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WE WANT TO RIOT

FROM THE FRONTLINE.....BRIXTON BULLETIN. MON13 APRIL
After years of street crimes and brutality, and despite the infiltration from outside of thousands of paid provocateurs, the Brixton Police has finally been taught a short, sharp lesson by the local community. It has been a constant source of amazement to observers just how long the local population have allowed these professional scare-mongers to roam the streets unchecked, harassing and beating up the youth and terrorising the residents.

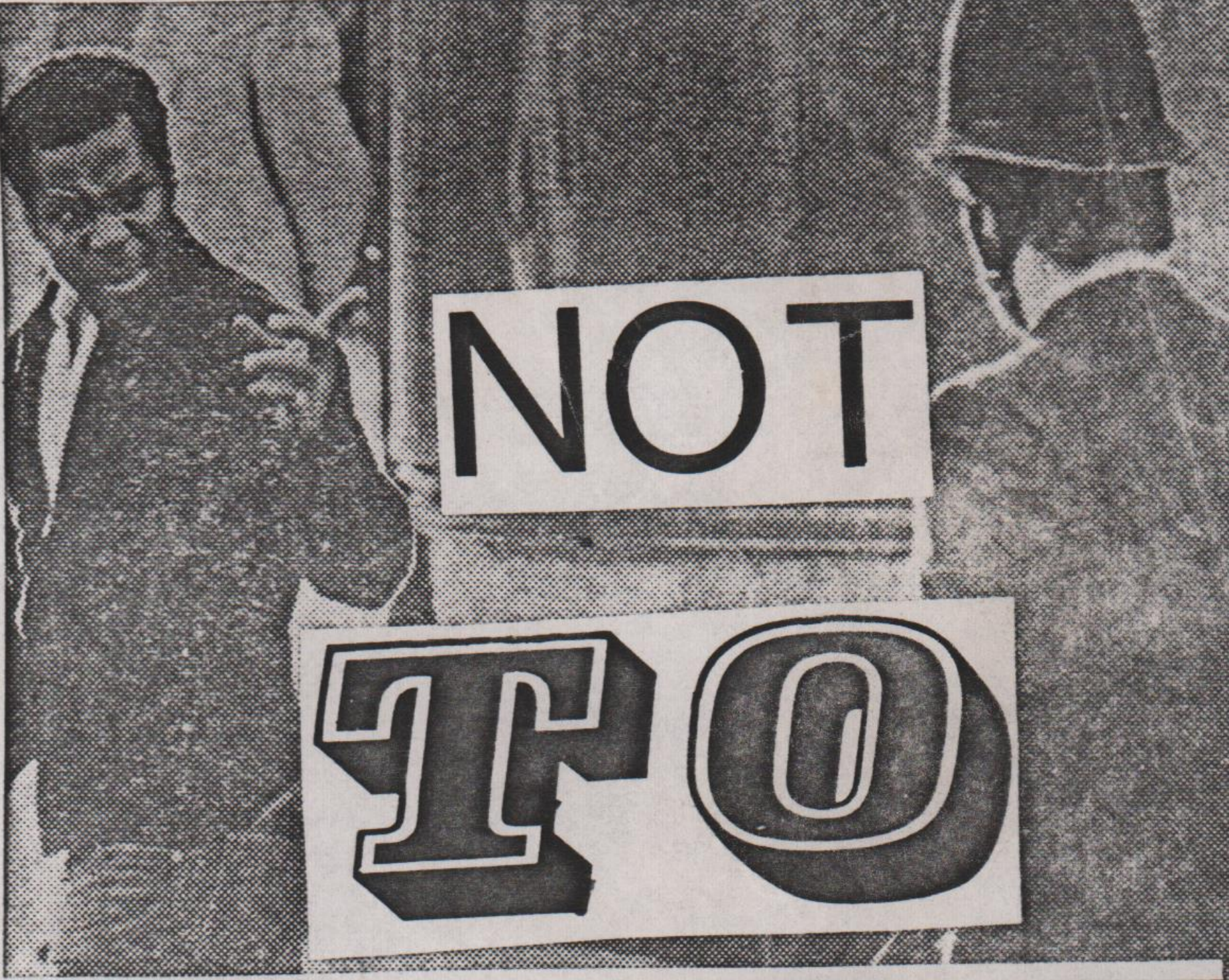
Over the last three years there has been a marked increase in the street crime and violence carried out by these so-called 'protectors'. The local population has stood by helplessly while their children have been snatched off the streets by these overtly racist and sexist gangs of thugs - kidnapped under the sinister 'sus law' they operate.

At least one recognised public execution has already been carried out by these murderous thugs para-military wing, the SPG, whilst dozens of 'unsolved' murders, which have happened behind the closed doors of police stations and prisons, are readily attributable to these state-styled stormtroopers and their cronies.

Relative calm returned to the streets on Sunday, only after they adopted their, by now familiar, ploy of following an afternoon of unbridled mayhem with a swift withdrawal at twilight (Lewisham residents are all too aware of this tactic). But the remarks of one of the thugs 'guarding' Stockwell station sums up the measure of their defeat - in a dejected tone he muttered to his mates: 'The whole world will be laughing at us...' But he was wrong. The world is not amused at having these gangs of thugs strutting around its streets under the guise of 'law n' order'. The world will want to know:

WHO ARE THE SINISTER BRAINS BEHIND THE BRIXTON RIOTS WHO PLANNED AND EXECUTED MASSIVE ACTION AGAINST THE COMMUNITY???

But, above all, will remain the question of JUST HOW LONG ARE WE PREPARED TO PUT UP WITH THESE ARROGANT, MARAUDING THUGS WHO ANSWER TO NO-ONE BUT THEMSELVES???



WORK



Page	CONTENTS
1 -	UNEMPLOYMENT SPECIAL
-	Unemployment in London : Myth and Reality
5 -	Unemployment and Organisation
8 -	Report: London Unemployed Peoples Conference April 5th
-	Some thoughts on Autonomy
10-11	London Unemployed Groups Listing
<hr/>	
11-	Review: In and Against the State
(12-	Leaked DHSS Report Exclusive)
15-	Who is Paying?
16-	Job Report: Librarians against Literacy
17-	Correspondence : Letter from P.S
19-	" " : Letter from Ted Knight
20-	" " : On Assemblies. Letter from A.M & Reply
(21-24	Extract from Root and Branch on Assemblies in Spain)
28-	Stuff Forte Campaign
29-	The Unions in the Lives of the Workers by Combate (Portugal)
31-32	Brixton

In another first for the London Workers Group, even after the traditional delays this issue of the bulletin is out in time to advertise our next public meeting :

Tuesday MAY 14th 1981

"UNEMPLOYMENT : NEVER A DOLE MOVEMENT ?"

8.15 pm. Upstairs at the Metropolitan Pub. 95 Farringdon Rd. EC1.
All welcome to participate (except party recruiters !)

The Frontline Bulletin reproduced on the cover turns out to be a minor mystery - we've no idea who produced it. The cover also promises Job Reports - In fact we only have one (Why is this ? Are you lazy dogs capable of NOTHING ?!!) - and also conferences though as you can see we've only one of those as well. It had been intended to include a critical review of the International Discussion Bulletin in preparation for the conference on the basis of proletarian autonomy organised by it in London April 18-20th. Once it became clear this issue wouldn't be out in time for the conference itself it seemed more appropriate to include it with a conference report for the next issue. (Though in view of the dreadful nature of the conference itself silence seems the most appropriate comment at this stage).

As you can see we are still using Rising Free's old address for correspondence overleaf, though Rising Free has now moved. Letters can be sent to the old address for the foreseeable future. R. Free hope to re-open elsewhere shortly, and have asked us to say that they will urgently need new people to work in the shop when they find new premises. The bad news is that all work there is voluntary (ie: no pay) If you're not working and are interested write c/o their old address or ring Fabian or Steff on 515 1699 (Evenings).

This is the first bulletin produced on our new duplicator. If any workers (or others) wish to have material duplicated (except party political, reactionary or fascist material) please feel free to contact us c/o the address overleaf giving a phone number you can be reached on.

Our thanks to R.A.P for use of their typewriter in producing this.

LONDON WORKERS GROUP BULLETIN.

London Workers Group - Aims and Principles

The London Workers Group is an organisation of non-party militants working in the London area. Our aim is to establish and encourage communication between workers in all industries, in order to:

- (1) learn from each others experience and increase our understanding of industry and trades unions within capitalist society.
- (2) seek out and maintain links with other anti-capitalists and anti-authoritarians. While recognising the importance of organised struggle in all areas of life, we choose to concentrate on the workplace struggle. We believe that the formation of autonomous workers groups within each industry is vital. The function of these groups is to spread revolutionary ideas and create solidarity among fellow workers. We would also encourage the formation of local workers groups all over London, to complement the industrial organisations.
- (3) devise and produce effective propaganda including a bulletin covering industrial news, workplace reports, analyses and theoretical articles.
- (4) and provide support where asked for.

Our aim is the establishment of a non-governmental, classless society of producers/consumers in free association. It is clear that unions and left-wing parties serve to perpetuate capitalism, not destroy it. We are opposed to all hierarchical organisation and political dogma, hence our opposition to all political parties. We support all actions that tend towards complete workers control and autonomy as has been experienced through workers councils.

Once again production delays have held up the appearance of the bulletin, which has meant that events have overtaken some of the contributions.

The LWG meets weekly at the Metropolitan Pub, 95 Farringdon Rd, EC1 (two mins. from Farringdon tube). All meetings are open and participation welcomed (except for party recruiters). Every 4-6 weeks we hold a public meeting on a previously advertised subject. Meetings at 8.15 pm.

The bulletin is open to all contributions. Apart from the aims and principles and unless otherwise stated views are those of individual contributors.

Contact us c/o: Box W, 182 Upper St. London N.1.

If we're to put an end to our misery and exploitation and to change society and ourselves, first we've got to unite as a class. We must organise according to factory and firm, irrespective of trade, and according to neighbourhood outside of capitalist parties and unions.

All those who claim to "represent" us: Tories, Labour, Leftists, Unions, are united in one thing at least; they are all committed to managing capital. If and when we move on our own, without "representatives" and seek to change the conditions that enslave us, all of them will oppose us violently. AS THEY DREAM OF ENSLAVING US WE MUST ORGANISE TO DESTROY THEM. (From leaflet for T.U.C anti-cuts Demo.)

UNEMPLOYMENT SPECIAL

Unemployment, one of the most important issues facing workers, is also not surprisingly, one of the most mystified. However the biggest mystifications come not from the right, or the so-called centre, but from the left - from the Labour party to the 'revolutionary' socialist fragments. The left defend capitalist discipline in the form of work, in the same way they defend state discipline - the police. They mystify the real power of these repressive institutions and call for meaningless reforms. The reasoning in both cases is the same. Thus the State Research/Leveller clique mystify the repressive force of the state in order to emphasise the hopelessness of revolutionary struggle. The lefts 'realistic' solution? - make police, courts, prisons etc. accountable. In the word 'accountable' we can spot their bureaucratic logic - what they want is a social audit of repression - a definition of what are acceptable levels of state violence. Police cell deaths? - "open the books" they call, never open the jail doors. The 'revolutionary' fragments are happier to make ferocious noises about repression, but what's on offer in their "workers state" socialism? "The principle of elected controllers extends into every area of workers democracy. (...) In the law courts there are no unelected judges interpreting and laying down the law. The jury system, a profoundly democratic method of making decisions about justice, can be extended into the area of law interpretation and of laying down punishment. (...), the 'mass of officials' in every walk of life are strictly accountable to the elected bodies." (Paul Foot - Why You Should Be A Socialist p.38).

So it is with work. For the left it's not work that's bad but the lack of participation by workers. Thus for them unemployment is the supreme evil - an unimaginable horror. "The regulation of civil behavior in all societies is intimately dependent on stable occupational arrangements... So long as people are fixed in their work roles, their activities and outlooks are also fixed. (...) But unemployment breaks that bond, loosening people from the main institution by which they are regulated and controlled... The entire structure of social control is weakened... The result is usually civil disorder.... The trigger that sets off disorder is not economic distress itself but the deterioration of social control." (Piven and Cloward - Regulating the Poor. pgs.6-8). Thus some of the left worry about the social dislocation, the demoralising effects of long term unemployment. For others it is the waste of 'Personpower', ("People should demand as of right to be able to make a contribution to the community" etc.etc). Those well off lefties who've been busily gentrifying run down working class areas peer nervously at their 'disadvantaged' neighbors - isn't unemployment creating social tensions? "I told you so" they all parrot when the people of Brixton hold the first 'street party' of Royal Wedding year.

In fact they've been "telling us so" about unemployment for so long that they have almost obscured the reality of it. Britain has been in the grip of recession and mounting unemployment since the late sixties but its progress and effects have been uneven. (For the following I'm indebted to articles by 'A Gardener' in Solidarity 14 and Solidarity's 'Infernal Bulletin'). Till 1966 employment levels (the number of the employed labour force) rose continuously, even absorbing a steep rise in the working population due to the post-war 'baby bulge', commonwealth immigration, and ever higher levels of women working. Between 1966 and 1972 the level of employment fell by 800,000 - but a number of factors (e.g: the end of the 'baby bulge' and the rise in the school leaving age, the halt in immigration and compulsory redundancy payments) prevented more than a fraction of this fall

(Cont. Over)

expressing itself as registered unemployment. During 1973-4 employment rose by 700,000 and registered unemployment dropped by 250,000. But 1975-9 saw a further fall and then slight rise in employment levels. Since Autumn 1979 employment has dropped, almost to 1972 levels and registered unemployment has reached its present 2,547,958.

