



JOBLESS HIT THE STREETS!

By Christophe Aguiton,
President of A.C.! The
main French organisation
for the unemployed

Unemployed workers have recently been having a notable political impact in France. Massive demonstrations in towns and cities throughout the country have been supplemented by occupations of the Dole Offices. These actions have won support from wide sections of the French people with an opinion poll in January showing 70% of public support for the protesters. Faced with these actions the government has been forced to make concessions and to increase the budget for unemployment benefits. The Dole Office occupations started in Marseilles because the local ASSEDIC, the equivalent of the Benefits Agency, refused to pay out the traditional Christmas bonus. This action was started by the CGT, a Trade Union which has long supported the unemployed and militant action. Meanwhile, other associations of the unemployed, independently of CGT's plans, had already decided on projects supported by trade unions. From the 16th to 21st December, an "urgent

social action" week was organised as a way to unite all organisations fighting against inequality, the rise of poverty and demanding increases in minimum benefits. Occupations spread outwards from Marseilles and into Paris. Posters demanding a Christmas bonus of £300 and benefit increases of £150 per month. These demands were adopted by the organisations of the unemployed as well as by sympathetic unions.

The Unemployed used the media to great effect and it was the continuous harassing of politicians on TV that played a significant part in winning the support of the public at large. One minister, Martin Aubrey, refused to comment on the demands

appear twice on TV and offer some concessions, including a pitiful 8% increase in one benefit for half a million people leaving another million with nothing. In the opinion of all the unemployment organisations these measures, however sig-

France on March 7th. Now the unemployed workers of Germany are organising a day of action every single month up to the German elections. International demonstrations have occurred in Amsterdam, Luxembourg and Brussels. The campaign for the Right to Work is developing across the whole of Europe.

We will be demonstrating again on June 13th, this time joining with comrades from across Europe, at the EU Conference of Ministers in Cardiff.

Will you be there?

During the occupation of the dole office in Gennevilliers, a Paris suburb, one of the protesters said: "Eight Billion francs [£800million] for the World Cup, a billion francs for the unemployed. Who's kidding who?"

but tried to discredit the campaign by claiming that only 13 dole offices were under occupation. Within five days the number of occupations had tripled! The occupations forced Prime Minister Jospin to

nificant, in no way came close to satisfying the specific demands of the French unemployed. Further demonstrations have taken place through France with hundreds of thousands turning out in a day of action across



Job Creation

In November 1997 the European Union rejected Jacques Delors its former leaders plan to create 10 million jobs, and stated in Luxembourg that job creation is not the responsibility of the European Union, but the responsibility of the member states. The February 1998 meeting of the most powerful industrialised countries in the world the G7 stated Governments should invest in education and training to make the worlds jobless more employable. The last British Government argued that Governments do not create jobs and job creation is only decided by the market and the requirements of employers.

The Combine believes that all Governments and all major trading blocs like the European Union have a responsibility to create jobs, and to raise the cash to finance it by looking at new, and bold ways of borrowing money in the short term and of raising the awareness to increase tax from those who can pay more in order to end poverty and human waste that unemployment brings.

