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# ECHANGES 68/69

FOR SUBSCRIPTIONS (£ 5 A YEAR; INCLUDING  
PAMPHLETS), INFORMATION AND  
CORRESPONDENCE - WRITE TO:  
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TO



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*Mr Lister*



## TO OUR READERS

### THE PRODUCTION OF ECHANGES

Once again we have to apology for the fact that the printing of this issue of Echanges unfortunately has been considerably delayed due to a number of reasons. Some of the general reasons have been accounted for in the previous issues, but the last half year has seen a remarkable number of 'events' following after another and leading to the delay with this issue. In the course of 1992 we hope to be able to establish a more regular publication again of the English edition. Any material for Echanges sent on a discette will facilitate this (see below).

### ADDRESS - CORRESPONDENCE AND ORDERS

Although our London post office box address is still valid, a quicker response to letters and orders for material will be made if sent to our Paris address.

It is not possible for Echanges to follow in detail events in all countries. We are therefore interested in material or articles on struggles or social and economic conditions - either written by readers for Echanges or material which can be reprinted from newspapers, journals, books etc. Irrespective of whether this material is used directly in Echanges or not, it will still be of value, because much of the time of the participants of Echanges is used on circulating material for information or discussion for the benefit of themselves and others. Frequently we get hold of material about a strike, but not follow-up material about the end of it or what happened afterwards. A typical example is the US rail strike covered in this issue, and we are therefore grateful for help from readers also in this respect.

### ECHANGES PRESENTATION PAMPHLET

For those interested in the **Echanges et Mouvement. Presentation pamphlet** which was included in the last issue, it is available also in a French edition. The text of this pamphlet was discussed for a long time involving many persons and will be further discussed and maybe improved upon. However, we think that a careful reading and consideration of the text will give a good impression of the ideas behind Echanges and how they in many ways differ fundamentally from many ideas of apparently similar or likeminded journals.

A text taking up many of the same points as in this pamphlet can be found in the critique of the pamphlet 'Capitalism and its revolutionary destruction' in Echanges no.51.

Readers who want extra copies or are seeing Echanges for the first time with the present issue, can have copies of the pamphlet for free by writing to our address.

### PAMPHLETS IN GERMAN - ADVOCOM VERLAG

Advocom Verlag (Steinbrecherstrasse 16, 3300 Braunschweig, Germany) has reprinted a number of Echanges pamphlets which has been added to our list of publications. The following old and new material in German is also available from Advocom and can be ordered either from the Advocom or Echanges address.

**Kritik des Leninschen Bolschewismus** - Cajo Brendel - 45 Seiten. Contains the two articles "Kritik der Leninschen Revolutionstheorie" and "Lenin als Strategie der bürgerlichen Revolution"; dealing with Russia and the Bolsheviki in general and in particular commenting two of Lenin's most important texts: 'State and Revolution' and 'Left Wing Communism - An Infantile Disorder'.

**Indien und der IWF** (International Monetary Fund) - Theo Sander - 100 Seiten, DM8.

**'Des grossen Planes Stimm' und Gang'**. **Bildungsplanung als Illusion** - Theo Sander - 216 Seiten, DM 17,80 - On the DDR (see Germany section in this Echanges)

**FIAT. Arbeiterkämpfe in Turin 1974-1980** - Anthology of articles mainly from Italian journals - 75 Seiten, DM6.

**Umweltpolitik in Thailand. Ein Land zwischen dauerhafter Entwicklung und schrittweiser Zerstörung** - Ingvar Sander - 191 Seiten, DM12.

**Polens Arbeiter auf dem Wege der Selbstbefreiung** - H. Simon - German version of Simon's book on Poland 80-82 - 60 Seiten - DM 4,50.

### FORTHCOMING ISSUES

For the next issues, Echanges is planning material about among other things:

- France: the closing of the Renault Billanceourt factory
- Japan
- Belgium: strike at the Cockeril-Sambre steelworks in Liege
- The situation in Spain
- About Spanish and other dockers. Discussions about and an international project on 'direct democracy'
- Greece
- Finland
- Russia
- Struggles in (east) Germany
- Italy

### COMPUTERS

In 66/67 we had on p.3 some remarks on computers and the exchange of material. If possible, material for the English edition of Echanges should be sent on a discette in accordance with what we said there and to the address we mentioned there. If someone is interested in material from Echanges on a discette, all material (except for that published in facsimile) for the issues 65 - 69 is available if a discette and a notice about the WP version you are using is sent to the same address.

### WILDCAT INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE - NOV.91 and JUNE 92

The persons behind the German journal 'Wildcat' (see Echanges 65 p.49) arranged an international conference (Echanges did not attend) in November with around 70 persons from various European countries. Prior to the conference a large **READER** was published (German, English, Italian) with articles about struggles in France 1990, 'post-fordism', 'toyotism' (Japan), East Germany, struggles in the Italian bank sector, FIAT after the restructuring, reforms in the UK National Health Service, struggles in the Italian public service, etc.



The conference was to start with reports by the organisers about: 1. The Wildcat group: what we have tried to do the last years, why this conference... 2. Class composition - political thesis we want to discuss. 3. Proposals for a project of 'militant research'.

The conference was then to split into the 3 following workgroups:

1. **Automated factory, team work, new workers.** This group was to deal with experiences with team work and new technologies and how workers react when confronted with this.
  2. **Service sector - the sectors of the 'new' struggles.** To deal with sectors like hospitals, childcare, banks and discuss working conditions in various countries and how the bosses use "Europe" as an argument for rationalising.
  3. **Unguaranteed workers, migrant workers: wobblers of the 90s?** Precarious workers, persons that have been engaged in refugee organising... discussions to comprise situations discussed by state and capital as 'unguaranteed jobs', 'deregulation of the labour market...'.
- There was also to be a plenary discussion about the trade union question: crisis of the unions/ alternative unions.

Wildcat will organise a follow-up meeting to this November conference and it will take place in the Berlin area in June. Those interested to attend should contact Wildcat at this address: Sisina, Postfach 360 527, D-1000 Berlin 36. There will be published a new READER for this new conference as well as READERS in other languages with parts of the material from both conferences.

### A-INFOS

We have seen two bulletins in English from A-Infos/Greece which we will make use of in Echanges. This is a source of information on Greece which many comrades will find useful. The address is: AP/ABC, 8 Aristidoustr., 10559 Athens, Greece. No.2/Dec.90-Jan.91 contains material about occupations of schools/colleges and demonstrations as a reaction to government proposal on education - with the most serious violence Athens has seen for many years. No.4-5/March-April 91 contains a chronology about various events and matters like prisoners, workers actions, hunger strikes, persecution of anarchists...

A-Infos apparently has to do with the Anarchist Black Cross and is a "network of independent groups exchanging information among anarchists/alternatives/antiauthoritarians throughout the world". There are groups also in France (c/o Humeurs Noirs, B.P. 79, 59370 Mons-En-Baroeul), Belgium (c/o Guernica, 65 rue du Midi, 1000 Bruxelles), Holland (c/o K.M. Kreuger, Postbus 61523, 2506 AM Den Haag), Germany (c/o Der Laden, 157 Dreikoenigen strasse, 4150 Krefeld 1) and Portugal (c/o Maldito, Apartado 2147, 1134 Lisboa Cedex). The bulletins from these countries we haven't seen.

RH 1/92

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## USA

### ATTACK ON US RAIL WORKERS JOBS AND CONDITIONS. AFTER THE 17 APRIL, 1991 STRIKE: DERAILED -- BUT NOT DEFEATED

*The following article by P. Rachleff written in connection with the April 17, 1991 US rail strike, is the original version of an article which appeared somewhat edited and abbreviated in 'Labor Notes' no.147. The author have been working with many rail union activists for the past 5 years and especially the first half of 1991.*

*The article doesn't only describe the strike and the immediate build-up to it. It gives the background to the present attack on US rail workers by describing the effects of the deregulation and restructuring of the rail industry in the 1980s, and also deals with activities and reactions in the month after the strike. For that reason we want to publish it in full. Class struggle in the US is widespread and often very militant, and another important reason for publishing the article is mentioned in a letter from a French comrade to the author: "I think the article is very interesting, not only because little is said in Europe about class struggle in the USA but also because the Eastern European events are a curtain for the US capital: the slightest strike in Russia could fill the papers with a lot of comments about the crisis of the system and practically nothing is said that could harness the idyllic picture of the 'free enterprise'." (See also remarks about Eastern Europe in this issue.)*

*Presently we have no material about what happened in the last half of 1991, but hope that some readers can supply us with that or write something.*

## Bush warns of rail strike dangers 16/4/91

PRESIDENT George Bush yesterday warned that failure of the rail industry to avert a strike called for midnight tonight could "seriously disrupt" the US economy just as it was "trying to turn around and get out of this recession". Most of the country's 235,000 freight line workers have threatened to walk off their jobs if there is no breakthrough in a three-year-old dispute over wages and health benefits. Lengthy bargaining sessions convened over the weekend by the National Mediation Board failed to produce a settlement.

The president urged labour and management to resolve their differences.

He said a report issued by a presidential emergency board, which held eight months of hearings, could provide a basis for settling the dispute.

"Because of the potential economy-wide disruption, it would be prudent that all efforts and actions be taken to

avoid the strike," he said. "My administration is willing to work with the parties to help in any way possible."

Mr Bush did not, however, threaten to go to Congress which could pass a bill ordering the strikers back to work. While he did not specifically threaten legislative action to block a strike, he implied that the recommendations of the emergency board could be imposed if the parties failed to resolve the dispute voluntarily.

A walkout would affect all Americans as well as the hundreds of thousands of rail workers, since the rail industry transported a third of all goods sold in the US, Mr Bush said.

Union officials said talks appeared stalled between two key unions - the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and the United Transportation Union - and railroad management.

A total of 11 unions are at loggerheads with railroad management.

## Rail strikers ordered back

By Nancy Dunne in Washington 19/4/91

PRESIDENT George Bush yesterday signed emergency legislation ordering 250,000 US rail workers back to work after just one day on the picket lines.

The legislation was whisked through Congress in a day, to forestall a strike which could have left 500,000 workers idle in industries dependent on the railways. The president was woken at 1:39am yesterday to sign the bill. By 7am most of the strikers were back on the job.

The strike came after three years of negotiations on some of the most complex issues ever to come before the National Mediation Board, according to its chairman, Mr Joshua Javits. A presidential emergency board was created in May 1990 to resolve the dispute. It held 219 hearings on health and welfare issues under dispute and issued a set of recommendations which pleased neither unions nor management.

Unions were displeased with board proposals which backed a reduction in the size of train crews, long sought by management. The rail companies were unhappy with the size of the wage increases recommended, averaging about 3-4 per cent a year over the next three years.

The legislation establishes a new emergency board to resolve remaining points of disputes or ambiguities in the previous board's recommendations.



## DERAILED -- BUT NOT DEFEATED

At 7:00 AM on April 17, some 230,000 railroad workers walked off their jobs. Employed by eleven of the country's largest railroads, and represented by thirteen different unions, they acted together in bringing the nation's rail system to a grinding halt. From clerks in offices in major cities to track repairmen operating heavy equipment in remote stretches of Montana, the strike was solid. Locomotive engineers, switchmen, brakemen, conductors, train dispatchers, and the many shop craft workers all acted in unison. It was a remarkable demonstration of the power workers still have in this country.

Yet by midnight, the U.S. Congress, Senate, and President had also acted together. They rushed through an emergency measure to order the railroad workers back to their jobs. In the House, only five congressmen objected. In the Senate, there was no questioning the move at all. Here was a remarkable demonstration of the lack of power workers have in this country.

Unfortunately, this chain of events has received little attention. This is unfortunate on two fronts: first, because the strategy of the railroad corporations is best served by an atmosphere of little public awareness; and second, because there is so much we can learn about the state of labor relations in America from this case.

The Background

The story begins in 1980, with the passage of the Staggers Act by Congress (and its endorsement by then President Jimmy

Carter). In response to pressure from the corporations and the business community, this act sought to reverse eight decades of government oversight of rail transportation. While it did not dismantle the Interstate Commerce Commission or throw out the Railway Labor Act, it moved significantly towards "deregulation."

The rail corporations had argued that they were being forced by government regulations to maintain service to areas in which they were unable to turn a profit, and that this situation then discouraged capital from flowing into the industry. The Staggers Act allowed the rail corporations to abandon or sell off track and operations. Most importantly, if the buyers were new corporations, they would not be obligated to live up to the labor agreements which had been in force.

The "shortlines" phenomenon played a major role in the restructuring of the railroad industry in the 1980s. More than 35,000 miles of track were abandoned or spun off. Dozens of non-union railroads sprang up, many of which interconnected with remaining mainline operations. In some cases, new "shortlines" leased all their equipment from the existing railroads and hired their former workers at cut-rate wages.

In all, more than 200,000 rail workers lost their jobs in the restructuring of the 1980s. Those still employed were whipsawed into taking major concessions, not just on wages and benefits, but on work rules and job descriptions. Some accepted transfers to distant locations in order to keep a job, uprooting their families in the process. Working conditions deteriorated and work schedules became more inhumane.



All this was a boon to the railroad corporations. Productivity skyrocketed, increasing faster than productivity in 93% of all American industries. Profits reached record levels. The years 1985-1990 were among the very best in all the years of railroads' history.

In keeping with the economic patterns of the Reagan "boom," most of these profits were not reinvested in the railroad. Corporate salaries, stock options, perks, and golden parachutes proliferated, as did leveraged buy-outs and paper transfers of wealth.

The Burlington Northern (BN) is a good case in point. In 1988, it split into two corporations. One, "Burlington Resources," took all the land held by the corporation, plus oil and natural gas leases and a few other goodies. The other, "Burlington Northern," kept the railroad and all of the debt which had been run up in an earlier restructuring. Carrying a heavy debt load, management came to the bargaining table crying poverty. Meanwhile, the CEO earned upwards of \$1.4 million a year, and the rest of the top corporate hierarchy collected another \$15-plus million in compensation.

Management found interesting ways to spend this money. In 1988, BN brought 193 management officials to a week-end "staff meeting" in the resort town of Spearfish, South Dakota. The bill exceeded \$30,000, including a wine tab of more than \$5,000. The activities included a visit to the popular "passion play" in Spearfish. When I suggested to a rail workers' rally in Alliance, Nebraska, that perhaps this could be justified as a

strategy for "humanizing" management, someone in the audience retorted that they were probably just learning how to "nail" labor better!

Across the bargaining table from these latter-day robber barons sit an array of union leaders who owe their status more to Samuel Gompers than to George Meany. For more than a century, rail workers have been fragmented into a dazzling collection of unions. Though they bargain jointly, they offer corporations a tasty menu of pressure points and possible divisions. At the national level, and even at work itself, there has been a history of hostility between such major organizations as the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers (BLE) and the United Transportation Union (UTU). Jurisdictional squabbles have been more common than gestures of solidarity.

The internal dynamics of these unions has been another source of weakness. They have little tradition of democracy and accountability. Members of some of the unions, such as the UTU, were looking forward to voting on a contract for the first time in the union's 88 year history! National officers are typically elected at conventions, held at four or even five year intervals. Incumbent administrations usually dominate these conventions, and the only opposition candidates with much chance of success have to come out of the existing leadership itself.

The system of labor relations on the railroads which took shape in the long period of government regulation reinforced these union structures and encouraged rank-and-file apathy and non-participation. Workers came to view their unions as akin to



insurance companies. If their rights were abrogated on the job, all they were to do was file a "claim" (the rail system's equivalent of a grievance), which their union officers would dutifully pursue. Meanwhile, life went on. Lawyers and lobbyists were frequently the unions' most visible public face. With members spread out over large geographic areas, rail unions manifested little internal life. As long as claims got processed with reasonable efficiency, officers enjoyed long tenures.

Until the 1980s, this system appeared to be stable. But under the pressures unleashed by "deregulation," it has come apart at the seams. Half of all railroad workers lost their jobs, and the remaining half found chaos where once they had known security and stability.

UTU Local 650 on the Chicago Northwestern (CNW) Railroad provides an interesting case in point. In the mid-1980s, their local chairman disappeared, abandoning his job, his union, and his family. When a committee from the local came to his home to look for the union's records (since they did not have a formal office), they found boxes and boxes of out-dated "claims" in his garage. Though well-intentioned and hard-working, he just could not keep up with the haywire character of what remained of the labor relations system. A doctor later diagnosed that he had suffered a nervous breakdown.

This individual breakdown is symbolic of the breakdown of the whole system. Many national officials seem to have adjusted themselves to this new state of affairs with an eye towards

preserving their own positions at the top of the heap. Regional and national officials experience the breakdown more immediately, but they are pressured by their own members to -- somehow -- make the system work. Some have begun looking for new approaches altogether, approaches which lead them to strategies for mobilizing their rank-and-file and building solidarity with the other crafts

#### 1988 -- The Showdown Begins

In 1988, the major railroads informed the unions that they wanted to reopen the contracts and discuss modifications. Through their national umbrella organization, they placed an incredible set of demands on the bargaining table. Unlike the negotiations typical of past periods, the railroads did not focus on a single craft. Instead, they made major demands upon each organization.

These demands began with wages and benefits. The railroads contended that they were losing a competitive struggle with trucking, and that "labor costs" must be pared down. Based on some job studies they had funded, they argued that most rail workers were substantially overpaid. Management also pointed to "runaway" health care costs and insisted that rail workers assume a significant share of the payment for these benefits.

The corporations' demands went beyond this package on wages and benefits to launch a wholesale attack on job descriptions, work rules, and seniority protections. Styling themselves as "modernizers" eager to root out "outdated" and "unnecessary"



rules, rail management made a series of proposals which threatened to turn most rail workers' lives upside down. Years of collective effort to gain adequate rest periods, to earn week-ends off, and to maintain some semblance of a "normal" family life were suddenly imperilled.

Brakemen, switchmen, and conductors (all members of the UTU) make up, along with engineers, the crew on a running train. Until the 1980s, the standard crew size (known as "crew consist") had been four. A series of union concessions and technological innovations chipped away at this standard over the course of the decade. A variety of trains were allowed to run with deviations of three or even two-man crews. Management now proposed to make this two-man crew the new national standard. A CNW brakeman with ten years' seniority told me that, if this proposal went through, he would not work for five years. With one sweep of the pen, this would have eliminated 30,000 jobs. Not surprisingly, UTU members have been among the most active in opposing rail management's proposals.

Track repairmen, organized in the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees (BMWE), were confronted with equally life-threatening demands. Over the past fifty years, this union had developed a system of workrules that enabled BMWE's to live relatively normal and stable lives. These rules limited the region ("seniority district") within which they could be ordered to work, for instance, and virtually guaranteed them week-ends at home with their families. But rail management's proposals would have drastically changed this. The seniority districts would

have been expanded to as wide as 800-900 miles, and BMWE's could have been ordered to report for work anywhere within that region on any day. Moreover, the railroads proposed to not begin paying them until they actually began work. Management offered the generous sum of \$29 a day for motel and meals, or the use of a reconditioned rail car to flop in.

