

NEW

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35 HOUR WEEK UNIONS GO ALL OUT

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE 35 HOUR WEEK IN WEST GERMANY LOOK LIKE BEING THE FIRST MAJOR INDUSTRIAL ACTION THAT COUNTRY HAS SEEN SINCE THE LATE 1950s.

Over 80% of the unionised workers in the industrial region of Baden-Wurttemberg have voted in favour of taking action to support the struggle for the 35 hour week. This region is one of the most important industrial areas in Germany, where the auto industry is located.

IG Metall, the large metal workers union with over 2.6 million members and the print workers union which has already called strikes this year are behind the moves for a 35 hour week. Needless to say the bosses are totally opposed to the cut of five hours off the working week without loss of pay. They say that the so-called economic recovery would be affected by the cut.

What the bosses do not mention is that in recent years they have been making very healthy profits, especially in the car, steel and engineering industries and that a cut in the working week would only effect their over inflated profits and not the industries themselves.

The West German workers organisation the Freie Arbeiter Union, a part of the anarcho-syndicalist international, the IWA, have been active for some time now in promoting the 35 hour issue. They have been working alongside the local trade union "35 hour committees", which have sprung up in all the major industrial towns in Germany. The FAU have produced much propaganda around the issue, and are at present in the process of setting up their own 35 hour committees in towns where

there are no active committees at present.

The 35 hour struggle is the first attempt by the unions to do something about the mass unemployment in Germany, which is now standing at around 2.25 million. By reducing the working week to 35 hours and banning all overtime there is no doubt that jobs will be created. But still some of the unions are resisting any moves to deprive their members of overtime, these reactionary unions are split among themselves. In a recent strike at a shipyard, workers on the picket lines, fighting their proposed redundancies had to stand by and watch while fellow members of the same union carried on working, work which also included overtime.

A spokesman for one of the leading unions, IG Metall, said that the strike would last between two to three weeks before the employers gave in to the 35 hour demand, but in the last large scale industrial action in 1957, the metal workers had to hold out for 16 weeks and that was just for an improvement in the sickness benefits.



XVII CONGRESS IWA

The Anarcho-syndicalist and revolutionary syndicalist organisations of the IWA (International Workers Association) held their XVII Congress in Madrid this Easter. Delegates from the FAU (W. Germany), ASO (Denmark), NSF (Norway), ASF (Sweden), CNTF (France), WSM (Japan), CNT (Spain), USI (Italy), DAM (Britain), LWG (New York), FORA (Argentina), CNTB (Bulgaria) FORVE (Venezuela), were present as were a number of comrades from fraternal organisations. Messages of solidarity were received from the IWW in America, Libertarian Youth of Portugal, and the prisoners of Segovia who are members of the CNT.

The Congress lasted four days, at the same time an anarchist festival was held at which films dealing with the workers struggle were shown daily, with public meetings in the evenings. An exhibition of the propaganda work of the sections of the IWA was staged in the entrance hall of the Congress building.

The Congress followed the prepared agenda which dealt with the many problems facing the working classes and the international anarcho-syndicalist movement. Matters relating to the activity of certain organisations outside the IWA were also discussed. In particular those of the Swedish syndicalist union, the SAC. This union has for a number of years past attempted to establish a rival syndicalist international, free of all revolutionary content, ready and willing to work with reformist unions. It has already showed its hand in Spain where it helped to establish the breakaway faction of the CNT who call themselves the 'Congress of Valencia' or Renovarda's. This strange alliance see nothing strange

in holding top level talks with the PSOE (Labour Party), or holding joint Mayday rallies with Catalan nationalists of the so-called CNT-PP-CC. The Congress was told by the delegates of the continuing fight to regain the lost properties of the CNT, which were seized by the Francoists at the end of the Civil War.

The other unions and political parties have had no trouble in reclaiming their offices and printing presses.

The Congress dealt with the situations in the countries of the various sections and received reports from the groups there. Unemployment was a major issue in most countries except Japan. The FAU reported the moves in Germany to reduce the working week and their involvement in the struggle. The French revolutionary syndicalist union the CNTF reported on their successes in the past year and in particular their proposed union with the Syndicat Autogestionnaire des Travailleurs des PTT du Rhone, which is a postal workers union. They also explained their recent moves to form an agricultural workers section within the CNTF.

