

THE BATTLE OF GRUNWICK



view from the left

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30p

Socialist Challenge

PAMPHLET

The struggle so far

1976

20 August: Devshi Bhudia sacked for answering back after a complaint about his work. Four others leave with him. Later Jayaben Desai walks out with her son Sunil after being told to work compulsory overtime.

23 August: The Desais, Bhudia and others picket Chapter Road factory collecting signatures in support of a union. About 50 workers walk out at 3pm and march to Cobbold Road factory to seek support. Management call the police. Strikers contact TUC through Citizens Advice Bureau and are referred to the clerical workers' union APEX.

24 August: Mass meeting elects a strike committee. By the end of the week 137 workers — 91 permanent, 46 temporary — are out. All 91 permanent workers join APEX.

31 August: APEX declares the strike official. First issue of regular bulletin produced by the strike committee. Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) makes first offer of conciliation — welcomed by union but rejected by Grunwick.

2 September: Grunwick sacks all employees on strike.

10 September: First demonstration organised by strikers.

14 September: Strike committee treasurer Jayaben Desai taken to hospital after director's car runs over her foot.

20 September: First arrest: picket Bhimji Patel charged with obstruction.

15 October: Following march to Parliament and lobby of MPs, APEX officially refers dispute to ACAS.

28 October: National Executive of Union of Post Office Workers (UPW) votes to boycott Grunwick mail.

1 November: Grunwick mail totally stopped. Police arrest eight pickets, including a Labour councillor.

3 November: Grunwick seeks High Court injunction against UPW on advice of National Association for Freedom (NAFF).

4 November: UPW calls off boycott after Grunwick agrees to let ACAS ballot workforce.

19 November: Workers inside Grunwick get a 15 per cent pay increase.

26 November: On advice from NAFF, Grunwick announces that it will not cooperate with ACAS if the sacked workers are among those balloted.

12 December: Len Murray addresses meeting of the strikers and pledges full TUC support.

15 December: Labour NEC backs the strike.

20 December: ACAS decides to go ahead with the ballot even though Grunwick has refused to supply the names and addresses of those still working. Questionnaires sent to the strikers on 29 December.

1977

12 January: ACAS delays report for one month.

29 January: Chemists shops throughout London handling Grunwick film are picketed in day of action.

9 February: ACAS draft report recommends recognition, but publication of full report postponed for another month.

11 February: Mass picket called by the North London District Committee of the AUEW.

9 March: ACAS report finally published, recommending union recognition. Grunwick refuse to accept report.

15 March: Lone picket Kanti Patel dragged inside the factory and beaten up.

18 March: More than 200 local trade unionists mount mass picket.

23 March: Strikers picket meeting of TUC General Council, which votes unanimous but unspecified support. Industrial tribunal rules that Grunwick acted within terms of Labour's legislation in sacking all strikers.

1 April: Grunwick workers receive further 10 per cent pay increase.

12 April: Start of 24-hour picketing at all six entrances to the factories.

27 April: March and mass picket by 2,000 trade unionists.

3 May: Six pickets acquitted of obstruction charges on appeal. Police ordered to pay costs.

16 May: Chief Inspector Robert Johnson of Willesden Green police station, retired prematurely on Home Office orders, starts new job as Grunwick personnel manager.

30 May: APEX annual conference calls for cutting off of all supplies to Grunwick.

13 June: Week of action begins with mass picket. Police move in and make 84 arrests.

14 June: Eleven Grunwick workers come out to join the strikers.

15 June: Cricklewood postal sorters start unofficial boycott of Grunwick mail.

17 June: Mass picket swells to 1,500. The week's arrests rise to 150. Strike committee decides to extend week of action.

18 June: Printworkers on the **Sunday Telegraph** refuse to print an article on Grunwick until they are given the right of reply.

21 June: Labour MP Audrey Wise arrested on the picket line.

23 June: Yorkshire miners' leader Arthur Scargill is among 53 arrested as size of picket reaches 2,500. APEX leader Roy Grantham's call for a limit of 500 on pickets rejected by strike committee. Employment Minister Albert Booth meets Grunwick managing director George Ward for talks.

24 June: Yorkshire and South Wales miners

Issue joint call for national day of action on 11 July. Number of arrests nears 300. Government proposes appointment of an independent mediator.

26 June: NAFF announces that Ward has agreed to become a member of its council.

27 June: Home Secretary Merlyn Rees visits picket line and praises police conduct. Refuses to interfere: 'I learnt in Northern Ireland that operational control must be in the hands of the police'.

30 June: Government sets up Court of Inquiry under Lord Justice Scarman.

5 July: Cricklewood sorters suspended by Post Office after voting to continue boycott of Grunwick mail.

11 July: 12,000-strong mass picket prevents scabs' bus from entering factory in morning, though they get in later as pickets are persuaded to join official march of 20,000. Seven Grunwick van drivers come out after joining the Transport and General Workers Union.

12 July: Lord Chief Justice Widgery upholds validity of ACAS report after Grunwick challenge in the High Court.

22 July: Strike committee calls for mass picket on 8 August.

29 July: 'Black Friday': sorters are brow-beaten by UPW leaders into agreeing to handle Grunwick mail; APEX leaders force strike committee to call off 8 August mass picket; Appeal Court supports Grunwick appeal against ACAS recommendations.

1 August: ACAS Council decides to challenge the Appeal Court ruling in the House of Lords.

8 August: An estimated 3,000 trade unionists defy the bureaucrats and mount a mass picket.

23 August: Emergency solidarity conference attended by 290 delegates.

25 August: Scarman Report calls for union recognition and reinstatement of strikers, but also condemns postal boycott and mass picketing.

31 August: Grunwick rejects Scarman Report.

6 September: TUC Congress unanimously supports motion calling for 'practical aid' to the strikers — but does not commit itself to cutting off supplies.

16 September: Grunwick moves in its own electricity generator.

28 September: Strikers picket TUC General Council demanding that supplies be cut off — with little success. Scargill cleared of picket line charge.

29 September: Strike committee issues call for day of action and resumption of mass picketing from 17 October. APEX leader Grantham attacks the decision.

[This pamphlet went to press on 3 October. Chronology compiled from reports in Labour Research, Morning Star, Red Weekly, Socialist Challenge, Socialist Worker.]

Introduction

IT IS a revealing commentary on the political situation in Britain under a Labour Government in 1977 that a major trade union dispute should take place on the elementary question of the right to belong to a union.

It is even more revealing that this dispute has to date lasted for 13 months and could not be resolved without a major clash with the State. Literally thousands of police, including plain clothes operatives and the infamous Special Patrol Group, have been drafted in with the full backing of Home Secretary Merlyn Rees to attack the mass pickets. On more than one occasion the law has been used or threatened against the Cricklewood sorters and the Union of Post Office Workers.

The Grunwick strike is far more than a simple trade union dispute. Every section of society is lined up on their attitude to the strike. Both the main parties in Parliament have been openly divided. The labour movement is buzzing with debate about how the strike can be won.

The Labour Government's Social Contract was described by its architect, Jack Jones, as more than an incomes policy. It was, he said, a philosophy of collaboration between the unions and the Government whereby restraint by the former on wages and similar issues would be matched by positive legislation from the Government to improve the social and economic position of workers. Grunwick has blown this 'philosophy' of class peace wide open.

The Tories are eagerly waiting in the wings for the moment when the Liberals decide to withdraw their support for the Lib-Lab pact. But the Tories remember that their last term in office was destroyed by the power of the trade union movement — in the factories, the pits, the sites and offices, and on the picket line. The Tory leaders know that to serve the capitalist class well they have to be able to 'deal' with the unions. Grunwick has driven a wedge between the Tory hawks and doves, with Joseph and Prior openly battling it out in the mass media.

The press itself has been the scene for struggle over Grunwick, as print workers have taken action to demand the right of reply to anti-union articles, raising vital questions about press freedom.

Other issues have also been raised by the fact that a high proportion of the Grunwick workers are Asian women. This most oppressed and vulnerable section of workers have set an example to a labour movement which has failed to campaign against racism and women's oppression.

At a time when extreme right-wing and fascist organisations like the National Front are feeding off working class disillusion with Labour's policies, the Grunwick strikers have provided a powerful counterweight to those who stand for immigration controls. At a time when the trade union leaders at the TUC decided not to campaign for a national minimum wage to protect the low paid, the women at Grunwick have shown how to prevent divisions within the labour movement along sex lines.

This Socialist Challenge pamphlet is a contribution to the discussion raised by these questions. Socialist Challenge stands four square on the side of the strikers and their Strike Committee against George Ward and all his allies. Our supporters have been active up and down the country in winning support for the strike.

We believe that the Strike Committee has taught workers many lessons about how to fight, about courage and determination in the face of such adversity. We have not

hidden our differences with the Strike Committee, for we believe that a wide-ranging debate on Grunwick and its lessons can only be positive in mapping out a path to victory.

Above all, we think that this struggle can help to change the entire face of the labour movement. As the trade union leaders have vacillated it is the rank-and-file who have taken the struggle forward. They have shown that it is class struggle and not class collaboration which truly defends the interests of the working class. And that is a lesson which needs to be repeated over and over again in the twilight of this disastrous Labour Government.

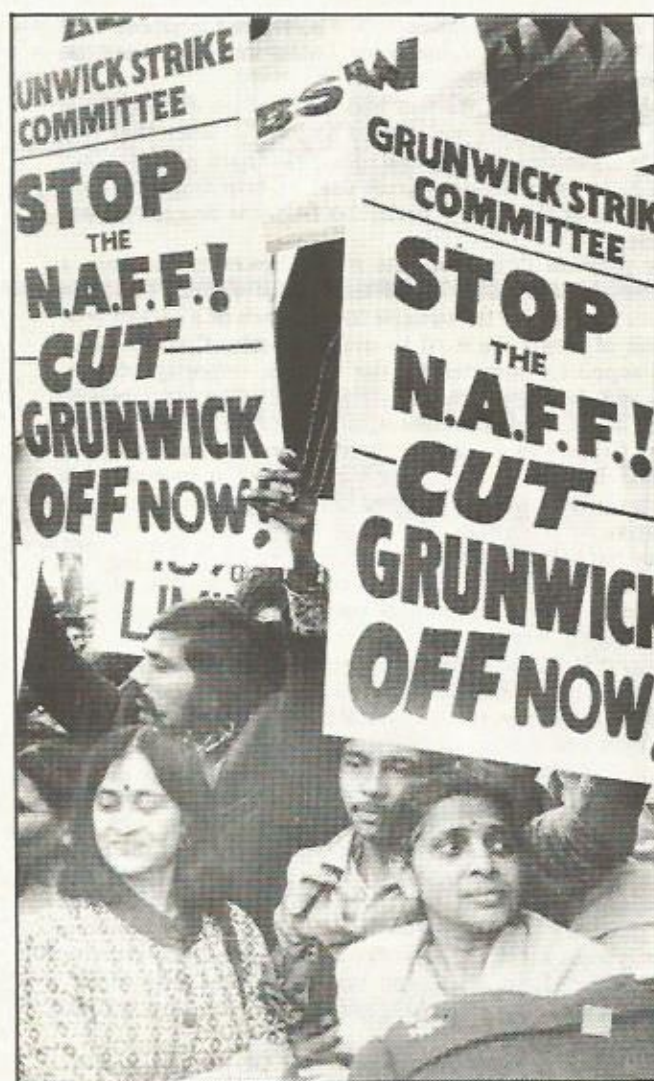


Photo: ANDREW WARD (Report)

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The strikers organise...

