

ECHANGES

Nr. 17 - MARCH 1979.

THIS BULLETIN IS, in its temporary form, for a group of comrades sharing similar positions and in close contact with one another, a means of exchanging news on struggles, discussions and criticisms and of publications based essentially on the New Movement i.e. on all the struggles of all kinds carried out by those directly concerned for their own emancipation. It is, therefore, important that each recipient make his own contribution to this end, in exchange for what he expects from others. He will, of course, determine the nature, the importance and the regularity of such contributions himself.

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RENEWAL OF SUBSCRIPTIONS :

The number on the strip of this issue indicates the beginning of your subscription (payment of 10 FF or equivalent). If this number is 11 or another up to eleven, you should renew your subscription. The average costs per page is 0,25 FF and you have received from no. 11 up to no. 17 (present issue not included) 42 pages. You will receive another issue and without payment of 10 FF (or equivalent) with no other notice we shall not send anymore bulletins after no. 10

TRIANGLES ET MOUVEMENT

Meetings

Get together among the French participants to Echanges took place at Toulouse at the 4th and 5th November 1978, somewhat disorganised by a railway strike. There will be a complete account of the discussions in French. It will be sent to the subscribers who ask for it. A very brief resumé will be published in the next issue.

An international get-together is to take place in 1979. Individuals or groups interested please write before Easter the most convenient date and place for that meeting. Proposed themes for discussion:

- drafting a new version of the text on the New Movement (proposal from Dutch and French comrades)
- comparison of the restructuring of capital, class relations and forms of struggle in the main countries of Europe (W. Germany, France, Spain, Great Britain, Italy), a proposal from Italian comrades

- new forms of social frameworks as an answer to new forms of struggle (from a comrade in Great Britain)
- new formula for Echanges (several comrades)

Pamphlets in preparation

- English translation of "Refus de travail" (Refusal of work)
- French and English edition of East Berlin June 1953
- French texts on Spain
- New French edition of Workers' Councils by Pannekoek (to be published by Élibaste)
- New French edition and first English edition of Class struggle in Great Britain
- Pamphlet on Chile, the Ford strike in Great Britain and on the evolution of capital in France

Just published

"A l'Ouest rien de nouveau?", on autonomous struggles in the USA from 1977-1978 (in French). Contents: three months of the coal miners' strike/the iron miners' strike/the food stamps/black-out and looting in New York on 14-7-'77/an interesting book on the class struggle in the USA./bibliography of texts and books/some groups in the USA. The pamphlet will be sent to subscribers who will pay 10 FF (or equivalent) (Paris or London)

New formula for Echanges

Instead of a centralised bulletin we are thinking of making international bulletins produced by comrades in one country or one group of countries (if possible in their own language). Those international bulletins will be made up of one national bulletin (or from one group of countries) edited by the comrades in their own language which would be put together with the bulletins received from other countries). Each group would be responsible for translating into its own language and for distributing to all subscribers who want to receive the paper in that language. It is a matter of discussion. Is it possible? In the meantime we will carry on as at present.

(a proposal for a platform for Echanges is already published in the French edition of this issue but as it could not be translated in time for the English edition it will be published in the next number)

TEXTS AND DOCUMENTS

U.S.A.

"The underground economy" (article publ. by "The American Owl" in no. 2, November 1978, NYC)

"Jahn Jackson has been a licensed carpenter for 19 years and is regularly employed by a high-rise construction company. Because of the frequent slumps in the industry, he began doing carpentry work for individuals "on the side" and is paid strictly on a cash basis. The income from this work is not reported for tax purposes and is thus a sizable supplement to his regular wage. He enjoys being his own boss working at his own pace, and setting his own schedule.

Linda Geary is 25 years old, has a young daughter, and is getting a divorce from her second husband. She re-

ceives welfare payments from the government and lives with relatives, for whom she does housework in exchange for her rent. She earns additional income - not reported to the government - by caring for several neighborhood children. She is also trying to get government vocational training funds to study writing. Her goal is to work part-time as a journalist, something she hopes to do at home with no fixed hours.

David Boone quit his factory job because the dust from the foundries aggravated his chronic sinus condition. His unemployment insurance expired over two years ago and he now receives no public assistance other than food-stamps. His income derives from a variety of odd jobs. For his landlord he mows the lawn, collects the rent, and does other jobs for cash and reductions in his own rent. For his neighbours he serves as television and radio repairman, electrician, and automobile mechanic. Occasionally he buys an old car, fixes it and resells it at a profit. He has no desire to return to his old job, which he refers to as virtual enslavement.

These three people are part of a significant transformation that is taking place within the U.S. labor force. More and more people are rejecting dependence on a workplace job and the wage in favor of a variety of new arrangements. Within the conventional labor market this has been reflected in the rapid increase of part-time, temporary, and variable occupations. But even more dramatic has been the mushrooming of a sphere of activities outside the institutional structure of work that has developed since the beginning of the century. These activities, which are not reported to the government for tax purposes and not covered by trade union contracts or state regulation, have come to be known as the underground economy.

Over the past year the extent of this phenomenon has suddenly been realized by the press, the academic community, and the government. The discussion was sparked by the publication of a short article in a fairly obscure business magazine (Financial Analysts Journal, November/December 1977) by Peter Gutmann of Baruch College of the City University of New York. He argued that the sharp increase in the relative amount of cash in circulation implied the rapid growth of an under-

ground economy, since the illegal nature of such transactions requires that only cash is used. On this basis he claimed that the underground economy amounts to about \$200 billion a year, equal to some ten percent of the entire legitimate gross national product. Gutmann's number was widely publicized, and although his methodology was later subjected to a barrage of criticism, almost no one has denied that the underground economy is large and rapidly growing.

