through the removal or enforced renewal of check-off they will be members that the union has already lost. People that simply cannot be bothered to sign and return the form.

To suggest the formation of independent organisations at a time when militancy and belief in collective action is at its lowest level in the twentieth century is bizarre. We should maintain our antagonistic participation in the unions as they provide a useful foil for our arguments. Our relationship to the unions and our criticisms of them allow us to make the political points we need to make: points about control, political direction, relations with the employers, etc.

To pose the idea of a devolved independent unionism whereby funds are held at branch level is impractical and unrealistic. A strike fund for such a small organisation would be a paltry affair which of necessity would evaporate within a week of the commencement of any industrial action—even this assumes that administrative overheads would be covered in the first place. Strike funds only work because the contributions of those sectors which are not currently engaged in industrial action support those members who are engaged in action.

To suggest that shop stewards should collect union dues in cash form is hopelessly outdated and impractical. Imagine the endless wasted hours collecting cash from people who forgot their purse, haven't got change, have an unexpected cash flow crisis, etc, etc. We would be advocating an extraordinarily cumbersome and time-consuming administrative task which would leave stewards and activists no time for any political functions. Almost everything is done by direct debit these days: insurance premiums, magazine subscriptions, pools contributions. To advocate a return to

Direct control

There is no doubt that all unions as they exist will lose substantially in financial terms once the change in the check-off system takes place. The unions' very survival will depend on promoting a direct debit or similar system of payment. I think it is inevitable that there will be enormous advertising campaigns, promotion and pressure on stewards and members to promote whatever is best for the survival of the union machinery.

In this context we have to decide:

- 1) Do we argue in favour of the payment method promoted by the union?
- 2) Do we argue against it?
- 3) Do we argue for something in between?

For us the debate is one about collective responsibility/control and independence. The argument that this measure promotes individual choice is easy to cut through. We only need to point out successive pieces of legislation in the eighties designed not to promote individual choice but to undermine the unions and collective action. This latest attempt to change the check-off arrangements is just another way of sticking the boot into the unions.

The essential argument for me, as I say, is the one about independence and collective control. While I accept that in the current climate that 'collectivity' and 'independent', are little understood ideas, I think we still need to up the stakes and use the opportunity around check-off to:

- 1) Expose the union's bureaucratic framework as being counterproductive for our day-to-day interests.
- 2) Pose an alternative way of working by explaining that if we had control over funds it would give us a greater stake in decision-making when it comes to the

fight for better conditions and jobs. We assert our control over what happens rather than wait for the unions to tell us what is happening; or more likely not tell us what is happening.

The check-off issue gives us a practical opportunity to raise the possibility of collective control and independent action. Too often we find ourselves in a position where we put forward an interesting argument without being able to clinch it with a practical alternative. This situation could be different. The immediate consequence would be the setting up of our own bank account as a 'holding account'. This would be a scary situation for us and raises all sorts of questions. But we should not let fear of a new situation put us off!

It is extremely unlikely that we would get anywhere near the point of establishing our own bank account but it is important to stress this as a practical possibility. Any other argument, I feel, has the effect of aligning ourselves with the status quo. On the one hand, we argue against the existing bureaucratic framework, and for greater control by the membership, while on the other hand, we do not challenge that framework in a practical way.

Of course for very practical reasons we want a national organisation and my argument may seem a recipe for fragmentation. But I believe it is more important to give a practical demonstration for control rather than being constrained by a national framework that we all know only serves to disorganise us.

Don't go back to cash

Our response to the question of check-off cannot be the same as our formulations at the time of *Taking Control*. There are significant changes in the way that people see trade unions and in the polit-

cash collections seems terribly Luddite.

The suggestion of a form of holding funds at branch level which could still operate by direct debit or standing order is much more practical and allows the same principles of control over funding to be raised. Independence from the employers is another aspect of this idea. Funds would be collected from members by direct debit and passed on to the union on a monthly basis, provided the bastards behaved themselves.