The announcement that unemployment had reached 2½ million 'for the first time since the thirties', was greeted with predictable 'Back to the Hungry Thirties' rhetoric by the left. Of course they failed to point out that when unemployment was at a comparable level in 1933 it represented 21.3% unemployment - today the growth in population means it only represents 10.4% which is lower than for any year of the thirties.

The lefts fixation on the level of unemployment ignores the fact that this magic figure only records the number of people who bother to register (and who aren't 'defined' out of the total by various crafty tricks such as the recent changes excluding those registering but not claiming benefit). Thus though the drop in the level of employment 1966-72 was greater than that after 1975, unemployment rose steeply after 1975 (far exceeding the fall in employment even). Its suggested that this was due to the much higher rate of inflation after 1975 which forced many more of the unwaged - whether housewives, or those living on savings, or those in undeclared ("black economy") work - to register unemployed. Another factor in the rise is that since 1976 the total working population - which had remained stable for 10 years - has steadily risen as the sixties 'baby bulge' has begun leaving school. This factor alone will add 1-200,000 people to the total working population every year to the end of the eighties. It can thus be seen that the level of registered unemployment means little except in relation to other factors. It doesn't even measure the level of unemployment. In Nov. 1980 the T.U.C estimated that the official figure of 2,062,000 should actually be 3,455,000 once allowance was made

for the 24% men and 45% women they estimated did not register and also for the people (especially youth) in temporary work schemes of various kinds. Similarly in Mar. 1981 a MORI survey for the New Statesman concluded that about one million people should be added to the official figure - this excluded those on temporary work schemes. The survey suggested that the missing million consisted of 90% women and was mostly (70%) between 25 & 54 years old. (Among registered unemployed over 50% are under 25 or over 55). Around 70% were available for part time rather than full time work (typically mothers looking for jobs to fit in with the school day) and 30% were women who'd given up work to have children.

The Labour party acquiescence to the official figures becomes explicable in this context. For the centre and right of the party are as anxious as the Tories to encourage women to return to their role as unwaged centre of the family unit. Thus not only reducing the unemployment statistics but making good the gaps as the welfare state services are cut back. "The nature and strength of the family and our attitude towards it will influence our attitude to care for the old and the weaker members of our society..." James Callaghan.

But overall the lefts playing of the numbers game has mystified the real level and impact of unemployment. What we've seen during the seventies has been capitalism using its safety valves. These buffers - youth, women, ethnic minorities, the disabled, the old - have acted as shock absorbers for the effects of the crisis. Only now is capitalism running through its buffers - only now are the effects of unemployment and generalised poverty beginning to be really felt. For example cuts in the social wage (Cuts in benefit, health services, public housing and social services etc.) are only now beginning to bite. For those capable of hustling or scrounging life on the dole is still far from unbearable. Again for those unemployed still

supported by someone else's 'family wage', life is a lot harder, but in all but a small minority of cases, a long way from desperate. And for a minority of long term unemployed, redundancy pay and savings have softened the impact. In London these cushioning effects take on an extra dimension. For a start levels of undeclared work and opportunities to hustle a living are greater in the big urban centres. But it also relates to the patterns of employment in London.

In contrast to the mythology of the left, lay-offs by large companies (usually with comparatively high levels of unionisation and consequently redundancy pay) while on a greater scale than ever before, still don't represent the general pattern of unemployment. Unemployment mostly occurs at the fringes of the economy across a large number of small businesses. It's in the marginal areas of capitalism that it's most likely to occur. And in London this pattern of unemployment is only an extension of the effects of the casualisation and job mobility that have become the rule since the war. As what little large industry is left has been successfully restructured (eg: the docks) or faces restructuring, (eg: print, Fords - and in the public sector; rail, post and telecom) London's become increasingly dependent on the safety valves of (predominantly white collar) service, finance and public sector employment. As a consequence London's economy has increasingly become based on small economic units. This, combined with the general tendency for the ratio of semi- and unskilled work to skilled to rise (and until recently a high level of job vacancies) has meant that the experience of a large proportion of London's workers (especially those who started work during the seventies) has been one of drifting from job to job, with intermittent periods of unemployment. The MORI survey quoted above shows the effects of this nationwide. 50% of the workforce under 25 have already experienced unemployment (and most of these at some time in the past two years). In the

45-54 age group by contrast, only 26% have - despite the fact that "someone who has been in the labour market for 30 years will have had more time to accumulate experience of unemployment than someone who has recently left school".... "It would seem that people who entered the labour market in the full-employment years after the war have remained more secure in their jobs than younger people who started work after unemployment started to rise in the mid-1960s". The effects of this in London are magnified. Since stable long-term employment isn't the rule, unemployment is much less traumatic. More important is the progressive sectoral expansion of poverty. "...some people are much more vulnerable to unemployment than others. When a recession comes along, the impact is very unequal: a high proportion of people who become jobless have been jobless before - but now they are jobless more frequently, and for longer. Meanwhile a significant number of workers remain in secure employment." (same article)

This was the experience of the thirties. If we haven't yet reached those levels the same tendencies will become apparent. Two in particular should be noted: The number of long term unemployed grew steadily even after unemployment as a whole began to drop in the middle to late thirties. Many found that having been unemployed over 12 months they might never work again. And employment only dropped below a million during the first year of the war and of war production. If war itself (as opposed to the threat of war) no longer exists as an option as regards the expansion of production, its potential for destroying the surplus population grows ever greater.

By mystifying the impact of unemployment the left become incapable of accounting for its real effects. For example the government often argue that since 300,000 people a month find work and sign off, as 360-400,000 sign on - (hence the rise in the level of unemployment), "unemployment

does not consist of a stagnant pool of jobless people, but a fast flowing stream, with hundreds of thousands of people entering and leaving the flow each month" (same article)

The New Statesman points out that 1. "At the end of 1973 one in two of the registered unemployed could expect to find work within a month. ...the ratio...is now one in nine" 2. "the governments flow figures show that there have been seven million new registrations of unemployed people in the past two years. According to MORI's survey, fewer than four million people (excluding unregistered women) have experienced unemployment over the same period. The explanation is that many people who join a dole queue have been there before".

If overall unemployment isn't a stagnant pool, for the buffer sectors - the young, old, women, the disabled, ethnic minorities - it's rapidly becoming so. For the rest of the working population the only direct effect of unemployment is its effect in depressing wage levels, and increasing competition between workers. 'Survivalism' becomes the rule - significantly the level of strikes fell considerably in 1980. Only the miners and some other key sections of public sector workers have gone against the trend. The lefts raving about occupations and sit-ins can't disguise the fact that overall they're as few and far between as ever. (And the conditions for successful occupations being even rarer still most workers quite understandably prefer to take the money). The lefts failure to understand this stems from their inability, firstly, to distinguish between the effects of short term economic policies and the immediate effects of the crisis on the one hand, and the effects of long term restructuring on the other. Secondly however, it stems from their inability to operate from any other level than that of work. The only experience common to all sections of the working class is not unemployment but poverty.

Their failure to understand this

becomes most obvious in their attempts to explain the Brixton celebrations. Confronted with a generalised community refusal of the 'Law and Order' response to their opposition to poverty (an opposition expressed in terms of generalised law breaking - which in itself, **obviously** doesn't challenge the legitimacy of those laws - and of community expressed through 'street culture' - which again obviously doesn't challenge notions of cultural commodities), a community refusal which goes on through socialised 'crime' - looting, vandalism, arson - to become a "Collective activity in which the actors can acquire a sense of their own social power". Confronted with this the left waffle about 'causes' (unemployment, police repression) or of "explosions of anger" - rather than of people enjoying themselves - or fetishise the forms of collective activity (looting, vandalism etc) rather than what they express. For the most dangerous, the community becomes a vanguard and its limitations are mystified into ideals. Its the common basis of all reactionary politics - nationalism, ghettoeism, sexism, syndicalism, racism - its other defining factor being its failure to attack capitalism at its roots : the destruction of state, commodity economy and social atomisation. However as poverty gets worse even the left can see the need for unemployed organisation. Recently there have been a number of attempts to set up unemployed groups - some by unemployed people themselves, rather more by left groups trying to hop on a slow-moving bandwagon. There's even been a meeting to establish a national federation. More noticeable than these stirrings however is their scarcity and slow growth. This surprises some who look back at the N.U.W.M in the thirties. To some extent this reflects the fact that unemployment is only beginning to have a real effect. To some extent its explained by the cushioning effects discussed above. To them should be added the new circumstances today as opposed to the thirties. The atomisation and destruction of

working class community (through restructuring, urban development, the development of capitalist dominance beyond the productive process into all areas of social life, etc.) reflects itself in the individualisation of much experience of unemployment - reinforced by fortnightly signing (as opposed to daily signing in the thirties), and payment by postal giro (rather than by personal application at the dole office) - all of which has removed a lot of the dole offices function in bringing workers together, out of the use of the workers themselves. (It was around meetings outside dole offices and the possibility of ready solidarity with grievances that much of the NUWM's basic organisation was erected.)

Leftist rhetoric generally conceals an ideological defence of one or other form of capitalism. But the militant defence of benefit rights (challenging wrong assessments of entitlement, resisting harassment by D.H.S.S cops etc.) often collapses into self managed 'social workerism'. The Claimants Union movement for example, at the start of the seventies caved-into respectability within the fringes of 'voluntary' social work - staffed by trainee 'social workers' looking for an 'alternative' career. The organisation of the unemployed for themselves, by themselves, isn't enough to guarantee any kind of 'autonomy' - but it's the indispensable condition for any 'autonomous activity' which is the basic need.

As real poverty begins to erupt it will become more and more vital that the unemployed organise themselves, most basically, as a matter of self-defence. The almost complete lack of response to the lefts initiatives 'into' unemployment is no surprise. But rejection musn't lead to ghettoisation or renewed fatalism. The unemployed must learn to help themselves on a collective basis, to understand that the solution to the misery of unemployment isn't found in the misery of employment, and to work out the basis of the only possible solution to poverty - the dissolution of the system that produces it.

D.T

That article like the one that follows was prepared as a presentation for an LWG meeting - which thanks to a typical LWG error never took place. Hopefully it will be rescheduled to take place soon (only this time with some advertising).

Unemployment and Organisation

Perhaps the bosses will start recruiting again, some time in the future. Whether they recruit workers into factories or soldiers to fight another war all depends on what becomes of this 'upturn' they keep telling us about. But either way, there are going to be less jobs in the future than there are now, and many workers who once expected to earn a wage will have to learn to expect something different.

Division The government already knows this, and is looking for ways of keeping as many people as it can out of the unemployment figures - Youth Opportunity Programmes, disqualifying as many workers from benefits as possible, paying 16-year-olds to stay on at school. At the same time it is saying that from now on 1½ million unemployed will be normal, 4 million acceptable. Their long term strategy is to restore profits by restoring the working class to poverty, by whatever means are necessary. At the moment this means reducing the size and bargaining power of the workforce, while renewing its onslaught on working class solidarity and culture. The old Keywords are there - Nation, Family, Sacrifice. But this time they are intent on creating a permanent division between waged workers and a new group - unemployed working class men, who will join the ranks of the dependents and the 'lumpen' where once they would have been out winning bread.

Labour Movement The Official Labour Movement has always excluded all but wage-earners. This time around, even the Labour Movement is disintegrating.

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(unemployment and organisation cont)

ating before the eyes of its actual and would-be leaders in the unions and left parties. Their response has been to try to reconstitute their power-base according to a new formula. While campaigning against redundancies in the old industries, they are busy recruiting among the civil service and what used to be called the 'professions'. The campaign against redundancies will be lost, and lost for good, because those industries - power, transport, and so on - will never come back in labour-intensive form.

Corporatism The other branch of the strategy is succeeding. The total affiliate membership of the TUC is growing, because the numbers recruited into new unions in the service industries has more than compensated for those lost from heavy industries. This means that the unions and the left will become more powerful than they are now; the TUC will become a senior partner in the corporate state, fixing wage levels, working hours and generally participating in industrial planning. The left will get a better chance of power by recruiting among the intelligentsia and the unionised middle class, and they will continue to work for more influence in the union bureaucracy.

Class Meanwhile, both will get further away from the majority of the revolutionary class, who will produce less and less in the way of commodities, and get poorer in relation to their privileged cousins in waged work.

Price of Labour In the past, we had the right to work. It was even our duty if we were fit and times were good. Now, we have the Right to Work Campaign, which aims to persuade the TUC to take responsibility for the unemployed. When the TUC has set up an unemployed workers union, it will have a monopoly of the skilled labour market. It will be able to fix the price of labour, and demand work-sharing agreements. This is the

ideal of reformists. Everyone gets some work. Instead of being either alienated or broke, we'll have a little of each. And this, remember, is if they succeed; if they don't, then many of us face the prospect of 24-hour leisure without autonomy.

Revolution Revolutionaries have always known that the society we wanted was one where work had been abolished; that is to say, one where we did not slave for wages; where the things we made were for our use, not for sale or possession; where our use of what we made was voluntary, not compulsory or 'consumptive', or just another version of work. This isn't a utopian dream, but a minimum requirement which we could fulfill using means that already exist, but which are monopolised by the ruling class and used to exploit us.

Dependence In the past, we were more or less dependent on waged work or someone in it. Without it we starved. High unemployment was high unemployment. Now, we face permanent Non-employment - the prospect of being out of a job for good.

Non-Employment So the unemployed have less in common with wage-earners than they did before. As always, wage-earners have to work harder and longer to maintain their standard of living. And as always, some unemployed will offer their labour on the cheap. But this time, the levels of employment and unemployment are not directly linked; there is a permanent pool of non-employed people, mainly young, who have no immediate prospect of getting any work at all. Eventually they will be absorbed out of the unemployment figures, along with those over 55, but in the end there will be fewer wage-earners, more dependents, and less to go around. In future, it will not be 'normal' to earn a wage if you are a man between 16 and 65.

