

# ECHANGES

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BULLETIN OF THE NETWORK  
"ECHANGES ET MOUVEMENT"

## SPAIN

Workers struggles.

The development of the dockers' union coordinadora and the question of alternative unions: from autonomy to bureaucracy.

Discussion about the development of capitalist production methods ('post-fordism') and changes in the working class.

## GOODBYE TO THE UNIONS?

About a controversy on trade unions and unionism

## GUATEMALA

Democracy and violence

## USA

On the democrats coming to power

## THIRD CAMP INTERNATIONALISTS IN FRANCE DURING WORLD WAR II

## OBITUARY:

Pierre Lanneret ('Camille')

## WORKERS AGAINST WORK

Labor in Paris and Barcelona during the Popular Fronts

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# ECHANGES

BULLETIN OF THE NETWORK *ECHANGES ET MOUVEMENT*.

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The main bulk of material in this issue of *Echanges* has to do with Spain: The development of Spanish capitalism and capitalism in general - Various workers struggles - The development of the dockers' union Coordinadora and in general the question of 'alternative', 'struggle' unions. This issue also contains other material about this everlasting discussion about various forms of unionism, in a section in connection with our pamphlet "Goodbye to the unions". We have previously had some material about movements in Europe outside of the traditional union channels, especially in Italy in France. Much material which has appeared in our French edition or in other journals has previously not been translated into English, but the last half year we have made an effort to have a lot of material translated into English on these movements and a lot of other questions. There is now a lot of material ready for publication. We have focussed on Spain in this issue. In the next issues we will publish more material on especially struggles in Italy and France from the beginning of the 90's and link the Spanish, Italian and French experiences to a discussion on 'alternative unions' in general.

Alltogether there will in the next issues be a great number of articles which we think will be of interest to the present and future readers. Some of the material more or less ready is the following: Latin America (Argentina, Guatemala, El Salvador) - Class struggles in France 1991-93 (general analysis, '91 Renault strike, '92 lorry drivers actions, struggles in the health sector, '93 Air France strike, Jan. 94 demonstration against private schools) - Discussion on alternative struggle organisation and unions (Italy, France, Spain) - Struggles and social conditions in the US - Struggles in Germany - Struggles in Italy - Struggles and conditions in ex-USSR - The Nordic countries - Yugoslavia - Indonesia - UK - Struggles in Holland - Remarks on ongoing debates on the ultra-left.

We are as always interested in receiving material on struggles and social conditions from readers. *Echanges* has never been preoccupied with achieving a big circulation, but we are of course interested in the help of our present readers in getting new readers and subscribers and other help and ideas for the distribution of the *Echanges* bulletin and pamphlets. The production of *Echanges* is the work a couple of persons and any help in any way is highly appreciated.

## BONNE ET HEUREUSE ANNÉE 1994



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# SPAIN

## WORKERS STRUGGLES - THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DOCKERS' UNION COORDINADORA AND THE QUESTION OF ALTERNATIVE UNIONS: FROM AUTONOMY TO BUREAUCRACY - DISCUSSION ABOUT THE DEVELOPMENT OF CAPITALIST PRODUCTION METHODS ('POST-FORDISM') AND CHANGES IN THE WORKING CLASS

### Introduction:

The material below is to a large extent written by a Spanish comrade of the journal *Etcetera*, who has contributed to *Echanges* for many years with material and discussions we have found very useful. It deals with many of the same questions as similar articles by and discussions with the comrade in the pages of *Echanges*: The character and development of Spanish capitalism and capitalism in general and correspondingly of the trade union movement and the composition of the working class, workers struggles in Spain, Spanish syndicalism, and the development of the Spanish dockers' union Coordinadora. (1) Rather than having a lot of smaller articles and discussions scattered over a number of issues of *Echanges*, I have here put together material written over a period of a couple of years, and complemented it with explanatory headlines, remarks, notes and with various other material relevant for the themes being discussed. I have chosen to print the material more or less chronologically according to the dates when it was written, rather than trying to separate it in various sections. This because even if dealing with various subjects like the Coordinadora, actions of Asturian miners or Madrid bus drivers, or the changes in capitalist production methods, it's to a large extent the same discussions and problems being posed. Some of the material was written as letters to *Echanges* and some of it for other journals, so there will be a certain grade of repetition of some of the points made, but this doesn't matter that much since it's important questions which are discussed.

One of the subjects discussed below is recent changes in capitalist production methods (often called 'post-fordism', in the articles below called 'dispersed fordism'): decentralised production, just-in-time production, etc.; and the effects on the composition of and struggles of the working class. On these questions many participants in *Echanges* have views differing from the Spanish comrade which don't need to be repeated here. A separate pamphlet will be published which contains the articles below (in better translations) and other contributions.

Another subject is the development of the Spanish dockers' union Coordinadora and the question of 'alternative unions' in general. A number of articles on this has appeared throughout the years in *Echanges*. The Coordinadora struggled effectively for many years against restructuring in the Spanish ports, withstood attacks from unions, governments and employers, and has managed to remain independent from the UGT and CCOO union federations while organising 80-90% of the 10.000 dockers in Spain's 23 ports. It was a 'struggle organisation' launching a number of conflicts, based itself on workers' assemblies, revokable delegates, delegates and officers having the same wage as ordinary dockers and actually working on the docks, job rotation (no dockers working for a particular shipper/company) and control over hiring, and autonomy for the branches in the local ports. It appeared to be

an exemplary case of the possibility of having a permanent 'struggle organisation'. Because of its organisation principles and practices mentioned above, and because of the history of Spanish anarcho-syndicalism, particular attention has been paid to the Coordinadora by a number of 'libertarian' organisations all over the world. Interestingly some of this 'discovery' of the Coordinadora took place at a time when signs of the direction the union would develop could very clearly be seen. The tendency has partly been to consider the Coordinadora as embodying the 'anarcho-syndicalist principles', partly to argue that it shows the possibility of having permanent 'revolutionary' unions under capitalism.

We will here just quote one example from the libertarian press, quite accidentally chosen: some articles by Don Fitz, an American who has done very much valuable to make known the struggles of the Spanish dockers. In an article in *Discussion Bulletin* no.31 the comrade writes:

*'Finding the US labor movement in such a degenerated state often results in radicals abandoning the workplace as a focus of organizing. Or else, it can lead to bizarre ideas about unions, such as the belief that unions "must" become reformist or that unions cannot survive as revolutionary organisations for any length of time within capitalist society... Coordinadora has survived since 1976 as a union which is as revolutionary in its internal structure as in its social goals.'* In an article in *Ideas & Action* no.11 it is talked about *"the revolutionary union of longshoremen"*.

Irrespective of sympathy with, admiration for and recognition of the importance of the struggles of the Spanish dockers, our analysis has all the time been another one, that the workers struggles under present-day capitalism in no way can be ascribed to more or less expressing some old political and ideological ideas and that all experience shows the impossibility of in the long run maintaining permanent mass struggle organisations. The development of the Coordinadora shows this clearly. And even if putting forward this idea of permanent struggle organisations, it's something else to even describe the Coordinadora as 'revolutionary' or more or less 'anarcho-syndicalist'. This amounts to nothing else than trying to press a real, living movement into one's own political and ideological schemes and preoccupations. Even if we don't use political labels on ourselves, many people describe *Echanges* as 'council communist' (with some justification given the background of some participants). In relation to an organisation as the Coordinadora with what used to be its organisation principles and the struggles it has waged, we would be just as justified to call it 'council communist'. However, to do something like that - rather than just spreading information about it and analyse it - wouldn't make any sense for us at all. We will publish a separate pamphlet about the Coordinadora, which partly will contain some of the material below in full version and better translations.

RH

(1) Material about Spain, and about the Coordinadora, has appeared regularly in *Echanges* from the beginning. For the last years we can in particular refer firstly to the last article dealing specifically with the Coordinadora in no.57, written shortly after it concluded an agreement with the bosses and the state in 1988 in which could be seen signs of changes in its practice pointing to developments becoming more and more clear in the following years. Secondly to an article in no.58 about the December '88 general strike in Spain and to the discussions and material which followed after that on the subjects we just mentioned (see no. 58, 61, 63, 64 and 65).



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## SPAIN: UNIONISM AT A CROSSROAD

The following is a summary of a much longer article by a Spanish comrade, covering much of what he has written in *Echanges* no. 58 onwards.

### Background

A low level of union membership. The unions search for mechanisms that allow its bureaucracy to survive within the framework of the new working and production conditions since the restructuring of the end of the 70s. A climate of low conflictuality after a successful government strategy of splitting the class in regions and sectors. The rapid introduction of automation in industry together with work organisation techniques from Japanese industrial authoritarianism, and a growing precarisation of work, let the unions' tactics to defend basic workers' rights appear obsolete.

Two fundamental positions inside the PSOE (1) and the government: traditional socialists see unions as useful instruments of mediatorship that have to get adjusted and integrated; the neo-liberal currency sees the unions' apparatus as an obstacle for a normal economic development, above all since the unions have finished their job of crushing the autonomous workers' movement and legitimating the new model of exploitation. The marginalisation of the union bureaucracy and its loss of power explains its radicalisation and orientation towards a unity of action between the national union federations UGT (2) and the CCOO (3). The changes in the relations of production puts the existence of these unions themselves in question, so they are looking for a new definition of their function, like the "service union" and "social policy" (travel agencies, housing, pensions etc.), thus trying to adapt themselves to the "social worker", the mass workers' possibilities having been destroyed by electronic technology and new organisation of work. They demand the right of participation, a stronger legal position for collective bargaining, but they are in a deep financial crisis too. The CCOO have to carry the additional load of the PCE (4) crisis, with the latter being in a phase of dissolving. Two positions developed inside CCOO, the "pressure bargaining" and the "mobilisation bargaining", both demanding to be recognised as negotiating partners in the future labor market, regulating industrial relations. Yet they are conscious of the dangers that lie in mobilising the workers, which shows a certain inability of the union to control the workers' movements.

### Anarcho-syndicalism: a marginal force

After the fall of the Franco regime, libertarian organisations were booming, but not for long, one reason being the criminalisation of the movement (e.g. the Scala case) that was to prevent a disruption of the consensus policy of the Moncloa pact of 1978. The internal reasons being the non-adaption to the new conditions and the split into two organisations, the "traditionalist" CNT/AIT (boycotting the union and factory committee elections, demanding assemblies and

the recognition of the union groups in the enterprises) and the "reformist" CGT (taking part in the enterprise elections), both having little influence amongst the workers. As a political manoeuvre, a court decision gave the "historical property" of the CNT confiscated by the fascists to the CNT/AIT, thus giving the money and buildings to an organisation with no real presence in industrial relations, while it might have given the CGT fuel after winning the SEAT factory committee elections at the Barcelona plant. Anyway, the SEAT success could not be repeated, leaving the CGT as a minority force with punctual presence in some conflicts, but all in all marginal.



### **The Coordinadora: From autonomy to bureaucracy**

The role of the ports has changed with the globalisation of markets and changes in international production processes, so a new organisation of work was introduced with new information technologies and automated systems for the handling and moving of freight between different means of transport. Traditionally port workers had had some autonomy at work which meant a real power over the goods. The restructuring at the end of the 70s tries to shift that power to the employers. With workers' resistance against this restructuring finally being defeated, the dockers' union Coordinadora (5) goes through its own restructuring to adapt itself to the new phase. It no longer tries to be a "fighting union" where everyone could intervene and act spontaneously, but changes into a "concerted union" doing collective bargaining and regulating working relations according to the companies' rules like the usual unions. Some of the reasons were the erosion of the assembly dynamic, the inertia of struggles and the low tide of these years where the delegates remained the same even though theoretically they could have been permanently replaced by new ones. The mechanisms of negotiations favoured specialisation, demanded certain knowledges, the workers delegated their representation to the bureaucrats who had the competence. A competition between ports about higher parts of the transport through lowering of costs and the offer of social peace split the former policy of a common front.

\*

In my opinion the general strike on Dec. 14, 1988 was a turning point in the recent history of trade unionism in Spain. The call of CCOO and UGT was a success; Spain was totally paralysed, not because the unions were able to mobilise but because they were able to create an outlet for the diffuse discontent in the country. But, paradoxically, this success was useless, it did not hinder or prevent any of the hard measures against the workers, thus questioning the meaning of such confessors' actions (days of strike) that have become symbolic and ritual acts of the masses.

CVG

Notes by Echanges:

- (1) PSOE (*Partido Socialista Obrero de Espana*/Socialist Labour Party of Spain, the ruling 'socialist' party in power since 1982)
- (2) UGT: *Union General de Trabajadores*/General Union of Workers, traditionally close to the socialist party)
- (3) CCOO: *Comisiones Obreras*/Workers Commissions, traditionally close to the communist party).
- (4) PCE: Communist Party of Spain
- (5) Coordinadora: The name normally used for *Coordinadora Estatal de los Estibadores Portuarios*, meaning something like the national coordination of port stevedores.

## DISPERSED FORDISM AND THE NEW ORGANISATION OF LABOUR

This article by a Spanish comrade was originally appeared in *Etcetera*, a journal published in Barcelona. We publish a facsimile of a summary from the US journal *Libertarian Labor Review*. The reason for publishing it is firstly that it provides some information about a truckers strike in Spain in 1990, and in a forthcoming issue we will have more about later truckers strikes in Spain and France. Secondly because the general subject of the is relevant for a letter by the same comrade published below and which contains a reference to this article.

## LETTERS ABOUT THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE COORDINADORA

Below we publish letters from a Spanish to a Norwegian and a French comrade, answering some questions posed about the Coordinadora.

### Letters from Barcelona

...In regard to Coordinadora: This is a question to be critically evaluated because it is a good example for understanding how a workers organisation born in a context defined both by social political conditions and by a determined concept of dock activities, becomes a classical union, strongly managed by the bureaucracy. In fact a new strategy is being implemented in the worldwide sea commodities transport. Consequently, the role of the ports is changing and so a new organisation of the working process is taking place in the docks. This process which began in the late 70s, is now finishing. (1) In fact the history of the Coordinadora is also the history of the restructuring process of port activities in Spain. Since the workers resistance is overcome, Coordinadora is developing its own restructuring in the sense of adopting to the new era; that is to say, to change from being a 'confrontation union' (where everybody could make spontaneous interventions) to a 'concertation union' (I mean a union closely attached to the policy of the social agreement). In this sense can be seen a proposal of the managers of Coordinadora (legal advisers and union leaders) to introduce a fundamental revision of the Coordinadora statutes for the removal of the clauses which makes it difficult to transform it into

# DISPERSED FORDISM & THE NEW ORGANIZATION OF LABOR: TOWARDS A NEW TYPE OF STRUGGLE?

*The following article is adapted from one that appeared in the Spanish anti-authoritarian journal Etcetera #18, June 1991.*

For eleven days in October, 1990 (10th - 20th), Spain witnessed one of the most violent labor conflicts in recent memory in a strike conducted by the "owner-operators" in the trucking industry.

While this struggle involved only some 15 percent of those working in the sector, it brought with it wide-ranging disruption and tensions (confrontations with police, persecution of scabs, burning of trucks, etc.). Within a few days of the strike's beginning, its impact could be seen in the empty shelves of the major supermarkets in Bilbao and Catalunya, and in the scarcity of goods in the central markets of Madrid and Barcelona. Disruption in the industrial centers was even greater, with reported losses ranging from 50,000 to 200,000 million pesetas. General Motors had to close. Firestone, Nissan and Seat shut down their assembly lines, as did Citroen. Many other enterprises suffered similar interruptions in the productive process: Fasa-Renault, Michelin, Ford (which had to hire 25 airplanes to fly in supplies from its plants in Great Britain and Germany), the chemical industry of Taragona and many lesser industries. In addition, the border at Irun was blockaded by the strikers.

Given the nature of the demands raised by the strikers: government intervention against "illegal" truckers, demands relating to the fixing of tariffs, inspection of vehicles, etc.--this strike could be dismissed as simply a conflict between big and small capital; that is, between the large employers' organizations that control the major part of the longhaul transport market, and the little guys who own and operate from one to five trucks. As such, this struggle would be of little interest. What is of interest, however, is how this battle highlights the profound structural weaknesses in the productive process growing out of the capitalist restructuring of the past 20 years, as well as the objective limits of modern techniques for organizing and managing the workforce.

## Capital's Project

The cycle of capitalist restructuring of the past two decades has had as its main objective the reopening of a path for a renewed cycle of capital accumulation, an accumulation that was increasingly being restricted by the very process that had been instituted to bring it about. This process, which has come to be called "Fordism," was characterized by the massive concentration of the labor force around the assembly lines of the giant manufacturing complexes (especially in the auto industry and the manufacture of consumer goods), and the appropriation by management of workers' inherent knowledge, leading to a deskilling and degradation of labor. This process, however, was limited by the very fact that great numbers of workers were brought together in the productive process, thus making possible the formation of a class opposition. Succeeding cycles of struggles eroded the accumulation of capital in the industrialized countries, causing management to seek to intensify the exploitation of labor power in the 1970s. This is the epoch of social pacts, of austerity, of the neo-liberal models that sought to undermine the foundations of the welfare state.

In order to achieve its main objective, capital has been obliged to institute new methods of organization—both to cut down on the costs of production and to overcome the resistance of the so-called mass worker. These new methods have resulted in a territorial decentralization and increased flexibility in the production process through the displacement of much of the assembly and finishing process towards the capitalist periphery, composed of countries which offer advantages in the availability of cheap labor (Turkey, South Korea, Philippines, Brazil, Mexico). This dispersion on a world scale has its counterpart on the regional level within the industrialized countries themselves. So we see the decentralization of the big manufacturing centers in smaller production units, and the extension of subcontracting, through which big corporations displace certain phases of production (and their costs)

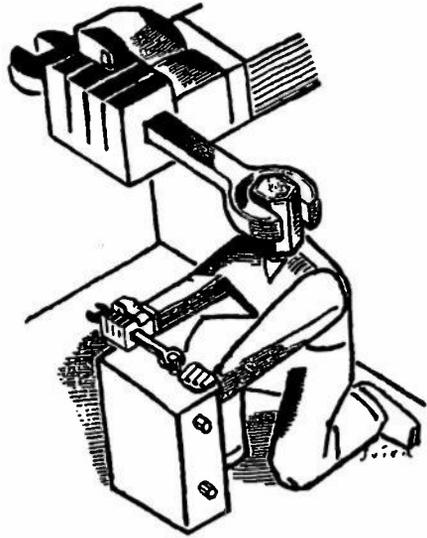
to smaller firms which are given the tasks of providing the parts and components for the final product.