Militancy among the BMWE's has grown by leaps and bounds in the last three years. Last June, they conducted an effective one day strike on the BN's old Chicago, Burlington & Quincy (CB&Q) system to protest the railroad's violations of agreements limiting sub-contracting. Phone trees and communications committees honeycomb their membership. Later last summer, they voted their incumbent president out of office, the first time in the union's 105 year history that an incumbent had been deposed. Though the new leadership has proven disappointing to the activists in the organization, all these undertakings have contributed to the rank-and-file's determination and the high degree of its organization. BMWE's have figured prominently in the budding rail labor movement.

Other groups have also been radicalized by management's demands. The shop crafts -- carmen, sheet metal workers, electricians, boilermakers, machinists, etc. -- have been threatened by the expansion of sub-contracting. Rail management would like the right to put all work out to bid, and then allow the unions to bid competitively against non-union contractors. Since most repair shops are now located in smaller communities, like Alliance, Nebraska, the differential between union and non-



union is substantial. The results of such a procedure are predictable.

Engineers, the traditional "aristocrats" of rail labor, face demands to lengthen their standard work day from 100 miles to 160, with no additional pay. The railroads' proposal would also break down all distinctions between yard and long distance work, take away guaranteed meal breaks, and cut into the engineers' protected rest periods. BLE union activists have calculated that these changes will extend the typical engineer's time away from home to 100 hours a week, for which he will receive 50 hours' pay.

Clerks do not fare much better under management's proposals. According to corporate-funded wage studies, the clerks are substantially overpaid. Management insists that their compensation must sink towards "market" levels before they will consider increases. Promises made years ago about life-long health benefits are being broken, as management seeks to put such issues back on the bargaining table. And so the clerks, as concentrated in larger cities as the shop crafts are in smaller communities, have also gotten on the bandwagon of the rail labor movement.

While there is a legacy of craft jealousy and suspicion, management's efforts to take a bite out of everybody's hide has encouraged cooperation at a grassroots level. Some activists have elevated the tactic of solidarity to the level of a basic principle. The Inter-Craft Association of Minnesota (ICAM) has been at it for more than six years, publishing a newspaper,

Straighttrack, distributing buttons depicting all the unions in a wheel with the motto "An Injury to One is an Injury to All," and organizing conferences on common interests. Straighttrack has more than 4,000 subscribers, mostly in the Upper Midwest. Two years ago, the General Chairmen's Association on the BN Railroad held coordinated rallies and demonstrated buttons reading "Rail Unions Stick Together." Inter-craft solidarity has been a growing feature of local and regional union activity.

#### 1990-1991: The Government Enters the Fray

Since making their initial proposals in 1988, management had sat tight. They knew that under the terms of the Railway Labor Act, once an impasse was declared, the President would appoint a "Presidential Emergency Board" to hold hearings and make a set of recommendations. Though these recommendations would be non-binding, Congress and the President then had the power to impose them on all parties. This had become a common pattern of late, most recently in the Chicago Northwestern strike of spring 1988. Management also knew that, in the political climate of the 1980s, claims of "efficiency," "rationality," and "competitiveness" were likely to elicit sympathy in the halls of government. So they had little incentive to budge from their initial demands.

In the spring of 1990, Bush appointed an Emergency Board (PEB 219), made up of three experienced rail arbitrators. They heard testimony for months, piling up transcripts of more than 20,000 pages. They paid little heed to union concerns about



restricting "shortlines" or protecting rest periods, while they endorsed nearly every management position. PER 219's final recommendations were historic in their breadth. Issued in January 1991, they provided a sweeping rewrite of work rules and procedures.

National union leadership speedily agreed to an extension of the cooling off period into mid-April. They expressed fear of trying to strike while the nation was at war. While they announced their disappointment with the PEB, they did little to organize their members against it. They didn't even turn their lobbyists loose on Capitol Hill until early April. Some of the unions entered into renewed negotiations with the railroads, eager to gain any terms that appeared "better" than the PEB recommendations.

Across the country, regional and local union leaders moved into action. Protest meetings, rallies, and demonstrations reached thousands of rank-and-filers over the next four months. Grounded in inter-craft solidarity and reaching out to the larger labor movement, activities took place in Seattle, Denver, Sheridan and Guernsey, Wyoming, Alliance and Lincoln, Nebraska, Sioux City, Iowa, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, Chicago, St. Paul, and Kansas City. A retired unionist told a St. Paul rally that he had not seen such activity in more than fifty years. Letter-writing sessions frequently followed protest actions. Thousands of rail workers and their families sat down and wrote to their congressmen and senators with an emphatically unified voice: Don't intervene! Numerous congressmen and senators noted a tidal

wave of mail and phone calls on the subject, and some even indicated that they would take such a stance.

Rail union activists likewise pressured their local media. Some held their first press conferences. Letters to the editor and op-ed pieces appeared in newspapers from Alliance, Nebraska, Bismarck, North Dakota, and Miles City, Montana, to Savannah, Georgia. A BMW local chairman's impassioned plea for help from Poland's Solidarity was widely reprinted. Others desperately tried to gain messages of support from the USSR's striking miners. Again and again, rail workers emphasized the similarities in the situation they faced vis-a-vis the Government with the situation of labor in Eastern Europe.

This local and regional activity also put pressure on national union leaders in Washington. They got lots of messages, too. As one regional BLE official put it: "Don't wave the white flag. We're not ready to give up." From the ranks also came strategic suggestions, such as singling out freight operations and allowing passenger trains to operate, or organizing rolling or selective strikes, rather than one big national shutdown which would almost surely force Congress' hand.

But even as rail workers were intensifying their campaign, their fate was being taken out of their hands. Management officials announced that if any railroad was struck, all would be shut down. Passenger trains would be denied the right to run over freight track they had long leased. Congress would be faced with the alternatives of intervening or seeing a national rail strike/lock-out. Behind the scenes, national union leaders and



their lobbyists suggested to congressmen and senators that they could live with a back-to-work order if they refrained from imposing the PEB recommendations and instead called for the appointment of a new board. And so the deal was made.

### The strike

On the morning of April 17, the cooling off period expired. Rail workers across the country set up pickets. Retirees and supporters joined them. Not one worker crossed. Even workers on smaller railroads which were not on strike stopped work when they were confronted by pickets. In a country which had, since PATCO, seen one strike after another broken with "replacements," this was an impressive accomplishment.

But the pressure mounted quickly. The media blared forth about how this strike was going to delay the "recovery" from the recession. We heard about farmers waiting for fertilizer, about auto plants waiting for parts. Congress went into emergency session. A "compromise" measure was drawn up, ordering an end to the strike and calling on President Bush to appoint a new board. By late that night, barely 18 hours after the beginning of the strike, this resolution had passed the House 400-5. In the Senate, a "unanimous consent" voice vote was recorded (though we would later learn that only two senators, Hatch and Kennedy, had been physically present). President Bush was awakened from his sleep at 1:30 AM, and he signed it into law.

This turn of events reminded one Minnesota activist of a statement by a Farmer Labor Party figure more than half a century

ago: "The only difference between the Democrats and the Republicans is that they work different shifts for the same cause, except in emergencies when they work overtime together."

Despite this conclusion, the strike had demonstrated to rail workers their own power. The open bridges across the Mississippi River in downtown St. Paul had borne witness to the power of rail workers to stop the system. Indeed, all workers saw that, all the moaning about the decline of industrial workers and the growth of service jobs, about the decline of unions and their increasing insignificance aside, workers did still have the power to bring the whole national economy to a screeching halt.

Rail workers knew that it was their activity which had prevented the imposition of the PEB recommendations right off the bat. In 1988, it had taken Congress only three hours to end a strike on the CNW and impose PEB recommendations there. But this time around, letters, phone calls, demonstrations, rallies, and the like had created some hesitation on Congress' part. And, rather than directly impose the heinous PEB recommendations, they had been forced to devise a more complex measure. But, unwilling to disobey Congress' back-to-work order, rail workers returned to their jobs a mere eighteen hours after they had walked off.

### The Strike is Over, But the Struggle Continues

Rail workers are angry and eager to continue to build their movement, but they have been stymied by the actions of Congress, the railroads, and their own national unions.

When the actual wording of Congress' resolution became



known, rail workers realized just how much damage had been done to their cause. The new board is to include one member of the original board, and its scope is to be limited to the issues that the old board made recommendations on (i.e., "shortlines" remain off the agenda). They are to operate with a "presumption of validity" for all of the old board's findings. Changes will only be made if parties prove specific terms to be "demonstrably inequitable or based on material error or material misunderstanding." The final recommendations of this new board are to be binding on all parties, with no right to strike reserved to rail workers and no right to appeal to the courts.

In the meanwhile, the railroads seem to have the upper hand. Although the joint resolution called on Bush to appoint a new PEB "promptly," as I sit here nearly one month after the strike he still has not done so! In this vacuum, rail management is picking the unions off one at a time. They approach individual unions with offers, the acceptance of which can create a snowball effect on the more militant hold-outs. National union leaders have shown little inclination to disrupt this scenario. This threatens the achievements of inter-craft solidarity at the local level.

A week after the strike, the American Train Dispatchers Association announced it had reached an agreement with the railroads. It included some items that made it just a bit better than the PEB recommendations. While there were efforts in the Upper Midwest, especially on the BN, to organize a "no" vote, the ATDA did ratify. "We wanted to stick together, too," an ATDA

vice-general chairman told me the day after the vote was announced, but local and regional activists just did not have the access to national networks they needed to be effective.

There have been other threats to solidarity. Only days after the ATDA settled, the Brotherhood of Railway Signalmen (BRS) reached an agreement with the railroads. Its national president has urged his membership to ratify, satisfied that its terms -- although concessionary -- are better than those accorded by the PEB. The TCU announced that it, too, had reached a tentative agreement. This was particularly damaging to the cause of solidarity, as Richard Kilroy, the national president, is also chair of the Railway Labor Executives Association (RLEA), which has headed up bargaining for all the unions. His defection threatens the still fragile relationship among the diverse craft unions.

Indeed, another threat to this unity blind-sided the unions in late April. Frustrated with the intransigence of some of the general chairmen, in June 1989 the BN had petitioned the National Mediation Board (NMB) to merge together the many bargaining committees that existed within each union on its system. On April 23, the NMB announced that it "extinguished" the certification of the separate committees (some of which dated back to 1934) and was leaving the respective national unions with the authority to designate official bargaining agents for each craft. Traffic World magazine gleefully predicted a "true bloodletting" among the unions in the aftermath of this incredible decision. Though the ramifications of this decision



are still not clear, the timing and thrust of this government intervention speaks volumes about the shared interests of the government, the railroads, and the national union leaders.

More than ever before, local and regional union activists have been left to their own devices. They have aimed their energies in several directions: at the rank-and-file and their families, to keep them involved; at the rest of the labor movement, to gain their solidarity; at the rail corporations; at the Government, particularly the Congressmen and Senators who had pledged their support and then failed them; and at their own international unions. This is an ambitious agenda, but nothing less will do.

Regional and local officers have stepped up their communications with their own members. Circular letters offering analyses of the strike, supported by all sorts of documents, have received wide distribution. ICAM produced a special issue of Straighttrack in the weeks before the strike in a press run of 20,000, five times their normal circulation. They are now readying yet another special issue for expanded distribution. Individual officers, often from different organizations, have expanded their communication with each other. Word processors and xerox and fax machines have been smoking. Rallies and hearings are also being organized, with particular attention to involving the spouses and children of rail workers.

Local rail unions have been reaching out to the larger labor movement. Many of the organizations have not been affiliated to central labor bodies, but that is changing rapidly.

In St. Paul, several UTU locals have affiliated with the Trades & Labor Assembly. In Alliance, Nebraska, rail locals are at the heart of the Western Nebraska Central Labor Coalition. In many cities, non-rail unions are being drawn into public meetings and rallies.

Rail workers were already furious with their employers before the strike. Over the last decade, they have been accorded the sort of treatment bound to produce schizophrenia. Out of one side of their mouths, rail management has praised its employees and enticed them to participate in a variety of co-operative programs -- "Corporate Culture," "High Performance Team Building," "Quality Education System," "Quality Process," and nauseum. Out of the other side, however, have come accusations of alcohol and drug abuse and complaints about "goldbricking" and "featherbedding." In the mid-1980s, the BN provoked a storm of controversy over its use of drug-sniffing dogs and its insistence that all workers submit to searches of their overnight bags, their persons, their cars, and their lockers. ICAM produced a popular button at this time, with a drawing of a dog sniffing a worker with a suitcase, reading "Corporate Culture Has Gone To The Dogs."

Rail management's contract proposals constituted the last straw for many workers. This was the end of all illusions about management's actual views. In the wake of the strike, workers have found new ways to express their anger to management. Many local unions have organized withdrawals from cooperative programs. In Alliance, Nebraska, the Train Dispatchers' local



added its name to a growing list of ex-participants in cooperative programs. A membership meeting of Division 238 of the BLE, based in Puyallup, Washington, voted unanimously "that some action was necessary to show our dissatisfaction and frustrations." They decided to "request members to stop all participation in voluntary and cooperative programs." "We will continue to take this action," they wrote to other BLE locals, "until the BN recognizes the contributions engineers make to this company... We can not continue to give more, while reducing our families' standard of living, so that BN, its management, and stockholders can make a larger profit at our expense."

BN management rubbed salt in the wounds when it posted a bulletin to all employees from CEO Jerry Grinstein the day after the strike, which praised them for "how professionally, responsibly and safely all members of the BN team, including the striking workers, handled the shutdown of our system..." Angry workers drafted a "Dear Mr. Grinstein" letter which circulated all across the system as fast as faxes could carry it. "Yes, we are part of the BN team," they wrote, "we just happen to be on the losing one." They continued:

When you hold out your hand to receive your bonus check, we know you're happy, happy to be part of the winning BN team. Why wouldn't you be? Your salary amounts to more than you'll ever use in a lifetime. Your bonuses exceed what most of us will ever make in a lifetime. Yes, the BN team is good for you...

Oh to be in your shoes -- Italian leather, we presume. Company write offs, travel expenses, the perks go on and on. Hotels and meals that far exceed the proposed \$29.00 a night allotment for weary BN train workers. How wonderful for you!

Yes, Mr. Grinstein, you are a part of a team. A team that has a name, "Corporate Greed!" A team that is so self-serving and so recklessly extravagant that the backbone of the company, the laboring class, who put people like you where they are, are being raked over the coals, sold down the river, all in the name of greed, "Corporate Greed!"

The Government, and particularly the Congressmen and Senators who voted to end the strike, have also been the focus of much of the rank-and-file's anger. In Minnesota, a BN TCU (clerks) local has organized a "Fightback Committee" which has been relentless in its determination to punish politicians who styled themselves as "labor's friends." On Saturday morning, April 28, they picketed Senator Paul Wellstone's appearance before a Workers' Memorial Day breakfast. They distributed leaflets that read, in part:

We, members of railroad unions, salute Workers' Memorial Day which commemorates the thousands of workers who die because of corporate greed...

Our union contracts expired three years ago in 1988. Since then our efforts to negotiate a contract in good faith have been stonewalled by the rail carriers. After three years of patience, our unions struck as a last resort and Congress forced us back to work without a contract. Many of us had worked for and contributed to the very politicians, such as Senator Wellstone, who did this to us.

We plan to hold every politician, Democrat and Republican, accountable for their actions as public servants just as we are held accountable by our employers.

As you know so well, the power of our unions -- our organized strength as a labor movement -- is the best defense we have against the corporate greed that endangers all our lives and living standards...



The entire Minnesota delegation in the U.S. Congress turned their backs on us last week. Our wounds are deep and they are raw. We ask you as brother and sister unionists to grant us your understanding as we strive toward our common goals.

The "Fightback Committee" has kept the heat on. A week later, they picketed Congressman Bruce Vento (DFL - St. Paul), at one of his regular meetings with constituents. They have also paid for a billboard to be displayed near the Minnesota state capitol reading "DFL = Definitely Failed Labor." Their anger, their determination to hold the politicians accountable, speaks for thousands of other rail workers.

The international unions have also been the objects of anger and scorn. Two weeks ago, TCU Local 593 met on a Friday night for its regular monthly meeting. Two hundred and fifty members, mostly women, were present. They debated the pros and cons of rejection until 11:30 PM, weighing the financial benefits of settling now versus the importance of inter-craft solidarity. After the expenditure of considerable emotion, they finally decided to stand with the other rail unions. Several speakers from the floor pointed out that this was an effective way to "send a message" to union president Kilroy as well as to BN management. The local's "Fightback Committee" has been urging other TCU members to reject the contract, banner and leafletting outside BN's corporate headquarters in St. Paul. Despite pressure from their international union and its political lobbyists, they have stuck to their guns. Indeed, some local members and officers have made no bones about their eagerness to vote Kilroy out of office at the union's mid-July national

convention in San Francisco.

With national conventions pending this summer and fall for the BLE and the UTU, similar ideas are running rampant in their ranks. In the BMWE, there has been talk of recalling the president, a "reformer" himself who has been in office less than a year. In the face of the threat to unity and regional autonomy represented by the NMB decertification decision mentioned above, BN general chairmen have stuck together in defense of their traditional rights -- vis-a-vis their own international unions as well as rail management.

Rail unionists have been struggling in recent weeks to keep up the momentum they built leading up to the strike. An Alliance, Nebraska, activist recently wrote me:

As I stop and reflect on what has transpired, dropping out of the union-busting Quality Process in Alliance, our solidarity pact with all unions in Alliance to work as one to turn back the BN at the bargaining table, our phone calling to our politicians, followed by our letter writing, and more phone calls, union rallies, media attention, another rally, and more letters and phone calls, developing nationwide solidarity, and the partnership developed with local business, I cannot help but feel we, as unionists, have laid the groundwork and bedrock for what is needed in the 1990s to turn the labor movement around.

