

Hackney Union

MARCH/APRIL 1990.

News

WORKERS ACTIONS INCREASE

Articles inside include the following:-

Page 2-7. Around the unions with reports from NATFHE, National Union of Students, NUR, Joint Shop Stewards Committee, TGWU/ACTSS, NUTGW & NALGO.
Page 8-Defend Abortion Rights.

DEFEAT THE POLL TAX

The huge anti-Poll Tax demo outside the Town Hall on March 8th showed the anger of Hackney people. The figure of £499 is simply unpayable for many people & with millions more around the country refusing to pay then this Tax can be defeated. Hackney Against the Poll Tax Federation is trying to co-ordinate activities in Hackney. Contact them at:-

Old Fire Station, Leswin Road N16.

Tel:-0426-911161. Meetings are second Wednesday in every month.

Support those arrested

A campaign to support those arrested on March 8th has been formed by Hackney Community Defence Association. They are appealing for witnesses to any arrests, photographs & financial donations. Contact them on 249-0193 or write to HCDA, c/o Family Centre, 50 Rectory Road, N16.

RESIST THE CUTS

The cuts to accompany the Poll Tax are £10 million. All sectors of the Council are to be effected & there is no guarantee that more cuts won't be needed throughout 1990/1. Inside are articles from the the Joint Shop Stewards Committee & Hackney TGWU/ACTSS branch calling for opposition to all cuts. Strike action is being organised for April 5th. (see inside for details.)

TEXTILE WORKERS STRIKE

100 workers, including many refugees, in the Textile sweatshop known as Bacton Fashions in Somerford Grove N16, have been locked out by their employer. They are fighting for the right to belong to the TGWU and for decent pay & conditions.

On February 26th their picket was attacked by the police & 4 refugees were arrested. If convicted it will put in danger their status in Britain.

The employer has now re-opened in another part of Hackney & picketing has moved there. He is finding it difficult to recruit new workers & the strikers demands remain the same as before.

Leaflets, draft resolutions, speakers for meetings & collection sheets are available. Finance is urgently needed & cheques should be made out to 'Bacton Strike Fund' & sent to Mike Farrell, c/o TUSU. Contact us for further details.

Ambulance 'Let-down.'

The Ambulance dispute has, of course, now ended with a pretty shabby deal for the Ambulance workers. The Government must be very relieved that the dispute has been settled & that they are not under a joint attack from ambulance workers & those opposed to the Poll Tax.

A number of stewards & branch officials, from a variety of unions, have expressed an interest in seeing their union branch sponsor Hackney Union News. Over the next few weeks we will be contacting them to try & work out the relevant amount. If other branches are interested, please contact us urgently.

AROUND THE UNIONS



NATFHE :dispute continues

NATFHE (National Association of Teachers in Further & Higher Education) members nationally have been in dispute with our employers since last autumn. Up to now our employers offer has been an insulting 5.3% tied to massive 'flexibility' strings.

If the employers get their way our conditions of service will deteriorate drastically through massive amounts of unpaid overtime & a severe cut in marking & preparation time. Part-timers hours will be cut & it opens the way to redundancies across the board. Needless to say, this will affect the quality of educational provision. This is not acceptable.

Hackney College NATFHE have also been involved in a local dispute over time-tabled tea-breaks which happily resulted in an unconditional union victory.

The national action has included 2 highly successful days of strike action, during which all colleges nationwide were closed. We are also implementing exam sanctions.

On the days of strike action we also showed our support for the struggles of local Kurdish refugees by joining the picket of Pentonville prison & demanding the right of asylum for refugees. We continue to give our support in any way we can.

Hackney NATFHE supports local ambulance workers. A weekly levy to give them financial support was set up early in their dispute. Over 150 students & staff struck for 2 hours on January 30th & attended the local rally.



Finally, we believe that international solidarity is also important. We shall be raising the question of support for the recently formed independent socialist federation of Russian Trade Unions, SOTSPROF.

By Isabelle Capri & Sacha Loban.

STUDENTS: we demand grants, not loans

By Tash Shifrin of the National Union of Students.

For 18 months, students have been fighting against the Government's plan to introduce student loans. The fight started back in November 1988 when the Government released a White Paper outlining its proposals. Students responded quickly with a huge demo which ended with mounted riot police charging into students on Westminster bridge.