### The New Industrial Culture & its Limits

In order for this new productive process to work in practice, it becomes increasingly necessary that each link in the production process chain needs to be perfectly coordinated. In other words, each part or component that goes into intermediate products on the way to final assembly must be at its destination in the correct quantity at the proper time. This substantially increases the vulnerability of the process, putting a greater burden on management to eliminate the possibility of disruption of the continuous flow of goods and components, whether by accident or design (sabotage or other acts of worker resistance). Consequently, we see the development of new methods of "human resource management," and the "enterprise spirit" becomes a priority. Hence the proliferation of "quality of work life," team concept," "customer focus" and other devices designed to get workers to identify with management's objectives.

But the nature of the dispersed production process, which makes the situation of increasingly larger sections of the work force ever more precarious (characterized by the growth of part-time and temporary workers), makes achieving such a consensus very difficult. For this reason, corporate strategy orients itself towards a differential treatment of each worker, according to his/her relative importance in the chain, determining a wage and functional hierarchy within the enterprise. This renewed stratification of labor results in increased divisions within the working class, pitting employed against unemployed, temporary workers against permanent workers, skilled against unskilled, workers covered by fringe benefits against workers without these guarantees, etc.

From Japan to the United States and Europe, one of the principal preoccupations of the transnational corporations is the "management of human resources." Management of the electronic technology demands a complementary strategy that begins with the necessity of generating a consensus among the distinct levels of the hierarchy—a "corporate culture" in which each worker assumes as his/her own the objectives determined by the technical-financial center. Such a consensus is essen-



tial to the efficient management of the widely dispersed production process. Just-in-time, total quality, and other watchwords put forth by the most aggressive Japanese transnationals are in the technological, as well as ideological, vanguard of this process. But the forms for obtaining this consensus differ from place to place. In Europe the welfare state, to the extent that it still lives, serves this role. But as the recession points towards the abolition of the welfare state, capital increasingly is turning towards the Japanese model.

The technologies of surveillance and control that are integrated in the automation process in order to enforce the physical control of the productive sequence demands increased management control as well. The goal is to create the "ideal" in automation, a self-regulating process in which humans and machines are fully integrated. This reduces workers' ability to organize resistance in a mass way reminiscent of the "old workers' movement." Thus, the struggles that have taken place within industrialized countries over the past decade have been largely localized and "corporatist" in form (railroad engineers, air traffic controllers, cleaning workers, bus drivers, health workers, etc.).

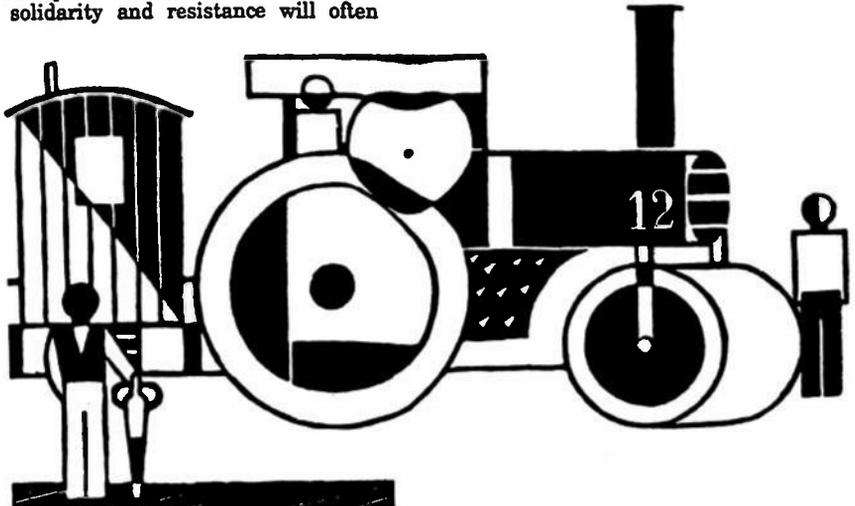
Yet while the increasing complexity of the productive process demands the consensual submission of all involved in the logistical chain, cost cutting, subcontracting and intensified exploitation create a multiplicity of differentiated interests. The truckers' strike is a good example. The large corporations have transferred many operations to subcontractors for organizational and economic reasons, seeking to maintain their control through economic power (forcing various contractors to compete with each other, for example). But as a result, the same companies find themselves dependent upon their subcontractors from the logistical point of view, and a strike (or sabotage) can quickly shut down not merely one part of the productive process, but much if not all of the interdependent productive chain.

Thus localized struggles can often have a disproportionate impact on the company as a whole. Thus struggles which challenge the traditional trade unions in their formal expression (as with the Italian base committees), even if they continue to revolve within the bounds of traditionally trade union demands, are expressions of the forms of solidarity corresponding to the new productive processes, in the same way that mass actions of the past expressed the forms of solidarity made possible by the "Fordist" organization of the work force. To criticize their sectoral character is, therefore, simply useless. Real solidarity, the possible sociality, is found in the process of struggle and resistance against capitalism. When labor processes are atomized and dispersed, solidarity and resistance will often

appear similarly atomized. But despite their limited character, these dispersed struggles represent, in a way, a questioning of the totality that composes the logistical chain and the process of reproduction, and causes the propaganda apparatus of the state and the communications media to orient themselves towards mobilizing the rest of the citizenry against the "anti-social" minority who would dare disrupt the consensus.

While these struggles do not orient themselves towards the emancipation of labor from wage slavery, they are still fundamentally radical acts in a world in which our very existence as human beings is increasingly defined as a source of valorization for capital. In an era when the very idea of emancipation seems hopeless, every act of resistance is an affirmation of that idea.

—Mike Hargis

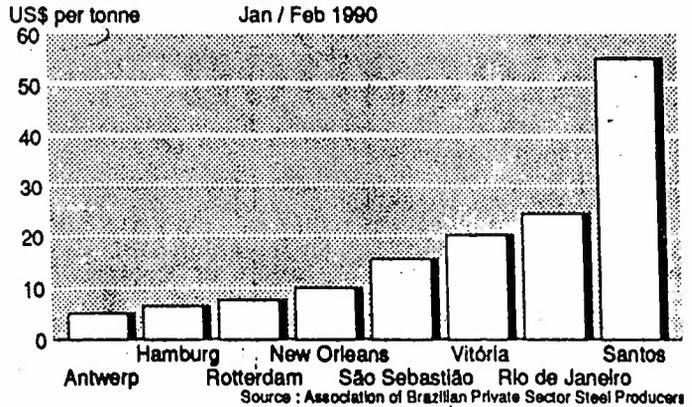


a completely bureaucratic union, for instance the disappearance of the workers' collective which allowed the existence of a rank and file assembly body in practice counterbalancing the power of capital at the lowest level of working conditions. (See *La Estiba* (The Docker) no.56) These managers are directly pressuring the Barcelona dockers over publishing the dockers' paper *La Estiba* because it is not controlled by themselves and is very critical of these bureaucratic trends. This example demonstrates well what has been the evolution of many workers' unions in Spain in the recent past.

CVG 10/90

(1) *Echanges* has published a lot of articles on the Coordinadora, on the restructuring of sea transport and its consequences for the dockers' and the seamen's struggles. This restructuring was not over when these letters were written, as can be seen from some articles about deregulation and privatisation of Britain's ports (*Financial Times* 6/2/91 and 12/2/91 which underline that "the winds of competition are blowing around the dock gates"), the deregulation of Brazilian ports (the end of restrictive laws which have operated unchanged since 1934 - *FT* 22/2/92 gives the following chart on 'Costs of loading steel sheets'), the failed attempts to achieve an Australian docks reform (*FT* 30/4/91). (Copies of articles available from *Echanges*.)

### Costs of loading steel sheets



### Another letter from Barcelona

Anyway, when referring to the Coordinadora and to its evolution towards more and more specifically unionist methods, we have to consider the important point that the dockers' movement took place (since 1981) when the most important autonomous workers' struggles (74,75,77) already had ended. In this meaning one could say that the process followed by the dockers refers to the late period of autonomous struggles; then the CCOO and UGT unions had already conquered their mediation position in the democratic transition of Spain. In fact the Coordinadora was born from a conflict having seen quite a lot of tactical errors from the UGT and CCOO bureaucrats; these unions abandoned the redundant dockers once they had signed an agreement with the port employers' organisation. Their error then was to underestimate the real feeling of solidarity among the dockers; this strong solidarity feeling was the start of a

struggle continuing until the redundant dockers were reengaged. It is this fact which saw the end and the almost total disappearance of the official unions in the port of Barcelona. ...to see where the lawyers and national leaders want to lead the Coordinadora, one must consider the texts "La Coordinadora a revisión" and "Propuesta de modificación en el funcionamiento organizativo de Coordinadora" published in *La Estiba* no. 56, June/July 90. These texts reveal the intention to change the assemblyist structures and principles of the Coordinadora, with the pretext of adapting them to the new working conditions in the port, etc.... (1)

CVG 1/92

(1) This letter continued with some more general remarks about Spain. Immediately below we however publish some more relevant material about what the letter says about the Coordinadora. The rest of the letter is published after that again under the title *On the autonomous movement in Spain and in general*.

## THREE TEXTS ON THE COORDINADORA FROM 'LA ESTIBA'



The following is a description of one of the *La Estiba* articles mentioned in the letters above: *La Coordinadora a Revisión*. Thereafter follows two critical articles by Barcelona dockers from the same paper.

### CHANGE IN THE FUNCTIONING OF THE COORDINADORA

Reflecting on the internal division within the organisation which followed the February '88 agreement, the writer wants to ask what is the better for the organisation and prefers to see the practical side - and that the agreement, which can have both positive and negative aspects, was signed and is functioning. Facing a decade of turmoil, an organisation such as the Coordinadora, with the presence it has in the ports, cannot forego definite schemes of action.

Then, to give an understanding of what might be best for the organisation, the writer gives an account of the union's history.

#### Period before Feb. '88

The first stage (77-79) was when the dock's collectives were part of the OTP (Office for Port Labour, a state board which was responsible for the operation of the docks). The trade union functioning was very simple and it revolved around the skills of the leaders who played up to the paternalism of the OTP which tried to survive without conflicts. The dockers' collectives were organised in separate 'syndicates' without a global vision of the ports (trade unionism purely individualistic), until 1979 when the Coordinadora starts.

The second stage (80-86): A very active period in the life of the organisation. Employing a model of confrontation, it tried to fight the interests of deregulation and privatisation. But since the organisation

didn't have the strength to keep these means of fight up, this would amount to pure suicide in the end.

Third stage (86-88): When a new model of the trade union struggle emerges and the Ports' Agreement of Feb. '88 is signed.

#### **Period after Feb. '88**

Leaving behind the 'confrontation union' image which belongs to the last century, the organisation enters a phase of maturity. It's not just **all** or **nothing**. In the 'new trade union model' the union concedes, negotiates, confronts, asks for, gives in, steps back to go forward, etc.

What comes next? A new set of tasks start to be formulated with the need for an enlarged Confederation of dockers and seamen and in line with the autonomous collectives to foment an overture to any other kindred organisation. Revision of the Coordinadora statutes to achieve these goals.

### **COORDINADORA - A NEW AREA**

The famous Agreement signed on Feb. 5th, 1988 (1) marks a change of direction on labour relations throughout the ports of our country. The acceptance of that decree not only involves great changes in the way our work is organised - which we are still involved with at this moment - but also a new kind of relationship with the administration-employers. By signing it the Coordinadora has begun a period of consensus based around a new model of how the ports could work which involves more privatised ports where the multinationals can at last get rid of the smaller employers and impose the kind of technology and discipline which will make labour cheaper and increase productivity. This approach also requires a new attitude from the union and a new way of negotiating conditions. Without workers' collaboration this reform would have been difficult, if not impossible. In fact, in those ports where this collaboration has not been achieved the restructuring has run into difficulties, eg. Las Palmas.

Once we have accepted the major structural changes which were part of the Agreement - drastic reductions in the workforce, forced retirement, red tape, wage freezes or reductions, new payment procedures, separation of the 'fijos' (2) and an increase in their numbers, the creation of special types of dockers under INEM (3), reduction in those tasks reserved purely for dock workers, division and privatisation, increases in output, etc. Once these had been accepted it's just a question of detail as to how each port adapts itself to realising the goals it has already agreed to....

This period of consensus has imposed changes on the union which would be logical in an organisation who's main aim is to achieve stability and ensure its own permanence. They are logical also for the committees which do not get renewed or when 'important' comrades who spend too long in the same post cease to be an expression of collective developments. They feel more and more justified in interpreting the collective interests from their own perspectives. More and more information is kept back - which leaves people feeling uninformed and inhibited - so they end up believing more in their own abilities to make decisions than in the strength of the collective.

The (union's) representatives have to rearm themselves ideologically to justify their acceptance of the Agreement, so they have initiated discussions about 'competivity', 'productivity',

'professionalism', 'profitability', 'discipline', etc. This kind of ideology is already being put out by the ruling class, but it has never been in the workers' interest. It converts the bosses into altruists simply because they give us a job, and makes any worker who doesn't accept conditions which are more and more precarious into an ungrateful saboteur. Constant and excessive contact with the bosses and the time spent studying their grand plans ends up convincing our representatives that their (i.e. the bosses') way is the best and only viable one, whilst ours is against the general interest. The workers take on the role of promoting the port, accepting the bosses' pressure to do nothing which would affect its competitive image.

These changes in our conditions of work, and the way in which they are carried out, are causing a rift between the committee and the collective, between the representatives and the Assembly as a forum for reflection. The workers feel more and more alienated from those representatives and the unpopular decisions they are taking. The prestige which our representatives have and the majority's fear of confronting their dominance means that opposition does not manifest itself for lack of organic channels of expression which would not cause suspicion and resentment [from the representatives]. This produces disillusionment, underhand criticism and, if not outright opposition, then passive resistance which implies a lack of faith in any alternative.

As this point people stop attending mass assemblies because "there's nothing to do", "the same people make all the decisions", "someone else has already done it for me", etc. The representatives, who are more and more isolated by their actions, legitimise what they are doing through their high-minded sense of responsibility... These groups grow more and more tight in response to their hostile environment and as a result become more and more isolated, turning on the worker in their own defense by saying "they don't know what they want", "they always criticise behind our backs", "they're boycotting the committee", etc. As a result our assemblies are alarmingly empty, and this is a luxury which our organisation cannot accept when we define ourselves in contrast with all the others as 'participative' and open to diverse opinion, with a constant change of delegates, etc. If we don't maintain this difference we will have not only killed our past but also failed to live up to our future...

The only alternatives we have is to face the trauma of inexperienced new delegates taking on the representation of an Assembly which accepts responsibility for its own destiny, rather than delegating decision.

Having revocable delegates only means something if it actually happens in practice, if



not... it's just nice words on a piece of paper. Equally, there is no point in threatening to recall someone if it never happens - you might as well just give them an unconditional right to remain where they are. If this distancing process between the delegates and their assembly isn't stopped the Agreement will have succeeded in achieving its ultimate objective: destroying a form of workers' organisation which has proved its validity over the years and has enabled the Spanish dockers' voice to be heard because it is a expression of our collective force.

F. Aroca - Barcelona (*La Estiba* no.55) (4)

#### Notes

(1) See *Echanges* no.57 for material about the December '87 dockers' strike, the negotiations leading to the February '88 agreement and reactions to this agreement among dockers.

(2) 'Fijos' are a small proportion of the workforce who's jobs cannot be rotated like other dockers because they are too specialist.

(3) INEM is the body which sorts out job creation schemes... like MSC did in Britain.

(4) This docker had criticised the adoption of the agreement as early as in *La Estiba* no. 33. Apart from the contents of the agreement itself, he pointed out that the dockers' assemblies were not properly consulted during the negotiations, but presented with a finished document on a 'take it or leave it' basis. He said the the whole thing had been done to quickly and that the agreement had been amended after the majority in the assemblies accepted it. He is one of a group of dockers who left the Barcelona delegate committee of the Coordinadora in 1992 (see the document '*Liquidation of the Coordinadora*' published later in this issue of *Echanges*).

## FOR A FREE AND PARTICIPATIVE ASSEMBLY

Perhaps a lot of people will ask "Don't we already have such a thing?" I don't reckon that we have, and I'll try to expalin why.

During Franco's last days, when the 'vertical' union which he had imposed was breathing its last gaps, the Barcelona dockers - as a result of the 21 day strike from November 12th, 1976 - began to use assemblies for discussion, debate and decision making. From this we went on to create a union which our statutes define as assemblyist. Since then our great strength has been our collective unity which operates through our assemblies. We can all remember the massive meetings... where we learned - not without difficulties - to participate and debate in a constructive spirit, accepting the decisions which were reached, because noone can deny the validity of decisions in which practically the whole collective has participated.

Nowadays it's not like this. If we consider the minutes of meetings over the last two years we see that the level of participation has fallen to about 60 or 70 comrades. I have to wonder "Can a minority hardly 10% decide for the whole collective?", "Will such discussions be respected and accepted?". That's why I say that our assemblies are not based on mass participation.

