THE GRUNWICK STRIKE

STRUGGLE, SOLIDARITY, BETRAYAL AND DEFEAT. 60p
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INTRODUCTION

The dispute at Grunwick began nearly twenty months ago when a few workers walked out on a Friday afternoon in August 1976 in protest against the working conditions in this North London film processing factory. That initial walkout was the first spark that set alight the hitherto latent anger, frustration and discontent of a large section of Asian workers in the factory - so much so that nearly 140 workers were on strike within a week. It was a dispute involving immigrant workers that remained a relatively low key affair largely unheard of by large sections of British workers for nearly ten months. The postal blacking in November 1976, the Government instituted arbitration body ACAS's (Arbitration and Conciliatory Advice Service) recommendation of a union for the Grunwick workforce in March 1977, the Grunwick manager George Ward's refusal to abide by the ACAS report and NAPFF's (National Association For Freedom) involvement in the dispute caused a few stirs, but did not produce tidal waves. From such small stirrings, the Grunwick dispute became a mighty storm with the beginning of mass picketing in June 1977; a storm that set in motion a whole series of other issues, such as the powers (or the lack of them) of ACAS, the picketing laws, the mass picket as a weapon in industrial struggles, the postal workers' right to strike etc., to the obvious discomfort of the government, the political parties and the union leaderships.

From the mass arrests to the court rulings, the debates in the party congresses, the waning and vanishing of trade union support and the present unresolved status of the dispute, many questions arise. To cite a few: was it a peculiar set of circumstances that caused the Grunwick explosion? Why was it that a dispute involving immigrant workers attracted the attention of the unions (remember the Imperial Typewriters strike and the Mansfield Hosiery dispute)? Was it simply because APEX was an expanding union looking for recruitment to swell its ranks? What forms of support did the strikers receive? What was the basis on which the trade union support for Grunwick was built? What was responsible for the waning of the trade union support? Why was the relationship between the pickets and the police particularly bad long before the Grunwick dispute became a national issue? Are picketing laws the answer, as is being suggested? Why is it that a Bill concerning the postal workers' right to take industrial action is being pushed through a largely empty Parliament? The answers to these and such other questions bear rich and vital lessons for all working people. But, before the evolution of the Grunwick dispute and the issues it has raised can be analysed, it is necessary to recall the general background, the conditions pertaining to 1976.
2 THE GENERAL BACKGROUND

The 1973 miners' strike brought a change of Government. The minority Labour Government came into office in 1974, when the capitalist world was gripped by recession and inflation. The repeated emphasis on productivity schemes and the battles over these schemes were to come later in 1977.

During this period of economic crisis, unemployment reached proportions unseen in the post-war years. The 'Social Contract' that had been forged between the Labour Government and the TUC proved to be a forgery indeed. This 'Contract' had no positive answers to the questions posed by unemployment. It could not even stem the growth of unemployment, leaving aside the question of eroding unemployment. With a 'reserve army' of 1 ½ million, the employers were in a strong position to launch head-on battles against the workers. In periods of high employment the employers avoid direct confrontation with the workers; in periods of high unemployment when large numbers of workers are placed in a vulnerable position, the employers gather their arsenals and seek direct confrontation, in pursuance of their objectives of still further subjugating the working class and reinforcing the divisions among workers. This has been true historically. This time the attack on the workers came from many directions, not only from the wages policies or their interpretations. The real threat of lay-offs, the threat of being pushed into the dole queue, places those who had employment into defensive positions. The employers held the upperhand. Grunwick and its Managing Director, Ward were one of the first to test their strength by direct confrontation. The Grunwick dispute was the first of several conflicts where the employers were involved in a head-on battle with workers. By the summer of 1976 the mood among the workers was very different too. This situation was to play a large part in determining the course of action in support of the Grunwick strikers in the summer of 1977.

The economic and political atmosphere during this period is an important factor that has to be taken into account in analysing the response of other workers to the Grunwick dispute. Theories of spontaneous upsurge do not provide a coherent framework in which the Grunwick dispute and the response it evoked can be understood. The general dissatisfaction with the wages policy and unemployment and the Right-Wing attacks on the social legislation that were an integral part of the Social Contract played a crucial role in shaping the response of the working people to the Grunwick dispute.
The other aspect of the background to the dispute concerns racism and the Labour Party’s approach towards tackling it. The Grundy report on immigrant workers. They were mainly Ugandan and Kenyan Asians who came to Britain in the wake of the new policies of the African regimes. Their plight was, in fact, a direct outcome of the British colonial policies in Asia and Africa, policies that bound India with Britain’s African colonies in many visible and invisible threads. The Asians were encouraged to emigrate to Africa in the early decades of the twentieth century, to play a role in the lower echelons of the administrative and educational setups and to promote small scale businesses, a task that the British bourgeoisie left to the immigrant Asians since there were better cherries to be picked elsewhere. The net result of these colonial policies was that the Asians came to occupy a middle layer between the native Africans and the white Sahibs. In the aftermath of political independence to the African colonies, the economic problems that the governments in the ex-colonies faced, together with the fact that a small number of businessmen of Asian origin were accumulating a huge wealth and expanding their businesses at the expense of the native Africans, and coming into conflict with the interests of the rising bourgeoisie meant that the Asian community as a whole became the target of attack of the African governments. Businessmen were expelled along with school teachers and small shopkeepers from Uganda. Many left Kenya fearing similar expulsion. Thus came the exodus of the British passport holders of Asian origin in Africa to Britain. Their passage to this country was not without considerable harassment. On their arrival in Britain, these new immigrants were faced with the same prospect as the immigrants who were already working in this country.

Long before this latest influx of immigrants, many black immigrants had been working in this country. They had been working in small industries, unsociable hours and the worst working conditions. The exploitation in many of these industries was intense and many of them did not permit any form of organised representation for their workers. Because of their vulnerable position as immigrants, they had no option but to work under such conditions. The position of immigrant labourers in France and Germany at present and the struggles of the immigrant workers in America during the depression years to mind as similar cases. But such working conditions did not go without resistance. The history of immigrant workers’ struggles in this country is a long one. Immigrants, Wolfes in Southall (1963) to Imperial Typewriters in Leicester (1974).

The earliest such struggles took place in the early sixties. Wolfes was the first major struggle involving black immigrant workers that brought into the open the double exploitation working class on one hand, black workers and the other of most immigrant workers in this country. Throughout the sixties and the seventies, black workers have waged struggles in small textile factories that manufacture electrical components and plastics, in foundries, in motor assembling plants, in engineering industries and in service industries. The late sixties saw the foundries of the West Midlands explode in a succession of strikes by immigrant workers. The wages were as little as five shillings an hour, while unskilled wages workers had to work near high temperature furnaces. Safety precautions against burns and injuries were minimal. There were divisions on the shopfloor along the lines of skilled white against unskilled black. The unions did not fight these divisions, and in some cases even reinforced them. In 1968, at the Midland Motor Cylinder Company, the black workers protested against the promotion of a white worker to their position and the strike went on until the worker concerned was withdrawn. In 1969, at Newby and Son, a Foundry, the dismissal of 80 Asian workers for unofficial strike over wages led to a bitter struggle and the long strike of 1969, at Shotton Brothers, 22 black workers were dismissed in a dispute over wages. The union and the management had earlier negotiated a wage agreement.

In the early seventies, the textile industries in the East Midlands became the battleground for Asian workers fighting for higher wages and better working conditions. In May 1972, Nottingham County Council paid off the strike of Pakistani production workers at Crepe Sizes over the sack of 5 men. Towards the end of 1972, Asian workers at Marshfield Hofstein in Newbury fought for a strike on higher wages and against their denial of promotion to the skilled sections of production. In May 1973, the strike at B & J Affes and Malmie Lake was a culmination of ten months of organisation inside the factory during which the strikers had built up a branch of the TGWU and attempted to get their union recognised by the management. In 1971, at Fortune Middlesex, Asian workers fought for bonuses and against management’s push for productivity. There were many more such cases of struggles.

Then came the Imperial Typewriters dispute, the highpoint of those earlier battles. Asian workers at Imperial in Leicester, most of them women refugees from Uganda, struggled against the management and the white head that owned the factory. Its significance lay in that it brought into focus nearly all the issues that black workers faced on the shopfloor - the working conditions, the wage rates, systematic discrimination in training and promotion to skilled jobs and above all the role of the local trade union, TGWU, in blatantly sabotaging any initiative of black workers to fight this naked oppression. The strike at Imperials started because of economic wrongdoings, racial exploitation and differentiation between white and Asian workers. Starting with the better conditions, the struggle transformed into a demand for equal trade union rights for black workers on the shop floor, an all out battle against the management, the government agencies which attempted mediation and the TGWU which denied support to the strikers and attempted to assist the management in defeating them. In fact George Woolley, a TGWU official and union negotiator for thirty years, said about the Asian workers in dispute "The workers have not followed the proper dispute procedures. They have no legitimate grievances and it is difficult to see that they want. Some people must learn how things are done." He was not the only union official who did not understand the grievances of immigrant workers.
The Grunwick dispute started at a different time. The immigrant workers had been consolidating their own organisations and these organisations were growing in strength. Racism was reaching advanced proportions in a period of economic deterioration. The struggles over racial divisions on the shopfloor that marked most of the struggles during the early seventies spilled onto the streets in the summer of 1976. The pressures of the economic crisis played an undeniable role in bringing racialism out into the streets. True, the National Front had reached its ugly peak years earlier. But this time it was different. The rise in unemployment and the decay of the inner cities were the direct outcomes of the economic situation and they provided fertile new grounds for advancing the old fascist arguments with even more vigour. In 1976, it was not merely the NF marching down the immigrant localities, shouting abuse. This time there were many physical attacks on immigrants and people were killed in racist attacks. The murders of the two Asians in London were not the only ones. The response of the black communities was different too. There were not only anti-racistist marches, mobilising thousands of people in the streets of the cities, but also other forms of resistance. This time, the younger generation of the blacks were tackling the situation differently too. Many Asian Youth Organisations sprang up across the country such as the one in Blackburn, where young Asian workers developed completely new methods of countering racist abuse. Since the black communities could find no protection from the police when they were attacked by the Front supporters, the concept of self-defence began to take root.

These bold responses of the black communities to the racist challenge forced certain advanced sections of the labour movement to take notice. The Labour Party took notice too! The Government recognised the need to check the situation from getting out of hand. The need to check racism on the shopfloor was also recognised. Exposing the real causes of racism and uprooting it was not a task that the Labour Party would undertake. The response of the Labour Party was a typical social-democratic one. The plan they wanted to follow was to encourage black workers to join unions, to foster immigrant workers onto the same union pole as other British workers and keep them in check, while attempts to check racism on the shop floor would be made, however half heartedly, by some of the militant Labour Party members. This was a difficult task for the Labour Party, since the balancing act of the Labour Government required maintenance of the role of small scale industries in the economy, and it is these small industries which exploit immigrant workers most, and inevitably resist introduction of unions in their factories. The Labour Party made party political broadcasts on the racist poison. One did not expect these broadcasts to focus on the real causes of racism, such as Britain's imperialist history, and how the division of the working class into warring camps is, what Marx referred to as 'the secret of the impotency of the British working class' inspite of its organisation. Tom Jackson, the General Secretary of the Union of Postal Workers, presented one of these broadcasts in the summer of 1976. Actions were taken up by some white progressives on the factory floor to combat racism on the shopfloor and in the unions. The TUC organised marches against racism in an attempt to rally people. The Grunwick dispute began at the height of this most recent racist upsurge.
3 THE BEGINNINGS OF THE DISPUTE

Grunwick is a small film processing plant in London. Its Managing Director, George Ward, an Angel who had set up the factory nearly ten years ago on very small financial investments with the technical help of a few of his friends. Initially Grunwick processed and developed black and white films, and within a few years the business established itself with the increasing boom in equipment and a few rapid photographers even developed black and white films. Later the business established itself in the mail-order film processing business. Ward claimed that the average hour worked by the workers had to be at times over 12 hours with compulsory overtime included as a clause in the terms of employment. It meant unsociable hours, and the workers had to agree to take their holidays outside the summer months, a period during which the business was highly busy. Over 70% of its business was conducted through mail-orders - films processed and mailed to the customers through the Post Office.

The Brent area, in which the Grunwick factory is situated at present, has a large concentration of immigrants, with unemployment particularly high. The Financial Times (30 June 1977) provided the rationale: "An immigrant community can only obtain a place of advantage for itself in the host economy if it is prepared to work for less pay than the existing host community." The courts can only rule on whether Ward had acted unfairly. The judgement as to whether their willingness to agree to such employment was a reflection of the vulnerable position in which they were placed is outside the scope of the courts.

The factory provided no scope for any form of organised representation for its workers. The factory operated a Works Committee system, which was in effect a human suggestions box for any grievances of the workers. The Mail-Order Department was excluded from even this system. A glance through the minutes of the Works Committee reveals that with the management side presiding over the meeting, it was impossible to discuss issues relating to the workers. Until the workers organised themselves and could counter the management from a strong position, such discussions would be futile. They were merely a union in the factory. In 1973, twelve workers joined the TGWU but the management refused to negotiate their unionisation and sacked them. The industrial courts ruling that this had been fair. The strike lasted only eight weeks. The Brent Trades Council had taken note of the strike and Tom Durkin, the present President of the Trades Council participated in efforts to help the strikers. The factory management has continued to claim that it is not anti-union, merely non-union.

The grievances of the workers were many and they were not merely about wages. There were arbitrary sackings on the flimsiest of excuses. The testimonies presented in the Scaman Court of Inquiry, by the management, about past sackings, amply proves that Grunwick was running a Kingdom of its own with its own arbitrary rules regarding every issue. Ward is said to have remarked that he could fire anyone (as the surname) for £15 any day. Wage increases in the two years preceding the strike were between £2 and £3 per week. There was discrimination in job training and job promotion. Some people who helped train new white recruits found themselves as subordinates soon after the training was completed. There was continual rule that they had to work on holidays. The management would inform the workers at short notice that they were working overtime that day. Many of the women workers were mothers with family responsibilities but such matters were of no concern to the management. They were 'operating according to the letter of the law'. Workers could be sacked for arguing or because they were unable to reach the factory on time. The testimony at the Court of Inquiry, we learn about the dismissal of a worker who could not come to work because there was a bus strike. This is the management that the unions are up against. The unions are protected by the law from civil libel suits; and that because of such legal protection they cannot sue APEX for the description of the workers' actions in the factory in the Strike Committee bulletin as 'a management lifted out of the Dickens era'; of course they go by the rule of secrecy. The starting wages were £25 for a 35 hour week and £28 for a 40 hour week, and the average wages were only slightly above these figures. There was no shortage of complaints before August 1976.
It was on Friday August 23 1976, that Devshi Bhudia, a young Asian worker, was going through his workload in a go-slow fashion as a form of protest. Subsequent heated argument with his supervisor led to his walkout. That same evening Mrs Desai, who had been working in the factory for a long time protested about the short notice received that evening regarding overtime work and she argued with the manager. She appealed to the other workers present in that area about the arbitrary decisions and walked out saying that she was resigning before she was sacked. Her son was working in the same firm and a few others also walked out. Much was made at the Scarman Inquiry about whether Devshi Bhudia had been sacked or had resigned. Both matters are of consequence in the discussion of the subsequent development of the dispute. Only the industrial courts concern themselves with actual happenings that evening to individuals in isolation, to determine whether the walkout had been 'proper'.

Suffice it to say the walkout of these few workers was a spark, at a time when the general dissatisfaction of the workers had matured into an explosive anger, and their frustrations could no longer be suffered in isolation.

That weekend the workers who had walked out discussed feverishly the avenues open to them and an idea of a union was floated around. They sought help from the Citizen's Advice Bureau. The CAB advised them to approach the Brent Trades Council. They met Jack Dromey, the secretary of Brent Trades Council. This meeting led to their contact with Len Griesty, the area organiser of APEX, the clerical workers union. Jack Dromey was later to become the strikers' situation, at the Court of Inquiry as a bunch of chickens outside of a coop!, a remarkable characterisation by a veteran of the TU movement, of the inexperience of the mostly young strikers. The strikers held a mass meeting on August 24 and elected an interim Strike Committee. At the meeting the strikers decided to approach the management with demands of reinstatement of sacked or victimised workers, and then proceed to negotiate on their grievances - pay, working conditions, compulsory overtime etc. They mounted a picket on Monday and many more joined the strike at the Chapter Road factory. They then marched to the Cobbold Road factory and the management, waking up to what was happening, closed the factory gates and refused permission for the strikers to appeal to their brethren inside. This led to scuffles and violent scenes in which some windows of the factory were broken.

The management was to make much of this later. The number of strikers increased every day and by the end of the week there were 137 workers on strike, 91 staff and 46 students. They had elected a proper strike committee on August 25.

It is interesting to note the contents of Len Griesty's letter in the first week of the dispute to Grantham, the APEX General Secretary, about the Grunwick dispute. The letter refers to the difficulties that would be encountered in obtaining reinstatement for some of those who had walked out early. The letter also warns 'a further difficulty is that the militants amongst the Asian community are going to get hold of the matter for their own political purposes, this has to be watched very carefully indeed'. Len Griesty's reference is to the Asian youths from Southall, the scene of violent racist attacks that summer, who got in touch with the strikers. Len Griesty also pointed out that most of those who had filled union forms were still working inside. A peculiar problem indeed! Len Griesty attempted to meet the management but without much success. The government attitude at that moment was, 'it's not our fight'.

The management's only response was to sack the strikers. The letter to the strikers read, 'Your participation in strike action has brought the contract to an end, and accordingly your employment with this company has ceased. Access for work done to date are enclosed. Any accrued holiday pay and the form P.45 will follow. ' Jack Dromey remarked then if we took these dismissals to an industrial tribunal we would be confident of winning reinstatement. This is a clear case of unfair dismissal as defined under the Trade Union and Industrial Relations Act 1974. The Wembley Observer and Wembley News (September 14, 1976) reported that it was not likely that APEX would be fighting the dismissals at the Tribunal, and that APEX wanted to win all their demands through collective bargaining before the next issue before the law. The strikers then initiated blanking of materials going into the factory. Van drivers not co-operating with the blanking were contacted. Strikers believed that within a matter of days workers at Cricklewood Post Office would be told by their union to return all mail addressed to the company.

The APEX Union Journal August/September 1976 remarked that the breaking of the Employment Protection Act, which guarantees the right to join a union and engage in industrial action, at least that is what they believed then! At the annual TUG Conference on September 15 Roy Grantham commented that the Grunwick strike had exposed the scandal of poverty line wages and feudal like conditions endured by many immigrant workers. The condition that Grunwick are the worst I have come across. Our members are being exploited by an employer more suited to the days of the British Empire than to the modern civilised state. In the past many workers have been unaware of their legal rights. But these days are now numbered as these British Citizens join unions to fight for decent and fair treatment at work. The strikers' aim is to win legal and just rights, reinstatement of the dismissed, negotiated salary increases denied them in the recent past and to ensure that the employers respect their rights in the future. Roy Grantham had offered to meet representatives of the company but the company had not taken up. Roy Grantham's speech was followed by that of Tom Jackson (UPW General Secretary) who pledged that his union would do everything to help the Grunwick workers. The dispute was televised nationally. The Strike Committee was optimistic that not only the 2000 delegates at the Conference but the Trade Union movement nationally would be swinging their weight behind them.

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Grunwick workers collecting their strike pay following their mass meeting. October 1 1976. Andrew Wiard (Report).