What is the loans plan?

The only detail we know about the loans plan comes from the White Paper—the bill itself is an enabling act which gives powers to the Education secretary without detailing how they should be used. This is obviously undemocratic.

students (cont)

The White Paper said that 'top-up loans' would be offered from September 1990 when the value of the grant would be frozen at its current level.

This means that each year the grant element would decrease & the loan would steadily take over. At the same time all full-time students would be removed from the benefit system: no housing benefit, income support or dole in the holidays!

Why grants not loans?

The value of the grant, in real terms, has been cut by 34% since the Tories took over in 1979. The 'top-up' loan will not even bring the total package up to the previous level!

More important though, is the fact that students would be paying for education. Not only will this discriminate against working class people, black people, women & disabled students in particular, it attacks the whole idea of **Free Education as a right. Education is something everyone, not just the rich, should have. It must be free & open to all.**

Decent grants for all.

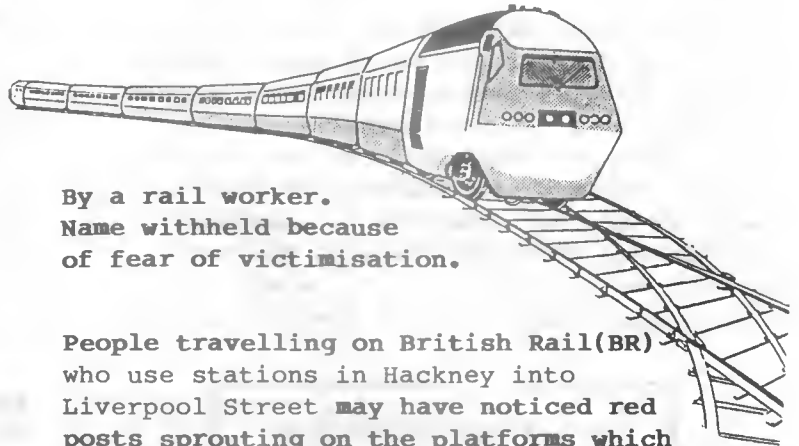
This means a grant for all students, brought back to its pre-1979 level, so that we can all afford education. The Grant system must be extended to all students over 16. Most further education students don't get grants & never make it to higher education.

The campaign.

Since November 88 the campaign has been built up. The last demo, on February 15th 1990, was the biggest yet. **We have now forced the banks to pull out of the scheme- a big blow to the Tories, who's majority is down to 50 on this issue.**

We will keep fighting until we have smashed loans & have a living grant for all students over the age of 16. If you want to help then contact the National Union of Students on 01-637-1181.

NUR: defeat BR's plans to remove all guards!



By a rail worker.
Name withheld because of fear of victimisation.

People travelling on British Rail (BR) who use stations in Hackney into Liverpool Street may have noticed red posts sprouting on the platforms which are then topped by video cameras or large screens. Ever wondered what they're for?

No guards.

These 'triffids' are the latest stage in BR's programme of driver-only operation (D.O.O.) & along with sliding door trains they enable BR to scrap guards on these lines.

Services to Chingford, Hertford East, Enfield, Cheshunt & Cambridge as well as Gideon Park & Southend are all scheduled to lose their guards by the end of 1990. **The cameras & screens are supposed to allow the driver to have a clear view of the platform so that s/he (yes, there are some women drivers around these days!) can operate the sliding doors as well as drive it!**

Not surprisingly, many guards aren't very happy. Firstly, most of their work, up to 75% at some depots & all at others, will disappear with under DOO. Stratford, in particular, will be badly hit. Some guards will become drivers or conductors but many won't. Over 100 jobs will be lost in the Greater London area of the Anglia Region.

No more Claphams!

Secondly, in the wake of the Clapham rail crash the guards believe it's crazy to remove them from trains. BR guards undergo six weeks intensive training, most of which is safety based to deal with emergencies such as Clapham.

Many skills.

The guard is a travel consultant, safety officer & tourist guide rolled into one-it's not what you do its what you know that counts!

Under BR's present path it will end up like the underground where some 1,200 guards have in recent years been scapped from 8 lines & where safety has collapsed. **Do you know that on the day of the Kings Cross disaster BR workers were giving out leaflets to passengers protesting about DOO safety?** How many people want BR services to become a sickening carbon copy of the underground?