The furor over Gutmann's work also helped to bring to wider attention the research of Louis Ferman of the Univ. of Michigan (Ann Arbor). His work began 20 years ago, when he was asked by the Michigan labor dept. to study what the long-term unemployed do with their time. Contrary to popular ideology, he found that they were not "idle"; rather they were quite busy in "off the books" employment (black work) and hustling of various kinds. Last March Ferman and his associates released a more extensive study of the underground economy in Detroit. They put together case studies of individuals (a few of which were summarized at the beginning of this article) and conducted a survey of households which found that 25percent of the services people bought were from underground sources and another 15 percent from what Ferman calls the social economy: friends, relatives, and neighbors doing things for one another for free.

But more important than the numbers were the conclusions that the underground economy was no longer confined to the ghetto and that the income from regular jobs and various government benefit programs.

More recent research by the press including articles in Business Week and Fortune, has uncovered further evidence of the size and the rate of expansion of the underground economy. In terms of aggregate figures, there has indeed been a sharp increase in the relative amount of currency in circulation, despite the great rise in the use of credit cards and checking accounts. The Internal Revenue Service admits that individuals and small businesses each year pay a smaller percentage of the taxes they should be paying (the U.S. has a "voluntary compliance" system in which people compute their own tax liability, but the I.R.S. audits a sample of tax returns to check for cheating). The Bureau of Labor statistics acknowledge the existence of "off the books" work but confesses that it does not know how even to begin measuring its extent.

Yet a more crucial issue than measurement is the relationship of the underground economy to what empts by capital to reorganize the labor force. On the one hand it seems to represent a setback for the working class, since the underground workers are deprived of hardwon protections such as the minimum wage and health benefits. In this sense it is an extension to the U.S. of the widespread European phenomenon of the diffused factory; and thus its clearest expression here is in the garment industry in the New York area, where many undocumented alien workers are doing sewing work at home at miserable piece work wages with no regulation.

On the other hand, the underground economy is the beginning of a self-initiated restructuring of one's working day and life. By getting the means of survival from a variety of sources and finding ways to work less, people are taking greater command over their lives. The break with the traditional workplace helps to dissolve the separation between work and leisure and allows for greater integration among one's activities.

The danger in these new developments is that what may appear to be autonomous satisfaction of needs may in fact be a deceptive form of self-management that ultimately contributes to capitalist accumulation. However, so far in the U.S., the underground economy seems to oppose capital by giving people more control over their time and undermining the form of social organization based on the job.

Newspapers' strike in New York

The same problems as everywhere in Paris, London or Germany: the introduction of modern techniques destroying the position of all the professionals and the importance of trade unions.

"It is far from being a victory. Certainly the editors have lowered their demands. But the printers particularly have agreed to a smaller number for the jobs which are left in exchange (the agreement comes to an end in 1964). The ITU has no more money to pay the strikers. Our strikers (in San Francisco) are getting nowhere and I think that the men are ready to accept any sort of agreement which would allow them to return to work. There is such demoralization that a strike tariff would have little chance of being accepted in a vote.

After almost 4 months the powerful teamsters at last are approaching an agreement with the supermarkets. The agreement would mean the redundancy of some of the lorry-drivers. We will see how the base will react.

Bad news also in catering. The local union had been placed under the direct control of a delegate of the International who came from New Jersey. He finally eliminated the new president of the local who had been elected six months ago in opposition to an old corrupt bureaucrat. There has been objections from the base, but the International has the money, the offices and the shock team behind it.

Documents on the USA

"Problèmes Economiques, nos. 1575 of 31.8.1978 and 1589 of 20.9.1978 (in French)

Fifth Estate, no. 5/6 of 21.8.1978, "The return of the social revolution or well dug, old mole
Science & Society, fall 1978, "working wives", their effects on the structure of the working class by G. Kolko (photocopy from Echanges)

"Products of the decomposition of the american left". Two texts in English on an american group "The U.S. labour party" (Business Week of 2.10.78 and Weekly People of 28.10.78) whose leader "La Rouché", son of a millionaire, developed from orthodox trotskyism to a fascist supertechnocrate carrying with him some groups of the SDS which had been formed during the struggle against the Vietnam war. In New Solidarity, their newspaper, political incoherence and absurdity vie with worn out reactionary ideas. The development of groups like this which are insignificant at the present time certainly depend on the support which american capitalism has reasons to give them.

WEST GERMANY

In the German Federal Republic the year 1978 ended the way it had begun with strikes which threatened to stop all production. For the fourth time the combativity of the workers showed itself to be of a very high degree. After the dockers, printworkers and car workers, the steelworkers of Rhine Westphalia have confronted the employers with wage demands and above all a demand for a 35 hour week. Under pressure from below the IG-Metall Union took over the running of the dispute which lasted until the end of the first week in July. The scenario of

the previous strikes mentioned, above all that of the car industry of Baden-Württemberg, more or less repeated itself. After several weeks of conflict the union bureaucrats signed a compromise agreement which in no way satisfied the workers' demands. The 35 hour week - the main demand in question - was swept aside at the negotiating table. All that remained was a lengthening of annual holidays to be obtained in stages (!), a 4% wage rise and days off in lieu of night-shift working for those under a certain age, but this also is to be introduced gradually.