Unity Undermined Once there might have been a lot

(unemployment and organisation cont)

of sense in promoting unity between workers and unemployed to obtain more jobs. Now, it is pretty certain that there aren't going to be any more jobs, ever. Because of the non-employed, the argument that one persons wage rises cost anothers job has become completely open-ended: even in times of relatively high employment, there will always be enough on the dole to undermine wage claims. The bosses are attempting to create the possibility of long-term wage cutting, while we are faced with no choice at all ; we can take one wage-cut, accept one speed-up, but we face redundancy anyway if we won't take any more.

Job-Sharing The only reform we can get to prevent this happening is job-sharing on a mass scale, administered presumably by union branches in conjunction with bosses organisations. We could all work, if we only work 4 hours, for 4 hours wages. But theres no chance of permanently improving our 'standard of living'. Those days are over.

Poverty This is why waged workers and the unemployed have no reform worth fighting for together. If we asked for more jobs we wouldn't get them. If we got work-sharing we wouldn't be significantly better off. Co-unionising wage-earners and the unemployed makes little sense in the long term, **because any attempt to increase employment or share out the work will have little impact on the real problem, which is not lack of jobs but poverty.** Poverty is what we are forced to bear under capitalism, and the solution to poverty is revolution. As long as there is work there will be poverty. It is not callous or reactionary to say, Fight for the Right Not to work ; on the contrary, it is the only realistic attitude we can take. Again, it is not a utopian dream, but a minimum requirement.

employed young people, but although it was good for some peoples morale and solidarity it failed to gather in large numbers of working-class school-leavers. This is because its backers misunderstand young peoples attitudes to work. Not many young people are starving, not many are demoralised. They have not suffered the 'loss of pride' we are told afflicts middle-aged unemployed breadwinners. They may hate being broke, but there isn't much enthusiasm for the lefts prescription, which is fighting, marching, begging for more jobs.

Autonomous Groups The movement for autonomous revolutionary groups has only just appeared in this country. But it is **the** only prospect we have of creating genuine revolutionary solidarity along side the campaigns to stop sackings, campaigns to stop wage-cuts, campaigns to improve benefits, all of which are losing. Groups like LWG must continue to try and set up autonomous groups in workplaces, to spread revolutionary ideas, to organise independently of unions and parties. But ~~there~~ must also develop an autonomous movement among the unemployed and non-employed ; not, primarily, to fight the lost battle against redundancies, or to demand more work, but to promote revolutionary change, to help those who absolutely need wages to get them, to resist the poverty of the rest by any means, legal or illegal ; and to organise co-ordinated actions with waged-workers and other non-employed groups.

Scumboni

Campaign Doesn't Work. The Right to Work
Campaign recruited hard among unem-

Conference report :

London Unemployed Peoples Conference 5th April

The motive behind the conference was to get unemployed groups, centres and individuals together to set up a London Federation of Unemployed Groups - which is about all it did do. Discussion was limited, the more vocal preferring to simply make dogmatic statements and get angry with each other, meanwhile annoying those who were interested in passing information about what groups are actually doing. The Right to Work campaign suffered badly in this respect. An interesting discussion of unemployed women organising autonomously was frustrated by left patriarchy proclaiming the absolute necessity for women to struggle with them.

It was refreshing to see the unaligned at the conference rejecting the Right to Work both as a group and a slogan. More interesting was the attitude to Trade Unions. The left peddled the line that the unemployed should join a union to propose motions concerning employment at branch meetings. The conference made it clear that the TUC should have no say in the running of unemployment groups and rejected the idea that all groups should acquire a place on their local Trades Council.

The talk became increasingly meaningless as little attempt was made to relate spoken words to what groups or the Federation were actually, or could be, doing. There was no discussion about how the unemployed could struggle with those in work other than left-dominated sloganising about forming

an Unemployed Workers Union and affiliating to the TUC.

After the vote to set up the Federation time ran out and another delegate conference has to be arranged to discuss 'aims and objectives'; as throughout this conference, no mention of discussing tactics. While this conference should be more rewarding, the games have already started. The Right to Work Campaign, who had not realised a Federation was being formed at the meeting and had no mandate to vote for it, were overheard planning: "If I can't be a delegate from North London I'll say I'm from a North West London group." Watch this space....

"Scrounger".

A slightly shortened version of the following article was circulated at the conference referred to above by members of the Southwark Unemployed Peoples Action Group, who run an Unemployed Centre at 6 Peckham High Street, Peckham, S.E.15.

Some Thoughts On Autonomy

Up to now most attempts to organise the unemployed have been initiated by either those with jobs or those in some way hoping to lead the struggle, with the aim of getting the unemployed to appeal for work by joining various campaigns. The common concern for unemployment shared by the TUC, Labour Party and Right to Work is that of recruitment. There is little provision for encouraging and allowing the unemployed to organise themselves. We believe that it is vital for the emerging unemployed centres/groups to assert their autonomy, to talk, think and struggle as ourselves not an appendage to the plans of others.

(Cont. Over)

(some thoughts on autonomy cont.)

Unemployment groups need, initially, access to resources, but offers should only be accepted on clear condition that access is free and unhindered. An important function of unemployment centres is for the unemployed to organise them. Unemployment Centres are not there for social workers to give them help. Acting on a collective basis we must provide our own help and support each other. Our task is not to lead the unemployed but to encourage participation in action that everyone can decide upon. Discussion should not be just about what to do but also what we want; specifically a questioning of the nature of work. SUPA (Southwark Unemployed Peoples Action Group) are involved in the Hays Wharf campaign not because we think we can win the enquiry but because it gave us a focal point for discussion about ourselves and our experience; what sort of jobs we do or do not want; relating unemployment to what is going on in the community. Unemployed groups should not act as just a campaign centre but a meeting place where those without jobs can talk about attitudes to work and alternatives within unemployment.

The most damaging illusion fostered by the right to work mentality is that capitalism will surrender after a siege by the unemployed. What it has resulted in is the unemployed laying siege to those with jobs and competing for work. It is the right to work and not the fact of unemployment that has given capitalism the upper hand; the boss can intimidate workers to accept a low wage rise by pointing to 2½ million who will accept it. It is essential that the unemployed act directly as unemployed people and not people wanting a hand-out of a job. This is even more important when considering who will form the basis of an unemployed group - not the young skilled and mobile but the 'old' 'disabled' 'workshy' or whose personal circumstances prevent them from working. We must assert our

autonomy from the labour market as a necessary assertion of autonomy from TUs and party political bosses - the would-be managers of labour and capital.

Given the current situation, we cannot rely on those with jobs to provide solutions to our problems. Firstly we cannot accept sacrifices from those in work: to take short time working or overtime bans and hence a cut in already low pay in the hope it will create more jobs - spreading out the misery of shitty pay and working conditions to more people. The current report of the working (sic) of the YOP is bad enough. Secondly the TU belief that a show of industrial muscle will create work is absurd. Those in employment are scared, accepting low pay rises in an attempt to keep jobs. There are few signs of willingness to act, and when it does arise it is a reaction to redundancies already announced. The unemployed should welcome support but cannot rely on it. It is more important for workers to struggle in their own workplaces and join the unemployed in reciprocal acts of direct action (see below) with the common slogan "Not The Right To Work But The Fight To Live".

The autonomous nature of a group will prove or disprove itself through activity. As a few pointers - tactics must be clear but flexible and must develop through the practice of struggle. The focus is initially on local struggle but with the ability to realise when the 'local' becomes general. Joint action must be coordinated by autonomous groups themselves. Autonomy is meaningless if no consideration is given to a future self-managed society, but we must not get so involved with talking about the long term as to ignore the day to day, admittedly reformist struggle for better benefits, facilities etc. Even so, it is preferable for us to negotiate for more money, free use, than for them

(some thoughts on autonomy cont.)

(be they political, TU or industrial bosses) to grant a few jobs. Better still, given that autonomous organisation has the aim of by-passing or ignoring official channels, is to form links with workers so that they give a free ride, free entry, free service etc. to the unemployed (the unemployed being a good start to extend the principle to others in future). This would cut out lengthy negotiation with authorities ; they dont grant **us** concessions, we take what we want, what we need. As a tactic in this direction, what about the unemployed going as a mass group onto buses, into facilities and arguing entry for nothing. If this fails occupy the place and open up the facilities for free use.

Action by the unemployed will only prove effective when the unemployed cease to be a group within the organisations of others, within the TUC or political parties. But that is not to say that we struggle as a single category ; we need to unite with other, preferably autonomous, groups - workers, women minorities - organised in terms of their own situations. The unemployed can readily link, for the purpose of mass action, with claimants and non-waged, with OAPs, single parents, the disabled. There are the hidden unemployed, housewives, those on short time working, youngsters on YOP. We can build links with the employed, for it is us the unemployed, and not TU or party leaders, who know what it is like to be unemployed. While we have no shop-floor to organise around we do have our neighborhood. All these links can be a start to breaking down the divisions between employment and unemployment, work and leisure, workplace and community. As important is the need to federate with other unemployed groups, a Federation being for contact not control, to exchange information and learn from each other, and also to facilitate more structured dialogue to provide a stronger basis for coordinated

action ; something very much lacking at the moment, something that we must put right at this conference.

We're giving a group listing for those London unemployed groups we know about. Better stress that we know little or nothing of most of them. Where we do know about them we've added comments. This isn't to put you off (we might be completely wrong for instance) but to give you some idea of what to expect. The differences between groups are immense - some are like bad dreams : Trot. fronts of different types, groups to help people adjust to less money on the dole (where to shop cheaply rather than where to steal easily), amateur social workers etc. And the professed aims are very various indeed. However theres nothing to stop you trying to make something out of them since they're all very recent in origin and won't be too set in their ways (well some of them anyway...)

Lambeth employment group
23 Herowtown Road
London S.W.9

Lewisham unemployed action group
c/o The Albany
179 Deptford High St.
S.E.8

Richmond unemployed group
c/o Richmond Adult College
Parkshott
Richmond
Surrey

Harlow Unemployed Workers
Organisation
144 Churchfields
Harlow

Haringey and Islington Claimants
Union
Crouch Hill Recreation Centre
Hillside Road
N.19

(not an unemployed group obviously
but advice/assistance. Meet
Mondays 7pm Wed. 2pm)
(Cont. Over)

(list of unemployed groups cont.)

Book Review

Southwark Unemployed Peoples Action Group

6 Peckham High Street
London S.E.15

(see need for unemployed to fight for selves around own conditions and broader community issues. Centre at above address open Tue, Wed, Thurs : 12-3pm Mondays open for women only. Contact Phone : 732 5727)

Lambeth Unemployed Workers Group

c/o Vassel Neighbourhood Centre
147 Brixton High Road
London S.W.9

(Front for R.C.T - who are hard core trots. Activist based but tied to R.C.T campaigning)

Greenwich Action Group on Unemployment

c/o 105 Plumstead High St.
London S.E.18

(Im told they're geared to alignment with, though not control by, Trades Councils. Instrumental in proposing idea of a federation)

Mary Ward Self Help Unemployed Group

c/o Mary Ward Centre
9 Tavistock Place
London W.C.1

(essentially a mutual aid group linked to campaigning for better provisions for unemployed)

East London Claimants Union

c/o Dame Collet House
Ben Jonson House
London E.1

(Longstanding Claimants Union only work around individuals problems though also act as pressure group for claimants rights)

Theres also an Islington group which has held a number of public meetings and filmshows, but I've lost the address. They meet at the library in Holloway Road on Thurs. afternoons I think.

If you know of other groups, or if any of the above is wrong please let us know.

In And Against The State.

by London-Edinburgh Week-End Return Group.

(1st.Ed. CSE Books, 2nd.Ed. Pluto Press 1980)

Despite its flaws, In and Against the State is a useful discussion of cut-backs and restructuring in the welfare state, and the possibilities for attack this process affords both state workers and state "clients". Having been employed primarily by hospitals and libraries as a clerical worker, the ideas and problems posed by the book have been of interest to me for a long time. In and Against the State was first published as a pamphlet in 1979 ; the new Pluto Press edition contains a long postscript, minor alterations, and not as many pictures. On the whole it is clearly written, with a minimum of esoteric leftist jargon.

The authors explore the contradictions of a situation in which we depend upon state services, yet are oppressed by them : "We seem to need things from the state, such as childcare, houses, medical treatment. But what we are given is shoddy or penny pinching, and comes to us in a way that seems to limit our freedom, reduce the control we have over our lives." "Most off the left has been exhorting us to "Defend our health service/schools/public housing etc.but people obviously haven't caught on", even though it's getting more and more difficult to get by. Coming to grips with the phenomenon of working class people who don't join cuts campaigns and vote Tory, the authors don't dismiss it as merely as a bit of "false consciousness" on the part of the backward masses. These attitudes are "an accurate reflection of their real experience of social democracy and its promise of reform through the state..... they are prepared to go along, for their own reasons, with the current ruling class rejection of the expanding state."

And now at last - an article that ISN'T ABOUT UNEMPLOYMENT !!!

(Cont. on Page 13)

REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON INEQUALITIES IN HEALTH: FOREWORD

The Working Group on Inequalities in Health was set up in 1977, on the initiative of my predecessor as Secretary of State, under the Chairmanship of Sir Douglas Black, to review information about differences in health status between the social classes; to consider possible causes and the implications for policy; and to suggest further research.