4 THE EMPLOYMENT PROTECTION ACT, APEX, THE TUC AND THE GOVERNMENT.

As mentioned earlier, Roy Grantham (APEX General Secretary) brought the Grunwick dispute under the aegis of the Trade Union movement at the TUC Congress in Brighton (September 1976) as an issue involving the immigrant workers. In response UWf pledged support and the TUC instructed its members not to cross the picketlines. Workers at Heathrow started blacking material for the Company entering or leaving the country. While APEX was seeking support from other unions, APEX also sought meetings with the Company's representatives, but these attempts were to no avail.

The arbitration body, ACAS, set up after the Industrial and Labour Relations Act (1974) was passed, was at odds with the TUC thinktank and its liaison with the Labour Party. Therefore ACAS was sounded about the Grunwick dispute. But the attempts of ACAS to talk to the Company ran into trouble because of the stone-walling tactics of George Ward, the Managing Director of Grunwick. At the Blackpool Labour Party Conference (October 1976) Grantham contacted Albert Booth, the Secretary of State for Employment about the problems posed by Ward. At the Executive Council meeting during the next week, it was decided that a formal request to the Secretary should be made asking for a full report from his department.

"Under the 1975 Employment Protection Act an employee has the right not to have action short of dismissal taken against him by his employer to prevent or deter him, from being or seeking to become a member of an independent trade union or for taking part in its activities at what are agreed to be appropriate times. This right is in addition to the Trades Union and Labor Relations Act 1974, which makes a sacking unfair, if, under "sole or principal reason" in ACAS, to become a member of a union or to take part in its activities. Claims for unfair dismissal under the 1975 Act can be made to an industrial tribunal. But if employees are dismissed solely as a result of strike action in support of a recognition dispute, they cannot claim unfair dismissal unless the employer discriminates against some of them, for example, by taking back only a proportion when the dispute is over. Mr Roy Grantham said that they were not particularly anxious to start industrial tribunal proceedings because they had 300 members dismissed or on strike and the machinery was not really satisfactory for dealing with the dispute at this stage. They had not used ACAS machinery because it was dealing with a large number of cases and they did not want to jump the queue. If there was favourable recommendation from any inquiry set up by the Minister and this was ignored by the Company, they could then seek the services of ACAS."

At the point of view of the Government, ACAS, the Government machinery had been set up precisely to resolve industrial disputes such as Grunwick and hence ACAS had to have an attempt at resolving the dispute. The strikers held a mass picket outside 10 Downing Street on 15 October, to impress upon the Prime Minister the need for the speedy convening of a Court of Inquiry. But this apparently had no effect since the Government was set on a particular course of action.

On the 16 October, Booth rejected an inquiry but suggested a reference to ACAS, under Section 11 of the Employment Protection Act under which ACAS could rule that a management should recognise a union, in spite of the fact that the Company had refused to meet ACAS twice in the first six weeks of the dispute. Booth told union leaders that he could not order a Court of Inquiry until both sides agree and that the Grunwick management had refused. The APEX union journal argued that the Secretary of State had this power to call a Court of Inquiry but that it was used only in highly exceptional circumstances.

Roy Grantham met the ACAS officials the next day. But Mr Sid Vickers, the union Area Secretary was not too hopeful of an early settlement pointing out that ACAS at a local level had tried to organise meetings between the two sides but that these had had no effect. The APEX union journal explained:

"APEX has submitted a claim for recognition to ACAS. This move is possible under Section 11 of the EPA which allows ACAS to recommend that an employer recognise an independent trade union. Should the employer still resist, the union can then seek a legally binding award from the CAB (Central Arbitration Committee). This however can prove a lengthy process."

It is useful to remember that the powers of ACAS, which APEX accepted willingly, came under question nine months later. It is also clear that ACAS was fully aware of the long drawn-out nature of the procedures of the Government arbitration machinery. Need one remind APEX that picketing through winters waiting for the machinery to get rolling is not exactly a pleasant occupation.

While such discussions on what machinery was to be used and how were taking place, Ward's position vis-a-vis the strikers became clear. In a TV interview on Thames Television on October 19 1976, Ward lied that only 30 people were still picketing and that 275 were still working. He also claimed that no worker had been sacked, that those who had walked out had broken their contract and thereby terminated their employment and that the whole dispute was a publicity stunt engineered by militants. During the subsequent weeks Ward refused to co-operate with ACAS.

On the 29 October, the Executive Committee of the UWf decided to instruct all its members not to handle Grunwick mail. The blacking initiated by the Cinelink ceased into effect on November 1. There was the usual uproar in Parliament about 'law-breaking'. On November 5, the postal workers were instructed by Jackson to withdraw from the sympathetic action. Jackson claimed that the decision to lift the blacking had been taken because the Company had agreed to co-operate with ACAS and abide by the
result of the inquiry. In other words, the postal blacking was seen only as a means of forcing the company to negotiate with ACAS. As a tactic, the blacking, more than anything else, had frightened the company. Ward had said that the company faced liquidation by the end of the week. But Ward had not said this to the union or to the workers. The postal blacking had the effect of encouraging six workers from the factory to join the strikers.

The strikers were led to believe that ACAS would be conducting a ballot in a matter of days. ACAS would put more obstacles on the ACAS path refusing to give there list of workers inside the factory which was required by ACAS to carry out the ballot. The lifting of the blacking and the support of his right wing friends gave him new found courage to oppose any mediation attempts.

On November 17, the strike committee representatives met with the London Regional Council of UWFIUAW in a bid to ensure further support for ACAS initiative to have an effect on the Company's attitude. Ninety Labour and Commons meetings had condemned Grunwick for the working conditions within the plant. Three weeks after the postal blacking was lifted, the ballot still had not been carried out. As early as the November, APEX had complained to ACAS that the Company was delaying the ballot. ACAS had given the company until Nov 17 to agree upon the list of those to be balloted. The deadline passed. Ward refused entry to the company to ACAS saying that he was consulting a QC. On November 22 Ward rang APEX to tell them that he was objecting to the ballot on legal grounds and asked ACAS not to send their team on the following day. On the 26 APEX learnt that the Company was objecting to those on strike being balloted, since they were, according to the Company, sacked, and objected to ACAS "going outside of the Company" to carry out the ballot. During this period of delaying tactics, the Company had given those still at work a 15% across-the-board pay rise. But Ward continued to refuse to co-operate by raising new obstacles. But the strikers maintained contact with UWFIUAW hoping that the blacking could be recurred. At the December 10 meeting of Brent Trades and Labour Hall many bigwigs of the Trade Union movement were present. No firm action was promised but general statements of support were made. These were calls for blacking at the meeting, but the response of the Trade Union officials was only cautious promises.

Unable to elicit the Company's support in conducting a ballot in the first week of January. This meant that ACAS balloted only the workers on strikes, leaving questions to be answered later on in the court cases. ACAS was expected to reach a decision at its full Council meeting on January 12 1977, but the decision was not reached. In the subsequent period APEX submitted a claim to the Company for improvement in pay and conditions of employment under Section 11 of the EPA and intended to pursue this claim irrespective of whether ACAS recognised the union or not. In the second week of February, after sixteen weeks of investigation, ACAS sent a report in draft form to both sides recommending that it should recognise the union to which the strikers belonged. APEX hailed the report as a 'great victory' but Ward's response was, by then, predictable. Ward argued "There is no law in the land that says I have to recognise the union or take people back. We will fight on, through the courts, if necessary." He further added "We cannot feel bound by the report... There are no jobs here now. They are out. If I take any of them back, I would probably leave myself open to action for unfair dismissal." Ward and his legal advisers were aware of the law concerning industrial disputes, had found loopholes in them and were determined to exploit them fully.

The final version of the ACAS report was published on March 9. It was clear that the Grunwick management would take ACAS to court to seek clarification of the existing laws. It became apparent that the balloting would be carried out by the legal manoeuvres.

After Ward's rejection of the ACAS report, Roy Grantham maintained "the dispute threatens it now."

In the meantime Ward claimed that a market research firm had conducted a ballot inside the factory, department by department, and had come to the conclusion that his workers did not want a union. Ward had spoken earlier to his APEX members for the loud "no" to the union. After the ballot, Ward had told those who had voted "yes" that they were free to leave. By now Ward's challenge to ACAS had become the focus of attention of the trade union officials. Contrary to this position, a letter signed by Jack Dromey and Tom Durkin of the Brent Trades Council in February 1977 argued:

"Grunwick is not just another dispute. The eyes of millions of unorganised workers and their employers are on it. So too are the eyes of the black community. The strikers have received support which has been unprecedented for a struggle of black workers for basic Trade Union rights. But they can not understand why our great movement seems shackled by the law, by the EPA and by the trade union leaders."

Welcoming trade union action in support of black workers in South Africa, they ask, "Why can't the union now take such a united approach and cut off all services to Grunwick?"

"The strike is a test, for the whole movement and it has starkly posed questions about the direction we are going in and in particular the effect on the movement of the flurry of social legislation that has been the corner stones of the Social Contract. The legal rights that this ballot, ACAS report and the machinery for enforcing them may be the only alternative in the small and poorly organised workplace but the Employment Protection Act is no substitute for the education and action. All too often the machinery is used to blunt the cutting edge of our movement."

"If our opposition to exploitation and racism means anything we cannot allow the brave men and women of Grunwick to be defeated. A defeat would be a major blow for the confidence of black workers in it."

"We must not allow ourselves to be paralyzed by the NAFF.... Above all the full power of the Trade Union movement should be used to bring the strike to a speedy and victorious end."

'The miners, engineers, dockers and others threatened the Tories and killed the Industrial Relations Act. A fraction of that power would soon sober Grunwick too. "Why not use
both Section 11 of the EPA which lays down a clear procedure for union recognition and the authority of ACAS. The folly of linking the resolution of the Grunwick dispute to the test of the powers of ACAS was not accepted even at this stage.

In April, the company went to the High Court to have the recommendation of ACAS set aside, claiming that ACAS acted outside its powers in making an arbitration award and therefore the recommendation was void. Roy Grantham could only moan about the writ being a 'legal nonsense'. The Villasen and Brent Chronicle argued that the whole of the EPA hung on the resolution of the Grunwick dispute. When the Strike Committee decided to call mass picketing in June, APEX had already produced a broadsheet about the Grunwick dispute for distribution throughout the Trade Union movement.

The APEX broadsheet headlined, "Why it is essential that we win this dispute", argued:

"For Trade Unionists this is a crucial strike. It is a strike for a fundamental right - for employees to be able to join a trade union without harassment by an employer and to have that union recognised. The law itself which helps define the right - the Employment Protection Act - is now being challenged in the High Court by this Company. Whatever the outcome in the courts this strike must be won, for it will be a blow for that basic right. It would be a signal for other employers to follow the example set by Grunwick and its advisers throughout the dispute, the curiously named National Association for Freedom. Employers would be able to sack workers asking for recognition. Employers, like Grunwick do not co-operate in an ACAS inquiry could then challenge in the courts the ACAS recommendation. If the determination of the strikers and their union is matched by other trade unionists, the strike will be won.

"The broadsheet appealed for blacking of all Grunwick's materials and goods and quoted the actual ACAS recommendation. 'From the tone of the broadsheet, it is clear that APEX was appealing to the Trade Unions' instinctive anathema towards the hard won rights of workers being attacked and challenged by the right wing.'

The Financial Times (June 10 1977) argued:

"The strike is rapidly approaching its climax as a major test case for the Government's radical legislative measures enshrined in the EPA, a major plank in the Government part of the Social Contract. In most cases, the Act has worked as planned - via the Arbitration and Conciliatory Advice Service - upon reluctant but not recalcitrant employers. At Grunwick, the inevitable legal challenge from a recalcitrant employer had arisen. Even without the significant legal implication of the dispute - which not only is being used to senior Whitehall and ACAS officials as a test case - but is also being closely watched by companies keen to jump on the band wagon if Grunwick wins... eventually it promises to enter the annals of modern industrial relations folklore. There have been constant allegations of violence and intimidation of pickets, several arrests and serious deterioration of local community relations with the police...

"The legal challenge mounted by Grunwick to the ACAS decision may assume greater national significance. If Grunwick wins, it is likely to unleash a flood of similar challenges to ACAS recommendations and add weight to those who believe that ACAS is unduly favourable to the Trade Unions. It would seriously undermine the strength of ACAS's provision in helping unions in a number of areas, including discipline and disclosure of information... Within the next weeks, therefore, APEX will - under Section 16 of the Act apply to the Central Arbitration Committee for a full inquiry. APEX argues that until the Court decision on the validity of the ACAS report is made, the recommendation stands. It will ask the CAC to uphold the ACAS recommendation. When the CAC granted Grantham to grant recognition. However, as the APEX appeal is also likely to be a test case for the CAC, it remains to be seen just what power such a CAC recommendation would have."

The similarity in the arguments of the APEX broadsheet and the Financial Times, the southeaster of capitalism, is striking. Everyone, by now, seemed to be concerned about the EPA etc and the whole question of the Grunwick strikers themselves was pushed to a secondary role.

The period before the mass picketing began was characterised by anxiousness by APEX and the Government to get the ACAS machinery rolling. Even though in the initial stages of the dispute, Grantham wanted a Court of Inquiry to look into the dispute, his reasons were merely technical: not wanting the dispute to be one of the first cases before ACAS, or that the ACAS machinery was not suitable at that stage of the dispute. When the Government insisted that ACAS was created precisely to handle disputes such as the Grunwick dispute, Grantham accepted the argument. Thereafter, the main efforts of APEX were directed towards getting ACAS to resolve the question of union recognition. Grantham's proposal was rejected by Ward, APEX agreed with the Strike Committee to call for mass picketing, and the ACAS report was held up until the APEX did seek support from other unions, it was on the basis that the EPA was being challenged by an employer. APEX saw the mass picketing as a way of putting pressure on the Company and at the same time drawing the attention of the Government to the seriousness of the dispute.

When the mass picketing, which began on June 13 1977, started to gather momentum, Grantham urged the Government to set up a Court of Inquiry. In response, Booth invited Ward, Grantham and Jim Mortimer (Chairman of ACAS) to a meeting in his office with the aim of finding ways to end the mass picketing and start new talks. But Ward refused Booth's invitation for talks at the Department of Employment saying that Booth should come to the factory, instead to meet him. But Booth continued to press for a Court of Inquiry. When the mass picketing began to intensify and the dispute reached political dimensions, unprepared by Grantham, the Government became concerned and a Cabinet ad hoc Committee was formed to assess and defuse the situation. The Cabinet ad hoc Committee that started meeting in one of the rooms of the mass picketing, planned to have Grunwick's Court case against ACAS brought forward. As a result, the Court hearing was advanced to July 4. Booth finally met Ward and asked for his views on a Court of Inquiry but Ward kept insisting that he would not act by the legal Court judgement. The APEX Court of Inquiry did not have the force of law. On June 26, the Cabinet Committee met under the Prime Minister's Chairmanship and agreed to consider setting up of a Court of Inquiry. But Booth, who still believed in his mediation attempts, was reluctant to arrange a Court of Inquiry. As the scenes at the factory gates were an embarrassment and threat to the Government, the Court of Inquiry was seen as a way of
defusing the situation. On June 30, Booth announced the setting up of a three man Court of Inquiry into the circumstances of the dispute. Lord Justice Scarmann, Mr Terry Farrry (General Secretary of the Fire Brigades Union) and Pat Lowry (Personnel Director of British Leyland) were named as members of the Court. There was a heated debate in Parliament and all parties were appealing to cool it on the picket lines. Booth strenuously appealed for a calm atmosphere. Ward insisted that he would cooperate with the Court of Inquiry as long as its report was not regarded as compulsory on the parties.

Ward also claimed that an industrial tribunal had cleared him of the accusation that he had sacked some of his workers for being members of trade unions. But in reality, the tribunal, the Appeal Court had cleared the dispute. The Prime Minister appealed to both sides to defuse the situation.

The High Court case on Grunwick's appeal against ACAS began on July 4. The Court of Inquiry was formed on the same day but adjourned until July 11 to let the High Court complete the ACAS case. On July 12, a day after the biggest mass picket, the High Court upheld the ACAS report that recommended that all Grunwick employees be compensated. The Prime Minister appealed to both sides to "draw back" but Ward insisted that he would fight the judgement right down the line, the Appeal Court being the first stage. Scannan hailed the judgement as a "splendid victory ".

Ward persisted with his defiant tactics. On July 20, a secret ballot conducted at Grunwick by Gallup polls produced an 85% vote against any Trade Union negotiating pay and conditions. Scannan described the opinion poll as "a farce" and said that it was meaningless in context of the dispute. The Strike Committee said that the opinion poll was worthless because it was carried out in a "climate of fear." The company had earlier dismissed four drivers who had taken part in the ballot. The NAG and Ward were still threatening legal action against the postmen. On the 26th, the House of Lords overturned the Appeal Court verdict that a private individual had the right to go over the head of the Attorney General to bring a court action to stop a crime being committed. On the 27th, the Scarmann Inquiry completed taking evidence in public and retired to consider the verdict.

On July 29, the Appeal Court found in favour of Grunwick, overturned the High Court decision on ACAS and declared the ACAS report void. After the Court verdict, Scannan met the TUC over the Appeals Court decision and to explore what could be done to clear up what was widely regarded as a serious flaw in the EPA. On August 1st, ACAS decided to take the Appeals Court verdict to the House of Lords. On August 6th, seven Grunwick drivers, who were dismissed after joining the TGWU and striking in support of the Grunwick pickets, failed to win reinstatement from an Industrial Tribunal. The House of Lords upheld the Appeal Court verdict on December 15 1977.

The Employment Protection Act states that "... when a recognition issue is referred to the Service (ACAS) the Service shall examine the issue, shall consult all parties and, if it is satisfied that the outcome of the reference and shall make such enquiries as it thinks fit... In the course of its inquiries into a recognition issue... the Service shall consider the opinions of workers to whom the issue relates by any means it thinks fit", the key words being "workers to whom the issue relates" and "shall ascertain". Ward had been arguing that the grunwick strikers whom he had sacked were not workers to whom the issue related. On the Question of what ACAS should have done before it made its recommendations, the High Court on the one hand, the Appeal Court and the House of Lords on the other differed in their opinions. Since ACAS had attempted to get the opinion of all Grunwick employees, including the strikers, but Ward had refused to cooperate with ACAS, the High Court thought that ACAS had done its best. The High Court interpreted "shall ascertain" to mean in favour of ACAS. The Appeal Court interpreted "shall ascertain" to mean in a directory sense, i.e. as a guideline, and not in a mandatory sense, i.e. as a compulsory condition. It interpreted "shall ascertain" to mean "shall ascertain insofar as reasonably practicable". Since the High Court was satisfied that ACAS had tried everything it thought possible, the judgement went in favour of ACAS. The Appeal Court interpreted "shall ascertain" to mean in a mandatory sense that ACAS must ascertain the opinion of all workers before it can make a recommendation. The judges argued that since the majority of Grunwick workers were at home, the obstacles were. ACAS should not have made any recommendations. According to the Appeal Court judges the fact that Ward did not supply the names and addresses of those still working did not mean that ACAS had exhausted all possibilities of obtaining the opinions of the workers whose names and addresses it did not possess. The judges even gave examples of methods by which ACAS could have obtained their opinions without Ward's cooperation. The House of Lords agreed with the Appeal Court interpretation and the judges. The judges also ruled that Grunwick had done the best it could, that an employer was under no legal obligation to cooperate with ACAS in its consultation or inquiries in a recognition issue, however "sensible" it might be to do so. In other words, an employer can cooperate with ACAS as much as or as little as he himself considered expedient. The Lords ruled that if the employer was not to be compelled to do more than was required of him in the EPA, an amendment to the Act would be needed. They also ruled that if ACAS, somehow, had obtained the opinion of all the workers, and came to a certain conclusion and recommendation the courts would have no jurisdiction over the judgement of ACAS.