During the whole of December such a compromise had been rejected by the union negotiators because they knew only too well that they could not get it accepted by the rank and file. Evidently, after six weeks they judged the moment ripe to present their members with a 'fait accompli'. The strike-call went out on the 28th November after half a century of industrial peace in that industry. The call came from a union bureaucracy which was in no way enthusiastic for a reduction of the working week. On 7th December, the daily paper "Die Welt" reminded its readers that the leadership of IG-Metall as well as the head of the Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund (DGB) had refused to take up this rank and file demand for a long while: "If they have now put themselves at the head of the movement, such an attitude can be explained by internal reasons concerning the organisation's own interests", added Die Welt. In other words: IG-Metall was "going for war" to avoid confrontation with the workers whose pressure was growing daily.

The successive phases of this pressure are well described in the weekly "Der Spiegel" in its issue for 4th December 1978. I quote: "At the IG-Metall congress at Düsseldorf in September 1977 the executive took up a position against the 35 hour week. In the spring of 1978, at the DGB-conference the same thing happened. There also the executive was defeated by the delegates, but were defeated by the delegates. A few weeks afterwards the head of IG-Metall was Rhine-Westphalia proposed to begin the annual pay and contract negotiations by putting forward this new demand".

This is confirmed by a member of the union's executive, Karl-Heinz Janzen, who said to a jour-

nalist: "On the shop floor we know from experience that the men want a 35 hour week; it is no joke; we as the leaders have no other choice." Nevertheless on the very eve of the strike, those who participated as "working commissionaires" representing the union in the company's executive board meetings - a sort of sham "industrial democracy" which exist in German steel and engineering industries - still maintained the original position against the reduction of the working week. Only those like national leader Eugen Loderer or the regional boss Kurt Herb, were more directly confronted with the feelings of the men on shop-floor level and therefore felt the need to act in another fashion. (1)

Therefore, to conclude, the strike in the steelworks was, from the beginning, characterised by the same conflict between the workers on the one hand and the union bureaucrats on the other as in the three previous strikes. It was perhaps even stronger despite appearances of the contrary. A witness of the events reported that "during the strike the union leadership felt more and more under pressure from the rank and file, which put the union in an increasingly difficult position. While the union leadership didn't believe that a 35 hour week could be achieved, the rank and file did not want to accept less and did not want to have struggled for nothing." A German correspondent wrote "The voice of the IG-Metall is probably another voice than that of those it claims to represent." And Der Spiegel said "The unions are exposed to shop floor pressure. The union has not called a strike in all the plants, but the workers are asking for the whole industry to be blocked. A worker had warned the union's president Loderer, on the first day of the strike, that the rank and file would not accept defeat and would start the conflict again on its own, if there was a defeat." A Dutch correspondent reported that when efforts were made to find a "solution" at the headquarters of the IG-Metall at Mülheim am Ruhr, workers gathered in a crowd outside the offices and protested vehemently against the attempt. So, you can understand the meaning of Kurt Herb's words: "The IG-Metall must finally risk industrial conflict." All this also explains why the minister Farthmann intervened without any result. But why the IG-Metall gave in to the employers after six weeks of struggle, explaining this volte face as a success to its members, we can find the answers in all that has been written above on its real position.

(1) Note: In order not to overcomplicate our explanation we have not noted the fact that the union defended the 35 hour week differently from the workers. For the union leadership it was a way of saving jobs. The workers stressed another aspect that the 35 hour week was desirable independent of unemployment situation, above all because of the bad conditions and hard work of a steelworker.

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This note was written by a Dutch correspondent who receives his news of German events partly directly from personal contacts and partly from German newspapers. Information from these sources are always a bit late and therefore incomplete. E.g. for the moment he does not know enough about how the rank and file have reacted to the compromise accepted by the union. He will talk about this in a future number of Echanges.

PORTUGAL

"The agrarian reform and agriculture" (Spartacus, no. 98 of October '78 and no. 100 of December '78) is a well documented article, with whose conclusion we are in agreement: "From the time when the occupation took place and the proletariat has had to organise production by itself, the new criteria corresponding to egalitarian and communitarian social relations which were established in the course of anti-capitalist struggle came into conflict with the criteria of capitalist management. The national and international situation forced the proletarian process of agrarian reform to integrate economically with the dominating capitalism. Since then and up till now the communitarian aspirations and the social and economic forms have been in conflict with a management based on profit, a management which the capitalist environment makes unavoidable."

GREAT BRITAIN

This text has been written at the beginning of January 1979. Since then other developments have taken place which we will mention another time.

The English Ford factories began work again at the beginning of December after two months of a complete strike of the 57.000 workers and effective solidarity from

all workers, dockers, sailors and lorry-drivers, which means that in these two months no Ford car or component was allowed to come into or leave Great Britain to be sold.

It can be underlined that the 17% wage increase that was obtained involved an anti-strike bonus (5% is not paid in a week when a stoppage takes place), but clauses against absenteeism or punishing those who arrive late at work were rejected. It can also be noted that the control of the base was expressed in the determination to struggle, e.g. the factory in Dagenham was shut down in 16 minutes. It was reflected by the care and carefulness of the trade union leaders about accepting proposals from the management. The trade union leaders controlled the organisation of the struggle and no committee of shop stewards or of workers appeared. It is true that from the beginning to the end of the struggle, if the trade union bureaucrats led the debate, the workers assembly in every factory controlled it, deciding on the strike, if it should be continued or not. Apart from these assemblies, the Ford workers staid at home; beside the unanimity of all the Ford workers meant that there was no need for any other organisation not even for pickets nor for any other intervention to stop Ford trading.