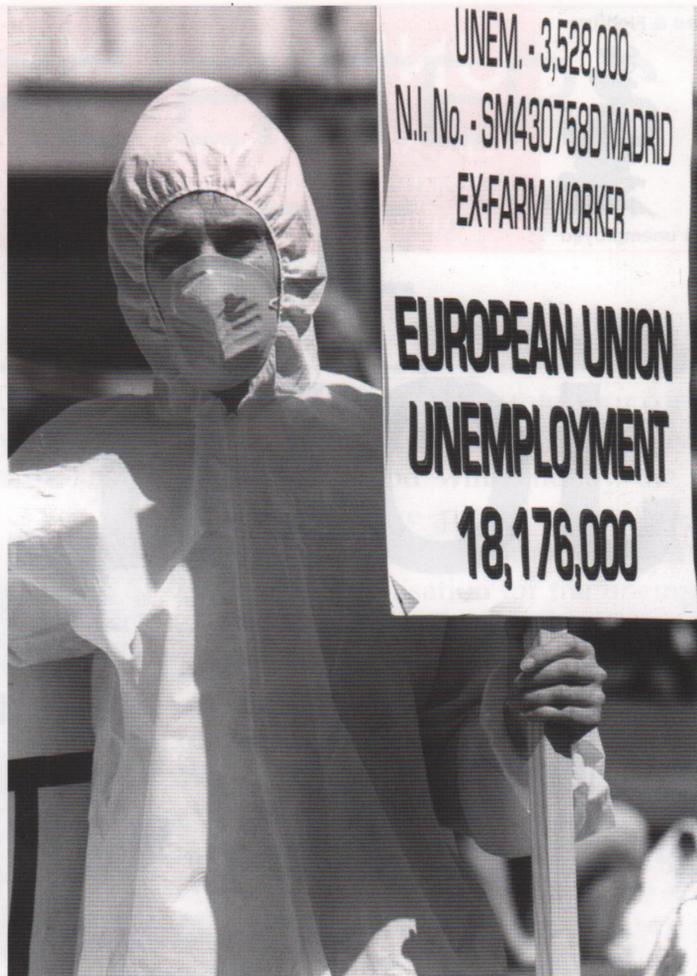
Incapacity Benefit

In 1995 the last Government introduced changes to phase out the invalidity benefit and replace it with incapacity, it was a policy to save money for the Treasury, and to make it harder for sick workers with and without jobs to get onto and stay on the new benefit, Labour in opposition opposed the changes as they were a set back for those on sickness benefits and stated that they would look for a better benefit system once they were elected. Labour has been in Government for over one year and incapacity benefit is still unchanged from when Labour in opposition fought its passage through Parliament. The Combine says the Government should and can reform incapacity benefit and should do it quickly to stop the regime of fear known as incapacity benefit.

Job Seekers Allowance

In March 1998 Alan Howarth M.P. a social security minister in reply to a Parliamentary colleague said there is no Government reform or review of the Job Seekers Allowance imminent. The Government will evaluate Welfare to Work, and working families tax credits before deciding what to do about JSA, Labour in opposition promised that on being elected to Government it would quickly and drastically reform, not repeal JSA. The Combine like the Parliamentary Labour Party opposed the last Governments attempt to impose JSA on the unemployed, we now know reforms would be welcomed by the Employment Service management and Unions, and the Unemployed. The Combine calls on this Government to implement those promises made in opposition immediately.

Kevin Flynn Chair NUCC



Did you hear about:

The "Jobseeker" from Burton on Trent who, having told the Dole Office that his sister was getting married at the weekend, went to the wedding in Cornwall? When he returned he found that his benefit was to be stopped because his "jobseeker's agreement" said that he was available for work seven days per week. "You can't be available if you're at a wedding" he was told! His appeal, some three months later, was upheld but it shouldn't have been necessary. The Nottinghamshire man who was told to go for a job as a lorry driver on £94 a week out of which he was expected to pay for two overnights every week? Because he refused he is being threatened with benefit suspension!

EUROPEAN CONFERENCE CALLS FOR NEW DEAL STANDARDS

The 1998 European Network of the Unemployed (ENU) Conference, hosted by the Scottish TUC at Glasgow's Caledonian University in April called for the New Deal programme to maintain certain minimum standards.

ENU believes that the New deal will only succeed if the following criteria are met:

- * Participation in the New Deal should be voluntary;
- * New Deal participants should be paid the appropriate rate for the job for any work done;
- * Mechanisms must exist for full trade union and unemployed involvement in the design, implementation and monitoring of the New Deal;
- * New Deal programmes should not lead to job substitution;
- * New Deal programmes should be of the highest quality and should include training towards nationally recognised qualifications;



SCROUNGERS PLC

Chancellor Gordon Brown wants to save money. Guardian journalist George Monbiot has the answer: cut the massive drain of taxpayers' cash going in welfare payments to industry.

Who of us would argue with the promise the Chancellor made in January to launch a "war on poverty." Neither is the hint that it will be partly financed through cuts in the government's support for industry likely to prove unpopular. It has long been hard to see why, if free enterprise is as robust as successive governments have maintained, it needs state support at all. But where is Mr Brown's blessed axe likely to fall? You can't help entertaining mixed feelings about the possibility that the most visibly subsidised companies might be targeted first.

