

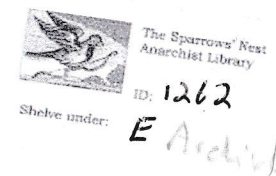
No.66/67 Jan.-June 91

# ECHANGES 66/67

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INFORMATION AND CORRESPONDENCE - WRITE TO:  
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TO



## ABOUT ECHANGES

### Production of Echanges

In Echanges no.65 (p.2) we explained some practical problems of the production of the bulletin/pamphlets and other activities. This often leads to delays in publication, material appearing later than it ought to, matters/countries not analysed or informed about in either the English or the French edition or hardly at all (at least not in writing in the bulletin, although a lot of discussions and exchange of material takes place), etc. The same can be said once more, with additional reasons lately being participants daily, private matters having to do for example with things like high workload (in private jobs as well as involvement with other projects/activities), well-deserved holidays, illness, moving to other addresses, etc. We don't mind saying openly that these kind of 'problems' does have and will continue to have an effect on Echanges' activity as far as regularity, quantity and quality of publication is concerned. For many vanguardist/activist groups believing to have a task, a role to play for the working class struggles now or in the future, or generally attributing a great importance to their publishing (or non-publishing), - this would constitute a problem to be dealt with by for example means of pressure on the participants, all kinds of political 'explanations' and so on. Not ascribing such a role to itself, Echanges does not see this situation as a big problem, but something which we would have wanted to be otherwise and therefore will try to improve upon.

### Pamphlets

-- A new pamphlet will be **ECHANGES ET MOUVEMENT - Presentation pamphlet**. This is a presentation text giving the history of Echanges and the political basis for the project, including a set of 'Basic principles' (what some would call a 'platform'). This text should be useful and informative to most receivers of Echanges and will be sent to all subscribers. Others can have it by writing to our address. This pamphlet could also explain and complement some of the remarks above at Echanges.

-- Some out of print pamphlets are now available again and can be found in the List of Publications.

-- There are a number of wishes/plans for reprints or new pamphlets, but what's possible to realise is restricted by time, money, distribution possibilities etc.

### Addresses

This issue of the English edition is still published with the London post office box as the official address of Echanges, but there will gradually be a moving of correspondence and other mail to our Paris address (Echanges, BP 24175866 Paris Cedex 18) and possibly one other address. The London post box is still valid and mail will be

collected, but those writing letters to us could note that letters in most cases will be received by us quicker when using the Paris address. Details will follow in a later issue concerning correspondence, orders and exchange of publications.

### Forthcoming issues:

Some of the planned material is about:

- Greece: students' and other actions
- France: the closure of the Renault Billancourt factory
- Strikes in Belgium
- On Spanish and other dockers
- USSR: completion of the chronology in this issue up to the end of the miners strike
- India: Bombay textile strike
- Brazil
- Workers councils in present Hungary
- More material about Japan.
- Norway
- Sweden

### On computers

Elsewhere in this issue we quote the introduction to a circular letter by 'Motiva Forlag' with a text about USSR. The letter ends with the following remarks about the use of computers:

*"We have started to use computers in our work. We have a computer in the 'IBM family' (using MS-DOS operating system), supplied with a 3 1/2 inch disc station. Our main writing programme is WordPerfect (version 5.1 or lower), but we can also use Windows 'Write'. Further we have PageMaker for page production. If you should wish to use this letter or larger parts of it in your publication we can send you the text on a disc..."*

We think that this possibility should be utilised also in connection with Echanges if possible, because it saves a lot of time for the persons responsible for the production of Echanges if material can be received on a disc instead of having to be retyped, enlarged/reduced etc. For the time being, we can receive material for the English edition of Echanges in accordance with the specifications made above, and also 5 1/4 inch discs. It will be passed on to a comrade working with the English edition if addressed like this: Echanges, c/o Motiva Forlag, boks 9430 Valerenga, 0610 Oslo 6, Norway.



## U S S R

### CLASS STRUGGLE AND PROTESTS 1989 - 1991

#### Introductionary remarks:

"Falling living standards are a cause of strikes, which in the first half of this year - that is, even before the miners went out - involved on average 15 000 workers each day." (Economist 16.9.1989)

1) In Echanges 62 p.21 we published an article (from 'Industrial Worker') about the July 89 miners strikes. A number of strikes took place prior to that as the quotation above shows (the 'Industrial Worker' article also mentions some examples), as well as afterwards. Material about the less extensive miners strikes starting in Vorkuta in the end of October, did not appear in Echanges, but are referred to in the first of the 'Daad en Gedachte' articles published below.

2) In Echanges 65 (p.83) we mentioned the French pamphlet *La Russie en 1989*, but due to a printing error parts of our notes about this pamphlet was missing so we here publish it in full:

"A 50 page pamphlet - no price given. One part is an account of all kinds of political parties and groups covering the whole right-left spectrum, environmental groups, independent trade unions etc. with contact addresses and telephone numbers. Another part is a chronology of strikes, demonstrations etc. for the whole of 1989. The pamphlet can be ordered from Nouvelles de nulle, c/o CNT, 33 rue des Vignoles, 75020 Paris."

3) Below we first publish a kind of chronological account of strikes, protests and other events from the beginning of 1990 to the end of April 1991. On the one hand it is not just a pure list of actions that took place, but consists of quotations from English papers and translations from papers in other languages, chronologically arranged for the whole period, and gives a lot of factual and background information. The material is not at all complete because probably no-one has a complete account of everything that took place in this period, and neither do we need such a complete chronology. On the other hand it is not at all an analysis, because the material from the newspapers and journals is just reproduced without any comments. Combining both tasks would be a big job and we find the document useful as it is. The work with the document was finished at the end of April, so it does not cover the end of the countrywide strike movement shortly afterwards.

The document is taken, but to some extent edited as far as readability is concerned,

from a circular letter from 'Motiva Forlag' in Norway, which also contains texts with information about Sweden and Norway reproduced in the next issue of Echanges. The introductory remarks to the circular letter is found in a note about Motiva in the next Echanges, and that part of it dealing with the USSR material is published below. The circular letter ends with some remarks about the use of computers for exchange of information, and that those who could make use of the whole of it on a discette can write to Motiva. This we reproduce in the note 'About Echanges'

, because similar considerations are also relevant in connection with Echanges.

4) Secondly, we publish two articles from the Dutch journal *Daad en Gedachte*. The article from no. 8/90 deals with the 1989 and 1990 miners strikes and some aspects of how to interpret them. There is particularly the question about these strikes being 'political strikes'. This is a favourite theme not only for those politicians centre or right seeing the end of 'communism' going on in the east, but also many leftwing groups. For many of the latter, the strikes are either political or ought to become political. Having another view of both our own 'role' and of the class struggle, we see this question quite differently. A similar discussion can be found in our debate with the group *Kamunist Kranti* in India in this issue, and our views of the class struggle is also explained in the pamphlet *Echanges et Mouvement. Presentation pamphlet* beeing produced. The other article from no. 4/91 deals with the strike movement in the first part of 1991 and raises similar questions.

RH 5/91

### CHRONOLOGICAL ACCOUNT 1990 - APRIL 1991

**Introduction by Motiva Forlag:** The state capitalist countries are in deep crisis. The USSR beeing the most important of these countries, calls for special attention. We are drowned in news and reports of some aspects of this crisis - the collapse of the economy, the nationalist struggles, what Gorbachev and Yeltzin and all the others are doing and saying, armed struggles and who knows what. But the most important things going on from our point of view - the workers' struggles - are not of the things given a high priority by mass media. We have collected the little we have managed to find out about the class struggle. As you will see it is not much we have been able to find. We will continue to try to follow the class struggle in the USSR, and we would welcome any contribution, for example copies of newspaper reports, articles etc. We would also be grateful if you could tell us about publications worthwhile to read. If our information gathering is fruitful, we might be able to distribute more frequent reports on the class struggle in the USSR. We would find such work worthwhile and should think that you would be of the same opinion.



The spelling of names of persons and places transcribed from Russian is no easy matter. Their spelling will vary from language to language. You will see that we use at least three or four different, depending of whether the reports are of English, German, Norwegian or Swedish origin. We have not put much work in making a correct and uniform English spelling of the names; because we don't always know the correct English spelling and because we think you should understand the names whichever spelling we use.

At the time of writing the situation in the USSR is not very clear. The miners' strike is apparently not over, even if some reports might indicate that it is about to end - other reports treat the strike as if it's far from being called off. There also seems to be a movement among other groups of workers but the extension and duration is not clear.

Some important questions concerning these strikes, apart from the fact that they are happening, such as their organisation, the influence of the miners strike committees from 1989, the influences of trade unions and other organisations, the influence of nationalism on the workers actions, co-ordination between strikers, can only be found out later - if ever. From the newspaper reports it is close to impossible to be very specific about such questions.

When I started to write down this collection of material for the piece about strikes in the USSR, the miners strike had not started. The work thus grew considerably during the writing itself. The material has not been edited, things are repeated and so on, and this makes it perhaps not very readable.

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## 1990

"At the same time Moscow's underground could be brought to a standstill by drivers demanding their wages be doubled." (Financial Times 17.01.90)

"One year ago (the paper) Rubikon reported about every little strike. Today we don't have the capacity to do this. Every day struggles occur at the level of brigades, some times the threat of strikes are against whole companies, as against the Izjorsk factory recently. Alone during the year 1989 Rubikon reports on strikes at Lentransagentsvo (640 workers), in the Leningrad fishery fleet, at the Magniton factory, among tram employees, at the Krizo factory and at bread bakery No. 5." (Klassekampen 17.01.90)

"Protests against the Soviet troop presence in Baku has led to strikes which has paralysed production at hundreds of oil wells, Tass reported Monday. At one of the most important offshore oil fields 650 pumps are not running, which constitutes about one third of the field. 'It will be needed at least three months to get them running again', the bureau reports. Aserbajdsjan produce 5 % of Soviet oil. The offshore fields in the Kaspian Sea normally produce 250 000 barrels a day. More serious is it that the region produces 60 per cent of the oil drilling and production equipment. Thus the strikes might effect the oil production throughout the union." (Klassekampen 31.01.91)

"Up to 700 000 workers in the Tyumen which produce 60 % of the Soviet Union's oil and gas are threatening to go on strike next month. ... The strike threat comes just after disastrous figures were released on the performance of the Soviet economy in the first two months of the year... Average wages in the two months increased by 15 per cent and the number of workdays lost from strikes exceeded the entire number for 1989." (Financial Times 30.03.90)

"10 000 coal miners in the Donbass region in Ukraine have gone on strike protesting an environment catastrophe in the region. 12 workers shall have died during the last months and approximately 50 hospitalized after being exposed to poisonous gases. ... The affected inhabitants in the towns Gorlovka and Jenakijevo demonstrate daily against the lethal pollution, and demand that the people responsible must be prosecuted and punished." (Aftenposten 12.05.90)

"In the first quarter of this year it is registered 9.4 million strike days, which corresponds to 130 000 on strike daily. Still this is a reduction from 1989 when strikes amounted to approximately 40 million days, or approximately 140 000 on strike each day. This was mainly due to the big miners strike." (Klassekampen 25.05.90 quoting from Goskomstat, the state committee for statistics)

"Wednesday more than two million Soviet miners will go on a 24 hour strike. ... The danger is imminent that the miners will be followed by many others if they go on strike. Auto workers making Lada at the Tsjigulij factory in Togliatti, have announced a sympathy meeting today, but they will most likely not follow it up with a sympathy strike. The workers in most parts of the dominating heavy industry are restless and angry. And from earlier the willingness to strike among the transport workers is well known. ... The striking miners demand higher wages, replacements of the incapable management, and union rights. 'Next time it will not be a strike but a revolt' says Boris Bronfmann, vice chairman in Donez, to Newsweek magazine." (Arbeiderbladet 11.07.90)



"Soviet miners left work this morning to take part in a 24 hour strike against the lack of results of the Soviet government policies. In Donez, which is the centre of the mining industry in the Ukraine, strike committees were active seeking support from miners for the strike and a huge protest meeting to take place today. It is estimated that 300 000 coal miners will strike in western Siberia. Tools would be downed for the whole day in 62 out of 130 mines, and the rest of the mines would strike for some of the day. Workers at 20 larger industrial enterprises would join the miners in a sympathy strike." (Aftenposten 11.07.90)

"The political warning strike of the Soviet miners yesterday seems at large to have been followed, the news agency Interfax reported through Radio Moscow. According to this report, tens of thousands of miners took part in the strike. In the Siberian region Kusbass 300 000 miners and other workers are believed to take part. Miners struck in other mining districts like Vorkuta high up in the north and Kemerovo in Siberia. The miners demanded in particular the retreat of the government of Premier Minister Nikolai Ryshkov, that the state takes over the assets of the CPSU as well as dissolving the party cells in the factories. ... In Kemerovo in Siberian Kusbass 66 mines downed tools for 24 hours and were supported by eleven enterprises in the town. In the Karaganda basin in Kazakhstan eleven mines struck. The strike movement even reached the island Sachalin in the East. There eight mines struck as well as ten big factories. Also in Magadan and Norilsk in eastern Siberia as well as in Novosibirsk in western Siberia some mines downed tools. However the strike was firmest in Ukrainian Donbass. Of 250 mines 124 downed tools for 24 hours and 110 others for different periods of time between one and six hours, as could be learned from the strike committee on the telephone. ... The strikers met in Donetsk in front of the house of the communist party for a twelve hour protest demonstration." (Tagezeitung 12.07.90)

"The Soviet miners in three coal mining districts of the country who went on strike for improved living and working conditions as well as for implementation of political demands, have ended their strike after one day duration. According to information from the leaders of the strike, work was taken up again in Donez in the Ukraine - as well as in the Kusnez basin in western Siberia and in the region of Vorkuta. No information of the number of strikers was officially given. Estimates based on mines on strike in the Donez basin indicates a total of approximately 100 000 strikers. The organisers of the strike said the number of strikers in western Siberia alone was 300 000." (Süddeutsche Zeitung 13.07.90)

"Gorbachev, the Soviet leader, warned yesterday that the miners' strike in Siberia and the Ukraine would bring dire consequences for the Soviet economy and for the perestroika reform process. In a striking concession to the wave of unrest sweeping

the country in protest at poor living conditions, he disclosed that Rs10bn (£9.8bn) had been set aside from reserves for the import of consumer goods - at least double the amount previously announced. The miners' strike was reported last night to have brought 80 pits in the Donetsk coal field in the Ukraine to a standstill - four times the number affected on Tuesday. Strikers in the country's largest coalfield seemed to be ignoring concessions by the authorities on wages and working conditions, as well as appeals by Gorbachev and prime minister Nikolai Ryzhkov. There were some encouraging signs, however, of the beginning of a return to work in the Kuznetsk coal field in Siberia, where 24.000 of the 150.000 strikers were reported to have gone back after a call for a return to work from their strike committee." (Financial Times 20.07.90)

"Dozens of people were injured in the Siberian town Tscheljabinsk as riots erupted starting in a queue in front of a shop. Waiting customers had been outraged as the employees in the shop had refused to serve them unless police protection was offered. The riots spread over the centre of the town, where demonstrators smashed windows and overturned cars demanding a better supply of food. After a protest meeting in front of the local party headquarters during the night, the demonstrators tried to storm the offices of the local officials. They demanded the liberation of youngsters who were arrested because they had possessed petrol bombs. In the end the police spread the protesters." (Süddeutsche Zeitung 27.08.90)

"Hundreds of protest actions in all districts of Moscow last week heralded new anger. 3000 demonstrators even occupied the 'Square of the revolution' not far from the Kremlin walls. Anger throughout the country: in Minsk special police units went against a crowd. Plunderers raided through Tscheljabinsk for three days. In Nischni Nowgorod (until recently Gorki) people wanted to storm the city hall." (Der Spiegel 36/90)

"The reactions of the people to the lack of vodka, wine, petrol, tobacco and now even bread, becomes more aggressive. On August 23, the inhabitants of the armaments metropole in the Urals, Tscheljabinsk, in anger because there was no wine available, blocked busses, smashed shop windows, demolished a supermarket, the party headquarters and the offices of the local authorities; eleven policemen were wounded and 13 police cars destroyed. Two days later the riots broke out again. In Tula and Wladimir there were also riots, and in 14 districts of Moscow indignant smokers rebelled on the 22nd August because they could not buy any tobacco." (Frankfurter Rundschau 07.09.90)

"In the vast Tyumen oilfields of western Siberia 700 000 oil and gas workers are threatening to stage a paralyzing strike. The workers demand protection from job



layoffs, price hikes and equipment shortages brought by Moscow's economic restructuring. ... Minor wildcat strikes already have erupted in the Siberian oilfields this year, more than a dozen of them in Nizhnevartovsk alone. One grey morning last month, 215 transport workers declared a strike as they gathered in a dingy bus depot. 'I work 12 hours a day and live in a crummy shanty', complained 37 year old bus driver Anatoly Bulokh as he and his colleagues lectured two unhappy supervisors. 'It's time for us to rise up!' shouted one driver. 'We've been as quiet as lambs until now.' After two hours of heated talks, the drivers agreed to go back on the job -but not before thousands of oil workers were left stranded at bus stops across the city." (Newsweek 1.10.90)

"According to information from the Soviet premier Ryshkow, in the first eight months of 1990 approximately 1700 companies and economical organisations were affected by strikes. This has led to losses of more than ten million working days. Because of the strikes, products of a value of approximately one billion rubles could not be produced. Even more important was the losses of the partners of the companies being struck, through missing deliveries of raw materials and materials for use in the production. Daily 200 000 workers had not worked because of absenteeism and stops in production in industry and building industry. The total losses amount to three billion rubles." (TagesZeitung 12.10.90)

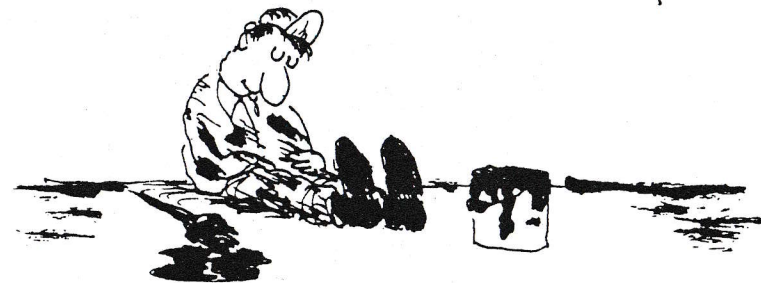
"The unrest already exists. It is reflected in the big increase of the number of strike days. Strikes have grown dramatically during the first half of the year. In 1989 an average of 15 000 workers struck every day. During the second half of 1989, 50 000 workers struck every day. During the five first months of 1990 an average of 180 000 workers struck every day." (Proletären No. 40, October 1990)

"In the district of Tscheljabinsk in south Ural approximately 13 000 workers from garment and shoe factories have met in order to protest. According to reports from the newsagency Tass about 40 factories can not run because this part of the Russian Federation don't receive deliveries of material from the other republics. According to information from the secretary of the unions in these industries, Klara Chnykija, the 13 000 workers are threatened with loosing their jobs early next year if this non-delivery of goods is continued. The strike committee will organise a strike." (Süddeutsche Zeitung 19.12.90)

"Tens of thousands of enraged inhabitants in the city Tsjitja in Siberia yesterday blocked traffic and ignited fires in the main street protesting against the lack of wine and vodka before the New Year celebrations, the newsagency Tass reports. Tsjitja has 315 000 inhabitants and lies 4800 kilometres east of Moscow. The 'wine riot' developed as people lost their temper after waiting in endless queues in front of

practically empty stores. The demonstrators demanded a meeting with local authorities to complain against lack of merchandise and constant problems with water and electricity supplies. The episode was a warning of coming social unrest because of the economic and material crisis." (Dagbladet 31.12.90)

SOWJETISCHE  
"ARBEITER!  
STÄRKT DIE  
ARBEITSDISZI



Soviet workers! Strengthen the work discipl...