Protection for women.

Guards also point out that many women, who already feel worried about travelling on trains in the evening, will be deterred from using them without guards. Many Hackney stations are deserted, dark & frightening places after the evening rush hour & many women have experienced attack. BR has removed (& will continue to) staff from many stations & now the trains themselves are to lose a trained, capable member of staff!

Reduced safety.

Removing guards clearly reduces safety levels on stations; the recent death of a 9 year old boy on the District line shows just how important guards can be in maintaining safety for passengers.

Railworkers must take action.

It may be that only action from railworkers can block BR's plans. Behind BR is Thatcherite transport policy which has recently slashed direct grants to BR by 33% over 3 years. This will mean big fare increases, more sales of BR property & the loss of 1,000 jobs by 1995.

NUR(2)

Various NUR branches in London have fought back against DOO. Waterloo, for example, called a one day strike about 2 years ago. West Ham branch has launched a campaign to halt DOO & hopes to get plenty of public support in the coming months.

You can support the guards by getting your union branch, local transport group or community organisation to protest to BR Network South East & to Cecil Parkinson, the Transport Minister.

For more information contact Tubewatch, PO Box 22, 136 Kingsland High St, London E8. Tubewatch can supply speakers for meetings & copies of its bi-monthly bulletin 'Tubewatch.'

Remember next time you travel on BR, spare a thought for the guard on your train..before it's too late!

JSSC:FIGHT THE CUTS

By Tony Cordell, Secretary of Joint Shop Stewards Committee.

Once again Hackney Council has a cash crisis. For a number of years, indeed from the beginnings of rate-capping in 1985, the Borough has been unable to balance its books properly without some form of cuts or 'redirection of resources' package at some stage of the financial year.

The crisis seems to deepen each year and, each year, the blame is laid at somebody's door. Whilst there is no doubt that the initial problem has come about because of Government spending restrictions, it is all too easy to use that fact as the be-all-and-end-all of Hackney's difficulties.

Mismanagement is one of the greatest scourges of Hackney Council. This, along with some incredible decisions by Councillors, often leaves us wondering whose interests they really have at heart. After all, who needs a new town hall?



Cuts hit poor.

The latest round of cuts is hitting the most vital areas of all. Closures, amalgamations & privatisation have hit the childrens' & Old Peoples' Homes, holiday hotels & other services, all of which go some way towards providing the more needy members of the community with some form of facilities to make their lives a bit more bearable.

I have no doubts that had it not been for appalling mismanagement & inaccurate budgeting in Social Services at the start of the financial year, this particular crisis may have been avoided. At the very least the impact could have been softened in some way.



The latest round of cuts threaten a number of old peoples homes.

High paid jobs created.

Whilst the council has been slashing vital services they have created a number of senior level jobs. Two new assistant chief executives, 2 new assistant directors of housing & a new deputy assistant director in the worst hit area, social services. If £300,000 can be found for these jobs where is the justification in closing existing services?

JSSC(2)

Councillors cave in.

If this wasn't enough, we have the position whereby Councillors are constantly having the threat of a Section 114 notice waved in front of them. 'Make cuts or face surcharge' & each time they have given in without a whimper.

Officers running council.

The local Labour Party has gone along with every instruction issued by the Director of Finance & politicians are no longer running the borough. When the Council Leader is simply paying lip service to a senior officer & threatens reprisals against any dissenting Councillors, then local democracy has truly died.

I can't believe that local people would have elected the present Councillors to represent them if they had made it clear that they would be carrying out cuts on the instructions of a senior officer.

Labours policies in tatters.

The present Labour Council was elected on a policy of no cuts in jobs & services and no rent rises above the rate of inflation. Well, how much of that have they stuck to? Not a lot, if any at all.

We need a fighting council.

Clearly it would serve this borough no good at all for a Tory council to be elected in May, but at the same time we are in need of a new Council. It should be committed to serving the people, committed to genuinely defending jobs & services, & committed to taking power back from the hands of the officers.

**Stop press...
ALL-OUT ON
APRIL 5th**

As we go to press we have heard that the JSSC intends to try & organise a one day strike, against all cuts, on Thursday April 5th. Ten mass meetings have been arranged, for all sections, with the first one starting at 10am on Thursday March 22nd. Contact your union for further details & leaflets.

