



GAS BOSSES' THREAT TO 10,000 JOBS

BRITISH GAS bosses will sack 10,000 pipeline engineers if they are forced to curb their massive profits.

They threw down this piece of blackmail after the industry's watchdog Ofgas demanded that British Gas cut charges for use of its pipelines.

Even if all the savings were passed on to customers they would cut the typical household tax bill by a miserly 50p a week.

But the ordinary customer might get nothing.

Pipeline operators were quick to cry that their profits were so low that they were not necessarily able to pass on the proposed reductions to buyers.

But big business will gain handsomely. Larger industrial gas consumers, with plenty of muscle, stand to profit by upwards of £40,000 a year from the proposed reductions.

British Gas deputy chairman Philip Rogerson also said that even the modest curb on profits would threaten safety standards.

BY THE EDITOR

Rogerson said that an appeal would now be lodged with the Monopolies and Mergers Commission to get the decision overturned.

Scandal

THE history of British Gas has been little short of a scandal:

■ To buy votes the Tories ten years ago sold the industry at well below its real value. That is why British Gas shares shot up from 135p at

privatisation to a peak of 357p in 1994. This was a fantastic return on what is one of the lowest risk investments in the country.

■ Shares fell back over the last year only because of the crazy contracting policy of British Gas chiefs, who committed the company to purchasing gas for up to 20 years ahead at grossly inflated prices.

This led to the proposed splitting of the company in a way that means the domestic consumer will pay for this commercial folly.

■ British Gas's pipeline arm, Transco, has regularly resorted to questionable devices to boost its monopoly profits. It constantly inflates investment forecasts to justify high costs. It then squirrels away unspent budgets. Experts say British Gas has made £2bn by this dodge alone.

Experience

THERE are some important lessons for the working class from this experience:

■ Committees of workers and consumers, assisted by sympathetic accountants and economists, must examine every aspect of the finances of this privatised monopoly and the role of the government in its affairs.

■ The Labour leaders must be told: we want the industry renationalised, without compensation, and to be run under the control of these committees.

This is the only answer to British Gas's blackmail.

Mawhinney Four sentence

THE three students and one lecturer who threw orange paint at Tory MP Brian Mawhinney in protest at the Asylum and Immigration Bill were sentenced on Tuesday last week.

They were given sentences of community service or attendance centre orders. They were also ordered to pay costs.

The Land Is Ours squat in London — story page 3



International Trade Union Solidarity Campaign — African Liberation Support Campaign
Conference address: PO Box 18, Epsom, KT18 7YR, Britain. Tel/Fax: +441372 721 550

AN INTERNATIONAL WORKERS' CONFERENCE

- Trade unions independent of the state and the employers
- Democracy in the trade unions • Workers' internationalism

AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL

Saturday—Sunday 8—9 June, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1.

Near Holborn. Start 10.30am Saturday, 10am Sunday.

This important conference is convened jointly by the ITUSC and ALISC. It will follow the 'Africa Month' here in Britain. We will be discussing and deciding how to take forward workers' international solidarity in the coming struggles. Delegates will be travelling from Africa, India, Bangladesh, South America, Russia, Ukraine and eastern Europe.

Therefore, rather than have a set attendance fee we are asking you to give whatever you can towards the cost of the conference and the fares of those delegates. A draft resolution will be sent to you, and we ask you to keep in touch during the preparation of the conference and let us have any resolutions and/or written material on the issues you wish discussed.

Funds needed: send money now!

ITUSC meeting: Sunday 20 May, 2pm

Queen's Head pub, Acton Street, London.

King's Cross tube, off Gray's Inn Road

Agenda: Preparations for the International Workers' Conference on 8-9 June

All comrades and friends welcome

are certainly stirring'



is terrified by the anger of the unemployed

A regular panic

MEANTIME, as you probably know, the distress in this country has gone on increasing, till at last it has been recognised by the 'authorities'.

Making demands for state work for the unemployed was always a *cheval de bataille* [battle horse] for the SDF and after the split they went into this matter with special ardour, partly no doubt to try to recover the ground they had lost by this election intrigue: a few days before 8 February they had an excited meeting at Holborn Town Hall, where it was determined to meet again and take fresh action.

For amidst all this a set of discredited tenth-rate politicians had been (backed up by Tory money) busy in making capital for the so-called Fair Traders out of this unemployed business; they called a meeting for 8 February in Trafalgar Square and the SDF determined to try and take the meeting from them: we determined to take no part officially in what seemed likely to be a mere faction fight; though many of our members went there.