No one would deny that this is a tall order. Activists have been searching for new strategies. ICAM and the TCU "Fightback Committee" are planning a regional rally for the steps of the Minnesota state capitol on June 15, to be followed by a hearing at which rail worker family members will testify about the consequences of the PEB proposals for their family lives. This



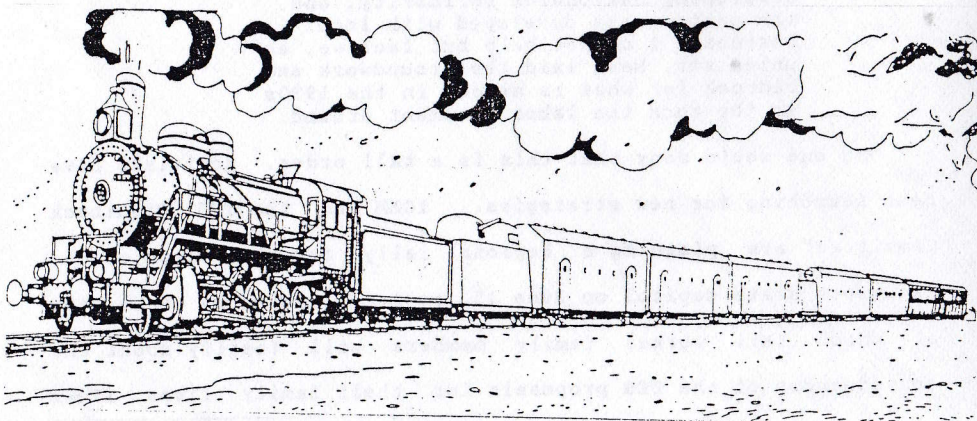
hearing will be video-taped and included as part of a package to be sent to the new PEB. Some activists are discussing the calling of a national rail rank-and-file conference for this coming fall. How all this will bear on the actual outcome of the present contractual struggle is hard to say.

Regardless of the way this particular set of battles concludes, there is hopeful evidence here of a new labor movement on the nation's rails. It is a movement which is rank-and-file based, democratic, politically independent, and deeply rooted in inter-craft solidarity. It has engaged thousands of rail workers and their families, and it has established some important linkages to other progressive forces in the larger labor movement. It has lots of thorny problems to resolve, but its dynamism is unmistakeable. It is the face of the future.

Peter Rachleff

St. Paul, Minnesota

May 16, 1991



**Discussion BULLETIN** (P.O. Box 1564, Grand Rapids, MI 49501) No.41/May 90: Three texts on the left Green movement: M.Bookchins's 'radical politics in the era of advanced capitalism', A response to this by Committee for Socialist Union, and the Youth Green Clearinghouse's 'Political statement. Anti-capitalism' - In defence of the communist left - The Tienanmen tragedy repeated - Continued debate between F.Girard and J.Zerzan on (de)industrialisation. No.42/July 90: Discussion on the relevance of many ideas/discussions in the DB - Beware of rapists at Earth Day (Leaflet by a number of left groups, against Earth Day taken over by corporations) - Discussion of the left Green texts in no.41. No.43/Sep.90: Discussions on Green movements - Organise for revolution - The SPGB and economic organisation - Review of S. Coleman's biography 'Daniel De Leon' (Manchester University Press) - Discussion Girard/Zerzan on (de)industrialisation - Reviews of the Kamunist Kranti edition of Luxemburg's 'The accumulation of capital' and the anthology 'Within the shell of the old: Essays on workers' self-organisation'.

### **FLEXIBILITY OF WAGES: THE IMPACT OF THE REAGAN YEARS**

This text (from 'Economies nationales', in French) studies the wages evolution and transformation of the wages structure. It is only interesting because it contains a lot of data. If you look for some extended explanations on this evolution and its relationship to the US and world economy, you will be disappointed. (Copy at Echanges)

### **CAN YOU COMPETE? HOW AMERICANS ARE FALLING BEHIND AND WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PICK UP THE PACE**

This long study published in Business Week (17/12/90) tries to sort out what are the causes of the American decline. One of the articles draws the conclusion that "low investment in human capital is one reason why the US is losing the competitiveness race". (Copy at Echanges)

### **GM PLANS TO SHUT UP 9 FACTORIES, LOSES 1,98 BILLION**

From New York Times 1/11/90, sent with this commentary by a US comrade: "GM is really doing well financially. The loss is only part of a strategy to consolidate wealth (without write off for closed plant, there was a modest profit). As part of US auto industry GM is weakening but in its totality as a corporation it is increasing its economic position."

**Fifth Estate** (4632 Second Avenue, Detroit, MI 48201) Spring 91: Why the US destroyed Iraq - These are not our troops, this is not our country - Detroit resists the war - marked cards in the Middle East, a short history - Civilisation in bulk - Bolshevik mystification and counterrevolution: Myth of the Party - French radicals sabotage prison project - The lessons of Vietnam.

**Factsheet Five** (Mike Gunderloy, 6 Arizona Ave., Rensselaer, NY 12144-4502) About this



journal, see Echanges 65 p.19 and 66/67 p.38 No.44/Aug.91 is another issue full of the usual reviews of journals/magazines of all kinds, T-shirts, calendars, postcards, music (magazines, record, tape, CD), comics, poetry, video... Factsheet Five is published 8 times a year with a circulation of 10.000 sent to all continents and is provided you sent them what you make a good way to get your material known to others. One of the many FF publications is **The Samisdat Method**, a book on "doing your own offset printing, at home, for as little money as possible" (112 pages, 10 dollars).

Some of the small reviews we found in this issue are:

**Anarchy** no.29 (£2,50 from CAL, PO Box 1446, Columbia, MO 65205-1446, USA): Apart from a few regular features (including a good survey of the anarchist press), this issue is devoted entirely to the Situationists and their lasting influence on radical movements. Mostly reprints, but there are interesting gems here, including John Zerzan's evaluation and T. Ward's "The Situationists reconsidered".

**ECOMEDIA** no.100-101 (\$18/26 issues from PO Box 915, Sta. F, Toronto, ONT, M9 2N9, Canada) A zine of anarchist thought with contacts around the world. The 100th issue predicts labor troubles for the summer, looks at the battle against the poll tax in Britain and takes a major marketer of Green products to task for being a fast buck artist.

**Wage Slave World News** Vol.3 No.5/6 (\$12/12 issues from PO Box 1217, Madison, WI 53701-1217): A special double issue of this zine of labor humour. President Bush's face turns up in a pork chop, Red the Clown tries some sabotage, and an alien shows up to do a bit of arm-twisting. Ridicules both the politicians and the labor politicians.

**Workers Info Rag** (Zamisdat Press, GPO 1226, Gracie Station, New York, NY 10028) This issue is one sheet with one article, a letter on the economic situation in the USA. We hope to come back to this text in a longer study of the USA.

### Special USA issue of Echanges?

Echanges is hoping to publish, but can not definitely promise, a special issue on the USA. There is a lot of material and articles to summarize or write, on economic and social conditions, as well as important strikes the last years like the Eastern airlines conflict, the Pittston miners strike, the Daily News strike...or general developments of production techniques, wage systems etc. in various industries. Help from American or other comrades with material, articles or ideas will of course be appreciated.

A special issue on the US published many years ago is out of print, but the French Echanges pamphlet "A l'Ouest rien de nouveau, USA 1978" is still available.

## EASTERN EUROPE. POLAND. USSR

### I. VARIOUS REMARKS AND MATERIAL

#### INTRODUCTION

A Russian woman was asked about her hope for the USSR/USA top meeting and answered:  
"That the USA sends fresh fruit to Russia."

In Echanges no.66/67 we published one article about the 1989 and 1990 and another about the 1991 miners strikes, all from the Dutch journal 'Daad en Gedachte', and a chronology of class struggle and protests 1990-91 by 'Motiva Forlag'. This material is the reference for some of the remarks below.

The main part of this section on Eastern Europe is Part III on the USSR, which among other material contains a chronology of events in Russia similar to the one in the last issue, but covering the end of the miners strike in May as well as the rest of 1991. This chronology is however preceded below by various other material and remarks I have put together, also about other countries - some of it old and some of it new.

RH

### EXTRACTS FROM AND REMARKS IN CONNECTION WITH A LETTER FROM A FRENCH COMRADE

The following is a letter from a French comrade responsible for the French edition of Echanges:

"I will not translate for the French edition the chronology by Motiva Forlag from no.66/67 of the English edition. We now have a lot of material on strikes in Russia. I got most of it in Paris - these documents are partly in French, partly in English and cover the period 89-91. I have a French publication - 'Les mauvais jours finiront...': 5 distinct issues which contain mainly translations of texts published in the USSR in various liberal-leftist publications concerning social and political events in the periods of: 1. '88 2. '89 3. A synthesis of the situation in the USSR ('89) 4. Texts about the events of Tbilissi the 9/4/89 and 5. Texts on the July '89 strike.

The main problem about the USSR is now not to publish documents or even analysis of a



*specific event, but to have a more general approach in using all this material; a matter of time. On the other hand, this interest about eastern countries must not hide the fact that it is only part of a world where class struggle is certainly as and perhaps more important than in the USSR (for instance in the USA or Europe). A good example is also this focus on the USSR and the almost complete silence now on Poland; class struggle interests the media only as far as it can be used by the reformist fraction of the ruling capitalist class, far less when it is threatening the transformation process of this class." (See also remarks about the USA in this issue.)*

HS

Even if agreeing with these remarks, we will as mentioned publish in this issue a further chronology of the USSR. We see this as useful to have, and we want to cover especially the end of the miners strike in May which was not covered in the material in the previous issue. Even if such chronologies are not an analysis of events, they are part of the background for it. And compiling and publishing this kind of material based on an 'interest' in the class struggle conforms well with what is said in our presentation pamphlet that a reason for starting publishing Échanges was to give "a minimum of information on class struggle" - and the information published was to be guided by the "inadequacy of the official means of information: lack of information on class conflicts, exaggeration of the importance of political and economic information" and "making a meaningful choice from the mass of political, diplomatic and economical news."

This is also behind the comrade's remarks above about when and when not the media is 'interested' in the class struggle. This has been shown on numerous occasions. What is also worth noting, as shown by what we mention about Poland below, is that when a reasonably 'wide' coverage of strikes does occur, it is often in connection with strikes occurring at the same time as and/or (in the eyes of bourgeois media) disturbing political/electoral events - or when it is so 'spectacular' that it cannot be neglected, like the Russian mass strikes or the Romanian miners actions in the capital in the summer of 91:

### Albania

A wide coverage was given to the demonstrations and demands of the 'people' and all the persons fleeing the country. After 'democratisation' however, during 1991 there was given relatively smaller coverage and even less analysis of the meaning and significance of a number of events:

- The miners strikes in January, mainly for wages, working conditions and independent unions, as well as strikes in the same period among for example bus drivers, metal workers - there is not a day without strikes (and demonstrations against the (ex-)CP government.

- The usual legalisation of the right to strike combined with, from the CP and all the

*(Editor's note: The following article is a translation of a piece that appeared in the October 27, 1988 issue of the French anarchist weekly Le Monde Libertaire. It is the "testimony," if you will, of a 28-year-old worker by the name of Stefan who is employed as a painter at the Lenin Shipyards in Gdansk, Poland. He is one of the younger, radical workers who launched the August strikes at the shipyards despite the threats of management and the hesitations of the union leaders. He does not mince words regarding the role played by Walesa. As more recent events have shown -- the proposed closing of the Lenin yards; Walesa's strike-breaking role vis-a-vis the wildcats in response; and his (Walesa's) embrace of Thatcher and Bush, virulent anti-unionists that they are -- there is a real split within Solidarnosc between the veterans of 1980-81 and a younger generation of militants. This is the voice of one of those militants. Translation by Mike Hargis.)*

I have participated in the strikes of May and August. The May strike was a spontaneous movement; that of August was somewhat better organized. Some say that it was Walesa who launched this strike, this is a lie.

After the May strike, we created the group "dym" ("smoke"). That is to say, after May Solidarnosc was not dead: one heard about it on the buses, on the trams, in the trains, it hawked newspapers. Then the strikes erupted in Silesia. These strikes went on for days, but our leaders did not move. It was the group "dym" that proposed calling a meeting inside the shipyards to support the striking miners. We printed up a leaflet. Thursday (August 18) we were very coldly received in a meeting of the factory commission. The comrades spoke of a provocation, they asked us, "Who gave you permission to do this on your own." This leaflet caused quite a stir. Then on Friday (August 19) the (solidarity) meeting took place, during the breakfast break. Walesa was at the

other parties, concern about the lack of labour discipline and appeals to stop strikes and wage demands until after the Spring elections.

-Many of the demands of the 27 days long general strike of 350000 workers starting in late May, at the end of which the opposition parties were included in the government. This strike drew the attention of western media when the strike leadership (of the union of independent Albanian unions) demanded a committee to be set up to investigate a murder of four demonstrators in May. The deadline for this was set to 16 May. After that, demands were in largely about wages (50-100 % rise), working conditions and social guarantees, as well as against old and new corrupt party leaders - and in reality directed against or not taking up the policy put forward by the opposition parties and the reform fraction of the CP concerning privatisations and removal of subsidies of basic goods.

### Yugoslavia

Much about ethnic/republic/military conflicts and, to be honest, remarks about the country's or the republics' economic problems as a background to this. But even if no mobilisations on a class basis can be seen in Yugoslavia in 1991, very little meaningful about what does exist in the form of opposition to the military conflicts and struggle for material interests:

Like the February strike of 20000 workers in Beograd for the immediate payment of their January wages and a large wage increase; the March actions of 5000 workers of the city Zenica in Bosnia-Herzegovina blocking all roads in the district for their material demands: payment of 3 months lacking wages, guarantees to keep their jobs; the April one-day general



meeting. He saw me passing by and called out to me: "You there, you know how to play the guitar, but apart from that..."; he didn't finish but I could guess the rest. Walesa declared to the guys as-



sembled in front of the entrance to the K1 plant that, if the situation didn't change, the strike would begin on Monday. Later, over the weekend, Walesa said it could wait another week.

strike of Serbian workers against their horrible economic situation; the April strike of mechanics of the JAT airline grounding all its flights; strikes of 10.000 miners of Bosnia, teachers in Slovenia and Vojvodina, the Federation of Independent Unions in Serbia which does engage in strikes and has not given up this 'right' as its counterpart in Croatia has done in support of the Zagreb government; the 100000 persons from all over Yugoslavia (to a large extent miners) assembling in Bosnia-Herzegovina's capitol Sarajevo in November to protest against the 'civil war' under the slogan "We want work, not war"; the November strike of railway workers in Bosnia against not having received their wages for many months...Undoubtly there are strikes we have not heard about. Or the misleading presentation of Serbian leader Milosevic as a 'communist hardliner' whereas he proposes a market economy and a free flow of labour, goods and capital.

### Poland

Reduced coverage or even lack of mentioning of class struggle - not only after Solidarnosc was legalised and Walesa's road to power openly started, but even in the period prior to this when the functioning of the union and the direction it was moving could clearly be seen. Some material is published in a separate section on Poland below.

### Romania

Much was published in the press about the 1990 and 1991 miners' strikes. The 1990 actions were generally characterised as the act of the old CP apparatus of Iliescu's 'National Salvation Front' against the 'democratic' and student opposition, with

... But, in the shop committee meeting, we decided that the strike would begin on Monday.

Monday (August 22), I arrive at the shop around 6:30 a.m. and started to organize the people. The guys have begun to assemble in the locker room. Finally, I realized that we couldn't stay there much longer because the foremen came in to get the men to go to work. Then the manager arrived. He asked me, "Who's in charge?". I told him that I was acting in the name of the strike committee which was taking over the shipyard, and that he should get out of the locker room. We took the banners and flags and went out to the front of the shop. I saw others, like us, leaving their shop (C5) and gathering in front. We were together, but we weren't very many.

### "Stop Your Machine, Come With Us!"

Going over the bridge (part of the Lenin yards is on an island) some of the men looked at us as if we were crazy. Shortly, another group joined us, I don't know what shop, C3 or C4 I think. All of a sudden, the lack of organization dawned on us. Going over to the K1 plant, I saw that the people were at their posts. I hesitated for a moment, then I said to a worker, "stop your machine and come with me, there's a strike." He said he couldn't. Then a friend said to him that we could do it, but that he would have to tell us how. Then we stopped the machine and he came with us. And that's how K1 joined the strike.

Later on someone gave out false information, as if K1 began the strike. Upon returning over the bridge we met another group that included Szablewski (Alojzy Szablewski, leader of the strike committee in May). From there, we took control of the gates. Then, we set out to

miners beating up oppositionists to the ruling regime. While there might be some truth in this characterisation, there is always a material background to events like this; people are moved by their objective conditions. A proper analysis would not take a moralistic and critical starting point that workers are not only being fooled or used by the ruling regime, but also try to understand why workers acted on the basis of seeing the 'democratic forces' as a greater threat to their interest than the present regime concerning questions like privatisation, job security and 'pro-capitalist' measures in general. The 1991 actions against the same regime showed this very clearly. We hope to have some material about these actions in a later issue.

However, other important actions have also taken place. In February 1991 for example, there was a 2 week rail strike of 20000 workers for a wage increase, which continued despite being declared illegal and ended with a victory. June saw strikes of rail workers, miners, teachers and locomotive builders in Bucharest.

## II. POLAND

### Introduction

The following books by participants in Échanges have been published:

**I.C.O.: Poland 1970-71. Capitalism and class struggle. Black & Red, 1977.** This is the translation of the analysis, but excluding much material on historical and economical background information as well



organize the strike better. We wanted to organize a press but at first we didn't have a mimeo or a typewriter, even. These were soon provided for.

A group from the KPN (Confederation for an Independent Poland) came by. There were three of them, the woman spoke. When the comrades learned that they wanted to support us, they were pleased. Our leaders were very critical, but what could they do?

I was on the strike committee. Many things, not to our credit, went on therein; no sooner had they obtained some responsibilities then they started to argue amongst themselves. At the gates, the atmosphere was fantastic; the people believed that they could fight to the end, for everything.

The sad part is, after about six days, one had to admit it wasn't true. Walesa left for Warsaw for a meeting with Kiszczak (the Minister-General of the Interior). We gave him our confidence, we gave him our mandate to defend our main demand: re-legalization of Solidarnosc. But he had no other mandate, he had no right to make any other decisions. Now, Walesa went to Warsaw and made the decision to call off the strikes, that was the basis of the telex he sent, to interrupt the movement.

### "Walesa Traitor!"

When I learned of this, I was furious. I loved that man more than any other; but it is terrible how he's changed. As for the MKS (Miedzynaklowdy Komitet Strajkowy -- inter-enterprise strike committee), there was talk of ending the strike, I rebelled. Nobody asked us, there was never a vote. Finally there was a vote to decide if a state of strike preparedness should be maintained. There were 15 votes for, 12 votes against, and 10 abstentions. But, some way was found to count the abstentions with the no votes, and that is how the decision

as a long afterword, of the original ICO text published by Spartacus: 'Capitalisme et lutte de classes en Pologne, 1970-71.

**H. Simon: Travailleurs contre capital. Le 25 juin 1976 en Pologne. Echanges 1977.** This has also been published in a Spanish edition of which Echanges could have a few copies left: "La huelga salvaje en polonia el 25 de junio de 1976", Las ediciones de La Piqueta.

