

Wildcat

MANCHESTER FREE BULLETIN

no.4 pass it round

OUR OBJECTIVES

1. To report on, analyse and seek solidarity for important struggles amongst our fellow workers, especially in the Greater Manchester area.
2. To encourage independent working class activity outside of the control of the trade unions and in opposition to all political parties.
3. To aim at the overthrow of all governments, bosses and leaders by a revolution in which the majority of people, who at the moment are just expected to follow orders, all play an equal part. And we would like to see the creation of a world without the wages/money/market system where we can all have a say in how things are run, and where production is for human need not profit.

COUNCIL WIELDS THE AXE

Manchester City Council and the GMC along with other councils in the North-West and throughout the country are planning major cut-backs in expenditure this year. Although final decisions have yet to be taken at full council meetings, proposals put before the relevant departmental committees paint a gloomy picture for the future of Manchester residents and council workers. They include cutting maintenance on roads, open spaces, drains, public buildings and council houses to a minimum; withdrawing many college courses and possibly even closing colleges altogether; closing playgrounds and nurseries; cutting school facilities and meals provision; withdrawing grants to many voluntary bodies; cutting social services to the old, sick and poor; cutting bus services; cutting library services and much more.

Along with these cuts in services are massive reductions in the number of council jobs. It is clear now that earlier scare stories about up to 12 thousand compulsory redundancies are not true. They were put out deliberately by the Labour Council and the unions in an effort to "soften us up" for their real plans. Nevertheless, thousands of jobs will be lost in the City alone and some of these will almost certainly be in the form of compulsory redundancies. It seems that part-time and short term contract workers (particularly in education) can expect to be hit especially hard.

On top of this rates, council rents and bus fares are all to rise dramatically and Council office workers offered a derisory 4% wage rise if we're lucky. Manual workers have already accepted a cut in their real wages of about 8%!

Council workers faced with redundancies, increased work loads and cuts in real wages will have little choice but to take strike action, combining this where closures are concerned with occupations. In taking this action common cause needs to be made with those who use our services - Council tenants, parents of school children etc.

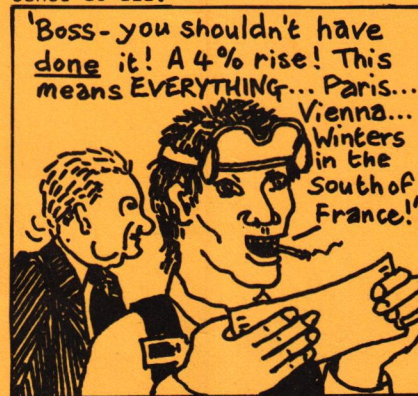
Would such a struggle be worth it? Could we really win? YES WE COULD WIN but only if we work to make our actions effective.

Lets look at some of the reasons that are being given for not taking any action:

1) "The money isn't there." This is the Council's argument. Its quite simple, they say, either we put up

the rates by 30-40% or we get rid of thousands of jobs and cut services (and remember this assumes a 4% wage 'rise', really a 12% cut compared to the 16% rise in the government's tax-price index.)

In economic terms this argument "makes sense". Just like it makes "economic sense" to have over three million people unemployed and to destroy large sectors of industry in this country. The trouble is that "economics" and the economic system we live under don't make sense at all!



In economic terms Manchester will be better off if thousands of Council jobs are lost. We will be "better off" with poorer education facilities, worse housing, more squalor and dereliction and road and sewerage systems that are literally falling apart! In economic terms we would be "crazy" to suggest that instead of getting rid of workers we should use these people and their skills to improve our schools housing and environment.

Politicians and economists tell us to be "reasonable" and "accept the facts". Clearly the only reasonable attitude we can take is to accept the fact that what's crazy is the economic system itself! To struggle to win means rejecting this whole logic and arguing our case in terms of what facilities are needed and how best to use all our resources (including the most valuable of all - human labour) to provide them.

2) "There are too many council workers anyway." Its true that many Council services are bureaucratic-ally and inefficiently organised, like any big capitalist enterprise. But cut-backs won't change that. We have to ask ourselves - Are there too many good houses in Manchester - Are the facilities in schools too good - Are the roads in too good a state of repair? For too long coun-

cil workers have been regarded (and have regarded ourselves) as "unproductive". The time has come to consign this idea to the dustbin where it belongs.