It is amusing to see how the whole issue had hinged on the interpretation of a particular phrase. After the Appeal Court decision ACAS faced increasing resistance from some other companies over the processing of union recognition claims. On November 30 1977, the Advisory Service said that, in the wake of the Grunwick hearings, a small number of large companies had now become distinctly more obstinate towards acting within what ACAS believed to be the spirit of the law dealing with employment protection and union recognition. It also became apparent that such resistance was coming from large foreign based concerns, many of which had
On December 6, Jack Jones called for an extension of the role of ACAS as a key aid to the reduction of strikes. In his Richard Dimbleby Lecture for the BBC, Jack Jones warned of the delays, frustration and ill-feeling which was putting ACAS "in real danger of being undermined, and called the negative attitude towards conciliation and arbitration, such as Ward's rejection of the findings of the Scarman Inquiry, as "industrial sabotage." The Financial Times (7-12-77) emphasised that Jack Jones was echoing industrialists' appeal for industrial peace at a time when the Government is stretched to sustain economic recovery and that according to Jones the maintenance of peaceful industrial relations was more important and more urgent than a further period of pay restraint. The Financial Times (9-12-77) argued about the need to re-shape ACAS. After the House of Lords judgement, Rob Grantham said that under the present EPA, an employer need not cooperate with ACAS in supplying information vital to it in making recommendations. He added "clearly this is a Catch-22 situation. The ball is now firmly at the feet of Parliament to put it right. If someone can obstruct a body established by Parliament, the law will have to be amended."

The Labour Party agreed with such arguments. Two bills have been tabled in Parliament by Ted Fletcher and Ian Mikardo that seek to amend the EPA to attempt to close the loopholes.

After the Court judgements, APEX asked ACAS to conduct a new ballot at Grunwick. ACAS, taking into account the arguments by the judges in their court verdicts, attempted to conduct a new ballot, but Ward continued to refuse cooperation. Four months after this new attempt started, the ballot had not been carried out. Yet, the annual report of ACAS for 1977, was still hopeful of resolving the union recognition question at Grunwick through negotiations. James Mortimer (Chairman of ACAS) said on April 13 1978 "We have still to ascertain the views of all the workers, and we are in touch with the union and the company on how to do that. Since the House of Lords case last December we have been trying to find a settlement of the recognition claim that will be acceptable to the company and the union. We have not yet been successful. But Mr Ward is talking to us and has replied to all our correspondence. There are no complaints on our part about the response." The ACAS chairman indeed has grounds for optimism, for he can always fall back on the 71% success rate of ACAS in the 2,891 disputes in which it mediated in 1977. As for the rest of the disputes, one could forever argue that "nobody is perfect", or "more legislation can cure these ills".

In the third week of May, 1978, George Ward ended the four month long negotiations with ACAS, with a refusal to allow a ballot of his workers over the question of union recognition. According to newspaper reports a number of Labour MPs were outraged. ACAS predicted that alternative plans would be worked out including a public meeting or a canvas at the gates, which are still being picketed by the Grunwick strikers.

Summary

The Employment Protection Act had been regarded by the Government and the Unions as a major plank of the 'Social Contract'. The legislations, and their provisions for resolving industrial disputes had been trumpeted around as a mighty achievement for the working class. Even after glaring loopholes had been revealed and exploited by a recalcitrant employer, many Trade Union leaders still refuse to draw the inevitable conclusions but argue as Jack Jones did in calling for an extension of the role of ACAS to secure 'industrial peace', the favourite slogan of the employers. The Grunwick dispute has helped to show in a salutory fashion what a farce the 'Social Contract' has been. To those who wax lyrical about the achievements of the EPA, one might ask "What about the EPA? Has ACAS failed to resolve?" Even if the amendments to the EPA, to rectify the loopholes that have been made apparent, succeed in Parliament, the basic question still remains. The problem is that, with regard to Grunwick, it was not so much that there were loopholes in the law, but that loopholes in it were found by the employer and the Court Judges. Laws will always be written with words, and words are always susceptible to interpretation in a context. The whole edifice of the legal profession relies on the fact that the law can be interpreted and then applied. The question that is posed is "who interprets the laws and for whom?" In spite of Michael Foot's occasional outbursts about the judges and how industrial disputes should not be left in their laps, the practice of the Labour Party and Trade Union leaders proves that they still maintain to the workers that this or that law will alleviate their problems and thereby continue to cloud the vision of the workers and perpetrate the mystifications this entails. If the amendments go through, the Grunwick case will remain an example of the amendment will still be susceptible to interpretation by the courts, by the judges alienated from the masses of workers and their grievances. It is not that "it shall be ascertain", on some other string of words or phrases.

The Grunwick dispute, by showing up in glaring fashion the inability of laws to resolve industrial disputes has helped to show the 'Social Contract' for what it really is. It has helped to show how the workers lose on both sides of the deal called the 'Social Contract'; wage reductions on the one side, impotent labour legislations on the other. It has helped to show how the legal mechanism is used to liquidate struggles by workers.
5. SUPPORT FOR THE STRIKE

Within days of the initial walkout by the Grunwick workers, the Brent Trades Council, with its vast network within the Trade Union movement built through years of patient work, arrived on the scene to aid the strikers. The militants in the Brent Trades Council, schooled in the traditional forms of Trade Union struggles through years of Trade Union experience, offered their help to the strikers. The strikers accepted their offer. Thus began a cooperation that was to have significant implications on the course of resistance to Ward.

The Brent Trades Council quickly set about the task of showing the strikers how to go about organising and gathering support for the strike. The experience of the Brent Trades Council proved to be a vital asset in opening up the traditional trade union avenues. On September 10 1976 two weeks after the strike began, the strikers held a march which was followed by a meeting at the Brent Trades and Labour Hall addressed by local factory convenors and Trades Council officials. A delegation from among the strikers went on a tour of all the large local workplaces in Brent. The strikers received messages of support from the strikers at Trico, Brentford where the women workers were struggling for equal pay.

The management's response to the strike was to bring in scab labour, the relatives of some of those still working, to try to break the strike. It was alleged that the strike breakers were being paid special rates well above the normal wage levels. The management resorted to intimidation. Confidential school records of one of the members of the strike committee were read out and one of the Directors of the company threatened to 'bring down a few boys from Kilmarnock' to sort out the pickets. On September 11 one of the directors accelerated his car as he was passing through the picket line on Chapter Road and his brand new Jaguar XJ6 ran over the foot of the treasurer of the strike committee, Mrs Jayaben Dass, but fortunately the injury was not too serious. Such intimidation from the management only strengthened the strikers' resolve. To the dismay of Ward who perhaps had believed that the strike would not last long.

On September 12, APEX agreed to pay strike pay to the strikers, backdated to September 1, the day of the official declaration of the strike by APEX. Soon after Grantham brought the Grunwick dispute to the attention of the TUC, workers at Heathrow started blacking material for the company entering or leaving the country. In an attempt to beat this blacking, the Company switched its continental work from Heathrow to Luton and Stansted airports. But within 48 hours both were closed off, since APEX had written to every airport in the country asking them to black the Company's materials. By October 1, a good percentage of the goods going into the factory were being blacked. The TUC had instructed its members not to cross the picket line. The strikers had mounted an effective picket every day. They also held daily mass meetings and organised marches and socials to gather support for the strike. The strikers were receiving donations from as far away as Ford Langley and a miners' lodge in South Wales. At a meeting on October 2, the strikers decided to call on the executive of the UPW to fulfil the pledge, made at the TUC conference in Brighton four weeks earlier, to back the struggle. The UPW decided in early October not to deal with Grunwick. On October 9, Len Gristay (APEX Area Organiser) and Mahmood Ahmed (Secretary of the Brent Trades Council) addressed the regional conference of APEX. On the same day, the Brent Trades Council received the unanimous support of the Greater London Association of Trade Unions, representing forty Trades Councils, for a motion calling for a total boycott of all companies dealing with Grunwick and blacking full support to the strikers. APEX discovered in early October that the company from the continent was coming through Gatwick Airport. The work had been coming in the name of a company in Scotland, then flown from Gatwick to Scotland and then sent by train back to London. APEX took efforts to stop it. Plugging the leaks was not easy.

On October 15 the strikers held a mass picket outside 10 Downing Street and lobbied the House of Commons. In aid of the strike, the Trico strikers won their equal pay after the multinational company finally cracked. This victory for the Trico women was a great morale booster for the Grunwick strikers because the Trico woman had persisted in their struggle in spite of the ACAS decision against them and won. The Trico women levied their rank and file to raise money in support of the Grunwick strikers and show solidarity.

On October 27, Mahmood Ahmed and Len Gristay addressed a meeting of APEX delegates from the London Regional Committee of the UPW and the meeting agreed to call upon the Executive Council to give the necessary instructions and blacken full backing of the London Post Office workers to those UPW members who refused to handle Grunwick mail. The National Executive of the UPW decided to cooperate with ACAS. The company was let off when it was about to buckle. In fact during the subsequent weeks Ward was not only not cooperating with ACAS, but was obstructing it.

On December 7, Len Murray met a Brent Trades Council sponsored delegation and offered the TUC's full support to the then
January 29 1977. Grunwick Strikers' Action Day. A Wembley chemist who returned the strikers' round letter, asking him not to do business with Grunwicks during the strike (adding his obscene racist comments), is faced with pickets. He left his job to argue with them, and as they did not give in, he called the police. Michael Sheridan (IFL).
15 week old strike, the TUC had earlier circulated a letter to all unions calling on them to support the strike. Len Murray came to address a meeting at Brent Trades and Labour Hall on December 12. At that meeting, the Deputy Secretary of the UFW pledged that if there was no progress in the negotiations between the company and AGAS his union would consider the union workers giving a strike ballot to the company to have been broken. Under those circumstances, the union Executive, which was meeting on December 15, would reconsider the situation if his union were approached by APEX. Mr Archie Sinclair, speaking for the Post Office union members at Cricklewood sorting office, said that they would be prepared to take action again and called on the TUC for full support. Len Murray said at the meeting:

"We (the Trade Union movement) are not only behind you but we are right alongside you and will be there until you win!"

Len Murray took this opportunity to open up the whole closed shop/union recognition debate by firing the first shot in that mock battle, thereby sidetracking attention from the main issues of the strike. Len Murray asked at the meeting whether Margaret Thatcher and James Prior, Tory Employment Spokesman, "...would stand up and be counted in situations like Grunwick?" His question to Prior was:

"Will you say to the management of Grunwick 'you have been wrong. The advice of the Conservative leadership to you, Mr Ward, is to act like any decent employer and recognise the right of your employees to join a Trade Union?'"

Tom Durkin, Chairman of Brent Trades Council, demanded an assurance from Len Murray that if any postman was arrested because of resumption of blacking, that he would not let him rot in jail like Tomlinson (one of the two Shrewsbury building workers). Of course, there was no such explicit assurance given at that meeting. But the loudest cheers at the meeting were to speakers who emphasised the need for further blacking action by the UFW to bring the company down to its knees. The next morning newspaper headlines were, inevitably of the Margaret Thatcher variety, highlighting Len Murray's reference to the question of union recognition, a subject that was to crop up again in the Party debates 9 months later. But the lasting impression of the meeting was one of Trade Union officials making cautious promises and each trying to elicit some assurance from the other. In the event, APEX did not write a letter to the UFW Executive asking for blacking and the UFW did not resume blacking.

But in quite a different context, the week of action in January 1977 in solidarity with black Trade Unionists in South Africa, the UFW was chosen as a principal source of action by APEX, the result being that a call to action went out to South Africa was contemplated. Once again NAFF went to Court and obtained an injunction preventing the postal workers from blacking. The court cases of NAFF and APEX were bound as it is by legality, would not recommend direct action in support of the Grunwick strikers.

In January 1977, the strikers planned a day of action. Letters were sent to over 400 chemists and on January 29, the chemists dealing with Grunwick were picketed. APEX for its part took efforts to trace the ways in which the company was bringing in work from overseas, in spite of the blacking at many airports. APEX also sent requests to Trade Unionists in Holland, Belgium and West Germany in preventing the flow of materials to Grunwick. The rejection of the ACAS report by Grunwick in February 1977 meant that the dispute would not end quickly.

The Grunwick strikers decided to picket the chemists again. The Grunwick management went to Court seeking an injunction against picketing, claiming that picketing chemists shops would ruin their business. On March 11, the High Court refused to grant an injunction. The judge also refused to stop the strikers giving a leaflet describing the firm as a "sweat-shop with a management which could have been lifted out of the Dickens era", and the chemists continuing to picket as Grunwicks as exploiting "slave labour". The Guardian (10.2.77) commented that such injunction would break the 1974 Trade Unions and Labour Relations Act. There was more picketing of chemists on the 19th and Trade Union representatives joined the strikers in the picketing.

At the emergency conference in support of the strikers on March 8, Roy Grantham promised that he would be asking the TUC General Council meeting on March 23 to consider ways of forcing the company to open negotiations. The strikers believe that APEX would be asking for all services to the company to be cut off including water, gas and electricity until the company recognised the union and reinstated the strikers. Delegations of strikers went on tours of the West Scotland and Sheffield areas seeking support. It was clear by then that Grantham would not ask the TUC for services to be cut off, despite the feelings among some APEX members. It was clear too that he supported only a more successful blacking of Grunwick products. While maintaining such an approach to resolve the dispute, he was still asserting that "...This is the first major dispute involving blacking in which the unions have given full support."

Nevertheless, the Grunwick strikers lodged the TUC General Council on March 23. As expected, the TUC General Council appeal to the unions to cooperate with APEX and the TUC duly obliged by issuing a statement asking all unions to help APEX and calling on Trade Unions to stop sending their films to Grunwick, as that was the most effective way of tackling Ward and thwarting his attempts to inflict a defeat upon the strikers. After the meeting Grantham was said that APEX would be sitting down with individual unions to coordinate action against Grunwick, but did not spell out what form such action would take. Because of the implications, information on the Grunwick dispute had spread through the Trade Union movement. Jack Dromey remarked that the TUC had been "inexorables" in its support for Grunwick than for any dispute for 15 years.

On April 12, the Grunwick strikers started 24 hour picketing of the six entrances to the factory. This was because the seasonal work of the company would increase after Easter and the company was desperate to get in supplies and new "scab" workers. A ring of steel around Grunwick was seen as a necessity amount to Trade Union bodies to take part in the picket rota. Ward gave pay increases of 10% to all those still working. The South East Regional Council of the TUC, the Greater London Association of Trades Councils and the No. 8 District of the
Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions called for a march on April 27 in support of the strike. The strikers appealed in particular to members of the EEPTU, GWMU and UPW, urging concerted action to cut off services to the company. On April 27 over 1000 workers marched in Brent. People came from as far as Liverpool and Wales, and at both factories police guards were on the march. Ten MPs were among the marchers. Arthur Latham (MP) remarked that day:

"It (the strike) is not only about Trade Union recognition but also has vile racist undertones."

There was a motion in the House of Commons calling on Grunwick to accept the ACAS report. In May, the European Kodak union meeting in Paris decided to launch a massive operation to isolate Grunwick throughout Europe.

On May 20 1977, three Government ministers, all MPs sponsored by APEX, joined the picket lines, attracting journalists to the factory gates and arousing Tory cries. Mr Howell referred to the possibility of APEX trying to obtain a legal injunction to force Grunwick to recognise APEX. Mrs Shirley Williams added that Grunwick was "as bad a case of exploitation as you could find". Fred Mulley chimed in: "This case takes us back a whole century in Trade Union and human struggles."

At the APEX Union Conference at Scarborough on May 30, 1977, Dennis Howell thundered:

"The Executive Council is determined that our Grunwick members will be supported until their victory is assured, not only because our fellow members are of Asian origin, but because the employer has sought to undermine all the procedures for arbitration and conciliation which Parliament has provided."

Eric Varley (Industry Secretary) joined in a standing ovation for a delegation of Grunwick strikers. An emergency motion was passed asking for a boycott of all supplies and products to the company. The Union Executive also decided to produce a broadsheet for distribution throughout the Trade Union movement and to mobilise support for the 24 hour picketing of the company which had been in effect from the middle of April.

After the Conference the strikers said:

"We got nothing from the Conference. We wanted a 24 hour strike of APEX members in London and we wanted APEX to make a public statement asking for the UPW to black, which they don't want to do because they say that by doing so they would be criticising another union."

In the last week of May the strikers decided to call mass picketing of the company from June 13 to try to stop those still going in by the police force. This move was decided upon, since the period June-August would be the peak period for the film processing work of the company. The Strike Committee Bulletin No. 37 said:

"Despite all promises and a call by the TUC for all unions to give us full assistance, we have not yet had the response that we need at the national level."

Trade Union support from all around the country was sought. Through the contacts opened up by the Brent Trades Council the Grunwick strikers had toured many areas of Britain, long before the mass picketing began, seeking support for the strike. When the call for support for the mass picketing was made, it was clear that the months of patient work would bear fruit. But what had not been expected was that the mass picketing began the day before the mass picketing was made, it was an example of the months of patient work bearing fruit.

APEX brought a broadsheet explaining the Grunwick dispute, for distribution among other unions. The broadsheet tilted heavily on the legal aspects of the dispute. The crux of the APEX position can be seen from an extract from the broadsheet:

"Employers would be able to sack workers asking for recognition. Employers like Grunwick who do not cooperate in an ACAS inquiry could challenge the ACAS recommendation in court."

The basis on which APEX sought support from other unions seemed to be that the Employment Protection Act and its provisions are under attack from the right. We must rally. The implications of this approach became clear later. On June 13 1977, the mass picketing began. It began with a bang. The police, who had been aware that a major demonstration was likely, were at the factory gates in full force to meet the strike supporters as they arrived by coach and car from London. There were over 1,000 pickets. As the pickets assembled and surged into the roadway, the police formed into a wedge and charged into the lines, breaking the line of pickets. The brutal police action culminated in over 100 arrests. Woman strikers trying to stop colleagues going to work were arrested. Even a BBC cameraman was arrested. Mrs Davie, Treasurer of the Strike Committee and one of the chief rallying forces among the strikers, was dragged along the road and kicked about. The pickets had no chance to speak with either those still going to work or with drivers crossing the picket line. Grunwick had now become a national issue. There were protests to the Home Secretary about the police behaviour. APEX called for an independent inquiry into the police behaviour. "Police riot" as Grantham put it. Grantham added that the police "thought it was a war, rather than a peaceful picket."

The Strike Committee appealed to trade unionists to demand that their unions use industrial power to stop the picketing. Tom Jackson thundered "If we can't crack Grunwicks, we can't crack anything."

News of the events at Grunwick, in particular the police behaviour spread throughout the Trade Union movement like forest fire.

The number of police arrests on that first day of mass picketing set the tone for the police attack during the subsequent weeks of mass picketing. On June 14, thirteen more were arrested. The company started using a bus to bring in new pickets. Laurie Pavitt MP warned in the Commons of an 'explosive' situation in his constituency. Mr Rees asked the Police Commissioner to draw up an urgent report. A miners' delegation joined the picket line. At the picket line there were more arrests. Grantham accused the police of breaking their agreement with him on the way picketing should be handled. Six more Grunwick strikers joined the picket line. The Strike Committee decided to continue mass picketing into the next week. The Annual Conference of NALGO pledged full strike support and called upon the TUC to organise the mass picketing. The Scottish TUC and the South-East Regional Council of the TUC called for 'swelling up' of the picket lines.
On June 15, the Cricklewood branch of UPW started blacking the delivery of mail order work to the factories and the strikers appealed to Jackson and the TUC to back the Cricklewood men. Jall concerned that the postmen to refuse from such action was ignored. A NALGO spokesman said that the Trade Union movement had not given sufficient support to the strikers, thus "permitting a disgraceful situation to continue." At the picket lines the Special Patrol Group used a flying wedge to smash its way through. 21 arrests were made in the process Scotland Yard's response to the allegations of police brutality was to promise an investigation into allegations.