They aren't free either, because people do not speak up for themselves, they're afraid of making a mistake, of having an opinion that doesn't fit in with what the delegates want. How many times have we seen opinions which differed from those of the commission refuted, not by one person on the platform, but by several, repeatedly and in some cases with a great deal

of irritation? To have unconditional opinions, to believe that things could be done differently and say so, is healthy and necessary - so we must banish the idea that anyone who doesn't think like me is against me. If not we'll find discussion turning into personal confrontations, in which case we'll be the ones who lose out.

All this is without mentioning the clique (for lack of a better word) which never says anything, but with its attitudes - its smiles and murmurs, noises, or even in some cases threats - cuts short free expression. With all this, I reckon that our assemblies are not free - they simply give out information, then take a vote at the end.

So who benefits from our organisation's present condition? Certainly not the dockworkers' collective, when our assemblies are a reflection of the level of disillusionment, disenchantment and lack of confidence which we have sunk to. We need to analyse objectively, without passion, what has brought us to this situation. Who is to blame? In some ways all of us - everyone who makes up our collective - although the main responsibility lies with those who hold positions of responsibility and who have done so for years.

If we do get back to a living assembly in which people can participate freely we will have breathed life back into an organisation which has proved its validity over the years in numerous critical situations. If we are not able to do so, our dockworkers' collective is sure to disappear and a distinctive kind of trade union which distanced itself from the status quo - a union which raised the hopes of this country's captive and disorientated workers' movement - will have failed.

Antoni Valero - Barcelona (*La Estiba* no. 56)

## ON THE AUTONOMOUS MOVEMENT IN SPAIN AND IN GENERAL

This is the continuation of the letter from the Spanish comrade published above ('Another letter from Barcelona').

...I want to give some precisions on the autonomous movement in Spain, which could help to better understand its radical characteristics as the result of the process of adaptation of the workforce moving from the countryside. During the last year of the Franco regime many workers were in such a situation, moving to the industrial towns in Catalonia, Madrid, the Basque country, Asturias, Valladolid, etc. I think that the workers' attitude is linked to their personal and historical experience in the milieu where they have grown up. In short, most of the workers involved in the most characteristic, often autonomous struggles were young people - the first generation born in urban districts or having emigrated from other parts of Spain, all of them having a very new experience of factory life and of its contradictions, with no political tradition (most of them coming from small villages in Andalusia, Extremadura, Galicia,

Aragon, Castilla). I.e. they were not used to the capitalist way of mediation to solve the problems of work; they only knew the previous current practice of 'caciquism' and relations still strongly tied to some kind of feudal remains. In this respect I see an important difference between the Asturian miners (where workers' organisations always have existed - it is not by chance that the CCOO had its origin there) and the workers on the line at the Valladolid Renault factory: indisciplined, angry and hostile to the unions. Of course, I know very well both experiences and I refer to formal differences - differences in the formal expression of autonomous struggles. On one hand, the Renault unions had to wait for the exhaustion of the autonomous movement to impose themselves, though staying rather weak; on the other hand the same unions are still powerful in the Asturias but they have to defend all the working rules transgressions (refusal of work, Monday absenteeism, faked sick-leaves from the doctors through pressure or bribery) in order to keep their influence amongst the miners.

All that brings me to what you said in your letter [*Echanges* no. 63] on the need to avoid the 'recipes for the success of struggles'. We have of course to consider 'the dialectical relationship', in other words the existing conflicts between the formal expressions of the organisations and

the struggle as the real battleground of the proletarian action. I asked myself for a long time up to which point we refer to prejudices, to inherited out of date concepts no longer related to the present world, when we are looking at the present conflicts in developed capitalist countries. I am referring here to the disappearance of 'finalism', considered as the fading of the meaning of quite a lot of concepts linked to the theory of class



struggle corresponding to the moment when the workers' subjectivity was formed as a formal social expression in front of capital embodied as the bourgeoisie. I am directly linking the disappearance of 'finalism' and of the messianic concepts of emancipation to the disintegration or the disappearance of the subject who supported them. We can observe a more and more developed process of decomposition of the social form of the classical proletariat (the factory workers who worked in large productive concentrations and had a certain homogeneity in its life and working conditions). The rise of the tertiary sector with a new fragmented and precarious proletariat and the dispersion of the large productive industrial units underline, in my opinion, a new stage of relationship in the exploitation of the labour force.

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On the workers' side, this means a break with the so-called workerist tradition and on capital's side new necessities and a new social consensus. But all that happens in an ocean of contradictions completely reshaped in a kaleidoscopic universe of tensions and conflicts. The contradictions which emerging at a certain level of social relations are not present at another level. For example, to consider the human condition only as labour force (i.e. the growing proletarianisation of the population) doesn't correspond to a sociologically homogenous class formation we could see with the working class linked to fordism after the second world war. We can furthermore say that we are living in a process of transformation only understandable if we consider the crumbling of the form of domination of capital (from classical fordism to the decentralised production, which implies the decomposition of the forms of class structure of the factory workers).

We can say, accordingly, that the classical model of confrontation has been greatly transformed, when the extension of capital brings about the disappearance of the formal subjectivity which was formed as a social subject around the traditional working class and as a practical reality in the mass movement. On the contrary, the new production and management techniques helped to build a very hierarchical structure in the whole labour force in such a way that what was expressed formerly in the form of the struggle of two classes now express itself as an 'explosion' of multiple contradictions. There is no longer a fundamental contradiction, but a conflictuality which spreads all over the developed capitalist countries through a lot of small unfair 'cheatings', crimes, insubordinations in the production sphere and in the social life in general. This dispersion of the conflicts concerning the more or less large layers of workers and the proletarianised population is not linked at all to a final aim, contrary to what we could see formerly amongst the working class organised in parties and unions. We can see to day this contradiction as a tendency towards the decomposition of capitalist society rather than a tendency to recompose an historical subject expressing a kind of alternative sociality. This does not mean the end of class struggle as the post modern sociology tries to explain, but its transformation corresponding to the present stage in the development of the exploitation of the labour force. And this also means new ways of expressing the resistance, even new values and concepts of struggles sometimes in contradiction with what we knew in the past.

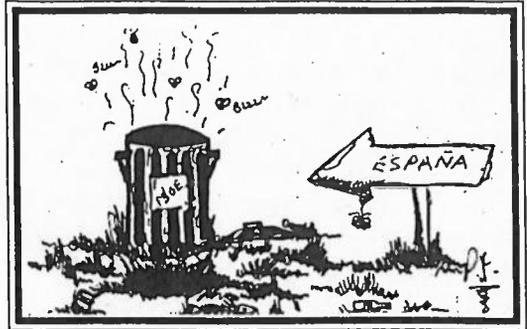
In fact I tried to discuss this approach in an article (*Dispersed fordism and the new organisation of labor*) in *Etcetera* concerning the transport strikes and the new dispersed fordist organisation of work. I think you are right when you say that this discussion about the forms of the struggles can be trapped in prejudices (anarcho syndicalist for instance) and it could be of a great help if we don't look at these more general questions which are behind this discussion on the forms of the class struggle and its meaning. In fact, I don't believe that it is possible to have an inductive perspective of analysis of what concerns the theorisation of communism; i.e. neither inductive (try to find in the present struggles the forms which could prefigure communism), nor deductive (to start from an ethical, ecological, teleological, etc. principle or premise). In my opinion, the

transformation of society no longer follows laws which were formed at the beginning of modern science according to a mecanist picture of the world. On the contrary, it is an open process in which it is possible to detect contradictions through conflicts and tensions which don't contain an historical finality but only the decomposition of a model of social organisation (capitalist). What communism is and how to bring it to life was a question which considered the actual reality of a dominant capitalism from a point of view corresponding to the previous period. Presently, everything looks as if communism would only be the virtuality of social change springing from the multiplicity of conflicts. E. g. the negation of the social statu quo can be seen in the fact that there is still a lot of conflicts even if they are not seen by the actors as aiming at the substitution of a social order for another one. Finally, I don't know until which point it is coherent to use these words with a finalist or determinist connotation when we try to start the criticism of present society and its conflicts.

### On Spain and the political debate

In Spain, the present political debate concerns the 'competetivity pact'. As I have already said in other letters (1) the government tries to push a new social pact and the unions are against. That is to say, the government put forward unacceptable conditions in its proposed text; unions played the same usual comedy, claiming loudly their refusal with the threat to start a new general strike like in December '88 (2) though agreeing 'to discuss'. The government proposals included a tighter wage control,

i.e. a bigger reduction of an already lowered living standard, a reduction of the employers' contribution to the health system (with as a counterpart an increase of the employees' contribution), a diminution of enterprises taxes, more 'flexibility' in the working contracts and the possibilities of making workers redundant (becoming less expensive for employers), etc...



All these measures aim at an increased productivity and competetivity, which is among the lowest of the European countries (only a bit better than Turkey) according some OECD or other international forum reports. The reduction of the labour price is the last possibility to try to improve Spain's competetivity on the European market and the counterpart offered by the government to the already invested transnational capital (or that which could be invested in a near future). There is indeed no other measures to take. The modernisation of the productive apparatus is practically over, mainly in the industrial branches which had some future in the EEC and in the disbanding of the branches without a future. Most of the modern factories are already in the hands of the transnational capital (more than 90% of the agrobusiness, the whole of the electronics industry, computers, and automation components,

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etc...). They only other possibilities remaining is tighter control of wages and public expenses for welfare.

The unions have maintained their usual positions during the whole previous period, i.e. a verbal opposition to the government proposals, to come back more recently to a position of dialogue expressing the will to arrive at a trilateral agreement (government, employers, unions). The process followed by the government is a very classical one in 'democracy': the government unveils its proposals for an 'industrial pact' and present it in a way and in such terms that it is unacceptable for the unions. Then it drops some words in its proposals (the less important but the most provocative) and then the unions agree first to come to discuss and lastly to sign the agreement.

For example, the unions at first refused to discuss wage control; but at the beginning of July, they declared openly they were ready to meet the government on this question (of course to discuss the pace of the next wage rise). The unions asked as a countermeasure a series of general measures on salary taxation, promotion of employment, professional training, all of it measures characterised by their ambiguity. Even more, in this document of the unions (presented in common by CCOO and UGT) there were other measures presented as the 'reenforcement of negotiation' which actually means a reenforcement of the union role in the whole of industrial relations and a guarantee to be present in the bodies managing unemployment benefits.

One of the proposals from the employers needs to be closely examined: the proposal linking wage rises to productivity increase. This measure would be applied individually for each worker in such a way that the wage of a worker would be directly related to his personal productivity level; a general agreement would fix a minimum wage for each sector, category, etc... (Seat-Volkswagen already has tried to impose this system in its Barcelona factory). It is in fact only another step forwards in the process of destruction of the working community build around the fordist organisation of work after the second world war. Presently the uniformity of wages and the negotiating procedure for wages raise are the last point of practical convergence of the workers' interests when expressing claims at the factory level; these facts were the main element of aggregation for the workers. I don't know up to which point this disaggregation of the forms of resistance linked to fordism will bring some new forms of resistance from the new proletariat. We will have to look for new forms of solidarity outside the traditional sphere of production, for instance in the sphere of the commodity consumption, where new identities are rising like style, rock music for instance, or mass sport events, fashion, etc... These new forms of solidarity would include some more or less marginal facts concerning the balance of the commodity sale like crime, but essentially the forms of resistance in several specific conflicts in developed capitalist society (squatters, desertion, etc...). We have perhaps to consider these new forms of solidarity as the problematic (contradictory) expression of the present phase of the capitalist system, as the expression of a decomposition of social life (parallel to the process of

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decomposition of the forms of the fordist aggregation) and the expression of a certain rise of the resistance of the exploited on new schemes.

Finally I have to add endly that the discussion on the 'competetivity pact' develops in a context of a more and more repressive policy from the government. The minister of labour has just published a project to limit the right to strike. If the unions disagree, the project will become law without a parliamentary debate by the means of a decret. The Spanish Home Office has just published the proposal of a law on 'citizens' security' which on one hand is written in a bizarre and obscure language not even correct in juridical terms and on the other hand pushes aside some fundamental right included in the 1978 constitution. The pretext is to repress the drug traffic (new scapegoat) because the value of terrorism is somewhat reduced in the social imaginary - the police can operate where it wants and enter private homes without any permission from a judge. It is in fact the extension of a previous law against terrorism. We can observe that the franquist law offered a better guarantee for the individual rights that this new proposal. As I said about the competetivity pact, after this polemics on the security law, the government will change some formulations and maintain the essential and more fundamental questions like the limitation of the freedom of speech, of demonstration and of meeting.

C.G.V. 12/7/91

1) On Spain, see a number of previous Echanges issues (no. 64 for the 'competetivity pact') and for the post-franquist period and the assembly movement the book *De l'anti-franquisme à l'apres franquisme - Illusions politiques et lutte de classe* (From anti-franquism to post-franquism - Political illusions and class struggle) (Echanges, 1980, by C. Brendel and H. Simon). The first social pact called the 'Moncloa Pact' was the result of a general consensus involving all parties and unions in order to modernise capitalism in a 'democratic' Spain.

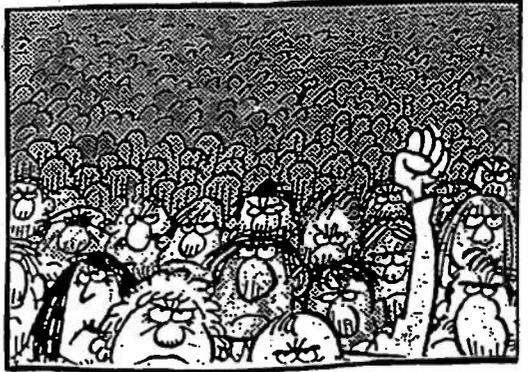
2) About this strike see Echanges no.58 and 61.

## ASTURIAS, REQUIEM TIME

The following article was published in *Etcetera* no. 19. While dealing with a strike of Asturian miners at the end of '91, it also contains the same kind of general discussion as in the letter above.

The mining villages of Asturia suddenly burst up on the TV screens during the last week of December 1991 with pictures of an apparent resurgence of industrial conflicts. General strike in the mining region, fights with the police and blockade of the main roads to the other parts of Spain, etc... brought Asturias to the forefront of the social problems. Why did the miners awake? Was it a reaction of a whole industry against a 'Survival Plan' in which, with a good sense of humour, the Madrid government projected to end all mining in this district. Were the miners again going to war as in 1934 or 1936, or even better as during the hard strikes against the dictatorship in the 60's and 70's? Nobody was leaping for joy. Big enthusiastic words were

not there. There was a large gap between on one hand the overwhelming propanganda flowing from the media (newspapers, radio, TV, etc...) and on the other hand from the workers the emotional approach which burst up in violent reactions. This situation could not hide the deep distortion of the meaning of this conflict and the solidarity with the miners. Neither the circumstances, nor the content of this fight or the concerned 'subjects' could be related to a 'glorious past'. On the contrary everything indicated that we were seeing the last phase of a model of social intervention of the workers led by the unions.



### **LOCKING THEMSELVES UP IN THE MINE: PROTECTING THE IMAGE AND THE POSITIONS OF UNION POWER**

The strength of the mobilisation in December led CCOO and UGT leaders to lock themselves up deep into the Barredo pit in the Rio Caudal valley near the city Mieres. It was actually a great surprise to see top union leaders dressed as miners and followed by a crowd going down into the pit at 300m depth to oblige the government to change the 'survival plan'. The situation must have been very serious to make the provincial union leaders to put on the miners cloths they had thrown away ages ago and in doing so start this spectacular action.

But if the situation was serious, it was so firstly for the unions and the people who lead them. This situation was the same in other European countries; the unions being pushed into a growing marginalisation in their ability to manage the labour force. The new organisation of work, the new technology of automation, the precariousness, etc... have transformed the universe of work relationship in such a way that there is no space for the intervention of the unions.

In Asturias, the closure of the pits belonging to the public national society Hunosa (foreseen for 2002) will mean for the unions the loss of one of the fortresses of their negotiating power and of the political intervention of the union bureaucracy. The mining industry was in fact the industrial branch where the rate of unionisation was the highest (90 %) and where the union tradition was deeply rooted (the CCOO were born at the La Camocha pit in the Asturias during the 60's). The disbanding of Hunosa represents the loss of an essential instrument of the personal power of Fernandez Villa, leader of the SOMA-UGT (UGT's miners union of Asturias), in relation to the PSOE apparatus in the Asturias. Hunosa means a lot to him, both in the use of union time, the distribution of financial advantages to his followers, and the control of the mayors of the mining villages' councils. Moreover, this sordid intriguer occupies a top function into the Madrid PSOE and is Felipe Gonzalez 's right hand in the inside war against

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UGT general secretary Nicolas Redondo. The PSOE with this faithful ally can play the double game in these conflict situations in a very clever way: though supporting the government policy, he can release an apparent opposition in any sector of the party (the well known comedy opposing for instance Guerre and Solchaga).

### THE 'SURVIVAL PLAN'

Hunosa (Hulleras des Norte S A) was formed in the 60's when private capital was no longer interested in the Asturian mines. Private capital looked elsewhere for better profits because of the strength of the workers movement in the mines, of the obsolescent equipment and of the growing difficulties in the exploitation of the seams. The state had to nationalise the loss-making coal production into Hunosa (part of INI, National Institute of Industry). In doing so the franquist government had it both ways: maintaining the mines preserved the social peace in a province where the struggles were disturbing the dictatorship and going ahead with coal production conformed with the policy of national energy independence.

During the 60's and the 70's, the miners fought constantly for the improvement of wages and working conditions and the Hunosa deficit was equally constant. The PSOE-government implemented restructuring foresaw the complete liquidation of the mining industry. The PSOE now pushes ahead the last phase of this liquidation with some recently revealed projects of reconversion. The EEC decisions and the buying of South African coal (four times cheaper than Asturian coal) are definite arguments to legitimate the government's 'survival plan'. This plan foresees the progressive reduction of employment up to the complete closure of Hunosa in 2002. The plan hopes to eliminate 6.000 jobs with early retirement in the first year, 1992, i.e. one third of the 18.000 present Hunosa miners. The only concession is the Hunosa offer of 25 million square meters of land (7 billions pesetas, £ 35 million) to be used for an 'industrial regeneration' of the mining district.