Henry Ford declared "It is the worst strike I have ever seen". In fact this complete blockade by the Ford workers had consequences considerably greater than the damage caused to the multinational Ford (although the strike took place in the time of the year where cars are sold the least) or the 17% that was obtained. It is the first time that a national strike has blocked almost all the European factories of the same trust (in Great Britain, France, Belgium, Germany, Spain) as an effect of this determination and length. This is the other aspect of the international division of labour. There is no doubt that Ford (and the other trusts) will try to find an answer to this unforeseen form of internationalizing the struggle, which certainly teaches all the workers of the trust about the consequences of their struggles.

The Ford strike almost caused the fall of the Labour government that can only keep in power because of the unanimity between the bosses and the political parties until the next elections in October 1979, because it is the only party which can still try to hold back the rising wave of wage demands which is fleeing through the breach the Ford workers have opened.

The policy of a limit to wage increase (5% in the phase 4) and of sanctions against the firms which go beyond no longer exist. The government has given up the idea of sanctions and most of the wage claims supported by strikes are far even more than that the Ford workers obtained.

The TUC was at the same time the creator and the policemen in the first three phases of the "wage policy" which was given the name of "social contract". The defeat of the government and of capital is at the same time their defeat. This however is much less noticeable. They has already in the summer of 1978 dissociated themselves in at least in words from the government policy, because of the rising movement of the base (note the failure to exclude from the TUC and from their job the 32 tool-makers at Leyland, who began work again on the 2nd November after 13 weeks of strike with the promise of having their claims met: equal pay with other factories). The "support" of the TUC to the Ford-strike was necessary to prevent a wildcat committee of shop stewards and to preserve for the TUC its image as a workers' organisation, which is absolutely indispensable for it to guarantee its function as intermediary between labour and capital.

For the moment their tactics is to play the same role in the Ford strike to tack between the power of capital which they cannot support too openly and the power of the workers which they cannot oppose openly.

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Articles on Great Britain

- in no. 1572 of 10.5.1978 of "Problèmes Economiques" (in French)
- in Spartacus no. 98 of October 1978 "La montée du pouvoir syndical en Grande Bretagne" (the rise of union power in G.B.) Recent facts from the struggle contradict the conclusions of this article which we will discuss another time.

FRANCE

Outline of an article on the French situation.

A policy of attempting to increase profits and of confronting the crisis shared by all capitalist countries, but specific situations according to national capitalism and to the respective balances of

struggle between workers and capital.

In France, up until the elections of Spring 1978, a deceptive situation in spite of the wage freeze (the "Barre" plan), no noticeable fall of the standard of living (electoral considerations). Capital is not directly threatened by the autonomous character of the struggles as in Italy or Spain. It does not need the help of the socialist or communist parties to keep the workers in line; up until now they are not going beyond certain limits. But also a desire not to provoke violent confrontations and an increase in base combativity.

There are many base level movements which are often spontaneous, but which remain either isolated (e.g. the Renault strike in July 1970 or the recent BNP strike) or enveloped within larger movements and controlled by the main unions. The general impression is of a multitude of localised, fragmented and specific actions, which can go beyond these levels.

In the past few years, this situation has been able to be maintained in a kind of pseudo-equilibrium because:

- of the strength with which union repression has been able to contain certain forms of struggle (e.g. occupations), the expulsion of recalcitrant sections of the union (habitual within the CGT in the past and become so now with the CFTD), the suffocation of base level struggles within larger movements controlled at the centre;
- a fairly liberal redundancy payment policy;
- the manipulation of the unskilled workforce (deportations, cessation of migration, incitements to leave, racial violence etc.)

The deepening of the crisis requires capital to attack the more directly as long as it still has hands to some extent free:

- inflation has to absorb salary increases, that one has never managed to have in control (brutal price increases in July, repeated in January);
- restructuring of certain basic industries (steelworks, textiles, shipyards etc.) which increases unemployment in the areas of mono-industries where it is difficult to find other work;
- various manipulations, the most recent being in social security contributions which in effect amount to a reduction in wages by executive decree.

The characteristics of the struggles of the past few years (on the whole since 1968) can be seen in con-

flicts which can be divided largely into three groups: against redundancies, for wage increases, for better working conditions. These characteristics are: base level democracy, attacks against property and individuals, shift in political balance against the state. Even when cancelled or controlled these situations make evident a potential which is dangerous for capital, at the same time it points up the possibilities of counter measures that the unions are advancing, but which capital finds difficult in acceding to in a period of crisis. Usually these characteristics can be seen in isolated situations and not as progression in a struggle which by its own dynamic changes the shift from particular objects to a more general.

(1) Base level democracy: spontaneity in the first thrust of numerous struggles, as in explosions of violence that will be gone into further on. One could, in a way, say that assemblies of workers remain sovereign in matters which have to do with the decision to engage the struggle or to return to work; but the trade union leadership has in effect maintained intact all of its mediatory and negotiating powers which gives it in practice the authority to manipulate this base level democracy. From a practical point of view, there has been no appearance of base level organisms nor of very many autonomous initiatives tending towards making the struggle more effective. The trade unions can still initiate days of "action strikes" in the professional sectors which are traditionally ineffective and which both counterbalance and play a role of counter-attack in relation to these base level tendencies.

(2) Attacks against property: Radical in the period before 1968, occupations are often not much than minority actions controlled by the unions and manipulated by the local authorities (e.g. Deferre in Marseille with Terrin-shipyards, LIP at Besancon, the steel industry in the East). At their most active, occupations are caught between the contradictions of the system: they either make moves towards finding new bosses, or else they form cooperatives, i.e. they make themselves into their own bosses, often with failure at the end. The LIP example is still a very lively issue, but the most interesting aspects of it,

e.g. the theft of watches and materials, remain practically useless for many other people (e.g. the workers in the steel industry).