Check-off arguments are useless

My objections to campaigning around check-off are tactical. The unions are now concerned about it but most workers really don't care. We would make ourselves ridiculous if we got preoccupied by it. The arguments in *Taking Control* are fine but they look at a situation which no longer exists.

Check-off arrangements in the sixties and seventies meant that most people, especially in the public sector, did not realise that they were in a union. Ordinary members were from their subscription onwards a passive stage army. It was important to argue against check-off to challenge this relationship and to make trade unions accountable. The labour movement despite this had some force and existence and we should be careful not to think that nothing has changed. Whatever we think of them and their politics, with all their capacity to hold back working class aspirations, trade union officials did have some clout and influence.

In the 1990s trade unions are just an insurance service. Not only to workers who are being pragmatic, but to the personnel of the unions themselves who sell themselves as facilitators of individual services. To campaign to collect insurance dues by hand will come across as mad. Things have changed. In the Natfhe dispute we have had to tackle the argument for collective action and control of the dispute around every issue. To argue for collective control of funds prior to winning any political arguments about what we should do is to put the cart before the horse.

Natfhe is now arguing for its own version of control when it says that members should sign direct debits in its favour. To argue for holding money elsewhere is an argument we simply can't win. Where there is a spark of activism people turn to a national arena. We must break the loyalty not to national organisation, but to the form which it takes.

I have listened to arguments for local control of national funds and for making local delivery of them contingent on the national union's support for the collec-



tively agreed positions and action proposals of the local union branch. There are severe technical problems with this but that is a secondary consideration. The whole proposition is a fantasy. It is a logical possibility, and I would like it to be a real possibility as it would have been 20 years ago.

My objection to making an issue of check-off is not the technical one that any organisation needs a more modern way of dues collection. But that it is not an issue around which to win political arguments. We should flag it as a study of trade union degeneration, of *what should have been* and not *what could be*. We should comment on how the prior commitment to check-off and their contemporary fall-back position of direct debit can do nothing to defend jobs and conditions, without evolving a general strategy or campaigning approach.

A caveat. Individuals in certain workplaces could make something of these arguments. Branches like my own where the union is hated and mistrusted could be won over but this would be a negative response. It would not stimulate a positive commitment to build an alternative. I have argued in my union around the central theme of accountability and building a collective approach to solving problems. This is established practice and having some effect. I fail to see how arguing against direct debit, which is the norm in Natfhe, would have got me anywhere. It would appear eccentric. Arguments around check-off can only take place in a climate that does not exist. We could make correct points for consideration at a future date and/or make the case for alternative organisations that there is no basis for. This is both wasteful and self-indulgent. Arguments around check-off are not the way to establish any form of serious credibility.

The membership in control

The modern shop stewards movement evolved in an environment of economic expansion and political stability. In these circumstances the unions appeared to have considerable power. Membership and wages rose. But union success was not based on their combativity and strength, but on capitalist stability. The unions were proud to be part of this success story and were all the more pleased when their status was reflected in perma-

nent formal negotiating procedures.

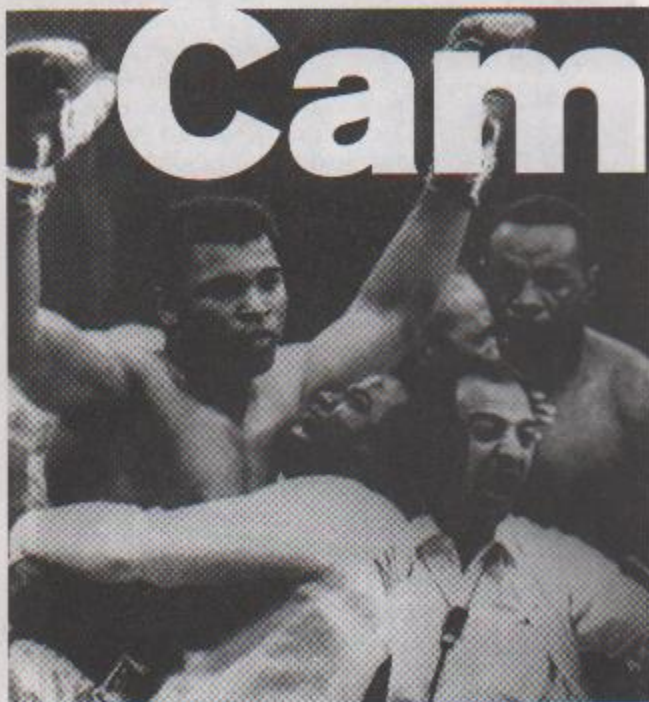
This is best illustrated in the development of the state white collar unions. The growth of trade unionism in the public sector ran alongside the development of extensive negotiating procedures such as Whitleyism. This had the effect of removing decision-making from the membership and distancing local union officers. Local officers spent more time with management. The role of officers became to police the agreements they had made with the employer. Their practical investment in the negotiating procedures gave them a real interest in avoiding any disruption.