The meeting came off, and was very big, the people were clearly very much excited. The SDF completely beat the Fair Traders, and Hyndman, Williams and specially Burns spoke in their usual way — not over wisely I fear. One or two of our people also spoke. As far as the speeches went they were (as I hear, for I wasn't there) of the usual type. However the result was widely different from the usual — nothing to wit.

Burns and the others led the mob up to Hyde Park, doubtless meaning nothing more than an ordinary demonstration by it. All went well till they got to the Carlton, where they stopped to hoot, and where some fools in the windows fell to jeering them. This led to stoning the windows, and the crowd got quite

unmanageable and in Piccadilly they turned out two or three shops.

Well they got up to Hyde Park where the others including Champion addressed them again, bade them go home quietly and so forth. There some of the crowd behaved very ill frightening old ladies, upsetting carriages and the like, but the more part seem to have listened quietly.

And so the Socialist leaders went home. But meantime a return wave of the crowd went back from Hyde Park down Audley Street where they broke nearly all the windows and so into Oxford Street where they sacked several shops (as also in Audley Street) and broke much plate-glass (my own, 449, only escaping by about half a minute).

Well this was all the rioting but the next day and the next, foggy dreary weather by the way, the shopkeepers and others had a regular panic, and behaved as though London were on the point of being taken by storm: nothing can be conceived more absurd than their cowardice: all sorts of 'shaves' flying about, and the police bidding people in King Street, Hammersmith, to put up their shutters, people in Kilburn even shutting up.

The only foundation for this was that no doubt the East End was excited and if it had been anybody's business to do so a dozen eager resolute men could have got up a very serious riot. As it was people were far more frightened than hurt.

The next Sunday the SDF held a very orderly meeting in Hyde Park attended by 50 to 60,000 people. But the police behaved very ill and did their best to get up a row, the mounted ones charging the people who were there merely as spectators.

Next act was the arrest of the leaders and after a wearisome time before the Bow Street magistrate in which I assisted as bail for Burns and Williams (Bax bailing Champion,



William Morris's birthplace in Walthamstow, now part of Lloyd Park, where Waltham Forest TUC's May Day festivities are held

and Joseph Cowen, Hyndman) they were committed for trial which comes off on 5 April. Burns and Hyndman will I think be cast, Champion probably not and Williams certainly not.

Well this matter has rather drawn us and the Federation together, though some of us hardly approve of their defending themselves by law quibbles.

For the rest, contemptible as the riot was, as a riot, it no doubt has had a great effect, both here and on the continent: in fact the surprise of people in finding that the British workman will not stand everything is extreme. As for the League we are out of it at present: but the times seem to me both hopeful and rough; I fancy there will be another attempt on our meetings this summer and I rather expect to learn one more new craft — oakum-picking to wit, though I don't want to — far from it.

Socialist League

THE League itself is going on pretty well; our branch is much livelier than it was and our meetings have been well attended through the winter.

We are going to make the rash venture of publishing the *Commonweal*. I cannot say that I am sanguine as to its success as a selling paper, though I think we shall make it a

good one. However our people would have it, and it certainly will wake them up a bit.

On 18 March we had a meeting in Commemoration of the Commune at South Place: that was a great success, the place crowded. Kropotkin new come from prison spoke, and I made his acquaintance there: I like him very much: had a long talk with him yesterday evening at a gathering of the SDF. So you see as far as meeting goes the old quarrel is patched up.

I have been out and about lectur-

ing; and am going to Dublin a fortnight. The Irish matter is hanging in the wind by the by very queerly. Our statesmen fairly don't know what to do; would be glad to be able to say yes and no at the same time.

As for Socialism I must say that in spite of all faults and follies of the party I am encouraged about the movement. The dry bones are certainly stirring.

(from a letter written by William Morris to John Carruthers in Venezuela)

Some people mentioned:

John BURNS (1858-1943) engineer, member Amalgamated Society of Engineers and TUC. Helped organise 1889 dock strike. Elected MP for Battersea 1892, member of Liberal cabinet 1905, but resigned 1914 because of war.

Joseph CHAMBERLAIN (1836-1914) Birmingham mayor and MP, initially Radical who promoted municipal reforms, he moved to the right over Ireland, colonialism and protection, becoming leader in 1891 of Liberal Unionists, who became part of Tory party. Colonial Secretary 1895-1903.

Henry Mayers HYNDMAN (1842-1921) Founded Democratic Federation which became Social Democratic Federation in 1884. Regarded himself as English Marxist, but neither Marx, Engels nor many others could stand his sectarianism and chauvinism.

Prince Peter KROPOTKIN (1842-1921) Russian geographer and anarchist, escaped from Tsarist police to exile in Britain. Returned to Russia after 1917 Revolution.