One example (letter from a comrade in Nice, november 1988): a factory of 200 workers making caravans (the "Le Cardinal" factory) is on strike and occupied since the 16th October 1978. "From the first informations gleaned, the machinations of the bosses and the unions have been even further brought to light, and the workers want to take over the battle themselves. The strikes have created several committees, one in particular is responsible for direct contacts with other enterprises, especially with those engaged in open struggles (whether of the type of) from the area (Le Palais, Aloa Marine ne, SCOM, Meyerber, Parachini, etc.) or of elsewhere (contact through Echanges for people who are interested). The original occupation had been spontaneous, but the discussion now turns on whether to form a workers cooperative or to find a "buyer".

All of this constitutes one of the extremes of attacks against the capitalist form of property which is contained within the occupations. The other extreme is the settlement of the crisis in the chemical industry by a semi-nationalisation which emanated from a right wing government. The problem posed by the development of capital tend as much on the one hand to be posed in reformist terms, as on the other hand in terms which can seem to appear "revolutionary". It is pretty obvious that depending on who initiates these attacks on the form of appropriation of goods, their content can be completely different. The example of what happened at St. Chamond shows to what extent such struggles can undergo a shift in power in their actual context. Other examples (use of sites, material, destruction of material) can also indicate a shift in power.

(3) Attacks upon individuals: Lock-ins of the bosses are never recognised by the unions. Very often, spontaneous uprisings are called of by the intervention of the unions, by the police if the unions fail; the majority of them remain peaceful, i.e. without physical violence. But what happened at St. Nazaire shows how rapidly that situation can change out of an apparently secondary occurrence (the recuperation of a power-vut by the EDF) into a serious taking of hostages, in the person of management personnel, who were paraded through the town and treated as prisoners. Here is what one of the shipyard workers writes: "The break-

down had happened on Tuesday and the management of the works decided to a lock-out. That day was able of recuperation. The following day there was an attempt of negotiation between unions and management. During this period the blokes had a meeting and started shouting "To the managers' offices". And that was the point where they went right over the unions' heads, forced the doors and recaptured the flying managers. Then they decided to go and demonstrate in the town, taking the managers with them. So the managers were kicked through the town in front of the demonstration, pushed from behind.

The CRS intervened but were unable to make a charge because of the hostages. And it was at that point that the unions regained control of the situation by deciding to go to the townhall in order to negotiate. At the townhall the deputies welcomed the directors and the workers "Come on, it is the people's own building. There negotiations want on until the evening. It was there, at the "people's building" that the CRS attacked, hitting both workers and deputies alike. One deputy, looking for a police superintendent (why?), was beaten up as well. Worth noting because the deputy was easily recognizable as such by his tricoloured deputy's sash; they were either socialist or communist deputies which led the next day to a demonstration of all kind of elected people at Nantes.

Briefly, the comrades who took the initiative at the beginning were not able as it turned out to maintain it ... for years we have wandered slipshod on demonstrations with no joy, no determination, no hatred either. Last Wednesday, it was something else: not a banner, no loud speaker to be chanting the Internationale in the name of the workers, but an impressive determination."

What is important is that the shift of a struggle arising in the factory and over a specific work-problem into street demonstration: even though it ended in an abrupt about turn, it was a complete different thing from the kind of trade union demonstration which sometimes occurs and of which a notable example occurred recently in Caen. The St. Nazaire workers had no political intentions and they were united in wanting to find an alternative to the impasse created by the unions, so as to work out their own problem for themselves. In do-

ing that they made their action at the same time both total in content and far more radical: its political character was only one of the consequences (and moreover it is through that that the unions will succeed in recuperating the movement).

(4) The political attack: Essentially it is a question of "going beyond" any action organised by the unions; "going beyond" in this sense originates from political minority groups which are trying to involve a working class or marginal fringe in open violence against the state (and not without ulterior motives): violence undertaken for itself and not as a means to attain an objective in the struggle that is taken place at this moment. Nevertheless the new twist taken by the developments at Caen are evidence of the impossibility of any political hopes still nourished of resolving social tensions which the regime accumulates with an impossible reformism.

A letter from a comrade in Caen: What is happening is not that the unions are "sold out", because they do not want to tackle the problems of work: the CHT after all is struggling for employment rather than against unemployment; what is happening neither is that the government - which is to say the bosses - do not want or cannot make the slightest concessions: the unions of being under the threat of being overwhelmed by the workers can do no more than limit themselves to merely express their "displeasure". So the CGT having intended to go too far even legally within the exaccepted boundaries, in view of the reaction very quickly turned its coat and returned to its traditional attitude.

The situation can be characterised as follows:

- neither the government nor the bosses intend to give in on any level (for example the refusal to let the four bridges blockaded and the immediate firing of the three warning shots). Is it a frustrated local response deriving from their experiences in Caen in 1967? Or is it an experimented try out?
- the unions, forced to react interdependently from both base level action and from the deteriorating economic situation, cannot any longer continue to restrict themselves to sham one day strike actions, nor traditional 'walkabouts';
- but as soon as they go any further and engage on an effective action, which works, they find themselves overtaken by the base level which is reinforced by the intransigence of both police and government.

Conclusion: the unions find them-

as really in the shit: where is

the time that they could negotiate with the employers and so could gain approval from the rank and file?

- on the question of the "agents provocateurs" as they said "wherever they came from" it is worth noting that the local CGT attitude which denounced "provocations" (from whatever source they come from) was given the lie by the regional CGT committees which the following day denounced solely police provocations.