On June 16, Grantham went into the factory at Ward's invitation. Ward had 'spoken' to his work force. Grantham was shouted down. On the picket lines there were six more arrests. 500 pickets came. The response to the call for more pickets at the factory gates was beginning to gather momentum. APEX wrote to the TUC asking for a meeting from the General Council. Grantham urged the Government to set up a Court of Inquiry. The first week of mass picketing, nearly 150 pickets had been arrested, while the mass pickets had succeeded in encouraging more than ten workers inside the factory to stop work and join the picket lines. The mass pickets of mass arrests was flashed across the length and breadth of the country. In the first week of mass picketing, the support had come mainly from the London metropolitan area.

That weekend, Booth attempted to bring ACAS, APEX and Grunwick together for talks, but Ward refused the invitation. The question of mass picketing led to raised in the newspapers and the Tories attacked the picketing at the factory gates. Before the second week of mass picketing began, Grantham appealed for a limit of 500 on the pickets on the pretext that 'peace talks' would be jeopardised. Other workers planning to support the Grunwick pickets were told not to do so without their union permission. Grantham's appeal was ignored. Many Trade Unions from around the country had already decided to participate in the week's mass picketing and delegations had been making arrangements to pile on to the factory gates.

Thus, the first week of mass picketing lifted the Grunwick dispute from a mere dispute to a national issue. The response to the call for mass picketing had been tremendous. A movement of support for the Grunwick strike from other workers was becoming discernible. The postal workers had taken the heroic stand of blacking mail to the company. In response, one arm of the Government, the police, was unleashing the sort of brutality unseen in this country for some time, while the other was waving the black flag at Grantham, while agreeing with the Strike Committee call to extend the mass picketing into the following week, was seeking to limit the pickets. It seems that Grantham was afraid that the situation would slip out of the hands of APEX.

On Monday, June 20, 1500 pickets came. The police violence continued. The TUC Finance and General Purposes Committee met to discuss Grantham's letter asking for support and decided to ask all Trade Unions to explore ways of bringing pressure on Grunwick and supporting APEX. The miners decided to join the picket lines. The Prime Minister had earlier told Cabinet Ministers not to join the picket line. There was a short debate in Parliament in which Rees praised the police handling of the situation, adding further that the scenes of the past few days had "no place in responsible Trade Unionism." Eric Heffer MP had earlier argued that there should be 20,000 trade unionists picketing the factory in solidarity. Dromey, at the picket line, said that "It is clear that Ward won't talk unless the company is brought to its knees."

On June 21, civilian bus drivers ferrying hundreds of police reinforcements to the Grunwick factory stopped work that day in support of the pickets. Scotland Yard had to hire a private coach to hire to hire. There were 1,000 pickets and 800 policemen at the Grunwick gates. A delegation of Labour MPs joined the picket lines. There were more scuffles and more arrests. Audrey Wise, Labour MP, was among the 17 people arrested, because she had protested about the handling of a woman picket. The MPs complained to Rees about police behaviour. Rees promised the MPs that there would be a police inquiry into their allegation, after the MPs had warned him that the police "protestation could lead to increased violence at the factory gates."

By now, how to cool the Grunwick dispute had become a matter of concern to the government. The police-black-shirted clashes, and the solidarity the Grunwick strikers were eliciting from the Trade Union movement had completely non plussed the Government. There were urgent Cabinet meetings and, on the Prime Minister's instruction, an ad-hoc committee was formed to oversee matters arising out of the dispute. Rees, Booth, Scanlon and Dromey were the members of the committee. This Committee first met on June 21, under the chairmanship of Rees. The Prime Minister had been deeply concerned about the number of pickets at the factory gate and the number one priority for the committee was to find out ways of limiting the pickets. They were concerned about coach loads of miners and other Trade Union followers, coming from every big city in England were joining the picket lines. Keith Joseph attacked the picketing as being "blatant terrorism and illegality in the name of Trade Unionism" and other Tories joined in the attack.

In Parliament Mr. Gavanon MP warned "The MPs saw many wrongful arrests. There are going to be some very ugly scenes indeed because when word of these latest events gets round here, Trade Union followers will be thousands converging from all over Britain. It is up to the Government to act now," Sam Silkin chimed in warning that the Grunwick dispute was fraught with 'very great dangers' and appealed to both sides to get down to discussion.

The Yorkshire miners urged the TUC to call an immediate conference on how to back the Grunwick strikers. The Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions at their annual conference in Scarborough passed a motion in support of the Grunwick strikers. On June 22 the General Council of the TUC discussed the APEX request for more help. At the meeting Hugh Scanlon was quoted as saying "This is a matter of principle": The council urged member unions to "intensify their financial and practical aid to the Grunwick strike." Still the same vague terms. Jack Dromey said, "This is the most important dispute in respect of Trade Union recognition and the status of immigrant workers this country has seen in many years." It had also revealed the weaknesses in legislation
Government Ministers join Grunwick picket line. Right to left: Denis Howell, Shirley Williams, Fred Mulley. On the left is Laurie Pavitt MP. Andrew Wiard (Report).

guaranteeing certain fundamental rights in industrial relations."

The Cabinet Committee set in motion its cooling off operation and arranged talks between Grantham and Scotland Yard officials, to arrange better control of the picket line. The Cabinet Committee also made plans to have Grunwick's Court Case against ACAS brought forward. As the police-picket scuffles increased and Margaret Thatcher's government to 'state categorically that the police have the full backing of the Government', the Government anxiety increased. There was a sigh of relief when Ward finally agreed to meet Booth.

On June 23, the Yorkshire miners led by Arthur Scargill, joined the picket lines along with 1500 other picketers. 800 policemen were waiting to receive them. At the picket line there were more scuffles. 15 more arrests were made. Scargill and some other miners were among those arrested. Scargill had told the pickets, "There are people determined to inflict a defeat upon us...I for one will not allow a defeat. If necessary we will ensure that this grows larger...We will have to swell the picket lines until our will is apparent to the police..." Scargill said, "We have not gone through centuries of struggle to give up now. The Trade Union movement must show its solidarity in all kinds of ways, including industrial action, if necessary, to bring about a speedy settlement to the dispute." He said later that the affair served as a demonstration on the scale of Saltley - the reference being to a memorable event during the miners' strike in 1973 when local police at Saltley Power Station were forced to close the station in the face of thousands of miners and engineers marching towards the gates.

After the arrest of the miners, one miners' lodge leader said, "They have lifted all our leaders and many of our members have taken a real hammering today. You can be damn sure we are not going to take this lying down." Special Patrol Group had been against the miners. An SPG policeman, PC Trevor Wilson, was hurt by a broken bottle in clashes outside the factory gates, causing uprisings in Parliament and the media. The Grunwick dispute had become a political problem for the government. The Cabinet was also concerned about the impressions created abroad by TV reports on the dispute. Booth met Ward and asked for his views on a Court of Inquiry but Ward kept insisting that he would be bound by the courts alone. Grantham held a hurried meeting with Scotland Yard to discuss the picketing situation. Grantham again called for a limit on pickets and use of arm bands to identify official pickets. The Prime Minister claimed that it was his suggestion. The Strike Committee immediately pre-jected a special bulletin, rejecting Grantham's suggestion, saying that they were not consulted about the decision and appealed for more support on the picket lines. Booth's talks with Ward failed.

On June 24, the Scottish miners joined the picket lines to swell them to 20,000. The police contingent at Grunwick was increasing day by day. There were 1,500 policemen on duty. Booth proposed setting up a Court of Inquiry into the dispute and sought assurance from APEX that it would take all possible steps to lift the mass picketing. The Cabinet Committee discussed the situation. The powers of the police were debated. The committee heard from Booth that he was continuing with his mediation and that the TUC statement made two days earlier had been so phrased as to mislead miners from coming down in overwhelming numbers. Such was the cabinet and TUC concern.

By the end of the second week of mass picketing nearly 300 people had been arrested. It was clear by the end of the second week that the TUC was supporting APEX's decision to use pickets stressing that any action by Trade Unionists should be at the official request of the union. Two major areas of the miners' union - Yorkshire and South Wales - gave support for a national day of action on July 11 in support of the Grunwick Strike.

That weekend (June 25), production of the Sunday edition of the Observer newspaper was delayed because of print workers' objection to an advertisement placed by NAPP in support of the Grunwick management. The TUC General Secretary intervened to allow the advertisement to go in the paper in return for space to be made available in the subsequent edition so that the TUC could explain their own position. That evening Ward refused to bind himself to the findings of a Court of Inquiry. But Booth maintained that the dispute could only be resolved in the High Court. On June 26, the Cabinet Committee met under the Prime Minister's chairmanship and agreed to consider urgently the setting up of a Court of Inquiry.

Thus, the second week of mass picketing was characterised by intensification of mass picketing, more brutality from the police and the frantic efforts of the Government and the TUC to defuse the situation. During the second week, the miners and other militant sections of workers were calling for more militant action at the picket lines, and they were treated brutally by the Special Patrol Group. It is useful to remember that these sections of workers provided the most persistent challenges to the Government's productivity schemes later in Autumn 1977.

The TUC for its part, while calling for support for the picket, in practice was trying to limit it. The contradiction with the movement of support was beginning to mature and their efforts to limit the picket and isolate the militants was the beginning of the TUC retreat. The formation of the Cabinet ad hoc Committee was a reflection of the Government's serious concern over the explosive situation that was building up at the picket lines and their main efforts were directed towards cooling off the picket line situation and in this operation they were liaising directly with the TUC. The injury to PC Wilson was used merely as an excuse to make the call for a limit on the number of pickets at the factory gates. APEX was cooperating with the TUC and was calling for limits on the picket lines. APEX was also pressuring the TUC for a Court of Inquiry as a way of defusing the situation. It also became clear during the second week that APEX saw the mass pickets merely as a form of protest, while the Strike Committee had different ideas. The contradiction between APEX and the Strike Committee and Brent Trades Council began to show. The Strike Committee believed that the response to the police brutality should be further mass picketing without any restriction on numbers. The second week also initiated the debate on what constitutes 'responsible Trade Unionism' and whether mass picketing had a role to play in Trade Union activity.
On Monday June 27 the editorial in the "Sun" was blacked by members of NATSOPA who objected to the contents of the editorial. The dispute had been simmering for a few days. On June 27, 900 pickets and 1100 police were present to receive Rees. Ward met Booth and reiterated his refusal to reinstate the sacked workers. APEX offered to call off the official picket only after an undertaking that Ward would be bound by the mediator's report. Conservative leaders, by way of example, at Grunwick, started debating about the laws on picketing and the 'right' of workers not to belong to a Trade Union. Grantham insisted that the company of the sacked strikers was the dispute's fundamental issue.

On July 1, the APEX national executive committee met to consider a motion to discontinue the picketing, in order that 'the government may not be prejudiced in any way by our actions.' But, on the picket lines that morning, police violence culminated in 12 arrests. After watching the police brutality, the APEX Assistant General Secretary Ray Edwards said that he had changed his mind and would favour mass picketing. The APEX council decided to continue mass picketing but sought to control the number of pickets by deciding that "We cannot allow Grunwick's to profit at the peak of the season by our cooperation with the Inquiry. APEX also decided to call for a march through Willesden in the event of the cooperation of the TUC on July 11, the day chosen by the miners as a 'day of action' at the peak of the season.' In the meantime Jackson called for a halt to the mass boycott. On the next day, the Financial Times (2-7-77) had a Stock Exchange report with the headline: 'Goldentime undermined by fresh Grunwick violence.' The incidents at the Grunwick factory gates and the possibility of the dispute escalating undermined confidence in the stock market. Such was the fear of mass picketing, in financial circles as the third week of mass picketing ended.

During the third week of mass picketing, the Government efforts to cool off the situation at the factory gates and the threats posed to the Government by the action of the postal workers took definite shapes, culminating in the announcement of a Court of Inquiry and Jackson's intense efforts to isolate sorters. Jackson was working hard in the government and shared their concern. Before the Court of Inquiry was announced, APEX was willing to call off the picketing if Ward agreed to abide by the mediator's report. Since Ward did not accept even the principle of a Court of Inquiry, APEX decided to continue the mass picketing as a form of protest and asked other unions to supply regular pickets. When the Court of Inquiry was announced, APEX was on the brink of calling off the mass picketing on the pretext that the Inquiry would be jeopardised. But the intensifying violet lines and the indignation it aroused around the Trade Union movement, meant that APEX was forced to change its tactics. APEX decided to continue the mass picketing, with the proviso that the number of pickets should be limited. In a move designed to isolate the militants like Scargill, APEX with the support of the Public Service Union asked the PSEU to call a march through Willesden on July 11, on the same day the miners had chosen as a day of action, with memories of Saltley Oak still fresh in their minds.

The company tried to break the tightening siege with secret mail drops, by chartering a plane to bring in up to 20,000 rolls of film each week from Belgium, Holland and West Germany. Over the weekend it was revealed that the National Federation of Self-Employed planed to disrupt the miners Day of Action. On Monday July 4, members of the AUEW Executive including Hugh Scanlon joined the picket lines. The Cabinet Committee met to discuss arrangements for July 11, and agreed to give top priority to getting the unions to talk to the Police as soon as possible. The London Regional Council of the TUC reversed its earlier decision supporting the Cricklewood blacking. The postal situation had clearly been damaged. Tom Jackson. The Cricklewood men had, only that morning, voted to continue the blacking at a mass meeting in defiance of Jackson. The Cricklewood men were suspended by the Post Office. On the next day, the Court of Inquiry opened formally, but adjourned until July 11, to let the High Court complete the ACAS case. Scargill was on the picket line and said that it was high time that the whole Trade Union movement brought the dispute to an...
ended by stopping the company's operations and added that Grunwick should be treated 'like a leper'. On July 6, the Cabinet Committee heard that the TUC and APEX were cooperating with each other and the police and that the Brent Trades Council were not towing the APEX line. But the very next day, the Cabinet Committee heard, to its immense relief, that the TUC had sought a Court of Appeal under TUC control. As for other events, the TGWU lent its support to the strike and rail union officials were expected to discuss possible ways of halting the movement of Grunwick mail by train. In the High Court, ACAS argued on July 6, that the courts should not intervene in union recognition disputes.

The fourth week of mass picketing saw the TUC tightening its grip over the situation at Grunwick. The TUC had worked feverishly to get Scargill and the Brent Trades Council to agree with APEX's handling of the situation. The division over whether there should be a march, supported by the TUC or a mass picket supported by the miners on July 11, manifested itself in the movement of support around the country. In the different cities, union branches were divided as to which activity they were going to participate in. The TUC called for a March at noon while the mass picket was due to start early in the morning. There were arguments in the union branches about the starting times of the coaches from the cities as this would effectively determine whether the mass picket or the TUC march.

It was becoming increasingly clear that the postal boycott was squeezing the company after 17 weeks of Britain's longest running industrial dispute. Supplies of paper and chemicals, though depleted, were still getting through to the company. But the mail boycott had tied the company down. Therefore, an appeal to the courts, held on July 9, NRA helped to Grunwick mail to be posted to be post boxes around the country in a daring, provocative action. Most of the public attention was concentrated on the postal boycott, but the struggle around the country by people making arrangements to participate in the activities at the Grunwick factory gates.

On July 11, 12,000 people gathered for mass picketing at the factory gates and by the time the march began at noon there were 20,000 people, one of the largest ever demonstrations in Brent. There were 4,000 police, while 2,000 were waiting in reserve. In violent incidents, 30 pickets and some police were injured. 69 pickets were arrested. Seven van drivers employed by the company had earlier joined TGWU refused to cross the picket lines. The march that followed the mass picket was fully controlled by the TUC and the Cabinet Committee met to hear reports from Grunwick. Rees announced in the Commons: "We disassociate ourselves from all acts of violence, from wherever they come," and announced that the company had admitted injuries at Grunwick were "unacceptable". The Cabinet Committee was contemplating changes to the law on pickets. The Court of Inquiry began taking evidence on the same day.

On July 12, the High Court upheld the ACAS report that recommended Union recognition at Grunwick. The Prime Minister appealed to both sides to 'draw back', but Ward

insisted that he would fight the judgement in the higher courts, while Grantham hailed the judgement as "a splendid victory".

On July 13, the Executive Council of the National Union of Bank Employees decided that it could not support a "black" the Grunwick account at a Midland Bank branch. Two officials of APEX were warned by the police that they risked prosecution under the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act of 1875 for failing to find out where the company bus picked up its workers. APEX announced that "no further demonstrations, marches or large-scale picketing will be held during the period of the Court of Inquiry." The picket lines were thinning down and the Government's tactics seemed to be working. By this time 377 arrests had been made. On July 14, Len Murray began circulating the APEX statement along with a letter asking affiliated unions to work strictly through APEX. In the meantime, the NUM Conference rejected the pit-level productivity scheme advocated by the President of the NUM, Joe Gormley, with Government support. Yorkshire rejected the scheme by 91% and Nottinghamshire by 90%.

The fifth week of mass picketing saw the Government's strategy coming to fruition, thanks to the cooperation of the TUC. The Court case went in favour of ACAS, but Ward would not budge. The Government used the opportunity to press for the lifting of mass picketing. APEX duly obliged and decided against any further major activity at the picket lines as long as the Inquiry was in progress. The TUC was pleased, and the APEX statement was duly circulated to all other unions by the TUC. The Government and TUC efforts, while directed generally at defusing the whole situation created by the Grunwick strike, were directed specifically at the specific manifestations of the movement of support for the Grunwick strikers that grew over a period of time, mainly, the mass picketing and postal blacking. The ruthless fashion in which the TUC and the Government pursued the task of neutralising this movement of support indicates what their real fears were.

After the week of the big demonstration Trade Union support at the picket line began to wane. During the next week, the strikers wanted to call a new mass picket on August 8, to encourage support for the strike. By this time, the Government for its part, turned to Jackson to lift the Cricklewood blacking. In the face of increasing support at the picket lines, and the consequent weakening of support for both the Grunwick strikers and the Cricklewood sorters, the postman were becoming to be isolated.

The cancellation of the planned mass picket at Grunwick had been achieved on "Black Friday" only after a week of heated discussion between the Strike Committee and the union. Grantham has been under pressure from the Government and the TUC. On July 27, Grantham had threatened the strikers with stoppage of strike pay. In his instructions, the company was faced with the dangers of injuries at Grunwick was "unsustainable". The Cabinet Committee was contemplating changes to the law on pickets. The Court of Inquiry began taking evidence on the same day.
with calls for a large scale mass picket on August 8. APEX had forced the Strike Committee to send a telegram to Scargill disbanding the miners from lending support to the revival of mass picketing. While the telegram was in transit, the strikers contacted Scargill over the phone seeking the miners' support for the mass picket.

The strikers believed that only massive industrial action, and not the legal procedures, would bring victory. Over 70 union branches had been in touch with the Strike Committee offering their support for the mass picket on August 8. Many in the Strike Committee felt that the succeeding few weeks would be one of the last opportunities to industrial action because Grunwick's seasonal film processing work would start to run down from the middle of August. Encouraged by the support they were receiving from trade unionists, in spite of the official opposition, the strikers met on August 2 and decided to go ahead with a full scale picket on August 8. The strikers called out for support on the picket lines.