**H. Simon: Poland 1980-82. Class struggle and the crisis of capital. Black & Red, 1985.** This is an updated version of the original published by Spartacus: "Pologne 1980-82, Lutte de classes et crise du capital". It is also available in a German version through Advocom Verlag: "Polens Arbeiter auf dem Wege der Selbstbefreiung".

Many critical remarks/reviews have been put forward about these books and their analysis of the class struggle, Solidarnosc and the evolution of eastern capitalism. Our view, which will not be argued for here, is that events up to now in Poland and eastern Europe to a large extent confirms the analysis put forward.

About events after 1982, no books by participants of Echanges has been published. However, this does not at all mean that Poland has been neglected in the context of Echanges and groups and journals we are in contact with, but only that there hasn't been the possibility to write and publish an analysis of this period. Material has been constantly collected, distributed and discussed. In particular Poland has been covered regularly in the Dutch journal 'Daad en Gedachte', but unfortunately hardly ever translated into English.

was made. I declared that I would not transmit this decision to the ranks. Then Lech went wild, he yelled at me, "you're full of shit."

I went back to see the guys. They didn't want to leave the shipyards. It was said -- I am not good at using certain language -- that our cause was sold out for an unknown price, because we trusted him too much. Me, I could not accept it, I could not forgive. In my view, those who said "Walesa Traitor!" were right. It's hard, but now I know that that is nothing new for a union that concerns itself with nothing more than beefsteak. That kind of union is not for me. It doesn't fight for the simple worker.

*Words recorded by the anarchist group (MA) of Gdansk*



News & Letters May 1989:

### HOW CAN ONE LIVE IN DIGNITY?

(N&L editor's note: During the Spring 89 'round table' negotiations between the Jaruzelski government and Lech Walesa, strikes continued. Below we print a report from a strike in Lodz, excerpted from 'Tygodnik Mazowski' (Mazowsze Weekly) no. 285.)

"Let Lech come and feed our children" say women from the weaving hall in answer to my question about their attitude to Walesa's appeal to stop striking during the round table discussions.

"Marchlewski" is the biggest factory in Lodz. It's light industry, but the work is very hard. Conditions are right out of "The Promised Land"; I saw a machine from 1896. The occupation strike started February 28.

In January the director received money for raises. Not much, the average was 16.000 zlotys per worker. He divided it himself, without any consultation with the workers and with a marked preference for those who earn a lot already. The raises varied from 4000 to 22000 zl.

On February 15 a large number of workers refused to accept their pay because it included the unjust raise. Strike was in the air.

People spontaneously started to turn off machines. They elected 38 representatives to the strike committee. "The rank and file chose to strike" said the president of the strike committee. "The 17 people negotiating with the director had no chance to control the almost 4000."

The majority working in "Marchlewski" are women. For them it's not an occupation strike but a "rotation" strike. They strike for 16 hours, then for 8 hours they go home to wash clothes, cook, get their children ready for school, shop.

"If we tried to propose to them to accept the director's offer", says one of the members of the strike committee,



"they would wheel us out in a wheel-barrow together with the director." "The government is provoking us with price raises. How can we live with dignity?"

"It was supposed to be an example for all of Lodz's factories", said one advisor to the strike committee. "Marchlewski was going to take care of its demands without striking. Then it got out of our hands. Marchlewski is a symbol for Lodz, like the shipyards are for Gdansk."

The night of March 7 the strike committee held a referendum; 65% voted to continue.

News & Letters May 90:

### POLISH WOMEN CONFRONT SOLIDARITY

(N&L editor's note: We recently received two articles from Poland which seem to prove that just as women were in the forefront in the struggles that brought Solidarity into being in the early 80s, so they remain in the forefront of the struggles today when Solidarity has assumed responsibility for the very system Polish workers have been fighting against for decades.)

One is an article from *Gazeta Wyborcza* describing life in Lodz, where women constitute 70% of those employed in the textile industry and where 60% of them suffer a variety of serious illnesses as a result of very hard working conditions - noise, vibrations, humidity. Lodz has the highest infant mortality rate in the country and in its amount of pollution is second in the world.

The second is an article about these textile workers which appeared in *Tygodnik Solidarnosc* (Solidarity Weekly). It was titled "When Kuron arrives" and written by Elzbieta Isakiewicz. Jacek Kuron, one of the earliest intellectual dissidents who helped found Solidarity, is now Minister of Labor and recently announced to the workers of Poland: "Different times call for different priorities. In 1980 I used to organize strikes. Now my job is to stop them." Below we reprint excerpts from "When Kuron arrives".

"Women here say that whoever call the labor we do for 'light industry' did not have all its marbles....Here is our Appeal: "We, women from the Defenders of Peace factory, are in full solidarity with the women from Stemil and Polmerino. We are exhausted by the difficulties of everyday life and whether we will be able to feed our children. We will not allow ourselves to have our human dignity trampled. We appeal to all those responsible for the fate of our nation to support our just demands and not force us to take to the streets..."

**Here is our situation: In the evening new price increases are announced on TV. We come to work and talk to each other about the prices and begin to swear. We are told that striking will hurt us and the factory when production falls. Taking to the streets does not solve much but at least it reminds the authorities that there is a working class.**

We work in 3 shifts. How productive can we be if we leave the night shift after 8 hours of work, stand in line until 11 AM, buy a scrap of food, prepare dinner, sleep 2 hours and go back to work?

The factory cannot afford to buy modern machinery so we keep working on Russian looms that are falling apart. Fixing them costs more money than they cost new. People are saying: New government, old absurdities.

**Information between Warsaw and Lodz is poor. Solidarity representatives promised much, but have forgotten it. There is no contact with them....In the sorting department women react to the slogan 'Solidarity' the way they did a year ago to the slogan 'Party'.**

Kuron tells us that there will be an improvement in the Spring. In 1990 things will normalize and in 1991 they will be completely normalized. Let him come to the factory and tell us that. Let him come and take my place at my wage. Let him show himself here. We'll come to meet him, one and all, with our empty bowls."

News & Letters Aug. 90:

### "OUR BELTS HAVE NO MORE NOTCHES"

(The following is excerpted from the article "Wail of the wretched" by E. Isakiewicz which appeared "Tygodnik Solidarnosc".)

Around 2000 old, sick, disabled people came to the Regional Office in Bialystok, where for 2 weeks the poor have been on strike. The strikers were asking: "Are you preparing coffins for us and opening crematoria? How can we survive the coming months?" In a statement to the government they wrote: "For 45 years the communists, using the method of carrot and stick, forced the nation to beg for bread. We owe them this catastrophe! However, in correcting the economy one cannot use the same method. The method of tightening the belt is hardest on those who have no more notches."

In order not to hurt the government, Bialystok's Solidarnosc did not join the action supporting the protest. But among the masses going to the regional office to meet with the government' representatives were members of Solidarnosc. They acknowledged the fact which cannot be hidden: the existence of the hopelessly wretched, people who until recently were "only" poor and who suddenly become paupers.

The tone of the meeting was set in the first few minutes by those crowding around the microphone, shouting and crying. The hall buzzed and applauded:

\* Helena Majewska, a sick woman with two disabled children, has enough money for potatoes with salt, but not enough for shoes or clothes for the children, so she can't even take them to (Labor Minister) Kuron's soup kitchen.

\* Stanislaw Korolczuk, 67 years, 40 of which he worked for the PRL and now has a retirement of 170000 zlotych a month, cried: "My co-workers, who faithfully served the Party, have 700000 zl. a month. They were secret police, rogues, crooks! Where is justice?"

\* An ex-prisoner from a concentration camp, 65 years, who appealed to the minister to understand that the laws, as they exist, are unjust.

\* A woman on crutches, an ex-prisoner, asking why those who get millions in retirement benefits get the same raises as the poor. Why is family allowances the same for all, regardless



of income?

"We don't want soup!" they shouted, "Let Kuron eat his soup." Their understanding of the situation is simple: a new regime came in, and with it worse poverty.

The minister, Helena Goralska, asked that people do not hold the current situation against this government, do not take their grievances to it. She assured them the government really does not act against the society.

"The to whom should we take our grievances", asked the people, "since there will be no accounting for the past? To Rakowski, to Bierut in the other world, or maybe Jaruzelski, whom Solidarnosc made president?"

The buzzing did not stop when she explained there is work on a new system for retirement benefits which will take effect only next year because 16 different laws have to be changed and that's a tremendous amount of work.

"We don't want laws. We want to live like human beings! How many of us will live to see next year?!"

## POLISH RAIL STRIKE CHALLENGES SOLIDARNOSC "SHOCK TREATMENT"

(From the 'Soviet defencist' trotskyist paper Workers Vanguard 1.June 1990):

SZCZECIN, May 26, 1990 - This is the biggest and busiest port in Poland. But the last 3 days the normally teeming railyards which take goods to and from northwestern Poland to the central port of Szczecin are shut down tight - as a wildcat railway strike centered on the town of Slupsk some 200 km from here enters its second week. Now Gdynia, the second-largest port, is also shut down.

This is the first serious working-class response to the Mazowiecki government's brutal austerity policies, which have lowered real wages by 40% and produced mass unemployment for the first time in four decades.

The rail strike committees are independent of both Solidarnosc and the former official Stalinist OPZZ union. In the last days however OPZZ has come out in support while L. Walesa has condemned the strike, accusing "demagogic forces" of leading the country towards "civil war". Negotiations broke down again today, as labor minister J.Kuron (erstwhile darling of the western left) hardlines it against any wage increase. Rail workers stormed out of the meeting with Kuron in anger.

The main passenger station in Szczecin, the cargo yard, the harbor railyard and two other stations in the city are all in the hands of occupying workers. Outside the entrances are signs reading "Occupation Strike" and pickets standing guard against possible provocation. The main station has been turned into strike headquarter for the whole city. All the doors are fastened shut with nails and wire, and barricaded from within with stacks of benches.

The former administration offices in the train station are now the offices of the strike

committee. The internal telephone service has been turned into a communication network connecting the different striking railyards throughout the region. The secretaries and clerical staff continue to work, but now they are working for the strike committee...

Outside the train station there are vanloads of police and military trucks....Solidarnosc appears to be generally reviled among the strikers, who pass around caricatures of Kuron....From 1981 on the "true face" of Solidarnosc has been its programme for restoring untrammelled "free market" exploitation, which is today ravaging the Polish people.

The strike began with a hunger strike by some 50 rail workers in Slupsk on May 10 demanding an immediate 110% payrise to keep pace with the deadly explosion of prices of basic goods. The austerity programme literally means slow starvation for the mass of the Polish people... Today even a kilogram of the cheapest sausage costs the equivalent of about two days' wages.

One 71-year-old woman who supports the strike bitterly explained how her US \$30 a month old-age pension now barely covers the cost of buying bread and paying for her apartment. "President Jaruzelski and Walesa Have enough" she said but "poor old people" are starving. With social services devastated by the austerity programme, it cost her more than 8 months of her pension to bury her husband when he died recently. The imperialist press is trumpeting the local elections tomorrow...As this woman said, "there is nobody to vote for."

The rail workers insist that theirs is not a political strike. After more than 40 years of stalinism and the more recent shattering of illusions in Solidarnosc, politics may well be a dirty word to many Polish workers...

## THE REVOLT OF THE RESEARCH ANIMALS

(Editorial of the Norwegian liberalist daily 'Dagens Næringsliv' 30/10/91):

".....the Poles have had enough after almost two years as research animals in an economic laboratory. It is difficult to interpret the October election in any other way. To the extent that people bothered to participate, the market liberalist ceceders from Solidarnosc were asked to go to hell and take everything that is named quick, uncompromising reforms with them. At the same time the previous communists in the left alliance emerge as the second biggest party. In the controlled election in June 1998 the communists were almost extinguished where possible and the same autumn removed from the halls of power.

The election result is particularly disappointing on the background of the role of the poles in the struggle against communism in the 80s. In this first free election only 2 out of 5 found it worthwhile participating in the democratic process. The combination of a discontent population and a parliament that in more than one way deserves the name 'polish', will force the government to change Poland's new course in a less uncompromising market-oriented direction..."



# Russian women 'exploited on the shop floor'

## INTRODUCTION

We reproduce below an article published in *The Guardian*, 23 January 1988. This article clearly exposes the lie behind the much-vaunted "women's equality" in the Soviet Union. In the Soviet Union, as in every other capitalist country, women who work do so on average in less skilled occupations and worse conditions than their male counterparts. The article also shows what 'glasnost' means for women workers - far from aiming to improve conditions to be compatible with health, safety and childrearing, Gorbachev advocates an end to lip service to women's equality and a return to the kitchen sink, whence they were forced years ago by the need to earn a living. We may be sure that he is less concerned with enabling women to return to their "purely womanly mission" than he is with disguising the mass employment engendered by the changing demands of capital.

**From Martin Walker  
in Moscow**

A devastating and unique attack on the exploitation of women in Soviet factories, published yesterday, claims that deafness, birth defects and later juvenile delinquency among their children is an occupational hazard for female textile workers.

Conditions in the vast Ivanovo textile complex are described in terms which recall the blackest early days of the Industrial Revolution. "The majority of factories were built before the revolution and underwent practically no modification since. There are no shower rooms, endless queues for the few lavatories. The machines are so noisy that they exceed the legal maximum by dozens of times, hence the occupational disease of chronic hearing loss, which affects 80 per cent of the women."

"The noise affects the women's nervous system, leads to memory loss and insomnia," Sotsialisticheskaya Industriya reported.

The report deals a series of body blows to many of the cherished myths about the equality of women, the lot of workers, and the responsibility of doctors and trade unions in

mitted by children of night shift mothers.

The report claims the factory managements had little choice but to exploit the women and ignore their health and safety, because the structure of Soviet industry was rigidly designed to reward only raw production.

The newspaper, *Sotsialisticheskaya Industriya*, is an official organ of the Communist Party Central Committee, and is designed to be the daily paper of industrial management, with a circulation of 1.2 million. Although increasingly outspoken and frank in its analysis of Soviet industrial backwardness and the urgent need for reform, yesterday's article on women workers goes far beyond all previous precedent, and establishes a new benchmark for glasnost on the shop floor.

"The industrial equipment is not designed for women, even though 51 per cent of them now work in industry," the newspaper went on. "All machine tools are designed for the statistically average male. Women sometimes have to stand on stools to adjust their machines, or lie on the machinery to work..." it says.

The report then claims that the official figures fail to prop-

factories of what is still supposed to be the workers' state.

The political purpose behind this unprecedented attack on Soviet industrial life seems to be part of a long-term strategy to prepare the way for a much reduced role for women in the workforce, to prepare for the time when industrial automation brings the prospect of mass unemployment.

But the shock effect of the report is striking enough. Dissident workers and free trade unionists have served prison and mental hospital terms for making such allegations.

Women do not bother to go to the factory clinics, the report claims, because they know the doctors are under orders to report a regular decrease in the number of industrial accidents and diseases. "If you go to a doctor, you lose the rest of your health," the newspaper quotes the women as saying.

It claims that the trade unions have simply not informed the women that state benefits are available for those suffering from occupational ailments. The trade unions also failed to support the women when they asked for compulsory shift work to be reduced for working mothers - even when sociologists proved that most teenage crime was com-

erly report the real level of industrial illness, because factory managers and trade union officials, as well as doctors, discourage the women from reporting illness.

"On average, 4-5 per cent of women cannot give birth healthily, but this figure doubles to 8 per cent of textile workers. Their babies weigh considerably less than average and many suffer from oxygen deficiency," the report went on.

"But the same might be said about many other fields of industry employing women - tractor-drivers, road workers, loaders... In other fields, they do manual work on average 50 per cent more often than men."

This criticism follows a recent call by Mr Gorbachev for a national debate on "what we should do to make it possible for women to return to their purely womanly mission."

"Whole generations of our people have been brought up on stories of glorious women tractor drivers, parachutists, and women building the Metro. And the result was that women today play an equal part in social production with the men. They may do so, but should they?," the paper said yesterday, questioning 70 years of Soviet policy on equality of the sexes.



### III. USSR 1988 - 1991

#### WINTER 89 VORKUTA MINERS' STRIKES

Echanges no.62 reprinted a chronology of the Summer 89 strikes in the USSR covering the period until the end of July. The miners strike starting in Vorkuta in October the same year we didn't publish anything about, but a short reference to it was made in one of the Daad en Gedachte articles on Russia in Echanges 66/67. The following remarks and the article "Russian miners wildcat" from the US journal 'News and Letters' on the Vorkuta strike is published in order to have had some material in our pages also about the strikes at the end of '89.

The background for the October '89 miners strikes was to a large extent the non-fulfilment of government promises after the actions during the Summer. Already then, miners in Siberia had been very sceptical and at a time refused a return to work agreement signed between their regional strike committee and the government. And after the strike wave of July was over, this scepticism was still there, strike committees were not dissolved, and on 5 August - eight days after the return of work - Vorkuta was on strike again accusing the government of not intending to implement what was needed. They returned to work after 24 hours. According to a source there was also on 3 August a successful 2 hour miners strike in Kamerevo for an immediate implementation of agreements on working conditions and supplies.

The Autumn saw discontent, actions and economic problems in key industrial sectors. Financial Times 25 October said for example that: "Dislocation on the railways, aggravated by go-slows and stoppages, has left huge stockpiles of coal at the pitheads." In the beginning of October, the Soviet parliament passed legislation providing for a legal right to strike (including provisions for a cooling-off period, secret ballots and arbitration) but at the same time forbidding strike action in key sectors like railways, public transport, fuel and energy.

Some weeks after this the Vorkuta actions started, preceeded a couple of days earlier by a short walkout of 20000 miners and other workers in the west Siberian town Mezhdurechensk where the July mass protests started. About these strikes taking place at the same time as the crumbling of the Berlin wall, Leonid Abalkin, one of the chief architects of perestroika, said that "I think we are more worried about what is happening in Vorkuta than in the DDR." Strikes in Vorkuta continued for around 4 weeks. They did not spread to other coal fields in the same way as during the summer. However, shorter actions like go-slows and 'warning strikes' took place many places in Siberia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan, combined with support for the demands and threats of action - for example a strike in the Denez area on 2. November.

#### Russian miners wildcat

(News and Letters, Dec. 89)

Russian coal miners have continued to press their demands against the limits of Gorbachev's glasnost. Miners in the Arctic Corcle region, site of one of the most notorious forced labor concentration camps under Stalin, have been on strike since late October.

The miners have directly defied measures passed earlier the same month to outlaw wildcat strikes in critical industries such as coal, and to impose arbitration and a cooling-off period for 'legal' strikes. Among the major demands by the miners is and end to what they call "serfdom", that is, the loss of pensions and other benefits if a miner moves to work for a different mine. The miners are also demanding punishment for party and industry bureaucrats who have failed to meet the miners' demands from the last Summer's strikes.