The next friday, the demonstration was inevitably less spontaneous. The "leftist" militants have turned out with all their equipment but were not able to use it: the police did not turn up; they had had their doubts. And the militants unleashed their frustration on boutique windows and upper class restaurants. As far as they were concerned, I think it was a question of post '68 elements who "no longer fit into" left militant organisations and who express themselves in the only way they can in the tail of demonstrations. I am not being sarcastic when I say this, because we are all to a certain extent at the same point, but to me it is derisory fairly pathetic point to be at."

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Conflict between SNCF and passengers, a peculiar aspect of struggles

Some aspects of the restructuring of capital have a direct effect on daily life. For example, in the case of the SNCF which is being restructring top speed, profitability above all, many passengers in various parts of France have taken action: so that the trains arrived in time, so that certain stations are kept open, and also so that the number of carriages is sufficient where trains are overcrowded. We can take note that those who participated in these movements do not do so specially to arrive in time, at their job, but to arrive on time at the station and in comfortable condition. This can go much further for example where the SNCF closes a station and where the people must get up earlier, they want to save time. To travel as comfortably as possible does not mean to go to work in bourgeois comfort: as soon as one allows the workers to live in and to be owner of a flat or a little house which is comfortable, people find it more and more difficult to travel squashed like sardines. Confronted by the SNCF' profitability the workers struggle for their time, ask for their conditions of life. In the stations, where these incidents have taken place, the railway workers have usually

approved the initiatives of the passengers (on the subject, a strike call was made by the trade unions against disciplinary hearing which was going to punish two railway workers from Lyon station/Paris) for having participated with the passengers in some demonstrations in the station). The interests of both groups corresponded. The most important problem is not whether capital recuperates this movement or not. The important thing is that people are now ready to struggle in the place of work and outside of it.

SPAIN

The petrol pump workers ("gasolineras") strike in Barcelona

This would only have been one strike amongst others in Spain in 1978, if it had not given very clear proof that in modern capitalism there is no room for an organisation that tries to be "revolutionary" trade union. In this case it was the CNT and here the important question is not the internal conflicts between traditional anarcho-sindicalist and modernists inside the organisation. The CNT would have been placed in the same dilemma in its old form or even in a new one. Either to be a trade union or to be a revolutionary group with all the consequences which are imposed on these choices by the movement of capital and the movement of the class struggle. If it must be a trade union it must be a trade union like the others playing its role under capital, then it can only be a revolutionary group in words. If it wants to be a revolutionary organisation it can only be an organisation like the others exterior to the autonomous movement, which in reality rejects all permanent exterior organisation and creates for itself when it is necessary temporary forms of organisation sui generis. To hover between these two positions as the CNT tries to do leads all the more certainly to the destruction during the struggles, of all its real basis of support. It is a question of time; in a limited but significant way, this is what happened with the "gasolineras" strike.

To describe briefly what happened: in the 288 filling stations in the Barcelona region, there were 2800 gasolineras, 80% of them belong to the CNT as a result of a reorganisation of the trade unions in 1976, when the whole bureaucracy of this trade union went on to the CNT.

The filling stations are the property of the state monopoly for petrol distribution - CAMPSA - which

leases the stations to managers, who exploit their own wage labourers, so there are an enormous number of separate small enterprises, mostly with less than 10 workers each, and where the trade union plays an important part in spreading information and in coordinating with good possibility of manipulation. The organisation of labour in the filling stations in Barcelona province has been established since 9 years ago by a provisional collective agreement, which at that time must have favoured local bosses. To maintain its strong position, the local CNT continued this system and based itself in a strike in October 1977 to obtain from the local bosses organisation an addition to the agreement, which guaranteed substantial advantages to the gasolineras in Barcelona. In March 1978 some assemblies of the base convoked by the CNT decided to demand a new clause for the regional agreement. A commission of delegates was mandated to discuss it with the local bosses. The commission comprised 9 CNT, 1 independent, 1 CCOO- and 1 UGT-member. An agreement could only be ratified by the general assembly of the gasolineras. In July 1978, the CCOO and the UGT signed in Madrid a national collective agreement with the Spanish capitalist organisation without consulting the base. The CNT was apparently invited to this debate, but refused to participate. The new agreement covered all the filling stations in Spain and made obsolete the conditions of the regional convention in Barcelona which was more favourable to the gasolineras. It is evident that the CNT was manoeuvred. It was pushed for starting and supporting a struggle, in which the gasolineras of Barcelona were isolated, backs to the wall. They could not expect any solidarity from the gasolineras of other regions, who had gained guarantees from the national agreement: the gasolineras of the Sabadell-region though close to Barcelona but influenced by the CCOO even refused to go on strike. To do nothing means for the CNT that it is useless as a trade union and that in fact the CCOO and the UGT are better means to fix the price of labour power since they are recognised as spokesmen by capital, which in its turn enforces them on the workers. To do something means for the CNT to support the strike in the face of and against everything. And that means to drive a fraction of the workers to a localised

struggle, in which despite the appearances, defence of the trade union will be more important than the defence of the advantages of a local collective agreement. One can see one of the paradoxes of the situation in the fact that the CNT finds itself obliged to defend a regionalist position, as can be seen from this part of a hand out to be given to the car drivers. "Car drivers, we state .. that we do not want an agreement signed in Madrid, we want a regional agreement signed in Barcelona." From the authorities' point of view, everybody was pleased with the chance of carrying out the manoeuvre to isolate and perhaps to eliminate a trade union, which is very small in number but which in certain circumstances could play a useful part in the struggle of the base. In this period of underhand renewal of the Pact of Moncloa and the delicate transition to party democracy any advantage will be taken. Further the capitalist centralisation of discussion about wages whence the interest for national collective agreement and a smaller number of trade unions. Although they were not able to avoid recognizing the CNT as a representative trade union in 1977, because at that time it was useful for capital tormented by the problem of the succession of Francoism, now it can be emptied of its content in the struggles, simply by making use of the joint action of "good" trade union legality and of repression. The CNT, which wants at the same time to play then direct action and powerless legality in fact cannot play either of these pions and is prey for this kind of manoeuvre.