3) "A strike by Council workers (and tenants?) would be defeated in the end." It is understandable that many people are asking how we can hope to succeed in a strike not only against our own council, but also, at least by implication, against the whole of government policy as well.

It depends on how a strike is organised. If we all go home and let a few union officials run things for us a strike will be defeated. The unions accept the council's arguments. Their whole approach is based on looking for compromises. The idea of a "strike for a month" or a "months unpaid leave" for example is simply an attempt to avoid confrontation with the Labour Council (which the particular union official whose idea it was hopes to join next May). This kind of approach won't stop the long-term cut-backs they're looking for.

The only alternative to accepting the cuts is the most militant and determined action.

There is no point in kidding ourselves, its not a question of whether we go on strike but when we go on strike. The economic recovery we are promised isn't going to come. Things will only get worse unless we start to fight back.

No political party offers any alternative. Sooner or later we will be forced to fight back, not only against more attacks on wages, jobs and services, but against the whole rotting system itself.

(Written by Manchester City Council workers. 25th February 1982)

CONTACT Wildcat

We would like to hear from anyone who agrees with the ideas expressed in WILDCAT and who would like to help us or join our group. If you don't agree with us we'd like to hear from you too - we'll try to answer letters, either personally, or in WILDCAT. We would also like to hear from people in other areas who are interested in what we are doing.

If you would like us to mail you copies of WILDCAT as they appear, please write enclosing £1 to cover postage to:

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BL GOES FOR BROKE!

The strike at British Leyland's bus and truck plants is over. We talked to workers on the picket line while they were still out. 3,500 workers at Bathgate and 8,400 in Lancashire were on strike in defence of their jobs. Over the last two years there have been several rounds of redundancies, each being presented by the management as the only way to restore the company to profitability. This reasoning was accepted by the workforce and the redundancies reluctantly agreed. Nevertheless the company did not return to profitability. This time, with plans to shed over 4,000 jobs, the workers said enough is enough and came out on strike. When we went to Leyland people were saying: "They have had two lots of redundancies already. If we let them get away with this one, when will it stop?"

The shop stewards obviously agreed with the company that the only way to keep jobs is to restore profitability. They proposed an alternative to the company's "Corporate Plan" and used this as justification for fighting the proposed redundancies. As if fighting for your job needs justifying! The whole of the unions' action is based on the idea that the company can be profitable. With more and more unprofitable companies around now, this seems rather unlikely. So the three official strike demands were:

- 1) Stop implementation of the company's Corporate Plan.
- 2) Discuss the alternative Trade Union Plan.
- 3) No victimisation of workers refusing to cross the picket lines.

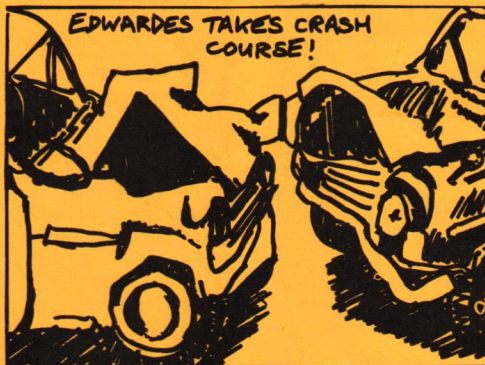
The shopfloor was out solidly. Various office and lower management sections were also on strike or refusing to cross picket lines. In what seemed a contradictory action some of the "corporates" (lower management), whose jobs are under severe threat, decided to continue working.

