

Libertarian STRUGGLE

May/June 1974

For Workers Power

Fivepence



INSIDE: LESNEY'S MATCHBOX MISERY
THE GREAT FOOD SCANDAL
THE MCINERNEY STRIKE

paper of the Organisation of Revolutionary Anarchists

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AIMS & PRINCIPLES

- 1 Capitalism is a class society.
- 2 The basic irreconcilable contradiction within it is between the class which owns and controls the means of production, distribution and exchange, the bourgeoisie, and the class who produce the agricultural and industrial wealth, the working class.
- 3 The social enslavement and exploitation of the working class forms the basis on which modern society stands, without which capitalism could not exist.
- 4 The state is the instrument of the ruling class. To destroy the power of the bourgeoisie, we must destroy the power of the state.
- 5 Russia and China are class societies in each of which a ruling class of administrators collectively owns and controls the means of production, distribution and exchange and in which a working class, the sole producer of all wealth, is exploited by that class. These states we would define as corporate state capitalist in that the ruling class is totally integrated with the state as is the trade union structure.
- 6 The class nature of society is reflected in all the dominant philosophies; class, race, sexual, social and personal relationships. The class relationships are expressed through all social relationships and generate attitudes such as sexism and racism.
- 7 The conflict of interest between the two classes generates the class struggle. In the history of society the class struggle has been the primary factor in the determination of the form and structure of society.
- 8 The day to day struggles of the working class reflect the class struggle. The position of the working class as the collective producer of society's wealth makes it the only force capable of replacing capitalism by a classless society. The existing defensive organisations thrown up by the working class such as the trade unions, whose bureaucracy is increasingly incorporated into capitalism, are not adequate for the smashing of capitalism and the building of a free classless society. However, working class rank and file organisations such as democratically controlled shop steward committees, factory committees, strike committees are developing through the place of work. These organisations are the forerunners of workers' councils which are the expression of working class power. Outside of work, the working class has developed other forms of organisation that are potentially revolutionary, such as tenants' action committees, rent strike committees and tenant-worker joint action committees.
- 9 Dual power exists before the power of the bourgeoisie is smashed. If the working class are successful then the organisation of the needs of society will be firmly based in working class hands. This is the collective working class in power, in which the working class destroys all remnants of bourgeois society such as racism, the family and hierarchies. This is the period of transition between capitalism and libertarian communism.
- 10 From our analysis of society we reach the inevitable conclusion that capitalism cannot be reformed in any fundamental way and that the only meaningful transformation of society is through the development of working class organisations and by means of a violent social revolution. Violence becomes inevitable for the working class to defend themselves against the onslaughts of the dispossessed ruling class.

THE ROLE OF THE ORA

- 1 The task of the ORA is to aid the preparation of the working class for their seizure of power. The establishment of an anarchist society is something that has to be consciously fought for by the working class. ORA is a conscious, organised expression of libertarian communist ideas. Through the shared experience, information and knowledge of the class struggle, ORA must be able to analyse and disseminate the nature of the problems facing the working class and apply these lessons in the class struggle.
- 2 ORA aims to offer a lead within the working class movement by example and explanation: and to build into the movement a high level of political consciousness so that it is capable of defeating capitalism and fighting the creation of a new ruling class. Fundamental to this is the contradiction between the organisation as a tendency within the class and its being in ideological advance of it. This contradiction can only be resolved with the establishment of a libertarian communist society. During the period of transition the potential basis for the emergence of a new ruling class is progressively removed so that the need for a separately organised libertarianism will decrease.
- 3 ORA seeks to develop and support working class organisations which are the forerunners of workers' councils and to develop in them revolutionary consciousness. ORA does not seek independent power for itself but seeks to work through the working class organisations.
- 4 ORA seeks to establish international links with libertarian revolutionary organisations and groups with an aim at establishing an international libertarian communist movement.
- 5 ORA seeks to combat attitudes of sexism, racism and national chauvinism as attitudes that help maintain class society.

The form our organisation takes is a realisation of libertarian perspectives in the current situation. We recognise that it is not a social model of a free society and must itself develop in interaction with the developing liberation of society.

- (i) We are a membership organisation.
- (ii) Membership is open to those who agree with our analysis of society and its transformation and who work towards this end.
- (iii) The main policy-making body will be the National Conference. Between National Conferences there will be held monthly Delegate Conferences to co-ordinate and carry out National Conference decisions, to decide interim policy on urgent issues and to initiate activity. Delegates are mandatable and rotated. Delegate Conference decisions can be revoked by National Conference.
- (iv) We seek to establish ORA groups in all areas, not only geographical but also industrial, education, etc. Groups interpret National Conference and Delegate Conference decisions to relate tactics to their local experience.

As agreed at ORA National Conference in Leeds
January 26/27th 1974

EDITORIAL

MAYDAY comes this year in an unusual situation of apparent calm. Yet inflation continues with prices still soaring and real wages dropping.

Labour, despite its election-time rhetoric, continues with the Tory Incomes Policy. The rent increases implemented under the Conservative 'Fair Rents' Act will not be cut, and the people of Clay Cross now pay 'fair' rents.

The Budget, far from producing 'howls of anger' from the rich, has hit the working class in many areas — electricity, beer, cigarettes, petrol (and therefore food), for example.

The calm is superficial. Underneath, the crisis facing the international ruling class continues. The present government is as unable to solve Britain's crisis as were their predecessors. Any attempt to fight their way out will be at the expense of the working class — in the shape of wages, standard of living and conditions of work.

The state will attempt to meet any resistance blow-for-blow with repression; as the lessons learnt from the 1972 mass miners' pickets resulted in the Shrewsbury show-trials

of building workers; as this winter's crisis was met with a token, but still menacing, show of force at Heathrow (backed up with increased advertising for the armed forces).

Any last hope that a Labour government can implement socialist policies (even if it wished!) will soon have died. But mass sympathy towards 'their' Labour Party lingers on amongst the working class.

The need must be made more evident for autonomous workplace committees linked locally, industrially and nationally to form a national rank and file movement which is able to stand and fight, while ignoring the posturings of the 'vanguard' parties or any other would-be leaders.

The forming of these workplace committees, which are potential forerunners to workers' councils, we consider to be a major priority for all genuine revolutionaries.

Only a movement based on workplace, neighbourhood and rural councils (and ignoring the social-democratic and vanguard-party blind alleys) can smash capitalism and lead to a self-managed socialist society.