On August 8, a mass demonstration took place. The police outnumbered the 3,000 strong picket at the factory gates and for the first time there were no arrests. The strikers believed that mass picketing on a hitherto unseen scale would be necessary no matter what the Scarman Report said. They argued that if Scarman came out in their favour, Ward would not accept it, large scale industrial action would therefore be necessary; if Scarman went in favour of the company, industrial action would be the only way of winning the dispute. Led by such reasoning, the Strike Committee was preparing for a month-long mass picketing after the Scarman Report was published.

The Times (August 9, 1977) reported "big differences of opinion between the Strike Committee and the more moderate Trade Union movement.

On August 12, the Strike Committee sent 1,000 letters to mobilise support for post-Scarman action. On August 15, TGWU challenged the 12-month rule between wage settlements and submitted a claim for a 35-hour week and an immediate substantial increase in bonus rates for workers in the construction industry. On August 19, the Strike Committee asked APEX and TGWU to put an emergency resolution on the agenda of the TUC Conference due to the place in a matter of weeks, calling for all supplies and services to the company to be cut off. The South-East Region of the TUC passed a similar resolution on August 23 and also called for another mass picket of the factory after the Congress.

In the weeks succeeding the August 8 picket, all attention was mainly concentrated on the outcome of the Scarman report. The Strike Committee was exploring ways and means of eliciting support for the strike after the publication of the report. During this period, leading APEX and Brent Trades Council representatives were repeatedly informing the strikers that they should not expect the report to concede all their demands and that they should be prepared to accept partial victory.
Support After Scarman

The Scarman report recommending reinstatement of strikers who were full time workers, and union recognition for the weekly paid staff which would help the company to run "smoothly" and chiding APEX for its decision to call mass picketing in the first place, was published on August 25. Booth appealed to both parties to reach agreement. Grantham expressed hope and said that he was prepared to go a long way towards meeting the company in the hope of reaching agreement. Arthur Scargill said that in view of Grunwick's past record, a continuous display of solidarity might be necessary from the Trade Union movement.

Jack Dromey roared: "If Grunwick accepts, it has a future, if it does not, it has none." The NAFF representatives attacked the report. The strikers themselves were not too hopeful. Mrs Jayaden Desai said of the report, "It is helpful, but it is not what we wanted. It comes down on our side but it does not suggest any way that we can return to work. The report leaves the question of union recognition to the House of Lords. We feel that it should have suggested a solution and union recognition."

The Scarman Report had also argued, that since the company depended on seasonal work, it might not be possible to reinstate all those on strike. If the company was to pay monetary compensation to those it could not take back. The report repeatedly pointed out that Ward had done nothing illegal. Ward's mistake, according to the report, was that "the efficacy of such a law (such as the Employment Protection Act) depends upon good will. If men act unreasonably by which we mean in obedience to the letter but not the spirit of the law, it will not work," ie Ward had not acted "reasonably" when he sacked all those who were on strike.

On August 31, Grantham offered a "compromise" to Grunwick. His union executive had agreed to make three concessions to the company which he described as "constructive and sensible proposals" which would enable the company to deal with APEX in the future. The three concessions were: (1) agreement to a staggered reinstatement of the union members (2) a written agreement with Grunwick that APEX would not seek a closed shop. (3) arbitration for the issues which could not be resolved by negotiation. Grantham also added that APEX would be prepared not to associate itself with the Appeal to the Lords by ACAS. APEX had decided that if the company made no move towards implementing the Scarman recommendations, it would issue a general union call to have the company's supplies halted, ie APEX would call for supplies. Lor service to be stopped, Grantham was of the opinion that the Scarman Report should be studied by the House of Commons with a view to preventing by law the kind of delaying tactics Grunwicks had used to hold up procedures aimed at settling industrial disputes.

On August 31, Ward, in his reply to Booth, rejected reinstatement, the principal recommendation of the Scarman report, but accepted only that individuals who should be represented if they so wished. Ward argued: "Never, in any circumstances, will the company reinstate those who were very properly dismissed." Ward also ruled out any question of compensation.

Len Murray discussed the situation with Roy Grantham, Jack Jones and Jack Dromey. Len Murray was reported to have said that in the light of Ward's rejection "no embarked approach" would have to be adopted. APEX, the TUC, the Brent Trades Council and the Strike Committee, all made statements indicating their determination to intensify the struggle. The Tories, led by Keith Joseph, launched a scathing condemnation of the Scarman Report. There was a war of words between the Tories and the Government.

On September 2, disagreement emerged between APEX and the strikers on the course of action to be taken on the aftermath of Ward's blunt rejection of the Scarman Report. The strikers demanded that APEX should urge the relevant unions to have the services cut off. Grantham reluctantly agreed to do that. The heated meeting between the strikers and Grantham had lasted 2½ hours. Before the meeting APEX had said that cutting off public services would not only be illegal, but would affect people living near the factory. The union had been embarrassed by the demand of the Government that it take measures on the union to prevent the dispute from again assuming large-scale involvement and active support of Trade Unionists. APEX wanted to concentrate only on blocking supply to the factory. The Strike Committee also felt that the APEX Emergency Motion to be tabled at the TUC Conference was far too weak and the Committee had not been consulted about the wording of the motion. The proposed motion read: "Congress reaffirms its support for APEX and the workers involved, and calls upon all affiliated unions to continue and intensify their financial and practical aid to those in dispute, in direct consultation with APEX." Earlier the TUC had agreed to set up a TUC Committee to organise the trade blockade of Grunwick.

The TUC Conference, which started at Blackpool on September 5, was viewed as a turning point by the strikers. A proposed debate on Grunwick was postponed on the opening day of the conference. On September 6, there was an unexpectedly low-key debate, moving the APEX emergency motion condemning the company's 'irresponsible action' in refusing to act on the recommendations of the Scarman Report and calling on all affiliated unions to continue and intensify the financial and practical aid, Grantham said that this was the first time that the principle recommendations of a Court of Inquiry had been rejected by the company concerned. He called for the support of the whole Trade Union movement to secure for immigrant workers the right to organise, to representation and to strike. He told delegates of 'one tiny fact' about the
When Grunwick pay. Grunwick had implied that the company's willingness to exploit immigrants, Grantham was persuaded to replace mass picketing in the campaign, but refused to disclose details. Grantham told the Congress that 'sophisticated planning' was needed to bring Grunwick to a halt, since Ward had paid in stocks when the unions had talked of a blockade. "I shall not disclose the details of our plans. I do not intend to signal our shots in advance. Action must be concentrated and effective," Grantham went on to say, "We must use our brains instead of our hearts." In other words Grantham was indicating that the action would be carefully designed to sever the company's lifelines.

Ron Todd (TGWU) seconding the motion, said that the Grunwick dispute was a dispute involving the whole of the British Trade Union movement. He further added that the company, of course, had a legal name, but it was a jungle which needed an effective and coordinated approach by the unions designed to bring the management to the negotiating table and that, "We either make this coordinated attack or we surrender the basic principles we believe in. . . . You can not argue with a rogue elephant - the only thing to do is try and stop him (Ward) in his track." Mr. Todd then referred to Ward's threat that he would rather go out of business than reinstate his sacked workers, and added, "The message from this TUC should be 'Go be it'!"

Frank Chapple (General Secretary of the Electrical Engineer's Union,EEPTU) said that cutting off supplies to the company was the best way to avoid a resurgence of mass picketing and violence. He added, "If there is anything key to our strategy, it is that we ought to take that road. I would much rather see the heads of a few police and pickets than Mr. Ward's." Len Murray said that the General Council was unanimously behind the motion and that all their efforts had not yet been enough to defeat the implausible enemy of the right of workers. He said that the TUC General Council (TGWU) had backed the Grunwick pickets, an enemy who was backed by NAPF. Len Murray went on to say that the TUC General Council applauded the immigrant workers for the way that they had held out in defence of their basic rights and that they were making a detailed study of the support needed for effective action. He also transpired that the TUC, on APEX's behalf, had already been in touch with the International Federation of Free Trade Unions, and received a promise that they would do to secure support from other countries. The emergency motion was passed unanimously. Jack Dromey said later that although the APEX resolution carried by the Congress was too weak, it was "heaping up the bonfire and now we need only the spark."

The conference in its usual roundabout way. had implied that the cutting off of the services to the factory was not the main consideration, and that the more effective blockade of supplies to the factory was being considered. No wonder then that Ward could boast that he could beat any blockade. The TUC consideration was shaped by the excuse that any attempt to cut off either gas or electricity could be a criminal offense under the 1972 Gas Act and the Electricity Acts. According to this act, anyone unlawfully or maliciously injuring any electrical or gas works or machinery intent to cut off any supply of electricity can be liable to up to 5 years in prison. That such an action was unlikely to be indicated way back in July 1977.

Mr. John Lyons (General Secretary of the Electrical Engineer's Union (EEPTU)) had written in his union journal, "When the NEC agreed to that donation (£500 to APEX), they did so because they felt it right to respond to the TUC's appeal for support of a union. . . . and further more the same employer both refused to recognise the union or accept a recommendation by ACAS... Since the NEC made that decision, there have been developments which have severely clouded the original issues and greatly disturbed many... in the Trade Union movement. I think it was sitting at Grunwick and the use made of this by certain elements seeking to turn it into a political confrontation and to gain personal and political publicity from it.

"The NEC had been asked to cut off electricity supplies to Grunwick at the same time as it considered financial support. This the NEC were not prepared to contemplate. Other unions in the industry have also been asked, and have reacted similarly. The view of the unions is quite clear. Our members have a statutory obligation to supply electricity to the company without discrimination and no matter what the intrinsic merits of other disputes there could never be any question of our association calling on its members to set aside that basic obligation. Nor would our members respond. Once started down this road we would indeed be on the highway to anarchy. The genuine issue at Grunwick remains. It was worth our support to begin with, and continues to be worth it now. It is that employees have a right to choose to belong to a union and seek recognition through legal procedures laid down by Parliament... on that issue we must continue to give every possible effort to establish the reality of this right by lawful means."

The TUC Conference was a turning point for the Grunwick strikers, precisely because any hope the strikers had that the mode of reasoning advanced above could be reversed. If the TUC Conference decision was not the final say, then Robert Moss (NAPF) could crow. "The leaders of the TUC are clearly embarrassed by the Grunwick dispute, which has exposed the unacceptable face of Trade Unionism. The call for a trade blockade is nothing new. This kind of pressure has been applied to Grunwick from the very start without rotatable effect."

The TUC Conference was a turning point because of another reason also. While the Grunwick mass picketing was in progress, each of the big unions like the miners, electricians, printers, shipbuilders, and engineering workers who had supported the Grunwick picket lines, had been discussing their forthcoming wage negotiations at their own union conferences. Much of the discussion was very heated. At the TUC Conference itself the question of wage negotiations was the principal question. The Government's wages policy was the principle focus. James Callaghan made an impassioned appeal for
adherence to the 12 month rule and the 10% limit. He told the delegates that whatever the unions decided about the 12-month rule, the Government would not be deflected from its 'responsibilities'. He warned delegates that if cooperation between the unions and the Labour Government withered away and there was confrontation over pay, both sides would be losers in a General Election. The Prime Minister scarcely mentioned the unemployment problem. Len Murray, Jack Jones and Hugh Scanlon spoke advocating support for the present policies. In the ensuing debate there was a big majority for the 12-month rule, to the delight of the Government and the private employers.

After the miners had cast their vote against the 12-month rule, Scargill said, "This does not make any difference to the miners. My advice to them is to press ahead with their wage claim and make sure it is implemented on November 1 this year." For Len Murray and David Bannett (GMWU) the resolution was a sign that the 'Social Contract' with the Labour Government could continue into and through a General Election. Given the divisions within the unions themselves about the wage policy, it was apparent that the unions would be involved in bitter arguments among themselves. It was clear too, that because the unions had their hands full of problems and were preoccupied predominantly with their own interests, Grunwick and the issues it had raised would assume secondary importance in their eyes. The subsequent course of events amply confirmed this.

It is interesting to note that the TUC Conference also passed, once again, a resolution pledging total support for the fight against racism. Tom Jackson, Chairman of the TUC's Equal Rights Committee told the Congress that the General Council of the TUC had decided to ask the Secretary General to set up a National Front demonstration banned. The recent banning of the National Front and all other demonstrations before the Ilford by-election in February 1975 is an indication of the TUC Committee's influence with the Labour Government. The Jackson motion at the TUC Conference, which received unanimously calls on the General Council to set up a campaign to fight infiltration by groups considered to be racist. It also asked the General Council to devote some of its resources to ensure the incorporation of the TUC Equal Opportunity model clause in employment contracts. It also wanted the General Council to introduce substantial programmes to improve inner city areas. Jackson also said that the Equal Rights Committee was becoming concerned over the role of industrial tribunals as a means of securing equal pay and argued that Industrial Tribunals were not a substitute for collective bargaining. Referring to the Equal Opportunities Commission, he said, "Neither by any stretch can we seek to become a substitute for the Trade Union movement." Jackson can continue to exercise the muscles in his mouth.

To come back to the Grunwick story and pick up the threads once again, the immediate post-Conference period was dominated by the closed shop debate. To the Tories, that was the most significant question raised by Grunwick, the right of an employee not to belong to a union. Newspapers were literally inundated by articles on that issue and the supposedly deep division between James Prior and Keith Joseph on this question. While the debate was continuing there was no significant change in the direction of resolving the Grunwick dispute.

On September 26, the TUC Finance and General Purposes Committee met and decided in favour of a full debate in the General Council on the way to deal with Grunwick. Union leaders decided not to recommend a course of action to the General Council which would have forced Grunwick to the negotiating table. There was no background paper for discussion and according to reports, the exchange of views lacked the sense of urgency that characterised the discussion at the TUC Conference. It seemed that the TUC was reticent to persuade workers "to do everything in their power" to bring about an early solution to the dispute, because that would involve serious difficulties including breaches of the law. All the arguments about cutting off the main supplies of gas, water, and electricity were rehearsed again without reaching any firm conclusion. At the General Council on September 28, the TUC leaders asked affiliated unions to apply 'such sanctions as are open to them', promised full support to unions applying sanctions and said that the sanctions were legal and practical obstacles to cutting off gas, water and electricity. TUC leaders agreed to meet Albert Booth (Employment Secretary) seeking support. According to newspaper reports, it appeared that the TUC was extremely wary about how to isolate the plant, giving rise to speculation that the unions did not regard the strike as winnable.

Even though Grantham had talked of new steps after the TUC Conference, no concrete measures had been taken. The Strike Committee called for a mass picket on October 17 in an attempt to revitalise support for the campaign. The TUC supported it. In spite of the official opposition, 4,000 pickets came and were received by 3,000 police. Power and water supply unions were, still, ostensibly, preventing cutting off supplies, but it was becoming clearer by the day that such action would not be forthcoming. The Strike Committee continued with the mass picketing and renewed efforts to attract support. 6,000 people picketed on November 7, and 113 were arrested in violent clashes. The November 7 mass picket was the third in the renewed mass campaign which started on October 17.

The Strike Committee, encouraged by the response they were still eliciting, planned to carry on with the weekly Monday morning mass pickets, and also planned another national day of action in December. The Strike Committee was intending to persuade workers to stay away from work that day.

The growing strength of the renewed campaign gave a flicker of hope. But the APEX press reported the Grunwick strikers intensified once again. November 7 turned out to be the last mass picket. Even though the strikers had continued to solicit support, the change of continuously attracting pickets to the factory gates had been hampered by the possibility of action on other fronts coming virtually to a standstill and by the changed circumstances in the post-TUC Conference period.

After the TUC Conference, the miners were involved in bitter arguments over the Government's pit level productivity scheme. One mining area was being pitted against another, threatening the unity of the

miners. The militant mining areas were involved in hectic operations to fight the manoeuvres of the National Coal Board. The Electricity Union members were bracing themselves to fight the 10% guideline. The electrical power supply union workers took unofficial action refusing to work overtime and causing blackouts in pursuance of their own wage demands. These changed circumstances meant that no action in support for the Grunwick strikers would be forthcoming.

On November 21, four Grunwick strikers started a hunger strike to protest over the Company's intransigence and the lack of positive action by the TUC. Len Murray asked them to call off their action. The hunger strikers, who had lost their best to block supplies to the factory, was like attempting to catch a fly by its wings, but APEX tried hard. The cooperation of the majority of workers in attempting to block supplies to the factory is an example of the sort of Trade Union solidarity that is a potential weapon in any industrial struggle.

The Cricklewood sorters took the bold action of blocking mail to the Company. The main artery of the Company was threatened, because the Company depended on the mail for a large part of its business. But the UPW Executive linked the lifting of the blocking to Ward's acceptance of ACAS as a mediator. Ward's words of acceptance were used by the UPW Executive as a pretext to lift the blocking. Ward, egged on by NAPF and the lifting of the postal blocking took a defiant posture towards ACAS. The TUC, in the name of loyalty, refused to promise support for any further postal blocking.

But the strikers, with the help of contacts developed by Brent Trades Council, went on tours of factories in Britain seeking support for the strike. Financial support flowed in. All through the period of the ACAS questionnaire, the ACAS verdict, and Ward's rejection of the ACAS report, the strikers patiently and persistently went about the task of establishing links with other Trade Unionists. The Brent Trades Council played a vital role in establishing these links. When Ward showed no sign of relenting and took ACAS to court, the strikers sought other means of winning the dispute. The efforts of APEX to get the other unions to cut off essential services to the factory such as gas, electricity and water, without which no modern industry could operate, failed to produce a positive response. 'Legality' was again used as an excuse.

The Strike Committee and APEX agreed to call mass picketing of the factory in an effort to prevent workers going into the factory during the peak operating period of the factory. The mass picketing in June 1977, was met with brutality by the police. The frustrations of workers over the wage policies of the Government, the refusal of Ward to accept the ACAS recommendation, the police brutality on the picket lines, and the links the strikers had established, all combined to produce a massive demonstration of support for the strikers at the picket lines. The mass picketing let loose the hitherto shackled discontent of large sections of workers. Thousands upon thousands of workers came to picket at the Grunwick factory gates. As the solidarity increased, so did the police response. Labour MPs and union leaders were met with the same brutality. Arguments as to whether mass picketing had a role to play in Trade Union activity were met with the accompanying Tory threats. Unification at the factory gates reached explosive proportions and posed a threat to the Government itself.

The Government was clearly worried and Grunwick became their number one priority. The TUC shared the Government's concern. A Cabinet Committee was formed. Cooling off the mass picketing became the prime concern. While a reign of terror on the picket lines by the police was let loose, frantic efforts were made at mediation. Thus the Government launched a four pronged tactic to counter the situation; (1) countering the pickets violently, (2) limiting the number of pickets with the
cooperation of the TUC,
(3) getting the UFW to handle the ending of postal blacking and
(4) setting some form of mediation in motion.
Government ministers kept on emphasising the differences between 'responsible trade unionists' and others, attempting to drive wedges into the unity that was emerging.

Prior to the mass picketing, the TUC was ready to help APEX in winning the strike by its own legal methods. But once the mass picketing began, the TUC shared the Government concern that the situation would get out of their hands if steps were not taken to stem this. Winning the Grunwick dispute and thereby winning the confidence of immigrant workers became a secondary issue. The TUC quickly set about the task of isolating the more militant sections of workers among the pickets. Grantham saw mass picketing merely as a form of protest. The response to the call of mass picketing had not been foreseen by APEX, Grantham began appealing for a limit of 500 on the pickets and requesting the government to urgently set up a Court of Inquiry, as a way to take the steam out of the situation. The TUC supported the APEX call of a 500 limit. Even though the TUC was often ignored, Grantham used the pretext of the injury to a policeman to appeal for a 500 limit and arm bands for allowed pickets.