Photo: ANDREW WIARD (Report)



IF GRUNWICK is a household name today, the main credit must go to the strikers themselves, who refused to give in until eventually the rest of the trade union movement had no alternative but to respond.

The Strike Committee had had no previous experience of trade unions — never mind actual disputes — when they first started organising. So they had to learn the hard way. But they were lucky in receiving a great deal of help from the local Brent Trades Council, in particular from the Secretary, Jack Dromey.

One problem throughout the strike, however, has been a tendency by the leadership of the Trades Council to try to confine support for the struggle to the hands of a chosen few. Instead of seeing the need to use the Trades Council as an open support committee for the strikers, important discussions and developments have frequently taken place behind closed doors. Thus the fight against the APEX bureaucracy led by Dromey (opposing its 'legal' approach, its attempt at limiting the mass pickets, etc.), has too often been a question of manoeuvring instead of openly involving the supporters of the strike.

What has to be realised in any dispute like this is that the way to build real support is to explain continually the state of play in the dispute. Trade unionists understand the problems but they can't be deceived.

When differences emerged between APEX and the Strike Committee on the question of mass picketing, for instance, it was essential for the strike committee to come out very clearly with their position, even to the extent of openly disagreeing with APEX. What happened on the 11 July Day of Action showed the dangers of trying to manoeuvre against the bureaucracy without fully relying on the support of the rank-and-file of the trade union movement. One of the main problems on that day arose because Dromey, through the Strike Committee, had not openly called for a picket in the week previously. Instead he announced only a march at noon, while phoning around the country asking delegations to arrive at 6am. By doing that, and not openly defying APEX, confusion abounded as to what exactly the picket was trying to do on that day.

The lessons of what happened on 11 July seemed to have been learnt to some extent with the call for a picket on 8 August to close down the factory for that day. That is the only approach that is possible if trade unionists are to support the strike actively and effectively.

The subsequent decision to call off the 8 August Day of Action showed not only the pressures the Strike Committee were under, but the excellent role of the Trades Council in openly criticising the decision. However, it also highlighted the urgent need for the Trades Council and the Strike Committee to *organise* their support openly in the rank-and-file of the labour movement, and not to rely on by-passing the bureaucracy by manoeuvres. To act otherwise is really to do a

disservice to the very excellent developments in self-organisation that have taken place inside the Strike Committee over the last year.

'Black Friday' highlighted the need for support committees in the areas. It has not been enough to use the 'network' of trade union contacts; what has been required is real grass roots support committees with the ability to involve the whole labour movement and the community in the localities.

It would have been best had the Strike Committee campaigned for such bodies; instead, when this very proposal was made for the Brent area itself, it was met with a veto from Jack Dromey, who informed those who had put forward the idea that the Trades Council would ensure, through its trade union contacts, that it would not receive support.

Of course, there is no question that the Trades Council itself has provided invaluable moral and practical support for the dispute, support that in the main no other body could have given in that area. But the real test of strength for the Trades Council would have been if it was prepared to widen that role to all those committed to the fight against Grunwick; if it was prepared to commit itself fully to independent mobilisation of the rank-and-file rather than retaining the possibility of backroom deals with the bureaucrats.

The excellent initiative taken by the South-East Region of the TUC in calling a solidarity conference on the first anniversary of the strike shows what could be achieved by a sustained approach of this kind. The conference was called at two and a half weeks' notice, in the middle of August. Even so the conference call mobilised some 300 trade union delegates and provided a much needed forum to debate out the way forward.

Similar conferences and meetings in the regions and towns can form the basis of local support committees. A network of such committees up and down the country co-ordinated democratically at the national level would have provided the required springboard to organise the mass picketing, postal blacking and even other blacking much sooner, and thus avoid the need for the strike to drag on as long as it has done. For one thing is certain — it has been the courage of the strikers themselves which has forced the pace at every stage and made victory possible. Had it been left to the trade union bureaucrats the workers would have long since lost the initiative.

The Grunwick Strike Committee can be contacted c/o Brent Trades Hall, 375 Willesden High Road, London N.W.10 (tel. 01-459 4121). A film made by Newsreel Collective on the 11 July mass picket is also available for hire from The Other Cinema, 25 Tottenham Street, London W.1 (tel. 01-734 8508).

Racism ~ the enemy within

The National Front has been keeping very quiet about Grunwick. Apart from NF members in towns like Cambridge selling Free Nation, the paper of the National Association for Freedom, the Front has maintained a low profile on its attitude to the strike.

After all, what can the fascists do when 'one bunch of wogs' are fighting another wog like Ward? Such are the problems that arise when the master race's blood was mixed with Indian blood. Yet despite the absence of the fascists, race has been an issue within the Grunwick dispute.

The first thing to ask is how many Grunwicks don't take place because a largely black or immigrant workforce is cowed into submission through lack of work-permits, British passports and the ever-present fear of deportation. It is the racist immigration laws of successive Labour and Tory governments which are the first step towards the backstreet sweatshops for overseas workers like those at Grunwick — driven from their homelands by war, poverty, or simply the desire to join the rest of their own family.

Until the labour movement recognises all immigration laws for what they are — racist legislation to divide white from black workers and intimidate the whole black community through threatening to divide their families — then racism will remain the Achilles heel of the working class movement and the mili-

tancy of the Grunwick workers will remain the exception rather than the rule.

Unfortunately the trend in the leadership of the trade unions and Labour Party is, if anything, the other way. While Tom Jackson has been making speeches calling for National Front marches to be banned, other TUC bureaucrats have been hob-nobbing with Labour Government ministers to reduce the number of work-permits issued to overseas workers. After all, it is but a short step from calling for import controls to keep out cheap foreign goods to calling for immigration controls to keep out cheap foreign labour. What these bureaucrats don't seem to realise is that it is their own failure to champion the cause of black workers and build solidarity when they do take action which allows the bosses to super-exploit black labour.

The Labour Party itself voted at its 1976 Conference for the immediate abolition of the 1968 and 1971 Immigration Acts on the grounds that they were racist, but the only noises heard from Cabinet Ministers since then have been promises to tighten up on 'loopholes' in existing legislation.

And inside the trade unions, black people often find themselves in the position of second class members. Because most black people are of working age and tend to be concentrated in unionised industries, a higher proportion of black workers than white

workers are in trade unions. Yet, like women, how many blacks are shop stewards and convenors, let alone full-time officials for national unions?

Socialist Challenge supports the formation of black caucuses inside the trade unions so that black workers can discuss and work out proposals for action to combat the double oppression they face. Only on the basis of struggle against this oppression do we believe it is possible to unite the whole working class in a common fight. And if black workers do have to go it alone to fight for their rights, as in the Imperial Typewriters dispute of 1974, we say that the job of the unions is to actively support their demands — not wait for a group of unfortunately racist workers to change their minds.

The Grunwick strikers have given a lead to the whole labour movement in their determined struggle for union rights and acted as a beacon of hope for many other groups of super-exploited black workers. Brent Trades Council report that, since the dispute began, they have had many approaches from other groups of black and immigrant workers seeking advice on unionisation. The job of the trade union movement now is to fight the racism in its own ranks, campaign against all immigration laws, and lend its full support to black workers going into struggle.

Challenging traditional position of women

The majority of strikers are Asian women. For them Grunwick has been not only their first experience of trade union disputes, but in many cases their first experience of work. The women have had to face more problems than the men: not merely because of their families, but with the added burden that their background often means that they have led more restricted lives than other women in this country.

From the beginning Jack Dromey, Secretary of Brent Trades Council, argued that the women must play an equal role in all aspects of the strike. So delegations touring the country have always been made up of 50 per cent women, women have played an active role on the picket line, etc. But these questions cannot simply be resolved organisationally.

It is true that such an approach has helped to create a climate in which the women can develop, but there has to be a more conscious attempt as well. The reality is that the women have not developed in the same way as the men have. If the women involved had had regular meetings on their own, discussing their problems in relation to the strike, they would have felt more confident in intervening.

There has been some recognition of this necessity, but unfortunately it has not been possible to extend it. For example, the local Working Women's Charter Campaign had a meeting with the women to discuss the situation, and the strikers themselves held a meeting to explain the situation to their own families — both very positive moves. The problem is that to impose such caucuses on the women would defeat its purpose, and so the problem remains as to how the women's

movement in particular can take up this issue within the wider labour movement.

Experiences of other women on strike would have been invaluable to the Grunwick women strikers, as their own experiences will be to others in the future. It is vital for the labour movement to learn continually from past struggles and benefit from successes and failures. And as women become more and more involved in all forms of struggle, so they must pass on their experiences to other women.

Of course, the women at Grunwick have developed; their lives can never be the same. The strike has done more to change them than anything else could have done. They are beginning to question their role as women and within their own communities, albeit in a limited way. For many, touring the country was the first time they had been away overnight from home. In some cases, the strikers are outside the gates whilst other members of the family continue to go through.

All this has resulted in a questioning and a challenging of the position of women in society. If the women begin to meet in an organised way, now and when the strike is won, they will be able to deepen their understanding that their problems are not isolated, individual ones, but ones that all women experience in some form or other. They will begin to recognise their own strength and feel more confident in playing a full role as trade unionists, as well as encouraging others in their position to do the same.



Photo: ANGELA PHILLIPS (IFL)

...while the bureaucrats retreat

The trade union leaders fully support the Grunwick strikers; but at the same time they are terrified by what that might mean.

They know on the one hand that the defeat of the strike would directly threaten the position of every trade union leader. After all, disputes over union recognition are basic to the survival not only of the rank-and-file but also of the trade union bureaucracy.

But the big danger is that a campaign for active support might get out of the bureaucrats' control. After all, their job is to *negotiate* between workers and bosses. When workers take strike action, the tasks of the hour are organising the strike, organising picketing, ensuring sympathy boycotts by other workers, electing a strike committee of the workers involved to get on top of the *struggle*. The bureaucrats are redundant in this situation. They need to get workers back to work so that the job of *negotiating* with the bosses can proceed. The bureaucrats try to reconcile the irreconcilable interests of workers and bosses, and in attempting to do so they deprive the workers of the only bargaining counter they have — the ability to organise independently on their own behalf. Thus even if the bureaucrats' aim is to win the strike, the collaborationist methods they employ are more likely to achieve the opposite.

This has been seen over and over again in the Grunwick strike, and it is worth looking in some detail at the efforts of Len Murray and friends to walk the tightrope of compromise.

Len Murray and the TUC

IT WAS as far back as last December that Len Murray brought solidarity greetings from the TUC to the Grunwick strikers. 'We do not just stand *behind* you', he said. 'We stand *side by side with you, all the way.*' But they've certainly chosen a funny way of showing it.

For a start it took three months to get the dispute onto the TUC General Council agenda. Cue for another round of verbal militancy. Len Murray told reporters that the General Council was asking unions to give all possible assistance to the strikers, and that the TUC would do its best to ensure that Grunwick's supplies and products were blacked. Even Frank Chapple of the Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications & Plumbing Union announced that he would be putting proposals for action to his executive the following Monday (their subsequent decision to do nothing was not so widely reported).