The company didn't try to fudge the issue. They said the TU Plan was completely out of the question, as it would require £600 million investment which the government would never agree to. They said they were losing £2 million a week before the strike, and the longer the strike continued the more orders would go elsewhere. In the days preceding the vote to return to work they said quite starkly: "The future of the company is in the hands of the workers. They will be voting whether to press ahead with the recovery of the business or whether BL should move out of the truck business altogether." In other words the choice presented by the company was clear: either go back to work or we'll sack you all. This was backed up by a vast media campaign to persuade the workers that these were the only alternatives. In a final act of treachery the AUEW executive issued a directive that a letter outlining the company's position, from BL's chairman Edwardes to Terry Duffy, be read out at the mass meetings. The shop stewards were so sickened by this action that they all refused, and it was left to a local

AUEW official to read it out, although he said it gave him no pleasure. He then read out a local AUEW resolution saying they were appalled and disgusted at the use the AUEW leadership had made of the letter, and urging workers to stay out.

In the face of this concerted attack by the company, media, and union leadership, no one in the union was giving any sound reason why the workers should stay out, or how they could win. It is clear from the vote that the majority of workers could see no other alternative but to return to work or be fired.

There is no doubt that BL is in desperate financial trouble. There is no doubt that the company needs to sack 4,100 workers. There is also no doubt that the TU's alternative plan would not work without massive government investment, and an end to the recession. Both company and unions base their plans on profitability. When are workers everywhere going to understand that profitability is not our concern? It is time to say to the bosses: "It's your system that is creating vast unemployment, and you are responsible; as workers we have nothing to do with capitalism and are going to fight to protect our jobs and wages, recession or no recession. If you can't pay, that's your problem."



Some workers we spoke to obviously realised the dispute went a lot further than BL vehicles management. One said "Of course Edwardes is behind all this, and the government's behind him." Another went further: "They're exporting all our jobs to places like Taiwan, and there's no way we can compete with them while they're prepared to work for sod all. It's only when they get organised to strike over there that we'll really be able to fight it."

These two comments bring out two very important points. Firstly why was no attempt made to link up with the workers in BL's car division, at Longbridge and Cowley? They've been in dispute over the same issues, and it's obvious it's the same struggle against the whole of BL management and the government. It's not a question of whether Britain's going to retain truck manufacturing capacity (as the strike committee and local Labour Party thought). It's a question of whether workers are going to have a reasonable standard of living, or whether we'll be thrown on the dole

to live the rest of our lives in poverty. When we asked about linkup action with Longbridge etc, people told us: "They're in a different division, we couldn't ask them to strike to support our disputes." Why not?! If workers don't support each other, we're all going to lose in little groups. An obvious linkup could have been made by the Bathgate workers, who occupied their factory with Plessey workers who are also occupying their factory over the same issue: jobs. It's clear the unions are scared of death of workers linking up disputes, especially outside union control - ask the workers at Laurence Scott!

The second point is that international action and solidarity is becoming increasingly important. We can't go competing with workers in Taiwan or France or Poland - it's like competing with workers in the factory down the road. It's capitalism that breeds competition, because capitalism thrives on competition. We don't need competition - it's the bosses that need it for their profit.

There has been considerable local support for the Lancashire strikers. According to the Lancashire Evening Post most wives of the men on strike were supporting the workers whole heartedly. One said: "It has been hard - like living on the dole I suppose. That makes me support the strike even more because we would be living on the dole if the men didn't make a stand now." However the article containing this quote was the only one amongst the daily articles warning the workers of their foolhardiness in continuing the strike.

The workers have given in and returned to work with no concessions from the company. One worker I had spoken to had told me: "This is going to be a long strike. If we give in they'll play hell with us when they get us back inside those gates!" He was right. Soon there will be several thousand more workers and their families on the dole in Lancashire and Bathgate, and we can be sure this will not be the last round of redundancies they demand. This is a fight against an outdated, dying, and bankrupt system. The time to take a stand is now.

DHSS OFFICE STRIKES

The Social Security offices in Rusholme and Wythenshaw were recently shut down as workers spontaneously walked out following the government's insulting wage offer of less than 4% for most and nothing for the lowest paid. A spokesperson said their action was a warning to both the government and the Union executive. Before the government's announcement, similar walkouts had occurred in Scotland, this time over the activities of the government's new 'Specialist Claims Control Unit' which the Scottish workers accused of "harassment, bullying and lying in order to ensure that people withdraw their claims for benefit." This unit may also be operating in Manchester. Clearly a lot could be gained by united action amongst social security workers and claimants in the hard times ahead.