TGWU/ACTSS: defend our services

By Tina Jenkins, ACTSS representative to the Joint Shop Stewards Committee.

ACTSS is the main union for workers in the Voluntary Sector. In Hackney there is over 500 community organisations, most of which are funded by Hackney Council.

These organisations vary from large community centres to small projects with perhaps with 1 part-time worker. There are nurseries, playschemes, arts/culture organisations, computer groups, tenants associations...& many more. **These groups provide a direct, localised & essential range of services for Hackney residents.**

Community & voluntary groups have long provided these services on the cheap. Because there has been inadequate growth in Council grants to meet inflationary increases & pay awards most ACTSS members in the borough are under-paid.

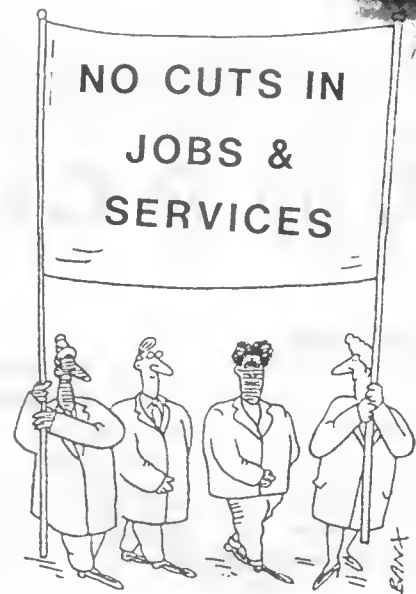
Workers in the voluntary sector do a wide range of jobs & have a wide range of skills & experience. **There is, however, no pay parity with workers in the private sector & the Council, who might do similar work.**

We want parity & better pay.

ACTSS, along with the main umbrella community organisations in the borough, has been campaigning for parity, better pay & conditions for its members. We participate in various Council working groups & assisted in drawing up the **Working Together** booklet which looks at pay, good employment practice, etc, etc.. However this booklet has become nothing more than a paper policy because of the last 3 years cuts.

Bleak future.

The overall financial outlook for Hackney Council & the Voluntary Sector it funds remains bleak. Recently ACTSS members & users fought & won the right to have all our previously agreed fourth quarter grants released to us. Leading Council officers were once again throwing good practice to the wind, and threatening the withdrawal of 20% of our grants. This fight was only the start of the battle.



Poll Tax to force council to make cuts

The Council is currently setting its 1990/1 budget. All services are being cut so that it can set a 'reasonable' poll tax. The recommended voluntary sector cuts will find council officers having to find £1 million 'savings.' This can't be done without cutting whole projects & this could effect as many as 1 in 5 groups & a similar number of ACTSS members jobs.

Oppose all cuts in jobs & serices.

Hackney ACTSS has a clear policy of no cuts in jobs & serices, & the voluntary sector must fight back now to protect both.

Whilst the Council has been hard hit by Central Government, we need to make cle to officers & Councillors that it would be politically & financially short-sighted for them to cut essential serices which are being provided much more cheaply, & often more effectively, than those by the Council.

Link up our struggles.

We recognise that if we are to be effective then we must link up with other council unions. This we have recently done when we took strike action & joined the various demo's in support of the ambulance workers.

Joint shop stewards committee.(JSSC)

ACTSS has 2 reps on the Councils JSSC (myself & Mark Metcalf). **Through the JSSC we can work to build real support from the Town Hall Unions & work with them to protect all services essential to local people in Hackney.**

NUTGW: pay rise won

By Barney Shuster.

Pay increase won.

There are over 80,000 NUTGW members in Britain & all of them have recently won a wage increase of 7.5% & one extra days holiday. (bringing entitlement to 25 days)

However many sweatshop workers in Hackney won't benefit as they aren't in a union. These workers are forced to work overtime & threatened with the sack if they don't. Overtime working however means that there will be no work & thus no pay at the years end.

Most clothing trade workers are lucky to get 4 weeks paid holiday & some employers even try to get people to work on Bank holidays. This, in fact, happened at Pazway on May 1st 1989 but the NUTGW members took strike action & forced the firm to back down.

Illegal practices, like continual company liquidations turn the workers into casual labourers; forced to go round factories looking for work.

Learning from the past.

The NUTGW was built from similar sweatshops generations ago & understands the pyramid of exploitation.