At that time Grunwick's was still just an ordinary (though somewhat prolonged) dispute for union recognition against a lone employer, the reactionary and stubborn George Ward. The bureaucrats had nothing to lose with their fiery talk. But today it's a different story. The mass picketing has elevated Grunwick's into a vital political issue. The whole of British society is lined up over the strike and the mass picketing and blacking. And the TUC has reacted accordingly.

You might think that the obvious task of the TUC in a situation like this was to organise the strength of its eleven million members to bring Grunwick's to a halt. But the TUC leaders don't see it in quite the same way. With the onset of the mass picketing, the TUC felt moved to issue the following



LEN MURRAY

Photo: PETER HARRAP (Report)

statement on 24 June:

'It would be a tragedy if the use of violence or any confusion introduced by irregular elements on the picket lines were to divide and deflect the support given by responsible trade unionists all over the country aimed at achieving an early and a peaceful solution to this problem. Trade unionists cannot condone the use of violence in this or any industrial dispute situation. At the same time, the TUC repeats its concern at allegations of unnecessary use of force by police against bona fide pickets.'

It was not made clear whether the TUC condoned the use of 'unnecessary force' against non-'bona fide pickets', or

Roy Grantham and APEX

ROY GRANTHAM is the General Secretary of the strikers' union, APEX. He is also a director of Chrysler. And that perfectly sums up his general approach to workers' struggles.

Grantham is a firm believer in collaborating with the bosses and the state in trying to resolve disputes. He is also a firm believer in the APEX slogan 'militancy within the law'. This means that he endorses mobilisations of the membership only insofar as they put pressure on management to come to the negotiating table. Thus on 16 June he justified a second week of mass picketing at Grunwick as follows: 'The company are obviously prepared to sweat it out. We shall step up the pressure until they come to us for a settlement.'

He means exactly that — *pressure*. The action by the Grunwick strikers, and by other workers throughout the country who have supported them, is not for Grantham a way of winning the strike. It is a way of 'pressuring' George Ward to 'see reason' and agree to talks. Grantham has always preferred to rely on the machinery of the state rather than the independent action of the working class. It was he who first called for the setting up of a court of inquiry into the dispute — as far back as last October! And when it comes to one of the main props of that state — the police — Grantham's attitude has been more than a little revealing. In response to the mass arrests outside Grunwick's in June, Grantham was quick to pinpoint the source of the trouble as 'a small fringe element who were not trade unionists'. At once he got round the negotiating table — this time in a 90-minute meeting with senior police officers at Scotland Yard. He did not see fit to explain publicly what he said to the cops, or what they said to him. But the outcome became clear with his subsequent appeal 'to all our trade union supporters to get in touch with APEX Head Office to limit the number of official pickets to 500'. Not only was everyone to wear an arm band, but there were to be no less than three different categories: 'APEX picket marshal', 'Grunwick picket', and 'APEX picket'.

Fortunately the strike committee completely disowned Grantham's bureaucratic methods. It was not necessary to wear armbands, they announced, nor did they intend to comply with any limitation of the number of pickets. To prove their point, the strike committee called for a mass picket from 6am on 11 July while Grantham and the TUC organised a summer parade to begin at midday. Not that Grantham turned up to either. He was too busy negotiating with Scarman at the court of inquiry!

As the court of inquiry proceeded, George Ward and his friends in NAFF seized on the lull this afforded to strengthen their own position — clearing the mail, organising more rigged polls of the workforce, etc. But when the strike committee decided to seize back the initiative by organising another mass picket on 8 August, they felt the full force of Grantham's tongue: 'I shall make it clear to the strike committee that there will be no mass picket on that date. They cannot get a mass picket without my authority, and no authority will be given.'

And when the Strike Committee still refused to call off the picket after a three-hour meeting with Grantham on 25 July, the bureaucrats went berserk.

Two days later the Strike Committee was summoned to appear before the APEX General Purposes Committee. There Denis Howell, former APEX President and a Government Minister, spoke darkly about there being 'a conspiracy afoot

whether it thought the police were justified in using necessary force. What was made clear was the TUC's opinion that control of the dispute must remain firmly in the hands of the APEX executive. The statement went on to give full support to APEX's decision to limit the number of pickets; the TUC wished to stress to all trade unionists that any action by them should be at the union's official request. No action should be taken without contacting APEX Head Office at Wimbledon (there was no mention of contacting the strike committee at Brent). If we go on to look at the role of Roy Grantham and APEX, we can begin to understand the TUC's insistence on this procedure.



ROY GRANTHAM

Photo: ANDREW WARD (Report)

to undermine the union'. The troublemakers, it seemed, were not George Ward or NAFF but Brent Trades Council! Still the Strike Committee stood firm.

So Grantham and Howell played their final card: the workers' strike pay would be cut if they didn't fall into line. The test came at a mass meeting on Friday 29 July, where threat after threat was used to browbeat the strikers. As sweeteners there were also a number of false promises: Grantham said he would see to it that henceforth there were 800 pickets, 200 on each gate, every day; he also gave his word that APEX would call a mass picket if Ward ignored Scarman. We can now see those promises for what they were: lies.

Finally, news came through at 5pm that the Cricklewood post office sorters had voted to call off their boycott of Grunwick mail. That shattering blow just tipped the balance, and a majority of the strikers voted to go along with Grantham and call off the mass picket.

But 8 August still saw a big turn-out by several thousand supporters of the strike, determined not to let the bureaucrats have it all their own way. No wonder Grantham and the TUC are so half-hearted about promoting any further action over Grunwick. They too are aware that this is in many ways a dress rehearsal for the struggles that could shortly break out over wages. What if those struggles started to throw up a leadership which actually fought for the interests of the working class? Why, it just doesn't bear thinking about — not for Len Murray, for Roy Grantham, nor for postal workers' leader Tom Jackson.

APEX: 'militancy within the law'



Photo: ANDREW WIARD (Report)

The 140,000 strong Association of Professional, Executive, Clerical and Computer Staff (APEX) is well known as a traditionally 'moderate' union. It has been to the fore in promoting and defending the Social Contract. But it combines this right-wing stance (which is also accompanied by bouts of vicious red-baiting) with a self-styled policy of 'militancy within the law'.

The APEX Executive has long had a keen eye for isolated struggles which can act as recruiting agents. The union has won many new recruits as a result of Grunwick's, with workers in other 'Victorian' establishments turning to the union leadership which 'backs the fight of its members'.

The same thing happened around the famous equal pay strike at Salford Electrical Industries in 1973 and other disputes which followed it. Ray Edwards, APEX Assistant General Secretary, told the union's 1975 conference that, 'Militancy within the law, which at first was regarded as a foolish slogan, has fired the imagination of those involved with the struggle for women's rights and highlighted the spirit of the union's campaign ... The fight is not over, and 29 December 1975 will not see the end of the

struggle. Vigilance and determination will be needed if women are not to find themselves still confined to the bottom grades in pay structures.'

But when some delegates suggested that this 'vigilance and determination' should be expressed through support for the Working Women's Charter, their motion was opposed by the Executive. The APEX leadership did not like a reference to industrial action and a minimum wage in the fight for women's rights. Industrial action should not be used for 'political' ends, said APEX President and Government Minister Denis Howell, and the motion was defeated.

Howell is just one of 23 Labour MPs who are members of APEX. Another is Denis Healey, who has been influential in giving backing to the Executive's support for the Social Contract through his membership of the union's parliamentary panel. Also an APEX member is Shirley Williams, whose red-baiting attack on Trotskyists earlier this year was quickly followed up by Howell at the union's annual conference: 'A hundred thousand of our members pay the political levy in the belief that they are supporting democratic socialism. They do not pay their contributions to support Trotskyism, the

International Socialists, or any other freak, way-out political philosophy. We have told the officers of the Labour Party that until they put their house in order they will get no contributions from us, apart from our affiliation fees.'

But the APEX leaders are like many others who prattle on about democracy — they're not very keen on applying it themselves. When the London Co-op Political Committee and the No. 8 Region of the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions organised an 'Assembly on Unemployment' in March 1976, the APEX Executive immediately issued the following instruction: 'Branches cannot associate or financially support the "Assembly on Unemployment" or any body that sponsors it, nor can any unit within the union be represented at this "Assembly on Unemployment".'

'We decide, you obey' is the kind of democracy that rules in APEX. So far it has enabled the Executive to win continued support for their right-wing policies and quash any threat from potential oppositions. But the rebuffs they have met with at Grunwick's suggest that they may not have things all their own way in the future.

Tom Jackson and the UPW

The moment of truth came for Tom Jackson when post office sorters at the Cricklewood depot decided to boycott Grunwick's mail. As the Cricklewood branch secretary of the Union of Post Office Workers later explained to *Socialist Challenge* (21 July): 'The TUC told everybody to give the Grunwick strikers and APEX the maximum support. My branch has done exactly that.' For TUC General Council member Tom Jackson, however, it was a signal to start running round in circles like a scared rabbit.

By the end of June the Post Office had threatened to suspend the Cricklewood workers unless they lifted the boycott. That was enough for Jackson. He aligned himself with the NAFF, the Attorney General and all the others who were calling for an end to the boycott, and managed to get the London District Committee of the UPW to withdraw its support for the Cricklewood branch. On 4 July he warned that all sorts of terrible things might happen if the boycott continued: it might prejudice the court of inquiry; it might make the UPW the 'fall guy'; it might even 'jeopardise the postal workers' hope that Parliament would restore their right to strike'. But all his pleas were in vain against the class solidarity of the Cricklewood sorters. They refused to lift the boycott, were suspended by the Post Office, and then finally locked out when they tried to carry on working on all other mail except Grunwick's.

So no mail was going out of Grunwick. Then George Ward and his friends in NAFF had a bright idea: smuggle it out and post it in boxes outside the Cricklewood area. This they did over the weekend 9/10 July. But all the packages had Grunwick labels, and many postal workers in depots up and down the country refused to touch them. In stepped Jackson again, and soon these workers were receiving written instructions from the UPW Executive that they must handle this mail.

Still the Cricklewood sorters stayed firm, however. And now the UPW bureaucracy turned really nasty, threatening to stop their hardship money unless they dropped the boycott.

Things came to a head at a meeting on 29 July — the same day as the Grunwick strikers' mass meeting — between the sorters and Norman Stagg, assistant general secretary of the UPW. Stagg threatened them with suspension from the union if they maintained their solidarity. As this would mean that they wouldn't belong to a union and as the Post Office is a closed shop, it also meant that the Cricklewood sorters would lose their jobs.

It is difficult to imagine anything more sick than to argue that because of a trade union principle such as the closed shop the Cricklewood sorters would be sacked by actions of their own union. But it just worked. By 51 votes to 48 the Cricklewood sorters decided to stop the boycott.

Now we don't think that Tom Jackson actually wants to help George Ward. Nevertheless, that is the result of his actions. Why does he find himself in this position?

That can best be answered by looking at the career of Jackson. It is that of someone who has sought whenever possible to take the 'peaceful', 'sensible' road in the class struggle. In other words, to have no class struggle at all. And when he is forced into action, as in the 1971 postal workers' strike, it is a pretty safe bet that the line he advocates will lead only to defeat.