## 1991

"Over Moscow hangs the threat of an unlimited strike at the Metro, because money for the next wage payment for the drivers are not at hand." (Spiegel No. 2/91)

"Workers downed tools in protests of up to two hours in 35 Moscow enterprises and almost 500 factories and institutes in Leningrad. The coal miners of the Kuzbas in western Siberia, who led the 1989 miners' strike, have announced a strike to continue 'until Gorbachev resigns'. "(Financial Times 17.01.91)



"One of the biggest auto factories in the Soviet Union, the Moskwitsch factory in Moscow, is on strike, the Komsomolskaja Prawda reports. The workers demand higher wages, longer holidays and the factory to be placed under management of the Russian republic. Until now the factory is under the management of the Soviet ministry for auto and tractor production. "(Süddeutsche Zeitung 31.01.91)

### Start of 1991 miners strikes

"The coal miners in the Ukraine have threatend to go on strike if the Moscow government don't follow a promise of better living and working conditions. The strike committee and workers collective in the city of Donetsk made this announcement in reaction to the 'extremely slow implementation' of the obligations taken up by the Soviet and Ukrainian governments during the miners strike in the summer of 1989, the news agency Tass reported. "(Süddeutsche Zeitung 18.02.91)

"More than 500 000 miners in the Soviet Ukraine's Donbass coalfield are to stage a 24-hour strike on Friday to press demands for a 150 % pay increase, trade union leaders said yesterday, Reuter reports from Kiev. "(Financial Times 27.02.91)

"The Soviet government faces a new working class challenge to its authority today as nearly a million miners from the main Soviet coal areas start an indefinite strike for higher pay, better food and decent housing.... The latest strikes, coordinated by the independent miners' union formed two years ago, have been called in support of wage increases of between 100 and 150 per cent. The strikes are also in protest at the government's failure to honour earlier promises. Miners in the Kuzbas area of Siberia have called for the resignation of president Gorbachev; an end to the Communist party's monopoly on power; and the dissolution of the Supreme Soviet, the country's parliament. ... Leaders of the independent miners' union, Pavel Shishpanov and Alexei Sergeev, said in Moscow yesterday that three of the main areas - the Donbass in the Ukraine, Vorkuta in the Polar North and Karaganda in Kazakhstan - will strike today. "(Financial Times 01.03.91)

"From Prokopiewsk a spokesman of a local strike committee reported to Moscow that 5000 miners had met in the town and demanded sovereignty rights for Russia. The independent news agency Interfax reported that other workers in the town would join the miners and demand the resignation of Gorbachev. ... Also in the Kuznetsk coal fields in the Urals tools were downed on Monday. According to reports from a trade union official approximately two dozen mines were hit. The demands went from higher wages and earlier retirement age to the resignation of Gorbachev and the removal of the Communist Party from power. "(Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 06.03.91)

"Union officials in the Kuzbass coalfield in western Siberia said workers at five mines had walked out indefinitely following a 24 hour political strike on Monday. Twenty-seven pits took part in Monday's stoppage. Tass news agency said management officials denied the union claims, saying only one mine was partly affected. At least 12 pits, with some of the country's richest coal deposits, remained on strike in the southern Donbass coalfield, a regional strike committee spokesman said. "(Financial Times 07.03.91)

"Miners' leaders in the Soviet Union's two largest coal fields yesterday called for an all-out strike, demanding huge pay rises and the resignation of Gorbachev and his government. The decision in the West Siberian Kuzbas, and Ukrainian Donbas fields, follows the refusal of Gorbachev to meet the miners' leaders or hear their demands until all the miners return to work. The signs are that the industrial unrest, which began fitfully at the start of the month, is spreading and becoming increasingly political. The Council of Workers' Committees in the Kuzbas decided on Monday to call a full-scale strike in the region, based entirely on political demands. They are calling for the resignation of Gorbachev, the dismissal of the present Supreme Soviet, the national parliament in Moscow, and the lifting on all restrictions on the broadcasts of radical Russian radio and television, and demonstrate their support for Boris Yeltsin, the Russian president. In the Ukrainian Donbas, the miners' leaders yesterday called for an all-out strike, because the central government had ignored their deadline, on Monday, to meet their demand for a 150 % pay rise. They claimed that 67 out of 254 pits in the coalfield were already backing the stoppage, 19 more than on Monday. In the Kuzbas, strike action has been patchy, but local journalists said this was a deliberate strategy by strike leaders to stagger their protest. This was now beeing stepped up. Tass, the official news agency, which has consistently played down the strike action, admitted last night that 'the situation in the Kuzbas is getting more complicated', with two mine construction organisations joining four striking mines in the towns of Novokuznetsk, Kiselevsk, and Berezovsky. Mass meetings were being held at many other mines, the agency said. On the other hand, both railway and steel workers in the region have been opposing the action. "(Financial Times 13.03.91)

"In spite of threats and appeals the strikes in one sixth of the Soviet coal mines continued Wednesday. At the same time at least five steel works in the Ukraine alone had to close down because of lack of coal. Reports from the two most important coal mining districts, Donbass in the Ukraine and Kusbass in western Siberia, indicated however that the strike wave had not spread further. All of the Soviet heavy industry is threatened if the steel industry must close down. Reductions in the production in almost all other sectors, from oil and gas to paper, adds to the misery. The strikers have made both political and economical demands. They



demand up to 150 % wage increases. The miners in Donbass demand that Gorbachev must resign. In several mining districts the miners appeal for a boycott of the referendum Sunday, whereas others urge people to vote 'no'. "(Arbeiderbladet 14.03.91)

"So far less than 50 000 miners are on strike. If the strikes don't spread they will constitute a rather marginal problem for Gorbachev before the referendum on Sunday. ... Workers are apparently already laid off in the Ukrainian steel industry, as it is reported that employees have lost incomes amounting to 1.5 million Rubles. That could indicate that as many as 50 000 working days are lost. ... Bitterness in the mining districts is widespread, especially as hardly any of the demands put forward by the miners during the big strikes two years ago have been met. "(Aftenposten 14.03.91)

"The strike of the miners spreads. Workers in the industrial concentration in the Urals have joined the strike, which also meets growing support in the big mining areas in Siberia and the Ukraine. 'The strike wave among Soviet miners grows', the Soviet official newsagency Tass admitted Tuesday in a report which stated that the striking workers' political demands have been put forward more clearly. Strikes have closed half the mines around the town Tseljabinsk in southern Urals, Tass writes. According to local strike committees in the Ukraine and in Siberia the workers' demands meet a growing support. One of the demands of the strike is that Gorbachev must resign. In the Siberian mining district Kusbass 54 mines are hit by the strike, according to local strike committees. Production in at least 42 mines in Donbass in the Ukraine are said to be stopped, in addition to some 20 mines in the western part of the republic. "(Klassekampen 20.03.91)

"Bread, meat, butter and rice are among the items which will become approximately three times more expensive from the beginning of April, the leader of the state price committee Vjatsjeslav Sentsjagov said in a television interview on Wednesday. Eggs will be twice as expensive, while fruit, vegetables and some other goods in short supply shall follow the price at the open (private) market. That will mean that their prices will be several times higher. Medicine, gasoline, gas, coffee and vodka are among the items that will not be affected by the price rises, he said. The authorities will sweeten the pill through paying a taxfree compensation of 60 Rubles per person each month. ... The official statement on price rises came in a period of growing unrest among Soviet workers, first and foremost in the important mining districts in Russia and the Ukraine. According to the miners' strike committee 280 000 workers are on strike for higher wages, better working conditions and a demand that Gorbachev must resign. The independent news agency Interfax estimates the figure at 50000." (Arbeiderbladet 21.03.91)

"The 12 mines in the district around Tsjervonograd was among those hit by the big miners' strike in 1989. Then the whole mining industry in the country was paralysed by a 12 day long strike among the miners, who demanded higher wages and a more reliable supply of food. Now the miners think that the government has broken all promises given then. 'Conditions have almost not changed at all since 1989. They promised us higher wages, longer holidays and a lower retirement age. But they have broken these promises,' says Oleg Karpjuk, leader of the strike committee in Tsjervonograd. ... The miners earn on average 410 Rubles a month (approximately £450 - at official exchange rate). The strikers demand a wage three times higher, as compensation for growing inflation and the high prices for fresh meat and vegetables at the local peasants' markets. "(Arbeiderbladet 22.03.91)

"In the Ukraine, Russia and Siberia more than 200 000 workers continued the strike, which threatened to paralyse the Soviet production of steel, iron and other important industrial products.

The agreement made between the 100 000 miners in the Karaganda district and the leaders of the central Asian republic Kazakhstan, will most likely reduce the damaging effects of the strike on the Soviet economy. According to the agreement, the political leadership in Kazakhstan, the third largest coal producer in the Soviet Union, retain much of the direct control of the mining industry from the Moscow authorities. All coal producing republics have struggled to have a greater control over their own natural resources.

A negotiation meeting in Kiev the capital of Ukraina, however, led to no results. The strike continues in the important Donbass district... The strikers in Donbass and Siberian Kuzbass demand higher wages, better working conditions and that Gorbachev must resign. There are also strikes in the Russian districts of Rostov and Vorkuta, as well as around Lvov in western Ukraine. The negotiations in Kiev broke down because the leadership of the republic declined to accept wage rises. Prime Minister Vitold Fokin and Vice Prime Minister Viktor Gladush accepted to lower the retirement age, but declined the demand for wage increases in the region of 100 to 150 %, says a spokesman for the miners. It was the newspaper Kasakhstanskaja Pravda which brought the news that the miners and leaders of the republic Kazakhstan had reached an agreement. The miners in Karaganda will not strike again before July the 1st, on conditions that the economical demands are met. "(Arbeiderbladet 23.03.91)

"...approximately 100 000 miners in the third largest coal district of the Soviet Union, Karaganda in Kazakhstan, have agreed to end the strike - which have lasted for three weeks - against a promise from the leadership of the republic of higher wages and a



bigger influence on the working conditions. ... In spite of the agreement in Kazakhstan approximately 200 000 miners in the rest of the country continue their strike. "(Aftenposten 23.03.91)

"Strike committees and independent trade unions already voice political demands. They demand the resignation of the government and president Gorbachev, and the independence of their republics. In the Kusnezsk basin in western Siberia the mass unrest is concentrated in one catch-word which sounds of revolution: General strike." (Spiegel No. 13/91)

"Striking Soviet coal miners from Siberia to the Polish border stated yesterday that they stick firmly to their demands, and showed no sign of following the appeal of the Prime Minister to return to work in order to save the troubled economy. Strike leaders in the big coal fields Kusbass in the Siberia and Donbass in the Ukraine expressed little sympathy for the warning from Prime Minister Pavlov that the strikers put the economy of the country 'several years back'. They also refused allegations that they are manipulated from the outside, which Pavlov indicated by referring to Boris Yeltzin and others who have supported the strikers demand that Gorbachev must resign. 'The general attitude is to stand by the demands', says Viktor Usovskij, a member of the strike committee in Donbass, where work is stopped in approximately 60 mines. The independent news agency Postfactum reported that miners in more than 165 mines from Sakhalin in the far East to western Ukraine was on strike this weekend. Mines north of the Polar Circle and in the Urals were also closed. Pjotr Popov, a member of the strike committee in Kusbass, said that the strike is effective in the whole of Siberia, and that Pavlov with his allegation that the strike is directed from the outside does not take into account that the strike leaders are democratically elected. "(Arbeiderbladet 25.03.91)

"Despite a government back-to-work order, Soviet coal miners continued to strike Monday. Almost one-fourth of the country's coalfields are idle, and workers are demanding the resignation of Gorbachev. Miners in the polar north, Kazakhstan, the Kuzbas region of Siberia and the Donbas region of the Ukraine first went out on strike March 1st and the strikes have spread since then. The strikers' demands are far more political and radical than they were in the summer of 1989, when the first strikes in 70 years were staged here for higher wages and better working conditions. Where once the miners seemed to think that alterations in the system could satisfy their economic demands, they now appear convinced that more fundamental changes are necessary. In mining cities such as Novokuznetsk in central Siberia, workers are supporting the president of the Russian Republic, Yeltsin, and have demanded the resignation of Gorbachev and the Soviet legislature. Like Yeltsin, the miners have called on the heads of the 15 republics to assume the collective

leadership of the country. The miners' strike of 1989 was dramatic because no group of workers in the history of the Soviet state had ever stood up to the authorities in such numbers. Since then, the strike committees have replaced the Communist Party-dominated labor unions as representatives of the workers. In some cities, such as Karaganda, the leaders of the strike committees are the most powerful political figures in the area. 'We've all lost faith in anything resembling the old system, the old perestroika reforms,' said Pyotr Schlegel, leader of the Karaganda miners in northern Kazakhstan. The state-controlled television news programs are hitting the miners hard, denouncing them as irresponsible for further jeopardizing the already fragile economy. Prime Minister Pavlov said the strikes were leading to dwindling fuel supplies and were pummeling the steel and auto industries. He said Soviet industry was only getting 220 000 of the 340 000 tons of coal needed to keep the country's enterprises running. 'If the strikes continue, even to the slightest degree,' Pavlov said on the state television, 'then we can say now that all of us, including the miners, will have to work for several years to repair the damage.' He said that he would start serious negotiations with the miners if they dropped their political demands. During the 1989 strikes, Gorbachev said that the workers were showing for the first time their sense of empowerment and were engaging in a revolution 'from below' to match his own revolution from above. He succeeded, if temporarily, in ending the strikes. Very briefly, workers in the mining regions did get slightly better food supplies, but soon they found themselves back where they had started. Coal miners, compared with other workers, are relatively well paid, but they work in horrendous conditions. In 1989, it was only the miners in Vorkuta in northern Russia who combined radical political demands with their economic demands. But now, miners from Sakhalin to the Polish border have become insistent on the need for radical change. The political pressure on the government promises to grow when across-the-board price increases on food and consumer goods go into effect April 2. The government has announced compensation measures, but most analysts say the measures will do little to offset the impact of the increases. "(International Herald Tribune 26.03.91)

"A Soviet deputy coal minister, Yegor Krol, arrived yesterday in Donetsk, capital of the coal-producing region Donbas, for talks with strike leaders, as a stoppage spread slowly to take in about a quarter of the country's mines, writes John Lloyd in Moscow. On Sunday night, Mikhail Schadov, the coal industry minister, said the losses from the strike so far stood at 3m tonnes of coal worth Rbs250m, of which Rbs60m had been earmarked for wages. He repeated the government's view that it could not negotiate while the striker's main demands remain political. The strike committee at Rostov-on-Don, in the Ukraine, said yesterday its political demands - including the resignation of Gorbachev - might be dropped if talks on the wage and social demands began with prime minister Pavlov. "(Financial Times 26.03.91)



"Strike leaders in Kusbass and Donbass, the big coal fields in Siberia and the Ukraine, think that the government is trying to mobilise scabs and have the people to dissociate itself from the strike. 'We will not return to work. The attempts of the government are in vain' says Alexander Aslandini, leader of the strike committee in Kusbass... Aslandini tells that a commission sent by prime minister Pavlov now is in Kemerovo, but that there have been no meetings between the parties. 'All we know is that they are searching for scabs', he says. Strike leaders think that a struggle for the support of the public is going on.... 60 mines in Donbass are closed. In Kusbass 50 mines are closed, and also other places the mines are not operating. The strike is hitting the metallurgical industry most. Factory managers and workers appear on TV and complain about reduced stocks and problems with heating. But also other sectors which needs coal in their production are affected by the strike. "(Arbeiderbladet 26.03.91)

"The Soviet Parliament, the Supreme Soviet, yesterday passed a resolution which instructs the striking coal miners in the Ukraine and Siberia to return to work. Only after two months will the miners be in a position to resume the strike, says the resolution. A motion to place a total strike ban, was however rejected. Immediately after the motion passed by the Supreme Soviet was known, spokesmen for the miners made it clear that a return to work was under no circumstances an issue. One of the leaders of the miners in Donbass, Nikolaj Volynko said yesterday that the Donbass miners had not consulted the Supreme Soviet before they started the strike. Neither had the Supreme Soviet consulted the miners before it passed its resolution. The only way to suppress the strike is through the use of violence. If the Kremlin attempts at this, we will see what our reply will be, he said. Another spokesman for the strikers said that they would immediately spread the actions if Yeltzin on Thursday loses his position as president of the Russian parliament. "(Aftenposten 27.03.91)

"The majority of the striking miners in the Kusbass mines have abandoned their economical demands because they have understood that their hope of a decent life is only possible through a democratic reform, says a statement from the workers council in Kusbass. "(Klassekampen 02.04.91)

"Other industries have begun following the miners' lead. Last week the country's metal workers called for a wage increase of 100 % and voiced their support for the miners' political demands. Work at the Soviet Union's biggest machine maker, Uralmash, was halted by a two-hour warning strike. "(Newsweek No. 14/91)

"The republic is suffering under serious political struggles because of the coal miners' strike. Most coal miners support Yeltsin and are critical to the communist

party. Yesterday Gorbachev was to meet the coal miners in an attempt to end the strike which is threatening to close the heavy industry. But the end of this month-long strike didn't seem close after radical miners said they would not meet Gorbachev because he was not willing to discuss political demands, including their demand that he must resign. Approximately 300 000 miners have downed tools and closed around two thirds of the country's mines. Gorbachev has with reference to the constitution rejected the workers' demand that he and the Soviet government must resign. Prime Minister Pavlov, said the miners demand of 150 % wage rises would cost 13 million Rubles, but he was willing to consider wage increases linked to a productivity rise. This was immediately rejected by the strike leaders. "(Aftenposten 04.04.91)

"Now, in the winter of 1991, times are different. The striking miners tells that the mass meetings are a thing of the past. Now, elected representatives makes the decisions. But the permanent strike committees have existed since 1989 and this has facilitated the spreading of the strike. ... The leaders of the official trade union urged the strikers to return to work, and the miners says that the whole state apparatus have been used to distort their case. Telephone connections have been broken so that the different districts have not been able to co-ordinate themselves. The mass media have spread lies. In an appeal the strikers write: 'The only possible solution is to rally all healthy forces in society around a government that has the confidence of the people. Under these circumstances the Inter-regional co-operation council of delegates from workers' strike committees from the coal districts of the country was formed.' (Arbetaren 05.04.91)

"The strike wave in the Soviet Union spreads beyond the ranks of the miners and undermine both the economy and the government. Yesterday most enterprises in Minsk, capital of Byelorussia, stood idle. The reason was that the workers had met to a gigantic mass meeting in the square down town. There they demanded the same wage increases that Pavlov had promised the miners Wednesday. The compromise between the miners and the government resembles most of all a capitulation from the side of the government. The government promises that the miners' wages shall gradually be doubled before the end of this year. Also the pensions payments shall be higher, and further state funds shall be used on housing and social services in the mining districts. The problem is that money simply doesn't exist to meet the promises. "(Aftenposten 05.04.91)

"In Minsk 10 000 auto workers demonstrated against the price hikes, demanding new elections. In Siberia and Ukraine, 300 000 coal miners extended a five-week-old strike that threatens to cripple key industries, rejecting Gorbachev's offer to double their pay. ... Labor troubles in the coal mines have spread to timber-producing enterprises in the forreststo the north and east of Khabarovsk. "(Newsweek No. 15/91)



"Unrest among Soviet workers have spread from the coal fields to the oil and heavy industries. ... Workers at the big Lieutenant Shmidt factory in Baku, capital of Aserbaïdjan, have also downed tools. They produce 60 per cent of the country's oil drilling equipment. Now they demand higher wages and the removal of the communist-lead government. According to the local journalist Nazim Ragimov the workers have received the support of the enterprise's director.... Dock workers in Baku and workers at another factory producing oil drilling equipment have said that they will go on strike from tomorrow, according to Ragimov. Independent Soviet news agencies have also reported about growing protests from workers. Many industrial workers have said they will follow the 300 000 miners who are on strike and many of them will demand the resignation of Gorbachev. The coal miners' strike has started on its sixth week and there are no signs of any solution. Official estimates show that the strike has imposed on the Soviet Union losses of seven million tons of coal, four million from the big coal fields in Kuzbass alone. The steelworks receive only 35 per cent of the coal needed to their furnaces. The strike leader Aslanidi has said that Yeltsin has the morale and political authority needed to get the strikers back to work, at least for a while. "(Aftenposten 07.04.91)

"The pro-Yeltsin wing at the Russian congress appears to have been encouraged by the apparent inability of the federal government to control growing labor unrest. Around a quarter of the country's 1.2 million coal miners are already on strike, and there were signs over the last week that the protests could be spreading to other sectors of the economy because of popular discontent over sharp price increases. In addition to standard economic demands, many of the strikers are calling for the resignation of the central government. Workers at a big heavy machinery plant in the Azerbaijani capital, Baku, stopped work Saturday, and local journalists said that post workers were threatening to join the strike on Monday. In Byelorussia, which has a reputation as a conservative stronghold, attempts are underway to organize a general strike starting Wednesday. The labor turmoil was cited by Yeltsin in his speech to the Russian parliament as a reason to grant him special powers. The Russian leader is the one politician in the country who could probably persuade the miners to go back to work. At a press conference Friday, he said he would not exclude a direct appeal if the situation worsened. "(International Herald Tribune 08.04.91)

"President Gorbachev yesterday asked his parliament to grant him permission to ban all demonstrations during working hours and the organisation of strikes throughout the Soviet Union. "(Aftenposten 10.04.91)

"As a direct reply to Gorbachev's initiative to ban strikes for the rest of the year, the strikes were extended yesterday. In the mining centre Kemerovo the bus drivers joined the strikers and in Byelorussian capital Minsk there were strikes at all larger

enterprises. Production also stopped in some other Byelorussian towns, among them at the truck factory in Zjodino. "(Aftenposten 11.04.91)

"New strikes started on Thursday around in Byelorussia, where the capital Minsk already on Wednesday was crippled by a big strike. On Thursday also, tens of thousands of strikers assembled in the centre of the town, and according to the news agency Interfax strike committees were created at 82 enterprises in Minsk. Workers were said to be on strike in many other Byelorussian towns. Later on Thursday the news agency Interfax reported that the strikers had decided to end the strikes. The decision was made after the local government had agreed to discuss with representatives of the strikers. A spokesman for the strikers said on telephone from Minsk that the strike was ended 'temporarily' and that the meeting in Minsk was finished. In Donetsk in the Ukraine striking miners assembled for new meetings under the catchword 'Down with the power bureaucrats'. Their striking comrades in the mines in Vorkuta far in the north called on all Soviet workers to join in a 'solidarity strike' on 17. April, DPA reports. At the same time it is reported that the miners on the island Schakalin have also joined the strike. The workers' discontent are over both the acute lack of food, the dramatic price increases on food and other basic commodities and the governments' politics in general.... The official Soviet trade union movement have also joined the choir of protests. The vice president of the Soviet trade union federation Michail Nagitsev said on Thursday that the official unions would organise 'a warning strike' at the Red Square in Moscow on the 1st May if the government had till then not agreed to start wage negotiations.... In the republic of Georgia, which claimed independence Tuesday, strikes also erupted, Reuter reports. But those strikes started with the support of president Zviad Gamsachurdias and the nationalist government and was a part of the struggle between Georgia and the Soviet central power in the Kremlin. Traffic on the railroad connecting the industrial towns of Russia with the Black Sea was completely closed Thursday. In the capital Tiblisi workers at a metal factory controlled by Moscow joined the strike, and from other enterprises reports came that strikes were planned. In Kutaisi approximately 10 000 auto workers were said to strike. "(Göteborgsposten 12.04.91)

"The demonstrations in Minsk on Thursday were guarded by Soviet interior troops, who however did not intervene. The number of demonstrators was said to be substantially higher than the 150 000 who assembled in the centre of the town on Wednesday.... According to Interfax all 103 mines in Kuzbass in western Siberia struck on Thursday.... In the republic Georgia railway workers are on strike and port workers are thought to follow soon. ... Later on Thursday it was reported that all rail traffic in Georgia stood still.... In the auto producing town Samara at Wolga the electricians went on strike and declined to repair the damaged electricity cables in



the house where the town government are. 'Let them sit in the dark' was the message from the electricians. "(Dagens Industri 12.04.91)

"After the price increases in the beginning of April, a big strike wave sweeps across all of Russia, Byelorussia and the Ukraine. In recent weeks strikes have occurred in a very large number of towns. The strikes have started with demands for economical compensations for the price increases. But rapidly they have taken on a political character. Developments in Minsk and Byelorussia are the most telling examples of the completely new situation that has arisen. The protests started on April 3rd in Minsk when workers at the four largest enterprises spontaneously went on strike and demanded compensation for the price increases. The following week the strikes spread like fires, not only in Minsk but throughout Byelorussia. On April 10th 62 enterprises in Minsk participated and factories in the towns Brest, Soligorsk, Borysow, Zodino, Homel and several other towns had joined the strike which now had taken on a clearly political character. Demands in Byelorussia are not only over wage compensations, but the resignation of Gorbachev and the Soviet government as well as a total political revolution in Byelorussia. Demands from the East European revolution 1989-90 are repeated, inclusive the demand for 'round table negotiations' and new democratic elections. The strikes in Byelorussia are stopped since Thursday after promises of negotiations, but a countrywide coordination committee has already been created and the threat of a big strike in all of Byelorussia on April 20th still remains. It is difficult to describe what is now going on in Byelorussia as anything other than the beginning of a political revolution. The hundreds of thousands miners in Siberia and the Ukraine who are still on strike have thus at last got powerful allies. Developments in Byelorussia the last week can any time become a pattern for workers and the political opposition in the Ukraine or in Russia. "(Göteborgs-posten 14.04.91)