The Group was given a formidable task, and Sir Douglas and his colleagues deserve thanks for seeing the work through, and for the thoroughness with which they have surveyed the considerable literature on the subject. As they make clear, the influences at work in explaining the relative health experience of different parts of our society are many and inter-related; and, while it is disappointing that the Group were unable to make greater progress in disentangling the various causes of inequalities in health, the difficulties they experienced are perhaps no surprise given current measurement techniques.

It will come as a disappointment to many that over long periods since the inception of the NHS there is generally little sign of health inequalities in Britain actually diminishing and, in some cases, they may be increasing. It will be seen that the Group has reached the view that the causes of health inequalities are so deep rooted that only a major and wide-ranging programme of public expenditure is capable of altering the pattern. I must make it clear that additional expenditure on the scale which could result from the report's recommendations - the amount involved could be upwards of £2 billion a year - is quite unrealistic in present or any foreseeable economic circumstances, quite apart from any judgement that may be formed of the effectiveness of such expenditure in dealing with the problems identified. I cannot, therefore, endorse the Group's recommendations. I am making the report available for discussion, but without any commitment by the Government to its proposals.

PATRICK JENKIN
Secretary of State for
Social Services

August 1980

Welfare State ? (or well leaked old mole)

The above is a (poor) reprint of the introduction to the Report of the DHSS research working group into Inequalities in Health, headed by Sir Douglas Black. (Known as the Black Report). Dated August 1980, it has never been published by the govt. only circulated to a number of "top" people. The introduction by Patrick Jenkin, Secretary of State for Social Services states: "It will come as a disappointment to many that over long periods since the inception of the NHS there is generally little sign of health inequalities in Britain actually diminishing and in some cases may be increasing" This and the fact that the group recommended a "wide-ranging programme of public expenditure" which "could be upwards of £2 Billion a year" indicate why the report has never been published but had to be leaked to the LWG by a mole. Three extracts: "Mortality tends to rise inversely with falling occupational rank and status, for both sexes and at all ages. Managers live longest, unskilled working class men shortest..." "Middle class patients receive a better service when they do present themselves (to G.Ps) than working class patients." "At birth and in the first month of life twice as many babies of unskilled manual parents as of professional parents die and in the next 11 months of life four times as many girls and five times as many boys die respectively...." "Rates of long standing illness rise with falling socio-economic status and tend to be twice as high among unskilled manual males and about two and a half times as high among unskilled manual females as the professional classes. If severe long standing illness is isolated from long standing illness then the poorer groups are found to be at a still greater disadvantage. Rates of sickness and absence from work are also widely unequal..."

(In and Against the State Cont.)

Capital Cuts the Overhead

In other wor-

ds, the schools/health service/council estates and what have you are not "ours". The "attack on the welfare state" is not simply those nasty Tories putting their axe to the fruits of working class struggle. Capital is cutting the overhead costs of social control and reproduction, "a change in certain forms of domination and control by the ruling class". Developed partially in response to working class militancy, the welfare state grants some important material concessions for the expressed purpose of containing social tensions and increasing "national efficiency" (see the Beveridge Report). Welfare expenditure has been an important part of reproducing the labour force; and of ensuring control over those workers whose "services" are no longer needed, through the payment of minimal subsistence combined with punitive and bureaucratic sanctions. As people are forced to negotiate, compete, and otherwise hassle for the "benefits" necessary to survive, the state pushes "the oppression and fragmentation implicit in state organisation deep into the texture of society".

Though state expenditure has been important for the survival of late capitalism during a period of expansion, the state capitalist economy at this point can no longer afford these measures. Cuts in the public sector must be made at least until restructuration is carried out and profitability restored. Trapped into the polarities of capitalist ideology, the left has adopted the position of defending oppressive institutions and discredited reformist solutions. Meanwhile, the opportunity to go beyond the defensive is ripe: "If the expansion of the state was important in ensuring political stability, then it is clear that its contraction involves certain risks for capital. This is what we must try to exploit." In order to do this, we must rethink the nature

of the state and organise in new ways. The parties and the trade unions have proven useless in getting us out of this deadlock, and (I would add) in fact, perpetuate it.

Workers For The State

One part of the book

contains interviews with individuals whose work is connected with the state. The authors hope to discuss some of the problems that arise in connection with their jobs and concrete ways these workers can act against the social relations their work is meant to reinforce in some way. The interviews include: a bus conductor, teachers, advice centre and community workers, a single mother of a large family who depends on state services, and (!) left Labour councillors (!!!). Here lies a major deficiency of the book. Using the vague category of state or public sector workers, the authors blur essential points of conflict or difference between groups within this category. And except for the bus driver and the mother, "professional" workers are emphasised throughout the book. The authors claim the cuts, rationalisation and the industrialisation of the public sector places professionals like them in roughly the same position as workers for private capital, and has resulted in them seeing themselves as "part of the working class movement".

They acknowledge the deficiencies of the book in regard to clerical and manual workers, but claim their major point would still be relevant. However, the relationship between professionals, clerical and manual workers still remains a problem, as someone once employed as a secretary to a bunch of snotty social workers can tell you. In most cases, divisions are artificial and need to be broken down in the course of struggle. But under no circumstances would I consider a Labour councillor to be in the same boat as a cook in a hospital canteen, a typist, a nurse, or a bus driver. And I'm not just talking about high wages

(Cont. Over)

(In and Against the State Cont.)

or low wages, but class terms. As one of the lefty labourites admits:

"Whatever we are doing at the moment is within this capitalist framework, anything you do will contain reformist and reactionary elements. And the way we as councillors relate to our workforce is through very traditional management/worker channels..... I think we are, after all, out to get as much as we can for our money, to get the best services possible. We are not for allowing every worker in the town hall to take 4 days holiday a week just because we've got a left wing council" (38-39)

No matter how leftist the local councillors may be, they act within

the limitations posed by the central government and access to capital. They'll impose the same austerity, perhaps trying to be a little nicer about it. The extremely nice councillors of Poplar and Clay Cross - held up as a cautious example by the authors - got put out of office and in the nick; and direct, popular resistance was none the stronger.

Resistance and Social Strikes

On the whole, the authors do look to new forms of action outside the unions and the parties, to simultaneously fight back and push forward oppositional forms of organisation that can threaten capitalist social relations. Resistance - sabotage, truancy, refusal to pay, women walking out of oppressive marriages - which take place outside the traditional forms, is all around. Trade unions, parties, and "existing socialist institutions" fail to "perceive, much less help collectivise, all the thousand acts of everyday resistance" (and may actively repress them, I'd add). Traditional trade union organisation and strike action have been particularly ineffective in the public sector. In this case, work which overlaps with community needs can provide a bridge for broad, class-based resistance to austerity

and the authoritarian organisation of most services. Actions taking this into account have been described as "social strikes", as opposed to particularistic, purely economic strikes.

One example of social strike action which had been widely used in Italy - and is beginning to be considered in Britain - would be the refusal of bus conductors to collect fares. ((within days of this article being written, rail workers in Manchester decided to do just that - typists intervention)) This has the same economic impact as a strike, but also encourages public resistance to rising fares or having to pay fares at all. Another new form of action developed in the past couple of years in Britain has been hospital work-ins or occupations while opposing closures. These actions have changed hierarchical relationships among the hospital workers, challenged medical privilege, and raised questions about the nature of the health care under capitalism. Among the other tactics discussed in the book: refusal to recognise hierarchies, introduction of collective decision making, and developing new relationships with "clients". The authors state the limitations: "we need our jobs and any action which poses any real threat to the state will probably lead to attempts to get rid of us", though hopefully such attempts could be collectively opposed. Again, a lot of the discussion is relevant mainly to "professionals". While they assert "counter-organisation" is not a substitute for revolution, the book does not succeed entirely in superceding the politics of the "community work" left.

In and Against The Left ?

In and Against

the State has inevitably been compared to Beyond the Fragments. The histories are similar: the pamphlet with a cult following becomes a book. There hasn't been an In and Against conference yet, though a number of meetings have taken place. Like BYF, the authors

(In and Against the State Cont.)

apparently come from a fairly traditional leftist background which they now look at critically and believe to be inadequate to the current situation. At times they share the major drawback of the BYF perspective ; which offers a shallow critique of the organisational forms of left institutions without discussing their ideological function in the capitalist crisis. In their account, it appears to be almost a simple mistake in strategy that leads the left to a knee-jerk defence of welfare capitalism, or ignore the implications of sabotage or absenteeism on the assembly line. The criticism they offer of trade union and party organisation doesn't take into account the way these institutions may actively deflect or suppress autonomous resistance ; for them the left just fails to organise this resistance.

Block The Process

However, In and Against is not as glib and opportunist as BYF. They make an honest attempt to confront the problems involved in their position as public sector "professionals", and offer some useful, concrete ideas. The pamphlet, after all, was conceived as a series of "discussion notes", not the proclamation of a new movement. Though I'm always suspicious of manifestos by social workers declaring themselves to be revolutionary (remember, I've worked for them !), the book makes worthwhile suggestions on how some public sector professionals can organise in their workplace to impair repressive state functions. Despite its neglect of the non-professional sections of state employees, In and Against begins an examination of tactics and possibilities which can be relevant to them as well. Most important, the book provides a long over-due critique of many anti-cuts campaigns which use simply defensive, ultimately reactionary rhetoric, and direct most of their appeals to trade union officials and the Labour left.

No More Dreary Campaigns

The fact that

anti-cuts campaigns have often operated (and failed) this way does not necessarily limit all opposition to the cuts to such a terrain. Austerity, the generalisation of the crisis throughout society, affects not only living standards but the degree of control we have over our everyday life. In addition to speed-ups and imposed overtime in the workplace, it is part of an across the board attempt to make us work harder, to place yet more of our time at capital's disposal. Cutbacks in childcare and geriatric services reinforce the nuclear family and the subordinate, isolated position of women in the home. Within its limitations In and Against suggests some means of departure from the usual run of dreary "campaigns" removed from the daily struggle against this condition. It remains up to us to develop the means to subvert every service we "defend" - blocking the restructuring process at every opportunity, claiming as much as possible for ourselves and taking it over.

Rosanne

Who is Paying ?

For those who are slow in realising the extent to which the poor are having to bail out the rich in the current economic crisis - heres another example. You know how we're all having to tighten our belts and pay higher rates - well predictably some of us will be tightening our belts less than others.

The Dept. of the Environment has posted a circular to numerous businessmen telling them how "you could get your rate bill cut". If your home is also your business premises or your work place, you can qualify to pay domestic rates rather than the higher business rate. This benefit is being made

easier to obtain. The change is "Generally speaking, if you live in more than one eighth of the building, you'll qualify for Rate Relief. Before, you had to live in more than one half." Strangely, I can't remember the press headlining this rates reduction...

DoE Mole

Job Report :

Librarians Against Literacy.

Much radical literature is on the theme of community control, be it medical self-help, legal self-defence, housing etc. All this (of course) presumes that the people concerned can get at the information that is needed to work within their area(s) of concern. Indeed, many self-help groups exist, and many individuals do have the knowledge about how they obtain information, but for many the expression 'go to the library' (to find out) is the best help that they will receive. However, perhaps that is the start of the problem, for the way in which public-libraries operate, and the way in which library staff are trained and expected to do their job can be seen as a problem area. This opinion is based upon the experience of working within the public-library system.

If one is to understand just why libraries are not in the business of helping people to help themselves, encouraging self-education, or indeed any study, then one must look at the structure in which the public library system operates. Firstly it must be understood that libraries, as part of 'local government' have many petty and frustrating problems to overcome which are common to all local govt. departments. Within a journal for radicals, I assume that I do not have to elaborate this, except to state that even without this albatross tugging at ones throat, then there's an elaborate hierarchical system within libraries that is part of a very long and dishonourable tradition. In fact, the

moves that have been made over the last few years to make libraries a "Graduate Profession" have widened the hierarchy out even further, and so lead to a frustration and despair of ever making the present public library service better. To give an example of this inherent attitude, there are 'senior' and 'junior' staff - i.e. professional and non-professional staff. This means that the professional staff take more money for the 'responsibilities' held, while one must conclude that the non-professionals are paid to be irresponsible. So, because of this professionalism kick, there are jobs that are for 'senior' staff only. However, this does not work out in practice, for many jobs marked 'professional' are handed over to non-professional staff to do. That is, we have para-professionals who do professional work, but who's salaries are not enhanced as a result. If there were a refusal to do jobs which staff were not being paid for, then many libraries would have long queues at all desks and very limited services. However, there exists a tradition of "Public Service" which has done much to undermine this from ever happening. The instigation of collectives within the public libraries would help, but that would solve only part of the problem.

Books or Circuses

One of the major problems facing the public library system, is about just what libraries exist for. This comes down to a battle between those who believe that libraries are for leisure and entertainment, and those who would argue that libraries should be providing (before all else) help with information and for education. The literature on this conflict is enormous, but with increasing repression, recession and cuts in education budgets, then we could do without the entertainment aspects (at least for some while to come). For example, cuts are being made in the education department budgets and so there is an increased demand for text-books. Yet money is spent in buying multiple copies

(librarians against literacy cont.)

from the best-seller lists, while money for more than one copy of standard text-books is not to be found. Here again, the elitist way in which book selection is done, means those who might know the needs within the area for specific types of literature (or information), are not necessarily the people that select the works that are to be purchased, while long waiting lists appear for specific titles. The increasing centralisation of administration within libraries, is another aspect of the same problem.