Conciliation is Jackson's watchword. So it was that he turned up at Newham Town Hall in September 1975 to speak for Reg Prentice, because of 'the real necessity of maintaining the fabric of the party ... only in unity can we achieve the success of this and future Labour Governments'. Reg Prentice's idea of unity has turned out to be embarrassingly different, however. Speaking in April 1977, he said that he 'would like to see a new party of the centre, wider than the Liberals, embracing the more progressive elements of the Conservative Party'.



TOM JACKSON

(9) Photo: CHRIS DAVIES (Report)

Jackson is particularly sensitive when it comes to the question of the law. In November 1976, for instance, the UPW finally got round to implementing Jackson's promise to the Grunwick strikers at the September TUC to boycott the company's mail. In stepped NAFF with the threat of a High Court writ. Exit Jackson in a hurry, consoling himself with the thought that '(Grunwick) have agreed to provide the necessary facilities for an inquiry for ACAS, and the recognition question could be settled by the end of the week'. Eleven months later...

In January 1977 it was the same old story. The UPW was due to boycott all communications with South Africa during an international week of solidarity. In stepped NAFF again, and once more Jackson fell over backwards to comply with the court's decision and call off the boycott.

Now he claims that a Grunwick boycott might 'jeopardise the postal workers' hope that Parliament would restore the right to strike'. Well, there is one way of ensuring that a law will be changed — and that is by defying it. The more postal workers who boycotted Grunwick, the more unworkable the law banning such action would become. The working class crippled the National Industrial Relations Court when they forced the freeing of the five jailed dockers in 1972. The Cricklewood sorters also understood that trade union rights have only ever been won by standing up and fighting for them.

But such actions are foreign to Tom Jackson and the 'peaceful methods' he represents. He would rather bow down to law courts and place his trust in the likes of Reg Prentice. He would rather believe that the Government and the employers are only too eager to improve his members' position provided he helps to keep their wages down in the meantime. It is not terribly important that such tactics have left Tom Jackson with egg all over his face. What is important is that such methods simply do not work.

The measure of Jackson's politics is that the withdrawal of the mail boycott has seriously weakened the strikers' chances of victory. It has, in fact, been the single most serious blow to their struggle. Only labour movement solidarity can reverse it by creating the conditions whereby another unofficial boycott can successfully resist Jackson's blackmail.

The struggle for the picket line

'YOU CANNOT make a strike effective without doing more than is lawful.' These immortal words come not from George Ward, the NAFF, the Tory Opposition or even Labour Home Secretary Merlyn Rees — although all have said as much in recent weeks. No, they come from Lord Justice Lindley, who effectively took away the right of picketing from the working class movement in 1896! Ever since then the battle for the picket line has continued.

Today at Grunwick the situation is no different. In mid-July, in an astute judgement on behalf of the ruling class (though the hawks of the Appeal Court later overturned it), Lord Chief Justice Widgery ruled in favour of the Grunwick strikers, their union APEX, and the conciliation service ACAS. What did this demonstrate but that the law was neutral! That workers could



Photo: ANDREW WIARD (Report)



Photo: ANDREW WIARD (Report)

win their battles in the courts! That you don't need mass pickets!

There was a veritable sigh of relief from the ruling class at Widgery's judgement. The *Daily Mirror* of 13 July waxed lyrical: 'This victory for industrial democracy contains an important lesson for the unions: They do *not* get unfavourable treatment from the courts ...' Then came the rub: 'Another welcome move is the promise by Employment Secretary Albert Booth to reform the antiquated laws on picketing. The sooner this is done the better. Perhaps, now, peace, order and common sense will prevail in the Grunwick dispute.'

Forget the arrests, forget the brutal attacks on the picket lines, forget the legal attacks on the Cricklewood sorters. Widgery's judgement showed that the law was 'impartial'; now it could be used to take away the right of mass picketing.

And ever since the mass picketing started on 13 June that has been the issue of greatest concern to the ruling class. Why? Because the mass picket and the flying picket are the most powerful tactic that groups of workers have at their disposal to win struggles at the present time. The mass pickets at Saltley and elsewhere won the 1972 miners' strike. The flying pickets of the building workers the same summer not only won the trade a substantial increase (despite the sell-out of their leaders on the full claim) but succeeded in unionising many sites in a notoriously disorganised industry. The same summer the Tories' hated Industrial Relations Act was ground into the dust as thousands of workers rallied to free the Pentonville Five. What is more, mass pickets raise the participation of the rank-and-file in struggles to a dangerously high level — not just for the bosses, but for the bureaucrats in Congress House as well. What need for their 'mediating' and 'conciliating' services if the strikers themselves can win their demands outright through struggle?

On the picket line at Grunwick the ruling class is trying to win back the ground it lost at Saltley Gates. This is part of an anti-picketing offensive that's been going on ever since the miners' strike of 1972.

It started in early 1973, when 24 Shrewsbury building workers, members of UCATT and the TGWU, were charged under the 1875 Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act with alleged offences arising out of the building workers'

Saltley Gates



Saltley Gates have been the words on everyone's lips since the mass picketing started on 13 June. And rightly so. On a cold February day in 1972 history was made at the Birmingham coke depot. Ten thousand car and engineering workers joined thousands of miners' pickets to close down the last major scab coke depot. From that point on the miners' strike was as good as won.

But more was won than that. Saltley was a gigantic demonstration of independent working class power and as such a memory that both the ruling class and labour bureaucracy

would dearly like to erase from the memory of the rank and file. That is what the police have been trying to do by smashing into the mass picket at Grunwick. Here, in the words of Yorkshire miners' leader Arthur Scargill, is why we should never forget:

'The events of today will go down in the history of the British working class movement as a historic day when not just individual unions but British trade unionists decided that they had had enough of police brutality.'

'They had had enough of intimidation by the police in obtaining passage through the

picket lines for scab labour, and they decided to do something about it.'

'We had a lesson in workers' control. For the first time in many years the workers of this land decided that the nation would be defied: that the state system would be defied, and the gates of Saltley depot would be closed.'

'It is a situation like this, I suppose, in the future, which will bring about the kind of unity in the trade union movement that is necessary to combine the whole forces of the labour movement to bring about a socialist revolution.'

strike of 1972. In all the workers faced a total of 210 charges. The most serious, aimed at the first six, was 'conspiracy to intimidate with a view to compelling men to abstain from carrying out their lawful work'.

Whether these six could be *proved* to have met before leading the flying pickets onto the building sites was irrelevant. As the judge told the defence: 'You know very well it can be a conspiracy when they never met and never knew each other'. Nobody on the building sites needed to have *seen* these men meeting and 'plotting' together. Nor was it necessary that these workers *themselves* actually committed violence or intimidation. Conviction, as the prosecution so neatly put it, could be obtained 'by inference of all the circumstances'. In other words, the jury was asked to convict on suspicion.

What was the foundation of the charge? The answer is simple. All six were branch secretaries or chairmen in UCATT or the TGWU during the strike. All were involved in *organising* pickets. Under the law of conspiracy they could therefore be charged and held responsible for the actions of persons whom they organised but who remained unknown to them.

As a result of the conspiracy charge, Des Warren spent nearly three years in prison and Ricky Tomlinson two. Others spent six months. Throughout the course of the trial and sentencing the TUC and UCATT and TGWU bureaucracies refused to support the 24. The fate of these workers, of picketing, was left to the due process of law.

Even after the TUC and every union in the country were forced by rank-and-file anger to declare their support for the Shrewsbury pickets, the bureaucracy, far from launching a fight against the jailings and the sentences, used their position



Photo: MARK RUSHER (IFL)

to sabotage action. Len Murray assured the readers of the *Sunday Mirror* that all would have been well if the Shrewsbury pickets had been charged with 'intimidation in an industrial dispute' where the sentence would have been 'three months at the most'. For him the law is some neutral force hovering above society, not one of the ruling class's most powerful weapons.

The bosses and their agents suffer from no such illusions. While the Shrewsbury pickets were being fixed up, Heath was busy preparing for his next round of confrontation with the miners. 'Yard Squad Ready for Pickets', announced a news item in the *Daily Telegraph* of 14 November 1973. It concluded: 'Special methods developed by police to break up crowds of strikers have been adopted for general use. Among these is the use of a standby group of police who move into the massing crowd in a wedge formation. This tends to break up those causing trouble into smaller groups so that they can be dispersed or calmed more easily.' The activities of the Special Patrol Group at Grunwick are painfully familiar in this description.

During the miners' strike of 1974, determined efforts were made by police to limit the number of pickets to six at any one point. The miners co-operated by having six pickets — and a few hundred demonstrators watching them across the road in case any scab chose to ignore the pickets. Few did.

But if the miners effectively maintained mass picketing, the Labour Government has done its best to continue the Tories' intimidation. Both Warren and Tomlinson served out their sentences under a Labour Government while working class struggle subsided as a result of the Social Contract. Even now there's a twist in the tail to the Shrewsbury saga. Forced by the power of rank-and-file feeling to introduce amendments in the law concerning conspiracy, the Labour Government has been busy pushing a Criminal Trespass Bill through Parliament which will make factory occupations and squatting illegal and liable to eviction without court orders.

Grunwick has brought the issue of mass picketing right back to the forefront of working class struggle. Hundreds of



Home Secretary Merlyn Rees dishes out praise to the police

Photo: ANDREW WIARD (Report)

thousands of workers will be looking to break Healey's three-card wage-trick this winter: the 10 per cent limit, the twelve month rule, and cash limits on local authority spending. Faced with the certainty that the trade union 'leaders' will make few, if any, of their strikes official, rank-and-file workers will have to find ways of involving the maximum number of workers in united struggle. The most effective means at their disposal will be the thorough-going involvement of every worker in their own strikes by making them part of a mass picket or a flying picket travelling to win support or cut off supplies and outlets.

All eyes are turned on Grunwick now, not just to see whether one rogue employer can run rings round the trade union movement on such elementary rights as union membership and recognition, but to see who wins the battle on the picket line. If the police do, the struggles later this year will be made that much harder. But if, as on the morning of 11 July, the bosses' 'law and order' is swept aside by the united strength of the rank-and-file, then those workers struggling for better wages later this year will receive a mighty boost.



Photo: JOHN STURROCK (Report)

A Special Branch provocateur who infiltrated the picket line is discovered and driven out



Photo: MARK RUSHER (I/F/L)

23 June: police arrest Yorkshire miners' leader Arthur Scargill. The case against him was later dismissed.

The laws on picketing

After the passing of the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act in 1875 the trade union movement generally considered the right to picket to be secure. That Act specifically legalised 'attending at or near ... a place ... in order to obtain or communicate information ...'

For the next few years the courts did indeed behave as if picketing was legal. But as the class struggle warmed up in the 1890s the courts quickly did an about face. In 1896 Lord Justice Lindley ruled that picketing was both a 'nuisance' under common law and an offence against the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act. The courts claimed that picketing was not protected under this Act because, by definition, it went beyond just 'communicating information'.

After this ruling successful prosecutions of pickets became common. In 1901 came a further blow against the trade unions — the historic Taff Vale judgement that trade unions could be sued for their industrial actions, and their funds seized to pay damages.

In reply the trade unions mounted a major national campaign which led to the passing of the Trades Disputes Act in 1906 after the Liberals' election victory. This not only wiped away the Taff Vale judgement but also tried to neutralise the various rulings on picketing by extending the definition of legally protected activities to include 'peaceful persuasion' as well as 'communicating information'.