The unions agree with the arguments on the decrease in the coalmines profitability and consequently the disbanding of the Hunosa. They only demand that the 'survival plan' shall include measures to build alternative new industries and jobs, i.e. measures which will maintain their ability to negotiate and the mediating function of the union leadership in the new relations of work after the disbanding of Hunosa... Anyway neither the government nor private capital are interested at all: the market laws defended by the unions during the transition to democracy mean that all investments have to be forgotten in a country like Asturias whose geographical and economic situation do not offer an opportunity to make profits.

### OBSOLESCENT ASTURIAS

The mining crises, as other previous crisis for example in the shipyards (Gijon 1983), is another episode in the process of the crumbling of the regional Asturian economy. The mining industry was the main activity bringing social and economic life to the 9 mining villages of Asturias (300.000 inhabitants, one third of the district population). Asturias have to afford the consequence of having been a model of industrial development supported by the State, a model

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which has to disappear according to the dominant neo-liberal doctrine of the Madrid government and of the EEC. Some other lossmaking public sectors (like Ensidesa - steel industry) will have to suppress some 5.000 jobs out of 14.500, in addition to the effect on a number of subsidiaries.

Agriculture, the other big economic sector of the region (16,3% of the workers) is not in a better condition. The local production and the technical condition of land exploitation explain the gap between the rentability in Asturias and the EEC. According to the previsions this sector will have to get rid of between 15000 and 20000 jobs in the coming years.

Asturias is a remote and particular region compared with the other more dynamic economic areas of the Peninsula. Mountains make communications difficult with the South (Castilla) and the infrastructural problems still exist in the communications with the other parts of the north Cantabrica (Galicia and Basque Country). As Asturias has a labour force strongly organised with a tradition of struggle for the defence of its interests, it is easy to understand why European or Japanese investors are not attracted.

Asturias, contrary to the other parts of Spain, have no local bourgeoisie whose interests could bring them to a coalition with other classes to stop the decline of the regional economy. Low and middle bourgeoisie have neither the ability nor the means to confront a situation which puts into question their own stability as a social group and the so-called high bourgeoisie traditionally has looked for investments outside the region with a prospect of more distant but larger profits.

### **THE LAST BATTLES OF THE OLD WORKERS MOVEMENT**

The violence of the fights between the demonstrators and the police, localised in only one valley and around the town of Mieres, is similar to what we have seen in other processes of restructuring (shipyards for instance) and is the expression of a weakness as well as of an offensive potential of struggle. The ability of the successive PSOE governments to implement the capitalist restructurisation in Spain was mainly due to their possibility to localise the mobilisations of resistance following a gradual calendar avoiding a general mobilisation at the same time in different sectors.

Unions on their side supported the government, maintaining a strict control of the workers (being able to stop various autonomous tendencies), signing social pacts or agreements for social peace and calling on the workers to accept the "necessary sacrifices for the rescue of the national economy"; in other words guaranteeing social peace. Furthermore the present situation is only the consequence of the processes started with the Moncloa Pact which lasted till the 80's, with the so-called industrial reconversion (textile, Sagonte, shipyards, etc...).

Considering the whole situation, the unions were apparently in a situation allowing them to repair their past errors and to form an interunion committee for the struggle. But considering their most recent positions we don't have to hesitate on the present role of the unions. How to explain the sudden radicalisation of the SOMA-UGT considering that this union did not even call for the general strike of October 23 and that Fernando Villa advised the socialist mayors

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of the mining towns not to follow this call? Why did the unions call for a unitarian demonstration against the Bilbao deindustrialisation (December 1st) and then tried to avoid the building of a common front against the restructurisation (exactly what they have done for the past decade)? Why did the unions leaders wait to launch a general mobilisation in the mines until the moment when they knew that the government was about to approve the restructuring plan, knowing well that in such circumstances nothing would happen?

Perhaps it was only a game considering the future of the union organisation faced with the progressive disparition of its social basis (in this case, the mining industry). Of course it was naive to believe that the government would soften its position and change the plan concerning Hunosa: the old union leaders isolated behind their barriers certainly didn't believe this. Why then this show with going down into the mine and draw the workers into a desperate and last minute action? Only to try to save their face and to maintain their members by giving them the impression that they have fought together with the miners as in the 'good old time'.

### INTERNALISING THE LOGIC OF THE MARKET

The evolution of the conflict bring to light the more and more ambiguous character of the unions' claims. In reality they didn't oppose the 'survival plan' which aims to liquidate Hunosa, except, lacing other alternatives, trying to maintain in the valley the level of employment and so maintaining their union strength. The union ideology tried for so many years to convince the workers of the benefits of the market economy, that the workers now start to question the logic of the market economy and to develop different ideas about the need to eliminate the public enterprises either through their liquidation or their selling to transnational capital.

The effect of the demagogy of the government is effectively supported by the taxpayers who don't want to support Asturian miners presented as absenteeist, undisciplined, high cost workers. Which 'serious' worker could reject such an argument? Of course, nobody talks about the selling of Enasa to Fiat, of the Seville TGV (only understandable as a compromise between the PSOE apparatus and Siemens and Alstom), the Sevilla exhibition, etc... or the buying of votes for the PSOE with the Plan for the rural employment in Andalusia. Yet, during the miners conflict, the only option pushed by the unions was to beg for investments. Those looking for an objective alliance between capital and trade unionism could find a good example here. The result is that in the present conditions of the exploitation of the labour force and of the growing precariousness, capital is able to manage without the mediation and the control of the working class which were usually performed by the unions.

When we know that since the Moncloa Pact the technocrates govern the country, the union bureaucracies only try to preserve what remains of their power. If they tried to use the rank and file workers, other had the upper hand, as always. The government could even gives its approval to the 'survival plan' while the union bureaucrats were at the bottom of the pit. It was not at all a display of forces as with the Moncloa Pact, but the total ignorance of a problem which doesn't give noticeable consequences for the smooth process of the socialist management of the restructurisation.

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The government could impose on the unions exactly what has happened in other countries, for instance in the English miners strike, because the new forms of work organisation and the work relations introduced with union help during the democratic transition had destabilised the workers movement and in consequence weakened its ability to answer the aggressions of capital.

There is only one explanation to why the socialist government so easily could implement its policy of industrial liquidation and crumbling of the proletarian conquests of the last franquist period: the decomposition of the workers movement, the loss of the vitality of union action, the pacification policy in the national interest sectors. It is only today, as the unions have made their work of undermining inside the working class, that the socialist government is free to implement the drastic economical recipes on a disarticulated, devitalised and demoralised working class.

### THE RITUALISATION OF CONFLICTS

After having spent twelve days in the Barredo pit, on 4 January 1992 the unionists announced the end of their 'action'; they could only observe the complete indifference of the government which had given their approval to the 'survival plan' during the last week of December. And as could be foreseen, even without the reservations they had obtained on other occasions, but only a vague promise to start 'negotiations on another level' (government - unions).

But independently of that, we can analyse the intentions of the union leaders in launching an action which - considering the results - maybe could be characterised as 'calculated inefficiency'. For years the actions against the government policy (NATO, December '88, Gulf War, or more recently the October 23 general strike in Asturias) took each time a more symbolic and marginal character in spite of the size of many of these mobilizations.

Hundred of thousands manifested, on the sunny Sunday mornings, their sincere opposition against for example NATO or the Spanish participation to the Gulf War, but expressed nothing but their despire of a part of the democratically elected leaders. The December '88 general strike did not produce a result, not even that the unions were invited to the government offices where the plans about the wage policy are decided.

With these calls for general strikes, ritualised more or less like a controlled exercise, the unions have reached the limits of their possibilities. These limits are nothing else than the historical limits of the union tactic, completely bypassed by the recent evolution of the system of exploitation of the labour force through the restructurisation for the two last decades.

Strike, mobilisation and continous sabotage are the weapons of workers' self defence. The use of these weapons, though being in accordance with trade union principles, have however been emptied of their content and converted into these rituals legitimising the negotiation between the union bureaucrats and the representatives of capital. The efficiency of a strike can be measured by its offensive character, e.g. its ability to paralyse the capital reproduction process, or if one prefers, its ability to break the cycle of the commodity from the phase of production until the market.

The new organisation of the production process (dispersed fordism) is not only a



theoretical formalisation. It is a practical reality which, when it is still new, sees an intervention against the weakest links of the capitalist process, generally the traditional branches, and condemning them to marginalisation or ruin. Such is the case for the coal mines and previously for the shipyards and the steel industry. The union actions against restructurisation contributed to the isolation of the combativity in some very active but marginal sectors. In fact, the strike in a declining industrial branch like the mines cost 'practically nothing' to the enterprise (exactly what the industry minister said to the mayors of the mining towns).

The noise of such 'mobilisations' against the restructurisations (as in the mines presently) was ineffective because the union tactics were marginal, peripheral in the new productive order. Their function was precisely to stop the confluence of actions and their extension to the new essential centers where profits are assured. Doing so, the unions transform these localised struggles in the marginal declining sectors into a problem of public order focused around these declining productive centers.

The impotence of the union strikes pushed ahead the evolution towards the increasing institutionalisation of the forms of struggle into the legal framework respecting the democratic order. And it is precisely that we can see in the new organisation of work and in the democratic totalitarianism in liquidating the traditional forms of intervention of the workers movement, in the impotence of the workers expressed by the use of marginal and symbolic forms of fight even if they take a violent and spectacular character (Reinosa, Euskalduna, Gijon, Cadiz). In these conditions mass action becomes a ritual like an exercise of collective frustration, without practical results considering the possibilities of pressure on the power. All this we can see in the mobilizations of the past years.

### **THE CONSOLIDATION OF A MORAL VICTORY**

If we said that everything followed a manoeuvre of the union bureaucracies, it would be a simplification; and it would be the same if one believed that the autonomous miners action bypassed the union orders about a return to the normal (what the mayors of the mining town

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told to the industry minister). Anyway both cases would suppose that one could make the government cancel its plans. In the latter case the disobedience of union orders would not have meant a rupture, but a usual act of indiscipline similar to what we can see regularly, for example the absenteeism on the Mondays' morning shift.

The miners are conscious of what is happening to them. This feeling was implicit in the acceptance of the economical logic which would end the lossmaking coal production and the other declining industries needing 'new investments in the Asturias'. The complete impotence of the workers movement appears here in its most dramatic and skeleton form: when the workers lose confidence in themselves they can only entrust their destiny to capital.

Furthermore, the miners knew that they were not completely abandoned: as a minimum the PSOE needs their votes. As we see in Andalusia with the PER, the socialists invent an escape road with the help of the European Social Fund to cushion the discontent and recover the votes of the miners. Anyway it is not a solution to the problem, especially not for the youth of the valley who the plan dooms to emigration, but they are accustomed to that for generations. Nothing of all that represents a problem because frustration and defeatism have become deeply rooted feelings.

The main problem is not to rescue Hunosa from its liquidation, but for the government technocrats and the regional union leaders to avoid a humiliation which could lead to a revolt from their faithful supporters in the mining valleys. The management of this problem by the socialist party is not a problem. They have the experience of 10 years of industrial restructuring and only have to ensure that the workers will have their defeat 'with dignity', which means after having delivered a fight. The restructuring strategy uses a principle of 'compensation' which adjusts between the practical victory of the government (executing the Plan) and the moral victory of the workers (not having fought in vain).

The unions had to manage a struggle in such a way as to stop the workers' combativity against the repressive actions and at the same time legitimate the defeat with the feeling to have fought 'to the bitter end'. Who, except for the old miners, welcomed this odd idea of the locking themselves up in the pit, the raised fists and the revolutionary symbols of another time? Even with our unconditional sympathy, why did the presence of all these people outside the pit represent a pathetic picture? Because the gestures of the old workers movement only can bring about such feelings.

To speak 'against' the workers always is a thankless task though in a certain way it is to speak against ourselves. Because of the self complacency we have displayed in such circumstances not to speak against "ourselves", we could appear pathetic, anachronistic and impotent. Because some courage is needed to drop prejudices and fears when we see the accelerated disappearance of all references to the class struggle of the past. Though it is painful to speak against ourselves, it prevents us from repeating the gestures and adopting the attitudes (trade unionist, electoral, ideological) which already have become no more than a poor caricature.

It is possible to conceal the doubts and the suspicion, it is possible to participate for

nothing else than the enthusiasm for the healthy revolt of the miners, to add our voice and to denounce the bad will and the treason of the workers' interests by the Madrid government (perhaps we hope that, finally, it will do something else). Could we be silent on the truth on this total liquidation of the mining industry like that which happened with the shipyards? To cheat ourselves once again, for one more day to live again the euphoria and to find the ideological failure which is still predicted by the managers of the best of all the possible worlds?

With all its complexity, the mobilization of the Asturian miners like all the other conflicts in the restructurized sectors brings a special meaning about the limits of the practices of the present class struggle. The changes in the technical-organisational conditions of exploitation of the labour force involve a change in the forms of the resistance of the new proletarian condition.

The forms of the control and of the intervention on the market of the capitalist economy (trade unionism) disappear with the liquidation of the traditional sectors which were the conditions for the aggregation of the working class. If we are not able to recognise the clear elements of the new phase of the class struggle in conflicts like the Asturian miners conflict, to see in them all the traditional elements (imprisoned for instance in the call for democratic values or for trade unionism), to evade from the lyrics of the defeat mixed with the liturgy of a symbolic solidarity, our conclusion will carry the same confusion: the last but one repetition of the same empty words about the crisis of leftist thinking.

C.V. 5/1/92

In the middle of January 92 the unions, the Hunosa direction and the town councillors prepare to negotiate again. The regional and the Madrid governments are presenting similar plans for the reindustrialisation of Asturias which the unions leaders consider as a triumph of their action, proclaiming they are ready to participate in these discussions. In fact the discussion is about a new version of the EEC budget for improving infrastructures and projected investments; all that always begins and ends on paper. When this struggle is over only one thing does not appear artificial: the action of a women collective of the mining valleys who reject all promises of 'negotiators' and attacked the union bureaucrats when they came out of the first negotiating session.

C.V. 1/92



## BUS STRIKE IN MADRID

*The following is from a letter from a Spanish comrade about the March-April '92 actions of bus drivers in Madrid. This strike was one of many in the Madrid public transport (bus and metro) from the mid-70s. From the end of the 80s a Unionist Platform (Plataforma Sindical) was started among the bus drivers in opposition to the traditional unions UGT and CCOO which dominated the enterprise committee. The UP slowly gained ground and in 1990 won an overwhelming majority in the enterprise committee elections. In March that year it called for an allout strike of drivers and other personnel which paralysed traffic in Madrid. The 22 day strike was held in defiance of the enterprise committee, run by a strike committee, with a high degree of organising and decision through general assemblies, included demonstrations and occupation of the CCOO and UGT offices, and finally resulted in a number of claims being met.*



In February 92, the bus drivers in Madrid started a wildcat strike - i.e. not observing the obligation to organise a minimum service as required by management. (1) This strike was organised by the Unionist Platform regrouping most of the 7,000 drivers. This organisation has 36 of the 42 delegates to the enterprise committee - CCOO and UGT didn't get any delegates at the last elections in 1990. The call for the strike found total support from the drivers. The result was total chaos and the almost impossibility to travel through Madrid. It was even more messy than usual because this strike at EMT (Council Transport Company) was organised to coincide with a stoppages of a couple of days in the Madrid metro. (2) The quasi-collapse of all the car traffic and the delays to go to work for thousands of workers were of such a size that it showed everybody that the drivers had the power to strike where and when they knew it would be the most effective.

The conflict in the tube ended but the bus drivers were still on strike. During the allout strike in February there was some attempts to break it with scabs protected by the police, but that was more a symbolic attempt considering that a very limited number of buses were in order to run. Afterwards the action continued but with a different tactic. From the beginning of March, the drivers decided to strictly follow the rules of the minimum schedule settled by management. This means 40% of the buses running on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. So the drivers could get some payment instead of the total loss of wages, but still completely disturb the operation of the bus company with non-manageable complications. At the same time, the drivers launched a work to rule movement. The Unionist Platform agreed to open discussions on a new contract, which meant a withdrawal from the previous positions, because it dropped the conditions posed at first not to discuss until 27 sacked drivers were reinstated (3). The drivers have managed their struggle very cleverly and carefully. They succeeded to neutralise the press campaign pushed by the government in order to bring hostility from the population. Perhaps the starting of the discussion was a political manoeuvre from the Platform to show that they were flexible and open to discussions. Since the beginning of the conflict, the drivers have protested

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against the uncomprising attitude of the EMT managers, who they often (rightly) present as 'franquists' (the conservative party - Partido Popular - controls the Madrid council).

The drivers' working conditions are difficult. They work 7 hour shifts. The calculated time to drive a route and the breaks offered are so marginal that the drivers often have problems even to go for a pee. The average monthly wage is 120,000 pesetas (around \$1000) and they are not at all 'privileged' workers. The PSOE and the media pretend to protect the 'rights of citizens', and the conservatives also try to criminalise the strike action and demand a ruling about the right to strike. The 'left' accuses the drivers of their lack of solidarity with other workers and their right to arrive at work on time, for giving more arguments to the conservatives for the privatisation of municipal transport (the strikers are strongly opposed to this privatisation), and to indirectly reinforce the interests of the PSOE because of the unpopularity of the Partido Popular controlling the Madrid municipal council. (4) It is once again evident that when workers with a strong position in the production process start a powerful action to impose their claims, they find in front of them a common opposition of all the so called 'democratic' forces. Such a situation is more and more dangerous for the precarious balance of the present socio-economical relationships in the capitalist societies.