No one outside the motor industry wants to see the railways run down, yet the thought of so much public money finding its way into the hands of the privateers who run them sticks in the craw. Much of the regional aid budget, indispensable as it is to the depressed parts of Britain, amounts to little more than relocation grants for ruthless multinationals, the UK's most successful benefit-tourists. But, galling as these payments may sometimes be, they are just the hours d'oeuvre at the start of the huge free lunch the United Kingdom offers to private industry. It is seldom whispered, even among Treasury hawks, but the corporate welfare state has never been fatter. Corporate welfare suckles from so many teats of national life that it is often hard to recognise, still harder to repulse. It is arguable that the whole nation has been marked down to a bargain basement price for sale to foreign "Investors". The Department of Trade and Industry's Invest-in-Britain bureau boasts to foreign businesses: "The UK has the least onerous labour regulations in Europe, with few restrictions on working hours, overtime

and holidays. There is no legal requirement to recognise a trade union. Many industries operate shift work, and 24-hour, seven-days-a-week production for both men and women."

Britain is, in other words, a giant loss leader, financed by a stupendous social subsidy which allows businesses to unload the costs they used to incur on to the rest of us.

Deregulation has been blamed for last year's alarming increase in fatal accidents at work. When companies need spend less on safety, the NHS picks up the bill. To ensure that such deregulation becomes irreversible the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), in negotiations over the multilateral agreement on investment, is insisting that strong health and safety, consumer protection and environmental controls are unfair barriers to trade.

The DTI is little more than a corporate dole office.

Every year the department spends tens of millions of pounds greasing the cogs of the oil industry, which, incidentally, pays the

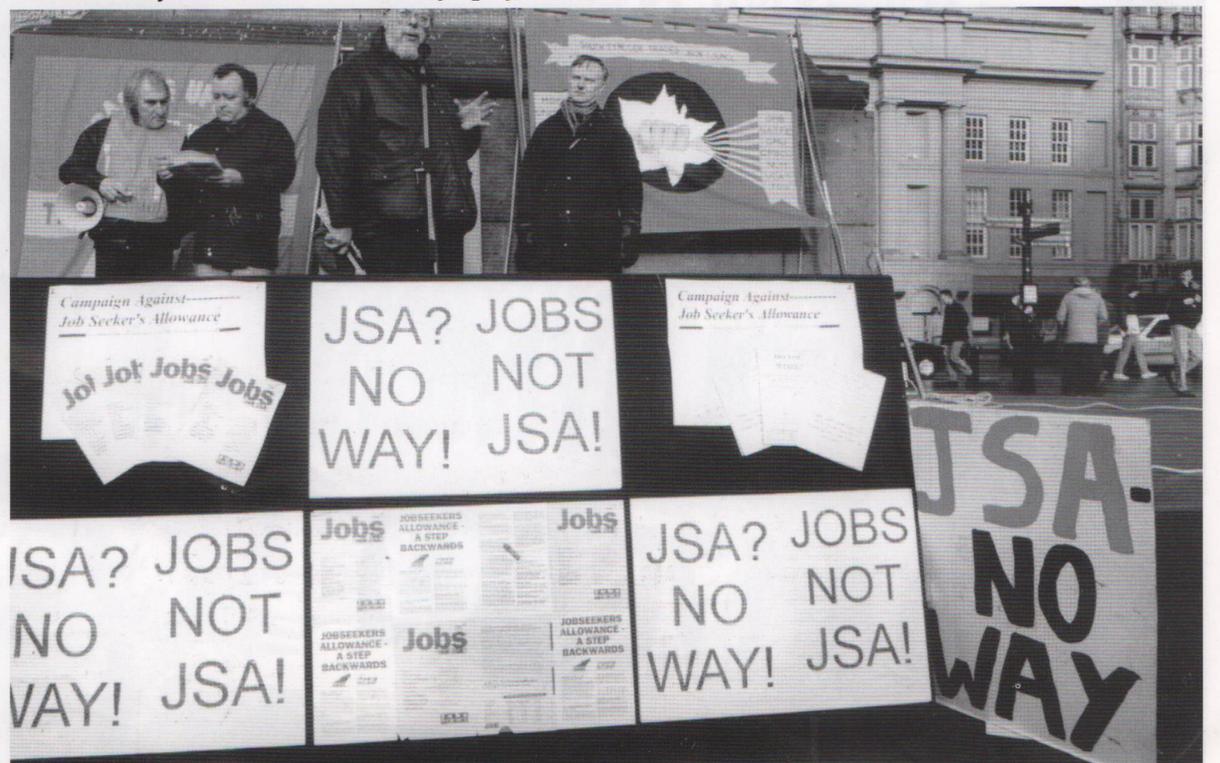
Crown little more than a peppercorn rent for the seabed whose treasures it taps.