The course of the strike can be described in a few words. The fact that is characterized by a "perfect democracy" from the base changes nothing. It is even difficult to determine in the pamphlets and the posters what comes from the strike committee and what comes from the CNT, since they are signed by both. An assembly voted for the strike and for the strike committee, which was mandated to enter into negotiations on the basis of the platform of March 1978. (250 pesetas more for 40 hours inst. of 48). The local managers seemed to hesitate, but in reality refused any discussion with the strike committee independantly of bureaucratic representation by the CCOO and the UGT. This is supported by these two trade unions. Everyone hides behind the national agreement including the government, which declares the strike illegal and has the filling stations occupied by the police from the first day of the strike, the 2nd September. The pickets are dealt with

violently; up to 70 are arrested at once, firing with rubber bullets. Very soon, the gasolineros began work again since the police began to distribute petrol, which made the strike completely useless. A few days later on the 6th September there are only 100 to 200 workers still fighting and even so a large part of them are those who have been fired, who if they want to find the job again must get themselves reinstated by their boss or bring him before the industrial tribunal. Here the strike is considered legal and the men granted their former job - with loss of wages - but this is nearly symbolic if the boss refuses to take back the workers, as in fact happened with a number of strikers.

The final result is that the CNT lost almost all its members in this sector, because they blamed it for the failure of the struggle. In appearance they are wrong, because the CNT supported the strike right to the end doing its utmost to create solidarity, which was always an exterior passive solidarity. Objectively they are right, because their failure is the failure of revolutionary trade unionism analysed at the start of this article.

It is quite a paradox to see in the CNT's papers allegations of "treason" made against the CCOO and the UGT, as if their role had not been clear for a very long time, which they intended to play in the capitalist system and how they would play it. It is equally paradoxal to see the CNT use an arsenal of juridical arguments to defend the legality of the strike, of the agreement, etc. and even to call on the ILO, as if capital's legality was not simply its repressive force and as if the Spanish workers had not ignored this legality in the course of all their struggles in the time of Franco. Equally paradoxical to have seen the CNT refuse as a trade union direct actions of sabotage against the pumps, which in fact would have been the only response to the repressive force of capital. Equally paradoxical to see the CNT announce that the defeat of the CNT is the domestication of the workers' movement in Spain, as if the relation of force was not that of the base against capital and to see it speak of the defence of the right of strike as if this right has not always been taken and not defended by the workers.

Where is the Rembrandthouse? Extract from a leaflet of the squatters of Amsterdam.

The question is asked by thousands of tourists who yearly visit Amsterdam. This is not surprising if you would expect the house of the famous 17th century painter to be situated not on a mini-motorway with a massive office bloc, which looks like a 'horizontal skyscraper' opposite. Next door to the Rembrandthouse is a large renovated office building, which has been empty for four years, although there is a huge sign outside saying it is to let by "James Lang & Wooton" (acting as a letting agency for the firm "Grand Vista", in which "Equity and Law" has a majority shareholding. Adjacent to these properties at some distance from each other, there are two houses, the houses in between have been demolished years ago. Between the houses is a big banner: "250.000 square meters of empty office space versus 60.000 homeless people".

In this street, the Jodenbreestraat, next to the militant Nieuwmarkt neighbourhood, the English-Dutch property developer Grand Vista wants to build next to the already mentioned empty office-building another new one. For this the two houses (with 8 dwellings and two shops, one of which is a community bookshop) in which 16 people live, have to be demolished. One of the houses which some years back was gutted illegally, has been rehabilitated by the squatters and people from the neighbourhood, who put in hundreds of work hours and thousands of guilders.

The residents, supported by several action groups, have already for 8 years resisted this kind of office development. This proposed office-building which will cost about 20 million dutch guilders will be financed by the life insurance company Equity and Law, whose activities belie the first part of its name.

The developers and the city council overestimated heavily the demand for office space, because the expected increase of employment in office labour did not take place. Another factor is the anticipated decrease of office labour created by the mini-computers. All this is confirmed by a recent economic thesis from a certain dr. Funken which calculated that the office development in progress will be empty for 6 to 14 years.

Some months ago people representing the interests of the local residents, visited the headquarters of the Dutch branch of Equity & Law in

the Hague, to emphasize the social implications of their investments and to inform them, that they would meet with determined resistance if they went ahead and carried out their plans.

The Grand Vista representative in Amsterdam tried to buy the residents off by offering them another house, which they bought for a half million guilders, payment of the removal costs and two rentfree years. The residents refused this offer, they say: "we stay and fight, there is not an office shortage, but a housing shortage."

On Saturday the 9th of September a manifestation was organised on the sidewalk, with music, exhibits on the housing question and speakers from different neighbourhoods. Many people committed themselves to help in the resistance.

On the morning the 25th of September at 5 o'clock a strong-arm group of Grand Vista tried to evict the bookshop from the basement. The alarm system functioned well: within a few minutes a siren woke up the neighbourhood and the assault failed completely.