One of the new sections, the Workers Solidarity Movement from Japan related the situation over there and in particular the very bad position of the workers in the company unions, the delegates of the DAM paid great attention to this report, in view of the recent moves by the British reformist unions to bend over backwards to meet the demands of the Japanese multi-national company Nissan who are about to open a factory in the North East of England. Most of these large companies in Japan have their own house unions, they have no record of ever going

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DAM/IWA

Aims and Principles of the DAM-IWA

- (1) The DAM-IWA is a working class organisation.
- (2) Our aim is the creation of a free and classless society.
- (3) We are fighting to abolish the state, capitalism and wage slavery in all their forms and replace them by self-managed production for need not profit.
- (4) In order to bring about the new social order, the workers must take over the means of production and distribution. We are the sworn enemies of those who would take over on behalf of the workers.
- (5) We believe that the only way for the working class to achieve this is for independent organisation in the workplace and community and federation with others in the same industry and locality, independent of, and opposed to all political parties and trade union bureaucracies. All such workers organisations must be controlled by the workers themselves and must unite rather than divide the workers movement. Any and all delegates of such workers organisations must be subject to immediate recall by the workers.
- (6) We are opposed to all States and state institutions. The working class has no country. The class struggle is world wide and recognises no artificial boundaries. The armies and police of all states do not exist to protect the workers of those states, they exist only as the repressive arm of the ruling class.
- (7) We oppose racism, sexism, militarism and all attitudes and institutions that stand in the way of equality and the right of all peoples everywhere to control their own lives and the environment.
- (8) The DAM-IWA is a federation of groups and individuals who believe in the principles of anarcho-syndicalism; a system where the workers alone control industry and the community without the dictates of politicians, bureaucrats, bosses and so-called experts.

Want to know more about the DAM-IWA and its work? Well why not write to the National Secretary c/o Raven Press 8-10 Gt. Ancoats Street, Manchester 4., if you live in Britain or to the International Secretary c/o 121 Railton Road, London SE 24 England if you live overseas. The DAM-IWA have many publications dealing with the struggle in the workplace, strike tactics, racism, etc. Why not write for a detailed list.

IWA continued from page 1 on strike and in fact are nothing but factory social clubs.

The delegates of the USI, which have recently held their 1st Congress as a revolutionary syndicalist union reported on the progress they had made there. The Congress listened with great attention to the details of how they rebuilt the USI from a small propaganda group to being an active revolutionary union, organised in the health services, communications, transport etc. Today there are USI groups active throughout Italy.

The USI also laid out their position on the present world economic situation. They were in particular concerned that the IWA had not as yet faced up to the problems of the workers in the Third World. The multinational companies are planning to use the Third World worker as a weapon to destroy the militant unions in the so-called developed

FRANCE-POLAND

At the time of going to press we are not sure if the French "Socialist" government have carried out their plan to expel the Solidarnosc militant Zbigniew Kowalewski.

Comrade Kowalewski is a member of the Solidarnosc presidium in Lodz, which is Poland's second largest industrial city. He was a leading advocate of the self-management movement and as such an unpopular figure among the Catholic wing of the union.

When he was in France in December 1981, martial law was proclaimed in Poland, he chose to stay in France rather than return to certain imprisonment. During his time in Paris he had several long meetings with comrades from the IWA (anarcho-syndicalist international), at which he expressed his desire to work closer with the sections of The IWA. Kowalewski believed that the anarcho-syndicalists and revolutionary syndicalists, were very close to his ideas on self-management, though he himself was not a syndicalist.

These views needless to say upset those in the CFDT and CGT who had initially invited him to visit France, and those within the Solidarnosc group in Paris who supported the Catholic wing of the union. It is therefore not too surprising that the hacks of the CFDT and CGT are not over concerned that their fellow comrades in the government are making moves to send him back to Poland.

Letters of protest please

world. We must be prepared to meet this challenge from capitalism, and put a stop to their plans. Only by working with the immigrant workers in our own countries will we be able to put over the ideas of revolutionary syndicalism, so when the time comes for their return to their own countries they will carry with them the ideas of revolutionary unionism.

Much of the work of the Congress was carried out by commissions elected during the Congress to deal with the finer details of the points on the agenda.