This remained the law as far as picketing was concerned until the passing of the Industrial Relations Act in 1971. This completely replaced the Trades Disputes Act but

seemed to leave the law on picketing unchanged. Robert Carr insisted that the existing laws were quite adequate to 'deal' with picketing — and for once he was telling the truth. Strict enforcement of the present laws would be enough to smash picketing as it is presently understood. The courts have all the material they need, in the form of legal precedents, to crack down on the picket lines.

In 1960, in the case of *Piddington vs. Bates*, the courts supported the conviction of a picket for obstructing the police in the execution of their duty. His 'crime' was to have refused to obey a policeman who had told a group of strikers that they could only have two pickets on a factory gate. The court ruled that the police were entitled to do this if they had reasonable grounds to expect a breach of the peace. Apply that to Grunwick!

In a more important case, *Tynan vs. Palmer* in 1967, the courts convicted another picket on the same charge. He had led 40 strikers who had picketed their factory gate marching in a tight circle. The prosecution failed to prove that any actual blocking of the entrance had taken place, but the courts ruled that the *purpose* of the pickets had been to force lorries to stop so the pickets could talk to the drivers. This, they said, went beyond just 'communicating information' or 'peaceful persuasion', and therefore constituted an unlawful nuisance which the police were entitled to prevent.

These rulings interpret the rights of pickets in such a narrow way and the rights of the police in such a broad way that a determined offensive by the police and the courts could completely tie the hands of pickets *now*. As trade union law expert Professor Kenneth Wedderburn puts it: 'The only indisputably

lawful pickets ... are those who attend in small numbers near the chosen place and who keep out of everyone's way. Meanwhile, the workers who they have come to persuade to join them can sweep past in vehicles which the pickets have no right to stop.'

That happened at Grunwick for 43 weeks until the mass picketing was introduced and attempts were made to stop the scab bus. It was only when the Grunwick workers and their supporters tried to make picketing effective, no matter what the law and the courts say, that Employment Secretary Albert Booth suddenly discovered that the laws on picketing were 'antiquated'.

He and the trade union bureaucracy would dearly love to conclude a deal whereby, in return for the legal 'right' to speak to a scab lorry driver for ten seconds, mass picketing would be illegalised. But laws, and attempts to change the law, do not exist apart from the class struggle. Flying pickets and mass pickets will be a common sight in Britain as workers move to bury Healey's wage-cut norms in opposition to their own union bureaucracies. The Government won't be able to stop the pickets forming, but the police may well be instructed to smash them up and the courts to hammer the arrested. In that way the police, headed by the Special Patrol Group, will try to lay the basis for changes in the law under a future Tory Government.

As at Grunwick, simultaneous self-defence will need to be organised and future Shrewsbury show-trials squashed at birth in order to make picketing effective. We can begin by demanding that the TUC support a campaign for the dropping of all charges against those arrested.

What about the law?

THE LABOUR GOVERNMENT, like the trade union bureaucrats, is very keen on 'the law'. And it is particularly proud of its own creation, the Employment Protection Act. This piece of legislation was part of the sop offered to the TUC in return for holding down the wages of their members under the Social Contract. Although some of its clauses do represent gains achieved by the working class in struggle (maternity pay, for instance), its main proclaimed purpose was that it would make disputes like Grunwick's unnecessary. And that is the yardstick by which it should be measured.

One of the chief things the Act did was to set up the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service. Michael Foot, then Secretary of State for Employment, wrote that, 'The creation of ACAS ... has been a vital part of our policy of getting back to voluntary collective bargaining and seeking every conceivable method ... to find reasonable and acceptable settlements of disputes which might otherwise — or might already — have led to what should be the last resort: strike action.' It thus had two main purposes:

- * To prevent struggles by offering the alternative of legal procedure.

- * To confuse struggles already taking place by allowing the trade union leaders to hold out ACAS as a means of resolving the dispute.

In other words, it was designed to take power away from the shop floor and rank-and-file workers in struggle and give it to the bureaucracy.

Foot claimed that 'the Act as a whole takes a long step forward in the encouragement of good industrial relations



practices between management and unions, and in securing individual working rights'. Yet it does *not* compel the employer to recognise any union. It does *not* alter the provision of the 1974 Trade Union & Labour Relations Act whereby an employer can dismiss workers on strike as long as all of them are sacked. It does *not* include Labour's 1974



Manifesto promise which would allow the nationalisation of all firms with bad industrial relations (and thus blow sky high George Ward's blackmailing threats to close down the factory if he is defeated).

The procedure it outlines thus has no teeth. It can also drag on interminably. As the *Economist* commented on 18 June: 'ACAS, which last year had to deal with 461 recognition claims, cannot move quickly. So employers have plenty of time to stall. Moreover, the delay before the final stages can blunt a union's membership drive and cool the workers' enthusiasm.' And if it has the reverse effect, you can always do an Albert Booth and set up a court of inquiry to provide a little temporary relief.

The law is a maze designed to entrap workers and prevent them from relying on their own strength. This is as true of the Employment Protection Act as it is of other legislation. Yet listen to the amazing Mr Foot (who is still a member of the Tribune Group): 'The Act strengthens present provisions against anyone being victimised for taking part in trade union activities. It also allows reasonable time off from work for union members to take part in union activities.'

What's reasonable, Mr Foot? Do you think 13 months is reasonable? After all, that's how long the Grunwick strikers have had off from work for their part in union activities. And we haven't seen you anywhere near the picket line in all that time.

The ACAS circus

THE STRIKE BEGAN on 23 August 1976, and was made official by APEX ten days later after the strikers had joined the union. At this stage ACAS attempted unsuccessfully to achieve a conciliated settlement. Grunwick's only response was to sack all the strikers.

On 15 October, APEX referred the issue to ACAS under the trade union recognition procedure laid down by the Employment Protection Act. This was after the Employment Secretary, Albert Booth, had refused to set up a Court of Inquiry into the dispute.

It was another month before Grunwick finally agreed to co-operate with an ACAS inquiry after further conciliation attempts had failed. The ACAS inquiry was presented by the postal workers' leader Tom Jackson as a reasonable and effective alternative to the boycott of Grunwick's mail, which he called off under legal threats from NAFF. Ward admitted that a continued boycott could have closed the factory within a few days. But he knew that he could spin out the ACAS procedure indefinitely.

Any ACAS inquiry must consult all sides involved in the dispute and obtain 'the opinions of workers to whom the issue relates'. ACAS produced a questionnaire. Grunwick refused to co-operate. At this point, APEX should have urged the recommencement of the postal boycott and the extension of this to the other services, as well as building effective pickets. Instead they played along with ACAS, who agreed to delay after delay while Grunwick consulted with its legal advisers in NAFF.

Management's objection was that ACAS should not consult the strikers, because they had been sacked and were therefore not workers 'to whom the issue relates'. Only on 29 December did ACAS finally decide to go ahead without the firm's co-operation and send out the questionnaire. This was four months after the strike had started a day and a half months after the issue had been referred to ACAS. Grunwick refused to supply the names and addresses of those still at work, so the questionnaire was sent only to the 110 APEX members whose names and addresses had been supplied by the union.

If no settlement has been reached by conciliation and consultation, the Employment Protection Act requires ACAS to issue a written report recommending for or against recognition and stating the reasons. Only after two postponements did ACAS finally publish a ten-page report on 9 March — ten weeks after the questionnaires were sent out. ACAS recommended that the company should recognise APEX for the purpose of collective bargaining.

An ACAS recognition recommendation becomes 'operative' 14 days after it is published. The company then has two months to comply with the recommendation — while those in dispute must wait patiently for its decision without being able to call on any legal sanctions through ACAS.

At Grunwick the recommendation became 'operative' on 23 March. On the same day, exactly seven months after the strike began, Grunwick was able to show at an industrial tribunal that the sacking of the strikers had

been 'fair' because they had sacked *everyone* on strike and had therefore not been discriminatory! Again, the use of the industrial tribunal rather than industrial action to obtain the re-instatement of the strikers was leading the struggle up a blind alley. The strikers have quickly learned that lesson. APEX, it would appear, have yet to do so.

On 30 May APEX submitted a formal complaint to ACAS under Section 15(2) of the Employment Protection Act that its recognition recommendation had been ignored. And guess what the next stage of procedure is: 'When a complaint is referred to the Service under this section the Service shall attempt to settle the matter by *conciliation*' (our emphasis). What a complete and utter farce!

In the final act in this circus (assuming that for some reason there is no settlement after all this 'conciliation'), the union can apply to the Central Arbitration Committee (CAC). Now this is the body which is supposed to have teeth. Yet it has *no* power to impose or even recommend recognition! All it can do is to make an award specifying the terms and conditions which the employer must observe in respect of its employees. In other words, after waiting all this time, the strikers are likely to find themselves still outside the gates with no recognition, while the only ones who benefit are those who have been crossing the picket line!

This may be the Labour Government's idea of justice, but it certainly isn't ours.



Photo: CHRIS DAVIES (Report)

It seems strange, but in all the talk about cooling off the struggle, in all the appeals by the Labour Government and trade union leaders to leave things up to the law, no-one has mentioned what Michael Foot told this year's annual conference of the Union of Post Office Workers:

'If the freedom of the people of this country, especially the rights of trade unionists — if these precious things of the past had been left to the good sense and fairmindedness of the judges, we would have few freedoms in this country at all.'

The Tories and NAFF

In 1974 the miners' strike brought down the Tory Government of Edward Heath. The strike displayed the political power of which organised workers are capable, and it frightened a good many people.

One writer was later to describe this strike and the previous campaign to defeat the Industrial Relations Act as 'a crisis for British democracy... when a minority of British subjects defied

the government of the day and defeated it'. He complained that the unions 'had taken powers and privileges which were nowhere specified by law... somehow unions must be persuaded to obey the law or democratic government is finished'.

The journal in which these remarks appeared was *Free Nation*, the newspaper of the National Association For Freedom. NAFF has played a major role in the Grunwick strike, and it is not difficult to see why. The Grunwick dispute, and the solidarity displayed there by thousands of workers, has shown in much the same way that working people are willing to stand up and fight for their rights. And the type of people who run and support NAFF do not like that.

So when Grunwick hit the headlines they rode to the aid of George Ward. It was NAFF which initiated the court actions against the solidarity of the Cricklewood sorters, and against the ACAS recommendation that Grunwick should recognise APEX. It is NAFF which has organised a number of strike-breaking operations — notably 'Operation Pony Express' to distribute the boycotted mail on 9/10 July. And it is NAFF which has conducted George Ward's publicity campaign.

What, then, is NAFF?

It was formed in 1975 after the assassination of Ross McWhirter; his twin brother Norris is one of NAFF's leading lights. Another is John Gouriet, the administrative director. But the real boss is Robert Moss, NAFF's 'director'.

Moss's views on 'freedom' are illustrated by the strong support he gave to the right-wing coup in Chile in which thousands of trade unionists were killed and imprisoned. In his book, *The Collapse of Democracy*, Moss stated that Britain needed an 'authoritarian regime'.