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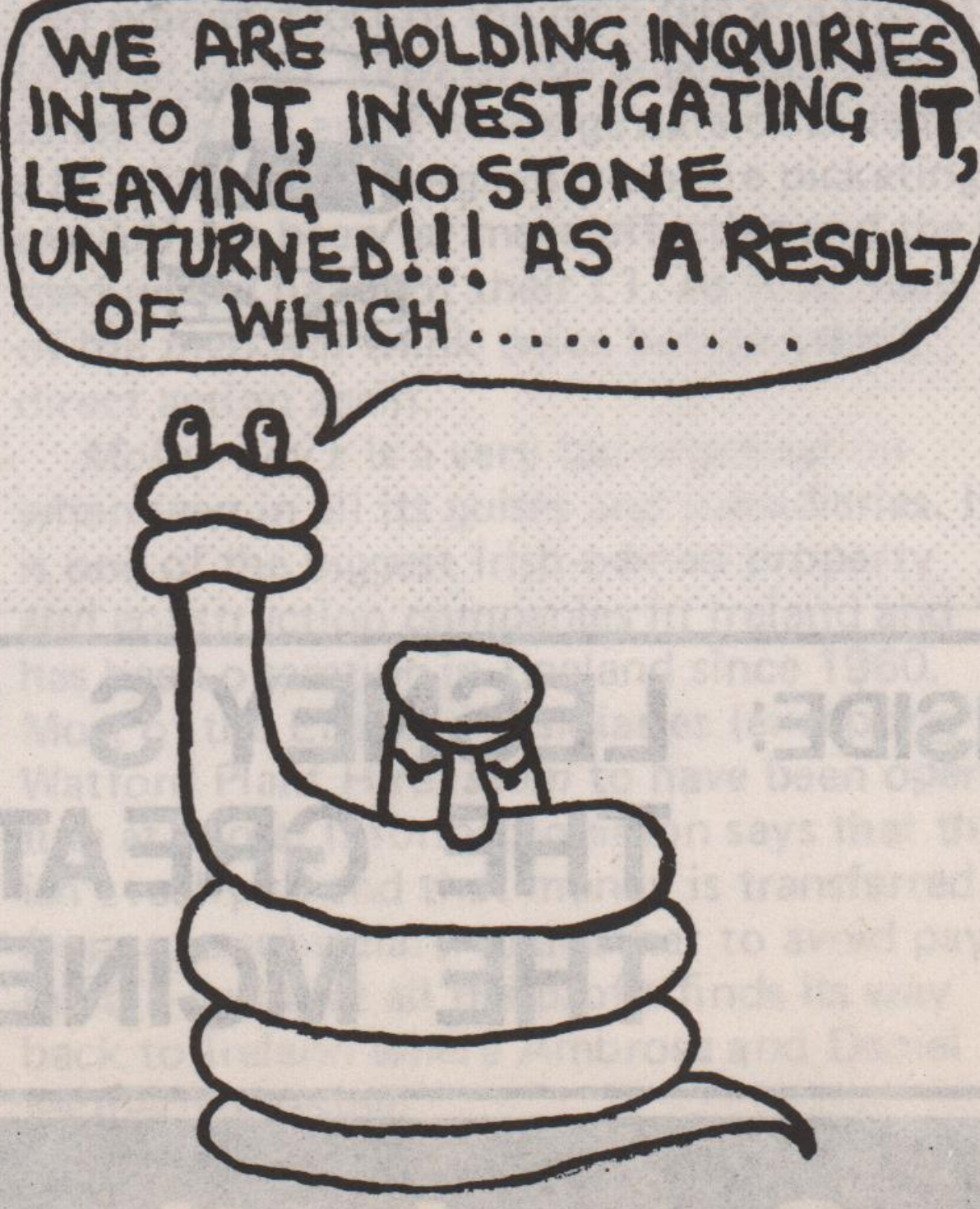
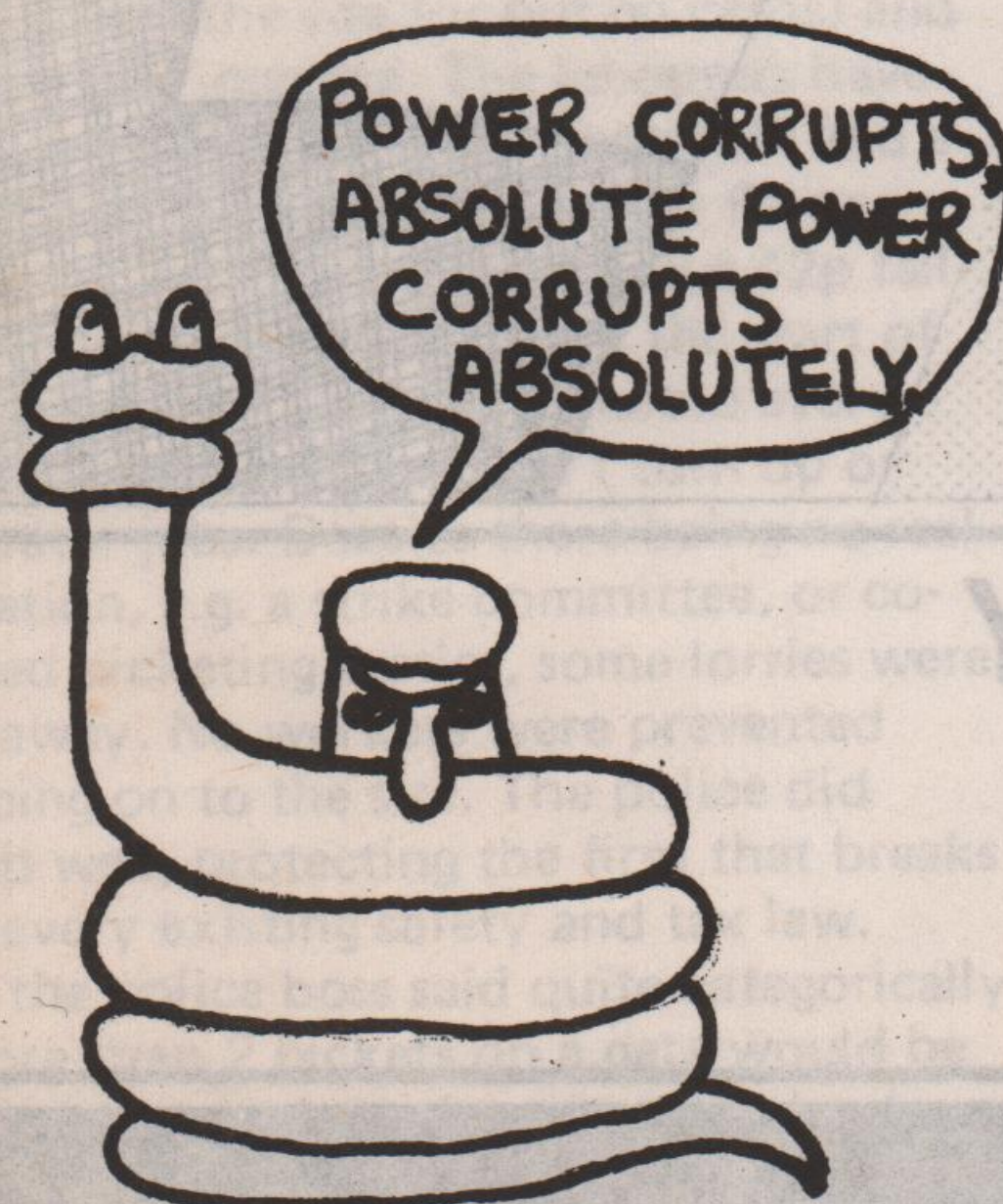


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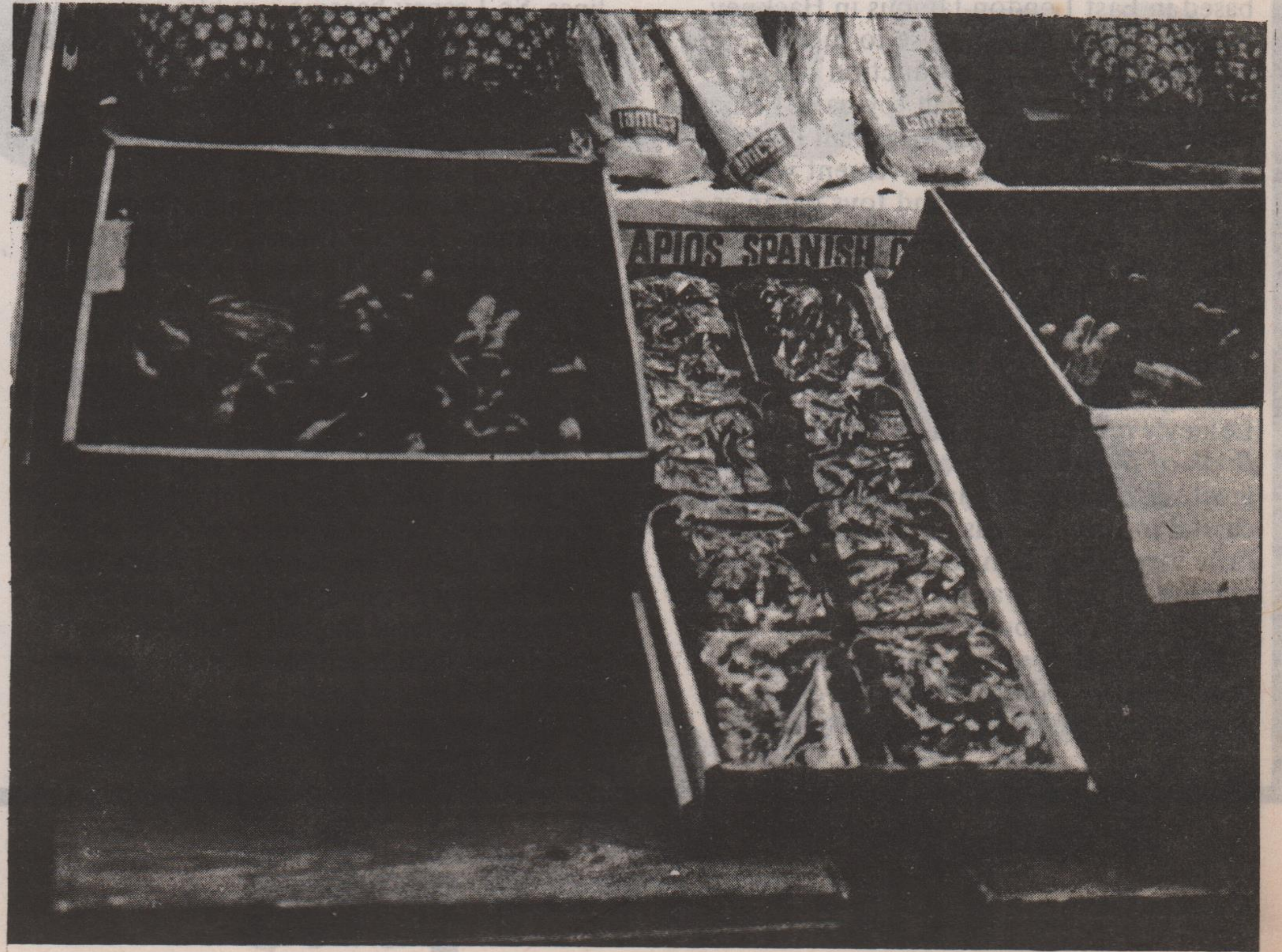
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SNAKE



THE GREAT FOOD SCANDAL



AMIDST ALL THE 'constitutional' crises, you may have noticed the Labour Party is already admitting that it cannot do very much about food prices. Like the Tories, they mostly blame the world situation. The truth is that the world situation *is* to blame, but not in the way they say it is.