This conflict is another example of the dynamics in the working class of the past years, with the spreading of numerous small struggles which are not spectacular but undermine the economy and the social peace and at the same time weakening the union hegemony. The hours lost during the last months because of such conflictuality become more and more important and the union role is more and more questioned through rank and file autonomous initiatives. The unions' weakness and this deterioration of the industrial relations worsened the structural problems (deindustrialisation, loss of competitivity, etc...) of Spanish industry confronted with heavy EEC pressure. Government, managers and unions are conscious of all that. It is the reason why the government proposed a strike law, a proposition which will not be discussed with the unions which are advocating the 'self regulation' of strikes in the Italian way. (5) But, as a conservative MP recognized it, when social conflicts burst up, the unions are unable to impose the rule of the minimum service and to avoid the spreading of rank and file committees, wildcat strikes, etc... Hence the strike law. On the other hand, the unions try to play another game in order to avoid being completely pushed aside from their traditional mediating function. On this last point, we have to consider the fact that if on one hand the new production and management techniques question the union function in the factory, on the other hand it is not at all evident that capital can completely remove all mediating or control form in the eventuality of social pressure or of conflictuality in the industrial relations. The present attitudes of the union bureaucracies mean an adaptation of this mediating function. In the governmental milieu one thinks that the destruction of the workers movement is already accomplished and that considering the incapacity of the unions to control the workers, there is nothing else to do than to directly repress the conflictuality poles with a strike law which will have to be more strict than the Italian strike law.

C.V. 3/92

Notes by *Echanges*

(1) We would guess that the requirement to notify management a number of days before a strike is started was not followed and that the strike was illegal also for this reason.

(2) The bus strike took place around the time of the normal contract negotiations. Similar negotiations were attempted delayed at the metro to avoid a simultaneous strike there, but this failed because of the length of the bus strike. There was also a strike of personnel of the suburban railroads. When the metro workers entered an allout strike they were quickly offered a wage increase which was accepted by the unions and the strike ended.

(3) These were UP delegates sacked as a reaction to the illegal strike. Later only 8 of these sackings were deemed 'legitimate' by a labour court. A number of other workers were also dismissed during the actions. The strike was called off at a mass meeting 7. April.

(4) As far as we know the strike was to a large extent provoked by a proposal to reduce the subvention for the municipal transport - seen by workers as a step towards privatisation. In other cities some bus lines had already been privatised. In addition there was claims concerning wage raises (3% more than the inflation), better holiday periods and better service for the users. The media campaign against the strikers was not successful. One of the initiatives taken by the strikers in this respect was that their wives, like in the strike in '90, more or less daily distributed leaflets in the living quarters and markets.

(5) See *Echanges* 65, p. 84.

## THE SITUATION OF AND CHANGES IN THE WORKING CLASS

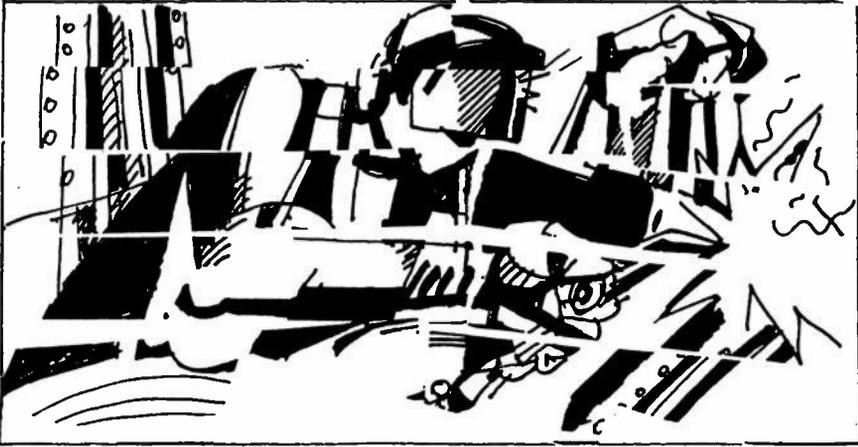
The following is a letter from a French comrade, commenting the Spanish comrade's letter above (the texts *Another letter from arcelona* and *On the autonomous movement in Spain and in general* and the article *Asturias, requiem time*. We discussed some similar questions with the Spanish comrade earlier: see *Echanges* no. 54 and 56 (discussion on the UK miners strike) for one discussion, no.58 and 61 for another, and finally no. 63 and 64.

The debate on the Coordinadora is interesting because this union offers a perfect example - an exemplary case - of the unavoidable evolution of a struggle organisation practising direct rank and file democracy into a traditional union in which the bureaucratic development is the consequence of the very function of regulation on the labour market (even though Coordinadora's existence was the result of the rank and file resistances against the transformation of these methods of regulation).

This discussion has to be welcomed because the struggle movements for the last years, mainly in France and Italy, have seriously shaken the unionist milieu and brought about the building of organisations which try to become permanent after the period of struggle which had seen their creation, some of them with the label of 'alternative unions'.

It would be interesting to write a pamphlet telling the whole story of the Coordinadora because in some countries (especially in the UK) and in the libertarian papers a lot of illusions were spread on the possibilities to build 'democratic' unions in following the Coordinadora example.

We could examine this attempt with the arguments of your letter when you ask yourselves to which extent we consider the present conflicts in the developed capitalist countries



with prejudices and concepts inherited from the past and no longer relevant to the present world. I think it is always like that, in the struggles themselves and in our mind. To escape these constant references to the past, we must analyse closely all the struggles in trying to detect in them what is referring to the past and what is new. Such an analysis must concern the struggles in the old industries (like the Asturian miners strike for instance) as well as the struggles in the new modern industries (like the strike of the technicians in the air traffic control centers in France for instance - see *Echanges* 70/71). Inside a struggle in an old sector we can find new forms of action (see for instance the British miners strike 84-85); on the other hand some apparently new forms of struggle organisations (like the COBAS in Italy or the coordinating committees in France) borrow a lot from the old union forms of organisation. An *Echanges* comrade developed such a criticism about the coordinating committees, explaining the anachronism of some finalist view and of organisational models like the workers councils for instance. A similar view was developed in a more theoretical manner by the French group 'Theorie Communiste'.

This last point could be linked to what is called 'the crisis of the Eastern Countries', which is often wrongly called the 'end of communism'. If we compare with the western branch of capitalism, this means the end of the social-democratic ideas of a possible management of the economical system with elected organisations more or less identified with the State, after its conquest either via the parliament or via a 'revolution'. This fading of the idea that an economic regulation of the present system could be performed by some kind of delegated organisations, not only concerns the crisis of confidence in such organisations (which involves what is called the 'crisis of politics') but the very idea that such a regulation could be possible.

If I could agree with what you said on the weakness, even the disappearance, of the traditional structures of struggle and beyond that the 'disappearance of finalism' (though I will contest their previous importance and the role they could have had in the class struggle), I would disagree with what you write about 'the more and more advanced process of decomposition of the social form of the classical proletariat'.

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You identify this 'classical proletariat' as the factory worker who worked in big industrial concentrations and had a 'homogeneity considering his working and life conditions'. Do you think really that this kind of proletariat as you define it has disappeared? It could be true if you consider that in the industrialised countries whole sectors of the industry like coal mines, steel industry, textile, have, if not disappeared, certainly strongly declined. This has of course been effectively followed by the disbanding of the workers communities which, to answer the need of capital, have been built around the productive centers, the mines, the factories.

But such a statement, true in limited national or local locations, is, if not untrue, very relative if we consider the whole capitalist world:

- The homogenous industrial concentrations have been rebuilt in the new industrialised countries according to the new international division of work.

- Inside the old industrialised countries new industrial concentrations have replaced the old ones. If I take the figures for France, the staff of the 1.000 most important industrial enterprises has increased from 3.342.000 in 1981 to 4.016.000 in 1991 and the average for each has grown from 3.000 to 4.000. If we take the 100 first enterprises the same figures are respectively 2.200.000 and 2.980.000 and the average 22.000 and 30.000. The last Renault strike at Cleon has revealed the importance of the transfer of workers in different factories where the staff is between 5.000 and 10.000 workers.

- When we look at the figures concerning the different categories in the working population (still the figures for France), we can see that this active population is growing after having been constant for a long time: 19 million from 1900 to 1954, 21 million in 1970 to more than 25 millions in 1990. The part of this working population working in the industry and the public works has grown from 6 million to 8,5 million in 1980 but began to decline to around 7,5 million in 1990. In other words if the population working in the industry has somewhat diminished, its relative importance is about the same as before, but we have to observe that this relative importance was to be seen against a numerous population of peasants, low middle class of shop keepers and artisans fifty years ago and that now it must be seen against a majority of wage earners in the services sector (in which are included transport and other industrial services separated from industry through new divisions of work but formerly included in the industrial sector).

- The extension and the concentration of this services sector has meant not only the proletarianisation of these workers, but the development of large working units similar to what already existed in the banking and insurance sector (transports, telecommunications, supermarkets, health sector...). You underline that in the industrial sector certain forms of homogenisation have disappeared (I don't agree with this assertion). But if we consider this services world we can see the development of a homogenisation where there was formerly a dispersion: the lorry drivers strike in the UK in 78-79 (we can add in France in 92 (BBBB) ) or the nurses actions in several European countries during the recent years offer examples of such an homogenisation despite the dispersion of the places of work.

- It is true that some large concentrations have disappeared when industry looked for

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better profitability in using selectively small subcontractors, a policy which broke with the former organisation of production with vertical concentration, especially in the car industry. But this new policy included on one hand the development of subsidiary companies and on the other hand recently the constitution of industrial poles around a central factory surrounded by a multitude of small or medium factories - all of them linked by mutual interdependence and depending on the central factory. For instance, the Douai Renault factory (north of France) with 6,300 workers is surrounded by a local industrial network of 25,000 workers. We could give a lot of other examples, and we can add that the difficulties of transport (not to speak of the recent lorry drivers strike) push to this restructuring to have the 'just in time' method of production effectively working.

- We can consider that there is a rebuilding of a proletarian social form different from the old one but no longer hierarchised or differentiated (you think the opposite), more uniformised and so more homogenous (in the UK, the Japanese car factories have only one category of workers and the other British factories are on the way to do the same). Even more, the wage level, the obligation to live in specific accommodations in specific locations, the limitations to a similar standard of living (with the use of the supermarket) and to the same type of leisure (mainly the TV) are evident factors for the reconstitution of a 'sociologically homogenous formation', different from the previous one which some often consider was 'better' when it is very fashionable to insist on the 'degradation of the present proletarian life'.

- Fordism was defined as mass production for mass consumption: these two elements are still here. The factory with the Taylorist division of work and the production line still works even if automation has brought some profound changes. When you speak of decentralised production, it is true for the production of parts (not all of them, and even the Japanese factories produce 40-50% of their parts in-house), but all that converges on the production line which is not decentralised but only often transferred to other locations to use cheap manpower and there to reconstitute the homogenous proletariat you think is disappearing.

I don't see exactly what you mean with the disappearance of a fundamental contradiction which will be replaced by a 'conflictuality' which testifies a tendency towards the decomposition of capitalist society. In my opinion, this 'conflictuality' has always existed, but was always considered as very minor, even as something despicable, a kind of individual survival very far from a 'revolutionary consciousness'. In my opinion, this 'subjectivity' was and remains essential and is the expression, at the lowest level of the rank and file, of this fundamental contradiction you think is vanishing - in more simple words, the expression of the class struggle. We have to consider how this important aspect of the class struggle has been in the past, completely hidden behind the idea of finality. According to this ideology, the consciousness must overcome the daily life, the daily class struggle, and often it was linked to a special work ethic.

All this would mean a complete discussion in itself. We would have to analyse what the union militant or political militant represents for the workers and for the work organisation in

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the different periods of the capitalist development, to analyse the corresponding workers movement and in which way the 'revolutionary' ideology really was the expression of the real workers' behaviour inside and outside the place of work (for example why a proletariat apparently deeply influenced by socialist and somewhat anarchist ideas so easily accepted the bloody war of 1914).

When you write that the transformation of society is no longer following laws, you seem to think that it was like that previously. I think that there was and still is a lot of illusions on the fact that the proletariat could have considered or still considers either some historical finality or that we could deduce from the present forms or characteristics of the class struggle some lines for another social order. Even if I would express it differently, I will rather agree with what you said at the end of this passage. I think that society evolves in a dynamic movement and nobody can foresee either its evolution or its finality (a finality will be in contradiction with the evolution of life itself on earth). The fundamental contradiction labour/capital works in a complex dialectical relations in which any movement of one is followed by a movement of the other and all this linked to immediate interests: profit on one side, survival on the other side (i.e. the resistance to reification). Beyond these immediate interests, everybody is pragmatic and never considers a finality. This pragmatism introduces what we could call tendencies which don't allow us to draw a picture of the future. All we can do, and what we are trying to do, is making comparisons, always with the previous periods, to see what is changing and eventually to discern some tendencies, but considering them as relative in space and in time.

You draw a parallel between:

- the triumphing capitalism which believed it could conquer the world in an endless progressive development, seen as the endless development of sciences and techniques.

- and the revolutionary theories which in another way followed the same basic ideologies.

And you link for the present days the tendency to the decomposition of capitalist society to the parallel decomposition of all the revolutionary ideologies and to their support by unions and parties. I could agree with these ideas but they will have to be further developed. This will oblige us to examine another important point: A new society could rise only through the development of the old society (and not at all brought about by some particular events), almost without the knowledge of the participants. It would rise through the dynamics of the present society pushed by its conflicts of interests, by the internal transformations of the relations of production and of the consequent social relations. Most of the time when we discuss these questions, we consider the events (which are only the consequence of the already accomplished internal transformations, often hidden to everybody) as the the cause of these transformations. In other words, to come back to this question of finality: what we consider as a finality can only be the formalisation of what already exists.

HS 12/2/92

## 'LIQUIDATION' OF THE COORDINADORA: ON A STATEMENT OF SOME BARCELONA DOCKERS' DELEGATES

A Spanish comrade made the following remarks in connection with sending a declaration (dated 28/4/92) to the general assembly of the Barcelona dockers by 6 members of their delegates committee, in which they announced their resignation:

With this declaration our comrades, members of the Barcelona dockers' committee, resigned. They had opposed the dominant tendency of the bureaucrats and their secret agreements with the port bosses. At the last elections these comrades got 6 seats on the dockers' committee. But for some months the situation had become unbearable. They constant pressure from the leadership faction of the Coordinadora, including a lot of threats and even physical attacks, was so strong that they were practically obliged to leave...

In fact, the decomposition of the Coordinadora, i.e. of the coordination between the various ports, was more and more evident, and this now happens also in the port of Barcelona. Of course this situation is not new, because tensions existed for a long time among the dockers. But now things have come to a point of no return and to the definitive liquidation of the practices and ideas which inspired the Coordinadora in the past.

CVG

## PREPARING FOR DEMOCRACY

No. 1 of the planned pamphlet series Preparing For Democracy has the title *Beyond just mass assemblies. A critical look at Spanish unions 'that work without bureaucracy'*. It was published quite a while ago by Active Democracy Network (39 Vesta Rd, Brockley, London SE4 2NJ). ADN originally had the name Direct Democracy Network (see *Echanges* 70/71) and springs from *SINews*, a journal on the Spanish

COMUNICADO A LA ASAMBLEA GENERAL DE ESTIBADORES PORTUARIOS

En la reunión del Comité de Delegados del día 21 de Abril, al presentar por escrito y defender nuestra opinión sobre las últimas actuaciones del Comité en los buques de fruta (escrito que se adjunta), un delegado fué insultado, provocado a gritos, amenazado violentamente y tirado de la silla, por lo que se vió obligado a abandonar la reunión. La actuación, protagonizada principalmente por Ernesto Gutierrez como delegado sindical, alegando que en la jornada del 4 de Abril se había insultado al delegado de la decisión como "especial" en el barco de fruta, hecho que se vio el orden y el respeto que se merecen, no se sancionó. Adoptamos esta decisión y el compañero que nos acompaña en la actualidad para apostar por el futuro de nuestra organización.

no es  
recurre

Francisco Aroca  
Jordi Domagach

Barcelona 28-4-92  
Miguel Capel

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le falta

labour movement which has been mentioned on some occasions in *Echanges*. Only this pamphlet has been published, and we are uncertain about if the address above is still valid.

The pamphlet contains some articles discussing mass assemblies, rotating delegates, the right to recall, etc., an article on the Michelin factory and finally the complete versions of two letters from *La Estiba* partly reproduced in this issue of *Echanges*.

According to the presentation "The aim of the pamphlets in this series is to help reclaim democracy as an active principle by making available some practical analysis of large scale organisations which encourage the fullest possible participation by their ordinary members. This first pamphlet centers around experiments which are happening in the Spanish state." It tries to give a certain number of advices on the way to settle and to maintain a rank and file democracy in a struggle organisation. The texts could be considered as contributions to a wider debate on unionism and unions: even if it doesn't deal directly with the question of 'alternative unions', it contains the same kind of idea that a 'rank and file democracy' can be maintained not only in strike committees but also in a permanent workers organisation, through the strict observance of some elementary rules. In the pamphlet we find the usual references to Spanish organisations like the CGT (ex-CNTRenovados) in the Michelin factory in Vitoria (Basque country) or to the Coordinadora, the national Spanish dockers organisation. These references are supposed to bring arguments on this 'direct democracy', on how 'to expand the role of the mass assemblies', etc. These references are not precisely the good ones (if there are some), because the present evolution of these 'democratic unions' bring perfect examples of the opposite: the impossibility to maintain the 'democratic rules' (if they have ever existed) in a permanent union-type organisation. The circumstances which brought about the formation of such an organisation, the statutes settled to guarantee a rank and file democracy against a possible 'bureaucratic diversion', were useless to prevent a certain evolution: sooner or later the 'new' union will follow the model of the other official unions it had fought at the beginning of its existence. This doesn't happen because the leaders will 'betray', follow a 'wrong way' or have made some 'mistakes; it will happen because of the function of a permanent organisation in the capitalist system which in the end doesn't allow any kind of organisation to be something else than an intermediary on the labour force market. This function shapes the union and it also shapes the officials of the union, and it is this constant pressure to perform such a function which destroys all the barriers and rules established at first to prevent such an evolution...