As stated already, a professional hierarchy exists within libraries. In comparing like with like, one could state that a membership of the libraries association (the L.A) is almost equivalent to the membership of doctors in the B.M.A. Both are self-perpetuating elites, which function to create a mystique about their work, and so help to boost their status and salaries. Given time and patience, the mysteries of catalogues, classification systems of information (dewey) etc, could be mastered by anyone. However if one wanders into ones local (if not all) libraries, then one will find it difficult to gain the information as to just how books are arranged upon the shelves. Indeed, many people are often surprised to find fiction arranged on the shelves in alphabetic order !! So how can they ever be expected to understand such as dewey, if it is surrounded with such a mystique. One answer could be that it is taught in the schools, but that is another question altogether.

I could continue in like vain, but the frustrations that one faces within such a system are many. Sitting around the staff-room, day after day, while what was on the T.V. the night before is talked about, does not lead to having a high regard for the intellectualism of fellow staff ; or for their knowledge of literature. While

there exists moves towards the creation of a 'graduate' profession', then there will be even less librarians that will encourage such bodies as for example the W.E.A., or who will appreciate the movement for self-education which created the social climate which enabled public-libraries to come into being.

I have only briefly outlined the framework of frustrations that face one from within the public-library system. The petty-mindedness resulting from 'library-regulations', and by-laws you can imagine. Yet this is not to say that one is not able to help people to help themselves within the public-libraries.....But !!!

Beetle

Correspondence :

The following letter was received in response to articles in our last issue.

Fellow wankers,

In your bulletin number 9 you complain that at the Oxford libertarian conference earlier this year "any attempt to discuss workplace organisation was received with complete apathy ... as usual and in the same discussion document bemoan "the major failure of anarcho-syndicalism is its inability to move beyond the workplace". Is this a rephrasing of the slogan Be realistic demand the impossible !? Any discussion of workplace organising at Ruskin College Oxford University would be "workerist" and for many there "militantism" reeking of the Leftism which you have in the past criticised for manipulating various social questions and recruiting upon the basis of a platform..... in Britain the DAM and IWW as groups have not moved beyond the workplace as they are not yet beyond work (when out of work involuntary like unemployed

(correspondence Cont.)

members are still concerned with getting jobs for various reasons - more money, harrasment by Dole Officials etc) and are concerned about the hours worked, conditions endured etc which is not merely "reformism" but "fighting the day to day struggle" be it "winning a 10 minute longer tea-break (by ourselves)" or "having the union negotiate a shorter working week", even going for a pay increase if you can get away with it. The latter activities are hardly "revolutionary" but do improve confidence and solidarity amongst workers, when Union officials get in the way then a lesson is learnt from direct experience and possibly direct action. Whereas ICC like propaganda which would merely recruit workers upon their agreement with ICC ideology comes across as SWP "revolutionary leadership" - except instead of the trade union vanguard these intelligentsia project themselves as the workers council vanguard.

Both trade union members and the participants in workers assemblies which delegate workers councils during strikes and occupations as well as the workers who support community struggles in their local areas are forced to compete in the haranguing dialectical debates between the Left fractions and run the gauntlet of paper sellers and leaflet distributors which I personally find seems pointless and only the terrain of the recruiting party hacks. The eruption of any dispute at present is swamped with specialists prepared to bring consciousness and whose "openness" refers only to salt-mines for which they apologise in the language of the radical intelligentsia. To find middle-class types wallowing in this opportunism is hardly surprising but the sight of workers aspiring for a career (as a trade union hack/paid official, Party bureaucrat or parliamentarian or local Govt. Councillor as well as the more obvious professional sports star or pop entertainer) parroting the rhetoric of the Left or the

macho stupidity of the Right is discouraging but all the more reason to put up some resistance.

Considering the federal basis of anarcho-syndicalism I see no real conflict between free associations of workers be they Autonomous Workers Groups, or emerging anarcho-syndicalist local workers groups and industrial federations. Pure syndicalism or pure councillism I interpret as pure shit. The goal of libertarian communism does not exclude autonomous organisation as a means or tactic as it is the strategy of the working class acting for itself and no one group can "liberate" themselves without the horizontal co-operation and coordination of other workers. The general strike, movement of occupations and local insurrection will become isolated and manipulated by local politicians and competing Nation States unless extended. The Polish workers choice to support Solidarity at present is I believe to allow open organising of the previously clandestine autonomous (from the Polish State) workers groups.

When the railway workers of West Berlin who are employed by the East German Democratic Socialist State occupied the signal boxes of the railway line that joins the East to the Social Democratic West demanding a union federation similar to Solidarity - that is independent of the existing unions which are headed by East German State Officials they were attacked (gassed and beaten) by a joint East West riot police force supervised by the East and of course the occupying forces in West Berlin (U.S. British French & West German States military personnel). So one can assume that "free unions" are to be as little tolerated in the West as the East or to put it another way the State run unions of the East and the State run unions of the West don't want autonomous workers groups federating into local and industrial organisations. Horizontal coordination against vertical or hierarchical power is the real

(correspondence cont.)

social question and the answer is not pure knowledge...Is knowledge power?...No -action is power...Does knowledge free us? No! action frees us!

P.S

**Councillor Ted Knight
Leader of the Council**

References

Yours

Ours ERK/PAC

LAMBETH

London Borough of Lambeth
Lambeth Town Hall
Brixton Hill London SW2 1RW

A MESSAGE FROM THE LEADER

Dear Colleagues,

As 1980 draws to a close, we find it necessary to inform you that the system in general and our Council in particular have lost a vital spark. False optimism can no longer be sustained as the situation becomes increasingly visible and painful to all concerned. Having assessed the many problems confronting us, we feel that declining worker morale is the major factor in our bleak outlook. And if you are honest, you must admit that often you have taken advantage of the Council to pursue selfish ends.

We purchase from you over half your waking hours, and expect you to relinquish that time to us. Instead we find you continually reclaiming that time for yourselves. You weren't happy with the eight hour day, and now you take — Council average — two hours for lunch and tea breaks, use an average of eight days sick leave a year for your personal holidays, 47% of actual in-office time on personal phone calls, personal letters, errands and chit-chat. We are continually victimised by petty theft (postage, office supplies, equipment, spare parts, tools and petty cash) and employees with access to greater funds have repeatedly attempted embezzlement.

In spite of our efforts to imbue a sense of corporate community and create a dedication that could keep this Council great, you continue to rebuff our efforts towards this end. Only 11% of employees attend after-work functions, 87% have ill-feelings towards their supervisors. Apathy and tension pervades the work atmosphere. We find important letters in the dustbin, documents and plans are flushed down the lavatories, forms are unfiled, and work quotas unfilled.

These are not local problems. Each fact cites finds its counterpart in nearly all modern corporations, both private and public. We are not alone with our problems.

WE HAVE DONE EVERYTHING in our power to improve your lot as employees of the Council, but to no avail. We have tried in many ways to demonstrate our concern for both your professional and private lives, since without your support the system is unworkable. But your petty self-concerns have begun to erode the very basis of your conditions as workers.

WE HAVE DONE OUR BEST to facilitate the methods by which we exploit you. Through the introduction of more humanitarian programmes like flexi-time, and worker participation in meetings at all levels, we have made a genuine effort to reduce your psychic tension and ensure the continuation of the status quo. But have you shown the least interest?

WE HAVE USED YOUR TIME for our ends, and you have daily refused to co-operate. This is why the system is failing. We have done our best to convince you that co-operation is important, but you haven't listened. Now it is too late: we can delude ourselves no longer. The system is failing because you have failed to sacrifice yourselves.

Come to work or don't come to work. Either way, it's too late.

Yours sincerely,

Ted Knight

Circulation of this letter in Lambeth Council offices caused uproar. Local press used 'falling morale' as a stick to beat Ted "marxist" Knight who threatened libel suits and made vain attempts

to discover the source... Meanwhile third issue of Lambeth Nalgo dissidents paper now out. (35p inc. post) from us, or through A. Distribution c/o BCM IT, WC1N 3XX. Strongly Recommended.

Correspondence :

I see there is growing a tendency to talk about the mythical "asambleas" movement in Spain (past) typified in ED's absurd scenario in LWG Bulletin slipped into an article nothing whatever to do with Spain. S/He says :

"During the assembly movement in Spain of 1976-8, militant Spanish workers saw the same logic, and treated the representatives of the reemerging 'independent' unions - the Workers Commissions, the U.G.T and, for that matter, the C.N.T., in the same way they treated the francoist C.N.S. - by expelling them from the assemblies." (LWG Bulletin 9 pg 3)

Asamblea means meeting (any kind) not assembly (which in English suggests an institutionalised formal gathering). There were "meetings" held all over Spain, at different times, and all the time even in illegality. The "assemblies" are mythical.

According to ED, the "assemblies" expelled the various unions "and for that matter the CNT" in the same way "as they did the Francoist CNS". All invention.

(a) The Comisiones Obreras was in any case in the CNS. The UGT and CNT opposed both. The Comisiones wanted to take over the CNS.

(b) The CNT always opposed, and has done so up to now, participating in meetings which elect representatives.

There were many meetings which tried to prevent the continuance of the CNS (successfully). They didn't "expel" anyone else (where from?). The Socialists then created (with the Government) the ludicrously-styled "workers councils" which are Parliaments in the workshop to which the Comisiones and the UGT and other unions put forward representatives, and which "represent" the workers. (The CNT opposes the election of representatives). These councils are then federated via the Moncloa Pact (in a manner similar to the old fascist syndicates) with the employers and the State. Thus

"trade union negotiations" in Spain are conducted ; all else is wildcat and unofficial including everything organised by the CNT.

How this scenario of ED's slips into an article purporting to deal with Poland I cannot understand. Where it comes from is the Trotskyists who at one time (having no contact in the Spanish working class) spoke of a "new movement...the workers assemblies" who did all sorts of wonderful things including the fact that they were held on the factory floor and "included housewives, students, small businessmen" as well.

A.M.

An LWG member replies :

While welcoming the spirit of class struggle, internationalist anarchism which expresses itself here in vigilant solidarity with the Spanish workers movement, I think A.M. raises some points which need refutation. ED may wish to reply concerning the historical detail of his account. I'd like to examine the claim that the assembly movement was a myth, which as it stands is very misleading.

What ED referred to as the assembly movement were the strike committees and General Assemblies set up during the strike waves in Spain 1976-7. To make clear what is being talked about we reproduce ~~opposite~~ two excerpts from an article in the american magazine Root and Branch (No.5 1978).

The experiences provoked some of the participants (and their enthusiasts - genuine and false) to see in the assemblies the ultimate solution to all the problems of organisation and class struggle. This became a politics of "assemblyism" with many contradictory strands. The Root and Branch piece makes some valid

(Cont. after Root & Branch excerpt on Page 24)

Excerpts from : Spain: Some Aspects of the New Workers Movement
reprinted from Root and Branch No.5 (1978).

1. Madrid, January 1976: The Vanguard Left Behind

The crisis of world capitalism struck the Spanish economy especially hard, for its new industries were completely tied to the foreign capital which had been attracted by the high post-war profit rate. By the end of 1975 the unemployment rate was 8% in Spain, and the rate of inflation was the highest in Europe. If we add to this the fact that labor contracts (signed every other year) were up for renewal, it's easy to see why the social situation appeared 'strained,' why the government continually repeated that 'this is a grave moment,' that 'the country is living beyond its means.'

In mid-December 1975, the 'clandestine organizations' called for a 'day of struggle' for amnesty and against the wage freeze; in most of the country, there was little response.* Such calls had become commonplace, and served not so much to invigorate the social movement as to keep the apparatchiki occupied and to dissipate the workers' sense of grievance harmlessly. But in the Madrid region, where strikes had already been going on for several days, the mobilization was extensive, amounting to some 70,000 strikers--too extensive, in fact: far from being absorbed by the 'day of struggle,' the movement took on a momentum of its own.

From January 4 on, strikes broke out everywhere, starting in the large metal-working enterprises of the Madrid region: Chrysler, Helvinator, Electromecanica, etc. On the 5th and 6th, the Métro was paralyzed, the stations occupied by thousands of workers. The police drove them out, but the meetings continued in the churches. The activity of the Métro workers was to be the barometer of the strike movement. The Métro is essential for the functioning of industry, since it transports the workforce: when it stops, the strike becomes an inescapable daily fact. It was here, and in other sectors where workers' struggles have the most decisive consequences for social life (PTT, Renfé), that the rulers of Spanish capital concentrated their efforts in attempting to halt the spread of the movement.**

The strikes extended to the post office, the banks, ITT, and Standard Electric. On the 12th, the construction workers struck; they were at the forefront of autonomous organization. In Madrid alone there were, between the 12th and the 17th, 100,000 strikers in construction, 180,000 in metallurgy, 15,000 in banking and insurance, and 20,000 in public services. The initial demands, very egalitarian, were essentially salarial, "the defense of working-class purchasing power."⁽¹⁾ However, political instability--the end of the Franco period--favored the widening of the struggles; it was the right moment to 'take to the streets.'

"I've never seen anything like the capacity for struggle which I observed in this strike. . . . Concretely, on two occasions at Casa and

I think several times at Standard, the vanguard was left behind. That demonstrated an impressive will to struggle, which frightened not only the employers but also the vanguard, who asked themselves at a certain point where all this was leading, for the workers themselves became the vanguard and, at a certain point, the strike escaped the control of the leaders."⁽²⁾ These words of a union militant sum up the situation. Just when the illegal organizations thought they had gotten control of the workers, the latter spontaneously set themselves into motion, took the initiative and carried out a course of actions independent of the plans of the organizations, and did so in a much more affirmative way than before. "The fundamental characteristic of this strike--one worker said-- was that there was no general strike order, but that it was a process which spread little by little with the incorporation of new sectors and factories."⁽³⁾

The industrial suburbs of Madrid--Getafe, Vallecas, Alcala, Torrejon--were totally paralyzed, and in these new workers' towns the strike went from the factories to the streets, in demonstrations and confrontations with the police. Despite a boycott by the 'clandestine' organizations, the movement also reached other regions: Barcelona, Bajo Llobregat, the Asturias, the construction industry of Valencia, the Renault factories at Valladolid. The extent of the movement was new, as was the fact that it reached not only the large plants where the illegal organizations are entrenched and where there is a tradition of struggle, but also the small factories dominated by passivity and paternalism, which had always been untouched by the 'days of action' called by the illegal unions.