It is the big retailers who profit the most. The middle-men, who control the orders, can withdraw work from any sweatshop Governor who won't accept their cut-throat prices.

BREAK THE STRANGLEHOLD.

The NUTGW is committed to building the widest possible organisation in the area. United in struggle we can break the stranglehold of the middle-men & force the employers to concede better wages, conditions & rights. Join the NUTGW & build up workplace organisations.

The NUTGW also participated in the great demonstrations of Turkish & Kurdish people against immigration raids and for an amnesty. We know they can organise their communities.

Contact.

NUTGW at 343 Mare Street, Hackney E8. Office open Mon-Friday from 9.15am to 4.45am. Late closing on first Wednesday of the month when the union branch meets.



NALGO: retired members group set up

On January 24th Hackney NALGO Retired Members met & decided to set up their own Retired Members Association. NALGO pensioners understood the need to join in the struggle of other pensioners against the Governments policies.

They knew that the Government was forcing them to use their occupational pension to subsidise the miserly £43.60 State Pension; to pay for eye tests & dental check-ups; to replace the Death Benefit; & its NHS proposals.

They also responded to the call by H.Mundy of the Greater London Pensioners Association that their expertise, developed over a lifetime of serving the public, would strengthen the Pensioners Movement & its Campaign for a £75 a week State Retirement Pension.

It is to be hoped that other unions will also consider setting up their own Retired Members Associations. Hackney's Pensioner Convention & the Greater London Pensioners will be only too pleased to assist! Remember, todays workers are tomorrows pensioners! By Harry Mundy.

DEFEND ABORTION RIGHTS

By Leonara Lloyd of the National Abortion Campaign. (NAC)

History shows that **women have always used abortion in their struggle to gain control over their own fertility**, & that poor women have suffered the most from the affects of both back street and self-inflicted abortions.

In America, before legislation in 1973, black teenagers were ten times as likely to die as white. Today, in townships like Soweto, illegal abortion is a **major killer of young women**.

Womens rights under attack.

Anti-abortionists care little about women's lives or health. In recent years, we have seen a world-wide attack on abortion rights spearheaded by American fundamentalists.

'Operation rescue', an American group that blockades abortion clinics, harassing & attacking patients & clinic workers, has set up similar groups in Europe & Britain. Whilst they have not succeeded in stopping women from getting abortions, they add considerably to their stress.

In **Parliament**, anti-abortion attacks have been stepped up-every year several bills, designed to weaken women's rights, are presented, usually by Tory MPs.

Now, despite **Tories** claims to be neutral, they have framed the **Human Fertilisation & Embryology Bill** in such a way as to allow **amendments on abortion to be added**.

The possibility of a cut in abortion time-limits is a real danger. There are few late abortions & the numbers have been dropping. (the overall abortion numbers have risen in recent years.) Those that take place do so for the most serious of reasons & the most vulnerable will suffer if time limits are cut.

Public opinion supports abortion

For those fighting for abortion rights, these are both good & bad times. Public opinion has moved steadily in favour of women's rights to choose. More MP's of all parties have joined the Pro-Choice Alliance. Membership of pro-choice groups

is going up & more national unions are affiliating to NAC.



Defend the gains made.

However the dangers of reductions in abortion rights have never been greater. If the anti-abortionists succeed, the sufferers will be working class & poor women, unable to afford safe illegal abortions here, nor able to travel to countries where abortion remains legal.

Smash the anti-abortionists.

Women & the labour movement can't afford to wait. Apathy is our biggest enemy. Everyone must get involved to defeat the anti-abortionists once & for all, by fighting to change the law to give women the right to choose & the right to have abortions on the NHS.

Join NAC.

By joining NAC, you can become part of the campaign to defend & extend abortion rights. Membership forms & information from:- NAC, Wesley House, 4 Wild Court, London WC2B 5AU. Membership is open to individuals & organisations that support our aims & we can supply speakers.

Hackney Union News is produced in English & Turkish by workers at Hackney Trade Union Support Unit. The articles do not necessarily correspond to the views of the workers or the management committee and are written to produce debate within the Trade Union movement.

Articles, letters, comments & suggestions to:- HUN, 489 Kingsland Road E8. Tel:249-6930 or 249-8086. If you would like a regular copy let us know.