The Government and the TUC supported the APEX call. Contradictions between the Strike Committee and APEX over the picketing question began to surface. The TUC and APEX began trying harder to limit the pickets. The brutal assault on the police, the miners, the miners called for a day of action, evoking memories of Saltley Gates. The TUC began to tackle the militant miners, while Jackson began to isolate the Cricklewood sorters. Booth's attempts at mediation failed to produce a positive response from Ward. The Government saw the Court of Inquiry as a way of removing the pressures of mass picketing and so a Court of Inquiry was announced. APEX wanted to use this opportunity to call off mass picketing but deferred the decision because of the mood among the pickets. The resolution could only be supported by the TUC, called for a march 'on July 11, in a move designed to isolate the militants. After the July 11 demonstration, APEX announced that there would be no further large scale activity during the period of the Court of Inquiry's sittings, under the pretext that the 'Inquiry will be put in jeopardy.'

The Government tactics began to work, thanks to the TUC. Even though Grantham quite early on in the dispute asked the Government to set up a Court of Inquiry, not necessarily bypassing ACAS, the Government began to consider the idea of a Court of Inquiry only after the dispute had assumed political dimensions. Because of the very manner in which the Court of Inquiry was convened, it was clear that such a device was designed only to cool the political situation that the Grunwick dispute had created. The masters of the tactic of divide and rule waved the magic wand of the Inquiry and attempted to link it with the ending of mass picketing. While the TUC and APEX had taken care of the picketing situation, the UFW Executive had been working at isolating the Cricklewood sorters. Intense political pressure was brought to bear on the postmen to end the blacking. The Grunwick strikers were threatened with disciplinary action including suspension of strike pay if they went ahead with their planned August 8 mass picket. The arguments and the tactics in both cases were similar; 'cooling off', 'the Inquiry will put a stop to everything', plus threats. The Black Friday July 29 saw the culmination of the Government tactics of neutralising the specific forms of support that had emerged.

When the mass picketing was in progress, unaccounted numbers of union branches sought in their own way to aid the strikers both financially and practically. The printing workers' bold action at The Observer and The Sun is just one example. In spite of the attempts of the TUC and APEX to keep the situation under their control, many workers defied their instructions as in the case of the picket on August 7 (which the TUC and APEX were anxious to avoid) when over 70 trade unions including large sections of miners showed support for the picket.

When the report of the Scarman Inquiry did appear, in classic fashion, it granted the strikers no real support. The TUC was looking for a way to cut off services to the factory. Maybe what Len Murray really meant, when he told the strikers in December 1976 that it 'was not only behind you but we are right alongside you until you win', was that the TUC 'would be right alongside the strikers to see them defeated.'

After the TUC Conference, even though the strikers' call for mass picketing in defiance of APEX did receive support from other workers, the renewed mass picketing was more of a defiant gesture than a strategy for victory. Even though the massive support for the striking during June and July nearly brought Grunwick down, major sections of the workers, who staunchly supported the Grunwick strikers, had let their attentions be diverted after the TUC Congress with the Phase III productivity schemes looming large in front of them. All the talk of 'matters of principle' failed to ensure the continuation of the pressure on the factory. One confronted with their own problems, the matters of principle assumed a secondary role. Thus the Grunwick dispute at once brought into focus both the strengths and weaknesses of the Trade Union movement.
6. THE UPW BLACKINGS

The postal workers played an important role during the Grunwick dispute. At the TUC Conference in Brighton (September 1976), when the Grunwick dispute was first raised as an issue involving immigrant workers and their rights, Tom Jackson, who was also the chairman of the TUC Equal Rights Committee, pledged that his union UPW would do everything possible to help the strikers. At such an early stage in the dispute it would be seen that the UPW was willing to take sympathetic action. Four weeks later, the Grunwick strikers were conscious that the pledge made at the Brighton conference should materialise into action and many meetings took place in the following weeks culminating in a member of the Strike Committee and an APEX representative addressing the London regional committee of UPW. That meeting decided to call upon the National Executive to give the necessary instructions. Finally on October 29, at the National Executive committee's meeting, it was decided that UPW should not take any action and a letter went to the company after an indication from the London branch that they would strike if Grunwick was not blocked and strong pressure from Tom Jackson, the General Secretary of the union.

The blacking came into effect on November 1. The life-line of the company was threatened.

Ward contacted John Gorst, the Conservative MP who in turn raised the issue in Parliament. John Gorst said that the firm would be forced into liquidation by the end of the week if the illegal withholding of mail continued. Other Conservative MPs intended to put pressure in the Commons about the complaints that members of the UPW were breaking the law by refusing to handle mail to a firm involved in an industrial dispute. The Government Minister responsible for Post refused to take any action against the UPW and said that the Company should talk to ACAS. Harold Walker, Minister for Employment, said that Mr Jackson was a responsible and moderate man 'who would not take such action unless provoked.' Norman Tebbit (Conservative), called for an emergency debate on the position with the delivery of the Queen's mail. Other MPs demanded a Government condemnation of the use of mail as an 'instrument of industrial warfare.'

On the day the blacking came into effect, an official at the head office of the post office worker's union said 'we are taking this action in sympathy with APEX, whose people came out on strike because of conditions at the firm and were then sacked. The firm refused to use ACAS, so we have agreed to assist by taking this action.' This statement indicates that the sole purpose of the UPW blacking was to force the Company to use the Government arbitration body, the brainchild of the TUC itself. In response to the criticisms levelled against the UPW in Parliament, Tom Jackson replied, 'we have never done anything like this before and we never have to do anything like it again. The post office statutes have never been tested in a case like this. The postmen take sympathetic action in support of another group of workers. Until it is, as far as our union is concerned, we are going to support the workers.'

Under the Post Office Act, 1953, incorporated into the legislation setting up the post office as a public corporation, the post office has the exclusive privilege of conveying mail, but it was a misdemeanour, liable to fine or imprisonment, to wilfully delay or detain the mail. This Act put Post Office workers in a special position, shaped only by people in the armed services and police. Tom Jackson was aware of this special position of the postal workers and the issue had been discussed by the union many times in the past. Even though it was understood that postal workers had a right to strike on their own behalf it was not made clear in the statute books. Jackson was arguing that the post office was in a special position when they took sympathetic industrial action had not been tested before and whether such action was illegal was a matter which had to be tested. The postal workers union was fully aware of the situation in relation to the law when they imposed blacking in support of the Grunwick strikers. It would appear that Jackson's statement had the intention of bringing the issue of postal workers into the focus of public attention. It seemed as if Jackson was calling on someone to test the postal workers' action in the courts.

There was an emergency debate in Parliament on November 3. Gorst called the blacking a criminal act, because if the action succeeded this time, such illegal action would have been shown to be successful. Gorst went on, 'if no action was taken against law breakers and they succeeded in their purpose reasonable men must suppose that law breaking was to their advantage. They had to consider the implications that arose if interference with the monopoly delivery of the mail on a selective basis was allowed to take place. Postal communications were to the infrastructure of commerce what the jugular vein was to the human body.' Booth (Secretary of State for Employment), chided Gorst for setting himself up as a judge and jury.

The Daily Telegraph editorial, under the headline 'The Great Mail Robbery', asked 'what justification is there for legally protecting a monopoly which is not fulfilling a contract?... The post men's 'sympathetic action' is in the highest trade union tradition of bloody-mindedness.' The evening Standard was of similar opinion 'There may very well be a case for arguing against such a restriction (no striking)
for postmen. What is not acceptable is the breezy attitude of the UPW General Secretary Tom Jackson towards the law as it stands.... The postmen may appear to be in breach of the criminal law, but the problem is essentially a political one. Grunwick Laboratories is the case, but the principle at stake has extremely serious implications for all manner of more vital sectional interests. If the UPW wins the right, it could become a formidable weapon in any number of other disputes - in the civil services for instance or the banks. The Act which limits the freedom of postmen to strike is the wider monopoly status on the Post Office. If the one is open to argument, then the postmen should recognise, so is the other. The Times argued, 'Workers in the public sector services have gone far towards discarding the inhibitions that used to make them disinclined to strike. If nurses, doctors and civil servants have found it in their consciences to take industrial action in their own interests, why is it impossible to impose a higher standard on postmen. What is so disturbing about the present case is that the postmen's interests are not directly at stake at all. The unbridled weight of organised labour in a great public monopoly has been brought down on a relatively insignificant case almost at random and might equally well be applied anywhere for any reason. The Royal Mail was created as a monopoly, it was to protect communications from the caprice of sectional interests. If sectional interests are allowed-entry to that monopoly from within, free communications would be better served without it.'

They all sang in one voice: if the postmen can strike, then the exclusive right of postmen to handle mail must be questioned. This position assumed significance, when the NAFF helped Grunwick to move its mail during the second postal blacking in July 1977, the 'Pony Express' episode. This episode will be discussed in due course.

On November 4, the Company and NAFF informed the Post Office and the union that they were going to court. The court action was initiated on November 6. On November 4, the UPW had told ACAS that they would call off the action provided that the company would cooperate in the ACAS enquiry and provided that the company accepted the recommendations of ACAS on the issue of recognition. Mr Booth said in Parliament on November 5, that the company had agreed for the first time to cooperate with the enquiry and had also agreed to abide by the result of the enquiry. Tom Jackson had sent a letter to Booth, informing Booth that as a result of the company agreeing to provide the evidence required by ACAS, a Section 11 enquiry, it was likely that the recognition question could be settled quickly and that therefore the postal workers would not take action. NAFF also withdrew from the sympathetic action. Jackson had said that it was a matter of regret that the UPW should be forced to take action at all. In Parliament, the conservative government did not take action when postmen had supported Japanese and New Zealand colleagues protest over French nuclear tests in the Pacific by stopping mail to France.

Even though the postal ban was lifted Grunwick and NAFF went ahead with their attempt to get an injunction - as a safe guard, as a legal protection for the future. After the ban was lifted, NAFF claimed victory. NAFF claimed to have won their High Court action that sent the postmen back to normal duties. On November 9 Grunwick abandoned its court action and accepted any threat from the UPW not to interfere with the mail.

In the subsequent weeks, the company employed delaying tactics and went so far as to file the ACAS enquiry as outlined earlier. Efforts were made to get the postal blacking in once again. At the meeting in Brent Trades and Labour Hall on December 1st, Unite, the MAU and General Secretary of UPW said that if the negotiations did not progress, his union would deem the UPW undertaking to the company not to have been broken and would be willing to resume blacking if so requested in a written form by APEX. The proceedings of this meeting were discussed in another context, suffice it to say, that the company did not write to the UPW Executive Council asking for blacking and were willing to let ACAS plod on in its efforts at mediation.

In the second week of January 1977, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions in Paris called a day wide open international trade union action against South Africa in protest against her apartheid policies and repression of black trade unionists. The UPW announced its support for this action and this time the TUC had chosen the UPW as the focal point of action. Blacking of mail, telegrams and telephones to South Africa was contemplated. Tom Jackson was willing to raise the issue of rights of postal workers once again. John Gouriet, Director of NAFF, asked Sam Silkin, Attorney General, for permission to take action against the postal unions in his name so that the postal boycott could be stopped. The Attorney General refused to grant permission. Silkin was willing to let the Post Office handle the situation. His argument was that if he did so at that stage then it 'might well result in breaches of the law and inconvenience to the public over a much wider area than the two sections of Post Office employees affected.' Gouriet went to the High Court. His application was turned down on January 11. Gouriet was still unhappy, so the Deputy Appeals Court. The Appeal Court granted a temporary injunction. Jackson stepped down and called off industrial action and Silkin was rebuked. 'Be you ever so high, the law is above you.'

The issue had become one of the powers of the Attorney General in such matters. Silkin argued that the Appeals Court had no right to challenge his decision and Michael Foot defended Silkin in the Commons. In the High Court, Silkin, while claiming that the enforcement of the law would be against the public interest, nevertheless admitted that the UPW action would be illegal. The Appeal Court verdict came on January 27, when Silkin was severely criticised. Subsequently, Michael Foot defended the Attorney General and the postal workers, more vigorously arguing that precious few free doms would be sacrificed if such matters were left in the hands of judges. The case eventually went to the House of Lord where the Lords ruled that the Attorney General's decision was unquestionable. So the main exercises in court only diverted attention away from the important issue. While the UPW action over South Africa was being discussed, the
Grundick strikers were appealing to the UPW 'if the commitment of our movement to the end of exploitation and the fight against racialism means anything, we cannot be allowed to be isolated and defeated.'

The response of the Government to the court cases involving postal workers was legislative. Mr Michael Foot promised delegates that the government would introduce legislation to restore to postal union members to take strike action. Before the Conference the Industry Secretary Eric Varley had written to Tom Jackson confirming that the government intended to push appropriate legislation through Parliament, to restore the right to strike. At the conference, when a delegate proposed that the union's blacking action should be made legal irrespective of any legal action resulting from NAPPS injunction, Jackson argued that the union's legal advisors had warned that not only would the postal union members involved in a blacking action risk being sent to jail, but the union's assets would be sequestered as well. Despite Jackson's argument nearly 10% of the delegates voted in favour of reintroduction of blacking of Grundick.

Then came the mass picketing of June 13. On that day Eric Varley confirmed that the government would shortly be introducing an amendment to the Post Office and Telegraph Acts. On Wednesday June 15, the Cricklewood branch of UPW started blacking the delivery of mail order work to the Grundick factories. The Grundick strikers appealed to Tom Jackson and the TOG to stand by the Cricklewood branch and bring the strike to an end. The Cricklewood branch had initiated action which affected the company's outgoing mail, although initially blacking appeared to be receiving all or most incoming mail. Appeals from Jackson and other UPW leaders to 'call off' their action were ignored. A Post Office spokesman said that the workers concerned risked very serious consequences. On June 17, the Attorney General rejected a demand from Ward that he should take steps to legal action against the postal workers under the 1953 Act, saying that in these circumstances, it did not call for any action by him at that time. A spokesman for the Attorney General's office said that 'although the Attorney General has declined to take matters further, there is nothing stopping a private prosecution taking place.' By now this was a familiar pasteurage.

Ward alleged that the Cricklewood office was under the influence of the Brent Town Council - a crime indeed. He also claimed that mail was being delivered from sorting offices other than Cricklewood. The Daily Telegraph advocated private prosecution of Peter Hain who was involved in a successful private prosecution by NAPPS's Mr Francis Bennion for disrupting sporting events involving South Africans. Sir Michael Havers QC, a Post Office attorney, said that legal advice called on the Post Office to prosecute the sorters at Cricklewood. He argued that if the Post Office itself also unreasonably failed to carry out its duty, then the Attorney General should instruct the Director of Public Prosecutions to initiate prosecutions in any case where there was sufficient evidence to justify it. On June 20, Grundick's solicitors wrote to the chairman of the Post Office asking if he planned to take legal action. Ward said that if the Post Office refused to take action, they would bring him himself through the Magistrates Courts.

On June 28, the London District Council of UPW voted to put a ban on Grundick mail throughout London. A complete ban on the mail to the company could have had the effect of severing the company's lifeline. Jackson warned that the action was completely unofficial, arguing that it could not be made official because of the 1953 Act, and that such action was contrary to his advice to the District Council. The District Council also endorsed the action taken by the Cricklewood men and promised full support to Cricklewood postmen and any others who might be targeted by the Post Office. The Post Office was under pressure to suspend and discipline sorters involved in the blacking action. There was a distinct possibility that the Post Office might take action against them, it could lead to an all out postal workers' strike throughout London. The Grundick strikers appealed to the postal workers to shut off the telephones to the factory also. Several speakers at the meeting of the District Council said that feeling was running very high in their branches and an industrial action in support of the Cricklewood sorters was a clear possibility. The most crucial decision was to be taken in the West Central branch, right Paddington, where incoming mail for Grundick was still being collected. Outgoing mail was still going through Cricklewood. Apologies stamped letters, which were posted in the normal way, the company had been unable to send back processed films. Mr Ward had made it clear that the blacking had begun to bite since his cash flow depended on a three week cycle, the time between receiving the mail order and collecting the payment.

On June 29, the Post Office ordered its staff to stop sending Grundick mail home. Any mail he be sent home would be refused. Notices were posted in London sorting offices. A postal strike seemed imminent. Jackson advised the Post Office that he was of the opinion that there was no legal basis for the action, because 'they are risking escalation of action by other Post Office workers,' but declared that there was no question of industrial action against the Compay. Sam Silkin had written to the Post Office chairman asking him to intervene. On June 30, Silkin ruled out the prosecution of postal workers blacking mail, saying that the time had come to take the issue out of the hands of the Post Office. Mr Silkin applauded the efforts of Tom Jackson to try to end the postal ban. The post office failed to carry out its threats but deferred action until Monday July 4. NAPPS was still threatening legal action. The Post Office announced on June 30 and Jackson called upon the postal workers to call off their action, because a Court of Inquiry had been called. Mountains of Grundick's mail had piled up. That period was the firm's busy period when it could receive up to 50,000 rolls of holiday film a week. The Cricklewood postmen had proved to be the most effective, they had disorder in so much as they were the only ones to hit Grundick's essential supplies while other unions did not heed the strikers call to cut off services. They were determined not to let Grundick off the hook at its busiest time of the year, while the postal boycott had begun to bite on the company. They
were determined not to give a new lease of life to Grunwick since they were fully aware of Ward's earlier tactics during the first postal ban.

On July 4, the Post Office threat to suspend the 126 workers at Cricklewood was postponed again the next day because Tom Jackson was striving to get the blacking called off. Jackson addressed an emergency conference of the London District Council and warned that the union could be 'sued, and sued heavily,' and that the prospect was one of suspensions, strikes and total stoppages of London mail, if the blacking did not stop. He also pointed out that no other group except the postal workers were involved directly in the struggle at Grunwick. The district council reversed its previous weeks decision supporting the Cricklewood branch. Jackson had clearly defined the situation and helped the Government in avoiding a postal strike.

On July 5, the post office suspended 26 workers on the afternoon shift for refusing to handle Grunwick mail. Jackson was confident that their branches would not take action. The Cricklewood branch had that morning voted to continue the blacking. There was no mail delivered in the NW2 area of the post office and advised residents to post their mail outside the district till the position had been resolved. The rest of the staff were suspended the following day. The NW2 sorting office had contained the dispute to Cricklewood. The union planned to give the suspended men hardship payment near their normal wages. Post boxes in NW2 area were sealed. The Post Office also took steps to stop incoming mail from other areas. There were initial sporadic industrial actions in sympathy with the Cricklewood men in branches in West London, but they died away after appeals from both union headquarters and the Cricklewood men not to take action then. Several large branches held meetings and decided to adopt a wait-and-see attitude. The post office locked the sorting office till the "staff concerned give a clear commitment to carry out their normal duties fully". Over the weekend it became clear that the factory was not processing work and that the processed work was not going out. A mountain of mail bags had built up inside the factory. Then came the 'pony express' episode. Ward had been buying stamps in bulk quantities and they were pasted onto thousands of packages. On the night of July 10, NAPF and its allies moved the backlog of mailbags, nearly a thousand, into huge vans and drove them hundreds of miles and posted them in post boxes all around the country. This daring smuggling operation came as a shock. Postmen at Luton and other post offices joined the blockade on mail from removing for the 'pony express' episode had already been prepared during the first postal blocking in November 1976 when the newspapers had argued that workers should take the illegal action and get away with it then. The right of the post office monopoly over the mail is open to question. In the light of such reasoning it was not surprising that the newspapers did not so condemn the 'pony express' operation as a provocation.