In the 1960s check-off helped to consolidate unions that didn't really exist. In the health service national unions were hardly established and had little contact with the membership. Contact was made through the check-off. The union appeared stronger but only through a bureaucratic mechanism which denied control and participation to the membership.

Looked at from this point of view, the points made in *Taking Control* stand. But we can go further and say that far from being a new thing, the collapse of the unions is a product of their own in-built weakness. Check-off should offer us a great opportunity to argue strongly for new types of working class organisation—but there is no spontaneous audience for such a call. People have turned away from collective solutions because as they are embodied in the present organisations they don't work. Where does this leave us?

The current discussion around check-off is different. The unions are now forced to go out and re-sign members. The unions are no longer needed as mediators between boss and worker. The patterns of past incorporation are defunct. We see the unedifying scenes of union-leaders pleading to be allowed to negotiate away their members' livelihoods while bosses prefer to do the job directly. Union leaders now see check-off and the numerical strength of their union as a way of keeping a place at the negotiating table.

We must take into account the distance that most workers now feel from the notion of collective action. At the same time, the ideas of accountability and membership control over funds are practical common sense. In practise, this means the right to withhold funds at any time. We should argue against direct debits as a means of paying funds. It may be that this is convenient but being a member of a union is not like paying your gas bill. The point at issue is that this method of payment reinforces the sense of isolation and personal preoccupation which is the crippling legacy of British trade unionism. We should establish the principle that the money passes through our hands and we decide what to do with it.



Camden work to rule

● Everyone was a bit disappointed. We had all nurtured personal fantasies of a quiet term, free of lunchtime meetings and the like. Unfortunately, the governors gave in before our work to rule had a chance to settle our digestive systems.

The school is a girl's state secondary. The strongest union is the National Union of Teachers (NUT) with 45 out of the 65 permanent staff. Most of the rest are in the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL). The management is liberal as these things go. In such a cosy set-up staff turnover is low and secure teachers will make their opinions known. By the same token, outright confrontation is avoided, since neither side wishes to rock the boat.

When trouble did arrive it came in the shape of '822'—an extra payment called the London Supplement which a handful of Local Education Authorities (LEAs) award in order to recruit and retain teachers. In 1993 the government first decided to scrap it, then to give it for one more year, but only to those already receiving it. We demanded of our governing body that it guarantee future payment of '822' to all.

Normal relations were already fraying due to our increased workload. A School Inspection had created a lot of work for us. In order to match National Curriculum requirements and avoid the 'at risk' hit list we all had to churn out reams of additional paperwork. Our frustration turned to anger when the inspection criticised the poor GCSE Media Studies exam results—since no such course was taught at the school!

The inspection found the school lacked a coherent management structure

and policies. We already knew this but weren't paid to tell anyone. It also identified a gap between the high quality teaching and exam results. Senior management produced an 'Action plan': targets were set and working parties set up to reach them. Staff were directed to volunteer to join the appropriate working party, which met after school time. We protested that we were taking the rap for the exam results and being forced to increase our workload. The working party on work-ethos was the special butt of our bitterness.