WHEN WILL IT BE CHEAPER TO DIE?

The food price index rose by 50% between 1968 and 1973. And the rises have been speeding up — between February 1971 and February of this year food has risen by 41%. The Tories said that the *average* Briton's earnings rose a little more than that. But these figures for average earnings conceal the appalling inequality of people's incomes. About three-quarters of us take home less than the 'average' pay of £42. And the rise in food prices means far more to the majority than it does to the rich minority — like the London couple the *Sunday Times* recently described who spend £160 *each week* on food and drink! Aware of what this implies, Mrs Williams said that Labour will re-introduce subsidies for some foods. But will this solve the problem? The subsidies will come out of the taxes most of us pay and they will go to the people who are making a profit from food.

DON'T BLAME THE WORKERS

Food rises cannot be blamed on farm-workers. Recent rises give basic workers £21.80 and craftsmen £25. Many small farmers receive not much more, while the big farmers rake it in. The bigger the farmer, the easier it is to survive; capitalist agriculture is designed that way. Thus as the price of feedstuffs rise, the big beef producers turn over to more profitable cereals and sell their herds. The result — less milk and less beef. And the changover is subsidised! Recently two big farmers got £100,000 of this kind of aid, and the farming press crowded with approval. Farming is like all business: the big win because they can switch to what is most profitable — but they never produce for the *needs* of those who cannot pay. And the state, that claims to be working for us, supports this with its subsidies.

WHY FOOD RISES?

Rises occur for many reasons. For a start, the devaluation of the pound by 20% means imported food costs more. And Britain imports half of what it eats.

Joining the Common Market means the operation of *minimum* prices: If beef doesn't reach a set price in the market it is bought, put into cold storage and when shortages arise to push up the price, it is sold at a handsome profit.

World-wide, there has been a *real* shortage of food for years. A third of the world's people are still either starving or undernourished. So long as they cannot *pay* for food they remain starving, and there need not necessarily be shortages of food *on the market*. But as soon as a few more people in the 'third world' are able to buy the food they need, this shows up as a shortage of food on the market, and prices rise as the demand for food increases.

And, again, 'acts of God', like the African droughts, or bad weather at harvest time can reduce the crops. As the food stocks dwindle the speculators move in, sensing the chance of higher profits. There is a vast 'Futures' market: speculators buy the food farmers expect to produce in future years at a high price. But, by the time they have got their hands on the food, its price has rocketed and their pockets are well lined. These speculators are really forcing up the price of food — the price of wheat on the 'futures market' has doubled in the last fifteen months purely on speculation. In this way businessmen make an already bad natural situation even worse.

INEFFICIENCY

The government and the National Farmers' Union both tell us that British farms, especially the large ones, are the most efficient in the world. What do they mean by this? By using machinery and fertilisers on large farms they've been able to pay just a few workers to produce a lot of food. And that means big profits.

But is this the best way to satisfy people's needs? When there's a desperate shortage of

food in the world and little more land that can be easily cultivated, we need to grow as much as we can on the space we've got. But, very often, the large farms that make use of 'mass production' methods produce less food per acre than the small farmers. In arable farming, small farms (under 50 acres) produced £70 of food per acre while the large farms (over 300 acres) only managed to grow £41 worth of food per acre (1965 figures).

PARASITES

Large scale farming, that often uses the land so ineffectively, is a parasite. As people have been thrown off the land, it has relied more and more on industry and the large corporations to keep its machines going. The large oil companies that keep its tractors going have made vast profits in grabbing oil from the Middle East, Venezuela and other poorer countries. In providing 'cheap energy' they have plundered the world's resources that can never be renewed — if we keep on using oil at the present rate it's likely to run out in about 30 years time. And the same goes for the large companies that provide fertilisers — one ton of nitrogen fertiliser requires five tons of oil to produce it. Modern agriculture has only appeared efficient because it has relied on this hidden plunder of the world's resources, often from the poorer countries. The *New Scientist* estimates that American farms burn up fertilisers, oil, etc., five times more calories of energy than they bring out of the soil as food. This sums up the 'efficiency' of modern farming.

AND PARASITES AGAIN

As if this weren't enough, our farms have been buying cheap protein from poorer countries who desperately need the food for themselves. It's been a cheap way of feeding our cattle and our poultry. It's not an effective way of making food — you need many pounds of animal feed to produce a pound of meat. But it's profitable. Just so long as there are people who can afford the luxury of a lot of meat; and just so long as poorer countries are forced to sell these foodstuffs off cheap to keep their economies going.

CREAMING IT OFF

Every time we pay for our food we're also keeping up the profits of the large companies on which our farmers depend. We've mentioned the oil companies and firms like ICI and Fison's whose fertilisers are a mixed

blessing — they 'run off' the farmland to pollute the lakes, rivers and seas. ICI's profits have doubled in the last year. The chemical firms also produce insecticides which, again, are a mixed blessing — insects develop a resistance to them, so more and more chemicals like DDT are sprayed on the crops, making for ever greater hazards to health and the environment. Then there are the firms who make the machinery; and the importers of animal feed, who are doing well out of the present crisis. And, at the end of the chain, are the large stores like our local Morrison's, who get their rake-off. In 1972-73 Marks and Spencers, one of our largest food retailers, made £1,890 profit for every person they employed — which is more than they pay many of their workers. Tesco's didn't do too badly either!

WHOSE SHORTAGES?

The oil that our farmers and food transporters use is getting scarcer; and *that* means that the oil producing countries in the Middle East, in Africa and South America, have found it easier to act together and push up the prices. These countries have been plundered and kept in a state of 'underdevelopment' by the rich nations of the world, and some of the money they make will go towards their development. But, as always, the rich and the powerful will take the lion's share — in an hour Colonel Gadafy once watched a Libyan oil magnate gamble away £150,000 of his country's oil revenue in a Park Lane gaming club. And in Saudi Arabia, where there is widespread poverty, £400 million a year—a third of the country's budget—was spent on armaments: all good business for the arms manufacturers whether they come from Russia or the West. And our own oil companies do very nicely out of the shortages. The crude oil they buy from the oil producers costs only a fraction of what the consumer pays for his petrol. But when the oil producers charge more, Shell and BP add 50% to their prices.

LEEDS FOOD CO-OP

MATCHBOX

LESNEY PRODUCTS LTD

Lesney Products & Co. Ltd. are the firm based in East London famous in Hackney 'notorious' for its rapid rise to success and great profit from the production of the 'Matchbox' range of small toy cars. Lesney's started up after the war as a small die-cast engineering firm. The involvement with the manufacture of models and toys began as a sideline, but after the amazing sales success of a model version of the Coronation Coach in the early fifties, the firm concentrated on the toy market. The rise of the company, virtually alone in the market for cheap die-cast toys, was very rapid. At one time Lesney's rated a mention in *The Guinness Book of Records* as the company with the greatest turnover in relation to investment capital in Britain. This means that from very little investment in machinery, a very large amount of profit was made: Lesney's always having paid rock-bottom wages.

Towards the end of the sixties their lack of investment capital told as the cheap toy market had become very competitive and

they didn't have the money to develop new lines. So Lesney became a public company, but the money realised by the sale of shares on the stock exchange was only a fraction of what the company had been worth in its heyday, when it had the monopoly of the market. They, therefore, found it necessary to go to the 'city' for money and almost folded up altogether. The city financiers who provided the cash now have a considerable say in the running of the company and Jack Odell—working-class boy made good—the shark who built up the company, has had his power curbed somewhat. With Odell out of it, the skilled and semi-skilled male workers became unionised—AUEW and EEPTTU) but no attempt has been made to unionise the large section of unskilled women workers who form the main work force; this year's figures show Lesney's employing 1,065 part-time workers, the large majority being women working at light assembly work for an average of 25 hours a week.

The nicest jobs come in small packages

Helen lives in Hackney, East London. She has young children and no-one supporting her. She needed to earn money but she also needed the daytime to see to her kids so she decided to work the night shift at Lesney's. Below is an interview with her about what it was like.

Q: Why were you working at Lesney's?