"The government newspaper Izvestija writes on Saturday that coal production has decreased by 82 per cent since the miners went on strike on the 1. March.... A strike committee in the capital of the Ukraine, Kiev, have called a one day strike in support of the miners on Tuesday reports the paper Nezavisimaja Gazeta. 'It can function as a preparation for a general political mass strike in the Ukraine,' says Leonid Kovaltsjuk, member of the strike committee. Sympathy strikes occurs in other parts of the country. Metall workers and miners in Tsjeljabinsk in the Urals threatens with a strike if their wage demands are not met." (Göteborgs-posten 14.04.91)

"The Soviet parliament yesterday preliminarily supported a law banning all political strikes. But there are not many signs that the law will be able to stop the strikes which are threatening to cripple the Soviet economy.... In the Town Kursk south of Moscow the miners went on strike for the first time yesterday. In Sverdlovsk, the

home town of Yeltsin, the trade unions have called for a two hour strike tomorrow in support of the miners. ... The Soviet government claims that the current strikes are illegal, according to a law passed two years ago. The miners are of the opinion that this law is of no relevance for them, further they have turned down an offer of a 100 per cent wage increase and ignores all requests to return to work. According to Tass the strikes have already led to several hundreds of millions Rubles losses. In Georgia, which declared its independence 9 April, president Gamsakhurdia issued an order to the country's government to support strikes as a step in the work to claim the republic's independence. "(Aftenposten 17.04.91)

"Russian trade union leaders said yesterday that millions of people all over the republic are supposed to participate in a one hour strike on 26 April. The planned strike is a protest against the attempt of Gorbachev to ban strikes and his opposition to the development of independent economical politics in the secessionist republics. 'The ruling circles deceive the people and force us to tighten our belts at the same time as they speak of gradual economic reforms. But our patience is almost at its end', said Igor Klotjskov, the leader of the big Federation of independent Russian trade unions with 60 million members, to the Russian Parliament. The trade union opposes the planned strike ban and supports the demand from many of the 300 000 striking coal miners that Gorbachev and the Soviet government must resign and that the wages shall be augmented. "(Aftenposten 19.04.91)

"Striking coal miners in Ukraine have decided to resume work after the Ukrainian government has accepted their wage demands, an Ukrainian journalist told yesterday. That was the latest in a string of agreements between the striking miners and local governments which have by-passed the central government. In Russia the government prepares to take over all mines situated within the boundaries of the republic. The two sides in the miners' strike in the Ukraine have signed an agreement ending the seven week strike and the workers will return to work today. Interfax reported that the miners had won support for an index regulation of wages, restricted to wage increases of 100 to 150 % because of the republic's difficult economical situation." (Aftenposten 20.04.91)

"Gradually the strikes have spread to other sectors. Before the weekend the independent trade union federation in Russia tried to flex its muscles through calling for a one hour strike. According to its own claims, this movement has 60 million members. The chairman Igor Klotjskov thinks that several million will participate in the protest strike next Friday. At the moment more than 300 000 miners in more than 230 mines participate in the strike. ... In one of the Soviet Union's biggest coal mines, situated in the Kemerovo district in Siberia, work was resumed last Thursday after the mine was placed under Russian jurisdiction." (Aftenposten 22.04.91)



## ON THE 1989 AND 1990 MINERS STRIKES

### From Daad en Gedachte 8/90:

Some time ago we published in *Echanges* an article concerning the situation in the USSR characterised by the word "perestroika". ("Whom or what does Gorbachev represent and what's the meaning of perestroika?" - *Echanges* 57.) We tried to explain that the word "democracy" always used by Gorbachev and his colleagues has nothing to do with a workers democracy and that the class struggle which has existed within Russian state capitalism since 1917 would only become more important. From the time these articles were written until now important strikes have broken out in the Siberian coal mines, in south Russia and in the far north near the Arctic Ocean. They showed clearly the class differences in the supposed classless Soviet State where we see the same contradictions of interest between the working class and the ruling class as everywhere else.

During summer 1989, after an important strike movement, the Russian miners resumed work after "sincere" promises to improve their situation. The strikes began again after some months because promises were still promises. The government tried to stop them with a High Court ruling ordering to end the strike, but the miners declared publicly that they did not in the least care about such judicial decisions. We did not learn how these last strikes ended because information was very scarce. It was nevertheless apparent that the Russian miners were both very cautious and very militant. That was evident when in mid-July 1990 miners of all Russian coal fields stopped work at the same time; this time workers in other industries went on strike too.

But it was only a type of warning strike lasting 24 hours. According to the papers it had a political character and was prepared in concertation with the "democratic movement". Its two demands were: the resignation of the government and an end to the power of the communist party.

These demands and certain others were indeed at first sight political but we can question the first reports of the movement given by journalists and doubt if they are accurate and not superficial. Reading between the lines one sometimes gets different details and reaches the conclusion that these political demands were not expressed by rank and file workers, but by workers not speaking directly in their capacity of workers but for some political current with which they had contacts or were active members of.

Our opinion comes of course from our experience related to the workers activity. But it has another basis too. We think we have to be very cautious about the tendency

of certain members of the intelligentsia to attach political aims to workers' struggles. Something like that happened during the strike wave of the summer of '89. In August a Californian radio station broadcast a direct programme by telephone: a journalist of "Against The Current" interviewing the Russian writer Boris Kagarlitsky. This writer was just returning to Moscow from a visit to one of the striking coal fields. Kagarlitsky is one of the top persons in the Russian "democratic movement" and can be characterised as a political head or a politician. Which means that he considered the workers movement from a political point of view. What he said about the political aspects of the strikes was not at all surprising. On one hand he showed very clearly the political character of the strike movement; but every time he talked about the political aspects, he was talking only of the power of the workers in struggle practically counterbalancing the power of the party and of the bureaucracy. In our opinion, such a fact is of a social not a political importance.

Kagarlitsky then declared then that most of the miners' demands were purely economic ones; they asked for wage rises, the improvement of working conditions and for more safety. It is true that Kagarlitsky added that the striking miners had political demands too, but he considered as political such demands as the legal recognition of the right to strike and the official recognition of the strike committees which were the legitimate workers' representation. In our opinion, such demands cannot be characterised as political; they are the direct consequence of a social struggle. Answering a question from the American journalist, Kagarlitsky recognised that the miners' demands had no political character; but he explained that among the members of the strike committees were some local civil servant observers without the right to vote but who nevertheless could give their opinions. From this interview published by "Against The Current" (Jan-Feb 1990) we have quoted only what we thought important and essential for the understanding of the recent strikes and of the actual position of all the workers.

Gorbachev declared that these latest strikes were "the action of hooligans" and according to him they are not very important. It is a reaction typical in such circumstances from any member of the ruling class in any country. Once again these words underlines the fact that Gorbachev belongs to the ruling class; not to the conservative section of this class but to today's slightly more progressive section. Those who see a political character in these strikes belong to a more progressive part of the ruling class which tries to use the miners' strike for their own political purpose. As in the past in Western Europe, a certain fraction of the bourgeoisie considers the workers struggle with a certain apparent sympathy in so far as it is directed against their conservative opponents. Of course such a situation does not at all mean that their class character is modified even though they may change the label stuck on their "modern" tendency.

CB



## RUSSIAN MINERS ON STRIKE AGAIN

### From Daad en Gedachte 4/91:

For the third time in more than two years, the miners of the most important coal fields are again on strike. Miners in the Kazakstan and of the Donetz in Ukraina were among the first to stop work on Friday, 1st March 1991. If we believe the earliest information, they are protest strikes launched by the independent union built during the 24 hour strikes in 1989. According to this news the miners did something other than what this union asked them to do. One week later, work had not resumed and the strike had spread to the coal fields of Vorkuta and Inta in the north of Ural. Two weeks later the mines of the Moscow coal field (near Tula) and of some other mines in Ukraina joined the strike. One day before, the newspapers had written that the union had asked the miners to resume work because the "strikes were threatening the Russian economy". The strikers were not at all impressed by this prospect. Neither was their strike committee, so we can draw the conclusion that this strike committee was controlled by the rank and file and not by the union.

As these lines are being written the strike has already lasted for three weeks and 300.000 miners are struggling. Their action is causing serious problems to the Russian government and to the managers; not only because coal deliveries to steelworks have stopped but because strikes on such a scale are a threat for the regime.

After 24 days of strike, prime minister Valentin Pavlov made a dramatic call to the strikers on TV; he said they have to think above all of the interests of the country and of the economy. "The government" said Pavlov "without doubt understands the miners, the government knows very well that the working conditions are far from being ideal and it knows too that this work is hard. But there are so many other places too where the work is hard and such circumstances constitute no reason to complain." Pavlov also said that the government was ready to negotiate with the miners but only on one condition: that they cancel their ultimatum to the government and that they stop the pressure of their strike. But the miners did not see why they should remove their only weapon, their strike. They didn't trust the words of the government. This bitter experience had been taught them by the government itself. After all, it was the third time they had been told the same thing and their present struggle was effective because the government had not kept its promises. None of these past promises from Moscow had been fulfilled and this time they were asking not only for the same things again, but also for the resignation of Gorbachev, the only one held responsible for this failure.

It is this last demand which led to the conclusion that this was a political strike. We

strongly doubt the rightness of this characterisation. In the history of the working class, political strikes are very rare, almost nonexistent. Workers all over the world fight for their direct interests. In practice their demands are directly linked to the material conditions of their lives, like wages, working time, work pressure or living conditions. Workers know perfectly well that politics is a matter for the ruling class, discussed and regulated between its various factions. It is difficult to believe these matters are different for the Russian workers. When the miners were on strike, Gorbachev organised a referendum in Russia and the miners declared that they considered their strike to be far more important than this referendum.

The supporters of Boris Yeltsin, the political adversary to Gorbachev or better his political competitor, tried to use the miners' strike to push their political prospects. But this situation says nothing about the actual character of the miners' strike. Their demand for the dismissal of Gorbachev means not at all that they support Yeltsin's policy or that they despise Gorbachev's policy. They are against him not because they are against his policy but because he has not kept his promises.

That promises had not been kept is not at all extraordinary. When 18 months ago a large part of the Russian working class went on strike, the Russian ruling class had no other possibility than to use the old traditional method always used by the capitalist class in any country in such a situation. For the Russian government what was important was the resumption of work and not at all the improvement of the miners' situation. The strike had to stop by any means as quickly as possible and for this reason concessions had to be made, which apparently were important but which in fact were nothing. The third Russian miners' strike was not at all an isolated phenomena. Class conflicts in Russia are spreading and it is evident that social development in this country has come to a point where the class contradictions are clearly visible, are becoming part of everyday life; this characteristic of western capitalism is coming to be a characteristic also of the eastern branch of capitalism.

Something else deserves all our attention. It is the attitude of the independent union founded 18 months ago during the miners strike because of the miners' distrust of the official union. We can assume that the new union is going to follow the same path as that of many dissident unions in the West. Many and various experiences show that the unions always behave like other unions even when they are set up for other purposes and apparently act differently at their very outset. It is one of the lessons the workers movement in the West has taught us. What we see currently in Russia suggests that the new Russian union is going the same way. The new union told the miners to strike only for 24 hours. The workers saw matters differently. The gap between the miners and "their" organisation which developed at this point was even bigger and more clear when one week later, the new union called the miners back to work. In Russia as in Western Europe workers have to take their interests in their



own hands and this is one of the reasons why the Russian government considers itself to be more threatened by this strike than by the previous ones. (1)

CB

(1) Note by Echanges: About the development of the official unions in the USSR towards an intermediary between workers and government, see some material in Echanges 63 p.36 and 64 p.7.

## **BULGARIA**

### **THE EVENTS IN BULGARIA**

(The following article was written by a Bulgarian comrade in mid-December '90 on request from Echanges.)

One cannot talk about current events here without at the same time mentioning the entire situation in the Eastern European countries. But it is impossible to develop all these problems in such a short article: the question is so vast, important, contradictory and uncertain. I think it deserves study, confrontation, discussion.

Here I shall consider only a few brief views on the present situation in Bulgaria. Bulgaria was one of the last countries of the East to try to free itself of its totalitarian regime and so to escape Moscow domination. It is also a country where 'democracy' went as far as possible (perhaps with the exception of Romania and Albania where we don't know exactly what is happening). Its last government, dismissed one week ago, was composed totally of communist members. The communist party with the new name of socialist party, got the majority in the last June elections and still has the majority in the National Assembly. Since the fall of communist party leader Todor Zivkov in November '89, not much has changed, except for freedom of the press, for associations and political parties and in the right to hold demonstrations. But I have the feeling that even these 'liberties' are orientated by the men of the party because all administration mainly in the small towns, in the country is still in the hands of the former power. The repressive apparatus, mainly the D.S. (State Security), i.e. the political police is still in the same position and still exert considerable pressure.

**Currently the situation could be described by three catastrophies.**

-- The first is economical. Industrial production is rarely above 30% of what it was. The amount of unpaid debts to Bulgaria is so huge that no new credit can be allowed. (The debt to Bulgaria is mainly composed of credits and weaponry to the Middle

East and African countries and they will never be repaid). But the most serious is the food situation bringing the country to the verge of famine. This is the first thing that surprises not only the Bulgarian people but most observers; daily life is very difficult. How to explain such a situation? - when we know that Bulgaria is mainly an agricultural country, that even during the last war the country escaped famine and that this year the harvest was relatively good. It is mainly disorganisation, the lack of initiatives, of transport; the economy was so centralised and directed, organised by the State, that everything is paralysed when no order comes from the top. We have to add that the old system was always on the edge of bankruptcy but always supported by grants - a situation concealed by false data. I think that there is a deliberate push to aggravate the situation because the party still has control of the political and economical administration. There is also a deliberate policy to starve the towns because the first attempts to shake up party power came from the towns and because the country is still in the hands of the party men. This winter is particularly hard because of the shortage of food and energy. Even some help coming from abroad (at a very low level for the time being) will not solve the problem (in USSR one million metric tons of food aid is still blocked in the airports and the rail stations).

-- The second point is a political catastrophe. The ex-communist party, now socialist party, has cleverly manipulated the situation opening up 'freedom of speech' but keeping most of its power and privileges. During 45 years of an uncontrolled reign, the party has accumulated errors, tragic responsibilities, monstrous crimes, etc. But the opposition (17 political groups are united in a cartel - the Union of Democratic Forces) is more than disappointing. Naivety, lack of political experience (since 1937, Bulgaria had no political life)... We have to add that most of the new opponents are former members of the communist party and were profiteers of the former regime. Prison or camp survivors are pushed aside; very few from the period before 1944. One example: the new president of the Republic Jelio Jeleu, elected by the Parliament after a lot of manipulation and after the communist majority had barred the road to presidency of a true social democrat resistant, has imposed as vice president a general, former interior minister. (Sofia students tried to get his dismissal or resignation through demonstrations and riots). Another example: as soon as an opposition leader tries to pursue an independent path, he is immediately pushed aside by a defamatory campaign (for instance accused of having been a police informer) as was Peter Beron. But in a totalitarian regime which held power for half a century, every citizen (mainly civil servants) was willy nilly collaborating with the ruling power. At the same time the real people responsible for the catastrophic situation of Bulgaria, the real criminals, cannot be traced. On the contrary, the men of the former ruling class and of the Nomenklatura have had all this time to preserve their privileges. Some have made a u-turn and are shouting louder than their victims in advocating democracy and liberty. On the other hand, the only ones able to cope with administration, science, technology and the economy are those formed by and who have worked with the former regime. Those most exposed have preferred to go



abroad because they had had the time to fill some foreign account. A lot are to get early retirement and could finish their dirty lives as peaceful pensioners, neighbours to their former victims. For most of the population not much has changed; they are still queuing for a piece of bread.

Constant fear has gone, but threat and uncertainty are still there. Recently another general, responsible for State Security, declared in front of all his subordinates: "We have taken power with blood, we will not leave it without blood". The Bulgarian people is very traumatised and exhausted by years and years of a tyrannical and bloody regime and haunted by the spectre of new violence.

-- The third point is an ideological and psychological catastrophe. I think that the most serious catastrophe lies there. Generations have been educated with and sacrificed for the hope of a marvellous tomorrow, for the building of a just society, for a better human life. All that is completely crumbling in ruins. Disarray in the head is more disturbing than hunger in the belly. The majority of the population no longer believe in anything, exhausted by the daily struggle for a minimum survival, disorientated even more by a political life with so many contradictory opinions. On the economical side, it is estimated that more than ten years will be needed to get back to a 'normal' life (which normal?). On the ideological side how many years will be needed - generations? Some prefer not to wait; the most frustrated or the most ambitious are leaving the country. In one year more than 100.000 (out of 9 million), mainly young and educated people, have left the country.

What can one think when considering such a black picture? Firstly not to have any regret for the former East European regimes. More than that the pleasure at last to be witnessing the end of the most despotic and inhuman regimes which has reigned in one third of the world for more than half a century. For another third of the world, it was an example and brought a 'scientific' justification for the tyranny of a 'one party system' and blocked human evolution all over the world. Its collapse means a new development of the idea of social justice and socialism. Everything is better because now everything is possible, after this 'glacial period' in the middle of the 20th century, an epoch of silence and death. Learning to live in a free political life, in freedom, is not that easy but it is a necessity. We have to be optimistic and if possible, to be present.

In Bulgaria, some aspects are positive. The change of regime was the result of a palace revolution which contained the hope that in removing some of the most corrupt individuals the essential privileges could be kept. Young people and students took this opportunity to try to destroy all of the old regime. It is still standing but its foundations are undermined, its walls are cracked.

Students are no longer alone. An independent workers union 'Podkrepa' has been formed. Even the old union movement closely linked to the party is trying to pursue an independent path. These two movements have organised a general strike, the first since 1932, and the communist government was obliged to give way. More than 1 million workers on strike (out of 9 million inhabitants) - it is something never seen earlier in Bulgaria. The independent union 'Podkrepa' has been excluded from the opposition cartel because it has proclaimed its solidarity with a violent demonstration and is showing its strength. Again the young people, at first disoriented by inaction, by the endless empty discussions between opposition and former communist party members, started new demonstrations. Even with their claims that their power was 'legal' because 'regularly' elected, the ex-communists were obliged to give way. Council elections are more or less planned next Spring and a lot of people hope to remove all party members still ruling the country. Everybody feels apparently more free now to speak out and to write in the papers. The latest news is of an ecologist being the new leader of the government (the ecological problem is very serious in Bulgaria).

Dimitrov 17/12/90

#### Remarks by a Norwegian comrade:

I found the article very interesting even if its approach and concerns and account of events is different from what you normally find in Echanges - or maybe precisely because of this.

I would personally have adopted another approach if trying to pass on some information about and/or analyse Bulgaria. This is partly caused by the simple fact of not being Bulgarian having experienced this particular kind of repressive regime. But what I also would have liked to see in the pages of Echanges was an account not only of the misery of the people and its thoughts, the country's economic problems, the political manipulations, the demonstrations, etc., but also of the class struggle that toppled the regime and the struggle afterwards and the real meaning of this struggle. This would also involve an evaluation of the new 'independent' union Podkrepa (as well as the reorganised and larger earlier official union federation) and its attitudes towards strikes (not only the 'general strikes' mentioned in the article), privatisation etc. The last part of the article could imply a positive attitude to the Podkrepa - my own judgement would anyway be different and maybe some time it will be time to return to that.

RH 5/91





## USA

### **Letter from comrades in Seattle:**

#### **THE GULF WAR AND THE SITUATION IN THE US**

The following letter was written this Spring by comrades from Seattle after the end of the war in the Gulf. An earlier letter by another comrade was published in Echanges 65 p.21. On the Gulf war, see also the journal 'Gulf Crisis Weekly' in the UK section in this Echanges.

Even before the start of the air war, the crisis in the Persian Gulf reinvigorated many discussions and criticisms of American society, capitalism in general and even modern industrial civilization. This may be positive; it is impossible to say for certain at this time. These discussions may simply be absorbed into the pluralist political circus or may lead to real ongoing thought and social action. Discussion has opened up partly because many people who never were before involved have become active in the opposition. But the dead hand of the bureaucratic left is still very evident. Unfortunately, a great deal of the organized anti-war activity has been dominated by mainstream, conventional left-liberal and authoritarian-bureaucratic political activists. Many of them are in love with the most modern business and political techniques and have been applying them to the oppositional movement.

Many of the leftists have had a lot of practice in previous opposition to US policies regarding El Salvador, Nicaragua, etc., which they have often linked with public-relations campaigns in favor of the Salvadoran rebel FMLN and the Sandinistas. They have brought their experiences with a vengeance into the new movement by demanding compromise with the status-quo ideology and calling for protest within the context of peaceful obedience to the authorities, so as to gain their respect. Many urge "working through the system." They tell us we must put pressure on elected representatives in Washington, including both the Congress and the president; we must elect better representatives in the next national elections, which will not be held until November of 1992, and which are obviously open to all sorts of media and other political manipulations. They urge that we "support our troops," not hurt their feelings by criticizing the job they do, and that we should express patriotism while criticizing government policy. We must prove that we deserve to be listened to by obeying the rules of law and order, and by respecting the police. As strange as it may seem to you in present-day Europe, the traditions of the communist party have not been totally discredited among a large part of the US left. Many still long for a 1930s-type of popular front politics similar to the idealized version, put forward by so many communists, which involves harmony and consensus between all sorts of left and liberal groups.

The split in the US ruling class and even status-quo institutions goes very deep. A number of local politicians in many cities and towns have openly opposed the war. The City Council and the mayor of Seattle came out in favor of negotiations and sanctions, and against military intervention. The city police were instructed to treat with consideration those demonstrators who engage in certain approved forms of protest. This basically meant that those who chose to passively sit or lie in the way of federal government workers trying to go to work or held peace rallies or tried to block traffic in the downtown area were generally treated with respect, gently asked to move, or gently carried out of the stream of traffic. Some leftists and left-liberals have been very enthusiastic about this cooperation and consideration. This kind of police behavior has also occurred in some other parts of the US; but, in most places the police have retained their usual brutal ways. And here in Seattle those who dared to engage in unauthorized forms of protest, such as trying to block the highways, were treated rather more harshly.