All commissions reported back to the Congress for ratifications of their decisions. Each section must within three months ratify all Congress decisions before they can become IWA policy.

Some of the major problems which the Congress discussed were, Central America and the Military Dictatorships, the EEC, Nuclear Power, New Technology, and the Advance of the Right.

On this last matter the DAM-IWA presented a statement

to the Congress on how they viewed Fascism and how they thought best we in the International could combat it.

"We must, through the work of the IWA provide a living practical alternative to capitalism, fascism and state-socialism, that bares itself on the libertarian principles of:
-self management
-international solidarity
-direct action

This work is not just a process of education. It is also a question of propaganda by deed, giving a concrete example ourselves of how we can fight against oppression and exploitation now, and at the same time creating the basis for a new society in the shell of the old."

The DAM-IWA felt that the threat of fascism was very real and therefore could not be dismissed or ignored.

Before the Congress closed it went on to elect a new General Secretary, this was Comrade Fidel Goron of the Madrid Construction Union of the CNT-AIT.

CHILE

Several members of the Chilean copper workers union have gone on hunger strike in Santiago in a series of one day fasts to draw attention to the El Teniente miners, seven of whom are on hunger strike for more than 20 days.

Meanwhile on the night of the 15 May, forty bombs went off in Santiago, with further blasts in Valparaiso, Vina del Mar, and Concepcion. There were no injuries and most of the targets were banks, offices of the mining company, the airport and some electrical transformers.

SPAIN

A crowd reported as between 4-5,000 attended the Mayday rally called by the CNT-AIT in Barcelona. A rival rally called by splinter groups of the CNT describing themselves as the CNT-AIT oposicion, CCT-CNT (Renovarda) and the CNT-PP CC and addressed by the ex-General secretary of the CNT-AIT Jose Bondia who was expelled recently from the anarcho-syndicalist union, attracted between 3-400 people. The rival rally was timed for 11.30am the same time as the main CNT-AIT rally.

Alvaro Alvaro Del Rio is a young comrade serving sentence in Carabanchel prison, Madrid. Please show solidarity by sending good-will messages, post-cards, greetings, etc., to: Alvaro Alvaro Del Rio, Apartado De Correos 27007, Madrid-25 (Spain)

to: Monsieur Gaston Deferre
Ministre de l'Interieur,
1 Place Beauveau,
Paris 8
France

One of the imprisoned militants of Solidarnosc, Piotr Bednarz is reported by the Polish authorities to have attempted to kill himself in prison. Bednarz was listed as a witness in the trial of



of a fellow militant Jozef Pinior.

There are still thirteen Solidarnosc and Kor militants in prison in Poland, most have been there since 1981. They have not yet been brought to trial.

The Solidarnosc members are; Marian Jurczyk, Andrzej Gwiazda, Seweryn Jaworski, Karol Mondzelawski, Grzegorz Palka, Jan Rulewski, and Andrzej Rozplochowski.

The Kor members are Adam Michnik, who is reported to be ill. Jacek Kuron, Henryk Wujec and Zbigniew Romaszewski who are held in Rakowiecka prison.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE IMMIGRANT WORKER IN THE CAPITALIST PLAN WAS HAMMERED HOME TIME AND TIME AGAIN AT THE RECENT CONGRESS OF THE INTERNATIONAL WORKERS ASSOCIATION IN MADRID THIS EASTER. THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE LOOKS AT THE RECENT TROUBLE IN THE FRANCE AUTO INDUSTRY, AND IN PARTICULAR THE ROLE OF NORTH AFRICAN WORKERS IN THE TALBOT PLANT AT POISSY.

All France is awash with industrial and social strife. Coal miners have struck, so have workers in the automobile industry, steel and ship building. Government employees have struck too, and farmers and lorry drivers have intervened with a spate of dramatic and militant actions.

This general restlessness among French workers and other sections of the society stems from the fact that the economy is presently undergoing a process of reconstruction and modernisation. The social consequences of this are drastic. Thousands of workers are aware that they will lose their jobs as machinery replaces men and women. This uncertainty has touched a raw nerve in French society.

In the forefront of these militant strikes are the immigrant workers who were recruited into post war French industry from Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Senegal and other countries in Francophone Africa, Martinique, and Guadeloupe. Through strikes, mass meetings and demonstrations immigrant workers have dramatised, for all of France to see and to note, the conditions under which they work and live.