On July 12, in Parliament, Sir Keith Joseph highlighted the statutory duty of the post office to deliver mail. He asked why the Cricklewood sorting office could not be kept open and other postal workers instructed to handle the mail for the NW2 area, which includes the Grunwick plants. The post office was unwilling to carry out its statutory duty, would the Government remove its statutory monopoly. Eric Varley, the Industry Secretary replied that the hope of securing an early end to the Grunwick dispute would be damaged by drafting in other postal workers to fulfill the duties of the men suspended at the Cricklewood sorting office and that Tom Jackson was doing his utmost to bring about a resumption of normal postal services.

On 13 July some postal workers who had refused to handle mail from Grunwick posted throughout the country in NAPF's 'pony express' operation accepted the advice of their union to work normally. On 14 July, Shaw Agencies, a company in the Cricklewood area whose mail was held up by the same sorting office tried to get the High Court to order the Post Office to hand over mail locked in the sorting office, but failed to do so. The Appeals Court turned down yet another bid to free the mail bags on July 18. On July 20, postal workers managed to hand over 200,000 Cricklewood packages. The next day NAPF threatened criminal proceedings against the Post Office. On 23 July the Post Office allowed Grunwick to retrieve 65 mail bags from Cricklewood after a formal request from Grunwick. The Post Office also ordered the re-opening of the sorting office from the following day, and lifted the suspensions. The union officials called the "staff concerned give a clear commitment to carry out their normal duties fully". The Cabinet had said no. On 26 July, Silkin won the case in the House of Lords. The
Appeal Court judgement against him was overturned in the case of Gourist versus Post Office union over blacking of mail to South Africa. On the 26 six postal district men refusing to handle Grunwick mail. On the same day, the London District Council of UPW met. Mr Norman Stagg argued that the Union could not authorise such action without the backing of members, employment and the union funds to the extent that the whole fabric of our organisation stands at risk. Stagg's position was supported by the London District Council. A motion criticising the National Executive was carried out instructions of the executive on the leadership of Stodd. The UPW National Executive's special meeting on 27 July even contemplated disciplinary action against the Cricklewood men. On 29 July the postmen at Cricklewood decided by a margin of 51 - 46 to return to work. The Grunwick strikers heard on the same day that the Appeal Court verdict went against ACAS and Grantham put pressure on the strikers to call off the pay of actions planned for August 8. Jack Dromey, secretary of the Brent Trades Council remarked that the strike committee and the Cricklewood postal workers had been "forced to retreat temporarily because of substantial pressure and outright blackmail from those in the Government to whom Grunwick is an embarrassment". The feeling in senior union circles last night was that the men would not appeal. The union and its members at the Post Office, the Union, who do not recognise that it is Trade Union strength that has lifted this dispute off the floor and that it is the same strength that can compel recognition and reinstatement."

On August 3, it was reported that postmen in various sorting offices were misdirecting post addressed to Grunwick. The aim was to slow the mail and reduce the Company's efficiency. Postmen at Cricklewood, faced with a backlog of mail, began an overtime ban. Unofficial action continued in some sorting offices by postmen sympathetic to the Grunwick strike. On August 4, only one office was still blanking. Grunwick's foreign mail was still being held up at King Edward Building in the city, but this also started on August 4, a lot of about 20 postmen at cricklewood walked out in a dispute about extra pay for clearing up the backlog of mail. The Grunwick branch sent a letter of censure to the headquarters about Norman Stagg, Assistant General Secretary of the Union. They alleged that Mr Stagg had said that unless they handled all mail, the union's decision would not be the final instalment of £7 in the 'hardship money paid the men while they were suspended by the Post Office.' Tom Jackson defended Norman Stagg saying that the £7 was being sought as an additional payment, not a final instalment. Jackson further added, in reference to Norman Stagg, "he has faithfully carried out instructions of the executive council without bludgeoning or bullying anyone. It is nonsense for anyone to suggest that our members at Cricklewood have been forced back to work."

On September 5, at the TUC conference in Blackpool, post office union leaders won the backing of TUC delegates in their efforts to achieve a new law which would give the post office workers the right to strike. The delegates approved a motion calling on the TUC general council to press the Government to introduce the Post Office Act 1953 and the Telegraph Act 1863, in order to give to postal workers the same rights as all other Trade Unionists in Britain.

On December 22 local members of UPW who defied their national leadership were fined a total of £1300 by a union disciplinary tribunal. The committee imposed fines ranging from £50 to £500 on officials who refused to abide by instructions not to interrupt mail to the factory. The London District Council Area Organiser, John Taylor, was fined £500, his assistant Derek Wash, £100. Mr Joseph Nulty and Mr Edward Lee of the District Council were fined £150 each. Douglas Taylor and Derek Saunders of Cricklewood were each fined £50. The Times of December 23 remarked that "on officials, anxious about the effect that such a move (blacking) would have on their attempt to restore the freedom of postal workers to take strike action in pursuit of a general industrial grievance, repeatedly told the rebels not to black Grunwick...."

The Disciplinary Committee which has six members, chosen from the union's executive, based its judgement on union officials... that the "Disciplinary Committee which has six members, chosen from the union's executive, based its judgement on union officials... that industrial action should not be taken without the express authority of the executive, particularly in the light of an undertaking in the High Court that the UPU would not handle the mail from the Grunwick post office unless it was agreed in other areas, unless that was agreed in negotiations with the Post Office."

A bill, giving the postal workers the right to strike against the Post Office, but forbidding them from taking discriminatory action against an individual, country or country- in short preventing them from sympathising with the strikers and from sympathetic industrial action - was produced by the Labour Party in February 1976. The bill was carefully tailored to meet the criticisms of both the Liberals and the Tories. Jackson sent out a letter to union branches pointing out that, "# it should be clearly understood that Norman Buchan's bill attempts to set the position right in relation to purely Post Office duties... But what's the point? It will not extend any entitlement to Post Office workers to the extent that the whole fabric of our organisation stands at risk."

A previous Government bill, which was passed, to prolong the period of arbitration that has apparently been rejected by the Courts."

Thus in September 1976, Tom Jackson and the UPW were willing to support sympathetic action in support of the Grunwick strikers.

The NAFF court cases during the first postal blacking in November 1976 and during the week of action directed against South Africa's apartheid policies, brought the special position of the postmen, the lack of their right to strike, into focus. The Government and the Labour Party took notice. The Labour Party promised legislation and as far as the UPW Executive was concerned the point had been made. The apparent willingness of the UPW Executive to support the first blacking was also shaped by the Labour Party's new outlook to check racism, viz, encouraging immigrant workers to join unions. Tom Jackson was the Chairman of the TUC Equal Rights Committee and he had made Party Political Broadcasts on behalf of the Labour Party on the question of racism. Grunwick was an immigrant workers' struggle and Jackson was prepared to support token acts of sympathy which could win the confidence of immigrant workers. Jackson withdrew the blacking as soon as Ward said that he would cooperate with ACAS. But Ward did not cooperate and the UPW Executive was silent.

The Cricklewood sorters undertook the blacking as an act of solidarity with the Grunwick strikers, with no ulterior motives. The Cricklewood sorters were more than willing to resume the blacking when Ward was playing 'catch me if you can' with ACAS. At the December 10 meeting in Brent Trades Hall, a spokesman for the Cricklewood sorters indicated their willingness to resume the blacking, but the Cricklewood sorters were anxious that they should not be isolated and victimised. The TUC was not prepared to give any such assurance.

The Cricklewood sorters resumed the blacking soon after the mass picketing started. The UPW officials did not support the blacking, but the Cricklewood sorters were able to get the backing of the London Regional Council of the UPW. The Post Office threatened to suspend those involved in the blacking. Faced with this situation the UPW officials authorised union funds to maintaining the public stance of not supporting the blacking. But as the situation at the Grunwick factory gates began to reach explosive proportions, the UPW officials started their manoeuvres to isolate the Cricklewood sorters. Tom Jackson worked closely with the Cabinet Ad-hoc Committee in this operation. Jackson's threats paid off, when on July 4, the District Council of the UPW reversed its previous decision of supporting the Cricklewood sorters. The Post Office carried out its threat of suspension. But the Cricklewood sorters refused to budge and voted to continue the blacking. The sorters were taking a heroic stand because for them suspension from the union would mean not only loss of their jobs, the UPW being a closed shop, but also loss of their pension rights. Having isolated the Cricklewood sorters, the UPW continued with its threats to 'persuade' the sorters to go back to work. After intense pressure, the sorters voted by a narrow margin to go back to work. Several months later, after the Grunwick situation had cooled down, the union took disciplinary action against the leading union members who had organised and supported the blacking.

The diluted Post Office Bill passing through Parliament under which the postal workers can not take sympathetic action underlines the the degree of compromise involved in the relationship between the UPW and the Labour Party. The empty Parliament and the lack of opposition to the bill serve only to show that the anti-working class forces have nothing to fear from the bill.

The Cricklewood sorters and their supporters are the true friends of the Grunwick strikers. The second postal blacking, taken at their initiative, their staunch support by blacking which nearly brought the Company to its knees and their unflinching support in spite of union manoeuvres illustrates the spirit in which true solidarity between workers is forged.

July 25 1977. At the doorstep of the Cricklewood Post Office, Archie Sinclair, Assistant Branch Secretary, tells his colleagues that they are locked out again. Andrew Ward (Report).
7. THE PICKETS AND THE POLICE

The pickets-police relationship in the Grunwick dispute came into the focus of the television cameras and attracted the attention of journalists only when the mass picketing began on June 13. Night after night the media presented a one-sided view of the sourfises between the police and pickets, portraying the police as brave men fighting against unruly mobs piling at the Grunwick gates and upholding their duty of seeing that the 'law of the land' is obeyed. The conclusion drawn by right-wingers was that the scenes at the Grunwick gates happened because of the inadequacy of the picketing laws. Their reasoning goes as follows: if the number of pickets to be allowed in front of the gates of a factory in dispute were clearly specified and the rights of the pickets (i.e. whether they are allowed to talk, those passing the picket lines) were clearly defined and if the number of supporters of the strikers allowed to picket, and their rights were also clearly defined, then the police-picket clashes could be avoided. Furthermore, mass picketing on the scale of Grunwick would not be possible, which would in turn eliminate, or at least minimise, violent scenes. To expose the bankruptcy of this viewpoint it is necessary to examine the facts.

The picketing of the factory did not start on June 13, 1977. In the first week of the dispute in August 1976, the strikers began picketing the factory gates. The very first Strike Committee 'bullied' and 'provoked' pickets to cross the picket line. The police which was later cleared up by the Strike Committee and a lawyer from the Brent Law Centre. The police then proceeded to hunt out an old 1869 law to charge us with. The most recent incident was when the police arrived at the Chapter 609 picket and stated that only six people could picket. The Chief Steward was asked to pick six so that the rest could be arrested. Before anyone could do anything eight people were arrested.

On 14th March, 1977, Kanti Patel, one of the pickets was alone waiting for the next shift of pickets to arrive. He was dragged into the factory reception office by the factory management and was assaulted brutally. He sustained multiple injuries in face, mouth, eyes, back of head and legs. Following the assault a protest demonstration developed, which was broken up by the police. Four people were arrested, including Jack Dromey. It was the fifteenth time the Willesden police struck, giving vent to their unrestrained hostility and racist antipathism towards the pickets. APEX and the Strike Committee sought an urgent meeting with the Home Secretary.

Mr. Robert Johnson, Chief Inspector at the Willesden Police Station, was the man who had ruled that six people and 'only six' could picket the factory gates, which led to some arrests. In April APEX was informed that Mr. Johnson had retired. In May the Strike Committee learnt that his reasons, in the Home Secretary, that Mr. Johnson was Grunwick's new Personnel Manager.

On May 29 Mrs. Desai was arrested at Chapter Road entrance, after exchanges with George Ward and another Director, Mr. Malcolm Alden. The Director planned to bring out a private summons for assault against the diminutive Mrs. Desai. The Willesden Police charged her with threatening behaviour likely to cause a breach of the peace and common assault on Mr. Alden. All the insults Ward and his cohorts threw at the woman escaped the police ears.
These are just a few instances which happened before June 13, the day mass picketing started. As before right-wing allegations that thousands of pickets were intimidating those who wanted to go to work. The police behaviour towards the pickets was brutal right from the beginning of the dispute. There have been many strikes in this country but there have been very few instances of such arbitrary rulings and blatantly partisan behaviour as at Grunwick. At the Automat dispute in Manchester for example, which was a year long dispute over union recognition that ended in February 1977, the history of arrests as at Grunwick was unheard of. Before the Grunwick dispute became a national issue, it is very likely that most of the decisions were made by the local authorities at the Willesden Green Police Station themselves. The reason behind the police behaviour would appear to have been shaped by two aspects; the racist aspect, and the left wing nature of the Brent area. The fact that most of the workers in dispute at Grunwicks were black immigrants, that racism is widely prevalent, and that the relationship between the police and immigrants has always been bad meant that racism was an additional dimension absent in many other disputes involving workers. Secondly, it was precisely because the Brent Trades Council was left-wing and there were many militant trade unionists in the Brent area with a long history of struggles and were supporting the Grunwick strikers actively, that the police right from the beginning of the dispute resorted to arbitrary decisions. It would appear that the police were testing their own strength and powers.

When the mass picketing began on June 13, on the very first day the police arrested nearly a hundred people on various charges. They dragged Mrs Desai onto the street and kicked her. This brutal behaviour alone contributed greatly towards setting the tone of the response for the next few weeks of mass picketing. Thousands of workers who had not heard of Grunwick before came to participate in the mass picketing in sympathy with the Grunwicks strikers and horrified by the brutality of the police.

In the subsequent weeks, the Special Patrol Group were brought in, and agent provocateurs were planted among pickets. The question of police brutality was raised by MPs who had witnessed the incidents at the factory gates. After mass picketing started, the Home Office and the higher echelons of the police department began to participate directly in the day to day handling of the situation at the factory gates.

The police philosophy became much clearer later in the Summer of 1977 in quite a different context. At Lewisham (August 1977) the police came with riot shields to counter an Anti-National Front demonstration. After the incidents in Lewisham, where many people were arrested, General Clutterbuck, in what he characterised as a personal capacity, outlined the police philosophy: 'At the moment the police prefer to rely on a doctrine described by Sir Robert Mark (Ex-Metropolitan Police Commissioner) as "winning by appearing to lose". As the role of public opinion is an important element in any demonstration the police feel that the sight of largely unprotected and unarmed police confronting missile hurling rioters, is one that is likely to provoke maximum sympathy.' The media, of course, bear out General Clutterbuck's beliefs. Some of the police officials want well defined "picketing law". The right-wing Tories support this view. To see picketing laws as the panacea is to miss the essential points.

At Grunwicks, in the first week of mass picketing alone 151 people were arrested. In the second week of mass picketing, MPs who joined the picket lines accused police of "acting like thugs". They said that a bus taking in the Grunwick workers had been used "like a tank, travelling up to the gate at speed and moving down everything in its path". Martin Flannery (MP) remarked, "I think the rent-a-mob there were the police. They acted like thugs. I have never in my life - and I speak as an ex-soldier - seen such violence". Ian Mikardo (MP) added "If I had driven it (the bus) like that I would have been booked for dangerous driving."
Ian Mikardo who was on the picket line on June 21 remarked that the scenes had been reminiscent of the police purge of the 30s. "Such violence that occurred was not from the action of the pickets or those who had come to show solidarity with them... At no time did I suffer to the police or any provocation." He alleged that police had pushed into the crowd to drag certain people out. "The bus came round the corner, it came very fast and at this moment as it reached the area where most of the people were. It was deliberately used as a projectile, as a tank. It moved through everything, up to the gates and through... everyone fell back from the bus except one who was knocked down. It was the worst of intimidation I have seen anywhere. If anyone had liked that bus driver, they would have been rightly charged. It was absolutely incredible."

On June 21, Labour MP, Mrs Audrey Wise was among those arrested on charges of obstruction. She later said, "I saw a girl being dragged by the hair and I didn't think that should happen." She was later released after informing the police that the girl was 'lovely, instead'. A cop had then kicked her. Her hand being she tried to open the window of the police van to speak to her husband. That day MPs held a half-hour meeting with Home Secretary Rees, detailing complaints against policemen and demanding an inquiry. Only a day earlier, Rees had praised police action at Grunwick in handling the pickets, while Tony MP's complained about the police. Labour MP Atkinson said that, if, by collusion between the police and the employer those who wanted to work were aided to get into the factory by bus, then the police were preventing the pickets interviewing people, and were thus guilty of breaking the law. In response to the complaints by the MPs, Mr Rees promised a full inquiry into their allegations.

On June 21 at the picket line there was a mysterious bottle throwing incident. The Grunwick strikers sought to establish the identity of four people who threw two bottles as a coach carrying striking workers attempted to enter the factory. Two of them were not revealed who they were. Two policemen took two of them through the crowd to a police bus but the two were shortly seen to be allowed to leave the bus. On June 22 APEX held a press conference with the two women injured at Grunwick gates. The women described the use of the Special Patrol Group. When the bus carrying the workers came the ordinary police had said that the bus would have to go back because it could not get through the picket line. At that moment the Special Patrol Group had jumped out of their blue vans and rushed at the pickets like animals, grabbed people indiscriminately and hurt many people.

On June 23 Arthur Scargill was arrested. Police had asked him whether he wanted to join the official picket of six people open. Scargill later said, "I said that I would prefer to nominate someone else and I went into the crowd, where it had been agreed with the police."

On the day Scargill was arrested a policeman was hurt by a broken bottle and the media screamed "PC in critical condition, felled by bottle." Pictures of the injured policeman were flashed across the nation to elicit public sympathy for the police and to try to caution the public to move an offical floppy disk at the BBC asking for footage of a patrol at Grunwick - with the intention of using the footage, whether it had been screened or not, to identify people. As part of the picketing and subsequent squabble the BBC was prepared only to show them footage that had already been screened on news bulletins. The next day the Police Commissioner visited the picket line to oversee the operations.

By the end of the second week of mass picketing the number of arrests rose to 300. In the third week the Special Patrol Group, watched by the Deputy Assistant Commissioner for Willesden, used tough new tactics to haul out those they believed were trouble-makers in the crowd. Rees had promised the strikers that they would be allowed to speak to the official, as the bus arrived the police pushed the official back to clear a path for the bus. The APEX Assistant General Secretary Ray Edward said, after the Grunwick picket line on July 1, that "the violence was caused by the police who waded in with fists, knees and boots and used their helmets as truncheons." He added "my personal opinion is that under the circumstances the police were right to act as they did."

On July 11, 18,000 pickets assembled at the factory gates. There were 4,000 policemen on duty and 2,000 were in reserve. The police concentrated, including police using police dogs on the pickets. The SPG was believed to be one of the largest ever. Violent incidents led to 113 arrests. After the mass picketing about 3,000 people marched to Willesden Green Police Station to protest about police behaviour. Rees said in Parliament that the police had his full confidence and the confidence of the Government. Earlier James Marshall (Labour MP who had been in the picket line said that he was appalled by the violence the police exhibited to many pickets, and at the wanton destruction of banners which were ripped and smashed when they were not being used as weapons."

Mr Martin Flannery (Labour MP) had said at the picket line, "The violence was provoked by the use of force, by the use of mounted police and by their hostile attitude generally
17 Oct. Mass Picket: Police separate the picketers to let through the car, Derek Speirs (I.F.L.)

to the strikers". Jack Dromey said, "It was as if the police had been let off the leash. They just went in dragging people around by the hair for no reason. I just do not see why they did it. There was nothing to gain and it provoked a lot of further trouble."