On the other hand, the Bush administration and most of the media have made a great attempt to convince the population that there has been no real opposition to the military incursion. Bush has even given a number of speeches in which he has simply and boldly stated that there was no opposition at all--despite massive numbers of people in the streets, at church services against the war and all sorts of lectures and discussion groups, vigils, etc. Although opinion polls indicated that an overwhelming majority, ranging from 75 to 95 percent of the population, supported the president's war policy, there are many good reasons to doubt the accuracy of these polls and to believe that the proportion of the population which, for various reasons, opposed the war was substantial. These polls generally interviewed a very small number of people, usually only about a thousand at a time. They generalized from the responses of the responses of these people based on their job, income, religious, racial, and other classifications. But in this crisis very many people clearly departed from the political stance that would be projected for their socio-economic profiles. Many who defined themselves as political conservatives or centrists opposed the war; large numbers of devout churchgoers, both conventional and evangelical, were against it; many affluent professionals also opposed it, as well as others not usually expected to oppose government policy. If a small number of people with similar profiles said they supported the war, the pollsters' projections that the majority of such people supported it were not necessarily correct. It should be noted that most of the US Catholic and Protestant hierarchies came out against the war, even though they rarely oppose government policy. Many people who define themselves as Jewish came out against the war, even though it was supported by the spokespeople for the major Zionist organizations. We really don't know what proportion of the population opposed this war, although it seems that there was more vocal opposition and activity in the western part of the country than in the East among all social groups. But certainly the public opinion polls on which the president and the media relied as proof that the population supported the policy should not be given greater credibility than the many thousands of letters and phone calls received by Congressional representatives indicating strong opposition to the war on the part of constituents. While there was much more public acquiescence and support for the war than we would have wanted, and while the opposition that did appear came from diverse motivations, the depth and extent of opposition must not be discounted.

The government has engaged in a concerted effort to shame the US population into passivity by telling us that we would be betraying our friends and relatives in the military by opposing the war, this despite the fact that large numbers of people called to serve in the Persian Gulf have also expressed opposition themselves. There is even an organization of families and friends of military people founded explicitly to express opposition to US hostilities in the Gulf. Although the fighting is now over, the military involvement is not, and neither is the opposition.

For a long time the US government has been engaging in various campaigns intended to both convince and intimidate the population into passively accepting military interventions in Central America and elsewhere, and into accepting the repression of those who resist brutal regimes friendly to the US. In the 1980- and since the authorities have used the "war on drugs" not primarily to apprehend big drug dealers and their large financial and CIA collaborators, but to frighten the American population into agreeing to a continued military-imperial role for the US government. The drug war has served to mask similarities between the government's deadly intervention and manipulation in Latin-America and Vietnam.

It is generally recognized that most of the American populace was thoroughly sickened and outraged by the Vietnam war, although many people opposed it primarily because it was hellish for "our boys," that is, the US soldiers. Others opposed it mainly because it was clearly an unwinnable war. But there were also many (including



ourselves) who opposed it as a heinous imperialist incursion which was destroying the lives of the people of Vietnam because they would not docilely submit to the brutalities of the US puppet regime in the South. The US authorities were also faced with rebellion and disorder in the military, especially among the lower-ranking soldiers. In addition, there was social unrest in the US, both in poor neighborhoods due to appalling living conditions (which by now have actually--though unbelievably--gotten worse) and among college students and young people from all social classes and groups who were demanding social justice at home as well as an end to the war abroad. The authorities and the established media labeled the pervasive aversion to official policy "the Vietnam syndrome," as if it were a sickness from which the population suffers. They have been trying to cure us of it since the mid-1970s.

Part of this attempt has involved restructuring the military to make it more reliable and less open to charges of class-based inequity. In the 1960s and '70s, the US military was primarily composed of conscripted soldiers. It was relatively easy for the affluent and the politically well-connected to avoid serving in the military if they wanted to. Most of the soldiers were from working-class and impoverished backgrounds, and were generally not enthusiastic about the army and their position in it. When faced with the realities of Vietnam, they often proved rebellious. The US now has an all-volunteer military. It is smaller, but the authorities hope and believe that it is more reliable. It is made up of dedicated career militarists, but also of very many people who would have found much lower wages or lower-skilled jobs in civilian life. These include black and Latino people (for the most part men, but also women) who due to discrimination, have many fewer opportunities of getting decently-paid jobs in the private sector. A lot of attention has recently been focused on these people because of the importance of racial conflict and discrimination in past and present social movements here in the US. During the Vietnam war the rebelliousness of many troops was related to ill-treatment and discrimination, which many minority members were protesting within the military.

Government figures indicate that 20 percent of the US military forces stationed in the Persian Gulf area before and during the war were black; blacks constitute only 12% of the population as a whole. Altogether, 28% of the army is black, about 16.5% of the navy and the air force, and about 20% of the marine corps. Close to one-third of the troops in frontline army units are black. In some of the airborne units blacks constitute about 35% of the personnel. But, only a small proportion of blacks get the most prestigious jobs. There are relatively few fighter pilots who are black. Somewhat more are helicopter pilots and specialized-traffic pilots.

Nevertheless, over the last decade, there has been a significant increase in opportunities for blacks and other minority members to gain training in skills and higher education leading to more highly paid positions. Ten years ago there were very few blacks in electronics, communications and intelligence units; today their numbers have increased substantially, as much as 200% in some fields and specialties. In the military there are training and job opportunities open to blacks which are not available to them in private industry. For that reason many who have enrolled in the armed forces, especially during the past decade or so, have been strongly motivated to succeed individually. Additionally, they have felt that their successful participation could contribute to opening up new opportunities for acceptance and success for all blacks, both inside the military and in civilian life. However, at the same time that job opportunities have opened up in the military (and to a lesser extent on the outside as well), racial bigotry and conflict in the society at large have, if anything, worsened. And even within the military blacks are often directed into occupations which fall below their skill levels or educational attainments, so as to exclude them from the more prestigious jobs (fighter pilots, etc.).

Most of those who have joined the military have always come from working-class backgrounds. But, over the last decade the socio-economic composition of the military has changed to an extent. Today's soldiers in general are better-educated and come from higher income groups than before. In the past, many had not completed high school (12 years of education). Presently the vast majority have, and some have even begun college before joining. A much smaller proportion of today's recruits come from impoverished backgrounds. Many more are from the families of skilled industrial and clerical workers and, in the case of minority youths, even professionals.

The black soldier of today is on average from a slightly higher economic stratum within the black population than is his or her white counterpart from within the white population. Minority members are not generally joining to escape a life of petty crime or personal problems, as many did in earlier times. They are generally very ambitious and achievement-oriented youths; a much higher proportion of them decide to make the military their career than do white youth. About 57.5% of black soldiers re-enlist after their first tour of duty, while 35% of white soldiers do so.

Recently there have been heated discussions among black politicians concerning what kind of attitudes black people should or do have toward government policies such as the incursion in the Gulf. Obviously there is a wide diversity of opinion among people who are black; but there are two main pressures from black politicians of various tendencies: one demands complete loyalty to government policies in hopes of expanding opportunities for blacks based on their commitment to the status quo, and another demands opposition to policies on the basis of the obvious lack of opportunities, as well as government neglect of the needs of black people in the US.

A poll published in THE WALL STREET JOURNAL at the end of January, 1991, indicated that support for the Gulf war was much weaker among black voters than among the voting population as a whole. While 78% of white voters asked said that the president had waited long enough before using military force, only 52% of black voters agreed. Of the black voters asked, 39% thought that Bush should have given sanctions more time to work, while only 19% of the non-black voters did. Many blacks, including intellectuals and professionals, feel that it is unfair that minorities should be more in danger proportionately of suffering casualties in a war than non-minority members of the population. They feel that the high proportion of minority members in the frontline units, as compared with the more prestigious and favored specialties and the support units, is directly related to the inequalities in American society as a whole. And they criticize the fact that racial discrimination drives black people into the military as a job of last recourse. But other black politicians and intellectuals argue that black people who are successful in the military lay the groundwork for civil rights gains in the rest of society and for greater acceptance as patriotic citizens by the society as a whole. To this their adversaries respond that in virtually every instance of US military conflict black soldiers have found themselves in the situation of fighting and struggling to remove discrimination which affected them before enrollment in the military, either personally or as a group. After all US wars political considerations have determined whether or not policy changes affecting the status of blacks have been put into effect. The Civil War resulted in the abolition of slavery and the granting of voting rights to adult black men directly afterwards. But neither the government nor the society at large generally acted to institute policies to remove discrimination. All subsequent wars raised the hopes of blacks for relief from discrimination with the return of peace. Even though some improvements did occur, despite hard work and dedication on the part of black soldiers, their basic hopes for better treatment were never fulfilled. But those who favor black loyal participation in the military argue that such criticisms openly expressed threaten to incite further hostility toward blacks on the part of the rest of the population.



In general, the composition of the US military has been very much affected by reductions in civilian social welfare and educational programs. For example, over the last ten years there have been drastic reductions in financial assistance for college education, while the cost of college education has risen sharply, even in state-affiliated institutions. Many students (working-class whites as well as minorities) have turned to the military as a source of funding for training and education. Often they have viewed themselves as primarily acquiring skills or higher education and engaging in other peacetime endeavors. Recruiting advertisements have purposely given this impression; one of their main slogans has been "Be All You Can Be." They have generally avoided war imagery.

Once in the military, many recruits have married, settled down, begun to have children, gotten second jobs to supplement their military incomes, and generally established themselves as reputable citizens. The call-up for duty in the Gulf very much disturbed these people, who had to leave their second jobs, their new wives or husbands and young children. Their experience has been very different from that of the 18-year-old unmarried men who were drafted to go to Vietnam, who, for the most part, had no illusions that the military offered job training or career opportunities and were fairly certain they would be involved in war.

It is unclear whether the US military is a more reliable or obedient force now that it is a volunteer army than it was when it was a drafted army during the Vietnam era. There have been a number of dramatic cases of resistance to the Gulf war by both active troops and by people in the military reserves. Groups which counsel military resisters have reported thousands of inquiries and calls for help. They also report that at least a thousand reservists and active-duty troops were restricted to their bases for refusing to go to the Persian Gulf (by the end of January). There are indications that resistance may have been widespread, although the government has not released information about it. Ten Marine recruits in training at Camp Pendleton in California are known to have refused to go to the Gulf and were put in prison. At Camp Lejeune in North Carolina, 14 Marine reservists also refused. A group of 27 US soldiers stationed in Germany requested political asylum in Sweden to avoid being sent to the Gulf; their request was rejected because of the UN resolution. Some troops who refused to go were forcibly sent in chains. Some military resisters have spoken publicly at anti-war rallies, including the largest ones, and have appeared on nationwide radio and TV programs. Many have asserted that they are willing to fight for their country but that they didn't believe that their country was at risk in this war. A number of military doctors and other medical personnel have refused to serve because they consider the war to be both inhumane and immoral. But very few resisters have so far expressed any kind of thoroughgoing criticism of the military or the political-social system.

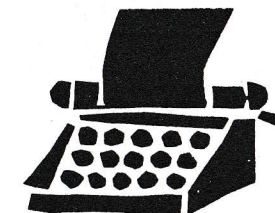
Many of today's recruits are themselves the children of Vietnam veterans, with firsthand experience of that war's toll on surviving US soldiers and their families. The constant attempts to reinterpret the Vietnam war, so as to make new incursions more palatable, have not really achieved their goal of creating complete passivity and obedience, although they have succeeded in confusing and intimidating many people. Only a small rightwing portion of the population is seriously dedicated to US imperial aims. Most other people seem to have at least some doubts, even when they can conceive of little opportunity to influence events.

Although some politicians have argued that the Gulf war will benefit the United States in the same way as did World Wars I and II, it must be remembered that the US entered those wars after the main combatants had begun to exhaust each other. Neither US troops nor the civilian population suffered the human casualties or material

destruction that were sustained in Europe and Asia. These wars also offered massive opportunities for the US capitalists and government to lend money to the allied governments to purchase arms, industrial material and consumer goods produced in the US. This, along with the arms and equipment required by the US military, generated many jobs and brought a prosperity of sorts. And after both of those conflicts the US was the only major industrial power and society in the world which had not been devastated by war. This enabled US capitalists to become dominant in world markets, beginning with the end of World War I and becoming definitive after World War II. The demand for goods produced in this country provided jobs here, which meant prosperity, if not wealth, for the majority of people. But this kind of economic stimulation has not accompanied subsequent wars waged by the US. It had to pay for the fight in South Korea and for the troops maintained there ever since, without gaining a market for massive amounts of goods produced in the US comparable to that gained after World War II. And the Vietnam war hurt the US economy deeply, even as it was thriving during the 1960s. Neither the Vietnam war nor any of the other "covert" wars the US government waged over the years has opened up new major markets for the sale of American-made goods and services, and therefore they have not created a significant number of jobs for ordinary people.

The government budget deficits caused by military spending in Vietnam and thereafter have been consistently used as justification for reductions of social welfare spending, such as for health care, schools, unemployment assistance, aid for mothers with young children or for the elderly, etc. At the same time, during the 1970s and 1980s the government has also reduced spending for maintaining roads, bridges and sidewalks, railroads and public transportation and other such services which businesses value and expect government to provide so as to make doing business easier and more efficient. These factors have contributed to the decision of many firms to move their production facilities out of the US, which eliminates jobs here. This process will certainly not be reversed by the Gulf war. The small number of jobs which may be generated for Americans in replacing military equipment, providing some civilian equipment and supervisory personnel for the reconstruction of Kuwait will not reverse the long-term trend of job loss to other parts of the world. With respect to Kuwait, most of the construction and other jobs will go to low-paid Middle Eastern and Asian laborers; only a small number of Americans will be employed as supervisors and technical staff. And only a few large corporations in the US will be making and selling equipment to the Kuwaitis and other parts of the region. They will not have to hire many workers in the US for this purpose.

In addition, the Gulf war will not remedy the deep problems faced by some of this country's key economic sectors, such as banking, finance, insurance, construction, real estate, and retail sales. It is generally expected that there will continue to be a lot of job reductions in all of these areas. Jobs are also being eliminated in the air line and military production industries because of restructuring which is aimed at increasing efficiency. As more people become unemployed, they buy less, and also put stress on state and local government finances because of their increased need for unemployment assistance payments and because they are paying less taxes. This is causing state and local governments to eliminate many of their own workers in an attempt to save money. This process has been accelerating over the last decade and is expected to continue. In general, none of the basic political and economic problems from which the country suffers will be fundamentally solved by the war.





**Discussion Bulletin** (P.O. Box 1564, Grand Rapids, MI 49501) Among the letters/discussion articles in DB no.39/Jan.90 are found: Update on Spanish dockers (An oct.89 letter from a Tenerife docker to a US contact) - Society in crisis (Leaflet by the 'DeLeonist' Industrial Union Party (Box 80, Madison Sq. Station, New York, N.Y. 10159) about the crisis of the present system, what to replace it with and how. We have never seen any material from this group, but the leaflet contains ordering information about pamphlets by Daniel DeLeon and others and the IUP journal 'Socialist Republic'.) - An exchange of letters between John Zerzan and F.Girard of DB concerning the (not new) debate about the emergence of capitalism and development of the productive forces, industrialisation/industrialism and marxist analysis of this - was this once 'progressive', was and is the marxist analysis and attitude right, what attitude to take to present industrialised society? If continued in DB this could be the start of an interesting discussion, but one where we - despite having published and distributed a number of his writings - would not side with Zerzan.) - Review of a new edition of Herman Gorter's 'Open Letter to Comrade Lenin' - Building a Green movement (A response by the 'DeLeonist' group Committee for Socialist Union to a document of of the (Green) Committees of Correspondence. No.40/March 90: Among the contents are: One Green World (Socialist Party of Great Britain leaflet) - Continued discussion between Girard and Zerzan on 'industrialism' - The usual number of debates and quarrels between all kinds of 'non-market' socialist groups and individuals which can not be summarised here and which are hard to follow even for regular readers.

**Processed World** (41 Sutter Street 1829, San Francisco, CA 94104) No.25/Summer 90: On Eastern Europe - Violence processing: fighting words and South Africa - The first-hand look and other perceptual problems (On Brazil) - On Lafargue's book 'The right to be lazy' - The occult revival - On the French book 'Working two hours a day' (Adret).

**'Effective opposition to war'...** must begin with the redefinition of support and solidarity. Some considerations of Power, Responsibility and Self activity' (Charlatan Stew, PO Box 31461, Seattle, WA 98103)

**Factsheet Five** (Mike Gunderloy, 6 Arizona Ave., Rensselaer, NY 12144-4502) We refer to a presentation of F.F. in Echanges no.65 p.19. The 132-page issue no.38 contains the usual, and useful, reviews of all kinds of magazines from all over the world (we quote some of them below), as well as reviews of calendars, T-shirts, artifacts, comics, video, books etc. Most people can find in F.F. magazines they haven't heard of but surely will be interested in. The price of F.F. is 3 dollars and it's published 6 times a year.



Some of the reviews we found in this issue are:

**The Labor Report** Vol.II no.1 (\$6 a year from Baton Rouge Jobs With Justice, PO Box 3823, Baton Rouge, LA 70821-3823) A mildly radical labor magazine, firmly behind unions and worker solidarity as the means to justice, but free of thoughts of revolution. They report on nasty things being done by bit business and on local contract struggles.

**MSRRT Newsletter** (45c postage from Chris Dodge/Jan DeSirey, 4645 Columbus Ave. S, Minneapolis, MN 55407) A newsletter for progressive librarians, sponsored by the Minnesota Library Association Social Responsibilities Round Table. They review plenty of liberal and other unusual periodicals, often things I don't get here at F.F. They also recommend resources for other libraries and interested researchers.

**The Socialist Republic** (\$3/4 issues from Industrial Union Party, PO Box 80, New York, NY 10159) The IUP calls for a fairly classic marxist form of socialism, based on organizing in the workplace...Articles here are written on a basic outreach level, each seeking to show part of the ugliness of capitalism and explain what the alternatives are...

**NAAPM Newsletter** no.44 (\$10/4 issues from 2735 Benvenue no.3, Berkeley, CA 94705) This is the newsletter from the National Association for the Advancement of Perry Mason. This issue concentrates on "the previous Perry's", namely those early 30's detective flicks which boasted at least four different Perry's and Della's. Complete filmographies and photos accompany.

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**Left Bank Distribution** (4142 Brooklyn NE Seattle, WA 98105) Catalog of books in English all concerning the libertarian tendency.

**Socialist Action** (3435 Army St., no.308, San Francisco, CA 94110) No.9/Sep.90: Prognosis for world capitalism: new crisis, attacks on workers - US out of the Middle East - Imperialism, oil and the Arab revolution: background to the US intervention (Two long studies on the background to the Gulf crisis) - 'Redwood Summer' activists want to win over loggers and mill workers.



**Labor Notes** (7435 Michigan Avenue, Detroit, MI 48210) **No.136/July 90:** In Los Angeles a demonstration of 120 striking janitors and 300 supporters attacked by the police: 90 injured, 40 arrested - What are the unions doing about fixing the Health Care System? - Deal with Chavez boosts Mexico's president - **New York Daily News** (2500 workers) waging a war of nerves; threat of closure to gain concessions from the unions and the workers, preparing for a possible strike.

**No.138/Sep.90:** Lorenzo takes off with \$30 million - Local strike settlement may set outlines of job security provisions in the 1990 Auto talks. **No.141/Dec.90:** Daily News finally gets its strike (A crowd of 15.000 rallied on Nov.1 in front of the News office - Us, Mexican and Canadian unionists meet to build solidarity across borders - Angry federal employees sit down at White House to protest budget crisis.

**No.142/Jan.90:** The battle for the Daily News - AFL-CIO: about-face on South Africa.

## GERMANY

The two articles below about the rail and post strikes in eastern Germany are both translated/adopted from the Dutch journal 'Daad en Gedachte'.

### THE RAILWAY STRIKE IN EAST GERMANY, Dec.1990

In the night between Sunday 25th and Monday 26th December last year the workforce in two East Berlin railway stations of the still existing Reichsbahn went on strike. Within 24 hours the strike spread over the whole territory of the former DDR. Around 260.000 drivers, guards, station staff, yardmen and others brought all the rail traffic of passengers and goods to a complete standstill. At the outset local, short distance traffic continued, but very soon this was paralysed as well, and from then on there were only trains carrying food parcels to Russia running.

Manfred Stolpe, prime minister of Brandenburg, was disturbed by what happened. He saw the strike as a "signal that should be taken very seriously", because it could

**Rail workers**  
FINANCIAL TIMES  
**begin strike in**  
27 NOV. 1990  
**east Germany**

possibly be a "forerunner of other conflicts". Therefore he advocated "a common step of politicians, employers and the trade union movement, which should make it clear what sort of improvements the working class in the former DDR would be able to rely on and what the limits of those improvements would be."

His anxiety was shared by Delev Rohwedder, the president of the organisation which manage all the former so-called "peoples properties" ("Volkseigentümer") in the former East German state. He too feared that this railway strike eventually could be the start of large scale social unrest. This fear not only prevailed in the eastern part of the now unified Germany, but likewise in the Federal Republic and its capitol Bonn. The West German ministry of Defence and the Federal Post Office (Bundespost) considered to bring the army (Bundeswehr) into action because of the expected amount of Christmas packets. (Information in Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung from 28.11.90). It wouldn't come to that because - as we shall see below - the strike ended after a couple of days.

The strike was not unofficial. Right from the beginning it was supported by the (West German) Gewerkschaft der Eisenbahner Deutschlands (GdED) (Union of the German Railwaymen), linked up with the West German trade union movement. With this West German union the East German union of railwaymen merged on the very moment of the German reunification. So, at the outbreak of the strike, the East German railwaymen were organised in a West German or All-German union. The Reichsbahn however was still an independent (eastern) company, as the Bundesbahn didn't yet want to take it over because of its bad financial state of affairs and out of date material. Consequently the situation was very complicated.

The president director of the Reichsbahn is Hans Klemm, a former member of the SED and of the trade union federation Freie Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund (FDGB). He was outraged over the strike, which of course broke out as a result of strong pressure from the rank and file, surprised the union and forced it to act. Klemm immediately took a plane to Bonn where he consulted the West German minister of Transport Friederich Zimmermann, who in spite of the fact that the two German railway companies hadn't merged, was his chief.

As one could expect, the minister said that the strike "by no means could be justified". Thereupon it was condemned by Hans Klemm too. (Information from the East German newspaper "Neues Deutschland" from 27.11.90). After so many years of SED rule Klemm was still in the habit of speaking just like his masters wanted him to speak. He was ready for negotiations, he said, but the demands of the union (i.e. the demands of the railwaymen) "did not come up for discussion".



There were three demands:

- First, the railwaymen were asking for a payrise so that the gap between their wages and those of the railwaymen in the western part of Germany would be narrowed. They realised that they could not have the equal wages immediately, but asked for 60 % of western wages.
- Second, they wanted a guarantee against enforced sackings if there would be a reduction of the workforce.
- Finally, they asked for measures to improve labour conditions and safety.