On January 12, when "in almost all sectors, the workers showed themselves ready to go on strike"⁽⁴⁾ and a general strike seemed possible, the illegal union organizations persuaded the Métro workers to go back to work without any of their demands having been met. (The frustration and rebelliousness which such practices on the part of the reformist organizations have provoked among a significant number of workers will no doubt have its effects.) At the same time, repression came down hard and fast. The army intervened in the Métro, PTT and Renfé; eight PTT workers were brought before a military court, and there were mass arrests and about 1,300 firings. The earlier wage demands were replaced by new slogans: rehiring of the fired, an end to police pursuits, freeing of the imprisoned. The turning-point came around the 20th, when the return to work began, though it did not proceed perfectly smoothly. In many cases, penalties were revoked and firings restrained, but wage demands went unanswered. Only in the construction industry did the workers obtain wage increases (on the order of 38%) and improvements in working conditions. The militancy and unity demonstrated in this sector, and the forms of direct action employed by the workers, certainly had something to do with this outcome.

*The "opposition organizations" group the CC.OO., USO, UGT, PCE, PSOE and PSUC, the Socialist and Communist parties and unions (see list of abbreviations).

**Métro = mass transit; PTT = communications; Renfé = railroads.

The Madrid strike wave was the first social upheaval on such a scale of the postwar period. Several months later the insurrectional strike at Vitoria, and more recently the struggle of the Roca workers in Barcelona, showed that Madrid was not an isolated case but a sign of a fundamental change in the relations between the Spanish workers' movement and the illegal organizations, the latter being no longer able to contain the former.

2. Organization and Solidarity in the New Spanish Workers' Movement

For the reformists, the PCE, the political content of any struggle is measured above all by the response which its party slogans (amnesty, democracy) evoke among the workers. But the recent workers' struggles, from the January strike movement in Madrid to the dock workers' and Roca strikes in Barcelona, express a political content, a class consciousness, which goes well beyond party slogans and simple economism. This is especially evident in the area of organization. A new tendency is coming into view, a tendency to make the workers' assemblies the deliberative and directing organ of the struggle, with control over all the actions and decisions of the "workers' representatives."

It has been said of the Madrid strikes: "In general, according to all the information we have received or directly observed, decisions were made in open and democratic General Assemblies (AGs), the union representatives or workers' agents acting as emissaries and negotiators without any definitive decision-making power. Several leaders of union organizations (banks, construction, metallurgy and public sector) were in agreement in affirming that, 'In every case, the assemblies had the prerogative of ratifying or refusing the final decisions.'" (5) A Metro delegate confirms the point: "For me, what was good about this struggle was that the rank and file made an important leap forward in understanding; it was always the masses who negotiated, and it was they who set the pace. We did nothing but negotiate in their name and according to their directives." (6) In the Roca strike, which began in November 1976 and rapidly moved towards a violent confrontation with state power, the use of sovereign assemblies was the crux of the movement. The delegating of power was done exclusively through the AGs, and all the delegates were revocable by them.

"The strike committee was formed by the elected representatives; its function was to develop and apply all the agreements and decisions made by the workers in their periodic Assemblies. The Committee proposed initiatives which were then discussed in the Assemblies. This was scrupulously respected during the conflict, and more than once the Assembly limited, made precise, or disavowed the role and functions of the delegates." (7)

One of the main consequences of this control of the struggle by the rank and file has been to short-circuit the vanguardist organizations which have habitually manipulated the delegates, who often are more their representatives than the workers'. "It is the assemblies which are the vanguard; they are the only real vanguard that I have known in this strike," said a Madrid worker in January 1976. But the danger is far from over, for the traditionalistic groups are capable of adapting to the new

situation, redirecting their manipulative activity towards the assemblies. It is important to avoid taking the tempting step of making a new fetish of the General Assemblies. In the most radical struggles, it is true, they have served as an organizational form which prefigures the emancipation of the working class under socialism. On the other hand, in those movements which proceed along the path marked out by traditional unionism, neither the bourgeoisie nor the 'leftist' parties has anything to fear from the GAs--a fact which has been recognized by the current government which in its newly-proposed law on union activity, institutionalizes the Assembly as a union organ.

Today, even a Stalinist leader of the CC.OO. isn't afraid to say, "Everyone accepts the principle that one must negotiate with the workers elected by the AGs . . . whether they hold union posts or not. . . ." (8) No organizational form, including the GA, can guarantee workers' autonomy. What is essential is the application of certain principles--open discussion, democratic decision-making, revocability of delegates, direct responsibility of all representative bodies to the workers--and for these purposes, appropriate organizational forms such as the Assembly are a necessary but not sufficient condition.

Besides the assemblies, other organizational forms have appeared, always based on the same principles. These 'unofficial representative organs,' as they are called, are elected by the rank-and-file: the 'Committee of Eight' in the postal service, the 'Committee of Seven' for the hospital workers, the 'Leading Committee' in construction and in the banks, the strike committees of the dock workers and the Roca workers. Created in the struggle, these organizations exist only during the struggle. In January 1976, the bank workers were organized on a national scale. Each assembly elected a delegate; these in turn elected a regional committee (15-20 members, in Madrid). The delegates of the various regional committees constituted a national committee, which included "official [union] delegates as well as rank-and-file workers; that is, all those who were elected by the AGs." (9) Similar organizations appeared in November, at Barcelona, with the United Workers' Collectives (CUT). The Madrid construction workers organized for direct action. They elected 'workshop delegates' and formed mobile strike pickets, capable of spreading the strike, of opposing the scabs and the employers' maneuvers at each building site.

At Vittoria, the situation was similar: "Vittoria, in these months from January to March 1976, was a great school of working class unity and solidarity, but above all Vittoria represented for the rest of the working class a movement which brought new ideas. . . . [T]he political structures which appeared here went beyond the orthodox projects of traditional syndicalism. The Workers' Assembly elects its representatives and can revoke them. The Representative Committees are constituted exclusively by these delegates. . . . From the beginning many political militants were part of the committees, but one could see that, at any moment, no political organization had a sufficient following to impose its analysis and strategy. . . . Soon after the conflicts began, the strictly economist positions were already abandoned. . . . [The workers] went so far as to refuse individual

solutions for the various factories.

"Factory assemblies met in the churches and working class neighborhoods; womens' and neighborhood assemblies also proliferated. At a certain point, a situation was reached where the entire population was organized in assemblies, in a type of democracy totally different from formal bourgeois democracy. It was this which Fraga Iribane, then a Minister, underlined when he declared to *Le Monde*, 'What happened then at Vittoria was not simple demonstrations by the workers; it was an insurrection similar to that of May '68.'" (10)

Solidarity between workers from different factories was frequently manifested on a local, and even national, level. In the Madrid movement, solidarity was demonstrated by the way the strikes spread in a chain reaction. Then it appeared in the streets of the working-class suburbs, where demonstrations, occupations, mutual aid and confrontations with the police became daily occurrences. Even in factories where the demands had been met, the workers went back on strike, realizing that more was at stake than their own immediate interests. Entire urban regions experienced moments of social revolt; the most extreme case occurred at Vittoria. Often, strikes broke out in solidarity with fired workers: "All or none," said the strikers at the Roca factories. In this latter instance, the workers explicitly posed the problem of the powerlessness of an isolated struggle. Addressing themselves to their entire class, the Roca workers proposed in their strike bulletin an organizational model based on the assemblies and on coordinated strike action.*

Such political consciousness is limited, however, to a minority of the workers; the majority show no signs of wanting a revolution and remain in the final analysis amenable to the 'reasonable' arguments of the reformists. But it is one thing to acknowledge the minority character of the radical tendencies, and quite another to pretend that movements of such breadth, such thorough-going radicalism, are nothing more than economic conflicts, invested with political significance only by the parties' slogans. For these were not struggles against individual bosses, but against an entire system of social relations, as is made clear in the vivid account of the January movement contained in *Trabajadores en huelga*. Likewise, in Barcelona at the time of the Roca strikes, an entire working-class suburb (Gafa) was thrown into turmoil. The significance of these events should not be minimized.

*The new CNT movement played an important role in spreading the news about the Roca strike, both inside Spain and outside; a meeting was held in Paris in January 1977, in which strikers participated. Such behavior is sufficiently rare to be worthy of special mention.

8. A New Kind of Unionism?

In the 1940's, Anton Pannekoek described the ambiguities of the workers' movement in the following terms: "Whereas in their conscious thinking old watchwords and theories play a role in determining their arguments and opinions, at the moment of decision on which weal and woe depend, a strong intuition of real conditions breaks forth, determining their actions. . . . [T]wo forms of organization and struggle stand opposed, the old one of trade unions and regulated strikes, and the new one of spontaneous strikes and workers' councils. This does not mean that the former at some time will simply be replaced by the latter. Intermediate forms may be conceived, attempts to correct the evils and weaknesses of trade unionism while preserving its valid principles. . . . An example of such a union may be found in the great American union, 'Industrial Workers of the World' . . . Similar forms of struggle and organization may arise elsewhere, when in big strikes the workers stand up, without as yet having the necessary self-confidence to take matters entirely into their hands. But only as temporary transitional forms." (43)

Pannekoek might just as well be describing the current situation in Spain. The spontaneous action of the rank-and-file and their consistent refusal to submit to outside leadership permit us to see in today's movement the germs of a more radical future. In the Madrid region, in shops where there was no tradition of struggle and where the workforce was often young and female, the workers use the term 'union' to describe any organization which functions on the basis of rank-and-file democracy and revocability of delegates, in a sort of modern renaissance of revolutionary syndicalism.

But for those who believe in the potentially revolutionary character of those forms of organization which stand halfway between the union and the autonomous rank-and-file group, for those who believe in the possibility of 'building a new unionism,' failure is certain--just as certain as it was in Portugal, where the majority of the leftist political movement tried to set up non-reformist 'class unions' starting from the Workers' Commissions. The new forms of organization could flourish only in the context of wide-scale social conflict; when this period came to a close, it was once again the problems of day-to-day survival which preoccupied the workers. Such daily issues can be handled most easily by a traditional union, whose functioning is based on class conciliation, permanent delegation of power, and absence of rank-and-file democracy; and the 'new unions' were forced to adapt themselves to these imperatives. In this game, the CP-controlled unions, with their tight organization and high degree of centralization, hold the winning hand. Those who would organize the CNT as a mass union should be aware that they can only create an insignificant miniature replica of the great reformist unions.

Perhaps for some the PCE's success is appealing. But such 'success' has nothing to offer the revolutionary, for it is predicated on the workers' defeat. Today in Spain, as yesterday in Portugal, Communist reformism develops only after the labor struggles have been smashed. The Party recruits on the basis of defeatism:

'To be a revolutionary gets you nowhere, come to us....' Lest the reader think this an exaggeration, I want to point out an incident that occurred during the December 1976 Renfe strikes: the Communists brought workers fired during other strikes to the mass meetings of the Madrid railroad men . . . to illustrate the consequences of 'irresponsible' and 'thoughtless' action! In the future, we can expect more of the same from the reformist organizations: they will try to keep 'politics' and 'unionism' strictly separated, placate revolutionary desires with reforms, and isolate the movements shop by shop, breaking that sentiment of class solidarity which was so evident in the recent struggles.

For the present, the reformists, whose strength derives from the material and ideological integration of the majority of the workers into capitalism, are in a strong position. The workers' frustration and lack of confidence in their own power may open the way for the 'social peace' desired by the reform bourgeoisie and for the parliamentary democracy desired by the political opposition. Yet we should not write off the prospects for renewed revolutionary struggles. All observers agree that in the conflicts of the last few years the workers have demonstrated a strong capacity for autonomous action, going beyond the bounds of the oppositional apparatus. And there is a radical tendency, small but determined, with a rich tradition and clear anti-capitalist goals, which has firm roots in Spanish society and a significant impact on the workers' struggles. The result of the conflict between this tendency and the reformists will have an importance which is not limited to Spain alone.

The reprint is of sections one and two of the article, and section eight the conclusion.

Root and Branch is a libertarian communist magazine, influenced by Paul Mattick and the American councillist tradition. Well worth reading - if you can get hold of it.

Contact : Root and Branch
P.O. Box 236
Somerville,
MA 02143
U.S.A.

(reply to A.M.'s Letter Cont.)

criticisms of the negative aspects of it. As they rightly point out "No organisational form, including the General Assembly, can guarantee workers autonomy." People who want to read for themselves what the "assemblyist" currents had to say should take a look at the pamphlet Wildcat Spain Encounters Democracy (published by a group who can be contacted through BM, bis London WclV 6XX - thats a box no. address)

Some of it is easy to mock : "The greatest achievement of the assembly movement is the movement itself. The freedom taken by the workers in starting to unite and organise themselves without intermediaries, is the one thing that could neither be granted by the regime nor demanded by its leaders, because today Spanish society is besieged and is falling apart. The assembly movement is the lived freedom of anti-hierarchical dialogue, the realisation of authentic democracy. It is where the revolution feels most at home and where its enemies feel like intruders, now not only denuded but denounced by their ideological jargon. Here all practical problems take form and can be resolved....."