The most recent strike, which caught the attention of the French and other Europeans, took place late last year at the Talbot works in Poissy, a suburb of Paris. A work force of 17,000

laboured at Talbot, producing cars for the Peugeot Simca Automobiles Group (PSA). 44% of these are immigrants, mainly North African. 80% of the assembly line workers are also immigrants, and so too are 52% of those concentrated in the lowest paid jobs.

Abdelkader and Mohammed from Khorigbha in Morocco worked in the B3 shop at Talbot, which housed the assembly line and the coach works. Abdelkader tells how he was recruited from his village in Morocco.

"At the labour office there was a lot of people who wanted to work abroad. They made me pass a test. I had to put similar nuts and bolts together. There was a bar attached to a string, you had

RACISM AND EXPLOITATION AT POISSY

OR

HOW IMMIGRANT WORKERS STOOD UP FOR THEIR RIGHTS AT TALBOT

to pull it to show your strength. They measured your chest and your height - everything. They made you undress and looked at your arse and all that. They inspected you like cattle."

"We had to go to Ain Barja for another visit. Ain Barja is a hospital like a barracks, made of wood, covered with corrugated iron. All the big French firms have offices there and nearly all the Moroccan immigrants have gone through Ain Barja. I waited seven hours and I got a contract for one year and a one way ticket. There were seventy of us. We took the train to Tangiers, then to Algeciras, then the train to Madrid, then from Madrid to Paris. We only travelled by night. At Ain Barja they gave us two tins of sardines and one of corned beef - for two and a half days. They were waiting for us at the station. We went to a hostel, tiny little rooms with partitions of plywood. If your neighbour coughs or farts, you hear everything."

Life in hostels, where immigrants are housed, is distinctly abnormal. First,

there is a curfew. The worker must be in by 10pm and no women are allowed. These hostels are run by wardens who were formerly officers in the French colonial army. The workers have no protection against eviction; they are not allowed to hold meetings there, and no contract exists between the landlords and tenants, as is the case in general society.

By arrangement with the French authorities, intelligence agents were infiltrated among the workers. These agents came from the countries of origin. There have been instances of workers being arrested and interrogated on return to their home countries for holidays. In one case, a photograph of a Moroccan worker, which could only have been taken at a factory in France, appeared in an intelligence dossier back in Morocco.

Within the organisation of the hostel, hierarchy of the village system is reproduced, ensuring complete control of the worker. From the hostel, the workers are bussed to the factory. Once in the factory, on the first day, the

new workers are met by the personnel officer. Invariably, sitting next to him, is the recruiting officer of the Confederation des Syndicats Libres - an extreme right wing, fascist, company union. They join, and it is vital that they do so.

Mohammed Ains: "The CSL recruiting officer came to see me after I'd been in the factory two days. He was Moroccan. 'How are you brother? Where do you come from?' and so on. Then he told me I had to join the union, that way I wouldn't lose my job, and that I could come and see him if I had any problems. A CSL card is the passport to Talbot." Abdelkader goes on to illustrate the power of the CSL.

"You're married and you want other accommodation. They ask for you CSL membership card. It's the CSL the whole time. I asked for a loan of 2,000 francs and to get it I had to pay CSL dues for one year. What's more the CSL collector is normally a worker. In fact he's never at his job. I asked for P1 qualification (skilled worker). The foreman promised it to me - the lot - but I never got it. I didn't know that you had to bring him back a carpet when you went on holiday, or buy him a bottle of Pernod."

The immigrant worker has no right of stay in France. Should he be convicted of a criminal offence within a year of his arrival he can be deported. When his initial period of stay comes to an end he must apply to the immigration authorities for renewal. It is vital that he be employed, for if he is not he risks deportation. Immigrant workers constantly complain that they are frequently harassed by police officers who demand that they produce their immigration documents.

Such have been the conditions under which immigrants have worked and lived; millions of them in France, working in the most modern productive activity, in an advanced capitalist society, and reduced to conditions akin to primitive slavery. They do not have the vote, and until recently, it was against the law to form their own organisations, when all around them a vibrant, democratic life is being pursued. Their segregation from the mass of indigenous French workers is complete. "I am not talking to those slaves, those dirty foreigners," one French worker commented. Immigrant workers relate that they have worked for fifteen years alongside Frenchmen and not a single word, outside of orders to do this or that, has passed between them for the entire period.