It was Moss, too, who wrote Margaret Thatcher's famous 'Iron Maiden' speech, in which the Tory leader advocated a return to the 'cold war'. Thatcher was also guest of honour at a NAFF dinner in January 1977. Other prominent Tories associated with NAFF include: Rhodes Boyson MP, Tory spokesperson on education; Russell Lewis, former chairperson of the Conservative Political Centre and Thatcher's biographer; Julian Amery MP, another member of Thatcher's Shadow Cabinet; Ian Sproat MP, who led a campaign to withdraw social security payments from the poor and unemployed. Other Tory MPs such as Norman Tebbit, Nicholas Ridley, Michael Brotherton, and Winston Churchill also have associations with NAFF.

But the leading NAFF Tory who really made headlines with his support of George Ward was Sir Keith Joseph, one of the party's most powerful figures and Thatcher's main adviser. Joseph attacked the Scarman inquiry as a 'recipe for lawlessness', and by so doing caused a major split in the Tory Party.

The debate between Joseph and Shadow Industry Minister James Prior which has divided the Tory Party is not, however, a debate over the substance of NAFF's proposals on industrial relations. On the contrary, NAFF's principal campaign has been to extend the use of the existing legal machinery, and all Tory MPs agree with that. NAFF's only proposal for additional legislation in the short term is for a tightening up of the picketing laws. Again there is agreement throughout the Tory Party on this question.

But while NAFF's objectives are shared by 'hawk' and 'dove' alike, there is bitter disagreement on how to arrive at them. The Selsdon Group of right-wing Tory MPs, for instance, proposed that Thatcher should appoint George Ward as special adviser on industrial relations to the Shadow Cabinet. People like James Prior see this as nothing but a crude provocation.

Prior, of course, is a member of APEX. He believes that maintaining such links with the unions is the best way to prepare a confrontation at a later stage. If the Tory Party is seen as the party of George Ward, this would identify them as being against the trade union movement *as a whole*.

Prior would much prefer a policy of divide and rule. Far better



(16) Photo: ANDREW WIARD (Report)

Grunwick managing director George Ward

How the 'free' press dealt with Grunwick

ON 26 JUNE a page-long article appeared in the *Sunday Telegraph* entitled 'Behind the Grunwick Bloodshed'. Accompanying it were a series of photographs, one of which was captioned 'Jack Dromey, leader of the pickets'. There was only one problem: the photograph was not of Jack Dromey, but of APEX official Chris Wright.

It takes a peculiar type of incompetence and ignorance to mistake thin and clean-shaven Chris Wright for burly and bearded Jack Dromey. But the *Sunday Telegraph* managed it without much trouble. For facts are the last thing to have worried the media in their coverage of Grunwick.

The media have played a central role in the Grunwick dispute. The television companies and the Fleet Street press are the major sources of information for the vast majority in this country. Accordingly they have great power to shape opinion by deciding how to report any event, what to leave out, and how to comment on it.

The media can play a more important role than, say, the police, because the media shape people's attitudes. They can in fact have a dominant influence on the outcome of a strike. For example, the strike committee has made appeal after appeal for solidarity action throughout the Grunwick strike. For the first ten months of the strike such appeals went unreported in the ruling class press. But when the police attacked the first mass picket on 13 June, the media rolled into action.

Almost without exception their aim was simple — to discredit the pickets. The most hysterical words were used to secure that aim:

- 'Little Hitlers' (*Sun*, 28 June)
- 'The buying rabble screaming obscenities... the essence of Fascism' (*Daily Express*, 20 June)
- 'The Fascist Left' (*Sun*, 20 June)
- 'Bloodthirsty mob' (*Daily Mail*, 12 July)
- 'The Mafia' (*Daily Mail*, 12 July)
- 'Godfathers of Protest' (*Daily Express*, 24 June)
- 'Blatant intimidation' (*Daily Mirror*, 23 June)
- 'Bullies' (*Sunday Times*, 3 July)
- 'Fanatical paranoia' (*Sunday Telegraph*, 3 July)

Most of these slanders came in editorial/comment type pieces. But to back up these allegations, the news reports themselves also had to be distorted. A prime example was the 'Picket Line Pay Off' story, as the *Mirror* put it.

This was the absurd allegation that the union had offered to pay £50 per week to any scab who joined the strike, that the local Labour council had similarly offered a council house, and that various scabs had been intimidated at their homes the previous night. Every paper gave wide coverage to these stories, repeating the allegations of management and George Ward in particular.

The *Mirror* devoted 40 lines to reporting the claims and only four to a denial of the council house bribe story from a Brent councillor. The *Express* also reported the allegations at length and gave one whole sentence to a denial from Roy Grantham. The *Sun* gave 49 lines to the claims, 3 to a



Photo: ANDREW WIARD (Report)

NATSOPA printworkers show their support for the strikers on the picket line

denial from APFX. While the *Mail* didn't even bother with a denial, but simply reported the claims as fact.

Then there was the horror of London's *Evening Standard* on 17 June, that 'there are people on the picket line who have never seen the inside of a photographic darkroom. They would not know a developer from a hypo.' The aim of such remarks was to make it seem somehow shocking for other trade unionists to appear on the picket line — as if solidarity was something to be ashamed of.

Not to be left out of all this were the television companies, and particularly the BBC. Indeed, one of the most memorable phrases of the entire dispute came from BBC newsreader Angela Rippon, who reported that one of the mass pickets had been attended by 'trade unionists and other extremists'.

Observer TV reviewer W. Stephen Gilbert neatly pinpointed the double standards present in the following BBC news commentary: 'For nearly four weeks now, management has found it necessary to camp out on the premises in order to maintain a 24-hour watch on the factory. It's not exactly primitive living, but it's not as comfortable as being at home either'. As Gilbert remarked, 'I doubt if the BBC ever expressed such sentiments about work-ins or student occupations.'

W. Stephen Gilbert was one of the few Fleet Street journalists to try to redress the balance. But it is important to record him, because it would be wrong to conclude that all journalists are automatically on the side of the bosses. Indeed, during the Grunwick dispute a number of prominent members of the NUJ have been arrested on the picket line — including Vice-President Denis McShane, Assistant General Secretary Charles Harkness, and National Executive members Jonathan Hammond and Roger Protz. The national NUJ banner and several branch banners were carried on 11 July.

It may well be the case that many of the journalists who have lied about and distorted the Grunwick strike have done so because they knew that only if they did so would their article appear. And this raises the question of what can be done in the future to ensure that trade union struggles are reported fairly.

While newspapers are owned and controlled by members of the ruling class there is a limit on what can be done. But there are some steps which journalists can take. They can demand that strikers have the 'right of reply'

in newspapers which attack them. Indeed, during the Grunwick strike printworkers on the *Sunday Telegraph*, the *Sun* and *Observer* have taken their own industrial action in protest at the unbalanced coverage and anti-Grunwick advertisements for NAFF.

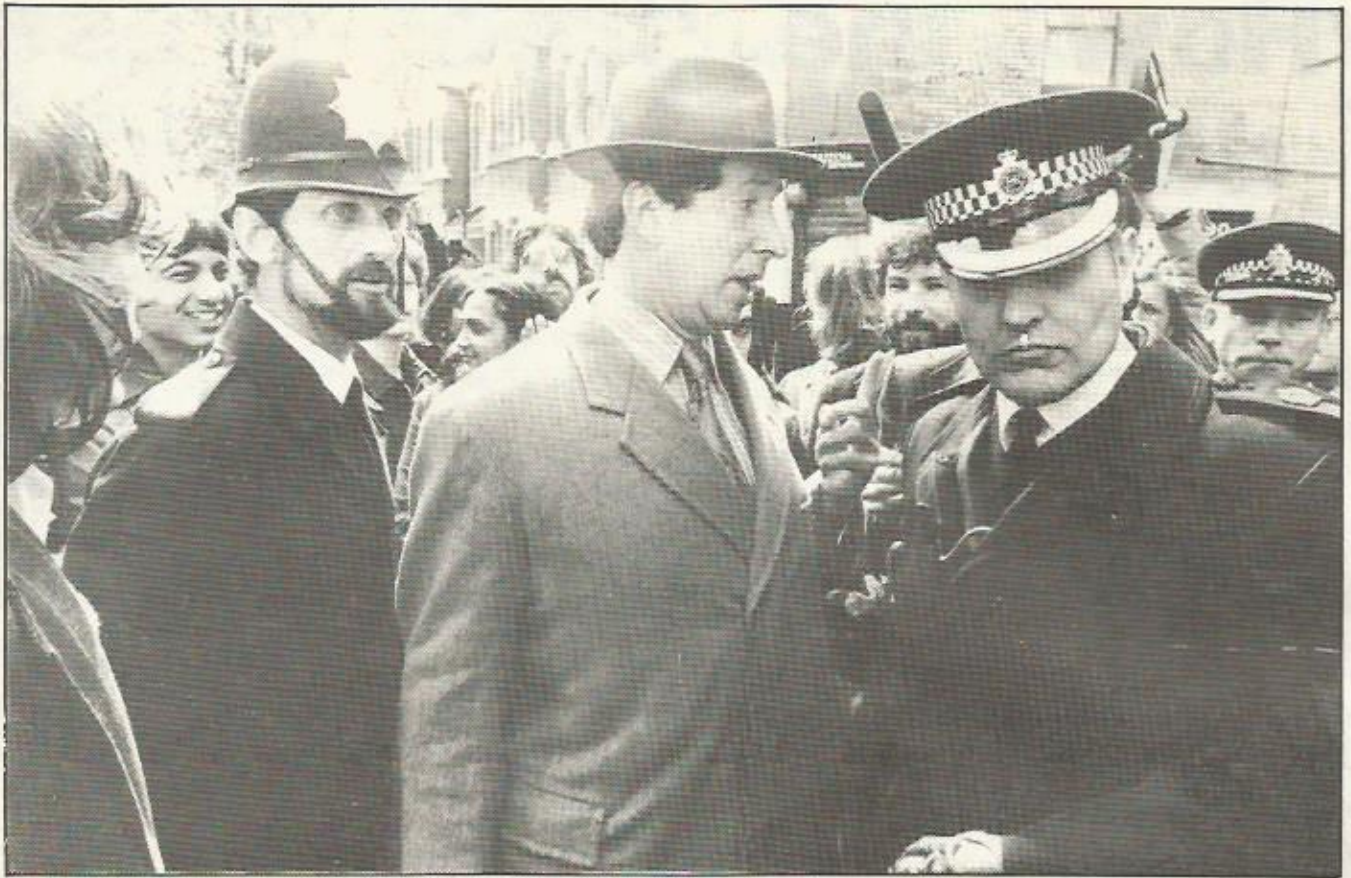
The *Observer* printworkers demanded that a front-page statement appear in the paper dissociating the printers from NAFF's ad. After a couple of hours strike action that demand was granted. The *Sunday Telegraph* workers also succeeded in getting a union disclaimer printed on the same page as the offending article. And the *Sun* had to appear with a blank space instead of an editorial after the printers objected to its hysterical description of pickets as a 'mob'.

As a result, the national executive of the National Graphical Association has since decided to support any of its members taking action to secure a right of reply to reactionary articles and advertisements on Grunwick.

Journalists have a more difficult job. They cannot immediately stop the presses. Nor are all journalists members of the NUJ. But something can be done about that problem. During the Grunwick dispute workers on strike in Darlington also came under repeated attack from the police. But this time they were journalists, and what they were fighting for was a 'closed shop' at their paper, the *Northern Echo*. The fight for the closed shop is the start of the fight to ensure that newspapers are not simply the mouthpieces of those who can afford to own them. Once a closed shop is established, NUJ members can ensure that the union has real power — and that can include the power to guarantee responsible, accurate and balanced reporting.