When the '822' proposal was aired we knew our management would love the chance to save money while blaming Camden LEA, which was recommending withholding 822. Camden LEA vacillated before confirming withdrawal. In turn, the LEA blamed this on pressure from the governing bodies. The LEA then recommended that its own recommendations were worthless, decisions on pay should be made at school level. We were piggy in the middle, being given the runaround. So in the NUT group we changed the rules and argued for a work to rule.

Gaining the support of all the staff for action was our first priority. We distributed the minutes of the NUT meeting where the vote for action had been taken to all teachers. The twists and turns of both the LEA and the governors were carefully documented, allowing us to explain the background to our decision, clarify the issues and keep everyone informed. We also prepared a survey to find out what form of action people would take straight away and what they would do should we need to apply more pressure. We were able to tap unharnessed creativity and discover how we could be

effective without hurting ourselves. The strategy was pulled together at an open meeting.

By the time the survey results were presented to the open meeting, everyone knew what was happening and why. Most teachers had been won to the view that the governors would not pay new teachers unless they were forced to. We were to take the action forward in stages. First a withdrawal of 'goodwill' since we didn't have any left to spare. Most staff were keen to start with a boycott of the reviled working parties, lunchtime meetings, and to walk out of timetabled meetings at the allocated finishing time. Top gun stuff, like refusing to chase after absence notes—a killer for any respectable School League Table results—was kept back for round two. Everyone was pleased that we were now setting the agenda.

When the Head got hold of one of the surveys she told us that it made her depressed. We replied that the staff were a weeny bit depressed about the prospect of a pay cut in September to 'add' to the one in April. The Head's second reaction was to become preoccupied with finding out who attended the open meeting and who was responsible for the unpleasantness. Had there been dissent and intimidation? When nobody turned up to the working party meetings her questions were answered. The action was solid.

After one week our opponents were clearly shaken. At an emergency meeting, the governors agreed to compensate new teachers for the loss of 822 by awarding them an additional point on the pay scale. They guaranteed the supplement for everyone else. They insisted it had all been a terrible misunderstanding and they would have paid all along. To show their good faith they suggested a new consultative forum with union reps and teacher governors on board to avoid future unpleasantness.

This sounds good but should set off the warning bells. We have to insist on the accountability of our representatives at such meetings. They have to give full reports to the staff and there is no need for them to have a permanent existence, since we don't have common interests to discuss on a continual basis. Everything we learned in our little success tells us we should organise in a different way.

Teachers complained bitterly that the governors had given in too quickly, dashing our hopes of a restful term. But it was apparent that our success lay in our collective strength. Continual argument and discussion had gained the support of the bulk of the staff, regardless of union affiliation. Everyone became involved in the process of decision-making and the direction of the dispute. Faced with such united opposition, the school's only choice was to pay up or risk switching to crisis management on a long-term basis.

Organising in an anti-union workplace

I work in the new breed of school. A school where the dictums of government thinktanks are tried and tested first. A school where the teacher is held responsible and blamed for everything. A school where there is a rabid and hostile anti-union environment—a City Technology College. The contract we all have to sign states that the college will not recognise trade unions for any purpose whatsoever.

Such an environment leads most staff to be, at best cautious, at worst downright insecure and frightened. However, it turns out that this is but a small obstacle to organising collectively compared with the negative examples of collaboration and betrayal provided by the existing unions, and carried as powerful memories by anyone who has been around for more than a few months. Why organise to take action armed with the spiked canons of the NUT, when you know you will immediately be shot out of the water?

I set about discussing with fellow teachers whether they felt we needed some form of representation. Few were enthusiastic about the existing staff association, some were hesitant about putting their head above the ramparts but everyone felt that some grouping was necessary and wanted to put their foot down regarding some aspect of draconian college policy.

The staff association was open to all and organised a Christmas and end of summer term party annually. I called a meeting of the association with a simple agenda based on the discussions I had already had:

- The need for an organisation to represent staff
- What type of organisation should we set up?