There was a distinct change when the Mitterand government came to power in 1981.

An amnesty for illegal workers was offered and some quarter of a million workers benefited. Of greater importance is the fact that immigrants could now form their own organisations. Also, Gaston Defferre, Minister of the Interior and Mayor of Marseilles, where there is a large concentration of immigrants warned the police that their "racist and brutal behaviour" towards immigrants had to change. And finally, all relations with intelligence services from the countries of origin were brought to an end.

Not all these reforms have been instituted with thoroughness.

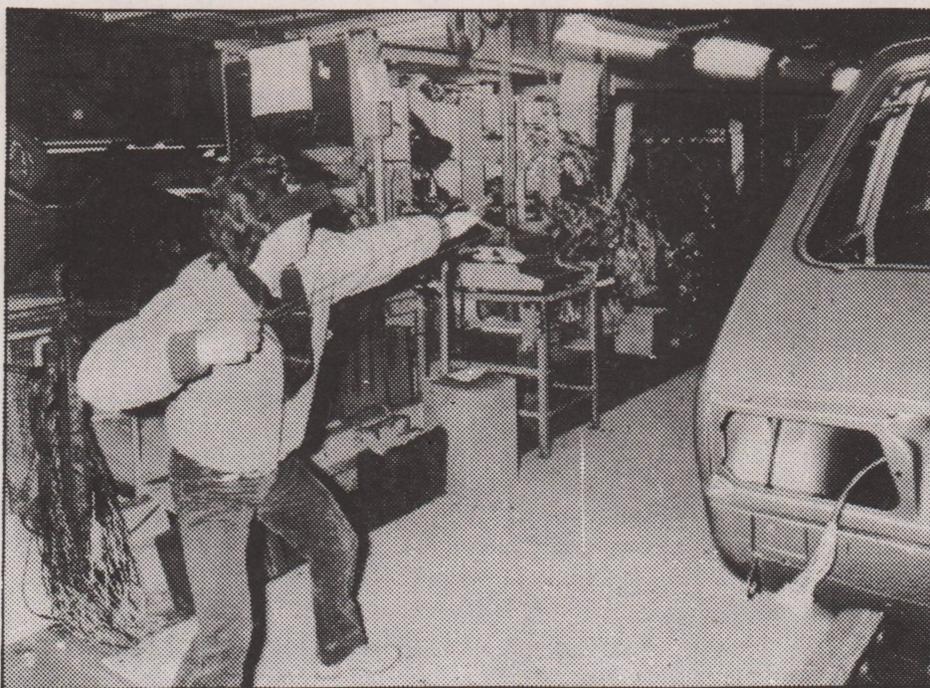
The profound change of attitudes among migrants was first manifested within industry. During the 1950s the Communist Party union, the CGT, was virtually eliminated from French industry, and the CSL reigned supreme. Slowly but surely, throughout the late 1970s, both the CGT and the Socialist Party's CFDT began to recruit once more within industry. But not without fierce and sometimes violent opposition from the CSL. Abdelkader describes this period:

"In 1976, I decided, quietly to take a CGT membership card. For one year they knew nothing about it. Then they saw me with blokes from the CGT. One day, Nora (CGT delegate) came to see me. At the time there were six or seven of us in the B2 shop, perhaps ten or so in the B3. We were quickly noticed if we spoke together! The CSL collectors tried to recuperate me, to threaten me with losing my job and not getting increases. They told me that they are communists. They threatened that I would be arrested in Morocco. In 1976 some union members were arrested coming back from Rabat. The Moroccan Association 'worked with the CSL. In 1980 the CGT began to grow, the CSL got irritated. When we were distributing leaflets, they snatched them from us. Once, a CSL screwed up a leaflet on the face of the black friend who was with me. We couldn't answer. Some of my friends were beaten up. I was lucky. They put spare parts into our lockers to get us dismissed for theft."

The liberal nature of the Mitterand regime strengthened the resolve of the immigrant workers, and the trickle into the CGT and the CFDT became a deluge post

1981. In the 1982 union elections at Talbot both the CGT and the CFDT recruited half the workforce, and the CSL were reduced to representing 39% of the workers. The mass of immigrant workers voted for the CGT and the white workers for the CSL.