While Russian courts have already declared the strike to be "illegal", miners have said that the strike is not a "warning" but will continue until they see "results". Some 13 miners have gone on a hunger strike to support organizers being sued by local courts controlled by the state-run mines.

Vorkuta miners are demanding documented agreement to their demands before they consider returning to work. Verbal agreements that concluded the July strike are unacceptable. These agreements were never fulfilled. Their demands are:

- 1) Maintenance of hardship bonuses for workers laid off, or who move elsewhere;
- 2) Hardship bonuses to youth who grew up in the area;
- 3) Repeal of laws making the miners' strike illegal;
- 4) Official recognition of strike committees, and
- 5) Punishment of officials who stood in the way of fulfilling last July's strike settlement.

Miners in Siberia and the Ukraine have expressed sympathy for the Vorkuta miners' demands. They have also threatened to walk out in support if the agreements in Vorkuta are not satisfactory to the miners there."

□□□

What is not mentioned in this article is that even if there is no doubt about the material needs and demands as the driving force behind this Vorkuta action, so-called 'political demands' were also heard. (The meaning of such demands, who makes them etc., was discussed in the articles in Echanges 66/67, and most material we have seen about the USSR in the last years vary much concerning what kind of demands - both 'material' and 'political' - which are raised.) Already in July, Vorkuta was among the first places from where demands like the abolition of the 'leading role' of the party was heard. And this time such demands were heard again, together with demands concerning direct elections for Soviet presidency and separation of the jobs of party leader and president.



## DISCUSSIONS WITH SPANISH COMRADES

*The following is part of an account from a Dutch comrade to a Norwegian comrade about the former's visit to Barcelona last year and discussions of various questions with comrades of the journal Etcetera.*

"Eastern Europe: The Spanish comrades had translated my articles on Gorbachev ("Whom or what does Gorbachev represent and what is the meaning of perestroika?" - Échanges 57) and shared my opinions. They also see the 1917 October revolution in Russia as one which paved the way for capitalism; they agree that it has been a middle-class revolution without a middle class, i.e. a revolution in which the workers did what in western Europe was done by the bourgeoisie. And the Spanish comrades agreed with me that the end of the the ursprüngliche Akkumulation (many years ago) and the need for what one could name 'normal' accumulation is at the background of the actual events in Russia and elsewhere in Eastern Europe.

Apart from all these agreements, at a certain moment I noticed a small rest of idealism, not to say a certain rest of voluntarism. It was when they asked me what I was thinking of the possibilities (or the perspective) of a proletarian revolution in Eastern Europe (or elsewhere) after all the changes. I felt a sort of fear that the revolution they had always dreamt of was disappearing behind the horizon. My answer has been that the class struggle was the most important thing and that one should not see it as something of second order, because the class struggle is not the result of a revolutionary perspective. It's the other way around: the revolution at least will be the result of the class struggle and it can't be denied that there is class struggle in Russia and in the rest of Eastern Europe."

CB

## THESIS ON THE END OF SOCIALISM

This article from no.27 of the Italian journal Collegamenti/Wobbly is based on discussions between Collegamenti comrades on the causes of the fall of the eastern bureaucracy. The text gives more importance to the political problems in the failure of these regimes; the first sentence of the article gives the general pattern: "The end of the state capitalism block is the product of a crisis governed from above, i.e. by the ruling groups of this block on the basis of the relations with the evolution of the world situation." The economical reasons are further developed later.

### Letter from a comrade of Collegamenti to Motiva Forlag:

"We found very interesting your letter dated April 1991 on the struggles in the Scandinavian countries and especially on the USSR. We translated into Italian the part on the miners strike in Kuzbass and Donbass March-April 91, because these struggles had been followed

very badly by our media and we all knew very little about them.... We published it in a monthly bulletin of debate named **COLLEGAMENTI-wobbly lettere**.

We would like to ask you about further essays, news, reports and all you have on the situation in the USSR after the 'coup' in August. We have plenty of news, but no direct experience, no voices on social struggles, strikes and direct actions of people, workers and so on.

Write to: Renato Strumio, Lungo Dora Agrigento 77, 10152 Torino, Italy.

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## STRIKES AND PROTEST IN THE USSR:

MID-APRIL 1991 - JANUARY 1992

*The following chronology is taken from circular letter no.4 of MOTIVA FORLAG (Postboks 9340 Vålerenga, 0610 Oslo, Norway), which also contained information about Finland which will appear in a later issue. Circular letter no.3 of Motiva, published in Échanges no.66/67, contained a similar chronology covering the period 1990 to mid-april 1991 - when the 1991 miners strike had not yet ended.*

In the introduction to the circular letter it is said:

"Since the abolishing of price control in Russia and the other republics of the former USSR January 1992, news about class struggle has been difficult to obtain. The media I have seen have been occupied with the quarrel between Russia and the Ukraine over control of the Black Sea fleet, parliamentary quarrels and such things. News about the class struggle and protests against the living conditions have been very scarce. As newspapers have been such bad sources I have also added bits and pieces heard on different radio stations.

In our last letter we asked for contributions of material in order to make the coverage of the USSR as good as possible. We must regret that we haven't received much. We still call upon you to send us contributions."

### From the middle of April 1991

"The Georgian president Gamsachurdija has ordered civil disobedience from all government employees under the orders of the republic, in order to boycott the interests of the Soviet central power in Georgia. In parallel with this, the independent Union Federation of the republic has ordered strikes in important state enterprises." (Süddeutsche Zeitung 17.04.91)

"Metal workers in the Urals industrial city of Sverdlovsk stopped work yesterday in a two-hour strike to show solidarity with the demands of striking coal miners. The Sverdlovsk protest, affecting 46 big



enterprises in the former power base of Mr Boris Yeltsin, was the first of a series of solidarity strikes planned outside the mining sector." (Financial Times 19.04.91)

"The Federation of Independent Trade Unions in the Russian federation has called all workers in Russia to a warning strike on April 26. The news agency TASS reported that the call for a strike had been decided at an extraordinary meeting of the federation. It is left to the workers in the individual enterprises to decide the duration of their strike. The strikers demand the abolishment of the maximum wage limit, monthly publication of the price index, the abolishment of the 5 per cent V.A.T. and the removal of a law on the setting of wages. Further the strike committees demand 24 vacation days a year, a monthly minimum wage of 195 Rubles and the 40 hour work week." (Süddeutsche Zeitung 19.04.91)

"... the strike committee in Byelorussia called a general strike for next Tuesday. ... The workers in Byelorussia had already shut down a greater part of the factories in the capital Minsk and several other cities on the 4. and 10. April. Representatives of the strike committee in Minsk based the call for a general strike on the refusal of the parliament to meet for a special session. They called among other things for a earlier election to parliament, the Soviet news agency Interfax reported on Friday. The next regular parliament session is fixed for 21. May." (Süddeutsche Zeitung 20.04.91)

"*'My wife was among the first who went on the streets'* a taxi driver tells his passengers on the long drive from the airport to Minsk, the capital of the Byelorussian republic. *'She works in an electro-technical factory. On 2. April she wanted to eat dinner in the factory canteen. Instead of one Rubel she had to pay three Rubles. That made the bucket flow over.'* The workers of the factory went firmly on a protest march. Workers from big factories joined in solidarity - from the famous Minsk tractor factory, both auto works, the engine factory, the factory for electronic machine production. The spontaneously formed columns marched from the central Lenin Square to the Government quarters. From ten in the morning to eight in the evening the striking workers stood at the square. At times they were tens of thousands, at times hundred of thousands. Thousands of students from the nearby university joined the strike. The police sympathised with the demonstrators, the army stayed in the barracks. The 'crazy price rises' of the Union government in Moscow for staple food and consumer goods, it is heard in Minsk over and over, were only the spark: Byelorussia, the most secure wall of the Moscow centre built on terror and discipline, has fallen." (Frankfurter Rundschau 20.04.91)

"In order to end the heavy social crisis in the Soviet Union, the Soviet government no longer excludes 'coercive measures from the state'. Only with the realization of the 'Anti crisis program' can mass unemployment and social disturbances in the country be avoided, said the Soviet PM Pawlow on Monday to the Soviet Parliament. He demanded a 'moratorium' on all strikes 'for the time it takes to come out of the crisis'. Later Pawlow added: *'Perhaps must we now in some trades even introduce a special regime, in energy production, in transportation, in some regions of the country.'* Railway blockings in Kaukasus and a 'criminal situation' in some mining districts would demand special actions of the government. *'This does not mean that we force anybody to work with the use of force, say with the army. It means that we will give the possibility of a normal work for those who wants to work'* the PM said. Those who are against the ideas of the government and supports further strikes will have to answer before the courts. *'The country is in such a difficult situation, that we can not meet all economical demands from the strikers.'*" (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 23.04.91)

"Tens of thousands of workers started their strike again on Tuesday in the Soviet republic Byelorussia in order to enforce political reforms and wage rises. In the capital Minsk they met for a demonstration. Also in other towns of the republic, workers joined the unlimited strike. ... On the demands of the strikers there are different statements. Mentioned are a special meeting of the Byelorussian Supreme Soviet which shall proclaim the sovereignty of Byelorussia. It is also demanded that the communist party shall withdraw from enterprises and state organs. The call for the resignation of president Gorbachev is apparently no longer risen." (Frankfurter Rundschau 24.04.91)

"Demonstrators have on Thursday once more blocked the Byelorussian rail road junction Orscha, said Tatjana Djo from the strike committee in Minsk. All connections between the strike committee and the demonstrators have been broken, because police and special troops of the Soviet interior ministry have surrounded the railway area. Approximately 20 000 demonstrators had ended a blockade after seven hours the day before." (Süddeutsche Zeitung 26.04.91)

"In the Russian Soviet republic warning strikes have taken place on Friday in protest against the bad living conditions and price rises. The Federation of Independent Trade Unions in Russia, which claims to have approximately 60 million members, had called the strikes. The protests took place in spite of the urge from the Russian president of Parliament Boris Yeltsin to refrain from strikes. ... In the Byelorussian town Orscha, a railway junction on the train lines from East to West, thousands of people at times blocked the rails on Thursday. ... The Soviet interior ministry sent 200 members of the special troops OMON as well as five busses with parachuters from a police school in Mogiljow to Orscha. Police tried to occupy the Orscha railway station." (Frankfurter Rundschau 27.04.91)

In Minsk the strike ended. Most workers returned to work on Friday after beeing guaranteed that the Byelorussian parliament would discuss their demands for better living conditions on the 21. May." (Süddeutsche Zeitung 27.04.91)

"In Meschduretschensk in Kusbass four mines returned to work, after having been moved from beeing under the Soviet Coal Ministry to be placed under 'Russian jurisdiction'. Also nine of the twelve mines in North Russian Vorkuta ended their strike. The chairman of the strike committee, Wiktor Kolessnikow, gave as the reason for this a principal agreement on a take-over between the Soviet and the Russian governments." (Süddeutsche Zeitung 29.04.91)

"The crews on five nuclear Soviet ice breakers from the North Sea fleet threatens with a strike, if a part of their wages are not paid in foreign currency. ... have the seamen stationed in Murmansk on the Kola peninsula given a final date of 25. May. ... Strike committees have already been formed on the ships." (Frankfurter Rundschau 02.05.91)

"After a passing calm the strikes in the coal district Vorkuta high in the North of the Soviet Union have flared up again. As the official news agency TASS reported on Sunday, two of the thirteen mines there downed tools completely. Another three produce only for the town and its miners' living areas." (Frankfurter Rundschau 06.05.91)



"A group of workers at the huge Kirov plant in Leningrad yesterday launched a warning strike to call for Gorbachev's resignation and protest against a proposed one year ban on strikes." (Financial Times 07.05.91)



"The strikes in the Russian coal mines have been ended after more than two months duration. The decisions of the strike committees in Siberian Kusbass and North Russian Vorkuta on Friday to start work again was taken after the signing of an agreement between the Soviet and Russian governments earlier this week. In this agreement it was decided to remove the coal companies from the management of the Soviet coal ministry, and place them under 'Russian jurisdiction'. ... Spokesmen of the strike committees both in Kusbass and in Vorkuta stressed that the return to work was only a suspension of the strike. ... The miners will not dissolve the strike committees until there is a noticeable progress in their situation. After the big strike movement in July 1989 the Soviet government had made far-reaching concessions to the miners, which were never honoured. This time the committees will secure that the reached agreement will really be realized, they said. They said further that the miners would give the leaders of the Russian Federation two months to meet the economical demands. Among them are a wage increase, which shall compensate the price rises of 2. April, and the withdrawal of the 5 per cent V.A.T." (Süddeutsche Zeitung 10.05.91)

"The Soviet president Gorbachev has by decree banned strikes in key industries. ... The decree of the president says that the economy is in a critical situation and production is sinking. Also the threat of closing down thousands of enterprises with millions employees. This situation calls for special

measures, above all in key industries, of which the work of other trades are dependent. The strike ban is extended to oil-, gas-, chemical-, and metal industries. For the rail roads, the coal industry and the electricity production and distribution there is already a strike ban. Persons who break the peace in the enterprises and prevent production, should be held responsible for the damages they do. ... Wladimir Schtscherbakow, the new first deputy prime minister in charge of economical politics, made public that the organisers of strikes would be severely punished. He appealed to the airline pilots and air traffic controllers to refrain from their planned strike. A strike would be 'a direct threat to the people', he said and added that he had studied in detail the actions of the former US president Reagan in a similar situation. Reagan had sacked the air traffic controllers during a strike and replaced them with military personnel." (Süddeutsche Zeitung 18.05.91)

"Whether Gorbachev's bans and threats will show more effect than during the miners' strike, is most uncertain. The president must fear, that exactly the example of the miners will catch." (TagesZeitung 18.05.91)

"In the Byelorussian Soviet republic there has been strikes again. The news agency Interfax reported that on Monday the early shift of an auto factory in Minsk have struck for an hour, in order to enforce the dissolution of communist factory groups." (Süddeutsche Zeitung 21.05.91)

"Soviet oil and gas workers are negotiating a 100 per cent pay rise with the government which would be financed through a big increase in the domestic price of energy, a trade union official said yesterday. Mr. Lev Mironov, chairman of Russia's oil and gas workers union, believed the Kremlin would give in to the demands of his members, rather than face industrial action in a sector which is the country's main source of hard currency. ... President Gorbachev last week signed a decree establishing a 'special regime' for transport, as well as the key energy, steel and chemical industries. But the government has so far been reluctant to carry out threats to prosecute strikers, opting instead to give in to pay demands which could be the forerunners of hyperinflation." (Financial Times 25.05.91)

"The miners in the biggest Soviet coal mining district, the Siberian Kuzbass region, have decided against a renewal of the strike this week. This was reported by the news agency Postfactum Sunday evening. In Soviet television it was said that the miners had decided to continue work because several pits have been put under control of the Russian republic." (Frankfurter Rundschau 09.07.91)

"The Soviet government will fight inflation through a wage freeze in the USSR. The Soviet PM Walentin Pawlow on Monday called the fight against inflation the pivot point of his future politics. If the devaluation of money should not be noticeably slowed down, the supply of the people with the daily necessities would not be secured next winter, Pawlow said in Moscow." (Frankfurter Rundschau 14.08.91)

### THE COUP OF AUGUST 1991

"Yeltsin called expressly for an unlimited general strike. He said that strikes had already begun in Leningrad and that workers in the Urals left their factories." (Frankfurter Rundschau 20.08.91)



“Approximately half the mines in the Siberian coal district Kuznezsk followed the call for a general strike, a spokesman for the miners said Tuesday. 26 mines had downed tools. The Kuznezsk basin is the biggest coal district in the USSR. The North Russian coal mining town Vorkuta is from midnight in a general strike. The spokesman of the strike committee, Viktor Kowalenko, said all factories and enterprises in the town are standing still. Five of the 13 mines shall also be closed. At an emergency meeting of the Russian Parliament in Moscow a representative from the Vorkuta district on Monday evening reported that several mines in the Russian federation, the Ukraine and in Byelorussia had followed the call of Yeltsin. Only Vladivostok was not taking part in the movement.” (Frankfurter Rundschau 21.08.91)

Yeltsin called for a general strike to defeat the coup, but apparently not many followed this call. “Add that only a small group of miners followed Yeltsin’s call for a general strike during the days of the coup” in the words of the Swedish stalinist paper “Proletären” (No. 37/91); “The miners, who this spring struck for the demand that Gorbachev should resign, were now among the first to follow Yeltsin’s courageous call to the workers for a general strike in order to reinstall the president - even though the response in the Siberian coal fields in Kuzbass was half-hearted at first.” in the words of the Swedish trotskyst paper “Offensiv” (No. 203) “Mass media reported that life went on as usual in Moscow suburbs during the coup days. People spent their time in queues and walked their dogs, apparently un-influenced by the drama down town.” (Proletären No. 37/91)

“That the coup collapsed as fast as it did is a testament both to deep divisions within the ruling bureaucracy and the actions of the masses, who took to the streets by the tens of thousands in Leningrad and Moscow. Within hours of the coup thousands of members of the Independent Miners’ Union walked off their jobs at coal mines in the vicinity of Vorkuta, site of the first massive revolt against Russian totalitarianism in the summer of 1953. Forty-one industries, from coal mines to poultry processing plants, joined in the walkouts, especially in the Kemerovo region of Siberia and the Kuzbass.” (News and Letters October, 1991)

“During the power play, the mobilization was not very significant, and the people had extremely divergent views. The majority of the population seemed relatively indifferent. In Moscow no factory went on strike. There were miners strikes in the provinces, but they were not really massive. There were very few workers in front of the ‘White House’, the Russian Parliament, during the construction of the barricades. The great majority of those who participated in these actions were youth and members of Democratic Russia etc.; but some leftist militants also participated ...” (Imprecor 29.08.91 quoted by Workers Vanguard 27.09.91)

### END OF 1991

“Patience in the people is already stretched out. They await decisions and not empty words. They long for reforms that can make everyday life easier. A few days ago food riots occurred in Moscow for the first time in many years. The reason for the riots was the crying lack of sugar. In the Ural’s city of Perm the authorities recently sent in truckloads of vodka and sugar in order to restrain angry demonstrators, who had barricaded the streets in protest against miserable living conditions. Wednesday evening this week there were big demonstrations on Manège Square in Moscow. The demonstrators said their patience was at end. They demanded bread and indexed wage rises and threatened a general strike.” (Arbeiderbladet 25.10.91)