The turn-out was good—about 45 per cent of the staff. I chose a time which coincided with a meeting of the College Executive—the senior management. In their absence we could minimise the risk



of individuals being victimised for what they said.

There is a real feeling of mistrust in the college which I was worried might hinder the discussion and so I raised the issue of who should be eligible for the association. I argued that we needed to exclude all those whose interests are by definition different to ours. Anyone who has the power to hire and fire—the executive—should not be in an organisation whose purpose is to defend the conditions of work and the jobs of its members. There was some apprehension at first because the executive would rightly see this as a hostile act. However, the simple act of voting on this meant that we could take collective responsibility for the decision. The vote unanimously carried the exclusion of the executive.

This was inspiring and led to more discussion about how collective responsibility could prevent individuals being victimised. At this point there did not seem to be any limits to what we could do through such an organisation, so long as most staff were members and all controversial decisions were discussed and voted on. We made the decision that the chairperson would not negotiate on behalf of the staff, but would present decisions which had already been discussed and agreed to at an association meeting.

This was a refreshing change to the poorly attended, bureaucratic branch or association meeting many of us had been used to. Only demoralisation and passivity can ensue where the doors are closed to the real world, problems avoided rather than discussed and 'action' takes the form of passing a motion to take to next national conference. The people who are part of our new and still untested association, who are now so optimistic about the power of collective decision-making, are the very ones whose apathy the union bureaucracy has blamed for its own craven attitude. Well, if you don't like the heat, then get out of the kitchen.

How to work in a right-wing college

I was convinced that nobody in my FE college would get involved in building for the one-day strike action—it's just not that sort of place. But the effort had to be made given the scale of the assault on us all. I knew that the likely turnout for the ritual union meeting was going to be low. So I put together a motion opposing local deals and went round to as many people as I could, talking about the strike and asking people to come to the meeting to vote for the motion.

Fifty people turned up—nearly half the membership, and the best attendance I had ever seen. People were confused because of the negotiation process itself and also about what the contracts meant but they understood straight away that local deals would be a disaster. My motion was carried unanimously. What was more important, however, was that we found a way to translate individual anger and worry into a form through which we could do something effective for ourselves. We agreed at the meeting to form a strike committee, which was accountable to all lecturers. Its responsibility was to work out the appropriate tactics according to our own strength.

The small group that came forward had lots of ideas on what to do on the day of the proposed strike. Our big problem was to get more people involved in them. We decided it was crucial to get a dialogue going and involve the students. We produced a leaflet calling on students to support the strike, and to discuss it with their lecturers. A second leaflet listed to the staff all the ways they could get involved, including discussion with their students.

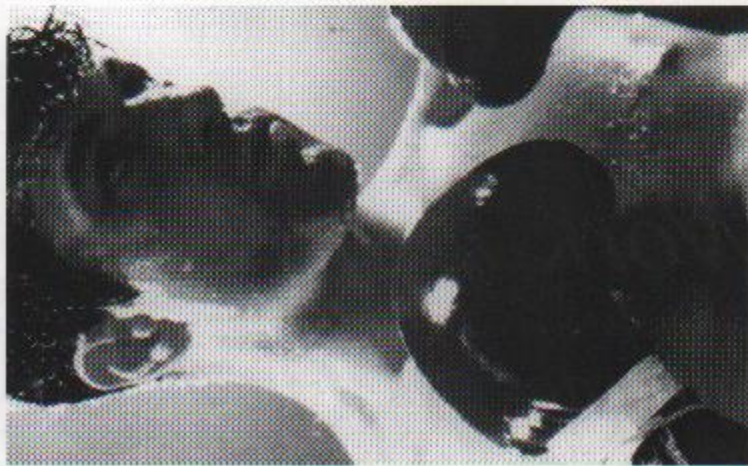
We made a banner, borrowed a megaphone and at the next branch meeting we drew up a rota for the picket line and planned a rally for lunch time on strike day. One lecturer who also works at a local sixth form college offered to get support from there and to bring these teachers to our rally. Someone else offered to contact all the local radio stations to advertise the strike. I wrote a press release. And a music lecturer got some of his students to perform 'live' at the rally.