Another question is not examined in the pamphlet but is posed indirectly. This question - the most important one - concerns the possibility for a struggle to be an autonomous struggle when it apparently is controlled by non-democratic rules, i.e. without any democratic assembly, rotating delegates, etc... (rules supposed to be the recipe for democracy). Such a struggle can be 'democratic' only by the effect of its dynamic. On the other hand a 'democratic' struggle - according to the 'rules' - can be perfectly bureaucratic. The 'democracy' in a struggle is not at all a matter of a recipe, it is the struggle itself and its dynamic which give this content, most of the time it is something else than words or writings, it is the action itself.

HS

The following extracts from a correspondence some time ago between *Echanges* and *SINEWS* gives some further explanations about the views of the people behind ADN and some critical remarks about *Echanges*:

**Letter to SINEWS:**

“...There has been an ongoing discussion concerning Spain from *Echanges* no. 58 onwards... In my opinion this is an important discussion among other things about Spanish syndicalism and the role of unions and of syndicalism. It is not a discussion which has as its starting point adherence to or nostalgia about this or that organisation or political/ideological tendency. Our starting point is the (increasingly) autonomous action of the working class and trying to situate this in the context of and explaining it as a result of the development and changes within capitalism and the productive process, the role of (any) unions, and so on.

**RH**

**Letter from SINEWS:**

“...I don't think that our approaches are too different. Although I'm sure you wouldn't accept the label, my impression is that *Echanges* is basically council communist, whereas I regard myself as syndicalist. By that I don't mean that I idealise the CNT, etc (far from it), but that I think it is necessary to prepare for any quantum leaps on 'the path to socialism' by working under the present system. I would also say that it is possible to learn lessons from some of the ways in which workers organise under capitalism which can probably inform a useful intervention in any future developments. It goes without saying that a dogmatic approach is out of the question, so while I appreciate the careful research *Echanges* does on the evolution of objective factors and the class response to them, I think it's unfortunate that your rejection of vanguardism leads you to throw the baby out with the bath water and avoid analysing on what basis those of us who support workers' autonomy can usefully get involved. Even if our involvement has a minimal effectiveness, we might as well do something while we are on the same planet. I would also say that the idea of 'spontaneity' is often used to gloss over the inevitable fact that the person who is analysing the situation often doesn't know in detail the histories that lead a group of people to take a certain course of action at a certain stage. For those involved events are seldom really spontaneous, and it adds nothing to our understanding to describe them as such.

Having said all that, I feel that the most important common ground between us is that we try to analyse what is happening in specific examples of class struggle in an open minded way. Any differences are secondary compared to this. In that context I've enclosed a copy of the preliminary draft of the pamphlet 'Beyond just mass assemblies'...

**MP**



**SOCIALISME**

I. C. O.

**OU BARBARIE**

INFORMATIONS CORRESPONDANCE OUVRIERES.

Organe de Critique et d'Orientation Révolutionnaire

## Obituary

**PIERRE LANNERET**

Pierre Lanneret (alias 'Camille'), in the beginning of his seventies, died end of May 1993 in San Francisco. He was an old militant: politically active socialist in France already in the 30's, thereafter an active member of French bordigist groups, then of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* - and various American groups like the ISO and the shortlived group A World to Win in California publishing the journal 'Now and After'. He worked as a printer in Paris, then in Canada where he emigrated and stayed from the beginning to the end of the 50s, and then in San Francisco until his retirement. He was an active trade union militant and involved in many struggles. Pierre wrote numerous articles and a pamphlet on "Third Camp Internationalists in France during World War II". He was one of the correspondents of I.C.O. (Information Correspondance Ouvrieres) and then of *Echanges*. He maintained contact with a wide variety of comrades, kept an open, critical and independent mind, and through discussions, exchange of material and correspondence he was one of many contributing to elaboration and clarification of themes and problems of common concern for many of us.

(This issue of *Echanges* contains extracts from some of the last letters Pierre Lanneret sent - see the sections on *Goodbye to the unions?*, *Guatemala* and *USA*).

A WORLD TO WIN  
P.O. Box 1587  
San Francisco, CA 94101

**NOW AND AFTER**

NUMBER 3, MAY 1970

**ECHANGES**

EMU

# LE RÉVEIL PROLÉTARIEN SPARTAKU

PROLETARIAT ALLER LÄNDER VEREINIGT EL  
ORGAN DER REVOLUTIONÄREN KOMMUNISTEN DEUTS  
NO. 1  
1. MAI

Organe du Groupe Revolutionnaire Proletaire

Unser Programm

Groupe  
Revolutionnaire  
de l'Internationisme

THIRD CAMP INTERNATIONALISTS  
IN FRANCE  
DURING WORLD WAR II

PROLETAIRES DE TOUS LES PAYS UNISSEZ-VOUS!

FRATERNISATION  
PROLETARIENNE!

ORGANE DES COMMUNISTES REVOLUTIONNAIRES DE FRANCE

104

N° 1. - Juin 1943

Lire, relire, faire lire et comprendre

# la RAISON

Organe de la Fédération Internationale Syndicaliste Révolutionnaire.

**B I L L A**  
théorique mensuel  
de la Gauche comm

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## THIRD CAMP INTERNATIONALISTS IN FRANCE DURING WORLD WAR II

This 20-page pamphlet was written at the end of the 80s for an American audience, but can with advantage be read also by others. Despite its title, fortunately it doesn't deal only with the small ultraleft groups and their ideas during this war. As background to the subject, it also gives valuable information and comments from World War I onwards about these tendencies themselves, other 'socialist' groups and the general political and economic situation. It was not written as an apologetic and ideological account of the groups in question and is very honest in its account of the ultraleft groups, not at all hiding their weaknesses and rather insignificant numerous strength, influence and importance. Neither was it written out of an academic concern, but for a political understanding of the past as well as the present. Alltogether, with yesterdays and todays capitalist society, its states, big 'labour organisations', leftwing groups, its heavy propaganda, myths, 'popular fronts', 'anti-fascism', etc... - this small pamphlet can help us in unmasking myths and illusions towards an internationalist understanding today.

Some copies of the pamphlet are available from *Echanges* for £1,50. An abbreviated French version was published in *Cahiers Leon Trotsky* no. 39, dec. 89. Below we give the chapters of the pamphlet (in bold letters) as well as extracts from some of them - extracts which we think give a good indication of the contents and analysis of the pamphlet, but not at all substituting for reading the complete text:

*The following pages describe... the activities of the 'Third Camp' internationalist nuclei in France during World War II... the Trotskyist groups had to be excluded from this study... Trotskyists never ceased during the war to state proudly and loudly their support of the "degenerated workers' state" and to extol the deeds of its army and its potentially revolutionary role. Before, during and after the war the Trotskyists have constantly offered advice, suggestions, appeals for a united front, promises of support, conditional or total, to the Russian ruling class... Within this ideological frame, ... the trotskyists remained on the terrain of class struggle during five years of constant and daring illegal activity. They have the grrreat merit of having initiated a work of fraternization and propaganda among German soldiers. It is not our purpose to further deal here with the Trotskyists whose activities during the war are now well documented... Suffice it to say that the divergencies between the Trotskyists and the so called "ultra-Left" were and remain unbridgeable, nonetheless.*

### **The Socialist Party.**

*A party of teachers, public servants and small tradesmen rather than a proletarian party... the leftwing of bourgeois radicalism... votes against the military credits but nobody doubts the willingness... to fulfill, as in 1914, its patriotic obligations when required.*

### **The Communist Party.**

### **The Communist Oppositions.**

*...Trotsky's friends cannot form a coherent opposition... 1929... there is a proliferation of opposition groups... isolated... circa 1930 groups appear which denounce the USSR as state capitalist and Trotsky as a bureaucrat in exile.*

#### **From 1934 to the war.**

*Described as backwards, Malthusian, usurious, French capitalism has been hit by the world depression and the working class suffers from wage cuts and unemployment...*

*In 1935 France and Russia signs a pact of defensive alliance... the pact requires the acquiescence of the working class to a policy of national defence... The Popular Front - SP, CP, Radical Party and the unions - is born... The working class is promised a shorter working week without loss of pay... The war industry will be nationalised...*

*This French "New Deal" does not imperial property rights nor impair the functioning of capitalism, but the obtuse French Right will sabotage this last-ditch attempt at the modernization of French capitalism... The elections of 1936 give an impressive majority to the Popular Front...*

*...The working class is impatient. Strikes begin - spontaneously - around Paris, spread rapidly and become a gigantic tidal wave involving millions of workers, most of them not yet unionized. Provincial industrialists are horrified when their ever-obedient workers raise the red flag over their factories and most often occupy them... Impervious to any appeal, the strikers threaten, in fact, the fragile alliance of the Popular Front... (the president) summons delegates from Labor and industrialists. A general agreement on wage increases is reached, though many factories continue to strike for more. Feverishly... parliament enacts a series of social laws: ...collective bargaining... 40 hour week... paid vacations... all dependent upon the evacuation of the factories by the workers...*

*In 1937 the working class has already lost the economic gains of 1936...*

*It is worthwhile to note that the same parliament which in 1936 enacted the new social laws... will in 1940 consecrate Petin and bury the Third Republic...*

*In 1936 the workers' actions compelled the bourgeoisie to grant within a few days more reforms than in the past half century... the factory sit-ins were an obvious breach of legality, but the workers stopped there, and remained within the limits defined by both parties and unions... The workers apparently believed that fascism could be defeated by abandoning the class struggle, through an alliance with the enlightened sections of the ruling class.*

*It is tempting to incriminate the "rotten and treacherous leaders" of the workers' parties and maintain the pleasant fiction of a revolutionary working class with an historical mission but constantly duped and betrayed by the freely accepted leadership... The sad truth is that internationalism... were only skin-deep in the working classes, except for a very small minority which we will here examine.*

#### **The Revolutionaries from 1934 to the end of the war.**

*The rallying of the Stalinists to national defense and the class collaboration of the Popular Front provoke angry reactions... from the tendencies to the left of the traditional workers' parties... Despite deep differences, they are able sometimes to join in uneasy common actions (participation in class-struggle groups in the unions, meetings against the war, against the Moscow trials and the repression in Republican Spain)... Although individually represented in the strikes, the leftists do not*

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*inspire them nor are they able to carry the movement further. When the workers lose some of their trust in the workers' parties, they remain passive or follow the Right. They do not listen to the leftists...*

*One can divide the leftists into three categories: 1) The anarchists; 2) organizations issuing from the communist current: the Trotskyists, the International Communist Left (bordiguists) and l'Union Communiste; and 3) the Socialist Lefty (PSOP)... The Bordiguists, with two new groups, the GRP-UCI and the RKD-CR, will maintain the internationalist tradition against all imperialism during the course of the war.*

### **The Anarchists.**

*...All tendencies compounded, the anarchists have a sizeable and dispersed audience throughout France... The anarchist movement speaks with many voices, and on the war question there are divergencies between "integral pacifists" (peace at any cost) and the revolutionary pacifists, but they share a refusal to participate in the coming war... When war breaks out... the militants follow their own inclinations: some leave France, others obey the mobilization orders, and a few refuse the draft and will spend years in military jails. France "at war for democracy" develops a vast repressive system which Vichy and the Nazis will inherit and refine: some anarchists rejoin Stalinists and foreign antifascists in concentration camps...*

*...But one can look in vain for analysis of the situation, for perspectives, for precise definition of the attitude of the movement in the available anarchist texts from this late period of the war... It seems difficult to assess objectively the role of the anarchists...*

*In short, some anarchists, willingly or not, remained quiet and waited for better times while keeping their hands clean; others behaved like isolated militants of other currents - without integrating within the Resistance, they did Resistance work and sometimes admirable work of solidarity. Not so numerous, it seems, are those who did integrate within the official resistance, but without securing any personal benefit... The worthy activities of Arru and his few friends does not obscure the collapse of the movement. It is its heterogeneity, its lack of cohesion and organization (deplored ad nauseam by many anarchists), its absence of perspectives which prevented it from acting during the war.*

### **The Trotskyists.**

#### **L'Union Communiste.**

*In 1933... groups of communists and isolated militants... a mini-regrouping gives birth to l'Union Communiste... with its organ L'Internationaliste. Chaze explains the importance of the theoretical tasks which confronted the nascent organization: "Concerning the nature and the counter-revolutionary role of the USSR, we were at least 10 years behind our Dutch comrades and those of the German Left. We were equally behind on the institutionalization and integration of the unions. Same situation as to the role of the revolutionary party. We faced the problems."*

*UC denounces the bureaucratic maneuvers of the Trotskyists and what it considers their political confusion: a shift from demagogic attitudes to entry into Social Democracy, overestimation of the revolutionary possibilities, propagation of illusions among the working class concerning the potential revolutionary role of the SP and the CP, etc. UC denounces the Popular Front, which is considered the equivalent of the National Front. In 1935 UC is against any defense of the USSR.*

*The war, along with the concomitant mobilization and arrest or exodus of the foreign militants,*

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causes the collapse of the group which, in its best period, had certainly no more than 40 members. Davoust (Chaze) is arrested, then deported. He will survive Sachenhausein and will resume his activities in the vanguard, but UC will not be reconstituted.

### **The Socialist Left and the PSOP.**

#### **The International Communist Left.**

...In Italy, the Bordiguists refuse the United Front with the socialists... Later they oppose the merger with the socialists... The advent of fascism does not modify the attitude... fascism and democracy are only different masks of bourgeois power, to which one can only oppose the dictatorship of the proletariat... After their defeat in 1926 the Bordiguists officially form the Left Fraction of the Italian Communist Party in Pantin, France. In 1935 this organization evolved into the Italian Fraction of the International Communist Left... At a very early stage of the Spanish civil war, the Fraction defined its position: the Spanish proletariat has been unable to form its class party, has not established its dictatorship, and in the name of the antifascist struggle, has left bourgeois power intact. The war is imperialist and the... ICL appeal to all workers to desert the fronts, to fraternize and to transform the war into a civil war against capital.

Union Communiste, the Revolution Proletarienne and some anarchists are well aware of the counter-revolutionary role of the Stalinists, which will culminate in the persecution of the revolutionaries and attacks against the collectivizations. They criticize, sometimes severely, what they consider the capitulations of the POUM and CNT-FAI, but they do not follow the Bordiguists who, according to them, mechanically apply to Spain slogans inherited from the first world war. The Bordiguists are not unanimous on this question...

...the Bordiguists have no hesitation when the second World War begins. This is another imperialist war which should be transformed into a civil war against all bourgeoisies... In Marseilles a small group of Italian Bordiguists and young French recruits... form the French Fraction of the ICL...

In 1945... the bordiguists hold a conference in Turin [and form] the International Communist Party... Although the Italians cannot provide any material help, the French Fraction acquires some prestige and a new vitality. Among others who adhere to the Fraction are veterans of the ex-Union Communiste, such as Davoust (Chaze) and Lasterade... The fraction publishes L'Internationale and contacts are established with several factories, notably in Renault, where fraction members play a role in the 1948 strike. These efforts produce few results and the theoretical problems resurface: In 1950 the majority of the French members consider that Bordiguism is fossilized and join Socialisme ou Barbarie.

#### **The German and French Revolutionary Communists: RKD and CR.**

The group known during the war as Revolutionären Kommunisten Deutschlands is originally part of the Austrian Trotskyist movement and is recognised in 1938 as the Austrian section... Driven into exile by the repression it rapidly enters into conflict with the Trotskyist movement and its delegates vote against the official proclamation of the 4th International in 1938... They advocate revolutionary defeatism in all countries... In 1941... breaks away from Trotskyism... defines the USSR as state capitalist and categorically opposes its defense...