The railway strike was the first big labour dispute in the now unified Germany. One has only to look carefully at the demands just mentioned, to understand that it was all about things which were at stake in practically all the East German enterprises and not the Reichsbahn alone. This explains the alarm, the fear for what could follow. It also explains the general disapproval of the strike by the West German authorities and press. In the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* of November 28th there was a commentary where the strike was called "scandalous", and other words of criticism were used by other papers.

Of course the West German workers didn't share this opinion. The Postal Union strongly opposed the idea that the Bundeswehr should be used for postal services. "If so", the president of the Deutsche Postgewerkschaft Kurt van Haaren told the government, "there certainly would be a strong resistance of the whole trade union movement" (*Frankfurter Rundschau* of 28.-11.90). Surely, the West German Post Union is, as any trade union, an institute of capitalist society. What van Haaren said, was nothing else than a clear indication, not of the standpoint of Post Union's leadership, but of the mood of the rank and file.

As far as the point of view of the *western* rank and file of the railway union GdED, one can make a conclusion from what its president Rudi Schäfer said, when he ascertained that the leadership "hitherto" (underlined by us) had been able to keep the membership from any sympathy strike". (Quoted by the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* November 28th).

In general, the public opinion and especially that of passengers in the former DDR was one of understanding the strikers' case. "Neues Deutschland" said on November 27th that people showed "resignation and sometimes sympathy". The minister of Labour of the (new) Federal State of Brandenburg, Mrs. Regine Hildebrandt, had a completely different opinion than her prime minister Stolpe. She said, "the strike is a necessity!".

The quick extension of the strike led to a quick resumption of the negotiations. As soon as Wednesday 28th November the Reichsbahn and the union talked again. On the same day railway traffic started again, though not completely. The negotiations lasted for seven hours. The result was a compromise signed by both parts. None of the important problems had been solved. All important decisions were postponed. There will be no enforced sackings before the end of June, but that's all! About social questions there will be negotiations in January '91 and there must be a result before the end of March. The union hopes that the reduction of the workforce (68.000 in five years) can be partly realised without enforced sackings; half of the number going due to retirement, the other half leaving voluntarily. About the wages there will be further negotiations. (Information from the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 30th Nov.)

A real guarantee that there will not be any enforced sackings was not given. The payrise for which the workforce was asking was not given. There was only one sop: everybody will receive an extra holiday allowance of 300 Marks; the X-mas bonus will be 75% of the monthly wage and for every child an employee has the Reichsbahn will pay this year 1991 a social premium of 50 Marks. For those working shift (day/night) the workweek of 40 hours will be introduced on April 1st.

The Bonn correspondent of a Dutch morning paper (not the voice of the German ruling class!) honestly reported on November 30th that union president Rudi Schäfer had not been very successful. But Rudi Schäfer himself spoke as a typical trade union boss, who was eager to reassure the rank and file. He told them: "With this strike we have for the greater part obtained what we were asking for". Reichsbahn manager Hans Klemm said: "The compromise is a step forward". Is there any possibility that the strikers have believed this? We think that the enthusiasm which minister Zimmermann displayed (as a representative of the ruling class) must have been the affirmation of what the workers had already noticed.

/ Süddeutsche Zeitung Nr. 273

28/11/90

## Der skandalöse Streik

VON FRANZ THOMA



## THE POST STRIKE IN EASTERN GERMANY, January 1991

When the railway strike burst out in eastern Germany November '90, it was considered by some analysts as a signal; most of them wrote that this strike would soon be followed by other conflicts. They were right and this happened faster than they thought. Nobody knowing the enormous gap on wages and living standards between eastern and western Germany is surprised by these strikes.

On Tuesday 15 January more than 5000 workers stopped work in the ex-DDR post - Deutsche Post - which like the Reichsbahn is not yet reunited with the west German post. Their claim was for a special allowance on top of their wages to compensate for the price rises. Moreover they asked for the opening up of negotiations about wage increases - the same claim made by railway workers some months earlier. They hoped in the short term to obtain 60 % of the wages of the west German post workers. From the post board they got exactly the same answer as the railway workers got from the Reichsbahn board when they too had asked for their wages to be raised to 60 % of west German rail wages. Another reason for this strike was the sudden increase in workload since reunification; as the charge for a letter in eastern Germany is still half the charge in west Germany, a lot of firms send their correspondence from the east (mainly postal sales), thereby completely jamming the eastern postal network. The post managers answered that they they could not agree to this claim because Deutsche Post was a state company; though east and west German postal organisations were not unified, nevertheless all decisions concerning the east are taken by the interior minister in Bonn.

The strike completely paralysed the postal service in the east. Where the telephone was not automatised it was impossible to phone and it was impossible anywhere to get phone disturbances fixed. At the very beginning of the strike, a strike committee was organised. On Wednesday 16 January, the second day of the strike, discussions were going on about spreading the strike elsewhere.

The first news about the strike mentioned more than 6000 strikers. on 24 January, the two DDR newspapers Berliner Zeitung and Neues Deutschland gave other figures, and they also wrote that the strike (the first time they mentioned it) had begun the previous day, 23 January. Both quoted Kurt van Haaren, president of the post workers union - Deutsche Postgewerkschaft - who had declared that the members had voted on the strike 23 January and that the strike had begun in Saxony the same evening.

How to explain that a Dutch paper (NRC-Handelsblad) had mentioned the strike one week before the two east German papers? No answer to this question in these

papers, but a short note in the Berliner Zeitung 25 January told us that during the previous days 26.000 east german post workers struck with 'warning strikes' ('Warnstrikes').

So, no surprise and we may indeed believe that the post workers went on strike 15 January - and that one week later, as the strike was still going on and under rank and file pressure, the unions organised a strike vote.

We think that this is the most credible explanation because it was exactly the same that happened at the beginning of the railway strike. These two papers in the ex-DDR have always expressed the views of the ruling party, the SED. DDR and SED no longer exists with the reunification of Germany and the two papers try more or less to adapt to the new situation. More or less, because they still employ the same journalists as before. To change completely one's ideological thinking is more difficult than one would think.

Two years earlier, these same blindfolded editors had been unable to understand the nature of the rank and file autonomous actions. Why should they suddenly understand their importance after the Berlin wall had fallen? The silence of these two paper does not at all mean that the rank and file hadn't moved before it was openly written that they had.

Anyway, Neues Deutschland told us on 24 January that out of 100.000 post union members, 95.534 (96%) had voted to strike because, as the paper said, they did not see any other possibility by which to support their social claims. The strike which was "official" in Saxony 23 January, spread "officially" the following day in Thuringia, Brandenburg and East Berlin. In the evening the 24th, the post strike was total and general throughout eastern Germany. No letters, papers and parcels were distributed; financial, post and most of telephone services were completely stopped. An emergency service for urgent telegrams was organised, but radio and TV were not affected by the strike.

As we have said, the strikers claimed a lump sum to compensate for the fast growing cost of living. The post management had promised such a compensation in December, but nothing had materialised. On Thursday 24 January millions of letters and parcels were piling up in the sorting offices. In the afternoon the same day, the post workers held a demonstration in front of the central berlin station Friedrichstrasse. West berlin post workers took part in this demonstration in solidarity with their east German fellow workers. The same day at the same time in Bonn negotiations were opened up between union delegates and the government. When discussing this fact, the Berliner Zeitung could write that the strike had "begun again", though



pretending it was the first day of the strike but admitting indirectly that the strike had been on before 24 January.

Friday 25, the strike was going ahead. The Berliner Zeitung counted 740 post cars full of post bags to be unloaded on the railway tracks. The newspapers organised private distribution networks through private agencies. During the weekend 26/27 January an agreement was settled in Bonn. The government offered compensation of one month's wages, between 650 and 900 German Marks. The union considered this enough to order an end of the strike, but the Bonn agreement had to be approved by the rank and file members. The union bureaucrats used the union statutes to put an end to the strike. On one hand, an agreement is considered as agreed to by the workers only if 25% of them approve it; on the other hand a strike can go ahead only if more than 75% of the workers agree to do so. So the union got both the ending of the strike and the approval of the agreement, though a majority was reluctant to resume work.

Is it possible to claim that the management had surrendered to strike? Formally yes, but we have to consider that at the same time certain measures were taken in order to escape the financial consequences of this "capitulation". During 1990, 1500 to 2000 ex-members of the STASI (the political police of the DDR) sacked from their previous function had been engaged in the DDR post service. Using the opportunity of the strike (some slogans during the strike were directed against the ex-STASI employees: "They have to go and look for another job"), the post management sacked them and doing so reduced their total wages expenditure. And to complete this measure, the letter and parcel rates rose by 25 %. The union protested verbally and mildly about these redundancies though it knew perfectly well that the east German post service was understaffed and that through this measure things could only worsen. At the same time, the union bureaucrats openly declared that the "social peace" would be shortlived.

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**Temps Critiques** (BP 331, 38013 Grenoble Cedex) This new journal was presented in Echanges 64 p.2. No.1/Spring 90: The German question in France - Germany: a collective hallucination - The German dream of a national social democracy - 1989: Berlin, its bananas, its wanderers - Berlin after the 'soft revolution' - The last hunger strike of the political prisoners - The meaning of life and the politisation in West Germany.

It is not the kind of texts we would expect about Germany. Nothing in these pages about the economic development in West and East Germany and its social and

political consequences. Only a discussion - partly sociological, partly philosophical, partly political - on the evolution of ideas in Germany as if this movement was completely distinct from its economical and social basis.

No.2/Autumn 90: Against the State-Nation - Individual at the heart of criticism - The logic of **antisemitism** (This article by Moishe Postone, translated from the German version (Zivilisationsbruch. Denken nach Auschwitz) is a very interesting analysis of antisemitism from a marxist point of view. We hope to come back to this text.)

## UK

### **SHAKE IT AND BREAK IT. CLASS AND POLITICS IN BRITAIN 1979/1989**

A new Echanges pamphlet with this title has been published - 38 pages, price 90p. The pamphlet has been sent to all subscribers of the English edition of Echanges. For other readers we can give the following presentation of the two texts about a country which was and still is the ill child of European and world capitalism.

#### **H.Simon: The social and political crisis in the UK during 'The winter of discontent'. The strikes and the fall of the Labour Government (1978/79).**

This text was written just after the fall of the Callaghan Labour government - for an international Echanges meeting but never published in English by us. It describes the second great post-war crisis which saw a social crisis lead to the fall of the government (the first crisis brought down the conservative Heath government in 1974). These two high points merely represent the most striking moments in the class struggle which has had to stand up to the union apparatus ever since the end of the second world war. These two crises were replies to attempts to submit this movement to the needs of capital. Just as with the strikes in 1972-74, those in 1978-79 saw the use of the practice of secondary picketing as an autonomous weapon. On the one hand, the struggle slipped from the unions' hands, while on the other it made the pickets masters of economic activity. This intolerable situation led to the political crisis and the introduction of a government sworn to smash the autonomous movement.

The article has the following chapters: - Political solutions to capital's problems - The Ford strike - The truck drivers strike and secondary pickets - The creeping strikes of Spring and Summer 1979 - The labour/capital relationship of forces.

**David Brown: Myths of Thatcherism** is a recent text with the these chapters: - The state's economic activities - The cuts - Wage and employment policy - The results: mobility - New labour relations? - Consensus to the Thatcher government - Conclusions.



The following is an extract from the foreword to this article:

"Frequently we see the idea that the form of the government policy in the UK seems to contain the vague outlines of an almost military style reconnaissance seeking a solution to the problems of the economy and society, almost as if there were a rigid programme for "the Thatcherian revolution" to be imposed at all costs. No doubt much evidence may be produced in favour of such a theory; we may recall the violence of the miners' strike, that of the printworkers, or the violence on the streets of Brixton and dozens of other cities...

But this image endures only because it suits all and sundry, right and left, capitalists and trade unionists, conservatives and labourites. It offers the government an ample margin to demonstrate its decisiveness based on solid principles...

The image suits the labourites and their unions as it allows them to forget and help others forget that it was just them who tried out for first a policy of public spending cuts and privatisation...

The image also suits the capitalist class as it demonstrates that it is serious about business after years of messing about by the state...

This image, nevertheless, is unconvincing both empirically and methodologically... If the government has something to boast about it is that of having gained an extended support, unlike that of the past, based on the traditional groups of the Conservative Party. The opposition to various government policies too is losing its former popular characteristics, while a 'green' movement is beginning to emerge which is as every bit as confused as that in the rest of Europe. Generally speaking, we can see that a different structure supporting the government came into being, a clear indication of major social mobility which may well remain permanent, at least during this economic cycle. All this is a far cry from a warlike enterprise, but instead shows that the foundations were laid **before** the start of the "Thatcher programme"...

Secondly, the creation of a state with a manifest will to intervene does not fit with a policy aimed at making the entrepreneurial class responsible for its own actions. As we shall see below, on many occasions legislation dealing with labour relations (with a whole heap of prohibitions, fines and even gaol for trade unionists and others) became a real millstone around the necks of the industrial leaders."

For a more complete view of the class struggle in UK after the last world war, we can refer to books unfortunately never translated into English:

-Cajo Brendel: *Lutte de classe autonome en Grande Bretagne 1947-77* (Published in French, German and Italian - all out of print but a French reprint may soon be available).

-Henri Simon: *'To the bitter end'. Greve des mineurs en Grande Bretagne (1984-85).*

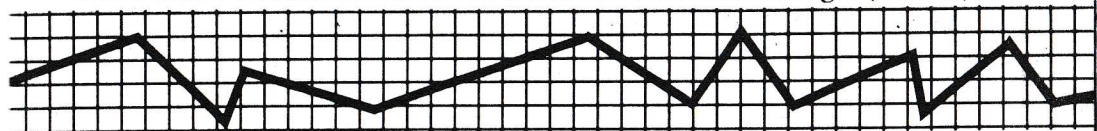
## 1990 UK OIL WORKERS STRIKES

*1990 saw strike action among UK oil workers in the North Sea. Below we publish an article translated from the September 90 issue of the Dutch journal 'Daad en Gedachte' and some follow-up remarks by a French comrade. In the next issue there will be a text about 'Norway 1990', where a Summer 90 strike of Norwegian oil workers is mentioned. Both strikes were wildcat strikes and involved occupation of oil installations. In many other respects the strikes were very different. Firstly, the Norwegian strike was mainly by production workers on the platforms, not maintenance workers. Secondly, UK workers were striking of course for their material interests, but concretely demanding union recognition, an oil workers union and a separate contract agreement for North Sea oil workers. All this exists in the Norwegian part of the North Sea.*

### A WILDCAT STRIKE TO ENFORCE RECOGNITION OF A TRADE UNION

A wildcat strike usually is a strike that is not declared by a union or by unions and that is not supported by them. It is an action in which the struggling workers go their own way. And that way of their own is almost always completely different from the one taken by the union. In almost every wildcat strike the trade union is either an idle spectator or it is doing everything possible to break the strike. And during a wildcat strike the strikers use to express themselves in a very critical manner about trade unions in general and about 'their' union in particular. But all this does not apply to the wildcat strike that broke out in the beginning of August 90 on the British oil platforms in the North Sea.

This strike was not declared or led by any union. It was led by a committee, the unofficial *Offshore Industry Liaison Committee*, that as a rule did not make any decisions without consulting the rank and file. It is true that this committee sometimes was referred to by some British newspapers as a 'kind of trade union', but nevertheless those same papers continued to talk about the strike as 'unofficial' and 'wild'. The same was done by the oil companies and other employers involved in the conflict. They had good reason for this in as far as 80 percent of the workers on the oil platforms did not have a permanent job, but were hired by contractors if and when they were needed. These kind of workers so far does not have a special union of their own, because the employers do not wish to accept it. What makes this strike different from other wildcat strikes, is the fact that one of the demands of the wildcat strikers was that the union should be recognized as their representative and that contracts should be made with it on wages and working conditions. It is often the case in a wildcat strike that *organised* workers go on strike against the will of the union that





is not able to defend their interests. This conflict was started by a majority of *unorganized* who are of the opinion that their interests are best defended by a union.

The British newspaper *The Guardian* wrote on August 6 about the "biggest and best coordinated strike action since the production of oil in the North Sea began 26 years ago". The immediate cause was an accident with a helicopter that brought drilling workers to a platform. The landing failed. The helicopter crashed into the sea and six men died. To the workers this was another proof that their safety was badly taken care of, even though the safety regulations, after the accident at the Piper Alpha platform (1) were tighter and though before the end of this year considerable improvements are to be made in this respect, amounting to a total of £ 750 million.

Right after this helicopter accident there were 'sit-in' strikes, i.e. strikes during which platforms, owned by Shell and BP, were occupied. Shell reacted by firing those who had taken an active part in these sit-in's. The refusal of the fired men to leave the platforms was the beginning of the massive action to protest against the dismissals and the working conditions in the oil industry in the second week of August.

The helicopter accident was the immediate cause, the extremely bad working conditions of course were the underlying reasons for the conflict. This explains why the appeal of the *Offshore Industry Liaison Committee* was followed on a great scale. Or rather, the appeals. For they were all 24 hour strikes, one after the other, because the employers obviously did not wish to understand the clear signals.

How bad the working conditions were is clearly demonstrated by Lorna Robertson, the wife of one of the (casual) workers. She told a reporter of *The Guardian*: "There is no certainty whatsoever that they will be employed and there is nothing that looks like a contract. My husband and his colleagues don't know today if they can go to work tomorrow." The enlisting companies recruit workers for the oil industry from areas like Clydeside, Tyneside and Teeside, areas with a high percentage of unemployment. A newspaper like *The Guardian* leaves no doubt that the oil companies and the enlisting companies profit heavily from this situation. According to this paper the working conditions in the oil production in the North Sea are comparable with those that existed in the British textile industry in the 19th century. Despite the fact that since the start of oil production several improvements have been made, which by the way cannot be credited to the companies. It comes as no surprise that during a meeting in Aberdeen strikers talked about the oil barons with great bitterness. "They can drop dead", was the general feeling, "and Shell in the first place!"

On Tuesday August 7th there were 1600 men on strike. The employers stated that they would not bend for that pressure and said that they would not negotiate as long as the actions were continuing. The workers stated that if necessary they would go on "until the bitter end". They knew with whom they were dealing. "If we don't win, the clock will be set back ten years", said striker Vaughan Mitcher. The *Offshore Industry Liaison Committee* understood that the only chance of victory was to expand the action. The rank and file understood this too. As time passed by the number of people who participated in the actions increased. There were strikes on alternate platforms. The oil companies reacted strongly with massive layoffs of activists. The reply from the strikers was occupation of the platforms. They sometimes let themselves be moved away from them by intimidation, but other times they did not. On behalf of the contractors David Odling declared that the actions had started three days after a letter had been received asking for co-operation to organise a secret ballot on the desirability of a trade union. According to Odling, "we had responded to that letter (in a positive manner), but when the actions started, that posed a hinderance to our cooperation". Ronny McDonald, chairman of the *Liaison Committee*, called this statement rousing of public sentiment. That kind of requests for cooperation had been made much earlier but, he said, "the employers never reacted to them seriously".

A week after the conflict had started 3.000 workers in Scottish construction and gas companies showed their sympathy for the actions of their comrades from the oil industry. They went on strike for one day. The *Liaison Committee* proclaimed for the third time a 24 hour strike and again this call was answered to by more workers. To the outside world the committee stated quite emphatically that the conflict was not about wages, but safety, recognition of the trade union, and labour contracts like they are agreed upon in all other branches of industry.

When the workers held their ground it looked as if the contractors were prepared to make some concessions. Odling declared that they were willing to cooperate on a ballot on trade unions on the condition that work was resumed immediately. When this brought no results, he directly changed his tune. He said he didn't feel like recognizing the trade union and withdrew his promise to that effect because "it had become clear to him by then that the union leadership was not able to gain control over the situation".

Before that the employers had shown a willingness to take back the workers they had fired in the beginning of August, but only on the condition that they should sign a statement that they would no longer take part in strikes. "Just sign them", Ronny McDonald said, "That doesn't change anything, because you sign under pressure and such a signature is invalid according to the Employment Protection Act."



As for the official British trade unions, their position were remarkable to say the least. Some six unions had members among certain categories, mainly drilling workers with steady jobs, like for instance technicians. But these organisations barely were a party to the conflict. Nevertheless they could not afford complete indifference or look unconcerned. Bob Eadie, an administrator of one of the technical unions, declared to a reporter of the *Financial Times*, that he "had had informal contacts with the oil companies and that he tried to achieve recognition of the union for his members".

The Times 14/7/91

## North Sea rig strikers condemned as cynical

By KERRY GILL

Roger Lyons, secretary general of another technical union, had spoken quite differently at the beginning of the conflict. He called upon the (conservative) government to make an end to it. "The Minister of State for energy should reproach himself bitterly, should he not interfere to prevent that the winning of North Sea oil falls victim to anarchy", he said.

Such statements were not particularly apt to maintain the trade union myth or to enforce the confidence of the rank and file. Therefore

the six unions that have members in the oil industry hastened to make another statement in order to make a better impression: "If the lay-offs are not withdrawn, the unions would fight them in court. As long as the lay-offs were maintained there could be no solution to the conflict."

This sounded tough! In reality it was a show. The demand for workers in the oil industry is greater than the supply and has been so for years. In every conflict in the past those involved were fired to be taken back shortly afterwards. "They cannot do without us", the fired worker David Shaw reassured his colleagues at a certain moment.

But of course it was no show when the unions announced at the end of August that they would find a solution to the conflict together with the employers. The time seemed right. The conflict still was at a deadlock. The unions had nothing to lose. If the employers (from their well understood self-interest) would agree to the ballot that had been asked for for such a long time and a majority would express as their wish that their interests should be taken care of by the unions (or by a yet to be founded union), then recognition of the unions would be inevitable and then an advice to resume work would be followed immediately and by everybody. Apparently

the strikers would have gained victory, but in reality the unions and the employers would do well out of it.

When the unions announced that they would try to find a final solution to the conflict, the *Liaison committee* expressed its joy. Hardening of the actions, expanding them by new 24-hour strikes - it was all suspended until September 6, the day of the negotiations between the unions and the employers. Did the committee not see the snake in the grass? Or was the committee, like some newspapers had written already, closer to the union than it had seemed?

At the time of writing this, the result of the meeting are not yet known. British or the Dutch papers in the week of September 6th gave no information. On Saturday the 8th of September only the *Financial Times* wrote that the strikes had spread to catering workers who take care of the provision of food supplies on the oil platforms. The maintenance engineers - the majority of whom are organized - prepared for participation in the strike and were supported by their union. From the employers it was stated that in short time there would also be negotiations with the union of this last group. Besides, the demands made by the catering workers turn out to be different from those made by other workers. They demand wage increases, as opposed to those who until now fought for recognition of the union, more safety and reenlisting those men fired. We will come back to this conflict.