We aimed to be as vibrant and attractive as possible and to cause as much noise and disruption as we could. But at the same time to have such tight and self-disciplined organisation so that when the police arrived, which they inevitably would, they would not be able to pick us off or to disperse us without our consent.

We were determined and did stay in control. At no time did we have the illusion that such a protest would win. We had too much ground to make up in too short a time. But it did give us the satisfaction of seeing a glimmer of our own potential for the future and served notice to the college bosses that they have still got a fight on their hands.

PUBLIC SECTOR WORKERS FIGHTBACK CAMPAIGN MANIFESTO

The government has begun the most sweeping attack ever on jobs and services in the public sector. It is desperate for us to pay the price for a system which does not work.



IT'S THEIR MESS NOT OURS

It's not our concern to work out a strategy for the bosses. Any attempt to do so will always rebound against us. Tens of thousands of jobs have gone because our side has put capitalist profit before working class lives. Terms are now dictated to us—as in the Tomlinson proposals for London's health service and London Underground's 'Company Plan'. Meanwhile the union leaders are still eager to advise the capitalists how to run their system.

Today we are asked to tender for our own jobs; to undercut the lousy wages and onerous working conditions that we already have. To add insult to injury, we are often asked to cover any shortfall by going out and begging for money. We can expect more of this as charities such as the Imperial Cancer Research Fund cut back their grants to hospitals like St Bartholomew's.

If we're to hold on to what we have and move forward, we will have to fight harder than ever before.

NO CUTS IN JOBS AND WAGES: FOR THE SERVICES WE NEED

Don't settle for what they offer. Think about what we need—not what we can put up with.

If we do this, we can begin to overcome the divisions that exist between different groups of workers; and between workers and consumers of services. We know that employers will try to exploit divisions between skilled and unskilled, men and women, black and white. We need a strategy that can bring unity against the management offensive.

This means no special cases—no one group of workers is more worthy of praise or blame than any other. Searching out public sympathy for frontline workers like nurses or ambulance drivers may seem attractive—but it is divisive. It counterposes a 'deserving' nurse to an 'undeserving' cleaner. This breeds resentment and recrimination.

Sympathy is no substitute for effective solidarity action. Eliciting public sympathy may be a reasonable starting point, but that is all. Everyone 'toots for the nurses', but that does not add a penny to the wage packet. We cannot afford to hold back from effective measures just to appear respectable. Do you want to be a well-loved victim or a worker with a well-paid job.

The clearest division we face is the 'choice' between jobs and decent wages on the one hand; and the provision of services on the other. We are told: 'If you are greedy enough to want a decent wage it will be your fault that the old die of hypothermia.' We say: 'We do not accept the choice between slave wages and inadequate services. We aspire to a living wage and all the services that provide for our needs and dignity.'