The ruling class say that this action would be a threat to the 'freedom of the press'. In one sense only would it be. It would stop the freedom of the small clique who run the press to spread anti-working class propaganda at will. It would stop the freedom to sell millions of copies based on prejudice, bigotry and dishonesty.

After the Grunwick strike and the press coverage of it, this question can be asked: Which would ensure the greater freedom of the press — the right of editors and newspaper owners alone to decide what is printed and what is censored, or the right of those whose labour produces the newspaper to have their say as well? And just to ask that question is to answer it.



NAFF administrative director John Gourlet arrives to confer with Grunwick management

Photo: ANDREW WIARD (Report)

to appear as being for the trade union movement and only against particular actions by particular unions. Then you have a chance of isolating individual unions when they move into struggle, as Heath did in 1970-1. He weakened the trade union movement *as a whole* by first inflicting defeats on the dustmen, then the Post Office workers, and then Fords Dagenham.

That is why Prior is against Keith Joseph — the front bench spokesperson for the 'hawks'. While Joseph is in favour of an assault on the closed shop, Prior says the time is not yet ripe. The workers organisations are still too strong, especially whilst a Labour Government is in office. Prior prefers to let the Labour Government do the job of demoralising and disorienting workers, and to wait until a Tory Government can use the authority of Parliament and the law.

Prior has the support of all the most important sections of the capitalist class. (It is worth noting, for instance, that all the CBI representatives on the ACAS Council voted to pursue their case against Grunwick to the House of Lords.) Joseph and the NAFF on the other hand have the overwhelming support of the Tory Party rank-and-file.

This debate about tactics and timing has seriously divided the party. It has prompted Thatcher herself to try to heal the breach by bringing forward her own proposals — notably for a referendum in the case of a major industrial clash. This has only had the effect of further weakening the party's cohesion, however, as even right-wing cranks like Peregrine Worsthorne have summarily denounced the proposal as threatening to weaken the authority of Parliament on which the Tories' legal attacks on the unions will depend.

Moreover, the referendum proposal would raise every clash between a trade union and management from a simple industrial dispute into a political clash of potentially major importance for the future of the Government. This is far too dangerous to be a serious option for the ruling class. The Grunwick strike has already shown the damage which can be caused to the central policies of the Government when a trade union dispute erupts into a political contest. And that is why the dispute has so exposed the divisions in the Tories.

But ultimately what is vital for the labour movement is to remember what unites the Tories. NAFF's Russell Lewis summed it up very clearly when he wrote in *Free Nation*: 'It is not confrontation, after all, which would be the ultimate tragedy. The ultimate tragedy would be to have a confrontation and lose.'

The same applies for the workers movement. With the very real prospect of the Tories returning to office, it is not only necessary to take the NAFF wing of the Tories very seriously — it is necessary to *organise* against them.

The miserable showing of the trade union leaders in the Grunwick dispute is not merely disastrous from the immediate point of view of winning the strike and raising the hopes and aspirations of other workers up and down the country. Their misleadership fails to take advantage of the growing splits in the Tories, allows the Tories to heal their wounds before they get into office, and, above all, threatens the ability of the workers movement to deal with the anti-union policies which will be put forward by a future Conservative Government.



SIR KEITH JOSEPH

Photo: MARK RUSHER

Scarman and after

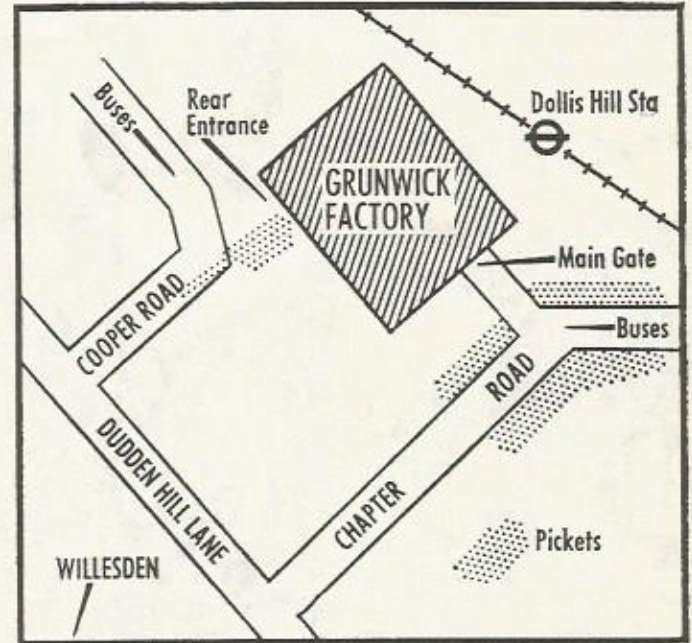
In a situation of general economic recession and crisis, any prolonged industrial dispute is likely to produce a difference of opinion inside the ruling class on how to deal with it.

Some bosses feel that to give any concessions will only strengthen the resolve of the workers the next time around. They believe that outright victory is the only answer to their immediate problems. Thus they favour a policy of confronting the unions head-on, trying to take advantage of the vacillating and weak-kneed response of the bureaucrats.

Others think that to do this simply pushes their potential allies—the 'responsible trade union leaders'—into the camp of the adversary. They believe that 'conciliation' is the order of the day. By playing on the willingness of the trade union bureaucrats to police their members, to dampen down the struggle, and thus disorient the rank and file, they calculate that the defences will be down when they really need to put the boot in.

Lord Justice Scarman is a representative of this latter section of the ruling class. His report into the Grunwick dispute was designed to ensure the ending of mass picketing and effective solidarity action whilst legitimising the strikers' case. His intention is perfectly summed up in the following couple of sentences from the report:

'It is important that the company, which has made a fine start, should continue in business; it is vital that the trade





Southall Youth Movement

Photo: MARK RUSHER (IFL)



LORD JUSTICE SCARMAN

union movement should continue effectively to serve the interests of its members. It would be tragic if our society should prove too inflexible to accommodate both the company and the union.'

The trade union leaders fell over themselves in the rush to support the findings of the Court of Inquiry. 'We want to give the other fellow a chance to come out of the corner', said Roy Grantham. 'If we grind his face in the dust nothing will be solved. There can never be a victory. A draw is the best result. . . . Both of us have spent a year in a cul-de-sac and it's time we got out and lived with each other

'We are prepared to go quite a long way down the road to meet them. Here we have for the first time an opportunity to resolve the matter honourably. We want to seize this opportunity.'

True to his word, Grantham came up with some new concessions — concocted without any reference at all to the strikers themselves. APEX would allow a *staggered* reinstatement of the strikers, it would promise not to seek a closed shop, and it would agree that issues not resolved by negotiation should go to arbitration(!).

But such craven class collaboration needs someone to collaborate with. George Ward was not looking for a 'draw'. He summarily tore up the Scarman Report and threw it in the dustbin.

Fortunately the Strike Committee, true to their policy of class *struggle*, adopted an equally forthright approach to the Scarman Report. 'For seven days', they said, 'we will hold out our hand to the company and ask them to sit down with our unions and negotiate a settlement. We will not wait longer and we think that it is unlikely that Ward will respond.

'On 30 August, we will be meeting with the Executive Committee of APEX and we will be asking APEX and the TGWU to put down an emergency motion at this year's TUC calling for all services — water, electricity and post — and supplies to be cut off to the company and calling upon the entire movement to support any union suffering as a result.

'We will also be calling upon our unions and the movement as a whole to support the resumption of the mass picketing after Congress meets

'In short, it was the strength of the trade union movement that lifted our dispute off the floor. It will be that same strength that wins a historic victory for the entire movement.'

Nationalise Grunwick!

Both mass picketing and, as the Strike Committee put it, 'coordinated action on supplies and services' are necessary if the strike is to have any chance of victory. But what if Ward carries out his threat to close down the company for good, taking his money with him?

Ward's rejection of Scarman has made it clear that he is interested, above everything else, in smashing trade unionism. He is quite prepared to shut down the factory altogether if it will serve the political purposes of NAFF and the right wing of the Tory Party. Ward himself will certainly not be found on the dole queue after performing such a service.

It is now obvious to everyone that Ward and his backers are using valuable productive resources solely for political purposes and sabotage. They must be taken out of George Ward's hands.

This would give the Grunwick strikers the unqualified victory they so richly deserve. It would also be a service to the whole working class.

During the TUC debate on Grunwick,

APEX leader Roy Grantham approached the prospect of Ward liquidating Grunwick with the dismissive comment: 'So be it'. Others to the left of Grantham argue that the closure of Grunwick could serve as a warning to any employer who attempts a repeat of George Ward's antics.

But if Ward closes Grunwick he can simply transfer his assets and open up somewhere else. The strikers, however, will be out of a job in an area which already suffers heavy unemployment. It is possible that the closure of Grunwick might discourage future George Wards, but it is more likely to discourage other workers from attempting what the strikers have done.

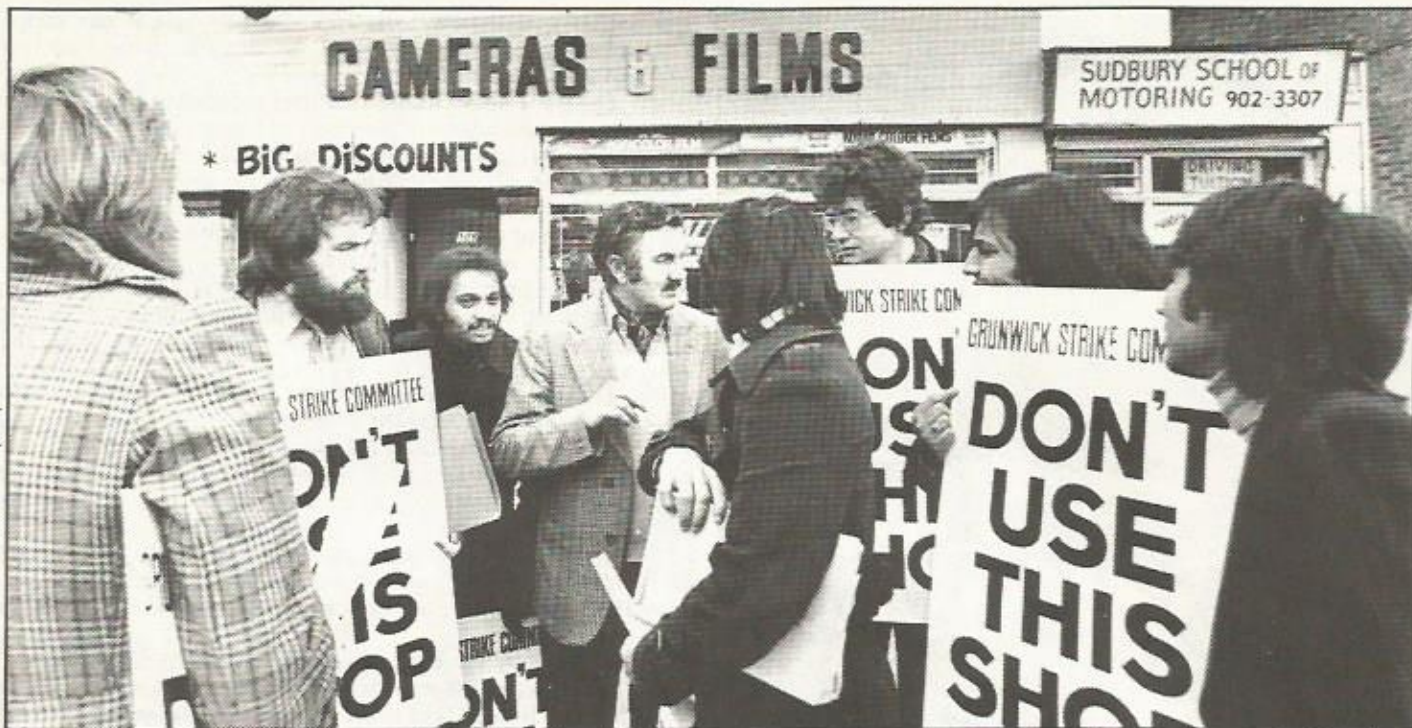
Specifically it could discourage immigrant and women workers — who make up the bulk of the Grunwick strikers — from staging another Grunwick. These are already the most unorganised, vulnerable and exploited sections of the working class, and the prospect of a closed factory after more than one year's strike action is hardly an incentive to struggle.