In the first half of 1982 immigrant workers struck at the Citroen, Renault and Talbot car factories. Citroen was named the 'factory of fear' and here the strikes were triggered off by the racist remarks of the foremen. In June 1982, at Talbot a member of the CSL jostled a worker who had been laid off and had returned to sell mint in the carpark. This was the trigger and the strike lasted a month. The CSL intervened to stop the strike and violent battles ensued. Several workers, mainly CSL, ended up in hospital, and among those seriously injured was the personnel manager, Hemery. The Minister of the Interior, Gaston Defferre, announced that he was ready to maintain order if the management asked him to do so.



Meanwhile the police surrounded the factory and evicted the immigrants who were occupying the B3 shop, only to see them return on the following day. The CGT and the CFDT issued warnings to the government against using police and they refrained from any further attempts at eviction.

The immigrants demanded a pay increase of 400 francs for all workers; a fifth week of holidays to be taken at the workers choice; longer rest periods on the assembly line and replacement personnel to be made available on the assembly line; 40% reduction on the air ticket for workers going home on

holidays; the part of the 13th month pay to be paid in June instead of July. Abdelkader takes up the story:

"The strike was described at length in the press. It was the liberation. I couldn't believe it. It was too much the first strike at Talbot. Then for a year, power was on our side and the superintendents were in a situation of inferiority.

There was more to the strike. The immigrants set up a system of delegates who represented different work areas. They virtually bypassed trade union representation and dealt directly with management. Abdelkader was an assembly line delegate.

The government hit back. Prime Minister, Mauroy, ascribed the new militancy to the agitation of Muslim fundamentalists. "The main difficulties which remain are those of the immigrant workers whose problems I am aware of but who, I am obliged to acknowledge it, are being stirred up by religious and political groups whose basis is in criteria which have little

manning, but their refusal was based on the lack of a social plan to accompany the redundancies. The Minister of Labour, a member of the central committee of the Communist Party, Ralite, appointed an expert, Pierre Beregovoy, to look into the situation and report.

By December 7 a rumour was in circulation that the redundancies would be accepted. A few hundred unskilled immigrant workers went on strike and occupied the factory. On December the 17 Ralite, announced 1905 redundancies with a social plan which stated the following:

6-8 months vocational training for those who lost their jobs.

A reduction in the price of a truck for those who wanted to go into a small transport business.

20,000 francs for those who wanted to return home.

The CFDT supported the strike under the slogan "No Redundancies". Not so the CGT whose leaders are part of the central committee of the Communist Party on which body sits, Ralite, Minister of Labour and author of the redundancies and social plan.

Of the 1905 redundancies announced by Ralite, 1500 were North African workers. It was stated that the remaining 500 were French citizens. It turned out that 350 of these were from Guadeloupe and Martinique. The conclusion was clear. Firstly, it was racial in content, aimed, of course, at smashing the growing power of black workers in the car industry. And, secondly, the Communist Party, posing as radical, was central to the manoeuvre.

On December 20 the striking workers rejected the CGT leaflet which outlined the plan and from then on anti-CGT sentiments became part of the rhetoric of the strikers. Three days later the strikers made contact with the daily paper, "Liberation", requesting a journalist to attend a press conference where they announced that they wanted to take charge of their own lives, "without unions or parties". "Nobody" they added "is capable of speaking for the immigrants except the immigrants themselves". They went on to identify the CGT for special criticism. "They recruit us and do not consult us".

After the Christmas holidays Nora Trehel, CGT representative, was booed and screamed at when she sought approval of the plan. That was on January 3. Two days later the CSL mobilised and launched an

to do with French social reality. "And again the Minister of the Interior, Defferre, identified the strikers as "Shi-ites". Mitterand accepted this version of events with the comment that his Prime Minister "spoke as an informed person".

Then the counter revolution struck. On July 12, 1983 Calvert, Director of the PSA group, announced 8000 redundancies within the group. 3,000 were to go at once at Talbot. The government refused to accept the redundancies. They accepted managements position that the lay offs were the consequences of over

USI A REVOLUTIONARY ORGANISATION RE-EMERGES

attack on the strikers. CSL goons referred to the immigrants as "les bougnoules", a derogatory term, and called for them to be thrown into the Seine. North African workers came from other factories as the violence mounted. Here's how one Guadeloupean worker saw it: "Men of the CSL came armed with guns to prevent people from going in and out. They were threatening to blow up the factory. The West Indians didn't really fight. Out of three West Indians on the spot, only one had been laid off. The other two were sympathetic to the strike."