The police violence was not confined to arrests on the picket lines. Maurice Jones, a Yorkshire journalist was the editor of the Yorkshire Miner, the monthly paper of the Yorkshire NUM. He was one of the men arrested from the delegation of 1500 miners who went to Grunwick on June 23. He was arrested on a charge of insulting behaviour. Mr Jones disappeared after his return to Barnsley. On July 15, a warrant for his arrest was issued since he failed to answer his bail. A day earlier Arthur Scargill had received a letter from Maurice Jones from East Germany. The letter had been delayed in delivery and one end of the envelope was open. The letter said in part, "I write this letter to you with tears in my eyes and my life in ruins.... When I was arrested on the picket line I was taken to Wembley Police Station as were many others. But with me it was not just a question of being charged. Two plain clothes gentlemen... spent about three to four minutes in a perfectly ordinary room..... What the younger one said to me..... has forced me to leave my homeland. First of all he produced a file on me from which he quoted extensively. He knows so much about me that I expected him to tell me when I bought my last pair of socks. The meat of what he was saying - as I interpreted it - was that it was alright for me to produce a run-of-the-mill trade union journal with all the expected left-wing rhetoric and noises about pay provided that it was not done too effectively." It was suggested that he would not make it "so dangerously attractive" to which Jones replied that he would publicise the conversation. The letter continued, "Then the threats began. First my wife was not British and it would not be too difficult to terminate her stay in Britain..... It was, however, the threat which they left till the end which persuaded me to smash everything that I've worked for, leave my home and my possessions and flee to the East. As far as I understood it, this threat would only be carried out if I..."
mentioned the conversation that had taken place. It was couched in two simple sentences—

'You have a delightful little girl, Mr Jones. The roads become very busy at this time of the year!'

Scotland Yard spokesmen denied that Special Branch officers had seen Jones or that he had been treated any differently. The Labour MP Peter Hardy asked the Foreign Office to enquire into Jone's flight to East Germany. A week later Jones returned to Britain with Scargill who had gone to see him in East Germany.

He was arrested at Heathrow Airport and subsequently released on a bail of £2,000 on condition that he surrendered his passport. Scotland Yard asked Thames Valley Police to appoint a team of inquiry to investigate the allegations of police threats.

The outcome of the inquiry is still unknown. Subsequently Jones was fined £250 by the Brent Magistrates Court, London, for using threatening words and behaviour.

By the time the mass picketing ended, 550 people had been arrested. By April 1978, 500 cases had gone through the courts. Nearly 80% were convicted, a very high rate, although the acquittal rate improved since the departure of one magistrate who had pledged herself to put right the 'leniency' of the early cases.

A bill has recently been introduced in Parliament by a Conservative MP that seeks to restrict the right to picket.

To summarise, the police attitude towards the pickets at the Grunwick factory gates was hostile right from the beginning of the dispute. The police are an important arm of the state and their role is precisely to counter, with violence, any militancy on the part of the workers, in the interest of the state. Their role is to attempt to break the solidarity between workers. As soon as the first postal blacking in November 1976 was initiated, the police came out violently and arrested pickets at the Grunwick factory gates on some pretext. But the Grunwick strikers and their supporters were not intimidated.

When the Grunwick strikers began eliciting solidarity from other workers, in the form of support for the mass picketing, the police were there in full force to counter the pickets. The violent clashes at the Grunwick factory gates happened, not because of the inciting laws, but because of the opposition of the police and the Govern-

ment to any form of militant solidarity between workers. The sole aim of the police actions was to discredit the pickets and break up this solidarity. That the Police Commissioner was prepared to use the Special Patrol Group, especially against militant sections of workers such as the miners, with the approval and indeed the praise of the Labour Government is a clear indication of the methods by which the state attempts to neutralise any manifestation of unity between different sections of workers, especially when such unity matures into forms which the state perceives as politically dangerous.

The police, the Government and the TUC in the end succeeded in defusing the political situation. The announcement of the Court of Inquiry and the waning of support on the picket lines, put them at ease. The August 8 mass picket, a defiant gesture by the strikers and their militant supporters, went without incidents. After the TUC Conference, when the Strike Committee renewed the mass picketing in defiance of APEX, and continued to receive response from other workers, the police came with violence once again. The last mass picket on November 7 saw the worst violence from the police. The police had to be absolutely sure that the mass picketing did not set off another upsurge.

The police brutality at the picket lines cannot simply be whitewashed with another inquiry which would conclude at best that "immoderate show of force should not have been used." In spite of the testimony of so many Labour MPs and Trade Union officials, who witnessed the violence on the picket lines and described it in such gruesome detail, nothing beyond an inquiry by the police about the police has materialised. The very same MPs are sitting in silence today. When the Strike Committee showed a film of the police brutality at one of the mass pickets to the Home Secretary and demanded action, the strikers failed to get any response from the Home Secretary. Guilt is preferable to remain silent. The TUC's response to the film was again silence.

As for the arguments regarding picketing laws, any changes to picketing laws that would disarm the workers of their only weapon which allows them to break out of the narrow confines of their own unions and show solidarity with other workers should be resisted tooth and nail.
8 CONCLUSION

The Grunwick dispute came about because of the general conditions prevailing in small industries. Given the conditions under which employers like Ward operate, the Grunwick dispute was in a sense inevitable. The dispute that immigrant workers was taken up by the unions, contrary to their earlier practice, precisely because of the changed political atmosphere which had generated a new outlook towards racism and the growing strength of immigrant workers was typically social democratic because the Labour Party was more concerned about mitigating the situation than attacking the basis of racism and paving the way for uprooting racism. Encouraging unions to take up disputes involving immigrant workers and taking token steps to counter the racism rampant within the unions themselves was seen as a way of checking the racist poison. The Labour Party would not come to grips with the problem. When the Grunwick strike began, the response of APEX and the Brent Trades Council was such as to shape the recognition of the necessity to fight for Trade Union principles in the small industries as well as by the new outlook of fighting against racism, of fighting for the rights of immigrant workers, who are inevitably drawn into small industries such as Grunwick. While it may be true that clerical workers' unions are at present in an expanding phase, the actual evidence available does not indicate that this was the principal reason why APEX took up the cause of the Grunwick strikers. The manner in which various Trade Union officials and Labour Party representatives posed the Grunwick dispute, during the various stages of the dispute, including the period after the mass picketing, simply confirms the analysis above. Len Griesty's letter to Grantham, Grantham's speech at the September 1976 TUC Conference, about 'employers from the past' and the Gratton's speech to the Grunwick dispute by Labour Ministers and Trade Union officials clearly display the spectacles through which they viewed the dispute. They saw the dispute as 'checking racism' concept in motion.

The three main demands the strikers made after the dispute started were:—

(1) Full recognition for APEX and the right of employees to belong to the union.

(2) Reinstatement of those who were sacked for joining the union and those who came out in their defence.

(3) Eventual negotiation of a decent living wage and an end to working conditions such as compulsory overtime and poor holiday and sick pay entitlements.

APEX wanted to achieve these aims through mediation. APEX even in the early stages of the dispute was aware of the complexities introduced into the dispute by the obstinate response of a small businessman who was stonewalling every mediatary move and later seeking clarification of the law from the courts on every little aspect, an approach that NAPF has, happily in the past. Confronted by this stubborn response, APEX sought to apply the traditional trade union pressure. Support for blacking of supplies was forthcoming and was met with positive response from other union members.

When the dispute came to the attention of the Government, the response was predictable. The Government advised APEX to make use of the machinery that they had created. ACAS.

The arbitration machinery was an important part of the other plank of the 'Social Contract'. So, the ACAS card was played. Until now Ward had successfully thwarted ACAS with the backing of the courts. It was clear from the outset that ACAS was to be used as a mediator, that the first of the three demands the strikers had made assumed the prime importance in the eyes of APEX, because the realisation was now spreading, that the Labour Party's response to the intensifying racial climate and the growing strength of immigrant workers was typically social democratic. The three main demands the strikers made were all made conditional upon the first demand succeeding. ACAS could make a ruling only on the union recognition question. Reinstatement and improvement in conditions of work could be negotiated by APEX only if it gained recognition in the first place. In spite of the fact that APEX officials repeatedly proclaimed that reinstatement was the main issue, the actual course APEX pursued actually placed the emphasis on the union recognition question.

The union recognition issue is deeply bound up in law. There are no fool proof laws. Laws are always susceptible to interpretation. The interpretation of the law is ultimately conditional on the social and political atmosphere. When an employer confronts workers, he is determined to keep exploiting them, the workers are fighting back. Because of the sheer numerical imbalance the employer would go to court to seek help. If the law is not clear enough, the employer seeks to deny the law or act according to his own interpretation of the law and then seek legal justification. In a capital-ist society the law ultimately has to defend exploitation. In such a situation the workers cannot solely rely on the unity of workers. The strength of the workers lies in their solidarity, not in the 'fairness' of the law. But, APEX thought otherwise.

While cherishing doubts regarding the ability of ACAS to resolve the dispute, APEX relied on ACAS nevertheless. Even cutting off supplies to the factory with the help of other sections of workers was pushed to a secondary role. When cutting off postal services to the factory was undertaken, the UPW officials intervened to make sure that blacking was used as a pressurising weapon and not as a means of directly resolving the dispute. Once ACAS tied the resolution of the Grunwick strike to the machinations of the Government machinery, it inextricably bound the dispute to the lengthy procedures of such a body and APEX was fully aware of this.

Thus, during the initial stages of the dispute, APEX with the support of the TUC had charted a clear course of action: rely on ACAS, black supplies wherever possible but refrain from actions which would involve conflict with the 'law'. This position is in sharp contrast to Ward's willingness to challenge the law on every pretext. It was not by accident that APEX put most, if not all its eggs in the ACAS basket. But the next plan that APEX had drawn began to receive jolts, because of Ward's stubborn resistance, with the support of outright right wingers. Ward's resistance began to puncture holes in the ACAS-TUC plan because until then they had maintained to the strikers that the existing legal procedures should be fully used.

When the ACAS recommendation was rejected the powers of ACAS were challenged in the courts by Ward, APEX and the TUC sought support from other unions to black services to the factory.
The strikers, who had patiently listened to the earlier APEX arguments, began pressing for alternative methods of winning the dispute. But the management held firm and the strikers decided to call for mass picketing of the factory with the agreement of APEX.

Initially the mass picketing was seen as a way of pressurising management during the peak period of the film processing business by attempting to pursue workers not to go into the factory. APEX sought support for the strike from other unions, putting the question marks that Ward was placing over the provisions of the EPA as an important argument.

When the mass picketing began, the police met the pickets with force. The frustrations over the Government's wage policies, Ward's challenge to the legislations that were the basis to the production contract, the patient work of the Brent Trades Council and the strikers in establishing firm links with other workers and the indignation at the violence orchestrated its move. In support of the pickets, all ignited together to produce massive support at the picket lines and other forms of support such as blacking of mail. It was this solidarity that became the main worry for the Government.

The events at the factory gates had overtaken the TUC's assessment of the situation. Their main worry became the mass picketing and the postal blacking. Closure of the factory had become a distinct possibility. This the Government and the TUC were not willing to see. They could not permit another Saltley Gates. They could not let the workers smell the sweet fragrance of success achieved through working class solidarity. Not check this, the methods used against Ward could boomerang against themselves. That is why the Grunwick dispute became the number one priority for the Government.

The Government quickly launched its operation to neutralise the unity that was growing by the day. TUC support was vital to ensure success. It started its move in low gear, by supporting the APEX call for reduct in the number of pickets, but quickly moved into top gear and tried every trick to isolate the militants who were calling for more action at the factory gates. The Government for its part came up with a Court of Inquiry to look into the dispute, while the police at the picket line was whipped up. The TUC began urging other unions to operate strictly through APEX. Stopping the bus carrying workers into the factory was the present. These manipulations succeeded in lifting the pressure from the factory gates and the TUC had accomplished its task. The UPW Executive met up with the Police to discuss the situation. The TUC had failed. The mass picketing had become the mass picketing and the postal blacking.

The primary motive behind the Government's call of a Court of Inquiry was to take the pressure off from the threats posed by the picketing at the factory gates. APEX alone had expressed the willingness to abide by the report. Ward had repeatedly said that he would not feel bound by the report. When the Inquiry was in progress, Jack Dromey repeated Ward's advice that the TUC should expect from the Inquiry at best only a 'Solomonic solution', part of the baby for the strikers, the remaining part for the employers. This was at best a 'Solomonic solution'. It recommended a union for the factory, staggered reinstatement of the strikers and compensation for those who could not be reinstated. The report spread the blame for the 'dangerous' forms the dispute evolved into, on both APEX and Ward. The Inquiry's recommendations were not enforceable, and Ward rejected them.

During the different phases of the dispute, the TUC had actively participated in defeating other approaches to winning the dispute. After the inevitable failure of the Scarman report to resolve the dispute in the period after the mass picketing and blacking of mail had been lifted, the TUC had run out of excuses to refrain from using direct industrial action to win the dispute. It had become clear by now that the Grunwick dispute was for the TUC more of an embarrassment than a dispute to be won. The TUC Congress failed to discuss an alternative strategy for resolving the dispute. The unions handling the essential services were not prepared to take the risk of imposing blockades that would have entailed breaches of the law. There is a unifying current underlying the TUC attitude towards different issues raised by the Grunwick dispute; post should not be blacked because essential services should not be out off that is illegal, large scale mass picketing should not be undertaken because that could amount to challenging the Labour Government and the Government would let the police loose on them. The TUC was not prepared to allow any method of resolving the dispute other than the ones it approved. When methods failed and other forms of resolving the dispute began to take shape, the TUC used threats and underhand pressures to defeat the unity that had been established. If there was a defeat for this defeat rests firmly at the doors of the TUC.

After the TUC Congress, the other sections of workers who had shown support for the strike were occupied with their own battles vis-a-vis the Social Contract. Trade union officials were busy seeking amendments to the law to prevent other Grunwick strikes. So were the Labour MPs who came to the Grunwick picket lines and spoke so eloquently about the dispute, who the Grunwick strikers knew who had failed them.

After the ACAS machinery had been set in motion and the glaring inadequacy of such a machinery had been exposed by a stubborn employer, the newly-formed Labour Party, the TUC and its affiliated unions shifted towards the need to protect ACAS and its parent - the Employment Protection Act, a step that was seen as a neutral way of solving the dispute. The TUC strived to avoid the possibility of perpetuating the confidence of workers in the Social Contract. Labour Party and union officials effectively took the stand that the Grunwick strike was simply a blip which reflected the inadequacies of the social legislations enacted in the past few years.

They had to take such a posture for political reasons. From their point of view retaining the confidence of the workers in legal processes was of paramount importance. It followed inexorably that the Labour Party would promise more legislations to set things right. So they have, the Post Office Bill and the two bills concerning the EPA are further manifestations of illusions that social de mocrats perpetrate.

NAPFF lost all the important court cases and has ended up with a huge bill of court costs. Ward continues to rule. The Tories are still discussing the question of 'closed shop'. For them, this was the most significant issue raised by Grunwick. A Tory MP has tabled a bill that seeks changes to the picketing laws to prevent, by law, mass picketing on the scale seen at the Grunwick factory gates.
The most important lesson from the Grunwick dispute is that the enemies of working class solidarity reside within the Trade Union movement as well as outside. The enemy within is far more dangerous precisely because he is privy to every move the working class makes. The Grunwick dispute has shown the strength of the Trade Union movement in uniting large sections of workers around a particular cause and at the same time revealed its weaknesses, its inability to extend that unity beyond certain limits, its inability to evolve effective ways of tackling enemies from within and asserting their own will in the face of opposition. The Grunwick dispute has not only given a glimpse of the power of workers when they stand united but also glaringly exposed the flims in the fabric of the Trade Union movement. It has shown that the alignment of forces that rallied for the Grunwick cause and supported the Labour Party (Trade Union leaders, Left-wing Labour MPs etc) ended up, almost inevitably, betraying the Grunwick strikers, because their final allegiance is to preserving the social democratic Labour Government, not to the basic principles they speak so much about. The inability of the Labour legislations to resolve the Grunwick dispute has shown firstly, that the workers can not rely solely on the laws to win their disputes and secondly, that the Social Contract has proved to be a raw deal. The brutality of the police towards workers in an industrial dispute and their supporters, with the compliance of the Government, has demonstrated once again the violence by which bourgeois democracy is preserved. The Grunwick mass picketing and the police violence have also underlined the fact that laws seeking to limit pickets should be resisted with full force.

As for immigrant workers' struggles, the response of the Trade Union officials has not undergone a qualitative change since the days of the Imperial Typewriters dispute. The difference between George Bromley's attitude to the workers at Imperial Typewriters and APEX towards Grunwick is only a matter of form, not substance as evidenced by the fact that when the Grunwick strikers went on hunger strike, APEX officials asked the strikers, "We have done so much for you. What more do you expect from us?"

Since the Grunwick strike started, the management has been forced to give wage increases to the workers still working in the factory and the working conditions have improved. Eventhough Ward took these steps as a bribe to retain the loyalty of those still working for him, it is the Grunwick strike that brought about these improvements, even if it is only for those working inside. The sheer tenacity with which the Grunwick strikers have persevered in their struggle has given heart to thousands of workers in small unionised factories. The strikers have been contacted by many such workers with a view to sharing their own experience. The Grunwick strikers will remain a shining example to workers in struggle for years to come.

Postscript
August 1978

On July 12, 1978 ACAS announced that it had failed to obtain the Grunwick workers' views on union recognition and could not proceed with the issue. On July 15, 1978 the Grunwick strikers voted to end the strike, 690 days after it had begun. The APEX executive council accepted this decision subsequently. The strike committee organised meetings with the local trades Council and union leaders in an effort to find jobs for the remaining strikers. After the decision to end the strike some of those involved in the dispute summed up the experience of the dispute; Mahmood Ahmed - "we have always disagreed with the idea that ACAS was the only way. We always said that mass pressure was the only way we can get victory at Grunwicks"; Mrs. Jayaben Desai blamed the Labour Government for their failure to obtain union recognition at Grunwicks and added, "The Trade Union movement will never forget this"; Jack Dromey - "the boss did not win at grunwick. The Trade Union movement lost......What snatched defeat from the jaws of victory was the domination of our Trade Union movement by what Fleet Street calls the moderates, and what everyone else calls the right wing. This strike brought out the very best and the very worst in the Trade Union movement.... When, last summer, we had a stranglehold on the company, the major preoccupation of the establishment and the government was the restoration of order at any cost, irrespective of the effect it would have on the cause of the Grunwick strikers. The government formed a Cabinet Committee on Grunwick, which brought pressure to bear on the TUC which then brought pressure to bear on APEX. We became pawns in a power game. We were squeezed out and then betrayed."
From the mass arrests to the court rulings, the debates in party conferences, the waxing and waning of trade union support many questions arise.

Was it a peculiar set of circumstances that caused the Grunwick explosion?
Why was it that a dispute involving immigrant workers attracted the attention of the unions? (Remember the Imperial Typewriters strike and the Mansfield Hosiery dispute.)
Was it simply because APEX was an expanding union looking for recruitments to swell its ranks?
What forms of support did the strikers receive?
What was the basis on which trade union support for the Grunwick Strike built?
What was responsible for the waning of trade union support?
Why was the relationship between the pickets and the police particularly bad long before the Grunwick dispute became a national issue?
Are picketing laws the answer as is being suggested?
Why is it that a bill concerning postal workers' right to undertake industrial action is being pushed through a largely empty Parliament?

This pamphlet was written and produced by members of the Manchester Marxist-Leninist Group and other Marxist-Leninists who were active in the Manchester Grunwick Strike Support Committee.
The Manchester Support Committee was formed in July 1977 to mobilise support amongst Trade Unionist and political militants on the broadest possible basis with one common principle - "that we act under the guidance and discipline of the Grunwick Strike Committee."
The Support Committee was a unitarian body that brought together Trade Union and political militants and with some successes continued to function until Spring 1978.

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