### 1992

“‘The people here is not easily angered, but if no miracle happens, then there will be an explosion in the end of January/beginning of February’, says Gregorij Kabota, political editor of ‘Uralski Rabotschi’. ‘The whole region is as a powder keg. When that keg explodes, more explosive power will be released than during the so called vodka rebellions the day before new years eve two years ago, as a crowd of several thousands rebelled against the introduction of rationing of liquor. When hungry people stops trains, attack shops, Kabota says, then the next revolution is on the agenda. Then good night, Boris Nikolajewitsch. Even Yeltsin, who comes from Sverdlovsk, would not be able to stand against the storm. ... The rest of Uralmasch is not so easily transferred into a market economy. Wladimir Sokolow, the chairman of the ‘Committee for administration of state property’, shall parcel out the whole mammoth combine and sell the individual enterprises. But to whom? Who buys a steel and machine combine with rolling-mills from the thirties, machine tools written off ten times, and more than 50 000 employees?’” (Der Spiegel 2/92 - in a report from Jekaterinburg - formerly Sverdlovsk)

“The first reports about lootings are now coming from Russia. There have also been demonstrations in several towns in protest against the big price increases. In the town Stavropol in Southern Russia windows were broken in several shops on Tuesday. It was also made death threats against the authorities of the town, and after this prices were reduced a little. Police also had to intervene in Vladimir, a town just south of Moscow. The incident was described as “milk disturbances”. The price for milk was then reduced. Also in Kirov, in North-Eastern Russia, the authorities had to reduce prices for several items. Chicken had its price reduced from 90 to 70 Rubles. The price before this new year was 34 Rubles per kilo. No reports have arrived about lootings from Moscow or Leningrad. It is obvious that the Russian government is expecting a very high inflation. It is now considered if 10.000 Rubles notes shall be printed. Average wages in Russia is about 5-600 Rubles a month. Until December 1991 the 100 Rubles note was the largest in the Soviet Union. Then the printing of 200 and 500 Rubles notes was started.” (Klassekampen 09.01.92)

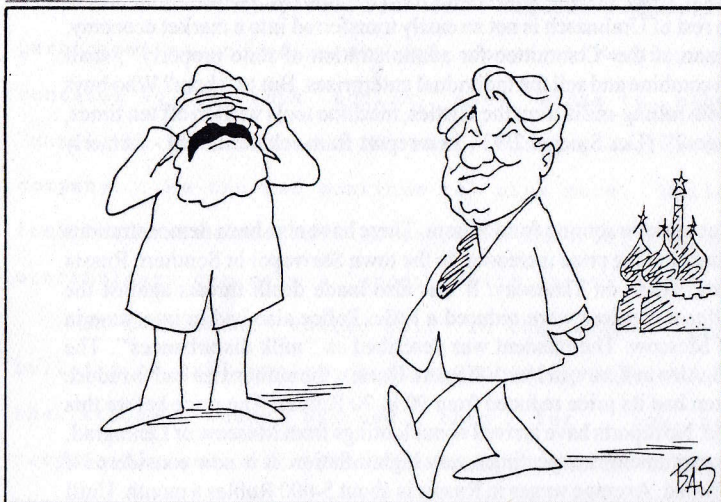
“The deepening crisis in the former Soviet states is forcing up trade barriers and triggering strikes by workers and resignations by officials. ... At the same time, the Council of Independent Trade Unions warned the Russian government to pay promised social compensation for the price rises, and to ‘reconsider’ by next Thursday - and presumably extend - the list of goods still sold at subsidised prices. If the government failed to do so, the council said it would call on members to rally, picket and ‘take other forms of protest action’ next Friday. Russia’s miners have also complained that a promised Rbs28bn subsidy to their industry to support higher wages is not being paid; they have been assured by Gaidar, the deputy prime minister in charge of economic reform, that it will be. Miners in Kazakhstan, the third largest of the former Union’s coal areas producing 100m tonnes of coal a year, have gone on strike in support of a demand to double their pay to Rbs4700 a month - a sum which would have been an average yearly wage less than a year ago. Workers in industries in the capital, Alma Ata, are also reported to have been on strike since January 6, when prices were freed. Mr Nursultan Nazarbayev, president of Kazakhstan, has called for a one-year moratorium on strikes in the republic ‘to prevent industry from coming to a halt’.” (Financial Times 10.01.92)

A four day strike by miners in Vorkuta was ended on Monday 13.01.92. The miners have been



promised higher wages, and that a part of this rise shall be delivered as food. (Reported on Swedish radio P3 news 13.01.92)

“Until now most Russians have more or less reluctantly accepted price increases between 3 and 30 per cent since new year. The price increases have led to ordinary people can no longer afford many necessities, at the same time as shop shelves stands as glaringly empty as before. But there are also



signs that unrest spreads. Khasbulatov's (president of the Russian parliament) own vice president, Vladimir Sjumeiko, said yesterday that an opinion poll in the Irkutsk region in Siberia shows that 45 per cent thought there would possibly be strikes in the time coming, while 38 per cent would not exclude food riots. Sjumeiko said, however, that the most alarming was the introduction of bread rationing. For most Russians bread is the most important basic

staple food. In Murmansk each inhabitant receives 150 grammes of white bread and 500 grammes of black bread per day. In Kasakhstan president Nasarbajev has responded to what he thinks is ill prepared economical reforms in Russia - reforms Kasakhstan have been dragged into - by reducing prices for bread and dairy produces. Coal miners in the Karaganda district in Kasakhstan have already been on strike for several days in protest against sinking living standards. Yesterday they were followed by miners in Vorkuta in Northern Russia.” (Aftenposten evening edition 14.01.92)

Comparing the above report with the radio announcement from Swedish radio don't match. The reason might be that the report in Aftenposten has been written before the weekend, and only been printed on Tuesday 14.01.92. But I really don't know.

“Voice of America” reported 16.01.92 1 GMT that price rises no doubt was generating strong popular protest across Russia. And also that thousands of taxi drivers blocked streets in St. Petersburg (Leningrad) during Yeltsin's visit to the city to protest against price rises.

“President Yeltsin of Russia walked into angry public protests Wednesday in St. Petersburg over the freeing of prices, and workers in his industrial power base warned of strikes over price increases. In the Kuzbass coalfield, center of Yeltsin's support during presidential elections last year, a union leader said workers were horrified by the scale of the increases and were ripe for strikes. *'If it does not act more effectively, this government will go, leaving behind more poverty than before'*, said Alexander Oslanidi, acting chairman of the workers' committee in the Kuzbass. Local journalists said Yeltsin was jeered when he visited a market in St. Petersburg. The president refused an offer for a kilogram (2 pounds) of honey costing two weeks' average salary. *'I have nothing to offer as consolation'*, he said. *'The fall into the economic abyss will continue until at least this autumn, but then prices will start going down.'* *'What are we going to eat?'* cried a woman from the crowd. *'You can slice me up, but that won't last you for long.'* Mr. Yeltsin replied with a bitter smile. ... But the scale of the increases, ranging from 3 to 50 times, have taken even pessimists by surprise. In the Kuzbass, largest coalfield in the commonwealth of 11 nations that succeeded the Soviet Union, Mr. Oslanidi said **there had already been wildcat strikes and that discontent was growing.** *'We are on the verge of strikes'*, he said from the city of Kemerovo.” (International Herald Tribune 16.01.92)

“The government's assurances may not be enough to prevent the first of mass strikes from hitting Russia. The Federation of Independent Trade Unions called for nationwide demonstrations today and Friday *'as the government's failure to take appropriate steps (has) left millions unprotected against robber prices'*, TASS reported.” (Wall Street Journal Europe 17-18.01.92)

“Independent Russian trade unions, 2 000 members of which demonstrated outside the parliament building yesterday, plan a day of action today to protest against the very way market reforms are being carried out. Miners in Kazakhstan are already on strike, while Russian miners and railway workers are threatening similar action.” (Financial Times 17.01.92)

“At the same time in Estonia, parliament declared a state of emergency because of dwindling food supplies and created a committee to control production and distribution of goods, The Associated Press reported from Talinn. Lawmakers voted, 53 to 37 to declare the emergency and set up the panel. Supplies of food and energy have been critically short in Talinn in recent weeks, with heat lowered in buildings, hot water turned off and stores empty of the basic goods, including bread, milk, cheese and butter. Food rationing has been imposed in the city of 500 000 people, and gasoline has been unavailable for weeks.” (International Herald Tribune 17.01.92)

## NORWAY

### THE SITUATION IN 1990

*The following text, slightly amended from the original version, is from a circular letter distributed in April 91 by Norwegian comrades using the name Motiva Forlag (Postboks 9340 Vålerenga, 0610 Oslo, Norway). It is a follow-up to a text about the situation in 1989, which also was published in Échanges (no.62). The circular letter also included texts with information about class struggle in the*



USSR (published in *Echanges* 66/67) and Sweden. In the introduction to the circular the following remarks are made:

'Oslo, April 1991

Dear Comrades.

*This is the third time we send you this kind of a letter. Scandinavia is still a rather quiet corner of the world, but we think it is useful to inform you about conditions here.*

*This time we have also written about what is going on in our neighbouring country Sweden. We would rather not do this, because we think that comrades living in that country is in a much better position to do this work. But as long as nobody which we are in contact with find it worthwhile to write about what is going on there, we will supply you with some information."*

*In addition to the text, it should be said that 1991 has seen a large increase in the number of unemployed, now resembling the numbers of the 1930s, and there is still a labour (social democratic) party government who made strong 'promises' of quite the opposite. Furthermore, there has been a widespread crisis in the banking sector, with more major banks more or less bankrupt (only being saved by government intervention and take-over, with thousands of jobs lost.*

RH 11/91

**Unemployment** has remained stable at approximately the same level as last year, i.e. around 150.000. Of this number about 90.000 are unemployed, and about 60.000 are kept on various government employment schemes. Prices rose about 4.1 percent during the year.

*"Norway's ten biggest industrial companies will invest nearly 17 billion kroner (approximately £ 1.7 billion) this year. ... Most people are of the opinion that the climate for investments has improved in Norway. Increased ability for competition vis-à-vis foreign countries, lower rates of interest and moderate wage increases, makes it more interesting to make investments at home. Reduced domestic demands, low activity in building and construction industry and high levels of unemployment makes the companies reluctant to make big new investments at home yet."* (Aftenposten 05.11.90)

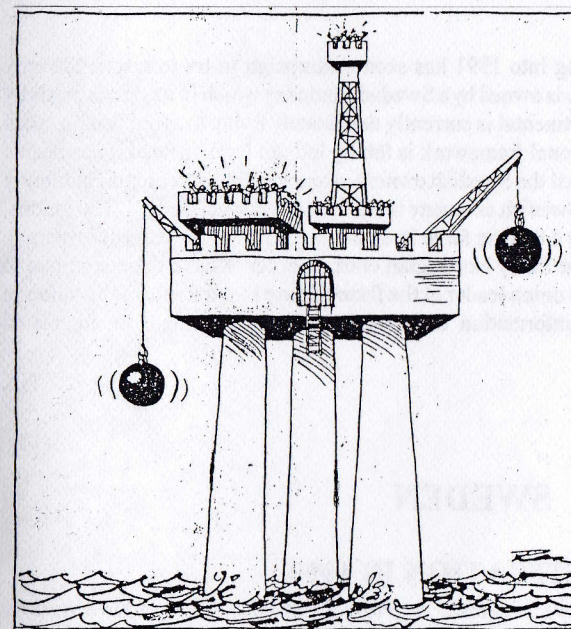
**The banks** are still loosing money. The major banks reduce their staff to improve their situation, and also rise their rate of interest in order to try to offset their losses. This rise of interest rates hits loans for housing, and most people here have such loans. Real estate prices are still going down, and it is in general not possible for people to reduce their debts through selling their home and getting a cheaper one; because very often the prices offered does not cover their debts.

Most municipal economies are in a bad state, and reductions in **public services** are common. These reductions vary from place to place, but there is no doubt that there is a general trend of reducing the social wage through reducing the services of the different municipals. On March 20th 1990, 20 000 municipal workers in Oslo went on a 12 hour strike called by their trade union to protest against the cuts.

**This year's contract negotiations** of wages and conditions had a "moderate" result as usual. This year there was no law governing local wage rises for those sectors with local negotiation 'rights', but the agreement between the major union federation (LO) and employers federation placed a deadline

for local negotiations - with the provision that if no local agreement was reached by this date, the rises would be what had been offered by the employer. This led to a series of sit-down strikes, go-slow actions, and other protests at different workplaces. Most likely because of these difficulties in the local negotiations, and a widespread dissatisfaction with the general results of the agreement, the members of LO voted against the agreement by a narrow margin. The agreement was renegotiated, but only marginal changes were made. At the next poll, the agreement was accepted. This was one of the very rare occasions where an agreement has been voted down when the whole membership of LO has polled together.

The agreements reached by the other union federations and in the state and municipal sectors, as a rule follow the agreements reached between LO and employers of private industry to a greater or lesser degree. A few strikes occurred in connection with this year's negotiations: the journalists at the state owned radio and television company, the newspaper journalists, bus drivers (the majority of them, organised in a federation outside LO), and in the offshore oil industry.



**The strike in the oil industry** started as a legal strike in connection with the negotiations. The government demanded an end to the strike almost immediately, and passed a law subjecting it to compulsory arbitration. That is a common occurrence in this country when a strike is "threatening vital interests of the society" (and most strikes do that in the eyes of the government; especially strikes in the oil sector), and in such instances a continuation of the strike is illegal. This time the oil workers decided to continue the strike in spite of the union calling the strike off. In Norway it is exceptional that strikes continue in such a situation. The position of the union was an ambiguous one. In public the union leadership appealed to the workers to return

to work, which they have to do according to the law. But there can be no doubt that the union apparatus had a great sympathy for the strike, and that the local union representatives had a strong hand in organising the strike. The illegal strike continued for almost a week through occupation of the oil platforms, but in the end the workers were defeated and forced to end the strike. The strikers were at their platforms scattered around the North Sea, and thus isolated from each other. Helicopter transportation to and from the platforms were to a large extent physically stopped at the platforms



in order to stop possible strike breakers from being flown out. Several workers were fired during this strike. They were all later reinstated after negotiations and many concessions from the trade union.

On October 11, the members of LO were called out on a 15 minute protest strike, to protest against the proposed state budget for 1991. This year has also seen other strikes, small or restricted in duration, but in some instances the workers have managed to fight lay-offs through local strikes.

**The negotiations between the EC and EFTA** about an economic agreement led to a total breakup of the centre/right government. The peasant party, which was one of the three parties in this government, is strongly against membership in the EC and also against what seems to become a close cooperation if these negotiations reach a conclusion. The Labour Party took over as a minority government, and continued its strong pro-EC policy - a policy not weakened after Sweden seems to have decided to apply for membership in the EC. In Norway the question of joining EC is not an easy one after a majority voted against it in a referendum in 1972, and the campaign leading up to the referendum was a very bitter one.

The last months of 1990 and continuing into 1991 has seen a campaign to try to rescue the only Norwegian auto tire factory. This factory is owned by a Swedish company which in its turn is partially owned by the German Continental. Continental is currently desperately trying to avoid being taken over by Italian Pirelli, but this international framework is totally left out here. Instead it has been a campaign on national sentiments - against the Swedish owners. Among many ingredients containing a campaign to "boycott the tires of the Swedish company if the factory is closed down". The unions, especially its local branches, have been a driving force in an attempt to force the current owners to sell the factory to other capitalists, most likely Norwegian ones, in order to have them continue to operate the factory. "Villy Grytvik (the union leader at the factory) says that the role of the union in this period is to contribute with all information that possible purchasers might be interested in." (Klassekampen 23.01.91)

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## SWEDEN

### THE SITUATION IN 1990

*This text, slightly amended from the original, is from a circular letter distributed by Norwegian comrades using the name Motiva Forlag.*

Sweden has much in common with Norway both historically and socially, having a long common border and very similar languages. Many of us watch Swedish television, read Swedish papers, visit the country fairly often and have social contacts in the country. But in our own television and press, news and reports about Sweden are scarce (the same

goes for our other close neighbour - Denmark). We can not give an extensive report about Swedish conditions without having to spend very much work on it, and even then our basic material is not good enough. Still we will pass on some information.

Sweden is the most important Scandinavian country, having the biggest population (approximately 8.5 million) and the biggest industrial capacity. It is the only Scandinavian country with a car industry (Volvo and Saab), being internationally small on personal cars but more important in the truck industry, and an airplane industry, both civilian and military. Sweden has a very big paper and pulp industry, and a large engineering industry.

Swedish governments has since the thirties been totally dominated by the social democratic party - the few instances of "bourgeoise" governments in the eighties being only a parenthesis in the long succession of social democratic governments. This could however soon change.

"Sweden's famous economic model - the envy of the world for more than half a century - is dead. ... Even Sweden can no longer live with the old illusion that it can pursue a national economic policy based on Keynesian principles of demand management. ... The outside world is now dictating what it can and cannot do. Under intense pressure from overseas financial opinion that forced up interest rates to 17 per cent ... the Swedish government is having to abandon a long-held belief: that the commitment to full employment and the defence of the welfare state should be over-riding priorities. ... From 1970 onwards ... the Swedish economy began to reveal alarming signs of sclerosis. Its growth rates - which apart from Japan's had been the best in the western industrialised world since the 1890's - began to falter. Productivity became sluggish. The balance of payments fell into deficit. Increasingly, Sweden's basic industries grew uncompetitive and inflexible to change. Above all, wage and price inflation in a tight labour market undermined its international competitiveness. ... At the same time, the country's public sector, relative to all other types of economic activity, grew into the largest in the world. There was a corresponding growth in the proportion of the gross domestic product devoted to public expenditure; this climbed to just over 60 per cent by the early 1980s. Today, more than one in three of Sweden's workers is employed in the public service sector, mainly in local government, health and education. ... The 1982 devaluation coincided with an upturn in world trade and boosted Swedish industry so it looked as though the country's economic revival was based on sound foundations and structural change was less urgently needed. ... From late 1988 there was a rapid deterioration in Sweden's balance of payments deficit, sluggish growth, and above all the return of a familiar bout of self-destructive, wage-push price inflation coupled with stagnant productivity in an overheated labour market. ... At present, Sweden has a registered rate of joblessness of a mere 1.5 per cent, one of the lowest in the western world, but this can be expected to climb sharply by the end of next year. ... Most Swedes do not yet realise the magnitude of the changes to their cherished way of life which they will have to accept over the next few years." (Financial Times 29.10.90)



"Investments in industry will fall four percent this year compared to last year, shows a series of interviews made by Sweden's Central Bureau of Statistics at 4400 companies in October. Investment plans have been changed at short notice. ... Thus the trend is broken of strong rises in investments that has been the rule in Swedish industry throughout most of the 80s. For 1991 the bureau's material points at even greater reductions, at between 5 and 10 per cent. Investments this year is calculated to be 47.9 billion kroner in current prices, compared to 47.3 billion last year. In volume this is thus a reduction of four per cent. The most dramatic downturn is in the forestry industry, which had a golden year last year. In the branches pulp and paper investments will be reduced 30 and 20 per cent respectively according to the bureau. Also in the iron and steel industry there will be reductions - nine per cent this year and ten per cent next year. In retail trade investments will go down seven per cent this year and ten per cent next year. Banking and insurance reckon on minus 20 per cent this year, but a plus of 2-3 per cent in 1991. Most branches reports reductions. But the public sector goes against the stream, in spite of a strongly weakened economy resulting from big wage rises and a state ban on rising taxes. ... All Swedish companies with more than 200 employees are covered by the survey of the bureau, as well as a random selection of smaller companies." (Aftenposten 21.1.90)

In February 1990 the government suggested a "crisis package" including a wage freeze and price freeze. The government was pressed to withdraw its proposals (see below) and resign - only to be reinstated shortly afterwards.