CB

The information for this article was drawn from *The Guardian* of August 6, 7, 10 and 11; from *The Financial Times* of August 4, 7 and 10; and from the Dutch newspaper *NRC* of the 8th of August.

### More on the North Sea oil platforms

The above article written in Autumn '90 still has no conclusion: the strike is over for the time being but there is still a lot of manoeuvres to prevent the strike to burst up again.

It is very difficult for the Oil Industry Liaison Committee, the unofficial grouping aiming at the coordination of claims and of action to get a continental shelf agreement covering all the oil workers, to pursue its action. Recently its chairman, Ronny McDonald, said: "We will observe the will of the offshore workers", but the workers and the committee are confronted with very hard pressure from the employers and from 'their' unions. Mass meetings would decide in the next few



weeks future tactics and will reveal the actual support for the unofficial committee and the damage caused to workers unity by the relentless assault of unions and employers. One thing is certain: none of the most important initial claims are met and the workers sacked during last summer are not reinstated.

The employers have a lot of possibilities of manoeuvre between the different categories of workers. The building and drilling workers (8.000) work for contractors regrouped in the Offshore Contractors Council (OCC). The catering workers (3.000) work for employers regrouped in the Catering Offshore Traders Association (COTA). Most of the maintenance workers are permanent workers engaged by the oil companies. Except for these maintenance workers, the unions are weak and they are regrouped in an official 'Offshore Union Committee'.

Last December, COTA had an agreement with the TGWU only for the catering workers and only on wages: 14.5% wage rise for 9 months from 1. January. But this agreement was opposed by the OCC which wants to limit this wage increase to 11%, the same increase it was supposed to offer to the manual workers engaged by the contractors. These workers had never been consulted by the unions and the threat of an industrial action by the unions was not followed even by a vote up to now. The situation is even more complex because only half of the workers are affected by this refusal to implement the agreement; the other contractors have agreed to follow it.

In March '91, the OCC offered unilaterally a package: 8.5% wage increase, 26 working weeks and 26 weeks leave for skilled offshore workers. This offer got the unions' approval. Tom MacLean, chairman of the official Offshore Union Committee said that this offer was a real "improvement" and predicted that after that, there was "no real prospect for an industrial action" this summer. Nothing could please more the contractors and the oil companies which want to go ahead with important work on two major platforms this summer and were looking for "trouble-free labour". At the same time, the unions were following discussions with OCC for a 'hook up' agreement, which means that the workers would have some guarantee only up to the point when oil or gas starts flowing; then they are no longer needed and they could be made redundant. No question about the reinstatement of the previously sacked workers and for a post hook up agreement: for the workers still working on the platforms after the hook up, the discussions would be rig by rig with individual employers for individual agreements.

No prospect for a continental shelf agreement which would be completely sapped by these separate agreements greatly dividing the workers. The future of the movement is in the workers' hands.

HS 3/91

## 1990 PRISON REVOLT

Much was written in UK papers last year about the Strangeway prison revolt in April. We have just seen one issue - June 90 - of the prison bulletin Inside Info with the subtitle "Prisoners of Class Conflict, Injustice and Oppression; Struggles within prison walls", which was inserted into an issue of 'Counter Information'. A statement of the Prisoners League Association on Strangeways says that "prisoners in over 20 establishments demonstrated their support for a united struggle against a corrupt legal system that discriminates against working class men and women, particularly our black and Irish comrades." The bulletin also contains a chronology of the April 90 prison uprisings.

"Why prisoners fight back" is an article by a prisoner which we quote the following from:

"The Strangeways uprising...has generated a plethora of interpretations and analysis about what are perceived as the current ills of the British prison system....none of the discussions about the cause and rationale of the uprising, which acted as a catalyst for generalised unrest throughout the entire prison system, went much beyond the usual superficial and non-contentious issues of overcrowding, staff shortages and the existence of a ubiquitous minority of 'subversive' prisoners.....shifting the focus away from the grievances raised by the Strangeway prisoners themselves (essentially complaints about physical and psychological brutality) and onto issues more palatable to the establishment. Inevitably, factors like gross overcrowding and a denial of basic facilities contributed to the uprising, but its true origins lay in the behaviour of a prison staff that distinguished Strangeways as one of a group of prisons...renowned for its brutal and inhuman treatment. Essentially, the disturbance at Strangeways was an act of resistance to a regime based on a long tradition of officially sanctioned violence and overt intimidation....

The system itself in its treatment of prisoners has dictated the terms of conflict and struggle in prisons and can hardly be surprised when prisoners adopt a strategy of direct action as a means of both highlighting their predicament and defending their basic human rights. In that sense the uprising was primarily a response to the far greater institutionalised violence of the prison system....The current economic and social crisis pervading British capitalist society is finding its most explosive points amongst the most marginalised and dispossessed (its probably no coincidence that Strangeways ignited during the same weekend that the huge anti-poll tax demonstration in London became transformed into a pitched battle with the police)..."

## ANTI-POLL TAX MOVEMENT

UK leftwing publications are still full of material about the poll tax, as can be seen from the material below. We can also refer to the remarks we made in Echanges no.65 p.33.



**Poll Tax Riot Class War** (London Class War, PO Box 467, London E 8) has just published a pamphlet with this title - available at the above address - send £1 and SAE (28p).

This pamphlet has the subtitle "10 hours that shook Trafalgar Square". This reminiscence of John Reeds book "Ten days that shook the world" about the 1917 Russian Revolution on one hand reveals what CW hides behind the systematic use of slang in its paper: its real intellectual approach of politics; on the other hand is particularly irrelevant to this situation. The UK in 1990 has nothing in common with Russia in 1917 except if we consider the superficial aspect of a 'revolt against'. The pamphlet actually does not go beyond that. It is a good description with a lot of photos of how demonstrating people enjoyed street fighting and casual looting. Except for the usual and correct attacks against the left trotskyist groups and the calls for a defence campaign, there is not much said about the meaning of so much people in the streets. In some parts there are some reflections about the 'mistakes' of the police, sometimes with some glimpse on a possible manipulation. But nothing more. Even if we could agree with some parts of the following statement, we find it difficult to understand exactly what is the real meaning of the whole: "...Yes, people are angry so your anger is more than an individual situation - it's a social problem. Capitalism survives (thrives) on individualism - once collectivity is even half realised, then capital is under threat. The Battle of Trafalgar Square was a sign of things that could come. It was certainly a sign of the reality of struggle; a battle for human dignity. But excitement should not substitute itself for analysis and clear thought. Let's go forward and build a movement that can shake the foundations of the ruling class and create a new world." When reading that, a lot of unanswered questions can rise.

**Poison Pen** ('Produced by local subversives' - address letters only as follows: P O Box 71, Hastings, East Sussex) Still not paying the poll tax - Council Bullies - Book review: How deep is deep ecology? (G. Bradford - Time Change Press) - Hunt Scum on the run.

**The Trafalgar Square Defendant's Campaign** set up because the official All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation advocate informing to the police on people involved in the riot, have gradually moved towards a close relationship with this Federation and now work closely with Federation stewards for the control of demonstrators.

A leaflet from **BM CAT** (London WC1N 3XX) - "Keep of the Grass" - tells more about the grassroots campaign against the poll tax and its repression.

**The destruction of Toytown UK** (BM Blob, WC1N 3XX) Their presentation of this pamphlet: "The following is a random collective thoughts instigated by the Great Poll

Tax riot of March 31st 1990. It ranges from on the spot observations by participants to a wider theoretical reflection because every event whether small or large - and the Poll Tax riot was large - touches on the profound social crisis in the UK which is fast approaching a Rubicon..."

**La poll tax, un coup dur pour le libéralisme** - 'The poll tax: a hard blow to liberalism' (CLB c/o Arthur Lutte, BP 272, 62204 Boulogne sur Mer Cedex, France) Most parts of this pamphlet in French contains reports of the various struggles against the Poll Tax with an evident emphasis on the violent demonstrations, translated from British anarchist papers. The title is not that accurate: Does the author think that this fight against the poll tax is actually only a political fight against liberalism - for what, for reformism or dirigism?

**Counter Information** (Pigeonhole CI, c/o 11 Forth St., Edinburgh) For a presentation of this bulletin, see Echanges 65 p.34) **No.28/Sep.90:** People power beating the state (More information about the massive figures of non-payers of the poll tax all over England and Scotland and actions against the tax. In Echanges 65 p.35-39 we quoted some examples of **workers actions in connection with the poll tax**. This article mentions:

"Housing workers in Greenwich, London, have been on strike since May 90 after cashiers were suspended for refusing to collect the tax. The 160 NALGO workers have received great support, with thousands refusing to cross their picket line." And: "Anti-poll tax groups, council workers and local residents in London took action in July 90 against redundancies and service cuts. 2800 NALGO workers struck on in Haringey on 23 July...500 council workers took strike action in Newham."

This issue also contains brief material on among other things: New Zealand, claimants actions against benefit cuts - West Germany: anti-immigration laws, actions against racism - Revolts and demonstrations in Kenya and Zambia - Strikes in Brazil, East Germany, Honduras, UK oil workers.

**Class War** (PO Box 39, SW PDO, Manchester M15 5HN) **No.43/Nov.90:** Interview with a Militant Tendency member having moved to Class War - A study of 'United States of Europe' - A lot about Thatcher and the resistance against the poll tax. **No.42:** Fight against the poll tax (with different advices on the ways to escape paying). **No.43:** More on the poll tax - Two pages on the 'United States of Europe'. **No.44:** No war but the class war - News of the poll tax fights - Buy or rot (On the housing crisis in the UK and the homeless). **No.45:** A lot of short news about struggles in England and a long double page on 'Revolution or destruction' about the economic recession. **No.46:** Two articles on the poll tax, "The battle is won" and "After the poll tax", among a lot of short spots on struggles facts, one page on the



present fight between the FA and the Football League for the money involved in soccer in England with some considerations on the social background of both organisations.

**Subversion** (PO Box 145, Oldham OL4 4WW) **No.4** (Autumn 90): The Gulf crisis - 'Our Arthur' or 'ourselves'? (About miners union leader A.Scargill) - Eastern Europe: Why perestroika will fail - Poll tax, class justice. **No.5** (Feb.91): Gulf war - Strikes in Turkey - The events in the Baltic - The war in Ireland (Criticisms of IRA/Sinn Fein) - Debate on A.Scargill - The 'left' and the poll tax. **No.6**: Cutting to the bone: Local government, jobs, polltax... - Profit and hunger - Eastern Europe - After the Gulf war, bring the war home.

**The Gulf Crisis Weekly** (Box G, c/o Housemans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1 - £4 for 8 issues) The at least 17 issues of this sheet containst a lot of information on the war. It is the result of an enormous work of reading, listening and watching to guess and approach the truth in reading between the lines and showing all the crap the media is flooding everywhere. It is worth to read this fresh air in the irrespirable atmosphere of one-way official media flooding.

**No.3** (4.2.91): 300000 dead in Irak - The first days of the war - Mutinees and transfers. **No.4** Hard issues nuclear threats - Some western problems. **No.5**: Liberating Kuwait not the priority - Gas mask racism: Israel and Saudi Arabia - The joys of the one party state. **No.6**: Slamming the door on peace - The Amariyah air raid shelter - Bombing civilians in Irak - Invasions you may have missed. **No.9**: The West prefers Saddam to democracy - Irak had already begun to withdraw - Death squads in free Kuwait. **No.10**: US occupation forces threatens Bagdad - The oil fires threaten Asia rains - The last time Kuwait was invaded. **No.14** (24.4.91): The West denies comfort to the refugees - The ceasefire stranglehold on Iraq - Desert storm: the space war - On the US arms sale to Iraq. **No.15**: The West tries to hijack the UN again - 'Bomb now, die later' - The british rapid deployment force - Fred Haliday and the myopic majority. **No.16**: Unimportant people (On the 60000 Shi'ites who have fled to Iran, the massacre and destructions unequaled in the Kurdish north which have received little attention) - Europe was a colony of Asia ("As Africa was to Europe in the 19th century so was Europe to mid-Asia in the 12th century" - from A.P. Thompson's 'Doctrines of Imperialism', 1965) - What does the word 'Arab' convey? (On the point that Arab civilisation and culture was one of the single most seminal sources of Western civilisation). **No.17**: The wolf and the refugee - Conflict over Europe's army - NATO Rapid Deployment force - Settlers shoot 4 year old Palestinian girl.

**Anarchist 1991 Yearbook** (Phoenix Press, PO Box 824, London N1 9DL) A guide of the anarchist movement in Britain (Magazines, publishers, groups).£1,50.

**Socialism from below** (AWG, PO Box 820, Huddersfield HD1) Paper of the Anarchist Workers Group - a good quality local anarchist paper which we know too little about. **No.1/Spring 90**: Articles on Eastern Europe, abortion rights, the union NALGO, Ireland - Discussion with the ACF.

## **FRANCE**

### **CLASS STRUGGLES IN FRANCE**

Material on this can be found below in the notes about Liaisons and other journals. Readers of the English edition of Echanges which are able to read French, should be aware that some articles from our French edition don't appear in English due to limited capacity to translate them. Furthermore that some articles in the recently published and in previous issues of Liaisons have been written by participants in Echanges and could just as well have appeared in Echanges. A comrade has written a text on '**Struggles in France 1990**' which will appear in full in no.67 of the French edition - and in summary in another issue of the English edition. An extract in German is also available.

For new readers we can refer to the Echanges pamphlet "**France - Winter 86/87 - An attempt at autonomous organisation - The railway strike**" (see our List of Publications) which analysed one of the first strikes in which the below mentioned coordinating committees appeared. A critique of this and other texts appeared in Echanges no.61: "Is direct democracy possible?". This issue also contained a long text dealing with the same strike and the student actions in the same period, in a review of the pamphlet "**France Goes Off The Rails**".

In addition to various small notes, material from recent issues of Echanges include:  
- The 1989 Peugeot strike (no.62 - see below about Liaisons)  
- 89/90 bank strike (no.65).

### **LIAISONS**

The latest issue of Liaisons - no.4/5 - is 108 pages dealing with class struggles mainly in France 1988-90 and can be ordered from Echanges. The following is a summary of the articles (all in French):

#### **A new form of organisation? The coordinating committees in France**

This text tries to place the appearance of the coordinating committees emerging in many important conflicts in France during the last years in the dialectical process



between the class struggle organisations and the present structures of capitalist society. It analyses the various forms of class autonomy, considering the constant adaptation of existing organisations to the attempts of workers to defend their present interests.

(See also some notes about coordinating committees in the critique of the article 'Coordinating committees facing syndicalism' in Echanges 63 p.4. About the emergence of some kind of coordinating committee among French-speaking teachers in Belgium, see under Belgium in this issue of Echanges.)

#### Notes on the workers conflicts in Europe in 1990

A translation of a text by C. Scarinzi from no.26 of the Italian journal 'Collegamenti' (see also ITALY section in this Echanges). We quote the conclusion which sums up the developments of this text:

"...The struggle brings, when it escapes the control of the ruling institutions, some kind of non profitable associations with the potential negotiation of the existing order and at the same time a basis for some experiments about social qualities and needs which are not and can not be solved in a capitalist system."

#### Chausson strike

The text was published in no.55 of the French edition of Echanges but never translated into English. This strike (Feb.-March 88) in a car industry subcontractor, with Renault and Peugeot among the owners, lasted 5 weeks and escaped more or less union control, with regular mass assemblies and the formation of an 'organisation committee'.

#### SNECMA strike

This strike of aircraft engine workers is more complex. It follows a complete restructuring of this large nationalised industrial group which has several factories in the Paris area. It had its background in a strike in one of the factories - Gennevilliers - in Spring 87, to bounce once again in Spring 88 and to spread to the other factories. One of them became the center of the strike which lasted more than two months without succeeding to become an all out strike in all the SNECMA factories or to spread to other sectors (aircraft or car industry). A coordinating committee made relentless efforts, in an unescapable fight with the unions which helped management to weaken the strike.

(German translations of the Chausson and SNECMA articles has been published in an old issue (no.22) of 'Wildcat-Info', a journal put out by the Wildcat group in Germany and can be ordered from them or Echanges.)

#### St.Nazaire shipyards

This text explains the long period of restructuring of the shipyards in France and

describes two long strikes in 88 and 89, showing how the autonomous tendencies escape the union control in the action itself with no specific form of organisation.

#### The French nurses actions (March 88 - Jan.89)

Long article and various documents on these actions. Can be compared with the long nurses actions in UK (see Echanges 60), but one of the interesting facts in this strike is precisely its coordinating committee - one of the most important having been built so far in a struggle in France.

#### Peugot strike

Divided in two parts: First a detailed chronology showing step by step the not so obvious though strong fight between the workers and the union's attempt to break their determination. Secondly a short analysis of the Fall 89 struggle already published in Echanges 62.

#### Civil servants

The last article in Liaisons tries to bring to light a long and almost hidden strike which lasted from Nov.88 to Nov.89 all over France among the civil servants of the Finance Ministry (having 180.000 employees). The failure of the strike was followed by a general refusal of work which obliged the minister to concede a lot of what he had previously refused, in order to have the services working 'normally'. All along the strike there was a lot of fights between strikers and unions.

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#### STRIKES IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOLS

To those interested we can send a copy of an article in French on this movement (Nov.90). To portray this movement, we quote extracts from a comment published in the French paper 'Liberation' 15/12/90:

"There are too many things to tell...was the sentence on a board in a demonstration: actually it takes place for a programme. The movement didn't speak, it was acting. Without verbs and without adjectives...More than the collective movement of 1968 or 1986, 1990 was a collection of individuals in movement. Claims were so various and different; they did not show any priorities or any possibility of synthesis. The common denominator was the lowest possible, a kind of general equivalent: money. What the government had to concede was far higher and out of proportion with what other social categories could have got in recent movements. Even so a teenager could tell: "Out of £ 450 m., we have not got something concrete...When we are external, we are so up to the end."

"One sentence was relentlessly coming: undifferentiated hate: against everything, against all. Unavoidable consequence of such an exclusion felt by



everybody...Hooligans actually are the tip of the iceberg: they are already marginalised in places where most of the pupils still can consider themselves as potential marginals. The difference with the 1986 movement on which the violence was imposed, the movement of 1990 had this violence inside itself. Hooligans were in the demonstrations like fish in the water: even disapproving it they accepted it, even criticising it they protected it.

Nothing was more out of their sight than the power, its games and its rituals...The most evident feature was the impossibility to control the movement. Some politicised coordinations succeed in discussing directly with the government, managing to find an honourable way out; this was nothing in regard to the spontaneity of the movement...The two coordinating committees were: one close to the JC (communist party youth organisation), the other one - FIDL - close to SOS Racism (linked to the Socialist Party). The first one was a skeleton, the second one microscopic. 2 months later both look as having taken the most of the movement. But both had lost the essential fight: the lyceens, mostly in the country, have massively deserted any form of organisation and have opposed the existing ones..."

Readers can with advantage look at our review (Echanges 61 p.22) of the pamphlet 'France goes off the rails. The movements in France Nov.86-Jan.87' which contains remarks about the French school system and the 1986 actions also referred to in the extracts below.

### THE LONG STRUGGLE AT 'SECURITE SOCIALE'

Securite Sociale: French national health administration and financing for health, work accidents, retirement, child benefits...

Copy at Echanges of a complete text in french about this strike which lasted 4 months in a district south east of Paris (Esonne) and spread to various other districts.

### IS FRANCE STILL AN INDUSTRIAL POWER?

This article (from Usine Nouvelle 15/11/90) underlines the weakness of industrial capital in France (permanent deficit, high unemployment, low investments) and raise some doubts about its ability to compete with other powerful rivals. (Copy at Echanges)

### LIMITS OF A UNION ACTIVITY

In no.36 of the journal Ruptures (OCL Champigny, BP 101, 94501 Champigny sur Marne Cedex) there is an interview with CRC militants. CRC is a coordinating committee between union militants expelled from the CFDT health sector sections after the Fall 88 nurses actions and forming an independant union federation and militants still in other unions. The interview shows clearly **the limits of a union activity** squeezed between the concrete questions of the workers and the obligation to participate in the various legal organisations discussing the management of the

labour force (union delegates and factory committees), the slow crumbling of their influence and position in the daily empty discussions with the big union bureaucracy and the constant harassment of the recognised unions, and the problems raised through common action with other minority, independent or ideological unions (CNT, SUD etc...).

No.40/Oct.90 of Ruptures: Paris administrative district: the repression inside the CFDT Public Services Union - Interview with an employee of the Securite Sociale (Essonne) - Struggle in three Champigny schools - How to control the suburbs: repression, murders, arms traffic and always the police.

A Contre Courant Syndical Et Politique (Renouveau syndical 68, BP 213, Mulhouse Cedex) No.16/July 90: The thousand faces of racism - Report on an ordinary dismissal: on the indirect sacking of teacher Claude Maignant from a Aix en Provence military lycée because of his opposition to racism. There is a call for a subscription (FF50 to the above address) to this paper which regularly brings a lot of information on the activity of the rank and file political and union organisations working for the support of the system.

A contre... Marseilles edition (4 rue St Vincent de paul, 13004 Marseille) No.4/May 90: Zapping in the East: workers are changing their chains (This article ends with a non-leninist bibliography on Eastern countries) - Poland - Romania; a short view of the social structure - Review of the film on the port of Marseille, 'Le rendez-vous des quai' on the fight against the Vietnam war, produced in the early 50s but distributed first in 1990 because of the censorship and the underground opposition of the Communist Party which had ordered the film but moved to another politics when it was delivered - The strike of the security vans - Obituary of CNT militant Jorge Valero - The Cedri, committee for the defence of immigrants and refugees. No.5/Oct.90: The Gulf crisis and the unions - Around the military operation 'Daguet': the 9 merchant ships carrying French troops to the Gulf disturbed by seamen action; The CFDT union defending the 'national interest' denounce the 'trouble makers' - Three Marseille unions evicted from the CNT.