Helen: The reason I got the job there was because I needed more money. The advert was in the *Hackney Gazette*. 'Nightbirds to earn £25 plus a week, free transport to and from work and fancy canteen thrown in'. When I went for the interview and asked how much I was going to earn, he said I would earn about £18.60 a week. When I said what about the £25 plus a week, he said that there were no more vacancies in the assembly shop, I would be working in the spray shop. When I actually started the job, I found that the women in the assembly shop had been told the same thing. There was no £25 plus a week; you could earn that after about six or seven months getting bonus and everything, but no-one had lasted that long. When I was there the woman who'd worked the longest had been there four months — she was leaving that week.

Q: What was it like in the spray shop?

Helen: Well, it was on a belt, sitting on a high stool, with rods passing you to be sprayed.

Q: You were working nights?

Helen: Yes. Lots of the women I met there were getting no sleep during the day because of young kids. When we were complaining about lack of sleep and the work being too hot and heavy, one of the men said he'd been doing it for three years and it hadn't done him any harm, but I think it's significant that there are no women in any positions of authority there. It's the men who press the buttons and tell the women what to do—they're the foremen—the women do the really hard work on the belts, so only the men have been there for years on and off. When we complained we were told we weren't pulling our weight and if we wanted to get our bonus we'd have to work harder. When he was working the day shift, he told us, his women could turn out fourteen gross each of

these tiny cars a day and we could only manage to put up nine or ten gross a night. Each belt makes a part of these tiny cars and you feed them all to this conveyor belt, which then sprays them.

If there were any gaps on the assembly line the foreman would come along and work beside you really fast, saying 'come on now, get a move on'. You weren't allowed to stop the belt for any reason. When you had a tea break, which lasted ten minutes, the tea was brought to you. The belt didn't stop; you had to sit there while the belt was passing you—nowhere to prop your tea or whatever—you sat there trying to eat, with the cup of tea on your knee and your cigarette in your hand. You couldn't put anything down because in front of you was piled all the bits of cars. So you crouched there for your ten minutes, and the minute your break was up you handed your cup back.

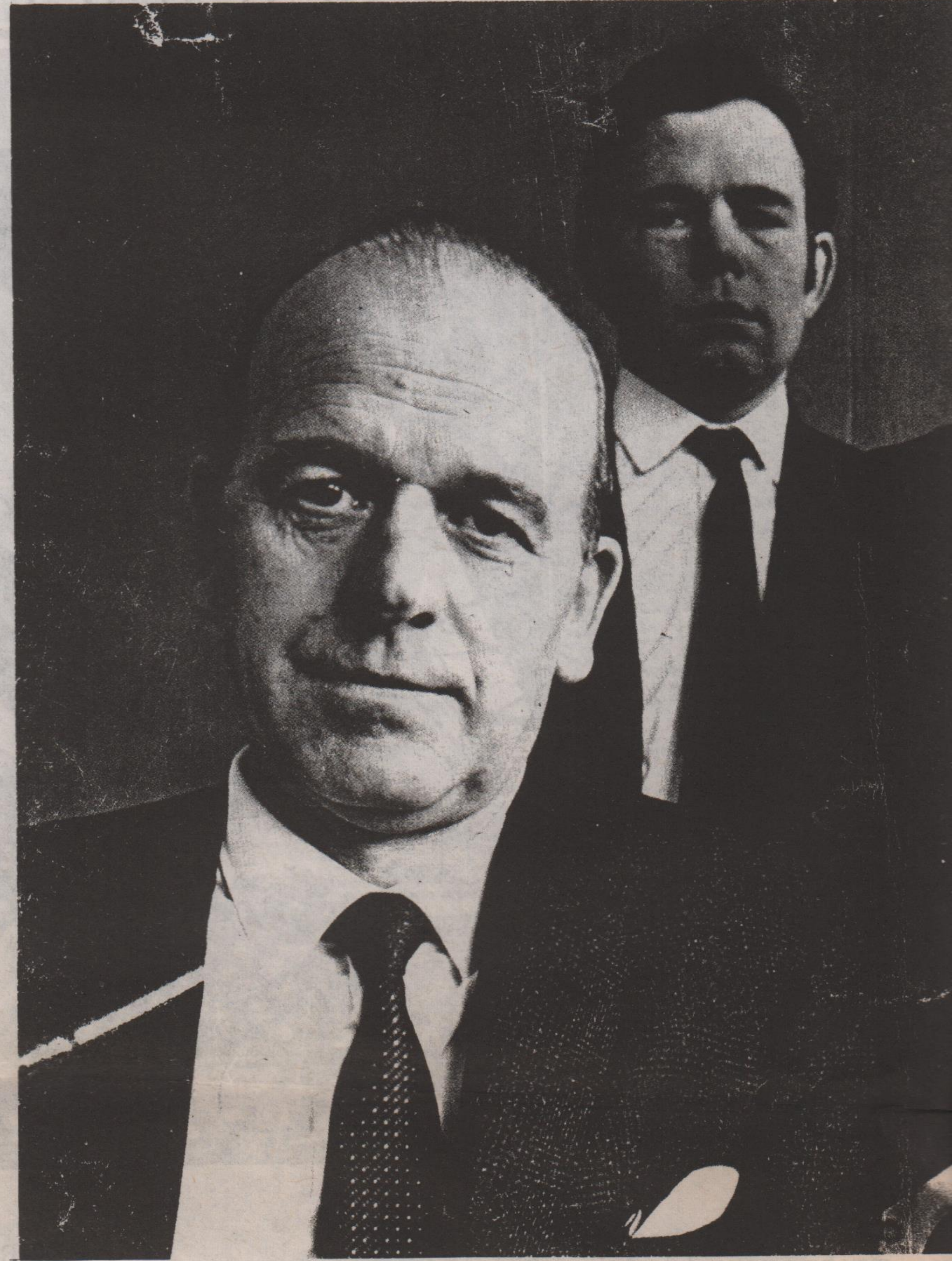
Q: How long was your main break?

Helen: Lunchbreak lasted half-an-hour. It was quite a nice big modern canteen but there was only one canteen assistant for that many women. By the time you'd queued for your meal you only had five minutes to eat it in. The men could go straight into the back of the kitchen and have their meal immed-

Pam's discovered the knack of putting doors on sports cars.



Pam got the hang of her new job in no time. Because only last week she was putting boots on Lotus Europas. And before that fitting bonnets on Lamborghinis. That's what Pam likes best about working in the part assembly department at Lesney's Eastway factory — the easy and quick pace of work. She likes everything else about Lesney, too — the light and clean working conditions, the low cost meals in the canteen, the free transport to and from work, the friendly atmosphere. And she knows she'd have a job to beat the money — up to £24.45 for a 37 hour week including bonus with a starting rate of £18.16.



NOT ALL CARSPRAYERS

ately. As soon as break is over they're already back there, waiting to get you back on the machines.

Q: Did many women collapse from fatigue?

Helen: Oh yes! The first night I was there, a girl near me collapsed from her stool. The foreman, instead of picking her up, put someone in her place first before helping her. The girl who collapsed was locked off from then.

There was a schoolteacher who'd got a new baby and was paying a mortgage off so she thought she'd do night shift. She collapsed after two or three hours. The same night another girl collapsed with the heat and had to be taken home. This apparently is quite common — other women who'd been there a few weeks said that most people didn't last long because the heat was too much. When I asked the foreman about this he said the heat was so bad because of the gas strike, which was on at the time. They were running different machines. They kept putting machines off because of the strike and sending women home in the middle of the night as there was no work. When they were layed off they didn't get paid by Lesney's; they had to go on the dole. They sent for them when there was work. There were actually hundreds laid off until things were back to normal.

The heat was terrific; especially if you were unlucky enough to be on the end of the belt. The girls there had to lift the cars off and put them into boxes, then the mould came round again to fill up with more cars. If you were the first three or four of these girls the moulds were still red hot and your fingers got blistered from touching them. The foreman had got some gloves in his belt which he should have given out to women who were liable to be burnt, but he said he only had a certain number per night. Even if you did manage to get some gloves, by chatting up the younger men, after about two

hours the finger tips had gone through as they were fine gloves, obviously not meant for heat work. The women on what was called the heat work were provided with heavier gloves. So lots of women had blisters on their fingers. One woman's watch melted on her wrist — a plastic watch which blistered all her wrist. She was told she would be compensated for it.