In 1990 prices rose approximately 11 percent.

### The car industry.

"The profit machine of the country - 'what is good for Volvo, is good for Sweden' - had to note a loss of 200 million kroner compared to a profit of the first nine months of 1989 of 6.5 billion. Zetterberg (Volvo boss) made no doubt about it that the Swedish costs of production are far too high and made public a drastic reduction of investments of Volvo in Sweden. The main producer of losses is the personal car division. After Saab, which for a long time has produced personal cars with losses - at the moment the company makes a loss for every sold car of 30 000 kroner, Volvo also has to book massive losses in the production of personal cars. The other divisions; lorries, busses, industrial and airplane engines however still maintains profits, though smaller than before. The losses in personal cars stand out in drastic contradiction to last year's results, when a profit of 6.1 billion was reached in this sector." (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 17.11.90)

"In Sweden Volvo shall reduce its manning with 5000 employees and workers, which is 10 per cent of its Swedish labour force. Christer Zetterberg plans gradually to move the industrial production to other countries. He has already stopped all investments in Sweden. Volvo no longer can afford to make new investments in Sweden. From now on only necessary additional investments in already existing plants will be made. In the future this will mean a considerable reduction of the company's industrial production in Sweden." (Aftenposten 19.11.90)

The Volvo plant in Gothenburg, its main plant, has reduced production, cut manning and abolished one evening shift. For those working shifts, the latter will mean a considerable pay reduction.

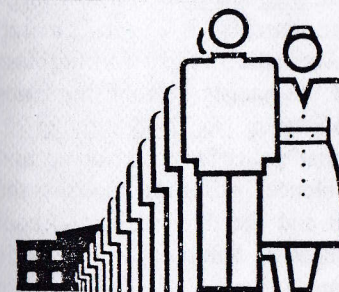
The reduction of the workforce was originally meant to be through 'natural' causes - turnover, people leaving voluntarily etc. However, on the Swedish TV news on 17.01.91 it was announced that 1550 employees and workers at Volvo would be fired. Among other things necessitating this step was a reduction of personnel turnover from 14 to 10 per cent. These days in Sweden workers don't leave their jobs as they used to, because it is not easy to find a new job elsewhere.

In June Saab personal cars, which is fifty percent owned by General Motors, presented a reduction of manpower of more than 1000 and the closure of some smaller factories on top of the reduction of more than 1000 at its main factory in Trollhättan already carried out. The Saab personal cars division will close down its Malmö factory before July 1991. This plant was opened only fifteen months ago, and approximately 900 workers will be affected by this. In 1990 Saab lost 3.25 billion kroner (approximately £ 325 million), and according to newspaper reports it will reduce its workforce by 3600.

One of the things going on in Sweden these days is a restructuring of the auto industry and perhaps also other sectors of industry; among other things trying to build up a "just in time" system of production. In order to make such production possible transportation is improved with better roads and railways and also a connection with mainland Europe without ferries.

### Workers struggles

1990 began with unrest among workers in the municipal sector. The contract which expired in June 1989 was still being negotiated, and in order to try to put pressure on both the employers and the national union, workers staged demonstration strikes. Workers in a mental hospital in Malmö went on strike for 24 hours from January 12-13, bus drivers in



Umeå on the 15th, road maintenance workers in the region of Norrbotten in the same period. 600 mental hospital workers in Malmö went on a 9 days strike ending 26th January. "Monday at midday around 40 bus drivers in Halmstad went on a wildcat strike. The protest was partly against the bus driver's low wages and partly in sympathy with the striking hospital workers in Malmö." (Proletären 25-31/1/90). Around the country there were also a lot of other wildcat strikes and protests in the municipal sector.

In addition to the wage negotiations the strikers protested against a new tax law being implemented at the time. Then in February the government, with support from LO (the main trade union federation - social democratic),



proposed a two year ban on strikes, wage rises and price rises. At the same time the union of municipal workers and employees signed a new agreement. "Today the buses don't run ... We sit down in protest against the restrictions in our legal right to negotiate an agreement ...' Some hundred bus- and subway drivers in Stockholm went out on a wildcat strike on Monday morning in protest against the ban on strikes and the agreement signed by their union the day before." (Internationalen 15/2/90)

The wave of wildcat strikes seems to have continued in the municipal sector and also to have started in the private sector, but then mostly with fewer workers involved.

At the Saab-Scania factory in Södertälje with 5300 workers there were a succession of smaller wildcats and demonstrations in order to put pressure behind the local wage claim. At the most it seems to have been more than 1000 workers on wildcat strike.

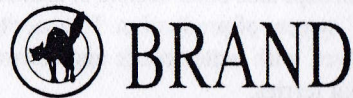
"A wildcat stopped production at Volvo truck factory in Umeå Tuesday last week. Approximately half of the 1300 workers at the factory took part in the strike which started at 11 AM and lasted until Wednesday morning." (Proletären 19-25/4/90)

During the spring there were several wildcats in connection with local wage negotiations in smaller factories.

(About 1990, see also below.)

NK

**Brand** (Box 150 15, 10465 Stockholm) About this anarchist journal in Swedish, see also Échanges no.65. We will give a better presentation of the journal and more issues in a later issue of Échanges. Even if the emphasis of what one writes about is quite different from Échanges (very little to find on the class struggle, very much on all kinds of alternative actions), readers understanding Swedish (and with each issue there is also a separate sheet with brief English summaries) can find an interest in this relatively widely read and well printed journal. No.35/April 90: Anti-capitalist anarchist meetings and demonstrations in Stockholm - Feminism: 8. March and 'Recover the night' demonstration - Squatting in Gothenburg - Occupations of flats of members of parliament. No.36/May 90: A special large format May issue with material about: About the 'christian anarchist' B.Wegerif's march thorough Europe - Poll tax - About the Shell oil company - About the Swedish working class novelist Moa Martinsson - Brand demolishes the left, part 1: the maoists (A promising series about the Swedish left) - The story of a Kurdish refugee to Sweden. No.37-38/Summer 90: House occupations in Stockholm and Malmö - 'Anti-terrorist' police forces in Norway and Sweden - Debate about demonstrations (confrontations, violence...) - Brand demolishes the left: trotskyism. No.39/Sep.90: Against new liberalism and the free market - About spending cuts in schools - Actions against Shell, petrol stations - South Africa - Struggle of Canadian indians - Poll tax struggle - Boicott the national census. No.40/Oct.90: A lot of reports about anarchist/autonomist actions in Sweden: Blocking of streets protesting car traffic/Anti-apartheid actions against Shell petrol stations (more than 300 actions since



1987)/'Free food picnic' in a supermarket/Squatting in the city of Malmö - Selfmanaged / antiimperialist coffee coops in Mexico - Class, power and class consciousness - Peace congress in Kiruna - Interview with a syndicalist train driver who was sacked for refusing to drive a train carrying weapons for export.

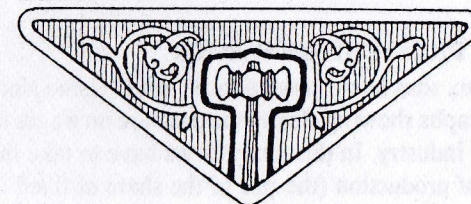
1990

*The following is reproduced from a newssheet in English from the anarchist journal Brand, as additional remarks about Sweden in 1990. Anyone familiar with the ideas of Échanges will know that we wouldn't agree with the last part of the text, for example attributing a decline of organised syndicalists to a lack of 'class consciousness' of Swedish workers or in general throughout the text (and in the pages of Brand) the emphasis put on a certain organisation when writing about the class struggle. But that's another discussion.*

"On Feb.12 health and welfare workers belonging to SAC - the Swedish syndicalist union - went on strike against the government plans to forbid strikes and stop all pay rises. In Stockholm about 180 syndicalists went on strike till Feb.15, when 100 other SAC members went on a half day political strike. Political strikes are very unusual in Sweden and its the first time that the SAC has called for one.

Thousands of workers in Sweden left the social democratic party in protest against the government's anti strike proposal and there were many wildcat strikes against the government. But before the situation got out of hand, the council workers union got a "relatively good" pay offer, putting the lid on any attempts at a mass strike. And the government, surprised as they were of the massive protests, took back their proposal.

For many years the SAC has been losing members and decaying from the inside, reflecting the lack of combativity and nonexistent class consciousness among the Swedish working class. In this context the SAC strike was a success, breaking through the wall of isolation, apathy and formalism that infected Swedish syndicalism. The strike was by no means perfect. Only 16 of SACs 140 local federations participated (SAC has 14000 members). SACs formal, slow structure isn't adapted for urgent class action. These things will hopefully be sorted out. Meanwhile the SAC is gaining in membership for the first time in many years. Several hundreds have joined in the aftermath of the strike."





## UK

**Anti Exchange and Mart** (BM Makhno, London WC1N 3XX) This new publication presents itself as follows: "...produced by four people. None of us are at present in a political organisation nor are we planning to start a new one. As well as putting out this magazine we also reprint free editions of books and pamphlets and are involved in such activities as workplace struggles and the anti-poll tax movement. Our basic politics are anti capitalist and anti state."

The first article, *Death to Rank and Filism*, is a long critical history of the Communication Worker group and of the different attempts to build some kind of rank and file organisations. It is a subject we have already discussed several times, but this concrete recent experiment will hopefully give us the opportunity to have a more general article to publish in a later issue. Other articles are about: The great enterprise swindle - Ireland - Fragmentation (on capitalism dividing the proletariat to rule it).

**Workers Hammer** (Spartacist Publications, PO Box 1041, London NW5 3EU) Issue no.122 contains articles on the present UK policy: Major/Kinnock, different name, same game (More a review of the various political positions of parties and groups than an analysis of present British capitalism and class struggle) - Where is the Soviet Union going? Rise of the military opposition (A mixture of very well documented facts and of prejudiced points of view from a 'pure' leninist line).

**Here and Now** (PO Box 109, Leeds LS53AA) No.11: D-Mark-ation: a report on the way in which the eastern part of Germany was absorbed by the federal republic - Poll tax: After Ribble Valley will active protest be sidelined and marginalised - The NHS reforms, an internal examination - Satanic abuses: recent events in Orkney and Rochdale highlight the dangerous fusion of liberal social services and Christian belief - Culture as cirens - Debate: Discourse, practice and power - Debate: Artistic disarmament - Softecnica: on the use and mythology of computers - Hacking: the elusive enemy.

## FRANCE

## PRESSURE ON WAGES

The article "Les couts salariaux sous haute surveillance" (in L'Usine Nouvelle 4/10/90, copy at Échanges) gives two graphs showing clearly the pressure on wages for the past five years, more evident in the car industry. In this analysis we have to take into account the transformation of the means of production (the rise of the share of fixed capital and the

diminution of variable capital) and the rising share of production taken by subcontractors.

## TRAINS - PLANES: THE TRAVELLERS PROTEST

This text (in French, Usine Nouvelle 20/12/90) gives a picture mainly of the situation in the railways in France where class struggle with various forms last year brought a lot of disturbances locally and nationally (no less than 36 strikes in all kinds of transport).

## LOCAL STRIKES

Another example of this situation is given by a collection of strikes which spread in October and November 1990 in a central remote district of France (Haute Loire) in **small textile and plastic factories**, mainly over wages. As a local militant observed in an interview (Rouge 6/12/90) referring to the previous big strikes in the public sector in France: "What has happened here is the sign of something important in the private sector." But we can draw the same conclusion from some local strikes in **public services**, for instance in a local post office at Evry (Paris suburbs) which failed though taking the 'democratic' organisation of regular assemblies and a strike committee.

## PEUGEOT - POISSY FACTORY

(See article on Peugeot in Échanges no.62 and in Liaisons no.4/5) Some unions agreed with a new organisation of working time at this factory in order to use more efficiently the constant capital and to get more profit from labour in producing more cars per day. According to new plans production should increase by 25% with only 1600 new workers (17% of the workforce of 9000). The new system is supposed to begin 22/4/91 to be progressively extended and see four day shifts of 10 hours and week ends of two or three days; every worker would have to move within a total flexibility. The first results appear disastrous with production lower than before the reorganisation. Peugeot pretended that its plans had the support of the workers but apparently workers' resistance was certainly accounting for something of what the managers call euphemistically 'teething problems'.

**The world as it is going at St Georges d'Aurac** A leaflet in French from V. Brisset, PR 43370 Solignac sur Loire. On the present life in a small town in the center of France and the consequences of modern capitalist development (mainly about the modern transport, motorways, highspeed train TGV...) on all aspects of this life. (Copy at Échanges.)

**MORDICUS** (BP 11, 75622 Paris Cedex 13) This new monthly paper (100FF a year) could be compared to the English paper Class War: the same style, the same use of aggressive words, the same wide range of information on revolts against all forms of repression, domination and manipulations in present society. Two evident ideas behind this project: "The abolition of the wage system is the subversive activity which contains all the others".... "propagate critical analysis and subversion on all its forms." But there is a



difference with Class War, which is populist whereas Mordicus is evidently intellectual - with some pretention to be populist in an intellectual way. Class War lacks serious theoretical discussion (compensated by a more theoretical paper, Heavy Stuff); it is evident that Mordicus has a solid theoretical background though it does not appear most of the time as such but mixed with very detailed concrete information and a lot of references to the present cultural and political activity in France. Reading the already published issues, we think it would be difficult to understand for foreigners and even for French people well aware of life in France as defined by the media. We got the feeling (perhaps we are wrong) that their fight is more against ideology (even if this fight is supported by concrete action) which, even referring to class struggle could lead them to some attitudes and actions very far from class struggle and at the end will keep them isolated in the circle of their own revolt.

No.0/Oct.90: The first issue sums shortly up its positions: "Our war: the war of the dangerous classes - Our weapons: the forbidden passions - Our energy: the energy of despair." Contents of this issue: War is peace - War of the poor in a disunited Kingdom (on UK poll tax) - The struggle against evictions in Paris. No.1/Dec.90: On the revolt of the Mohawks (Red men against iron men) - From democracy to social revolution - Vaulx en Velin, we are coming back - 13000 belles: a complete report of actions against the building of new prisons in France (sabotages, raids on offices and persons of various firms earning money from this dirty work). No.2/Jan.91: On the Gulf war. With this issue there is a call for support of people arrested for the actions against the building of new prisons as described above.

**L'Intersyndicaliste** Paper of the GSED (11 rue St Vincent de Paul, 13004 Marseille) No.31/Oct-Dec 90: Everything is crumbling - Despair for the peasants. Letter dec.90: Various informations on Britain, China, the Gulf war.

**Le Frondeur** (BP 105, 94402 Vitry sur Seine Cedex) No.3/Jan.91: Editorial - On the reasons to be together - leaflet 'Democracy is war'. No.4/Apr.91: About the human community - What are the reasons to be together - One day yet everything will come.

**Courant Alternatif** (OCL/Eggregore, BP 213, 51058 Reims Cedex) Nov.90: Lyons suburbs burning: the failure of the social workers (on the Vaulx en Velin riots) - Immigration: the organisation of illegal immigrants against the repression, a witness about the imprisonment camps - Strike in the metal workshops of Poelain - The nuclear dustbin of Itteville. Dec.90: Cops and army to help the citizens - Doucé affair: the corruption of the police - Demonstrations of the lycéens (Paris 12/11/90) - The council estates are becoming ghettos, the lycées too - Great Britain: struggles against the poll tax. No.7/March 91: Behind the bombs: the business - The media in the turmoil - Some actions in the movement against the war - The explosive situation in Turkey and Kurdistan - Chile: the third blow to the

popular movement - Debate on agriculture - The war reveals the truth - Solidarity with the squatters of East Berlin - Feminists or consensuals.

**A contre courant syndical et politique** (11 rue St Vincent de Paul, 13004 Marseille) No.23/Apr.91: The nausea: on the cynicism of governments - Where is Germany going? (On the rising discontent west and east) - After the war: anxiety and questioning: on the reasons behind the Gulf war and the impotence of the anti-war groups - International meeting of women in Thailand, Spring 1992 (this text offers some views of the social conditions in this country) - On the failure of an attempt to regroup libertarian groups around the idea of a 'libertarian alternative'.

**Noir et Rouge** Revue Libertaire (Samedi soir, Dimanche matin, BP 22, 75660 Paris Cedex 14) This review is published irregularly with special issues on a specific subject (5 issues, 100FF) The Autumn 1990 issue, no.20, with the title "East/West, North/South: The compass is crazy" tries to analyse 'the new social dynamics, the other anti-imperialist forms and the prospects for revolutionaries'.

**Ruptures** (BP 01, 94501 Champigny Cedex) No.45/March 91: Their peace is not ours - Against the double sentence (which allows in France to punish legal immigrants twice successively for the same crime) - 9 day strike in a Paris suburbs post office. No.46/Apr.91: On anti-war committees and repression of their actions - Renault, St Ouen and Billancourt factories: from the workers fortress to the unemployment office - Presentation and book list of the publisher Acratie.

## NEW ZEALAND

### Benefit cuts

On 7 April 1990 New Zealand's labour government announced a package of truly Thatcher-esque benefit cuts: no benefits for under 18's, pensions cuts, accident compensation reduced, and lower benefits for single people in shared accommodation.

Unemployment is a record 10.7%. Compulsory work interviews for the unemployed (like restart!) and a work for dole scheme are other government measures. (Reproduced from 'Counter Information' no.28)

**Anarchist Alliance** We have received several publications from the Anarchist Alliance of Aoteroa (PO Box 78104, Grey Lynn, Auckland). The monthly journal **The State Adversary**: No.15/Aug.90: A lot of short news on New Zealand and various leaflets. Dec.90: An article on the Gulf War and what is called 'Third World War'; very little on class struggle in New Zealand.



The leaflet "What is wrong with MacDonald?" (all the economic, social and health problems linked to the MacDonald processed food) and the pamphlet "Is a free society possible?"