Courant Alternatif (OCL/Eggregore, BP 213, 51058 Reims Cedex) Supplement to no.97/June 90: Revolutions still waiting in the West and the East - Behind the debt - France, top level of militarism - The rise of nationalism in the East - The anarchosindicalist conference in Russia. Summer 90, new no.1: From the National Front to national unity - France, Africa and democracy - The end of the workers fortress: **Renault Billancourt** (Describes the methods used by management to softly get rid of some 10000 workers with a mounting pressure on all those who have refused all kinds of money seduction) - About the eviction of squatters and the attack on the Comite des mal loges (Committee for people having bad accomodation)



- Women in prisons. Oct.90: Irak, Kuwait, a war is hiding another one - USA and the Gulf ("The hard core of the contradiction is the explosive question of the relations between the industrialised countries of the North against the Southern countries with the background of the crisis of American hegemony") - Irak, a servant of the Occident - Murder for security at Reims on the background of poverty - Chernobyl 90 (on the far consequences of the explosion and the biological mutations) - The East is for sale - What happens in the Securite Sociale (strike in the Essonne district). Nov.90: The Lyon suburbs on fire (Vaulx and Velin) - Immigration - A witness about the detention camps - Meeting of the union oppositions of the journal 'Collectif' for a 'class struggle syndicalism'. Dec.90: The Douce affair: a branch of the police under scrutiny - Report on the events in paris 12/11/90 (lyceens) - Suburbs become ghettos, lyceens too.

**Squatting in Paris** leaflets in French on squatting in Paris and the defence of popular districts threatened by speculators. (Collectif d'occupation, 3 rue Ligner, 75020 Paris or Octobre, BP 781, paris Cedex 03)

**Theorie Communiste** (address letter as follows: C. Charrier, BP2318, 13213 Marseilles Cedex 02) No.10/Dec.90: The '86-'87 French railway strike-Dynamic and limits of the new cycle of struggles - Civil society: fetishism and politics (Articles about this subject preceded by Notes about the 1986 French student movement) - Report about a meeting with the Italian journal 'Maelstrom' (about the 'activity of revolutionaries' and 'participation in the immediate struggles') - Discussion with a member of the group Guerre Sociale - Restructuring: a text and correspondence.

This issue of TC is 100 pages A-4 at the price of 30 francs. A number of back issues of TC and the seires 'Notes de travail' is available. The article on the French railway strike contains references to a text from us on this subject published in Liaisons no.2 and in English as a pamphlet (see List of publications in this issue of Echanges). A review of a previous issue of TC in Echanges no.53 gives a presentation of some of their ideas and some similarities and differences with the ideas of Echanges.

**Heresis** (BP 701, 75162 Paris Cedex 04) No.5/Sep.90: To die for the Emirs (On the Gulf war, written in a flaming style: "It is stiffling, heavy, and marshy reign of the general complicity of the managers.")

**CRHMSS** (9 rue Malher, 75181 Paris Cedex 04) (Center for the research of the history of social movements and unionism) Bulletin no.13: Among the presentation of books and texts (all in French) are:

-Research on 'workers during World War II'

-J.L.Roberts: Workers and parisian workers movement during WWI and its aftermath

-Marina Ardeni: The Italian immigration in Paris from 1926 to 1936

-A.Guillenoles: The terrorist temptation: extreme left and violence in France 1968-74

-Nathalie Hermella: The 1963 miners strike: national appraisal and local remembrance (the situation in the Cevennes)

-R.Fabienne: The workers movement in the Oise district 1919-35, unions and strikes.

**Contre** (Contre/Octobre, BP 781, 75124 Paris Cedex 03) No.7/Oct.90: Reconquering the town (Most of this issue is about the fights against evictions) - report from an international meeting on Autonomy (April 90).

**Le Proletaire** (Editions Programme, 3 rue Basse Combalot, 69007 Lyon) No.408/Oct.90: Most of this issue concerns the **Gulf war** with a serious study of the importance of the Middle East oil for the industrialised countries.

**Le Camisard Libres** (Brisset, Poste restante, 43370 Solignac sur Loire) No.1/Sep.90: All kinds of local struggles in France (more than 150) against the destruction of natural life for the sake of capitalist interests.

## **BELGIUM**

### **1990 STRIKE OF FRENCH-SPEAKING TEACHERS**

1) There are 105.000 francophone teachers. 52 % in the public education system, 48 % in the private system. 50 % are unionised. In Flanders, 80 % of the schools are catholic and private.

2) From 1975 to 1990, the education budget in the state expenses dropped from 21,84 % to 15,4 %. In 1986, the government adopted an austerity plan concerning all teachers. In 15 years, the purchasing power dropped 15 %.

There was a general degradation of working conditions, with an increase of the number of children in a class, bigger differences between pupils, the prospect of unemployment for most of the teenagers, the buildings completely derelicted...

3) Since 1986, demonstrations, token strikes organised by the unions without result.

Spring 1990, an agreement for all civil servants fixing the wage rise to 2 %. But the



ministers claimed they could not implement this agreement and want to reduce employment even more. This is the beginning of the revolt. A movement starts and goes beyond some token union barriers. Even the teachers in the private schools are more active than in the public schools: the former start the strikes and spread them to the public schools.

For one month - mid May to mid June - strikes, school occupations, picketing.

The strikes start again in September and last for 6 weeks with the support of parents and pupils. The strike is widely spread: all the secondary schools and 90 % of the primary schools are closed. The demonstrations are huge: 100.000 on 18/11, all pupils and parents being in the streets with the teachers.

Teachers are not picketing their own school. They are picketing neighbouring schools and could therefore pretend to be barred to go into their own school and work normally because of pickets, and so get full pay.

Some coordinating committees try to bring some kind of independent organisation, for the first time in Belgium.

End of November the unions sign an agreement which get some concessions but very far from the initial claim - they call for the resumption of work and succeed in obtaining this.

**Le Mouvement Communiste pour la formation du Parti Communiste Mondial** (address letter only as follows: BP 1666 Centre Monnaie, 1000 Bruxelles) In our notes about no.1 of this journal in Echanges 65 p.79 part of our remarks were missing and should have been as follows:

This journal, meaning the 'Communist Movement for the formation of the World Communist Party', is a regroupment of two journals previously mentioned in Echanges: 'A Contre-Courant' and 'Cahiers Communistes', and wants to constitute an 'international pole of regroupment' of communist forces. Subscription is 120FF/700FB for six issues.

**Supplement to no.2/Winter 90: One year after: Peugeot:**

This supplement contains only texts about the last Peugeot strike (see Echanges 62 and the notes in this issue about the French journal 'Liaisons'). The titles of the different parts give an idea of its contents: The reasons for a struggle - Restructuring and actions in the car industry - The 1974 crisis: measures to rebuild the capital accumulation in changing the technical and organic composition of capital and the job management at PSA - Productivity increase and exploitation - A new organisation

of time and motion - Restructuring and class composition - Lessons of the struggle. An appendix gives a detailed chronology of the strike and a study on Taylorism: a great victory of technique, man slave of the machine.

**Perspective Internationaliste** (Destryker, BP 1181, Centre Monnaie, 1000 Bruxelles 1, or BM Box 8154, London WC1N 3XX, UK) Journal of the 'External Fraction of the ICC' in French and English editions. **No.17/Summer 90:** Analysis, discussions and criticisms on the turmoils in Eastern Europe. These texts show a balance between divergent opinions: is there a real crisis in the Eastern branch of capitalism or is it only an attempt to consolidate politically the Russian capitalist class?

## **CANADA**

**Open Road** (Box 46135, Station G, Vancouver, BC) Anarchist News Journal. **Winter 90:** How Green is my neighbourhood? - Claire Culhane and some of her stories - Beyond feminism: Anarchism and human freedom - Theatre of the Absurds.

**Demolition Derby** (CP 1554, Succ.B, Montreal P Q Canada H3 B3) (This paper in English is free) Feminism: 3 women offer harsh critiques: texts by Dominique Fauquet concerning the republication of the 'SCUM Manifesto, Gyrocracy Song (Annie Lebrun) and J.Claudia, Feminism unveiled - Discussion about militancy: The highest stage of alienation - The Mohawk resistance - Correspondance: Most of the letters are from 'Interrogations', Fifth Estate and others concerning a previous article on anarchosyndicalism - Book reviews: America as paradise and Modernity and the Holocaust (John Zerzan), Having little, being much: A chronicle of Fredy Perlman's fifty years (Lorraine Perlman).

## **CANADIAN INDIANS - The Mohawk revolt:**

**CARP** (Support Committee for First Nations Claims) (64 rue de Maisonneuve, apt 7, Quebec, GIR 2 C3) Defence fund for Mohawk Sovereignty - Call for solidarity with the resistance of the Mohawk people against the police attack when they only claim their historical rights.

**Letter from a friend in Canada:**

"Canadian politics tend to be a lame imitation of US politics. The cuts in social services are stepping up now following the model. Just now the parliament wonders



where to cut to get the 200 million more to finance the Canadian army in the Gulf.

But in general, Canadians think of themselves as not making part of any real capitalist system or, at least, not just like the one in the States. They seem to avoid thinking about all the Canadian enterprises that make it big by exploiting the resources and people of any country round the world and in Canada itself.

In the same order of affairs, when I arrived here in Montreal it was the beginning of the Mohawk stand in Oka and Kanawaka and the demand for land that was rightly theirs. Two weeks later the provincial and federal governments didn't have any other answer but the deployment of the army round the reservations. The warrior Mohawks, after a time, gave themselves in, hoping for a final resolution for their demands, but until now nothing has happened, except that some Mohawks were put in jail and maltreated and some are out on bail.

There were waves of support from many other indian communities but their stands have all been broken into by the brutality of the police and arrests. The last was in British Columbia when a group was trying to defend their land from being logged."

S. Nov.90

#### **Additional notes from a Norwegian comrade:**

The 'warriors' referred to are the Mohawk's 'Warrior Society', an institution created by the government of the Mohawks - in the words of an article I read, "according to the tradition whereby military chiefs are subject to the authority of the representatives of the clans and the nations" and with the aim of replacing the Canadian police force and defend the Mohawk people.

The uprising started in March 90 when the Mohawks of Oka, Quebec tried, by erecting a barricade, to stop the building of a golf course in a forest area held sacred by the Mohawks. But the work with a golf course was only what started the uprising. The area in question has been demanded by the Mohawks as a reservation for years. More generally, there is a deep level of frustration of this most deprived group in Canadian society and demands for a unification of their present and historic territories and political and economical self-determination.

In July there was a massive police intervention, when the Mohawks defied court injunctions to tear down the barricades which prevented the cutting down of the forest. This led to police attacks with assault weapons, concussion grenades and tear gas, but the police were driven back by armed Mohawks. After this, Oka was surrounded and food supplies and medicines prevented from going in. In solidarity, Mohawks in Kanawake erected barricades around their territory and closed down a bridge leading into Montreal. Their area was also surrounded - first by police, then by the army.

The Quebec government would only 'negotiate' an unconditional surrender with dismantling of the barricades and handing over the guns. The Mohawks did not

give in, and the army was ordered to tear down the barricades, invade the reservations, arrest members of the Warrior Society and use firepower against resistance. In the beginning of September they dismantled the barricades, and the last resisters surrendered on September 26.

RH 4/91

## **SPAIN**

**Odio al capitalismo** (Note new address - letters to be addressed as follows, without mentioning the name of the journal: A.V.V.N., Apartado 111, 15300 Betanzos, La Coruna) **No.10/Oct.90**: Capital throws itself with ashield. How to react and for what? (A leaflet on the Gulf crisis) - War in the Gulf, scoundrels in agreement, scoundrels at war - Izquierda Unida: 'Don't let the USA command the operation...but the UN (On the Spanish CP's condition and their attitude towards the Gulf crisis) - On immigration laws approved by the Spanish state - Worldwide repression of workers struggles - Programmatic development: The marxist left in the second international. **No.11/Jan.91**: Carry on being troops or struggle against capitalist peace and wars - Programmatic elaboration, part 5: The marxist left in the second international - Prepare war during social peace and accumulate - 3 uses of biochemistry by capitalism - Extracts of a pamphlet of the Argentinian group 'Emancipacion Obrera': Against capitalism both in peace and war.

**Resiste/Eutsi** (Apdo 1673, Gasteiz - In Spanish and Basque) **No.10**: La Zapa, history of a street - Bilbao: urban restructuring according to the logic of capital - The selling of the DDR.

**Zer Egin?** (S. Martzial 2,4 - Ezk, 20005 Donostia) **No.288**: The Gulf war - The French revolution and selfdetermination - Union elections: fights for representativity - The situation in the prisons. **No.289**: The restructuring of the A H V (steel industry) in the Ensidesa - Nicaragua: a review of the errors with selfcriticism - Daily exploitation and racism. **No.292**: The universal police (On the Gulf war) **No.293**: GLADIO: the international of terror - USSR: a transition towards capitalism; the economic reforms in the USSR.

**Cultura Libertaria** (Apartado de Correos 1687, 01080 Vitoria) **No.19/Feb.91**: Catalogue of libertarian yexys in Spanish (1976-85) (Periodicals, documents, pamphlets and books) - Anarchism in the novels of Paz Galdos - AIP to all anarchists: on the lies of senior Alvarez of the CNT.



## **JAPAN**

Western media gives us a picture of social conditions and the condition and attitudes of workers in Japan which often is false, one-sided and/or presents as general what is true for only parts of social life or industry. Below we publish a text about a revolt of day labourers in the Kamagasaki district of Osaka written for Echanges by a Japanese contact.

More material on Japan will follow in another issue, among other things a text about overtime work in Japanese industry. We are interested in material or information about available material from readers, because Japan is not a country about which the kind of information we seek is easily available.

### **THE 1990 KAMAGASAKI WORKERS RIOTS**

From October 2 to October 6 1990, Kamagasaki in Osaka was deeply disturbed by riots. Every day, around the police station of Nisinari which controls this district, a crowd of ancillary workers and young people rioted, throwing stones, setting fire to cars and buildings, breaking into and looting shops and stores.

It was something completely unforeseen in the seemingly quiet Japan of today. To understand these riots, we have to look at the background of Japanese economy and social life.

20.000 inhabitants live in Kamagasaki. There are similar districts in Tokyo (Sanya) and Yokohama (Kotobuki) in which poor ancillary workers live. They are men who have had to forget their families, even their names and are obliged to live anonymously; most of them single and not very young, all of them rejected by the "normal" society. Many failures in their lives have pushed them little by little into these ghettos.

Most of them come from the poorest parts of the country or are of Korean origin. Most of them work on a day to day basis in the building industry or public works, others in transport, the warehouses or the port, ... They are recruited daily by labour dealers from either special criminal gangs or employment offices. The gangsters offer harder work but higher pay than the others.

These workers are the lowest category among the workers. To understand this we must refer to the pyramidal structure of Japanese industries. All big firms are the heads of a complex sub-contractors organisation: parent-firm, son-firm, grandson-

firm, etc... (70 to 80 % of the production of the firms are made outside the factories of the firm). Using such a structure, the parent firm is well protected: economy of investment, flexibility for the production, no risk of losses or of social disturbances. Such a rationalisation in exploitation is part of the competitive strenght of Japanese firms in the world market: in 1978, the only year for which such figures exist, Toyota had 168 son firms (first level of sub contractors), 4,700 grandson firms (second level), 31.600 grand grandson firms (third level).

We can see the same organisation in the building and public services industries. The building firm organises such a pyramidal system everytime it gets a contract; contracting liable firms, first sub-contractors, second sub-contractors, etc... On the building sites, all the teams regroup temporary ancillary workers, which are disbanded immediately the specific work they have been engaged for is over. All building contractors look for disposable labour. Seasonal labour or people from areas like Kamagasaki provide it.

The Kamagasaki district is a pile-up of shanties for daily workers who each has only a bed or one room of less than 5 square yards (maximum). After a day of hard work or of not finding any work, they escape into gambling and spirits. They don't drink low price saki for their pleasure but to escape the hardness of their life. The district is full of illegal horse or cycle racing bookmakers where these poor people bet part of their hard won money. Kamagasaki is completely controlled by criminal gangs. The police know this very well: illegal gambling takes place openly in the streets around the police station. Policemen don't see the people living there as ordinary citizens but as something other than human. For instance no crime against Kamagasaki people, blackmailings, burglaries or murders is ever inquired into by the police. So people living there always hate a police force which does not at all protect them but on the contrary strictly controls them. This hatred burst out in October 1990 when it became known that an inspector had taken a bribe from a gang. The workers' protest was against the police exploiting the gang exploiting them. The police was somewhat reluctant to use their full repressive force against the riot because its cause was a policeman's corruption. So the riots lasted and lasted. Hooligans, students, young workers, teenagers came from other districts to take advantage of this situation and gave the riot a push. For all these youngsters pushed aside in the harsh race for school degrees, these events were a festival.

The Kamagasaki events removed the veil masking the reality of Japanese society. Some think it is the sign of a social transformation. I think this an overstatement. If "political" implies a kind of consciousness of a new or other society, these workers were not acting politically at all. On another hand there was no solidarity at all between these workers and other workers outside what it is called "the ghetto without walls".



## Diary of events

October 1, 1990: The Osaka district police are inquiring into a Nisinari police station inspector working in Kamagasaki who shall have taken a £ 4.000 bribe from a gang to give them information.

October 2: All these facts start to be known in Kamagasaki and this evening a crowd of more than 600 workers start a protest in front of the police station, throwing stones at the building and the 500 policemen called out for its protection.

October 3: All night more than 1.000 people are throwing stones and setting cars and shops on fire. This crowd is dispersed early in the morning but some stay in front of the heavily protected police station, throwing stones. The Osaka district police arrest the corrupt inspector. During the night young workers and students from other districts have joined the Kamagasaki workers and the number of rioters has gone up - cars are set on fire, trees are cut down to block the streets, a railway line crossing the district is blocked. More than 1.500 policemen are brought in to try to contain the riots.

October 4: 6 am, it is raining and some 1.000 in front of the police station have to run for shelter. But after 9 am, several thousand workers gather again at the same place, shouting and throwing stones.

October 6: It's raining early in the morning but again at 6 am, hundreds of workers without work because of the rain, start gathering in front of the police station. This day is relatively quiet but in the evening more than 1.000 are again in the streets fighting with the police. Things start to ease up. The workers have no money left and they have to go to work (they earn everything on a day to day basis and have nothing saved); some are more or less fed up with these riots which are getting nowhere and disagreements also are arising with youth from other districts. The atmosphere of the first days is fading.

October 7: A typhoon blows in a very strong storm in the city. The district is suddenly quiet and nothing further happens when the bad weather is over.

Kan Eguchi 12/90

The following extracts from an article in *Le Monde* (October 90) brings some complement to the description of these workers' ghettos of some Japanese cities. "...The feeling of relative poverty when a Japanese worker compares his situation to figures of the national wealth, masks the real condition of other workers who are effectively at the lowest level of the social ladder.

The material poverty is clearly visible in certain districts of the main cities and often

linked to social categories victimised through a social apartheid; some belong to the "burakumin", others are Koreans. The "Burakumin" belonged in the old Japan to a cast of parias who had to perform the most dirty jobs; officially they are not discriminated against but are still the victims of an unofficial exclusion. 3 million "burakumin" live in some 6.000 ghettos. Apparently these districts are similar to the other workers districts but then they are not: to be born in one of these districts means you are barred access to a "normal" work and life. In these districts no public money is spent: narrow streets of slums and derelict houses as in Suijin near Kyoto station.

The Korean districts (650.000) are more openly segregated. For instance Kawasaki in Tokyo's suburbs is not even mentioned on the maps. If not only poverty is reserved now to these minorities it is also evident that in their districts, crime, unemployment, low wages and precariousness is the common lot of the people living there at a far higher degree than elsewhere.

Less visible and more insidious is the poverty of a numerous category of low waged workers, the artisans of Japanese wealth. Most of them come from the countryside and at one time worked partly in the town and partly in their village. But the lack of work in their remote places of origin obliged them to remain in the big towns, working hard, living in dormitories, spending as little as possible in order to send as much as possible back to their families. The town is too expensive for them to have their families with them and there is no longer work available in the countryside. As temporary workers, their wages are very low and they have to make them up with a lot of overtime. ..."

## INDIA

### DEBATE WITH KAMUNIST KRANTI

In *Echanges* no.63 (p.7) we published an article from *FMS*, the paper of the group Kamunist Kranti in Faridabad, about an action of textile workers in Kanpur - followed by a letter from the Dutch comrade CB to KK about this article, raising some questions about the nature of working class struggles, 'class consciousness' etc. A look at this material is necessary before reading the letters published below.

Below we first publish KK's response to CB's letter. This was discussed at an *Echanges* meeting and the contents of a quick reply to it was discussed. This reply is CB's "About our differences: A short reply to the comrades of Kamunist Kranti" also published below. An answer to this has not been received from KK. Since it was



agreed that a quick answer should be made, it must be mentioned that CB's letter is therefore very short and does not elaborate the arguments in detail nor go into historical and current examples - something which however could easily be done. Our views of the class struggle in USSR published elsewhere in this issue of Echanges is also relevant to this discussion, as well as a presentation pamphlet of Echanges being produced.

Extracts of the discussion has previously been published in the Dutch journal Daad en Gedachte, but we publish it in full.

We also refer to the material about India and Kamunist Kranti in Echanges no.65 (p.3). Two brief notes concerning Indian workers are reproduced below from two leftwing journals. More material will probably follow in future issues, including about a Bombay textile workers strike, the 'caste riots' and about Kamunist Kranti's edition of Rosa Luxemburg's "The accumulation of capital".

RH 4/91

### **Answer to the Dutch comrade from Kamunist Kranti:**

We do not know whether we have correctly understood what CB is saying. So, our reply should be taken more as a step towards understanding each others positions. We are not very well acquainted with the situation in Europe and what we have being able to know does not give rise to high hopes. So, we hope you will not give those meanings to our words that the European context has stuck to them. We hope that together we will be able to overcome these preliminary and irritating difficulties that are a product of circumstances.

Having said this, in our opinion the ideas underlying these words of CB, that "...workers, defending their interests in opposition to the interests of the ruling class(es), from a certain level of capitalist development onwards, are irrevocably forced to fight for themselves and by themselves", are WRONG. When is or will this "certain level of capitalist development" be reached beyond ("onwards") which workers in general will act as MARXISTS? The "importance of workers' spontaneous struggles" for marxists is that workers' autonomous struggles force workers to bluntly face existing social reality and thus take steps that lead towards the communist revolution. The "importance of workers spontaneous struggles" for marxists is that at times they may give rise to "sparks of communist consciousness" (Paris Commune, Soviets) AND the indispensability of organised marxist work in capitalism that they bring to the fore. Recent workers' spontaneous struggles have shaken state-capitalist bastions AND given rise to obscurantist/chauvinist aspirations. It is because of this that while

we optimistically look forward to "sparks of communist consciousness" that the spontaneous movement of the working class may give rise to, we also work for organised marxist work on a global scale ("world communist party").

In our opinion, marxist/communist/materialist interpretation of history for revolutionary practice of the working class AND workers movement are NORMALLY not synonymous. Also, they are NOT "outside" one another. We consider ourselves marxist, a part of the working class movement.