After the French collapse the RKD settles in Southern France and displays a remarkable activity, regularly publishing 'RK Bulletin'..., 'Spartakus', the first issue of which contains an appeal

*to the workers of the world to break their chains and form the international republic of the workers' and soldiers' councils... and 'Fraternisation Proletarienne' and other leaflets and theoretical texts... Contacts are initiated with German soldiers and liaisons established with the French revolutionary underground. Although well seasoned in clandestine activity, the RKD is not immune to repression:... Karl Fischer, arrested in 1944, survives Buchenwald, but is later kidnapped by Russian police in Austria (in 1947) and spends 8 years in Siberia... In August 1944 during the liberation of Paris, the RKD and the French CR for the first and last time play a role in a genuine working class movement: CR militants head the strike committee at the big Renault plant...*

*Independently of any political assessment, the astonishing labor accomplished by this handful of Austrian and German militants of the RKD, under difficult and dangerous conditions, commands respect.*

### **The Groupe Revolutionnaire Proletarien - Union des Communistes Internationalistes (GRP-UCI).**

*At the end of 1941 isolated militants of various backgrounds meet to renew old contacts and... the formation of a new group. A broad agreement is reached concerning the imperialist nature of the war and on the definition of Russia as a state capitalist system. The members come from Trotskyist, anarchist and various German opposition groups, and represent many nationalities...*

*...in 1946 the evolution of the group towards the position of the Workers' Councils Communists appears clearly... After the liberation of Paris, limited organizing amongst the socialist youth brings new blood... and... new contacts. But the GRP-UCI - it happens also to other organizations - is ill-prepared to assimilate these new people, who are doubtless motivated by a healthy reaction against class collaboration, but who are inexperienced politically and prone to be easily discouraged by the rarefied atmosphere of the group and its lack of possibility of expression. Some members quit the group, some of the foreigners leave France... The group... ceases to function in 1947. It has fulfilled a useful role during the war...*

### **Conclusions.**

*This study attempts to explain only the historical background and the actions of the three groups which took an unequivocal attitude during the war: The RKD-CR, the GRP-UCI and the ICL. As they were not tormented, as were Trotskyists, by the problems of strategy and tactics caused by the participation of the USSR in the conflicts, they differed little in their analysis of the war. It is now irrelevant to know whether the RKD or GRP assessed correctly or not the Italian situation, or to rehash old arguments on perennial theoretical problems. mention of the anarchist current was deemed necessary, both to emphasize the collapse of the movement and to recognize the efforts of the militants who tried at least to pick up the threads.*

*With many nuances, the three groups were most optimistic - as were the Trotskyists - as to the revolutionary potential of the conflict. Their hopes were mercilessly crushed: the feeble attempts here and there at autonomous working class actions promptly vanished with the restoration, aided by Stalinists and reformists, of state power.*

*The ultra-left analysis of the USSR was confirmed while the Trotskyists' overlabored analysis crumbled. The bureaucracy did not succumb to capitalist pressure nor to a proletarian revolution. It*

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*protected and extended its power... The war and post-war periods proved that the bureaucratic society was not a freak occurrence limited to Russia. Bureaucratic societies exist over half of Europe and elsewhere in the world, providing the Trotskyists with other specimens of workers' states born distorted or deformed. This is the most important event of the century, the irrefutable proof that the elimination of private capitalism without a democratic organization of society engenders new forms of domination and exploitation.*

*This short history of the ultra-left is not an a posteriori justification, but nonetheless some misconceptions should be dispelled.*

*While not contesting the imperialist character of the war, some people have accused the internationalists of having given indirect help to the Nazis by not subordinating everything to the necessity of the anti-fascist fight. This is a most serious question, and the complexity of the problem was revealed in various discussions which took place before the war...*

*The swift German victory in France brought a partial answer to these questions for the internationalists. In the measure that the French bourgeoisie, with enough duplicity to safeguard its future, stood behind the Nazis, the fight against Vichy and the Nazis became the same fight. But the war continued, and left intact the problem of dealing with the resistance.*

*The ultra-left and the Trotskyists maintained their complete independence and fought Vichy and the Nazis within the framework of their respective global perspectives. The ultra-left was only a grain of sand in the tempest and could only assign itself modest tasks. Despite its weakness, it deemed necessary the maintenance of its organizations in order to safeguard and develop the theory, to regroup the militants and to denounce the lies and illusions spread by the various imperialists. The ultra-left stood for the defense of proletarian interests against French and German capital, advocated sabotage of the nazi war effort and resistance to german and Vichy legislation. Although the German soldiers fought bravely indeed, they were not all Nazis. Thousands of deserters were executed. The limited but effective work of the Trotskyists among German soldiers proved they were not impervious to propaganda. This was an anti-nazi attitude but on a class ground, without any concession to the class collaboration and chauvinism of the Stalinists and de Gaullists.*

*Some well-meaning people have suggested that the ultra-left, and also the trotskyists, should have infiltrated the Resistance in order to influence it. The weakness of the ultra-left precluded any diversion of its militants. More numerous, the Trotskyists finally chose to concentrate their militants in the factories. But the basic objection is a political one. Even with the best intentions, clandestine activity is not conducive to lengthy debate and democratic process beyond the phase of small-room discussions. The Resistance was not a political forum. In order to be known and respected, within a necessarily small number of people, an infiltrator would have had to obey orders and perform tasks assigned to him - in other words, to be lost to his own organization and ideas... Trotskyists gained influence and respect in some factories, but as the most militant and best trade unionists. When they unfurled their flag, the workers did not flock...*

*At the end of the war... the three ultra-left groups influenced perhaps a few hundred people... the conditions had been difficult; most militants were in various degrees of jeopardy (as Jews, foreigners, forced-labor dodgers, jail escapees, etc)... money, false papers, food tickets, safe housing*

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*had to be secured. Printing material was difficult to obtain. Already having to contend with the various French and German police, internationalists feared the Stalinists and were suspicious of the Resistance... But the existing material conditions do not explain everything, and are themselves partly a reflection of political isolation. The internationalists were totally in opposition to the various ideologies which claimed the allegiance of those French people who had not already taken refuge in passivity or opportunism. Internationalists could only endure, bear testimony and work for the future.*

# GUATEMALA

## DEMOCRACY AND VIOLENCE

### LETTER FROM AN AMERICAN COMRADE

*In the previous Echanges we published an eyewitness account from Guatemala by an American comrade. Some more material by her and from other sources will follow in another issue. In the meantime we publish below a translation from French of a letter from another American comrade, written in July '92 after a visit to Guatemala the month before, giving some updates on the situation compared with the article in the last issue which was rather old.*

Here I don't give advices for a travel there, even if I am ready to do it if somebody needs it... and not at all a summing up of the history of this country... there exists quite a lot of literature on the subject... but only my observations from my last trip in June. I went there in 81, 82 and 88 also. 90% of the following notes are based on reading the local press, on what I could guess and on some discussions with the hotel keeper and with a couple working for an international agency. I will try to make a distinction between the facts, what I feel or suppose. Note that presently 1 dollar equals 5 Quetzales.

#### Democracy and violence

The election of Cerezo to presidency in 1986 had given rise to high expectations after years of a brutal military repression which completely devastated several provinces and provoked the exodus of tens of thousands of Indians to Mexico where they still live. These hopes were deceived and the army is still powerful behind the light veil of civil authority. Anyway some things has changed a little... Individual killings have replaced mass killings, though the army still kill quite a lot in the indian villages. In 1988, in nine months, American Watch could count 621 politically motivated murders. The democratic mechanism is there: a 'Human Rights Office', an

Inspection of Labour and of the Judges... but it doesn't work or works very badly... the inquiry on the murder of an anthropologist made no progress in two years because one of the supposed murderers belongs to the 'security services' ... in this murder the victim had a family powerful enough to prevent the suppression of the affair. Army and security services are practically beyond reach, except when one of their members of the lowest grades is involved in a crime.

Killing is very frequent in Guatemala... A full page of *Prensa Libre* (6/11/92) describing all the horrors happening in this country, reveals that the rate of killing is four times that of US, Chile, Argentine or Nicaragua... Perhaps there is some exaggeration in that. But it is true anyway that for a country of 9 millions inhabitants, the daily list of killed people is rather long... even if we don't count the criminal or passional murders, we can read that family members or individuals have their throat cut with the machete without apparent reasons... even the members of the ruling class don't escape assassination and nobody, note that, accuses the 'guerilla'. During my almost three weeks stay I could recapitulate the following assassinations among 'top people' of the country:

1) A political leader, wellknown and estimated banker, killed by heavy gunfire when leaving his helicopter in Peten in the north of the country. 2) A colonel, one of the hopes of the army, killed with his driver on the road. 3) The president of the 'Industrial Trade Chamber' machine-gunned on the road - he survived. 4) An anthropologist strangled in his residence. 5) A colonel, former director of civil aviation, killed in the capital. 6) A judge killed at Rutdhuleu. 7) A TV journalist, criticising the regime a little, survived though severely wounded. 8) Not to forget the president of the conference of bishops of Guatemala killed in his car and ejected on the road, after having tried in vain to invoke his position as servant of God.

It is evident that there is some trouble among the ruling class. After all, according to a killer, a *pistolero* can be hired for 1,000 \$ and certainly less if people to be killed are without importance (peasants, union organisers). In a certain way, an quick method to clear the way for a promotion.

The ruling class appears divided on a lot of questions... Serrano (the successor of Cerezo) vetoed some measures proposed by the parliament... The coffee industry has quite a lot of problems and the capitalist milieus explain that 100,000 count in Guatemala... the others can only work and shut their mouth, in their own interest.

It is true that the Cerezo government has meant a light



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change, *la apertura politica*, but it is a very narrow change... The media are not completely controlled and can sometimes contain very hard criticism... the unions have benefitted from the new climate of tolerance, perhaps because a part of the army is fed up of being systemetically used to break the strikes and certainly to improve their reputation internationally (to get foreign subsidies). They also think that the best way to discourage the guerilla is to give the unions a certain freedom of action. Finally, under Cerezo discussions with the guerilla dstarted. Now more details about some of these points.

### Unions

The first unions were founded in the 20's. Except during a short period (Arbenz government) they have always functioned in very difficult conditions, sometimes somewhat tolerated, sometimes violently repressed. The counter revolution in 1954 helped by the CIA completely destroyed a movement which had organised one tenth of the workforce. Presently they organise only 5% of the workers. Several union federations exist and the workers are now and then organised on a factory basis, now and then on a branch basis, but coalitions or agreements on a national level or even on a regional level are rare. The extent of unemployment and of precarious work, the low standard of living and the low level of education, the general political climate, - it is evident that the unions work with terrible handicaps. As a well informed Canadian man told me: the life expectations of the union leaders are always very limited. Anyway the unions try to use the new political possibilities as well as possible and some strikes burst up in June. The unions opposed the privatisation of the state companies, with the argument (among others) that they were a manoeuvre to break the unions and push the impoverishment process.

Guatemala has ratified most of the international agreements on labour, and the present laws, though considered by the unions as inadequate, give the workers some not negligible guarantees IF they were implemented. That is not at all the situation, and after a 4 years inquiry the AFL-CIO asked the US Congress to apply to Guatemala the sanctions of the law for non-respect of workers rights (these sanctions would consist of a change in the custom taxes). The Guatemalan press unanimously condemned the AFL-CIO, but the Guatemalan unions approved and once again condemned the maquiladora factories which are totally exempted of taxes, pay the lowest wages and don't utilise modern technology.

### Guerilla

For three weeks, the papers mentioned some fights between the army and the guerilla with 5 or 6 dead. Here and there, the guerilla cut the electricity lines, burn a coach or destroy a road. Sometimes during the night, a village is invaded to keep a meeting and distribute some literature. Nothing very dangerous for the government.. For the 5 or 6 previous weeks some meetings of country people living in the highlands ask for the end of war and a peaceful solution, mainly asking that the guerilla stop war actions very damageable to all the population. It is impossible to know what is the part of the 'special units' of the army in these meetings, but it is evident that the majority of the population is fed up with a situation which has been lasting

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for more than 30 years, most of these civilians being squeezed between the two warring camps, each burnt coach aggravating their difficulties. The government declarations about the weakening of a more and more internationally isolated guerilla correspond more or less to the reality. Military people think that the Guatemalan weapon equipment comes from the disbanded Salvadorian guerilla, but this assertion has to be proved. The same source estimated that the guerilla numbers only between 800 to 1,000 fighters.

In these conditions the army can impose its conditions. In an interview, the general minister of defence and 'el titular de Gobernacion' (?) have offered the guerilla an amnesty (still to define) and the possibility to be transformed in a political party when it has surrendered all its weapons without conditions. The Union Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (UNRG) has considered these proposals as ridiculous... (Siglo Veintiuno, 22/6/92) but it can't hope for better ones... the situation is far more worse for the guerilla than in Salvador or in Nicaragua where a fragile compromise has been settled. It is evident anyway that in a poor and small country, the guerilla is still a problem, obliging the constant use of the military forces in conjunction with the police: the army protect the banks, the department stores, the buses,... the cars on the roads, etc...

### Standard of living

It is impossible to give accurate figures, to try some comparisons. Some wages taken from the papers: a bus or lorry driver from 500 to 700 Q a month (50 to 70 £ - 100 to 120 \$), an accountant from 500 to 700 Q, a cook from 400 to 700 Q (sometimes getting the food and an accommodation), an office messenger from 325 Q up to 500 (if he owns a motorbike), a secretary from 500 up to 700 Q (if she is very skilled). A typographer can earn 20 Q a day (2 £ or 1.50 \$) but a hairdresser can get 700 monthly (plus tips), a waitress 475 Q. The award for exploitation can go to somebody offering 300 Q to a young able to wash and iron allowed only to rest on Sunday. The same young woman could get up to 700 Q a week if she work in a massage parlour... According to the law the workers can get a yearly bonus and the working week is fixed to 44 hours, but practically most of the workers work six days a week. I could not find information about the very skilled jobs: electricians, engineers, technicians, etc... A salesman very skilled (in mechanics for instance) can earn 1,000 Q plus commissions a month. An accountancy degree or a totally bilingual secretary means a very good level referring to the level of education in this country. My American informer told me that 2,000 Q (200 / 300 \$) a month for a couple can be considered as a very good income in Guatemala.

### Prices

All my informers agree that the accommodation problem was very important in Guatemala; in the capitol town, the foreigners can live as kings... some rents have to be paid in dollars; according to the offers in the papers no rent is below 250 Q (25 / 40 \$) a month which is quite a lot for people earning between 400 Q and 600 Q a month, often with a large family. The solution is found in pilung up people, often a whole family living in one room or sharing the house with

others. The poorest ones live in 'colonias', on the slopes of the 'barrancos', deep ravines around the town, in slums. An American-Canadian couple works for an international agency helping the poor to buy their 'home': this organisation lend the money for the land and the building materials to a cooperative in which the members provide the building work... These buildings are very simple, the walls... the roof of corrugated iron... the mortgage would be 40 Q a month. The unions complain about all the facilities offered to the import companies so that the purchasing power has diminished and ruining the national industries... Effectively I can see that the shops are very well supplied and that prices are not so scandalously high as in the past... The US products are not the only ones, Chinese and Japanese goods have their part of the market. But most of the prices are similar to the American prices in the popular stores: shirts starts at 56 Q, a tailored dress at 80 Q, a not too bad pair of shoes 100 Q, chicken starts at 7 Q a pound and mince meat from 7 to 11 Q a pound. The steak (very tough) 11 Q a pound, a beer can be 2,50 Q in the supermarket but 3.50 to 5 Q in the restaurant. Transport is very cheap (subsidised by the state): 40 centavos in the capital, 2,50 Q from Guatemala City to Antigua.



Don't forget that besides the low wages, there is unemployment and underemployment. I don't have the figures but they are high... All youths have a lot of difficulties to survive, wandering around the markets, the buses, selling shoestring or chewing gum... To sum up, for the poor: bad accomodation, a minimum of clothes and poor food... beans, tortillas with onions, avocados... And the 'mush', a kind of light porridge of oats or 'I'atole', a kind of clear soup made with corn, all that with sugar. Meat and milk are a luxury. I saw that the population practically don't eat fresh vegetables.

Cholera has actually caused about a hundred of deaths (If I am not wrong). It is a disease linked to poverty, affecting mainly the rural sones where now and then the river water is used for everything. No cholera in Antigua where the water is pure and the reputation is of great importance for tourism.

### Ecology

The first tanker delivering unlead petrol came to Guatemala last year, but it was the only one... I have found the same foul smell as previously in Guatemala City where hundreds of buses spread clouds of black smoke. On 4th Avenue where there is an uninterrupted stream of buses, the people - shop keepers, office workers, restaurant workers - work with doors and windows open and breathe this poison all day long.

More important is the problem of deforestation. A page in *Prensa Libre* (11/6/92) with the title *Destruction de nuestro ambiente* says that 30 years ago the forest covered 80% of the country... now it covers only 25% and in 20 years everything will have disappeared, bringing

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a situation similar to Haiti with the disappearance of agriculture as well as maritime life along the coasts covered by the earth brought by the erosion. When traveling I could observe that this was right... entire slopes in the mountains are completely deforested; when we see them from far away the green land is an illusion: it is not trees but *chapparal*... the big trees are rare. The government can't ignore this situation and forest rangers replant trees and encourage the commercial production of tortillas in order to reduce the use of less economic domestic woodfires. Some of these measures are not very efficient and some are purely symbolical... a cop would be needed behind each peasant to prevent him to cut wood when nothing else is offered to him instead... Electricity is rare and expensive, coal is nonexistent and gas stoves are expensive... Another subject of anxiety in the same article: the high birth rate... if the birth rate decline significantly the population will be 19 million in 30 years and 29 million if there is a smaller decline. The article proposes family planning.

This is not all my notes, but I think I have covered the essential. It is easy to find statistics on mortality, hygiene, unemployment, education, etc... Guatemala, like Mexico, has strongly protested against the decision of the US Supreme Court to legalise the kidnapping of individuals in foreign countries by the US security services. This imperialist arrogance brought strong protests in the US and the State Department sent its best acrobats to try to soften the reactions to this decision. *El Grafico* (17/6/92) published a virulent editorial against the US *La legalizacion del terrorismo*; as we say here "It takes one to know one"....

PL 7/92

## GOODBYE TO THE UNIONS?

### A CONTROVERSY ABOUT AUTONOMOUS CLASS STRUGGLE IN GREAT BRITAIN

#### REMARKS ABOUT SOME RECENT PUBLICATIONS AND TEXTS

##### A book and a bad summary

A book by Cajo Brendel on this subject was first published in German in 1974 with the title "Autonome Klassenkämpfe in England 1945-1972". An expanded French version was later published by Echanges (a few copies might still be available from our Paris address) with the title "Lutte de classe autonome en Grande Bretagne 1945-1977". However, there was never an English edition of this book, which is a long account of the autonomous struggle of the British

working class in the post-war period, based on an extended knowledge of and a lifelong occupation with the subject.

Some time ago we became aware of a kind of abbreviated English version of the book which has circulated for some years without our knowledge, an anonymously published pamphlet with the title "*Autonomous class struggle in Great Britain 1945-77. A summary*". It was in general a good idea trying to put out such a pamphlet since an English version of Brendel's book doesn't exist. However, the pamphlet is a bad extract and summary (including a number of factual errors not found in the original) which does not give a good account of the author's real ideas, analysis and experience with the working class struggle. Any critique of Brendel's work based on this pamphlet is therefore deemed to contain many unnecessary misunderstandings. We don't say that once a reader has had a look at the original, he would agree with the analysis put forward - but a more fruitful discussion could then be possible.