## SPAIN

**Etcetera** Correspondencia de la guerra social (Apartado Correos 1.363, 08080 Barcelona) No.17/Jan.91: The crisis and the Gulf - The years of decline of the USA - The fight of Besos, a suburb of Barcelona - Correspondence (Letters from New York, Paris, Athens, Cuba) - Reviews of books and papers (Brocken zum Thema Perestroika materialistisch betrachtet - Spanish social idealism - Thekla no.13 - La diagnose des autonomies - Temps Critiques - Mordicus - Science as Culture).

**La Estiba** Paper of the dockers union Coordinadora (c/del Mar 97, 08003 Barcelona) No.57/Oct.90: Information on the ports of Chile and Brazil - On the crisis in the Gulf - On the Spanish ports and the activity of the Coordinadora.

**Zer Egin?** (S. Martzial 2, 4 - Ezk., 20005 Donostia - In Basque and Spanish) No.295: The logic of the Maze (negotiations with the government) - War in Euskadi - Pre-marxist communists - International consequence of the USSR crisis.

### SPANISH AIR FORCE PILOTS WIN STRIKE

*The following (from 'Flight International' Oct.89) is not about a working class action. But it is still an example, even if from Spanish air force pilots, of the general fact that whatever legal and practical restraints you find, struggle always finds a way - by simply ignoring the laws or in this way finding an effective way around it.*

"Spanish Air Force pilots will not be court martialled despite refusing to fly. The action, in support of two air force pilots and an air traffic controller facing fines and possible imprisonment following a mid-air collision last November, effectively grounded the air force for two days last week.

The collision was between a F-18 Hornet and a Hercules tanker aircraft; damage was slight and both aircraft landed safely. Early last week the prosecuting military judge advocate general asked for four years imprisonment for the two pilots and four months for a sergeant air traffic control operator.

Strike action is illegal in the Spanish armed forces and would be treated as mutiny, but pilots at several of the main bases certified their aircraft as unserviceable on walkaround, and also refused to take command of aircraft with any minor malfunctions entered in the technical log."

## DISCUSSIONS AND CORRESPONDENCE WITH SPANISH COMRADES OF 'ETCETERA'

*The last years Echanges has published much material involving written and verbal discussions with Spanish comrades, mainly related to Spain but also other matters. These and similar discussions are part of a continuing exchange of letters, articles, material and opinions which has been going on for a long time, some of it also being reproduced in other journals like the German 'Wildcat', and in Echanges notably from no.58 onwards.*

### Letter from a Dutch to a Norwegian comrade:

"In Barcelona I met the group which is publishing 'Etcetera'. We arranged a meeting for discussion with three subjects: 1) The Spanish situation; 2) China; 3) Eastern Europe....they should describe what was going on in Spain, I would make a short introduction about China after after that we should discuss the changes in Russia and Eastern Europe. (Note by Echanges: the parts about China and Russia are published elsewhere in Echanges.)

On the Spanish situation Q. told me more or less the same things which C. told me last Autumn, things which are dealt with in a short article in Echanges no.63 (p.43). However, Q. and other members of the group have given me more details. For instance they dealt with the period just before the social democrat Felipe Gonzales formed his government and became prime minister. In that period the so-called 'centrist' Adolpho Suarez was heading the government. He seriously tried to transform the backward country of Spain into a modern industrial state. Seriously, because there was no other way for Spain. However, Suarez couldn't be successful, because he was hampered by his franquist past.

For the rest, Q. was telling the same as C. had done before him: the Spanish Right has absolutely no perspective because this Right really is an anachronism and it can't offer any perspective to Spanish capital.

New to me was the information that Spanish employers are a little bit in a sort of panic because of the changes in eastern Europe. They fear that the situation now created there - and more particularly the situation in Germany - will be so favourable for worldwide capital and especially for US capital, that foreign capitalists will reduce their investments in Spain because the eastern European market is promising more and easier obtainable profits. Spain on the other hand needs those investments, without which it will be unable to compete on the European market after 1992."

CB 5/90

### Crisis of anarchism and syndicalism. The CNT.

*The following is from a letter from a Spanish to a Norwegian comrade about an old text of the former in Spanish about the crisis of anarchism. What is said about the CNT here is in line with the discussion on Spain between this Spanish comrade and Dutch and French*



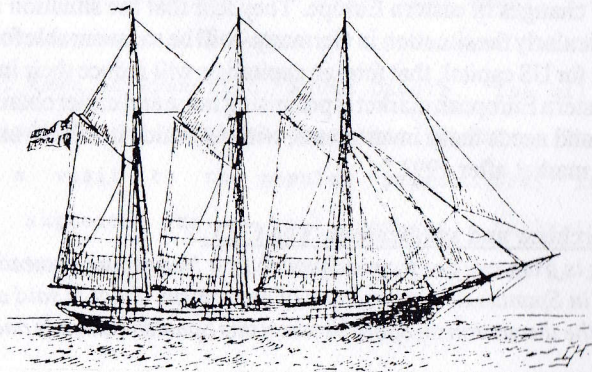
*comrades in Echanges the last years (from no. 61 onwards). A longer letter of the same kind by the Spanish comrade was published in Echanges no. 37-38.*

"The text is not exactly an analysis of the history of the CNT in Spain, but a general remark on both anarchism and anarcho-sindicalism, of course taking some topics of CNT developments as reference. I wrote it when I got out from the CNT's "reconstruction process" in the last years of Franco's dictatorship before I got in contact with Etcetera. I broke with the CNT in 1977 and began an individual reflection in reviewing some topics of the theory and practice of the libertarian movement. The text is only an effort for organizing my own ideas in a new era of Spanish history; I mean, in the democratic period started after Franco's death.

The text is developing the theses about the bureaucratization of the CNT. In my view this trend to bureaucratization is present all along the CNT history. But overall during the Second Republic (1931-39), CNT takes part in a context of an increasing mass movement and so, the bureaucratic tendencies are "solved" by the action of the workers who take their initiatives in a very "autonomous" way. It's a time when the CNT becomes a "disorganized" union.

But this situation is wholly changed during the years of exile in France. Here the different bureaucratic fractions take the CNT in their hands...which becomes a union without workers and overall, without the active mass movement that in the past obstructed the bureaucratic tendencies. In my view this analytical way would help to understand the "problems" that I found in the years of the "reconstruction period" in regard to the views and practices of the exiled representatives of the CNT, the same problems that leading to the fragmentation of the marginalization of the CNT, unable to adapt its old ideology to the new times of the capitalist development in Spain."

CVG 9/90



## INDIA

### DISCUSSION WITH KAMUNIST KRANTI

From Kamunist Kranti (see Echanges 63, 65 and 66/67) we have received the following circular:

"Dear friends. We plan to hold a discussion at Faridabad in March 1992. The topic for discussion is: "What are the fundamental problems facing the marxist communist movement today?" Please send us a written text in English/Hindi on the topic latest by 15/2/91."

In a letter to KK we said:

"We would like to acknowledge the reception of the circular and tell you that we will not be sending a contribution to the meeting. This is partly caused by lack of time. But partly also because, as you will have understood from the debate with you published in Echanges 66/67 and the views put forward in the "Echanges et Mouvement. Presentation pamphlet", our way of seeing things and posing the (for us) relevant and important questions are quite different. The latter is of course no reason for not entering a debate, but a contribution to the question you pose could really be no different from the above mentioned texts or other material published by us."

RH

In another letter we said:

"Our presentation pamphlet is clear enough to give you our answer to the question of "What are the fundamental problems facing the marxist communist movement?". For us, such a question will need some clarification:

\* What do you consider as the "marxist communist movement"? If you refer to individuals or groups still considering the marxist method as the best tool to understand present capitalist society (including the ex-'Eastern branch' of capitalism, we could try to give an answer; but their work of analysis would not be to solve a "fundamental problem" and they would not be a "movement" in the meaning of "workers movement" for instance. On the other hand, so many people or groups are still using "marxism" as a mask for a lot of capitalist variations that we could consider that the first problem would be to clear this "marxist movement" which is anyway going to die by itself.

\* If you consider this "marxist communist movement" as having to persome some kind of "task" (another possible meaning of the phrase "fundamental problems"), we would have no answer to such a question which is a "non-question" for Echanges people.

\* If you think that this "marxist communist movement" is identical with the workers' movement (not the unions but the practical movement of class struggle), we would say that this movement of struggle has its own identity, without any kind of label or identity with some radical group or movement. The problems facing the class struggle movement are the problems of capitalism itself in the dialectical process of the struggle; in this respect



the "problem" (as far as we consider it a "problem") would be to analyse and understand this process for a better understanding of the exploited people engaged in the continuous fight against their exploitation."

HS

For similar discussions and remarks, see also 'Council communism', class struggle and Echanges in the USA section in this Echanges.

**"Resistance to the plan has been heavy: The class struggles of the Green revolution in India"** In response to a question about their view of this article published in Echanges no.65, Kamunist Kranti gave the following remarks in a letter: "The article was, in our opinion, a liberal-maoist hotch-potch. Its publication by you was a surprise for us."

FMS (paper in Hindi of Kamunist Kranti - address letters as follows: Majdoor Library, Autopin Jhuggi, N.I.T. Faridabad - 121001, India) May 90: Meaning of 1st of May - Critique of reformist demands of 8-6 hour day - Critique of nationalism - Situation in Escorts factory - Accident in a local factory. June 90: Position of temporary workers - Strike in Dehli Transport Corporation (D.T.C. - local bus service owned by the government) - Russian capitalism. July 90: Capitalism and crisis in industry - Private and government jobs, how safe are they? - Workers movement today. Aug. 90: Marxism: critique of leftism - Situation in a local factory - Nepal, a view of capitalist democracy - Situation in two local factories. Sep. 90: Marxism: critique of leftism - Situation in local factories - Accident in a local factory where 5 workers died - Unemployment - Pro-reservation and anti-reservation; a comment on ongoing movement against reservations in the governmental sector for lower castes - Oct. 90: Present chaos in India and the workers - Marxism: critique of leftism - Situation in a local cotton factory - Situation in Faridabad. Nov. 90: religious conflicts between Hindus and Moslems - *Accidents* (According to the newspaper 'Economic Times' a chairman of Industrial Security told that per year 25000 workers die due to electrical shock, 15000 get burned and many times these numbers become handicapped) - Germany - Strikes in the world.

## ITALY

**COLLEGAMENTI/WOBBLY per l'organizzazione diretta di classe** (Angelo Caruso, C.P. 10591, 20110 Milano) No. 27/Spring 91: This issue was published one year after no. 26 (see Echanges 66/67) because of a crisis marked partly by the publishing in no. 26 of the article on A. Negri.

\*The logic of domination (Text on the war).

\*Some reflections on unions and struggles; on the end of contracts, the failure of the COBAS and the relationship unions-management.

\*Two interviews; one on FIAT, the other on Olivetti; the crisis of the computer sector with 7000 unemployed.

\*Eastern Germany after the Autumn; Synthesis text on the political, economical and social evolution showing the difficulties to come and giving a general view of all the strikes.

\*Thesis on the end of Socialism (See **Eastern Europe** in this issue of Echanges).

\*Historical socialism: The USSR - Reflexions on Bolshevism and Stalinism.

\*The crisis of Stalinist socialism: on the end of Stalinism seen as a means of developing capitalism.

\*Negri: who was this mate? (A strong critique of negri positions, answering the article on this subject in the previous issue. The article recalls that Negri was and still is a neo-leninist and that Collegamenti's positions have nothing to do with this orientation. These Collegamenti basic principles are again precised and the criticism directed to the comrades who are now far from these principles.

## PROLETARIAN RESISTANCE IN EAST GERMANY 1945-58

In Echanges no. 63 (p. 5) we gave some reasons for recommending the book by Benno Sarel on this subject: *'Arbeiter gegen den Kommunismus'. Zur Geschichte des proletarischen Widerstandes in der DDR 1945-1958*. Both the German and French editions has long been out of print. We have now received information that a German reprint has been made, including a discussion paper by the present publishers: Verlag Schwarze Risse, Berlin. We haven't seen this edition ourselves and don't have the address of the publisher. The price of the book is DM15.

At the same time we can once again recommend another book mentioned briefly presented in the same issue of Echanges (p. 4) and available from Advocom Verlag (see elsewhere in this issue): Theo Sander's *Des grossen Planes Stimm und Gang. Bildungsplanung als Illusion*. With the fall of the DDR regime, the relevance of the analysis of the contradictions of the East German society provided in this book should be clearer than when it was written and of interest to many of our readers.

### The working class uprising in East Germany June 1953. Class struggle against Bolshevism.

The original version of this Echanges pamphlet was written by Cajo Brendel a couple of months after the events took place and therefore based on the material available then. The original text was a 'battle cry' against the Bolshevik lies about the uprising, taking the side of the insurgents against the state capitalist regime. The English and French versions by Echanges many years later more or less follow the original, even if more important material has become available since then. Our French version is still available. Within Echanges there has been discussion on whether a new English version should be produced or resources should be used on other pamphlets, and among the arguments against a reprint is that with the fall of the old regime conditions are very much different today. One can however say that the 1953 uprising, and the meaning of it, is still too little known to many people on the left. Another relevance of the pamphlet even today can be the way 17. June has been used in Germany as a celebration 'Day of German unity'. The pamphlet as well as published material after 1953 shows clearly that the workers were not fighting for any kind of capitalist 'reunification'.

In our English version of this pamphlet there are some small errors, and one of these can create some confusion. At the top of p. 24 it shall read:

"In December 1905, Tsar Nikolass II's cossacks under the command one general Semjonow put down a workers' uprising in Moscow. In June 1953 another Semjonow, High Commissioner of the USSR in East Berlin, was responsible for the suppression of the uprising which took place then. Russian soldiers fired..."



## LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

Publications marked with \* are practically out of print and might not be available when the order is received. Prices are in sterling for the publications in English and in French francs for the publications in French. Cheques or postal orders have to be in sterling or francs. Notes in any other currency could be sent if they are the countervalue of the total order. Prices include postage. Orders will be answered only if the corresponding payment is joined. Orders as well as requests about information and any proposal to meet, discuss or participate in the activity of Échanges can be sent to the following addresses:

**ECHANGES ET MOUVEMENT, BP 241, 75866 Paris Cedex 13, or  
ECHANGES ET MOUVEMENT, BM BOX 91, LONDON WC1N3XX, UK.**

### PUBLICATIONS IN ENGLISH

**ECHANGES** - Current issue of the bulletin Échanges available free. Subscription (4-5 issues a year) is £5 and includes pamphlets and possible books published. Back issues are available, for most of them at the price of photocopying (4p pr. A4 double page) and postage.

**Echanges et Mouvement. Presentation pamphlet** (free)

**Shake it and break it. Class and politics in Britain 1979/1989** - Échanges (90p)

**Workers Councils** - A. Pannekoek - Échanges

\*Part 1 and 2 (1,00) Part 3 (50p), Part 4 (50p)

\***Anton Pannekoek - His life and work - "Marxism" - "General remarks on the question of organisation** - Work Press Pamphlet (50p)

**The Hungarian Revolution** - Council Communist Pamphlet (60p)

**The experience of the factory committees in the Russian Revolution** - Council Communist Pamphlet (60p)

\***Cwmbach miners and women speak out** (From the 84-85 miners strike in a mining village in Wales) (60p)

**Poland 1980-1982. Class struggle and the crisis of capital** - H. Simon - Black and Red (2,00)

\***Theses on the Chinese Revolution** - C. Brendel - Solidarity (1,00)

\***The New Movement** - H. Simon - Solidarity (1,00)

**France - Winter 86-87 - An attempt at autonomous organisation - The railway strike** - Échanges (50p)

**The COBAS - A new rank and file movement - Italy 1986-87** - D. Brown - Échanges (1,50)

**The refusal of work. Facts and discussions** - Various contributors - Échanges (1,50)

### PUBLICATIONS IN FRENCH

**ECHANGES** - Bulletin - specimen sur demande - abonnement 50F par an donnant droit à 4 bulletins et aux brochures ou livres publiés dans l'anne - Des exemplaires des anciens numeros peuvent etre obtenus au prix des photocopies (0,40F une double page format A4) et des frais postaux.

**Echanges et Mouvement. Presentation**

**LIAISONS** - numeros déjà parus; 10F; No. 1,2,3. No. 4/5 (35FF).

\***SOCIALISME OU BARBARIE** - ancien numeros (10F chaque): 5/6,23

\***INFORMATIONS CORRESPONDANCE OUVRIERES (ICO)** - ancien numeros (5F chaque)

\***LANTERNE NOIRE** - ancien numeros; 9,10,11

\***RAISONS DE LA COLERE** - ancien numero; 1

**La greve generalisee en France, mai 1968** - ICO (10F)

\***Hongrie 1956** - A. Anderson - Échanges (10F)

\***Un conflit decisif; Les syndicats combattent la revolte contre le travail** - J. Zerzan - Échanges (5F)

**Wildcat, Dodge Truck, 1974** - Black and Red - Échanges (5)

\***Le 25 juin 1976 en Pologne** - H. Simon - Échanges (10F)

**Pologne 80-82. Lutte de classe et crise du capital** - H. Simon - Spartacus (20F) **L'insurrection ouvriere en Allemagne de l'Est, juin 1953** - C. Brendel - Échanges (10F)

**A l'Ouest rien de nouveau, USA 1978** - Échanges (10F)

\***Lutte de classe autonome en Grande Bretagne** - C. Brendel - Échanges (20F)

**To the bitter end - Greve des mineurs en Grande Bretagne - Mars 84 - mars 85** - H. Simon - Acratie (30F)

\***Thèses sur la revolution chinoise** - C. Brendel - Échanges (10F)

**Grève à General Motors** - collectif de Strasbourg (5F)

**Espagne, de l'antifranquisme à l'après-franquisme** - C. Brendel et H. Simon - Échanges (20F)

**Cwmbach miniers et femmes de mineurs parlent** (5F)

\***Chronique de la revolution espagnole** - H. Chaze/Union Communiste - Spartacus (20F)

\***Lenine philosophe** - H. Gorter - Spartacus (20F)

\***Reponse à Lenine** - H. Gorter - Spartacus (20F)

\***Remarques generales sur la question de l'organisation** - A. Pannekoek - Vlam Canada (5F)

### OTHER PUBLICATIONS

#### German

For material from Advocom Verlag, see "TO OUR READERS" in this issue of Échanges.

#### Spanish

\***La huelga salvaje en polonia el 25 de junio de 1976** - H. Simon - La Piqueta

### Bewick Editions

Échanges has received for sale a limited number of the following material (for a presentation, see Échanges no. 65 p. 17-18):

**The American Worker** - Paul Romano and Ria Stone (£1.50)

**Wartime strikes. The struggle against the no-strike pledge in the Union of Auto Workers (UAW)** - Martin Glaberman (£3)

**'Be his payment high or low'. The American working class in the 60's** - M. Glaberman -(50p)

**Punching out** - M. Glaberman (25p)

BBB