In this melee the CFDT, who all along supported the strikers, went into reverse and called the police to evacuate the factory.

The idea of repatriation is now part of the Socialist government policy. Renault has since announced 10,000 redundancies over the next two years and expressed its willingness to negotiate terms of repatriation with immigrant workers.

First published in Race Today magazine.

ANARCHO-SYNDICALIST PUBLICATIONS

DIRECT ACTION
national paper of the DAM-IWA, 20p
59 Cookridge St. Leeds LS2 3AW

Publications of the IWA sections.

Le COMBAT SYNDICALISTE
Bourse du Travail, 3 rue Merly, 31000 Toulouse, France.

DIREKTE AKTION
Postlagerkarte 073654A, 4600 Dortmund West Germany.

LOTTA DI CLASSE
CP 2382, 00100 Roma AD, Italy.

ARBEIDER SOLIDARITET
Boks 1883, Vika, Oslo Norway.

SOLIDARIDAD OBRERA
c/Reina Cristina 12, 2, 2a Barcelona 3 Spain.

BLACK FLAG
Anarchist fortnightly, 30p
121 Railton Road, London SE 24

ANARCHY
84B Whitechapel High St. London E1

IT IS A WELL KNOWN FACT THAT AFTER THE FAMOUS (in the annals of the workers movement) INTERNATIONAL ANARCHIST CONGRESS HELD IN AMSTERDAM IN 1907, MANY DIRECT ACTION COMMITTEES WERE FORMED IN ITALY, TO WHICH ADHERED ABOUT 83,000 PEOPLE. BUT IT WAS AT THE CONGRESS OF MODENA IN 1912 THAT THE UNIONE SINDICALE ITALIANA WAS CREATED. IT HAD A MEMBERSHIP OF 200,000.

FROM ITS INCEPTION TO THE ADVENT OF FASCISM MANY ATTEMPTS WERE MADE TO TURN IT FROM ITS REVOLUTIONARY PATH AND MAKE IT A REFORMIST ORGANISATION.

It was Armando Borghi as a general secretary and first issue of 'Lotta di Classe' that brought the union to its revolutionary position. The severe repression during fascism eliminated the USI completely, which until then had 500,000 members.

After World War II, all socialist and syndicalist forces were united under a common flag of unity. This unity proved of short duration and this led to the formation of committees of co-ordination to reconstruct the USI. These committees were active in the 70's, but what happened to the USI after this period?

Carlo Bianchi, present general secretary of the USI explains the situation to a comrade of the French Anarchist Federation.

CARLO BIANCHI: During the 70's the libertarian movement had passed through a grave crisis due to the murder of Pinelli and the imprisonment of Valpreda and other anarchist comrades. In spite of these events necessitating an intensive amount of counterinformation work, the project of rebuilding the USI as an opposition to reformist trade unions was begun. This happened at the 13th Congress of the Italian

Anarchist Federation, and a commission was set up to work together with other workers on this issue. Nevertheless, two tendencies soon appeared. In 1978, one tendency had regrouped as the USI, while the majority of the comrades in the FAI had decided the means of rebuilding it, consisted of first of building bases of syndicalist practice in the work place.

FAF: And today?

CB: All the debates that ensued then are not yet finished. The USI had thought that to work as a revolutionary minority created confusion, failed to clarify the situation and failed to distinguish itself from

the Italian 'Anarchist' party (crypto communists who used the method of syndicalism as transmission belt in favour of the Italian Communist Party).

Today this polemic has ended and we have begun to occupy ourselves with problems related to the world of labour. We have begun to organise workers on these problems, and in the meantime, the USI and the FAI continue to work together and maintain dialogue on workers issues.

We have invited the FAI and all segments of the libertarian movement that we have good relations with to our congress.

This is an important



moment for the USI. The earlier hopes of rebuilding the USI and enhancing syndicalist activity were not fulfilled. Hence the necessity to re-activate the union today.