Nationalising Grunwick would deal decisively with Ward, save jobs, and encourage other workers to follow the Grunwick example. It would also establish an important principle — the nationalisation of firms threatening wholesale redundancies or closure.

An obvious question arises: Is such a solution possible? Given the right-wing nature of the Labour Government it seems unlikely.

But just a few months ago the prospect of the Government intervening directly in Grunwick, or a judge coming out in favour of the strikers, also seemed highly unlikely. So, too, was the prospect of the TUC even talking about cutting off supplies and services to George Ward.

All this has been achieved essentially by the mass pickets that the strike committee has led, and as long as the demand for nationalisation is linked to this same type of action it can provide a real recipe for total victory.



One major success in the solidarity campaign has been to cut the number of shops handling Grunwick film by more than 75 per cent.

The brand names to watch for are: Bonuspool, Trucolour, Monkcolour, and Cooper & Pearson.

The real problem facing the strikers was highlighted at a solidarity conference on 23 August by Jayaben Desai: 'We are drowning in support and starving from lack of action.' The calling of this rank-and-file conference by the South-East Region of the TUC (of which Jack Dromey is the Secretary) in association with the Strike Committee showed a welcome recognition of the need to organise independently of the trade union bureaucrats to fight for class struggle policies. Unfortunately this fight has not been carried on consistently in the past.

For example, the Strike Committee has not campaigned for the building of support committees in every area. A heavy penalty is now being paid for this mistake. It means that the strikers have no organised alternative to turn to in the face of the TUC's continued inaction. But just think what would have been possible had the example of Manchester (see box) been followed up and down the country.

Of course, committees like that in Manchester are a big embarrassment to the local bureaucrats, exposing their lack of real support activity. But such embarrassment can only be to the good. It keeps the heat on and forces the official 'leaders' to act.

A network of such committees covering the whole country

would be an important step in building a counterweight to the collaborationist line of the bureaucracy. They could act as a springboard for building a representative national solidarity conference (something which has been needed for months) which could co-ordinate really effective mass action in support of the Grunwick strikers.

The hesitant way in which this question of organising independently of the bureaucracy has been approached had very negative consequences in the calling off of the mass picket on 8 August. This setback can be overcome, but only by clearly advancing class struggle policies which seek to force the official trade union leadership into action through independent mobilisations which will otherwise leave them high and dry.

- *Rebuild mass picketing to stop the bus until the strike is won.
- *Boycott Grunwick — no water, no power, no gas, no mail, no supplies.
- *Demand that the Labour Government nationalises Grunwick without compensation under workers control.
- *Drop all charges against the arrested pickets.
- *Disband the Special Patrol Group and all anti-picket squads. Defend the right to picket.

Support committees — the example of Manchester

The Manchester Grunwick Strike Support Committee developed out of a decision in June by members of the International Marxist Group and Big Flame to organise a factory tour and a public meeting for a member of the Strike Committee.

Up till then the local APEX bureaucracy had been totally inactive on the question of Grunwick, although this initiative woke them up a little — they sent two full-time officials to address the meeting. On the basis of the success of the factory tour, IMG militants proposed the setting up of a Support Committee to organise the existing support, and take the question of Grunwick deeper into the local labour movement.

The support committee is open to all those willing to organise support for the strike.

Since its formation, the committee has:

- *organised two further public meetings, addressed by a member of the Strike Committee and local labour movement speakers;
- *organised a series of street meetings;
- *reproduced copies of the strike bulletin for distribution in local factories, hospitals, etc;
- *produced four issues of a widely circulated local support bulletin;
- *produced leaflets in Urdu for the local Asian population;
- *leafleted local post offices calling for the boycotting of Grunwick mail;
- *mobilised coachloads of supporters to go down to the 11 July and 8 August days of action;
- *sent a coach to the lobby of the TUC on 5

September;

- *organised a regular rota system of people to join the picket line in London;
- *held a very successful social to raise money for the strike.

The Support Committee is now investigating the possibility of contacting other support committees up and down the country to set up an effective coordinated network of committees. *Socialist Challenge* supporters have helped the campaign by giving the support committee full use of their local offices, phone, duplicating facilities, etc. The Manchester Grunwick Strike Support Committee can be contacted c/o Socialist Challenge Centre, 14 Piccadilly, Manchester, telephone 061-236 2352.

For a Class Struggle Left Wing!

THE DIVIDE between class struggle and class collaborationist trade unionism is not limited to the Grunwick issue. On the contrary, just as the workers movement is lined up between those who stand for militant action to win the Grunwick strike and those who don't, so equally the movement is divided on its attitude to almost all the major questions of the day.

It is no coincidence that the very trade union leaders who have so trumpeted the cause of 'moderation' over Grunwick have been in the forefront of those campaigning in support of the Labour Government's Social Contract.

Faced with a growing revolt inside the labour movement, the trade union bureaucrats have pulled out all the stops to force through their policies. Twenty-one union general secretaries openly sided with British Leyland management and the Government in trying to break the strike of the Leyland toolmakers. The NATSOPA leaders supported a lock-out of their own members by management at *The Times*. The AUEW National Executive fought a vicious battle against their members on strike at Heathrow airport.

The bureaucrats have had more up their sleeve than open strike-breaking. They have also flouted the most elementary principles of trade union democracy in an attempt to force through their policies. At the September TUC Congress, Hugh Scanlon cast the votes of the AUEW in favour of the 12-month rule against the position of the union's policy-making National Committee, which had come out in favour of an immediate return to free collective bargaining.

To back up their anti-democratic manoeuvres, the bureaucrats join with Callaghan and Healey in blackmailing threats to the effect that every group of workers going into struggle will bring down the Labour Government because the Liberals will refuse to continue the Lib-Lab pact. But the Labour Government will not be kept in office by parliamentary manoeuvres. The longer the Lib-Lab pact and its pro-capitalist policies continue, the more unpopular the Government will become. The Tories, Liberals and the ragbag of Ulster Unionists and the rest will be able to choose their moment to turf it out of office.

The only way to keep the Tories out is to defy the pressure of the British and international capitalists, to ditch the Lib-Lab pact, and to embark on a course of socialist measures. But the TUC has shown that it is not prepared to launch such a fight. On the contrary, the policies put forward by the trade union leaders can only divide the ranks

of the working class.

AUEW Presidential candidate Terry Duffy and other right-wingers divide high-paid from low paid workers by concentrating exclusively on differentials and the so-called traditional wages pattern. The TUC's refusal to support the demand for a national minimum wage was a decision to let the lower-paid go to the wall. This will particularly hit women workers who make up the bulk of the low paid, and it will thus also sharpen divisions along sex lines. Failure to take up policies to fight for the right to work threatens to divide employed from unemployed.

Without a clear fight against the cash limits system, and for automatic rises in social services spending to offset the effects of inflation, there is a real danger that workers in the welfare state sector will be divided from those in industry. And even workers in the same industry can be divided if the fight for their individual claims remains uncoordinated.

What is needed is an organising centre within the labour movement which can weld the fragmented opposition into a united movement based on clear demands to unify the struggle.

Faced by a similar situation in the 1920s, militants in the unions organised into the National Minority Movement. In every union the Minority Movement organised its supporters to fight against the class collaborationist right wing. In the Labour Party, too, the National Left-Wing Movement was formed to carry on the fight.

The possibilities exist for building a Minority Movement today. Already the embryo of such an organisation of militants exists in a number of unions. On a class wide basis, many unofficial labour movement conferences have demonstrated the willingness of militants, socialists and left-wingers to organise together. In March 1976, three thousand delegates came together in the National Assembly on Unemployment. In February 1977, 1,200 trade unionists assembled at the conference called by the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions. Seventeen hundred attended the conference against wage controls called by the British Leyland shop stewards in April 1977.

But whilst these conferences demonstrated the preparedness of militants to organise together in a fighting alternative to the right wing, their leaderships have prevented them from developing beyond one-off events to pressurise the official leaderships. A decision at the LCDTU conference to establish local committees in every area was not pursued by

the Communist Party-led Liaison Committee. Today no local committees exist.

The Right to Work Campaign and the Rank & File groupings led by the Socialist Workers Party have correctly attacked the Broad Left's reliance on the trade union bureaucrats. In November 1976, the Right to Work Campaign built a national conference of some 700 delegates which vowed to campaign actively in support of all workers going into struggle. And as a measure of such support, the Campaign organised a meeting during the day of action called by the Leyland stewards' conference on 20 April at which representatives of the Heathrow and Port Talbot strikers spoke.

But the very strength of the Right to Work Campaign is also its weakness. Its opposition to the policies of the bureaucracy and its preparedness to act without them has become almost a policy of not fighting to force the bureaucrats into united action. The Right to Work Campaign acts as though it were the left wing of the labour movement, with support from millions of workers.

The reality is very different. A precondition for the Right to Work Campaign (or the Rank & File groupings in individual unions) to be able to reach out to wider layers is their preparedness to fight for united action and organisation on a consistent basis with other sections of the left of the labour movement. It is impossible to win united action with the base of the Broad Left if you're not prepared to fight to involve the Broad Left leadership in such united action.

A commitment by the Right To Work Campaign and the LCDTU to sponsor a joint open conference of the left wing and to build united committees in every locality would gain enormous support. The conference and the committees would of course have to be democratic: only through the guarantee of the democratic rights of all tendencies can unity behind the decisions of such committees and conferences be ensured.

Such an initiative would be an excellent first step along the road of building the Minority Movement of today. The right wing would shake in its boots if a genuine commitment from the LCDTU-Broad Left and the Right To Work Campaign-Rank & File to such united action and democratic organisation around militant class struggle policies was forthcoming.

These groupings have shown no interest to date in such a project beyond token calls for united action whose real aim is to expose people rather than build joint struggle. A consistent fight is necessary. Socialist Challenge commits itself to such a fight and to a struggle for policies which are a real answer to the class collaboration of the right wing.

What's black and white and read all over?



Evening Standard: Anthony Hart

Socialist Challenge

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