The private finance initiative (PFI) is now as sticky with sweeteners as any Tory privatisation deal. The nuclear industry has been allowed to accumulate a £30 billion shortfall in its provision against the costs of decommissioning, which will have to be discharged by the taxpayer. The Ministry of Defence still conflates the defence of the nation with the defence of the nation's arms manufacturers.

Even social security offers as much help to business as it does to its nominal recipients. Family credit is, of course, a straightforward subsidy for sweatshops. So, in many cases, is housing benefit, which, incidentally, costs so much because the Government is feather-bedding the property industry by refusing to impose the planning regulations needed to bring down the price of development land.

If Gordon Brown is serious about getting corporate scroungers off welfare and into work, he should start by decommissioning the DTI and the Ministry of Defence.

This is a slightly abridged version of an article which first appeared in the Guardian 21st January 1998, with permission.



GEORDIE CENTRE ENTERS ITS THIRD DECADE

1975 saw the transition from high to mass youth unemployment in Newcastle. The adults experienced the same transition within a year. The working class and the unions had not experienced anything like it since the 1930's, and debates followed about how to fight mass unemployment in the union branches, work place committees etc.

Should workers take industrial action to defend jobs or seek higher severance payments? Was the so-called Youth Opportunity Programme (YOP) a betrayal of the youth or a temporary gap until apprenticeships were reinstated? Was this a temporary recession or the beginnings of a long protracted slump? These were the questions being debated. Without action, however, debates are sterile, so in 1978 the Newcastle Trades Union Council decided to establish the first TUC Centre Against Unemployment with the City Council providing a building and some money. A new movement was born.

The Tory Years

The early Tory Government deliberately created mass unemployment to attack the trade unions, to further transfer power from labour to capital, to transfer wealth from the poor to the rich. Every programme of the Tories from the Youth Training Scheme 1979 to the Job Seekers Allowance 1996 was geared to blaming the unemployed for not having a job and disciplining them to go on dead end schemes or low paid jobs and to undermine the employed and their unions. The unity of the employed and the unemployed was vital, and the Newcastle Centre

worked closely with the Trade Unions for maximum unity within the newly developing national network of TUC Unemployed Centres.



For twenty years The Centre has struggled to survive financially, and has faced many economic crises, but the spirit which set up our Centre in 1978 is as strong in 1998 as ever before. We enjoyed a wonderful night on the 1st. May 1997 when the Tory Government collapsed and there was a landslide victory for Labour. Now we demand full employment and quality jobs as Government changes to JSA and Incapacity Benefit, plus increases in benefits to alleviate poverty

which has constantly haunted our communities for the past 22 years. For 20 years our Centre has stood with and by the unemployed, we have provided welfare rights advice, run education courses, been a friend, carer, and organisation for the unemployed, we have organised marches, demonstrations, petitions, public meetings, organised occupations of doles etc. for the unemployed.

We have won claims for all kinds of employed and unemployed people, bringing millions of pounds into the local economy. We have stood on every picket line set up in the last 20 years in solidarity with workers in struggle. We have raised millions of hearts and given hope to many people whose poverty and suffering would have been worse without existence.

We are proud that the TUC Unemployed Workers Network originated in Newcastle with the setting up of our Centre by Newcastle Trades Council in 1978. We are similarly proud of the solidarity which, since then has been built and continues to exist between all the Centres throughout England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland.

This year we will have our AGM on Wednesday 15th. July at Gateshead Civic Centre. On that evening we will be celebrating twenty years of past struggles and at the same time looking forward to future battles until the scourge of unemployment is banished and our existence is no longer needed!