FAF: In which regions and industries are the USI most active?

CB: Our organisation is pretty weak, but we have roots geographically in Rome, Milan, Trieste and the region of Marche. Here it is proper to state that the creation of the USI has been the work of some dozens of militants but today, there are more groups in formation. We are strongly represented in the health industry, but we also have contacts in the communications, public service, transport, and other industries.

To be accepted we have had to face many difficulties.

Among other things we do not have the benefit of official recognition, as other trade unions do. We have to struggle to participate in general workers assemblies and factory councils. It is only in the health industry that we are influential.

FAF: Do the USI have any relations or contacts with the anarchists or other minorities in the reformist unions?

CB: Due to bitter arguments we have no contacts with other trade unions, but we have friendly relations with our comrades in these organisations. Actually they are waiting to see how the USI is going to work. And if it does, according to their expectations, they are going to join it.

FAF: What international contacts do you have?

CB: We have good relations with the IWA and its sections. In particular, we are interested in strengthening our relations with the CNT-AIT. Thus the attendance of its General Secretary, Fernando Montero at our Congress, will give us a great opportunity for that.

On the other hand we keep up extensive international contacts with the international libertarian movement, thanks to our comrade Umberto Marzocchi of the CRIFA (Anarchist International)

FAF: What future do you envisage for anarcho-syndicalism in Italy?

CB: There is a great future for anarcho-syndicalism if a unity is realised on a common revolutionary syndicalist level. This unity is necessary if we are to successfully develop our ideas in the work place.

International contacts would be of great help. For example, there could be common action on certain international problems, such as ecology, famine in the Third World, problems of energy etc.

On the other hand the social and economic situation of contemporary Italy favours anarcho-syndicalism. This is one of the main reasons why we are holding this congress. We know that unemployment is increasing rather than diminishing. We denounce certain technological advances in capitalist society as dangerous and causing unemployment. The Italian workers increasingly show their hostility towards the reformist unions which have no answer to all these problems. The USI is the alternative to reformist trade unions.

PERSPECTIVES ON SYNDICALIST ALTERNATIVES

The last wages agreement in Italy on 22 January 1982 strengthened the reformist unions which had negotiated it. The rising inflation overshadowed more basic demands and led to an increasingly political negotiation of the agreement. This lowering of the purchasing power had rather much more impact than had been foreseen.

Thus all demands, the workers had fought for were buried, the reduction of work time without any loss in wages, the struggle against dismissals, the rejection of state controlled health services, etc.

The USI realises that the traditional modes of struggle are useless. The introduction of new technology completely removes the worker from the knowledge of the various stages of production.

The USI believes that it is necessary to re-appropriate workers technical knowledge and to use the forms of struggle abandoned by the reformist unions: wild cat strikes, go slows, lightning stoppages, utilisation of various forms of civil disobedience etc, and through these struggles to engender the sense of solidarity among various groups of workers.

The USI demands the restructuring of the unions, on the bases of the work place. It proposes workers factory councils and shop floor delegates, who are directly representative of their work places and not

just representatives of the reformist trade union structure, as at present.

The USI considers itself a syndicalist organisation advancing demands of workers and not manipulated by the existing reformist trade unions. It tries to build a strategy of intervention which has to be the possession of the whole working class.

The USI has to explain its actions regarding the following objectives:

- (1) The reduction of the working week to 35 hours without a reduction in wages. This paired with the improvement of conditions of work and the creation of new employment.

- (2) The rejection of any forced transfer of workers from one factory to another. This mobility of the work force is necessary to the new organisation of capitalism, but it is contrary to the interests of the working class, unless these transfers are voluntary.

- (3) The integral control over the conditions of work, which allow for the elimination of work hazards, the modification of production, reduced working hours and special provisions for dangerous work where this exists. Also the setting up of research units to provide scientific information on dangerous work practices.

- (4) The firm rejection of the shutdown of work places on technical pretexts, which is always the first step in the process of standing or dismissal of workers.

- (5) The re-appropriation of the initiative to determine for ourselves an acceptable minimum workers wage which



will serve as the basis for all future agreements and contracts, which are entered into.

(6) The USI is opposed to all tendencies towards worker/management co-determination and it re-affirms the value of workers selfmanagement. It is going to support all activities leading in this direction

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