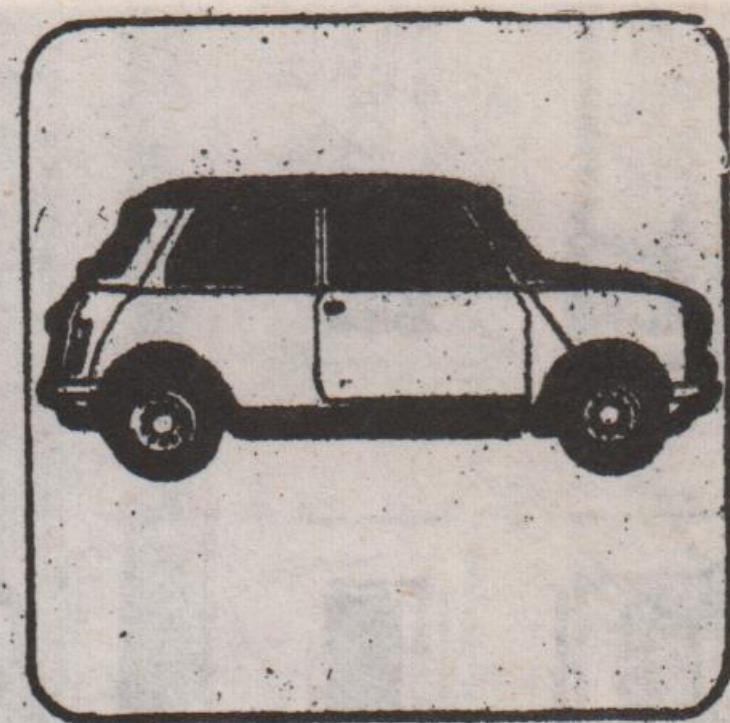
Q: Did you sign any form of contract?

Helen: When you first get the job they give you this Workers' Handbook — or, rather, they don't give it to you, they open up the last page and you sign this page, which the man then tears out. Then they give it to you. The page is put in your file. Afterwards I was reading the book and realised I should have read through the book before signing. It was a book of rules. Everyone I asked hadn't read it, as a matter of fact most women had thrown it in the bin that night.

Q: What about the free transport to and from work in the advert?

Helen: Yes. One of the main attractions was the free transport which would pick you up near home — this is a big help when you've got kids, you don't have to travel too far to get there and get home in time to get them off to school. If you had to depend on public transport that time of the morning, you couldn't do it. When we first got there, this woman and I, who live near each other, we rushed down to the buses, looking to see the one which went our way (they draw up one at a time for different areas). We eventually approached somebody and said: 'Can we get a bus to Hackney?' He said: 'You'll have to get a public bus as there's none going in that direction.' Lots of women were queuing at the bus stop and a lot of them didn't come back the next night. I went back as I could get a lift to work at night and get a bus to the corner of my street in the morning, but the other women had to give up the job because of that. If, by any chance, the com-

MISERY!



Jack Odell (front row, right) with other members of the board.

'to make a quick profit.'

HAVE MUSCLES

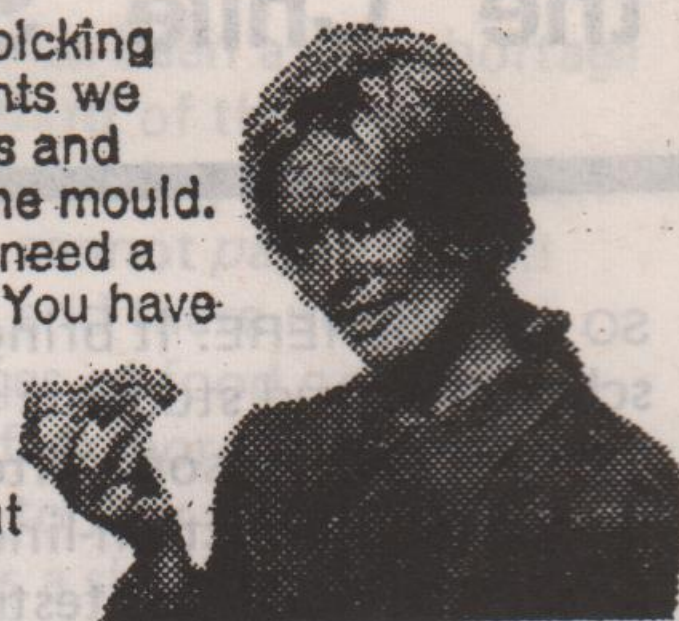
pany bus broke down on the way to work and you were late getting there, you lost your time and the money. The advert puts emphasis on these buses, but when you start work they emphasise that you take them at your own risk and you can't rely on them.

Q: You were working on a bonus system?

Helen: Yes. Bonuses were the things that were to bring your wages up from the £18.60 you'd been offered to the £25 in the advert. Every night they keep at you: 'Don't forget you'll earn your bonus tonight if you work harder'. When you're first learning, they tell you it will take a few weeks before you'll earn any bonus, when you've got a certain speed up. The second night I was there, the foreman told us that if we got the lot we were working on out in time that night, we could all get a £2 in the morning. There were about fourteen girls on that belt. So we all worked really hard that night and, about five minutes before clocking off time, he came and took one of the cars out of the box, one of the finished ones, and had a look at it. He then made a great show of telling us that this wouldn't do and that the paint was all mottled. This was nothing to do with the girls on the belt, it was to do with the paint sprayers. He said this lot wouldn't pass and we would not get the bonus. We all thought this a bit of a fiddle to make us work harder. The bonus could really divide the women. Some women would keep hard at it all the time and complain to the foreman that so and so wasn't working as hard as she could. These women thought that they were going to be paid more, but they rarely did. Some of them left too. They were being used just as much as the rest of us but couldn't see it. They would move the faster women from belt to belt. The faster they worked, the faster you had to work to keep up. There was one woman I remember who'd been there about ten weeks and she'd got her first bonus. We all crowded round to see what

Mary's got a good eye for a chassis.

There's quite an art in picking out the metal components we use in Matchbox models and separating them from the mould. Because you don't just need a good eye for a chassis. You have to spot wheel bases, boots, even the little doors which fit onto some of our models. But Mary's glad she started work in the fettling department at Lesney's Eastway factory. Not least because her job earns her an average of £24.50 for a 40 hour week including bonus with a starting rate of £21.42, or she could work on our evening shift from 5.30-9.30 and earn £12.25.



she'd got, and it was sixty pence for the week's work. She said she was leaving.

Is the shop unionised?

There is a union there, but they told us they don't negotiate with the union, they have friendly workers-management talks to get any problems sorted out. There are notice boards up saying that as production doubled last year, they are passing the benefit on to the workers: there would be a free Disco this year, being along your friends, your husbands.

"MATCHBOX"

Helen left the job after a few weeks, as did many of the women she started with, but others have replaced them and will be replaced when they've had enough, and Lesney's continue to make profit out of them. This last year was a good one for the company, the chairman of the board told the shareholders' meeting earlier this year. Lesney's had an 18% return on their capital investment and made an 11% profit from sales, and Jack Odell is spending £200,000 on his new home in North London.

This interview is one woman's experience of night factory work and the bonus system — but it is by no means isolated to Lesney's or the type of work there. All over East London are small factories—the rag trade being the most notorious—using cheap unorganised women labour in sweat shop conditions; out to make a quick profit with the minimum of capital outlay.

Most of the women Helen met while working at Lesney's were in a similar position to herself — looking after their husband and children during the day and wage earning at night. Lesney's success and large profits are directly related to the particular situation of the women they employ: they rely on the women seeing their factory work as having little significance in their lives. Even though they can spend up to forty hours a week at the factory, they see themselves as a housewife earning 'on the side', though their wages are an essential part of the family income; so when they are laid-off for any reason they fall back on their husband's income until they get the job back.

Most women have no experience of organising at their work place, and at Lesney's what energy they have must go into surviving on very little sleep under dreadful conditions as they are trying to fill two jobs at once, the housewife and the factory worker—something which few men unionists have any experience of. Lesney's also ensure that there is little chance of the women developing any militancy about their jobs. The bonus system uses the women against each other because of their reliance on each other's speed at the job in order to get their own bonus. Moving the fast women from bench to bench to keep up the pace can cause them to resent the slower ones. No men work alongside the women on the belts; if they did the firm would have to pay the women better wages. Under the new Equal Pay Bill, equal pay has to be given where men and women are doing

the same job, so to avoid this the women work in one part of the factory at one type of job and the men in another. The only men the women come in contact with are the foremen, the men Helen saw only 'press the buttons and tell the women what to do'. This reaction to the men working with them leads some of the women to resent all the men at the factory as they don't know about the work done by the other men workers in the foundry, etc. There is therefore no influence at work and little knowledge on the part of the women of the conditions and wages paid in other parts of the factory which could begin to change their enforced ignorance of shop floor organisation.

The men workers at Lesney's are unionised but most of the women feel, and rightly, that the unions don't and aren't making any effort to represent them. The AUEW (Foundry and Engineering sections) is strong in the factory, but no efforts have been made to recruit the women, although the union has a women's section.