But two points should be made - like enthusiasts of soviets and councils in the twenties, or situationist writings about may 1968, or indeed the writings of anarcho-syndicalists about the spanish collectivisations, its only possible to mock with benefit of hindsight. Its entirely understandable that workers in struggle are blind to limitations out of enthusiasm. Where this enthusiasm persists after the struggle ends and the forms of struggle are fetishised into theories of "assemblies", (or "councils", or "worker-student action committees", or "anarcho-syndicalist unions") it's a different matter. Such pretensions should be deflated, (gently or not according to the circumstances). However there is a clear difference between deflating pretensions - which involves examining the real strengths and

(reply to A.M.'s Letter Cont.)

weaknesses of a movement, and as A.M. does, denying it occurred or that it had significance. When A.M. says that "there were meetings all over Spain, at different times, and all the time" one might imagine that events like those at Vitoria happened every day - which of course is nonsense.

The second point about notions of "assemblyism" is that they're not just the inventions of Trotskyists. The suggestion is a revealing one however. A.M. would be quite right if he said that Trotskyists - like the other 56 varieties of leftist rubbish - attempt to 'capture' strike committees and General Assemblies, in the same way they attempt to capture the phony official "workers councils" (in order not to confuse I will refer to these as works committees hereafter) which A.M. rightly derides.

A.M. draws no distinction, except to imply that "meetings" are of secondary interest to the problems raised by works committees. I think his reference to Trotskyists by contrast reflects the debates within the CNT. The failure to draw distinctions becomes explicable in this context - its possible to try to capture works committees and union apparatus' (even anarcho-syndicalist unions apparatus) in ways which are difficult if not impossible to apply to strike committees or General Assemblies of the type meant in the term assembly. That is, based on 'open discussion, democratic decision making, revocability of delegates, direct responsibility of all representative bodies to the workers' as Root and Branch put it (I think what's meant is clear though one could rightly question some of their phraseology as ambiguous).

For the CNT troskyist entrism was a real problem, though the term seems to have been used to expel a variety of oppositional tendencies in local faction fights. Some of these trots no doubt used "assemblyist" ideas in much the same way that their

Bolshevik pin-ups used "All Power To The Soviets" as a slogan, on a purely tactical basis. Doubtless the assorted clones and droogs of these trots in this country will parrot out the same crap. But none of this leftist trash created the assemblies they talk about, any more than the bolsheviks were capable of creating a single one of the soviets they used as a stepping stone to power. And I cannot believe that the best way to counter that crap is to talk about 'mythical "assemblies"' in a way that can only mislead. Trot. "assemblies" may be myth. The strike wave was fact and so were the various forms of General Assembly and strike committee produced during it. Indeed the experience of these unmythical assemblies was seen as sufficiently profound by Spanish workers and revolutionaries (as well as leftists) to inspire a debate about them. A debate which even inspired the CNT which passed four resolutions on assemblies at its stormy fifth congress in december 1979. (see the translation of the Summary of Resolutions from it in our bulletin No.8). One of them, for example, read: "CNT affiliates can only be represented, in principle, by their own CNT representatives, with the exception that in a free assembly (my emphasis) of all the workers in a workplace these workers decide together to defend agreements which do not go against the tactics and aims of the CNT and which necessitate the direct election of representatives, mandated from the assembly to fulfill specific mandates or requirements of that assembly." Incidentally, unless my understanding or the translation is at fault, this contradicts what A.M. says about the CNT not participating in meetings which elect representatives.

Speaking of the CNT. A.M. asks (with rather calculated ingenueness) what the references to assemblies in Spain had to do with Poland. Well ED's article was about Poland - but as its title (Free Trade Unions - Do We Need

(reply to A.M.'s Letter Cont.)

Them ?) indicated, it also related to the debate within the LWG about the role of unions within capitalism - and specifically, whether Independent or "Free" unions are possible. And the CNT claims to be independent in that sense - of and for workers rather than above them. Root and Branch also tackled this question in the conclusion to their article. I don't entirely agree with everything they say, but I think they're right to say that such independent, 'class' unions "could flourish only in the context of wide-scale social conflict" and that with the end of such a period of conflict workers concerns become problems of day-to-day survival which are dealt with most easily by traditional unions based on "class conciliation, permanent delegation of power, and absence of rank-and-file democracy". (Obviously this breaks down in periods of economic crisis.)

These conclusions seem borne out by what has happened to the CNT - created in the period of intense class struggle that culminated in the strike waves 1976-7, it's been racked with dissension in the subsequent period of low levels of struggle as the effects of world economic recession have begun to bite. Last year indeed it split, and accepting that the splits were as much a matter of circumstance and personality as anything else, they also involved fundamental disagreements over questions of reformism. One argument was whether or not to sign wage contracts on a yearly basis, trading industrial 'peace' for wages. Another was whether or not to elect permanent shop stewards. (As distinct from the mandated delegates referred to in the congress resolution I quoted above.) (See Freedom Review 8 Dec. 1980). However I'm getting carried away from the question of assemblies.

Looking back over what has become an article on assemblies I can see I've let myself become unnecessarily heated at the expense of A.M. The cause of that heat is that his remarks about assemblies touch on an unresolved debate about them at LWG meetings. I don't apologise for using his letter to continue that debate. But I regret if I've read too much of that debate into his letter at the expense of his ideas. If I have I hope he'll write and correct me.

One of the problems with the debate on assemblies at LWG meetings is the failure to define terms. So for some people assembly has become a dirty word where others

use it to mean totally different things. The confusion was begun by the use of the term "mass assembly". For example on a leaflet circulated on the May 14th 'Day of (in-)Action' last year by ourselves and other autonomists and anarchists. (The leaflet was produced by the Krondstadt Kids) :

'workers!..(must)...re-appropriate their own struggles in an autonomous way, outside and against the unions. This autonomous organisation must consist of running the strike from mass assemblies of workers. These assemblies must exercise power in the direction of the strike. Various committees will be needed - elected from mass assemblies, revocable and answerable to them. These committees are not needed to negotiate with the bosses or "independent" inquiries. These committees will be needed to talk to other workers not to the bourgeoisie. They will need to bring together and coordinate the /various assemblies, and to spread the strike outside the individual trade."

I think what is intended is fairly clear - however the use of the term "mass assembly" raises (wholly unnecessary) problems. For most people "mass assembly" already has a meaning - the mass meetings beloved of T.V news where a couple of thousand workers listen to union bureaucrats - or their 'own' shop stewards give them the 'opportunity' to accept or reject whatever offer (read sell out) has been cooked up by management and union(s). This sort of mass meeting has been rightly described in this bulletin as the "domain of the demagogues". Obviously this sort of meeting is not what is meant by the writers of the leaflet above. But no mass meeting of thousands of workers (even hundreds for that matter) can do anything than vote on already prepared motions. What the writers mean is a 'General Assembly' of all the workers in a particular struggle. This should be the body which formulates strike strategy and if necessary delegates committees to effect the decisions arrived at. However strategy can't be even discussed let alone formulated in any kind of mass meeting.

(reply to A.M.'s Letter Cont.)

That must be done at rank and file (that is shop-floor, department, office, etc. as appropriate) level. The General Assembly can only operate once this work at 'base-level' has been done. And it can only operate once the bureaucratic structure ('Platform' 'Audience') of the mass meeting has been swept aside, to allow participation by all. The alternative is to retain the mass meeting but change those on the platform (i.e. change nothing). This is the perspective of the ICC. Thus :

"Union mass meetings...are a device aimed at giving the illusion that the 'rank and file' are making the decisions, when often the vote is a jerry-mandered foregone conclusion.(...)But because these are union mass meetings revolutionaries must attempt to work against the sabotage which is always implicit in any union-organised event. The ideal situation would be that the workers called their own mass meetings outside of the unions control (here we can give the example of Poland). But, just as in any strike there can be a tendency towards autonomy from union control, we understand that even within rigged union meetings/mass meetings the idea that workers can snatch the meeting out of the hands of the union bosses cannot be thrown out as impossible...An example which proves our point is the French Steelworkers taking over the platform from the CGT at Dunkirk..." (World Revolution 33). What can this mean except that 'workers' meaning here the most militant, and 'revolutionary' workers can capture the platform, or better still can call mass meetings of their fellow workers. The Dunkirk example, invariably cited by them at meetings because some of these 'revolutionary' steelworkers forced CGT stewards to admit some ICC members, shows their ambition clearly. To gain access as 'militant' workers or as 'revolutionaries' to mass meetings (better still to call or be invited to the workers 'own' mass meetings) as alternate demagogues. This is the reason for their laughably amateurish attempts

to prepare for such demagoguery, through their soporific 'interventions' 'from the floor' (ideologically speaking from six foot under it of course), at meetings. Including, unfortunately, ours.

The lesson workers can learn from this is not exercising control of their own struggles, but the perfidy of unions - the 'point' of all 'revolutionary intervention' as far as the ICC are concerned.(!) Enough of this leftist-"communist" rubbish.

I hope that enough has been said to make future discussion of assemblies more productive. Certain obvious questions remain to be discussed - the relation of general assemblies to the future organisations created by workers in a revolutionary situation. The difference between them and the various conceptions of workers councils. The fact that in talking of General Assemblies we're talking of something that will only appear when workers have already broken with unionism to the extent that they are active at 'base-level' and determined to control their own struggles. (And thus something quite different to ideas of capturing 'union mass meetings' which is only a new (and more ridiculous) version of SWP style Rank and Fileism - dedicated to capturing the unions themselves.) And related to this, the question of what the abstract notion of assemblies means in practise within different work situations (since we don't all work in car factories or steelworks) and against the background of the actual level of class struggle today.

Anything else is pointless abstraction. Workers have enough shit to contend with, without digging their own, or having so called parties, or 'intellectuals' throwing it at them.

C.O. Jones

STUFF FORTE!



"We treat our people properly, are generous to them and recognise them as people." (Charles Forte)
"Charles Forte can say this while at the same time he runs the company like he's some feudal baron. As the biggest company in the largest industry in this country, he makes sure that wages stay at poverty-level. He exploits the low expectations of women and the immigrant communities, while at the same time smashing any attempt at combination."

"Fortes places dish out the extremes of crap convenience food, particularly in his motorway cafes (and never think that those exorbitant prices go to pay the staff), as well as offering the limits in conspicuous consumption."

"One thing for sure, THF will continue to expand, and with all those extra profits created by the Royal Wedding, Forte or his spawn are guaranteed a peerage."

Never ones to hide our lights under bushels we are proud to reveal for the first time our contribution to the 'Stuff Forte' campaign. At an early stage we discussed with the people organising it the possibility of joint activity. In fact knowing of our assistance to previous groups of catering workers in struggle they approached us. Our response? To date nothing at all!

Anyhow copies of this leaflet or a poster of the picture for fly-posting outside trust house forte establishments are available from us, or c/o Xtra, BCM IT, London, WC1N 3XX.

Stuff Forte!

→ Stuff His Wages

They're a pittance, an insult. We work for the biggest industry in this country, and the worse paid. THF, as the biggest company in catering, makes sure of this.

→ Stuff The Way We Work

The split shifts, pressure, heat, bad accommodation, accidents, unsocial hours and weekend working. Other industries make their bosses pay for these - so should we.

→ Stuff His Food

To THF staff are just costly cattle, and the more they cut back on people (especially skilled) the more profits they make. That is why we are moving towards the factory-produced/microwave-warmed crap. Under THF motorway cafes are the shape of things to come.

→ Stuff His Profits

THF makes massive profits, while at the same time whining that it cannot afford to improve the poverty-level wages in the industry. These profits are made out of us, and we don't want to see them end up in Forte's back pocket.

→ Stuff Him Personally

Everytime that certain mask comes up on TV it makes us want to throw up. To quote Mr C. Forte 'We treat our people properly, are generous to them and recognise them as people.' Judge from your own experiences.

Pôelé Forte

(Roasted in its own juices)

THE UNIONS IN THE LIVES OF THE WORKERS.

The following article about unions appeared in the Portugese paper Combate in April 1977. (Issue 49). The translation is theirs - hence the occasional rather odd turn of phrase. For more of their writings see Issue 5 of the International Discussion Bulletin, which includes their own account of their history. Briefly the paper started in the wave of revolutionary enthusiasm and workers self-activity after a military coup toppled the fascist Salazarist regime in April 1974. Combate was dedicated to publishing verbatim workers own accounts (usually tape recorded in interviews) of what they were doing, why, the problems encountered and the organisational forms they were developing to overcome them. Initially these accounts formed 90% of the paper with 10% editorial comment. However as the "workers committees" were reincorporated and bureaucratised within the reinvigorated state capitalist economy, the paper took a more critical attitude to this trend. The reaction continued apace and workers eventually abandoned the organisations they'd set up and which now acted against them. By 1978 the purpose of the paper - to record the workers own account of their progressive self-activity had gone and it ceased publication. In 1975 members of Combate had opened a bookshop in a working class district of Lisbon, which has operated to this day, distributing and publishing libertarian literature and acting as a meeting place for libertarian and revolutionary groups - its non-commercial and survives on the support of its members. (Rather like Rising Free in London). Footnotes 1,2 & 3 are Combate's. Those indicated by letters (A),(B) etc.) are ours. For more background on Portugal the best book is Phil Mailers 'Portugal. The Impossible Revolution?' published by Solidarity in 1977.

(One)

A worker lives two lives. On the one hand, by force of circumstances, he is forced to struggle against capitalism, attempting to abolish it, and thus creating communism. But he lives another life; surviving under capitalism he is forced to defend himself in the best possible way. The fact that at certain times only one of these lives seems possible doesn't negate the existence of the other. Capitalists are always surprised when, thinking that the workers have resigned themselves to life under capitalism, they see that when a revolutionary crisis opens that the workers clearly take on their other lives; their life against capitalism. Similarly, certain myopic revolutionaries are surprised because they never understood that the life of a worker against capitalism always exists within capitalism.