The houses are now under permanent surveillance of the action group.

This leaflet was issued in October 1978. The bookshop, the already mentioned previously in Echanges, is the "Fort van Sjakoo" and is still there.

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CHINA

Two members of the group publishing the review "Minus 5" (in English) and other magazines and books on China will start a trip in Europe this spring for a number of months to talk about the P.R. of China. People interested in this project can write to:

Mr. Bas Moreel,
Nobelweg 108, tel. 08370-
Wageningen/Holland. 13698

A Dutch comrade asks for a review of the book "Avoir 20 ans en Chine" by Jean Jacques Michel and the Huang He Group (publ. in French by Le Seuil).

Minus 5 published another book "Three essays on the new mandarins" (by Lee Yu See) which are:

- (1) The new mandarins: a brief introduction (Lee Yu See)
- (2) The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. The Chief mandarin asked for rebellion (kan San)
- (3) The new mandarins and mass psychology in China (Yu Shu and Wu Man)

How many types of prisons are there in mainland China? A short discussion on the subject with a Chinese comrade from Hong Kong (copy at Echanges in English)

The execution of mayor Yin and other stories from the Great Proletarian Revolution. By Chen Yo-Shi, with an introduction by Simon Leys. Review by F. Wakeman in the New York Review of 20.7.1978. (copy in English from Echanges)

JAPAN

Information on Japan in the reviews (in English) published by the NAMAZU collective
2-12-2 Asahimachi
Abeno - OSAKA - Japan

INDOCHINA

A Dutch comrade asks for information on the situation in Cambodia. He indicates the book "Cambodia, année zéro" by Francois Pouchaud published in English by Penguin.

ITALY

Collegamenti per l'organizz azione diretta di classe, no. 5 (Marco Maiolani, C.P. 4046, 20.100 Miaano, in Italian) contains
- workers' struggle in Turin 1974-1978; a long thesis on the development of the restructuring at Fiat
- question of public services, a contribution to the debate.

DISCUSSIONS

The role of armaments in the economy
"Security and economic development: two imperatives that go hand in hand" (in "Défense Nationale" of aug./sept. 1978 and in "Problèmes Economiques", no. 1591 of 4.10.78, both in French). This article discusses the controversial theme of the war economy as a remedy to periodical crisis: too much leads in inflation and confusion (c.f. the war in Algeria and the 1958 crisis in France, the Vietnam war for the USA). There is an important difference from the crisis of the thirties. In a period of demilitarization of the army from 1958 to 1973 there is an corresponding militarisation of the economy to maintain the equilibrium. There are no figures for France, but the article gives the example of the USA where without the military industry which employed 3,8 million people

in 1969, unemployment would reach a level of 24% comparable to that of 1933.

The new international division of labour and its effects on employment

(in Problèmes Economiques, no. 1592 de 11.10.1978) Some extracts.

"The development of capitalism is not shown only by the development of wage labour as the dominant factor of production and by a reinforcement of the division of labour inside individual enterprise, but also by a process of division of labour on a regional and international scale. Three circumstances which are linked seem to us decisive in this respect:

- (1) .. a great reservoir of labour power has been formed in the developing countries, to a large extent in consequence of the increasing role of capital in agriculture. .. Many workers are available in the "socialist" countries for working on contracted jobs in the framework of the capitalist production process, which has access to a reservoir of labour power of several hundred million workers (compared to 77 million in the industrialised countries). The reservoir is characterised by:
 - (a) the total of wages and costs is 10 to 20% of that in the old industrialised countries;
 - (b) the length of the work day, of the week and of the year is generally speaking much longer (in S. Korea a worker provides 2,800 productive hours as compared to 1,900 in West Germany;
 - (c) the same productivity;
 - (d) more intensive work rhythm with greater exploitation; worn out workers can be easily replaced;
 - (e) wide choice of workers to find the best for each job. The criteria for choosing are all on the same basis: those employed are those who need to be paid least and whose work power is still intact, i.e. those who are young and from whom one can demand a high rhythm of work.
 - (2) Technological progress is making the choice of place and the distribution of production more and more independent of the geographical situation and of distances;
 - (3) Technology and methods which allow a complete process of production to be broken down have been developed and refined to the point where even an uneducated workforce can quickly and easily be able to carry out the specific part of the production process;
- The article gives different tables which show esp. for Germany the development from 1960 to 1965 of the labour force in the underdeveloped countries working for the markets of the industrialised countries. However, it seems that capitalism's crisis is resolved by these changes. On the contrary, the articles concluded with the following two observations:)

.. If the new distribution in the world causes increasing ..

it scarcely diminishes unemployment in the developing countries, where new factories are being installed. these countries there are so many unemployed that even if a considerable part of the world industrial production took place there, one would still only provide work for a tiny number of them. Further considering the profound structural changes taking place in the agricultural production of the developing countries one can even expect a rapid growth of the reserve of labour power, which is already so big today. ...

Moving factories is accompanied by a further development of rationalisation both in the classical industrialised countries and in the new ones.

An important example is the electronic industry. The substitution of electronics for electro-mechanics in this branch and in others was only possible because of mass production of miniature components at a very low price... principally produced in the developing countries by a cheap labor force, suitable for working "under the microscope" and better "disposed" for the job.

The abundant supply of cheap component; was made possible by and even indispensable the wave of rationalization which has been expressed by the replacement of electro-mechanic by electronics.

(On the same subject, an article "Immigration of work, immigration of capital, in French in Spartacus, no. 100 of December 1978)

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