FOR INDEPENDENT ORGANISATION AND RANK AND FILE CONTROL

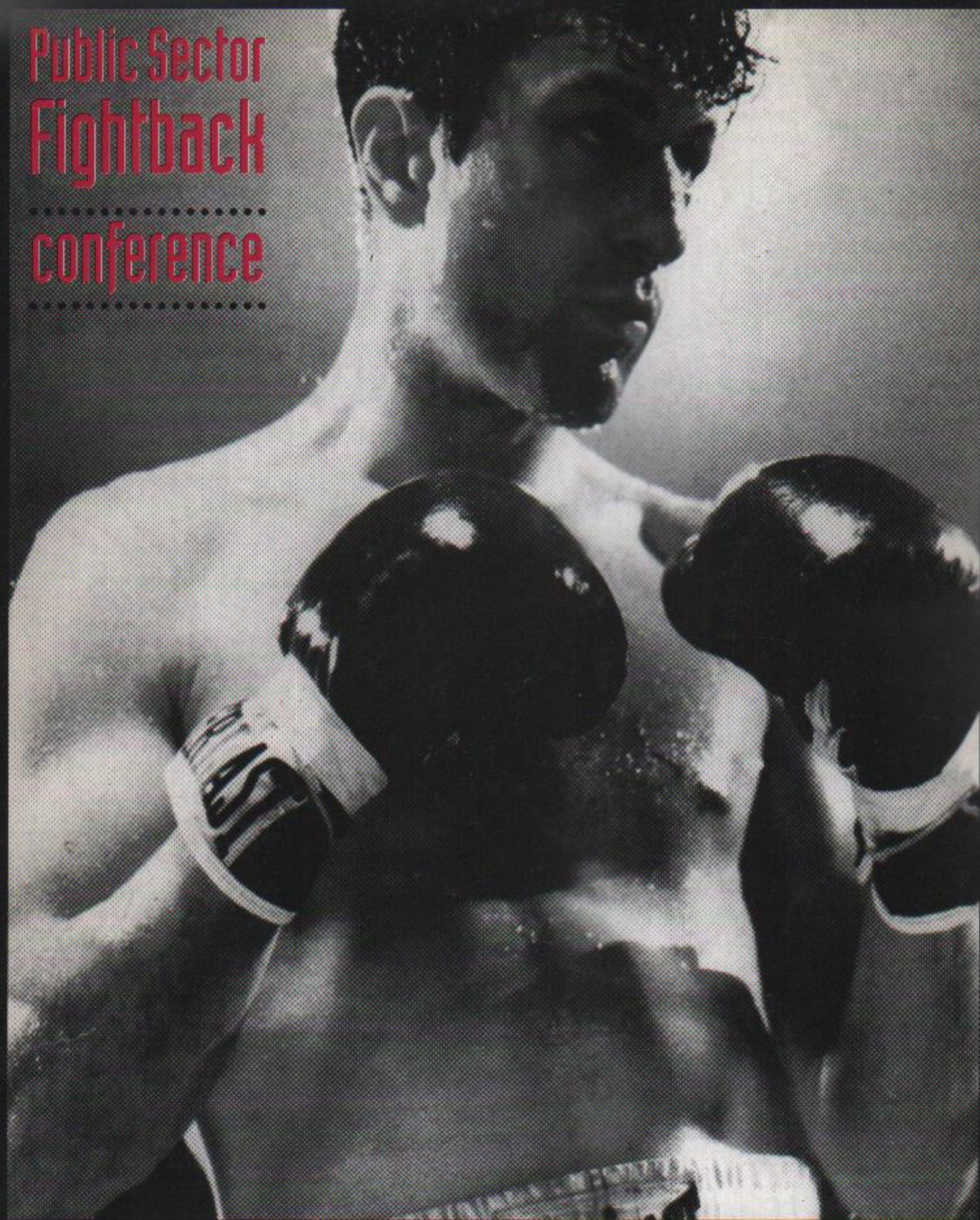
We require organisations that always act with our needs in mind first and last. RMT's negotiations with London Underground before calling off strike action is exactly what should not happen. In secret, the RMT executive found a way to preserve its negotiating position in exchange for agreeing to redundancies. We should demand that all talks with the bosses are broadcast for everyone to hear.

Whatever their pretensions, local councils are employers like any other. But that's not how our unions have operated. In many cases we have management in our union branches. How can we discuss and organise for effective action when the boss is in the room? If management wants an association or union let them form their own.

We need to organise across sections and sectors to overcome divisions. We need to build unity from the bottom up. It stands to reason that there would be a greater possibility of effective action if there were just one union that covered the tube, rail, and buses, or if nurses were in a single organisation. We are going to have to create such organisations ourselves. Effective action will not be brought about through existing structures.

We've all met the argument from fellow workers that they agree with us but that nothing can be done. But some simple propositions which have always been true for the working class are just as true today. The longer we fail to organise, the harder it will become to fight back. The attacks on us are not going to stop. We have one possible chance to defend our class: to fight back hard and to fight back now.

Public Sector
Fightback
.....
conference
.....



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