Before April 25th, 1974, in Portugal, the worker was forced to work and be knuckled under, forced to live almost exclusively just one of these lives, although the struggle against capitalism always existed. But on May 1st 1974 to the great surprise of many of the left parties his second life came into the fore. After April 25th the workers in many firms frontally attacked the entire capitalist system. As long as real possibilities exist workers can dominate the situation and advance.

But when this situation no longer directly exists, as in the present situation of reflux (A), the worker is forced to take sides within the capitalist system, attacking whenever it's possible, defending themselves as much as possible. They are forced to put aside some of their most violent criticisms and change tactics. Contrary to what the official working class vanguards say on the subject, it is the workers who decide strategy for the class (and not just tactics, as the parties would have us believe). The only thing that the parties can decide (and this has been well demonstrated since April 25th) is the question of tactics.

(Two)

After April 25th the workers frontally attacked capitalism and all the organis-

ations which supported it. In this phase they were able to go beyond the trade unions, creating their own organisations - the "workers committees" - and realised that the organisations of the previous phase were of little use to them. The unions, therefore, took on a minor role in the workers struggles. But after November 25th 1975 (B) (and the consequent reinforcement of the state apparatus), real possibilities declined and these organisations, created for a frontal attack on capitalism, began to decline in importance. The bureaucratisation of the "workers committees", after Nov. 25th 1975, results fundamentally from the fact that the aim of these organisations was no longer lived as a real possibility by the workers and they began to look to other forms of organisation which could be more useful to them in this new phase. This doesn't mean that the workers denied the possibility of advancing in the future, but that for the moment, they had to survive as best possible. Because of this, in the present phase, the unions assume an important new role.

The unions present themselves as workers organisations in defence of wages. While the capitalist class attempts to increase surplus-value, the unions attempt to reduce it by wage increases. In terms of absolute surplus value (C) (increase in the working day, decrease of wages etc.) the unions defend the workers against its worst aspects. But there is always that margin which the unions allow, that half-light in which the unions act. Where the unions always concede is in terms of relative surplus value (the modernisation of machinery, increase in production, increase in the work rythm etc.). The unions support the capitalist class when they increase relative surplus value. Its here that they show their true reactionary nature. Unions can support bosses who want to close factories, they allow (and even demand) the necessary reorganisation of productivity and more relative surplus value. The mere fact that under capitalism, they constitute the main force against absolute surplus value allows them to be turned into instruments for the achievement of relative

surplus value. In this their ultimate aim is exactly the same as the mode of production in which they exist.

This capitalist integration of unions as one of the fundamental supports follows from the form of union organisation. The unions reproduce internally all the dominant hierarchies of capitalism, they cultivate the passivity of their members in the face of the 'monopoly' of the representatives as regards any decisions to be taken. They are one of the pieces which makes capitalism a system where some produce without managing and others manage without producing. Obviously union leaders have frequently to appeal to the base for support in particular negotiations (very often overtaken in these negotiations by the base). Sometimes it is the base itself which takes the initiative, ridiculing the claims of the union delegates and even of the union. In these cases the unions are completely overtaken by the base of the workers. As long as the union officials dominate the situation the workers are relegated to a position of passivity and it is this form of union activity which is so easily integrated into capitalism.

Collective Work Contracts (1) are perhaps the most important tasks of the unions under capitalism and one of the more modern ways of extracting relative surplus value. What is important in these contracts is not so much the possible wage increases, but that they take place at a certain phase of the financial year and also that they form the basis of a pact by "the workers" - or at least the unions - not to struggle over a certain period of time. In this way such contracts form the basis of a modern method for planning the workforce and production in general. Through such pacts the unions make the cost of capitalist management cheaper and become part of that management.

Under capitalism in the American hemisphere (2) the unions form an integral part of the struggle of Department Two (consumer goods) against Department One (raw materials, means of production, and machinery). Everyone knows that capitalist production needs a market. But there are many types of markets. We can distinguish between the type of market for industrial companies (raw materials, machines, and other goods necessary for installation purposes) and the type of market for individuals (goods which are necessary for survival, and in so far as is possible, for filling in free time). Dept. One produces for the first type of market and Dept. Two for the second. It's an important difference, because while on the one hand all capitalists are interested in lowering real wages, on the other hand some capitalists require that a certain buying power is available. Here lies divergent interests within the two Depts. In a certain simplistic way, the firms of Dept. One (selling to other firms) are interested in an absolute reduction of wages, while Dept. Two are only interested in a relative one (since the latter requires that the population in general has a certain buying power). (3) The

The unions are thus, as a general rule on the side of Dept. Two companies against Dept. One. This is most obvious when the two Dept.'s are in conflict. Perhaps the most famous historical example is that of 1933 Germany when the Nazi technocracy supported by Dept. One took absolute power against Dept. Two and the social-democratic trade unions; or also Portugal between 1926 and 1933. (7)

(Three)

Given the complexity of this situation the base movement is clearly ambivalent in relation to the unions. On the one hand the unions are useful in defending wages. The base is a constant, it exists wherever there are workers who form a base. It reaches as far as the base reaches. And clearly this includes the unions. Workers, as any worker knows, don't cease to be workers just because they've joined a union, as some of those who are on the extreme of the extreme left would like us to believe. When we went out with a cassette player to interview some workers on a demo called by the unions (cf. Combate No. 49) we saw that those present on the demo met and discussed common problems. They didn't cease to exist as a base just because the demo was called by the unions. A proof of this, if proof were necessary, is the fact that our interviewer, when he began talking directly to the workers and not to the union delegates, the latter became extremely angry and tried to stop the workers from talking. Another proof is that although the struggle was supposed to be led by the unions it was the workers themselves who took over the telexes and telephones to contact other workers all over the country. The bourgeoisie certainly, needs unions - but is it this type of base activity that they need? Union delegates are not always sure of their folds and that in struggle they won't be overtaken. The question of whether one can be revolutionary within the unions - the answer which seems most correct is yes. One can be revolutionary within the unions if one is always trying to take the struggle outside the unions. After all this is what happens under capitalism in general; revolutionary activity starts within capitalism, but as it develops and unfolds the workers create new egalitarian and communist relations amongst themselves, going beyond capitalism and creating a new society outside of capitalism and against it.

Those comrades who pat off the unions as acting only in the interests of capitalism forget that the base-movement is also active in these struggles (clearly as long as they are not pure talks or negotiations between union delegates and capitalists and workers are actively involved), and that the workers can go beyond the union leadership.

Finally workers have a completely utilitarian attitude to union organisations - they can use them or they can go beyond them.

Footnotes : (1) Work contracts made and negotiated by unions and management by
(Cont. Over)

{footnotes to Combate article Cont.) Brixton

sectors of industry. Generally they involve 7-15 different wage scales within the sector.

(2) Clearly in the pure type of state capitalism (China, USSR etc) unions are different and only a purely repressive function.

(3) Simple terms because even Dept. One after a certain point, has identical interests with Dept. Two, given that the latter is a market for its products. But this simplistic view suffices to show the inter-capitalistic struggle.

(A) Reflux is a term for the period of decreased and decreasing class struggle after a period of intense class struggle - for example in Britain after the winter of discontent 1978-9.

(B) Nov. 25th 1975 - date of a right wing military coup marking the end of the period of autonomous workers struggles. Coup leader was Gen. Ramalho Eanes - last year voted president with C.P & socialist support.

(C) Surplus value can be roughly understood as profit, as far as this discussion is concerned. Marx pointed out the difference between Absolute and Surplus Relative surplus value. It relates to the different ways of extracting profits. By forcing workers to work longer or for less money (Absolute) or forcing them to work harder or through mechanisation, produce more in the same time (Relative).

(D) The whole discussion of Dept. One and Two is highly abstract (based on very abstract categories in Marx's economics). A little thought will show that Combate's attempt to apply it to real life are dubious. For example, to say that unions are 'as a general rule on the side of Dept. Two companies against Dept. One' overlooks that its normally Dept. One companies that are highly unionised - often in marked contrast to Dept. Two. While discussion of the place of unions within the arguments within the ruling class is obviously useful, this doesn't frankly contribute to it very much.

Events in Brixton have two particular features of interest to the LWG. The attempt to 'blame' them on unemployment and the attempt to blame them on outside agitators (other than the police) - specifically 'white anarchists'. In this context we reprint below a paragraph from the paper Xtra (issue 8) which demolishes the first argument. And overleaf we reprint the leaflet produced by some Brixton anarchists in answer to the second argument.

"The police are unable to cope with people who just hang around, just as the state is unable to cope with those who are unwilling to work, or who refuse to fit in with the norm. The police in Brixton felt threatened by the sight of people talking, sitting and standing on the street - their reaction to it was and is vicious stupidity. The press, social workers etc claim unemployment as the 'problem'. But the problem is society. A society which holds its morality in and around the work ethic and which is unwilling to accept anyone who won't or can't hold to that idea. The police are the psychopathic tools of that society - the big blunt hammer it uses.

The press reaction to the Brixton scene follows the same pattern.(...) They try to show it up as an isolated incident. But the situation is the same all over London and most of the country. Its just that the people of Lambeth aren't willing to take it anymore, whereas everywhere else anger is repressed or diverted."

Elections - A Stupid Joke.

Q - Who is going to win the French elections ?

A - Paris.

Q - Why Paris ?

A - Because French elections are always won by the Capital of France.



BRIXTON — NO APOLOGIES!

The week preceding the riots had seen an increase in the already, intense policing of the streets of Brixton. (On Friday 3rd April Railton Road was sealed off in a police raid; all that week Operation Swamp 81 had been going on resulting in 1,000 people — mainly black youth — being stopped and searched).

After an incident in Railton Road on Friday 10th, an incident which was being dealt with by local people, the police arrived and started making trouble. This resulted in an occupation force of police descending on the Front Line on Saturday 11th April. The cops sat there all day waiting for trouble. Then at about 5.00 in the afternoon they provoked it.

The response of the local community was immediate and decisive. "These are our streets and we won't take any more police oppression." This response was spontaneous and there were no leaders or outside agitators. The police occupation force was attacked and routed. It was a joyous occasion as people felt that here, for the first time, they were taking part in mass direct action to control the streets of their community and were succeeding.

This mass action, at first an attack on the immediate enemy, the police, rippled out into the market and main road areas and people, so long denied the full fruits of their labour, took what they wanted. The size of this action was such that the police were overwhelmed. The people of Brixton were proving that the State is not invulnerable. With materials which were readily available to everyone they had the police on the run. For most of Saturday evening the Front Line was a no-go area. The police, outnumbered, bewildered and scared, concentrated their efforts on holding operations, the chief one being the defence of the police station. This allowed people to take what they wanted right from under the noses of the police. Usually the police put the protection of property before people but on that festive night they were forced to change their priorities — they had to save their own necks first and the goods in the shops came second. They became so worried that C.S. gas and a military advisor — a naval officer — were brought to Brixton police station.

The following day, Sunday, saw a repeat of the previous day's defence of the community and again people took what they needed. The police meanwhile had drafted in an extra 1,000 personnel. The whole of Brixton was sealed off and under occupation.

We do not pretend that the weekend's events were all positive. We would like to see a situation where anti-social acts (rape, intimidation of community members by others etc) are dealt with by the local community and not by any external authority such as the police. The stabbing incident of Friday, 10th was being taken care of by local people until the police arrived and provoked trouble.

The responses of the authorities

The attempt by the authorities to call the events of the weekend a 'race riot' fell flat immediately. So then they tried to blame 'outside agitators' and 'white anarchists' for the whole thing. This was a crude attempt to distract attention from the real problems with the implicit assumption that local police — community relations are so good that trouble could only be started by outsiders. An obvious lie. It also assumes that the local community are incapable of taking the actions they carried out so well. A double lie.

Let us stress again that the riots were a spontaneous, un-led response of local people — black and white, female and male, young and old — to the militarisation of the streets of Brixton by the Metropolitan Police and also a response against the kind of society in which such everyday oppression is part.

We live here and are part of this community. As anarchists we believe people should take control of every aspect of their lives without the mediation of cops, governments, money, bosses, political parties etc. Where we differ from other so-called revolutionary groups is that we believe the State and its agents — cops, soldiers, bureaucrats etc — are parasites and enemies of the people and that direct action is the way people start to take control of their lives.

The left-wing groups active in Brixton are forever calling for revolution but on Saturday 11th they were nowhere to be seen. It was only after the cops had cleared the streets that they moved in and claimed the riots as a victory. These groups and various "community leaders" have apologised for the riots, claiming more money will solve the problems. However, the problem is not simply bad housing and unemployment or even too many police on the streets. The problem goes much deeper and is not just confined to Brixton — it runs throughout class society. At home, at work, at school and in the community generally, we are everywhere confronted with the rigid hierarchy of power in terms of class, sex and race. Everywhere we are kept apart, the easier to be controlled. The Front Line stretches further than Brixton. It goes to Bristol, Belfast, Berlin and beyond. It is everywhere the police and state authorities show their faces.

The common demand on Saturday night was for the police to fuck off from our streets and release all those arrested and drop all charges. The State's response was "we control the streets and that's all there is to it". To keep the police off the streets means more self-activity of the kind shown by the community over that weekend (Brixton Police Station, Camberwell Magistrates Court, Brixton Prison, Barclays Bank the list of rubbish to be cleared away is endless).

For people who live outside Brixton who wish to express solidarity — you have police on your streets.

Note: There are no photographs in this for obvious reasons.

SOME BRIXTON ANARCHISTS