It is materialist interpretation of history for the revolutionary practice of the working class that brings to the fore the global/internationalist dimension of the working class movement and NOT the workers movement in POLAND. It is materialist interpretation of history for revolutionary practice of the working class that brings to the fore the importance of abolishing standing armies and universally arming of wage-workers. We TELL workers about the Paris Commune, Soviets, demolition of nations/countries and formation of the global human community, events like Kanpur AND what workers SHOULD and SHOULD NOT do. Marxists MUST TELL and without a standing army/"Red" army under their command, they can ONLY TELL the workers what they should do, ONLY EXPLAIN to them - the decisions, right or wrong, REMAIN IN THE HANDS OF UNIVERSALLY ARMED WORKERS.

Materialist interpretation of history for revolutionary practice of the working class thinks that the level that the productive forces have reached is such that the productive forces can be harnessed for human welfare on global basis alone AND if this is not done, humanity faces self destruction. It is for this reason that marxists consider organised activity on a global scale to be of paramount importance. We do not know if comrade CB considers organised practice by marxists indispensable or not. We will assume that he is for organised practice (his participation in Echanges is a pointer), then the question of the FORM of this organised practice becomes a prominent question. We will also assume that CB is for globally organised practice (Echanges practice), then the experiences of past practice and their sum-up become our point of departure for present organised work. The word "party" seems to be too loaded for CB and he considers the adjective non-hierarchical to be mere a word. We think otherwise. In our opinion, past practice only tells us to fight against the formation of "Red" army AND hierarchical organisations. New practice will certainly bring up new problems but then, is there any other way out.

We certainly consider propagating experiences of Paris Commune, Soviets, "Red" army etc...essential "for stimulating 'class-consciousness'." AND in our opinion, communist revolution (if it takes place) will be a conscious act of humanity.



## ABOUT OUR DIFFERENCES - A short reply to the comrades of Kamunist Kranti

I think that one should always welcome any attempt to a better understanding of each other. For this reason I'm glad for KK's letter. As the comrades from India don't know if they have understood me correctly, I'll try to give an additional explanation. Doing so, I can only hope that in turn I have understood them well. It is not for nothing that I start my reply in this way. We know well how difficult it is to make the right interpretation of a view which is not exactly like your own. And as far as I can see, our differences are big and if a discussion will be of any use, we have to honestly admit this.

KK begin as follows:

"In our opinion the ideas underlying these words of CB: *"...workers, defending their interests in opposition to the interests of the ruling class(es), from a certain level of capitalist development onwards, are irrevocably forced to fight for themselves and by themselves"*, are WRONG."

"When", ask KK, "is or will this 'certain level of capitalist development' be reached beyond which workers in general will act as marxists?"

It's a very good beginning, because this brings us straight to the heart of the matter. The best I can do is to explain my view in a different way and with other words. Firstly, it's a misunderstanding if one believes that there are any kind of ideas underlying my views. What I've tried to describe is neither a view nor an opinion. It is a social reality which I've seen before my eyes during my lifetime. Of course this reality can't be seen everywhere. Where it can be observed, one can only share my opinion. Where not, something else is the truth.

That "certain level of capitalist development" is very difficult to define. Surely it will be different in different countries and of course it's related with the whole economical, social and historical scene. Nobody is able to say: it will be reached at this or that moment. But in the course of history the struggle of the working class takes on different forms. That this is caused by capitalist developments seems to me to be an undeniable fact.

As contrasted with your opinion, I don't think that workers "act as marxists". They don't and they will never do. They act in defending their own interests. As I see it, the class struggle is not an ideological fight. Workers don't fight because they want to make the communist revolution, but the communist revolution will be the inevitable outcome of their fight even if they're not aware of this result.

As I see it, class consciousness does not mean that the working class has a clear idea

from what is usually called "it's task" or something like that. If one is conscious, one is always conscious about something, and this something can only be his real being, i.e. the social reality of one's life, the reality of one's place in capitalist society and in the process of production.

I think this makes it very clear that I don't agree with your interpretation of history. My materialist (marxist) interpretation is quite different. However, I think that it's useless to quarrel over the 'right interpretation' of Marx. Useful however, is a close examination of working class struggles in our different countries and exchange information about them for a better understanding.

Of course I could say a lot more about KK's letter and your opinions. But I don't want to deal with everything and every detail here and now. May I refer to the presentation pamphlet of Echanges. There you will find again in other words than those I've used here, the same opinions I have tried to develop. (See the pamphlet 'Echanges et Mouvement. Presentation pamphlet'.)

To conclude: In my opinion the best thing one can do is not to speak to workers about the Paris Commune or an event like that - however important it may have been - but to speak to them about their own deeds and struggles. I realise that this is an approach quite different from yours. We will have to discuss this in detail. Hope to read you again.

CB 7/90

### Dockers

"...we have had news from our comrades on the struggle of dock and port workers in April (1989). Like all workers in India the dockers' struggle to maintain an existence was fought over near absolute levels levels of exploitation. With the legal minimum wage in the Dehli area (it varies throughout the country) standing at £20.78 a month a struggle against wage cuts due to inflation can literally become a life and death matter. After a week of struggle where the government moved in the navy and troops the strike ended with a 20 % wage settlement: a miniscule price to pay to secure India's exports and no thanks to the five dock workers' unions who last year called off a strike and who have successfully prevented dock workers joining with the rest of their class in the strikes which are a daily occurrence in India."

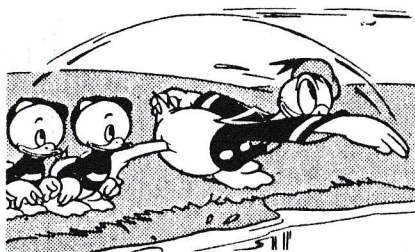
(From 'Workers Voice', paper of the UK group Communist Workers Organisation)

### Lockouts

"1989: Indian capitalists have been mounting an offensive against Indian workers. Closures and lockouts are becoming more widespread. Lockouts have become a



major problem facing Indian workers over the past year. They account for 60% of all working days lost in industry. In the first three months of this year, for example, a million working days were lost in the state of Maharashtra - which includes the industrial city of Bombay - almost 4 times as many as in the same period last year. In June alone, lockouts were announced at 34 Bombay worksites employing some 15.000 workers. As with their American counterparts, Indian and multinational bosses are locking out workers to achieve inferior working conditions, curtail shoopfloor control, lay off workers, cut pay or make changes in workrules." (From no.13 (end 1989) of the US syndicalist journal 'ideas & action'.)



## **HONDURAS**

### **Some scattered notes concerning Honduras**

In the same way as for New Guinea in Echanges no.65 (p.88) we include some material from a country not usually covered in Echanges, but unfortunately nothing amounting to an analysis because we have not had the capacity to follow this country closely or time to write about it in detail.

The US military presence in Honduras makes it a country more or less under occupation. 20 large military bases and 80000 soldiers on month-long exercises creates a number of 'problems' - for the environment and scarce resources (like citrus fruits), for the peasants being evicted from their land without compensation when bases were built, for the other peasants during the military exercises, all kinds of social problems in connection with the bases (like prostitution) etc.

On a number of points you find the same in Honduras as in many other countries in this area:

-An economic austerity programme, privatisation, a large military budget, a low standard of living.

There is no longer a public supply of water. There is a big increase in the cost of living,



and you have to pay for any service in the health sector. The military expenses are 35 percent of the state's budget, and the loans for the purchase of weapons make up an additional large part of the budget. There are cuts in everything like health, schools, building of houses...

Honduras is one of Central America's poorest countries. Almost 50 percent of the children die before the age of 5. Illiteracy in the rural areas are 70 percent. More than 200.000 peasants are without land, and unemployment is more than 30 percent.

-You find a large-scale repression, both in the form of the foreign and native military forces, the police, and the usual death squad-/contras-like groups. Apart from measures like police surveillance, tapping of phones etc against student and women activists and workers and union leaders, you find in the same way as for example in Guatemala and Colombia that workers are "disappearing" and executed by military units or paramilitary death squads.

To give just a few examples from the summer of 89: A series of killings took place in the city San Pedro Sula in the north. A leader of the Bijao Cement Company Workers Union was shot and killed by a security guard outside the plant. A leader of the Honduran Tobacco Workers Union was gunned down as he was entering a bus going to work. Death threats are common.

Below we reprint two articles from Financial Times. The first is about a strike wave in June/July 90 against effects of privatisation and austerity programmes, mentioning actions in a number of sectors. We can not for the time being say what happened with all these strikes, apart from the banana workers strikes which is the subject of the second article. Any relevant comments from readers will therefore be welcome.

RH 4/91

### **HONDURAN STRIKES SPREAD IN ANTI-REFORM DRIVE**

From Financial Times 6/7/90:

A wave of strikes which began last month in the state hospitals and spread to the mail service and the country's banana plantations, is on the verge of becoming a general strike. Most of the trade union federations yesterday threatened a general stoppage





unless a rapid solution were found to the hospital dispute. The hospital strike began three weeks ago in protest at the health sector privatisation plans. Postal workers then stopped work when the government laid off 400 employees as part of a broader austerity programme. This was followed 12 days ago by a strike of the 11000 plantation workers of the Tela Railroad company who are demanding higher wages.

Other unions have since joined the strike wave as part of coordinated opposition to the liberalising economic reforms, which have substantially increased the cost of living. The strikes have officially been declared illegal. Senior military officers have warned that troops may be used to break strikes.

### TROOPS END BANANA WORKERS STRIKE

Excerpts from Financial Times 7/8/90:

"President Callejas ordered troops to break up a banana workers strike at plantations of the Tela Railroad Company. Several hundred soldiers supported by police and light tanks were used to dislodge strikers from the company's plantations in the northern town of La Lima. They had occupied installations during the 42-day strike. Two strikers were reported to have received bullet wounds.

Tela Railroad is a subsidiary of US-based United Fruit and is one of the biggest and most powerful banana producers in Central America...producing bananas for the US and European market under the "Chiquita" brand. Workers had been demanding a 60 percent wage increase. The president decided to end the strike by force after a failed attempts to mediate - he had suggested a 25 percent settlement.

The secretary-general of the workers' union said: "We have decided to end the conflict to protect the lives of our members and have accepted a 25 percent offer." Banana workers in Honduras are the most powerful unionised sector and tend to be the reference point for other unions' wage demands. The fruit is Honduras' principal export and a big source of revenue. By forcibly ending the the strike, the president has won a breathing space for his economic austerity plan and headed off a threat by United Fruit to close its operations in Honduras."



## ITALY

**Collegamenti/Wobbly per l'organizzazione diretta di classe** (Address letters as follows: Angelo Caruso, C.P. 10591, 20110 Milano) No.26/Spring 90:

\* *Communismus: hic sunt leones* (Reflections on the crisis in the Eastern countries on an ironical mode and some hypothesis for the future.)

\* *Students in Rome in the 90's* (Some views on the student movement of Winter 89/90, called 'The Panther', which tried to oppose the attempt to rationalise university work.)

\* *The 90's: Notes on labour conflicts in Europe* (In French in Liaisons no.4/5 - See France section in this Echanges. The article explains the need to look for new criteria to understand struggles and tries to find them in the struggles of the past ten years related to capital restructuring.)

\* *The tempest has washed out Leopardi, Negri...and us* (Apologetic reflexion on the theoretical elaboration of Negri.)

\* *Red blood cells: The social selfmanaged centers* (A short report of this experience which has developed in most of the big Italian towns and which maintains a certain importance. Squatted buildings most of the time, sometimes legalised, most of the time with evictions and fights with the police. It is the remains of the autonomous network - punks, anars... - of the previous years - most important in Rome.)

\* *On the UK* (The article by D.Brown published in the Echanges pamphlet 'Shake it and Break it' - see UK section in this Echanges.)

\* *Three texts on China: 50 days in Peking - Historical socialism: China - Interview with a Red Guard.*

\* *Rebels and deserters in the Nazi army* (A letter from a comrade who managed to do research on the desertions in the German army in Italy and their engagement in the Italian resistance against fascism.)

**Comidad** - Bulletino di collegamento nazionale (Vincenzo Italiano, CP 391, 80100 Napoli) No.69/July 90 and no.70/Sep 90: These two issues contain discussions with Collegamenti on the social conflict in Eastern Europe and the translation of the article "Is direct democracy possible?" from Echanges 61 p.16. (An Italian comrade has written to Echanges about their publication of this article, and his letter will appear in the next Echanges.) No.71/Dec.90: 12.Dec.1969. the state throws a bomb against anarchism - Continuation of the discussion with Collegamenti about Capitalism, Communism, Stirnerism. No.72/Feb.91: Anarchist method and war - Again on the Trieste meeting - Discussion with Collegamenti on the organisation of class struggle.



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- 1974 - 1975: The third issue was published.
- 1976 - 1977: The fourth issue was published.
- 1978 - 1979: The fifth issue was published.
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- 1982 - 1983: The seventh issue was published.
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- 2016 - 2017: The twenty-fourth issue was published.
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- 2022 - 2023: The twenty-seventh issue was published.
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### Presentation pamphlet

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## What is Echanges et Mouvement as a group?

Echanges is not a group in the traditional political sense of this word in the leftist milieu. The most accurate way to define it is to call it a "network".

A network, yes but of which people united by what and for what purpose?

Some elements of the history of Echanges will allow to better understand its present position. The Echanges network was established in 1975 by left militants coming from various groups:

- some from the English group "Solidarity"; these people were still in contact with a former "Solidarity" member (Joe Jacobs) expelled from this group for his opposition to the "cardanist" line of the group (Castoriadis), mainly for his persistent defence of the importance of class struggle;

➤ some from the French group "I.C.O." (Informations Correspondance Ouvrières) which disappeared in the aftermath of 1968 among hard discussions raising the same question of the nature and the importance of class struggle;

➤ some members of the Dutch council communist group "Daad en Gedachte";

➤ a small group of militants in Belgium publishing the paper "Liaisons".

The contacts between these groups and individuals had existed before, and mostly for a long time. Quite a lot of other individuals scattered all over the Western world were connected to this core, the link between them being not only the group's publications or exchange of correspondence but also international meetings. One of these meetings had furnished the material for a pamphlet more or less giving the common position of the mentioned militants. This pamphlet, entitled "The New Movement", was the ideological link between them. To keep alive the exchanges built for years around these various groups and individuals, it was decided to regularly publish a bulletin giving a minimum of information on class struggle and of the life of the left groups in all countries. This bulletin was Echanges, and the network was constituted by all the contacts previously existing. It gave the opportunity to initiate or to follow discussions on the evolution of capitalist society and of class struggle in the modern world.

## The bulletin Echanges

The bulletin was started as a means of spreading and receiving information. Those participating in this project decided not to bother with the clarification of standpoints held in common (which usually accompanies the birth of a new group) but to accept the existing tacit agreement. The basic implicit agreement which underlay the content and form of the information published was still badly defined at the start, but as the project developed, it revealed a sufficiently unified approach among participants even if participants were very diverse as explained above.

This tacit agreement expressed itself in the analysis of the various phenomena of class struggle taking place every day as to be placed in the context of a more general understanding of the world. These phenomena include what many other people think to be individual forms of protest which are in fact part of a collective movement (e.g. absenteeism, turnover, refusal of work, etc.). This is necessarily linked to the critique of the existing theories of modern society.

To do this, we must have information about these conflicts and theories. If inside Echanges we sometimes draw different conclusions from a specific fact or from a set of facts, we still think that the information which describes these facts should have certain qualities. Here, too, a few simple principles guide our way of selecting the information published in the bulletin:

① The *raison d'être* of the bulletin is directly determined by the double inadequacy of the official means of information: lack of information on class conflicts, exaggeration of the importance of political and economic information (two ways of masking reality).

② Hence the double task of looking for information concerning the experience of struggles of all sorts and of making a meaningful choice from the mass of political, diplomatic and economical news.

③ We have few fixed, preconceived conceptions limiting our gathering of information or of analyses concerning the meaning of class conflicts today or the forms these conflicts will take in the future. It is not what workers think, even about their own struggles, that matters but what they actually do and the real meaning of their activity. We think we have to learn from these struggles and to consider their links with the general movement of struggles and with the situation of capitalism as a whole. So we despise using bluff, empty rhetoric or self-satisfying proclamations or offering "advices" or "lessons" to the workers. We see this attitude as an elitist conception seeking to use and dominate workers' struggles.

④ As its name implies the bulletin Echanges wants to be more than a one way means of information. It is conceived rather as collective letter to which each reader is encouraged to contribute according to his/her own possibilities and need, in exchange for what he/she expects to get from others. However, several years' experience shows that even with the best intentions one cannot, just by wanting to, escape certain traditional forms of activity. Presently, the exchange of views and material, the contribution of texts and the practical production of the bulletin are the work of a minority as opposed to the majority of readers. But the original conception remains a goal of Echanges.

## Some basic principles

A network, like any group or collectivity, is something having its own life and having an evolution related to the transformation of society as a whole. People left Echanges for a number of reasons, others joined it who did not have the same approach as the first participants. In 1980 some of us thought to write a statement expressing more clearly the common positions of Echanges. The resulting theses were a matter of permanent discussion and cannot be considered as an Echanges platform but rather as something to be improved through an open discussion. What follows is not the original text but the latest version discussed:

1) In capitalist society the true contradiction is not one of ideas - revolutionary, reformist, conservative, reactionary, etc. - but one of interests. No kind of will or desire can overthrow commodity production or abolish the wage system. This will only break down as a result of class struggle arising from the very position of the working class in the system of capitalist production.

2) According to a widespread opinion "class consciousness" and "unity" are seen to be the main and necessary conditions for what is considered as "revolutionary behaviour" or as "working class action". This view overlooks or misinterprets how action and consciousness are influencing each other. Workers don't act as a "revolutionary class" because first of all they are or become "conscious" of what they want. "Unity" is not a precondition for, but is created in and is a result of struggle. Workers are a "revolutionary class" because their position as a class inside the capitalist system makes it inevitable that the mere defence of their own interests brings them into direct opposition to the fundamentals of the existing order. The social struggle itself transforms the mentality of the people involved in it. Such struggles are fought continuously in the factories and elsewhere, and potentially they are revolutionary.

3) The development of class struggle with all its changing forms is therefore far more important than the development of the so called "revolutionary movement", regardless of the meaning given to this word.

4) The break with any form of exploitation or political practice and thought (reformism, etc.) is not a matter of theoretical discussion and conceptions but a matter of class struggle and workers' practice, a practice which is the result of their daily conditions of exploitation.



5) Trade unions are institutions in capitalist society whose function is to regulate the labour market. To be able to do so, they have to keep a balance between on the one hand workers' interests (trying to maintain the loyalty and the support from the workers) and on the other hand the interest of capitalists (trying to maintain the confidence of as well as their usefulness for management). But in modern capitalism the historical trend pushes towards their complete integration. Performing their initial function in these conditions they are more and more transformed into mechanism of disciplining the workers. Calls for rejecting the unions or for their support or for reforms have no meaning at all. It is more important to see what is the specific and concrete role of unions in the development of class struggle. One has to be well aware of the fact that the same rank and file workers who at one time support unions, will oppose them in practice when their own interests force them to go against the present social order. In general we can say that particularly in the highly developed countries the post-war development of class struggle has greatly reduced the possibility of mediating between the classes and has created a situation where workers find themselves permanently opposed to the unions. The same development of the actual class struggle has rendered obsolete any kind of syndicalist project.

6) For similar reasons it is useless to call for the rejection or support of parliamentarism. The fate of parliamentarism depends exclusively on class struggle inside the capitalist system. Whatever may be the reason for those who want to call themselves "revolutionaries" not to participate in parliamentary work or not to vote in an election workers have other reasons when they don't go to the poll. If they stay at home on election day, they don't do so with revolutionary ideas in mind. They abstain because parliament, parliamentary parties and politicians don't have anything to say to them, because they have understood that none of the political parties is defending their interests and that it does not make much difference if this party or another is in office. On the other hand workers who go to the poll and share parliamentary illusions will not refuse to participate in unofficial strikes or factory occupations if they seem necessary. Both categories behave the same way in practice irrespective of their attitude in elections. They do so without a revolutionary theory about parliament and without being conscious that and when they are attacking the order of bourgeois society.

7) The so called "revolutionary movement" and the "revolutionary groups" tend to be weaker and weaker nowadays and clearly suffer the fate of atomisation. They are weak because workers are more and more acting for themselves and by themselves. It is more and more clear that their means of action and methods of struggle are not and cannot be prescribed or taught by any sort of movement or group formed for this purpose outside or inside the working class. Class struggle exists and develops independently of these "revolutionary groups" or "movements". The level and size of the so called "intervention of revolutionary groups in the struggles" never determine or fundamentally influence the level and size of working class struggle. We may be individually involved in such struggles either because we belong to the collectivity involved in a particular struggle or because we participate in one or another of the host of temporary organisms created during a particular struggle and for that struggle alone. We consider that outside these struggles the exchange of information, discussions and the seeking of theoretical insights are an essential instrument of our own activity which eventually might serve others as well.

8) In very general terms "revolution" is usually defined as the overthrowing of capitalism. If we wish to characterize it in a different way we could say e.g. that it means on one hand the decline and disappearance of all kinds of practical organisational forms "representing" and repressing workers' interests and of ideological expression of such attempts, on the other hand the generalisation at the same time of the autonomous workers' practice.

## What is Echanges today?

As we are not concerned with conquering any organisation or being the leadership of anyone we have nothing to hide or to pretend. We are a small number of scattered militants writing and distributing publications to between 300 and 500 people equally scattered and being more or less politically motivated people, among them certainly not too many workers, and many of them showing political disagreement with the basic positions developed in this presentation text.

We could, as so many groups do, pretend to be an "international organisation" involved and "intervening" in a lot of struggles all over the world. We are, however, not at all worried to be what we are: a group as we have said above is the product of a specific situation in the development of present society. Its fate, be this growth or decline, will be the result not simply of our own involvement and activity, but of the evolution of class struggle. Trying to build something else only referring to our own "revolutionary will" would be inconsistent with our view on class struggle and rather inconsequent as well. To answer the usual criticism of being a mere "spectator" of class struggle we will say that it is not a matter of our own choice being constantly involved in the development of class antagonism or not.

To face some sensible curiosity we can say that the most active in Echanges are either individuals or groups located in

- France
- Germany
- Holland
- Italy
- Norway
- the UK
- and the U.S.A.

and that these individuals or groups are in close contact with individuals or groups in Belgium, France (Liaisons), Holland (Daad en Gedachte), Italy (Collegamenti), Scandinavia (Motiva Forlag), Spain (Etcetera), U.S.A. ... though it is undeniable that these contacts are not excluding differences of opinion and distinct ways of action.

\* \* \*



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