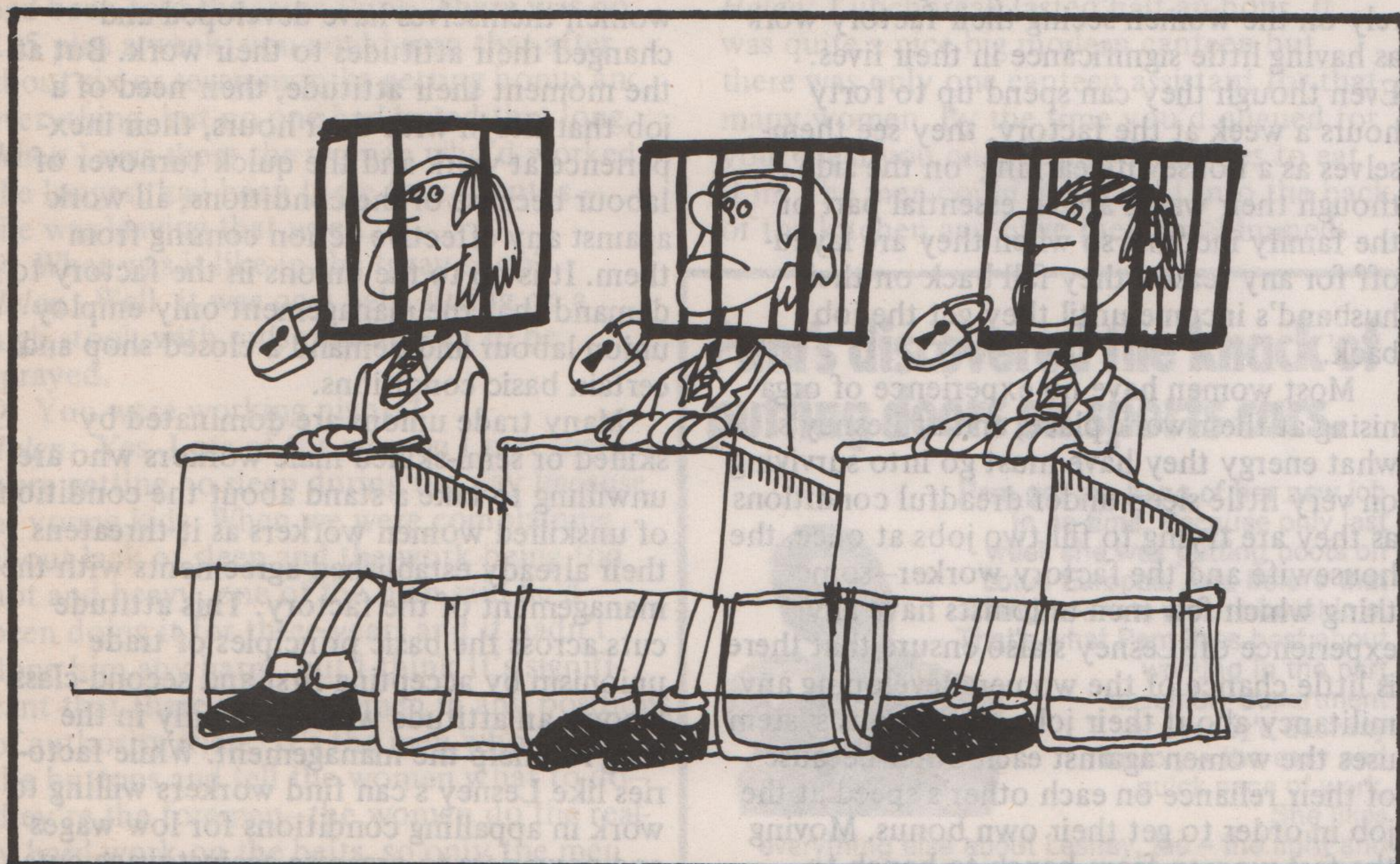
The only effective way of beginning to change the conditions of the women is through unionisation. Any lasting successes will, of course, only come about when the women themselves have developed and changed their attitudes to their work. But at the moment their attitude, their need of a job that fits in with their hours, their inexperience at work and the quick turnover of labour because of the conditions, all work against any effective action coming from them. It is up to the unions in the factory to demand that the management only employ union labour and demand a closed shop and certain basic conditions.

Many trade unions are dominated by skilled or semi-skilled male workers who are unwilling to take a stand about the conditions of unskilled women workers as it threatens their already established agreements with the management of the factory. This attitude cuts across the basic principles of trade unionism by accepting first and second-class labour, an attitude which can only in the long run help the management. While factories like Lesney's can find workers willing to work in appalling conditions for low wages and powerless to organise against wage cuts and lay-offs, all trade unionists are threatened. It is up to the conscious militants in the unions to realise that it is in their own interests to raise these questions in their union at branch and shop-floor level and to press for full unionisation.



A London O.R.A. contingent supported the 20,000 strong NO ARMS FOR CHILE demonstration on May 5th organised by the Chile Solidarity Campaign.

EDUCATION OR



EXAMINATION?

SO MAY IS HERE. It brings for thousands of schoolkids and students the start of the examination season. After the requisite period of production-line processing, the product is ready for testing.

For some, at the top of the ladder, university finals are approaching. For the elite of the system this will most likely be the climax of a long series of exams. Behind them will be a numbing record of exams. Resistance will have been deadened by the seemingly endless sequence — 11-plus, school tests and exams, O-levels, A-levels, university exams. Others will be at these lower stages of the ladder, on the way up; still others will have been made well aware that for *them* the ladder stops right here ('not quite the calibre for O-levels, you understand'). Some will pass, some will fail.

But most won't be on the ladder at all. The vast majority of school leavers have no examination successes. In our society, based on hierarchy, all that is required from the schools is an educated elite. And the present education system serves this purpose admirably. So far, for very many schoolkids, 'education' is a mockery.

But has the arrival of the much praised comprehensives changed matters? The 11-plus has indeed gone. But apart from the names of schools now including 'comprehensive' in their titles, and some amalgamation or expansion of schools, little has changed. And the nominal abolition of the 11-plus has been

negated by the system of grading and streaming *within* the schools, producing essentially the same system as before.

At A and O and CSE-level there are allegedly changes in the wind. But what this amounts to is the replacement of one set of exams by another. 'O' and 'F' to replace 'A' and 'O', or whatever the latest idea may be. In other words, the conveyor belt continues but a different final testing process might be introduced!

And what is this 'progressive' idea? They also want the conveyor-belt to continue, but the product must be watched at all times! Continuous assessment, through lots of little exams and by grading the pupils' work throughout the course, is seen as an improvement. But all this is merely producing a less objectional type of exam. Examination of any kind is an anti-education force, working to produce the required output for the hierarchical society.

What education in its true sense demands, then, is not just no examinations but no grading at all, no assessment at all. (Obviously an airline pilot or a dentist needs to prove competence, but that is another matter.) A school with no streaming, no grading, no examinations; a school managed by staff, students, parents, cleaners, technicians; a school without prefects and headmasters, caning and detentions. Given these, we can begin to *educate* our children and ourselves.

J.B.

THE NATIONAL RANK & FILE CONFERENCE I.S. PARTY GAMES?

THE FIRST NATIONAL Rank and File Delegate Conference, held at Birmingham on the 30th March, was an impressive affair from the point of view of the number of delegates that attended. In fact, approximately 700 delegates from 307 trade union organisations attended, with about 60% of the delegates coming from industrial unions and about 40% from the white collar unions; nearly all seemed to be official delegates from union branches and committees. Although some people had been offered credentials without having to represent their branches.

The organisation of the Conference centred around five main motions proposed by the co-ordinating committee which set up the Conference. The content of the motions seemed admirable at first glance, stating as they did a broad reaction to Wilson and Heath's governmental attacks on the working class, but that was all they were — a broad reaction. Nowhere was there any mention of how a National Rank and File movement should go forward; what its main priorities of action should be and what role ultimately it should serve in terms of workers' power and workers' control.

The motions were essentially reformist demands because, in not stating what the way forward for independent rank and file organisation was, they were in fact asking the present capitalist system to make concessions. A preamble to one of the motions reads: 'This Conference pledges to organise rank and file groups inside each union to fight for militant policies, for the extension of democracy, and supports all candidates fighting the right-wing; in particular it encourages and supports candidates standing on this rank and file platform.' What kind of 'militant policies' and leading to what? What kind of democracy? Proletarian democracy where delegates are really delegates, mandated by their members on each issue, or only bourgeois democracy where the membership elects a representative who acts on 'behalf' of the membership? And who are the 'right-wing'?

Typical of some of the demands were moves against racialism because it splits and divides workers; for 'the struggle of women

THIS IS THE TEXT OF A LEAFLET DISTRIBUTED BY O.R.A. MEMBERS AT THE CONFERENCE

TODAY'S CONFERENCE will be important in the development of the working class movement in Britain. But delegates should be aware of several points.

In some cases, delegates to this conference will not be truly representing a rank and file. Those who delegated them may not, in some cases, be fully aware of the aims and consequences of such a conference. Some industries have not yet developed a strong rank and file movement.

This is not to pour cold water on the idea of the conference — just to realise that we should not put the cart before the horse. As such, delegates should realise the limitations of today's meeting — and how far today's decisions represent a strong, self-active working class. Delegates must return to their place of work after the conference and help the growth of a strong national rank and file movement that aims to set up workplace committees, and which will build links across industry and union, bringing the whole of the working class to the aid of each sector involved in struggle. Comparisons have been made to the Minority Movement of pre-war years — but this was a national movement that grew from the base where strong rank and file groupings had already developed in most industries. Some of the groups represented here, like the NUT rank and file, are comparatively strong whilst others like Hospital Worker are very weak.

This conference indicates the growing militancy amongst trade unionists, and their growing disillusionment with the union bureaucracy; this awakening militancy must not be channelled off into the backyard of

for equal pay and against discrimination', and 'for a 35-hour week now'. All meaningless if well intentioned rhetoric unless these demands relate to how the rank and file of trade unions are going to achieve it.

It was clear that the impressive number of delegates attending the Conference were

one political group.

The International Socialists are backing this conference all the way, *not* in order to encourage a genuinely independent rank and file but in order to use it as a recruiting platform for themselves. They told their members to make as much effort as possible to be delegates — packing out the conference with their people so that they [can influence] decisions their way and influence non-IS delegates, but also having the reverse effect of only talking to themselves.

People here today who are not members of IS must make sure that an independent rank and file is fought for, and not as the industrial wing of a political group that wants to lead the working class.

Members of IS should remember various statements of theirs from the past where they advocated autonomous rank and file action, and remember that within their organisation, as in the unions, bureaucracy is growing and democracy is dying. They should remember that IS has already made a heavy-handed effort to turn NUT rank and file into the IS teachers' faction — an effort that alienated many and discouraged countless others from joining Rank and File.

No one political tendency has the whole truth, the whole of the time. A real rank and file must be under the control of *all* its members. Only in this way can we get correct policies, and only this can prepare the way for real socialism; a socialism that will involve the utmost democracy and where *all* working class people will manage and run society through a network of workplace and neighbourhood councils.

there because politically there seemed nowhere else to go. In fact over half the delegates had applied for credentials since the Labour government had been elected. Many speakers at the beginning stated that the Labour government was indulging in the greatest act of class collaboration since the

sell out by the TUC in the 1926 General Strike. By keeping Phase 3, the Shrewsbury Three in prison and the Clay Cross Councilors with a massive fine hanging over their heads, they were in fact agreeing with the Tories that working class living standards should be cut and that the working class should be prevented from fighting back. It is no use turning to the trade union leaders — they have done a deal (the 'social contract') that there should be no wage rises above Phase 3.

This then raises the question — was the Conference an International Socialist front designed as a rally for the credit of IS? In one sense it was. Before the Conference IS sent out industrial circulars to their members making it top priority that they be delegated by their trade union branch to go to the Conference, and further that the Conference was very important because IS would be able to gauge its penetration into the trade union movement. It was also clear that the Organising Committee, who made up the platform, instructed IS members on how to vote. An additional motion put by a member of the General and Municipal Workers' Union, broadly outlining—as he saw them—first principles for a rank and file movement centring on workers' control, women's rights and racism, was only defeated on a second vote (a card vote) and only after the chairman of the Organising Committee had made it clear that it was not acceptable to them. It is also important to note that a third of the delegates had left by the time the motion had come up. In another sense, the Conference was not stage-managed. Many speakers did not have the familiar rhetoric and easiness of delivery and they were clearly bemused as to the role they should be playing.

Everyone was there because the trade union leadership and the government had betrayed them, but the large body of non-IS delegates were bewildered as to the point of the motions and as to what the Conference should lead to. As to IS themselves, they have no perspective of what real workers' power should be, what an independent rank and file should be, and, ultimately, what workers' councils are.

A WOMAN'S PLACE



IN THE CLASS STRUGGLE?

NOW THAT WOMEN'S LIBERATION is no longer the front page news it was, and the media has realised that the women's movement is involved in more important issues than analysing the sexually oppressive factors involved in wearing a bra, the involvement of women in wider political issues has shown a weakness in many women's ideas of their place in the revolutionary movement.

It was inevitable that in time the more committed and serious women in the women's movement would trace their speci-

fic oppression as women to being based in the economics of the capitalist system; and the realisation that the majority of men are oppressed in this society too, based as it is on the economic exploitation of the many by the few. Women's oppression is not rooted in the nature of men but in the economic necessities of this system. Many of the original militants of the movement have developed a revolutionary analysis of this society and are working with other women and men in groups formed to 'hasten' the collapse of capitalism and bring about a social revo-

lution which will provide the economic equality which is the only basis for sexual revolution.

All women's groups, and the women in them, at some time reach the point of either avoiding this central political issue, as their interests are those of this society; or realising that their interests are tied to those of the working class and, if the women's movement is to have any meaningful future, it must split on class lines and work accordingly.

The new priority of work for women has produced its own problems for some. The most effective work the women's movement has done in the past is to raise the consciousness of the women in it to realise the full extent of their oppression at home, at work, in their own attitudes, and the restrictions of such labels as male and female. But it seems to have left many with the feeling that they are first and foremost women before revolutionaries.

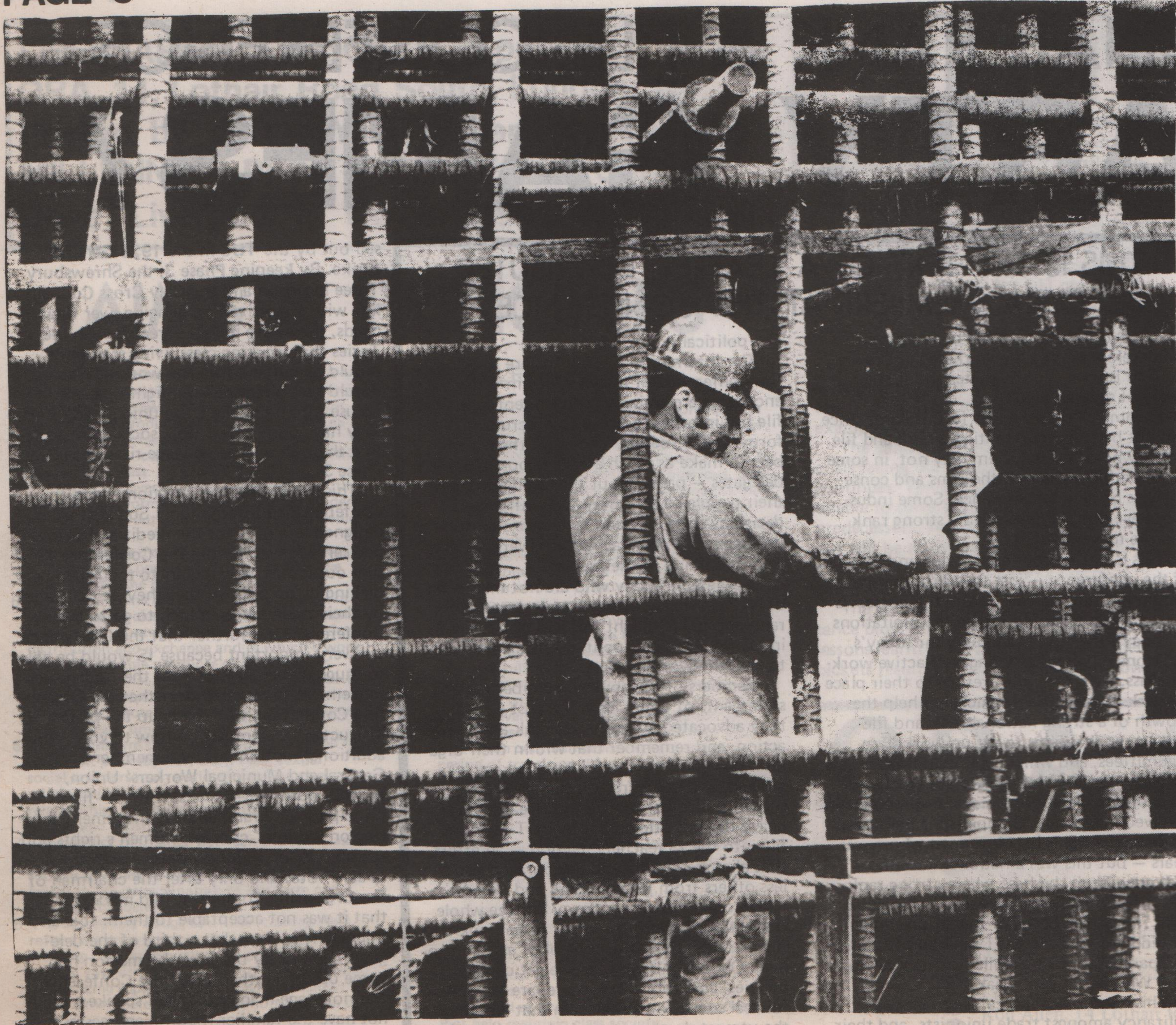
Once women and men are working together as committed revolutionaries the necessity for separate women's (or men's) groupings should disappear, any sexism that appears should be tackled by the group as a whole. Only if women really feel oppressed by their male comrades need they form a separate grouping — something which brings into question the whole politics of the group. (The need for separate women's groups in Trotskyite groups (of course, not men's) is obvious because of their limited politics based on vanguards and leaderships). This is not to discount individual women in the group getting together on specific issues they

feel closely associated with, just as building workers, teachers, etc. will get together.

Women must see themselves as revolutionaries first and not expect special treatment because they are women. Just as in the home, the first push to change her traditional role as a wife comes from the woman as she is most aware of her oppression, and often men are not aware of their sexist attitudes since they are so much part of this system; so in a revolutionary grouping, women must show themselves capable of being active members. At the present time there are of course more men than women involved in revolutionary politics, this only shows the double extent of oppression a woman has to throw off to become aware of the true nature of this system. It does not necessarily mean that the groupings are sexist, which I have heard being naively stated. Not all revolutionary men, thank Goldman, feel guilt in their relations with women; so if you get shouted at, sister, don't be so quick to shout 'sexual oppression', maybe they just disagree with your opinion.

Until women see themselves as truly part of the struggle and the solution, and that such terms as 'workers', 'unemployed workers', 'revolutionaries' and 'the movement' include them, and instead want special terms for themselves within the movement, then they will get the place in the group they complain of — making the tea and typing the revolutionary tracts of others; and worse, the movement will lose a number of strong comrades.

**NO SPECIAL FAVOURS FOR WOMEN
WE DON'T NEED THEM!**



MCINERNEY STRIKE

FOR PARITY WITH SELF-EMPLOYED RATES

T. MCINERNEY AND SON LTD., the construction firm, builds houses and flats for the GLC and other surrounding local authorities. GLC stated policy is totally opposed to lump labour. McNerney's is probably one of the biggest employers of lump labour in London and is acknowledged to be 'King of the Lump', a title which it (McNerney's) fights hard to retain.

For the last four years McNerney's has been hard at work in Beale Road, off Roman Road, London E.3, building 510 new homes. The work is so hard, the conditions so bad, and the pay so low that in the last year alone 1,000 labourers have passed through the site. On this site 70% of the men are 'self-employed operatives', i.e. lump workers. Most of the remaining 30% being to UCATT.

On Friday, 29th March, the union men finally decided they'd had enough. After a site meeting with the UCATT area organiser, they walked off the site declaring they wouldn't return until the lump workers had been taken off the site (or put on cards) and they got a pay increase. The labourers have been receiving 58p per hour basic rate and a bonus of 15p per hour. They want £1 per hour overall, i.e. 58p basic rate plus 42p fall-back (guaranteed) bonus. From the start of the strike most of the men picketed every day, though some either didn't turn up or found other jobs. Despite there being no real organisation, e.g. a strike committee, or co-ordinated picketing tactics, some lorries were turned away. No workers were prevented from going on to the site. The police did their job well, protecting the firm that breaks almost every existing safety and tax law. Indeed the police boss said quite categorically that more than 2 pickets on a gate would be intimidation — and that's against the law!

On Tuesday, 9th April, the Panel (a group

of employers and trade union representatives) met to listen to the cases put forward by McNerney's and UCATT. The Panel came up with three findings:

- 1 The Panel direct resumption of normal working;
- 2 The Panel direct McNerney's and UCATT to hold *immediate* discussions within the framework of the Working Rule Agreement and the General Principles concerning Incentive Schemes to effect an equitable incentive/productivity payment scheme. (This means that the targets set for the bonus should be realistic both in terms of the amount of work and amount of bonus);
- 3 Regarding the use of self-employed operatives, the Panel direct that the Company put themselves in compliance with the Working Rule Agreement *forthwith*.

The next day (Wednesday, 10th April), McNerney's and the union met. McNerney's readily accepted the first finding, refused to discuss the second until there was a resumption of work and not only refused to get rid of the lump 'forthwith' but also said the lump would remain indefinitely. The men of course rejected a return to work, but by Thursday the 11th April spirits were low among some of them. They'd been offered nothing and work was still continuing on the site. This was not improved when, on that day, one of the site agents told some of the men (not the militants) that the Union had been offered 92½p per hour but this had been turned down. This was a lie but was enough to make some men more disillusioned and distrustful of their union.

After Easter (Tuesday, 16th April) McNerney's and UCATT men again met. This time McNerney's offered:

- 1 88p per hour (58p + 30p) guaranteed for

four weeks whilst negotiations were going on for a bonus of around 45 to 50p;

- 2 most lump workers to be on cards or off the site by the end of the week and the rest within a fortnight;
- 3 back pay (to be negotiated) for bonuses that had been illegally withheld since October 1973.

The men accepted the offer and returned to work on Wednesday, 17th April. Although they didn't get their £1 per hour, the increase is worth about £7 per 45 hour week to them and it seems that the lump system will not be so dominant on the site.

The Union. UCATT did *not* make the strike official and the men received no strike pay though a whip-round on a couple of other sites helped a bit. The union area organiser did not attempt to organise a strike committee or get support from other sites and unions. Most of the men felt at a loss as to what to do. Most of the anger and militancy seeped away in the gutters outside the site. With a bit of organisation the picketing *would* have been far more effective and the men *would* have got their £1. As it is, many of the men will think twice before taking direct action again.

McNerney's is a very big organisation when seen in all its guises and subsidiaries. It is one of the biggest Irish-owned property and construction companies in Ireland and has been operating in England since 1960. Most of the English subsidiaries (excepting Watford Plant Hire) *seem* to have been operating at a loss. Informed opinion says that this isn't really so and that money is transferred from one subsidiary to another to avoid paying tax and that all the profit finds its way back to Ireland where Ambrose and Daniel McNerney reside.

NUJ, NUJ, SAY NO MORE!

National Union of Journalists

An excerpt from the Final Agenda of the
Annual Delegate Meeting
Talbot Hotel, Wexford
23rd to 26th April 1974

MOTION

- 190 Being concerned at the growing militancy within the Union, this ADM calls on the NEC to instruct all nominees for NEC positions to declare their political affiliations in writing before ballot.

Dorset

AMENDMENTS

Between "growing" and "militancy", insert "lack of". *Mid-Herts.*

Standing Orders Committee recommends that the following amendment is out of order as it introduces widely new matter.

Delete "concerned" (line 1), substitute "delighted". After "political" (line 3), insert "/religious/sporting/sexual".

Teesside

Standing Orders Committee recommends that the following amendment is out of order as it introduces widely new matter.

Add at end: "and post them to the CIA's Dorset Branch."

London West

Standing Orders Committee recommends that the following amendment is out of order as it introduces widely new matter.

Delete "concerned", substitute "pleased"; delete all after "on" (line 2), substitute: "members of Dorset Branch to declare their own political affiliations before proposing a political witch-hunt, and instructs the national organisers to investigate whether Dorset branch operates democratically or otherwise."

Shields

PUBLICATIONS

SOLIDARITY

6p plus postage from 123 Lotham Road, London E6. Just out: 'The Lump, a Heretical Analysis' by Dave Lamb, a *Solidarity* pamphlet, 15p plus postage from the above address.

FRONT LIBERTAIRE

Fortnightly paper of ORA France. Subscriptions to 33 Rue des Vignoles, 75020, Paris, France.

DE VRIJE SOCIALIST

Dutch Libertarian Socialist Fed. paper. Copies from Jan Vervoets, Millem de zwijgerlaan 104, Den Haag, Netherlands.

LEICESTER FREE PRESS

4p + postage from 1 Wilne Street, Leicester

LEEDS OTHER PAPER

3p + postage from 66 Brudenell Mount, Leeds 6.

LIBERTARIAN COMMUNIST REVIEW

An ORA publication; articles on Trotskyism, Sectarianism and Phase Three. 15p plus postage from 29 Cardigan Road, Leeds 6.

ANARCHY

20p + postage from 29 Grosvenor Avenue, London N5.