The remarks below is made for new readers of *Echanges* who might have seen the English pamphlet or various critiques, to make known that we disagree with these texts and have attempted to answer them. For those who have seen the pamphlet *Goodbye to the unions* which we've published on the subject, the following remarks are made in order to comment and make known some other texts which are part of the same controversy. The work has been started to translate and update Brendel's book, but it is uncertain when this can be finished and a publisher be found.

### A hostile critique and a pamphlet trying to answer it

A reaction to the English pamphlet was a 4 page leaflet with a critique of Brendel - or rather of the 'unauthorised' pamphlet: *Some thoughts as I read the pamphlet "Autonomous Class Struggle in Great Britain"*. By David Douglass, National Union of Mineworkers, where the author apparently is extremely offended by anyone daring to talk about the autonomous

Some thoughts as I read the pamphlet  
"Autonomous Class Struggle in Great Britain"  
by David Douglass  
National Union of Mineworkers

struggle of the workers and especially anyone criticising 'his' union. There is little doubt that the author, even if he had could seen the original book, would disagree with much - and most likely the substance - of Brendel's and our analysis. But the critique's very large number of extremely 'hard',

hostile and unfriendly remarks are maybe to a larger extent than necessary caused by the distorted and/or uncomplete account of our views and by the number of factual errors in the English pamphlet. Douglass apparently never cared to even take into account that he was criticising a summary made by someone else and that he had no knowledge whatsoever about

the author or about his ideas and the political 'tradition' he comes from. Instead he just jumped into making a critique in an extremely despicable and disgusting tone, some of the worst we've seen on the left for many years, in addition to some meaningless assumptions about the author being a 'situationist'.

Because of the circulation of the 'unauthorized' pamphlet and of the above mentioned and other critiques of it, *Echanges* published the pamphlet *Goodbye to the unions - A controversy about autonomous class struggle in Great Britain*, containing a brief summary of Brendel's book, Douglass' above mentioned critique, an answer from Brendel and other texts by *Echanges*. This pamphlet has been distributed to all subscribers and is also for sale in bookshops or from *Echanges* and will therefore not be summarised here.

### A speech at a Class War conference

The above mentioned leaflet is not the only Douglass text in circulation criticising Brendel. In '91 the English Class War Federation arranged an international conference. An account of the conference in no. 47/48 of the Swedish anarchist journal *Brand*, in a paragraph called "The unions as resistance", says: "*A speech which lead to standing ovations came from Dave Douglass, secretary of the Hatfield section of the National Union of Miners, when he give an account of the ('84- '85) miners strike. He attacked the whole left for its superior attitude towards the workers. Dave was of the opinion that the autonomists / council anarchists are wrong when they say that the unions always act as a brake on the resistance of the workers. -During the miners strike it was on our union meetings that we planned all illegal actions, our 'hit squads' against strike breakers and the Coal Board.*"

Douglass' speech was published in no.5 of the Class War discussion journal *Heavy Stuff*, in the article *Charge of the left Brigade. The left, working class trade unionism and the experience of the miners - by DD, Doncaster Class War*. (1) Elsewhere in the journal there's given the address to something called *Class War Colliers, c/o D. Douglass...* The bulk of the text is a critique - somewhat amusing and in some places with a couple of arguments and examples which we can appreciate - of the leninist left and its attempts to intervene in workers' struggles and teach the workers. It further argues that British workers express an attachment to the trade unions, that struggles often develop out of or parallel to the formal union structures, etc. and a lot of other points also made in his leaflet mentioned above - all of which neither is unknown to us nor is in contradiction with our analysis. The difference is only that Douglass' only concern is a stubborn defence of the unions at any cost, especially his 'own'. In Douglass' text we also again find the fantasies about the miners' union being "a catalyst in revolutionary upsurges" all the time from its inception... until the 1984-85 miners strike!

At the end of the speech/article there's an attack on Brendel which starts as follows: "*Not that such blinkered vision is confined to Leninists. Cajo Brendel, in 'Autonomous class struggle in Britain', what I suppose is a Situationist work (in fact Brendel is... a veteran Dutch council communist - Heavy Stuff editor's note), misses the relationship of the worker to the trade union, in a period of mass Trade Union upsurge, sees all struggle as anti-union and non-struggle as*

## CHARGE OF THE LEFT BRIGADE

The Left, Working Class Trade Unionism and the Experience of the 1970s.

By DD, Doncaster Class War (Dave Douglass)

trade unionism...''It's interesting once again to note this accusation about 'situationism'. Apart from being totally unjustified as a characterisation of Brendel, Douglass must must be the only person on the left nowadays who feels a need to attack something as dated as 'situationism' - hardly a 'force' present anywhere in Britain to deceive Douglass' trade unionists. But we guess it could be a question of not knowing much about what situationism is/was and just using it as a label to attach to and attack another individual. At the end of his article Douglass actually has a Glossary of Terms defining situationism as follows: "*In the context of this article refers to a belief in the spontaneity of the working class, rather than action being instigated by any established organisation.*" Hardly a very precise definition of situationism, the content of the definition is hardly specific to the situationists, and actually it says something which we could more or less say about ourselves. Douglass furthermore talks about "a period of mass Trade Union upsurge". Here's maybe in a nutshell one of the main differences between us. When there are massive working class struggles, or for that case as in the UK in the postwar period also a myriad of continuous small struggles and resistance at local level, Douglass as a long time trade union official (although at a low level) in his stubbornness has only one way to characterise this is, as "mass Trade Union upsurge" (trade union even with capital letters to emphasise the point) quite independently of what is actually going on. The logic is apparently simple: The majority of the workers are members of a trade union, so... everything workers do is simply an extension of the union activities.

Douglass also writes that Brendel "sees all struggle as anti-union and non-struggle as trade unionism". Here he is not even making a caricature of Brendel's and our position, but makes it into something completely different. Not only is his characterisation not in accordance with what our views actually are. But it is difficult to understand how one could get this impression even from the 'unauthorised' English pamphlet which started all Douglass attacks - that is to say, difficult to understand provided the pamphlet actually was read properly and the intention was to give an honest account and critique. We will only give a brief quotation from it, which however is typical for Brendel's analysis: "*This does not mean that the autonomous struggle and the union struggle are automatically opposed; the pure union struggle is as much a fiction as its opposite. Usually it oscillates from one side to the other. Some wildcat strikes*

they couldn't assist us. The SWP blamed the collapse of the strike on the FAILURE OF THE LEADERS TO ACT...

We pass each other like ships in the night.

Not that such blinkered vision is confined to Leninists. Cajo Brendel, in 'Autonomous Class Struggle in Britain 1945-77', what I suppose is Situationist work (in fact Cajo Brendel is not a Situationist, but a veteran Dutch council communist - editor's note), misses the relationship of the worker to the trade union, in a period of mass Trade Union upsurge, sees all struggle as anti-union and non-struggle as trade unionism. He repeats the dogma that unions can only RESTRICT the struggle of the class and NEVER, not EVER, have been used by the class as a combative force, despite bureaucratic restrictions and outright betrayals. He is confident enough to write an extensive thesis without ONCE referring to any of the workers involved in the struggles he cites. The struggle is an abstract, it doesn't involve real people with their own views on things and their own ways of changing things.

eventually submit to union control while others launched officially end in breaking free from union control. This was the case with the miners strike of 1972." It is the analysis of such dialectical relationships, free from any ideological or organisational hangups, which constitutes the strength of Brendel's analysis. It's the inability of any consistent analysis, the inability to have two apparently different ideas in one's head at the same time, which is at the core of Douglass' writings. Anyone not blinded by Douglass being 'a miner' and even a consciously 'revolutionary' one, but calmly looks at the style and contents of his writings, will see that it "is a surrealistic blend of facts woven into a myth and on a canvas of dogma" (quotation taken from Douglass' diatribe against Brendel in "Some thoughts...").

In connection with the Class War speech we sent the following letter to *Heavy Stuff* (a journal which by the way in its front page header indicates that it wants to promote "The thought behind the anger"):

To: 'The Heavy Stuff'

10/1/93



Dear comrades,

You will find enclosed a pamphlet published by our network: 'Goodbye to the Unions' which is a controversy about autonomous class struggle in Great Britain. This pamphlet has an history and Class War was involved in it, though not being part of the controversy... a speech by David Douglass, NUM branch delegate, to the Class War Federation Conference in London september '91. In this speech Douglass mixed a right criticism of the attempts of all kind of organisations coming to teach the workers how to struggle, with the defence of some kind of perfect identity between the workers struggles and the unions. A passage of this speech attacked a text trying to show how workers have to manage their struggle through a lot of barriers, the main one being at first the unions; the text being attacked was a bad summary of a book published years ago by our network. Douglass, not even trying to know more about these ideas, 'supposed' it was a situationist work: in fact the author was an old militant of the Dutch Council Communist movement which cannot be assimilated in any manner to these people coming to teach the workers, as most of his life and activity was devoted to learn from the workers in trying to understand class struggles.

The text of this speech was published as a pamphlet by the 121 Bookshop/Anarchist Center with the signature of David Douglass 'Yorkshire Miner'. (Can we consider a NUM Branch Delegate as a miner?). The same text was published in your paper 'Heavy Stuff' with the title 'Charge of the Left Brigade' and with a picture of Arthur Scargill cheerfully waving at the reader.

David Douglass has the right to defend his positions, which are not new at all: all unionists and all "workers' parties" members have always defended the complete identity of their aims with the workers' struggle; it was the cornerstone of their organisations and ideology.

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*So we were not surprised to find this position so vehemently defended by a NUM Branch Delegate. But we were surprised to find this union apology and this mystification exposed at a Class War conference and developed without any criticism in the Class War discussion forum paper. How could you fight all kind of mystifications in this society, most often in the right way, and open the door to such confuse and dangerous ideas about unions which were and still are one of the pillar of the capitalist domination of labour.*

*Fraternally,*

As mentioned in this letter, Douglass speech was first published as a pamphlet with the title "*Refracted Perspectives*" by 121 Bookshop in London. (2) The *Heavy Stuff* article and the pamphlet is identical, with one exception: the article contains some definitions, including one of 'situationism' quoted above. These are not in the pamphlet, which however contains some introductory remarks about 'Who are we talking about?': "*the departees from trotskyism... but also elements of the situationists... Basically I've dubbed them collectively the 'substitutionist left' - the bodies that substitute themselves for the working class and address us as though they are the working class, or even our leaders.*" So here's another 'definition' of 'situationism' - who cares that it's different from the one we've quoted above?

### **A review in a libertarian journal**

Our pamphlet "Goodbye to the unions" was reviewed in no.6 of the UK libertarian journal *Flux* (3), together with "*Refracted Perspectives*" and the Wildcat pamphlet "*Outside and against the unions*". A proper comment to this review can't be made here, because it would mean a complete article in itself. Firstly because the journal even got the most basic facts wrong: Brendel's name is spelt wrong (a point which is of practically no importance but fits nicely into the rest of the review), they got the name of our pamphlet wrong (calling it "Making the unions pay", a very 'militant' and 'revolutionary' title we would never use) and the whole 'sequence of events' is wrong (presenting it as if Brendel/Echanges and Wildcat published something first and Douglass then answered, whereas in reality it was Douglass' writings which led to an answer from us - and completely separated from us, a comment by Wildcat). Secondly, because the review is rather confusing and contains many misunderstandings of Brendel's analysis, so it would take a long time to clear them up. For example, it makes no sense to talk about the 'categorically anti-union position' of 'Brendel / Wildcat'. This is an identification we're sure Wildcat would disagree with also, because we've stated our disagreements with their analysis of working class consciousness and actions and trade unions on several occasions, and we anyway never talk in the 'oh-so-revolutionary' terms of 'anti-union', 'destroying the unions' etc... (4) Some of the arguments the reviewer puts forward against 'Brendel / Wildcat' we could actually somewhat agree with (as they are stated in the review - we don't know if the reviewer gives the same meaning to these sentences as we do and put them in the same overall analysis) and are hardly in contradiction with our view: "*Day to day struggles (for compensation, a*

**Dave Douglass, 'Refracted Perspectives';**  
**Cajo Brendal, 'Making the Unions Pay' Exchanges et Mouvement, 90p**  
**Wildcat, 'Outside and Against the Unions', 45p**

THESE PAMPHLETS REPRESENT THE LATEST round in the anarcho/communist Trade Union debate. The Dutch Council Communist Cajo Brendal and Wildcat take their scalpel and crowbar respectively to demolish the myths of leftist trade unionism. Dave Douglass, of the NUM and Class War, gives his reply.

For Brendal and Wildcat trade unions are categorically not defence organisations of the working class. Rather, their role is to act as 'go-betweens', between the bosses and the working class, who negotiate the rate of exploitation and aim to 'normalise' class relations. But the one thing trade unions can't do is negotiate away exploitation. To fulfill this role trade unions need to exercise power over working people, organisationally and ideologically. This power is a block in the way of working class self-liberation and makes the unions fundamentally anti-working class organisations. Workers' liberation requires not trade union action, but autonomous action - in Wildcat's terms "outside and against the unions".

This, of course, is not as heretical as it sounds. The ideology of 'social partnership' with capital has permeated trade unionism since the beginning. A group like Big Flame argued pretty much along these lines when discussing the Shop Stewards Movement in the early 70's. That it might sound heretical really is to do with the sheer lack of major workers/trade union struggle over the last decade.

But what makes this 'communist' position different from most orthodox left criticism of the unions is that Wildcat/Brendal do not see this or that leadership or the lack of a union rank and file as the problem. They see the problem as trade unionism per se.

Dave Douglass' position is more orthodox. Whilst he concedes the problem of right wing leadership and union bureaucratisation he gives the unions his vigorous endorsement. In the process he demolishes some myths himself. He argues that what Brendal sees as 'autonomous' action by the British working class in the post war period was very often action fought by rank and file trade unionists, as trade unionists.

Douglass sees unions as vehicles which workers can take as far and in which

ever direction they choose. And he argues that to be anti-union is to be anti-working class.

There is more than a hint of syndicalism in Douglas' thinking. This clearly sets him apart from the Leninist left, who (in theory) see unions as pre-political organisations whose militancy can only come to revolutionary fruition with the aid of the party. For Douglass, the workers need no party.

The weaknesses of Douglas' position are clear. He overestimates the capacity of rank and file workers to move unions, against the entrenched power and practice of the bureaucracy. He also uses a kind of trick argument whereby because 'trade unions = workers' organisations', workers activity is by definition trade union activity, whether or not against the hierarchy. Importantly, he doesn't really deal with the crux of the Wildcat/Brendal argument - that it is the function of trade unionism which is at issue; and that, however democratic, bureaucratic, craven or bold the leadership - and this includes rank and file self-leadership - negotiation spells compromise.

However, I do sense a certain inconsistency in Douglas' position, a sense that his trade unionism is more pragmatic and conditional than his polemical defence of trade unionism suggests. Then, Wildcat are enough to drive anybody into inconsistency!

Yet there is a great deal to favour Douglas' argument. Firstly, there is a powerful sense of history, culture and tradition. This might involve some mythmaking, but it's not simply about mythmaking.

When we understand that people act out of an 'historical sense' of themselves, this notion of culture becomes important. Trade Unions not only mean compromise (the 'communist' argument about function), they are also felt to embody cultural values and experiences of solidarity and collective struggle. As such, however valid Wildcat/Brendal's thesis is, implicit in Douglas' reply is an equally valid point: that Trade Unions are not homogeneous organisations. Rather, they are highly contradictory, 'meaning' different things to different people in different places. Wildcat can iconoclastically cite examples of the NUM leadership curtailing rank and file initiative during the 84 Miners' Strike. But we can also cite numerous examples of workers in struggle during the 80's, as Trade Unionists, for their own notion of Trade unionism, despite the official Trade Union. Unions might be held within the framework of capitalist social relations (willy-nilly negotiating the price of exploitation), but they are not free of the system's conflicts and contradictions.

This contradictoriness makes a

categorically anti-union position difficult to sustain.

The problem with Brendal/Wildcat is their unremitting 'ultra-leftism'. Day to day struggles (for compensation, a shorter week etc) are nothing to these ultra-revolutionaries. Only the complete and utter destruction of exploitation counts. Unfortunately, day to day issues are important, because it is only through struggles around these that the struggle to change society can have any meaning.

This struggle is a process. There are times of advance and of retreat, and there are constant clashes of interest at many levels (bureaucracy: rank and file, the desire for autonomy; the mundane constraints of daily life etc. etc.). It is only through this process of struggle that the high points of revolutionary history have been reached. The Factory Council Movement in revolutionary Russia, the Italian autonomist struggles of the 70's, Anton Pannekoek's demolition of Lenin the Philosopher, whatever - none of these just happened, they were weak moments in a process of struggle. This is how we should see involvement in the trade unions: not as an end but as a moment in the process of struggle. But rather than critical involvement in a process, Wildcat/Brendal offer us only hyper-criticism and abstraction.

Wildcat/Brendal are right to focus in on the trade unions' function of negotiation. They certainly act as an emetic to those lefties who see trade unions as the be all and end all of 'serious' political activity. However, rank and file activity does not mean that you inevitably end up on the other side of the fence. Internal conflicts can and do create opportunities for struggle outside the official structures. Negotiation now (and Wildcat explicitly recognises its inevitability) does mean compromise. It can also up the ante for next time round. The traditions of collectivity which are so much a part of the rank and file trade union perspective (if not always realised in practice) are important. And what's more, taking unions seriously doesn't mean supporting the view that a leftist clique capturing the apparatus will change anything very much of substance.

John French



shorter week etc) are nothing to these ultra-revolutionaries. Only the complete and utter destruction of the unions counts. Unfortunately, day to day issues are important, because it is only through struggles around these that the struggle to change society can have any meaning."

How the reviewer gets this impression from Brendel's texts in our pamphlet is difficult to understand. Just picking two single pages (p.12 and 34) quite accidentally when writing this, one finds for example: "...workers continued to act in accordance with their class situation, ...with their own experience on the assembly line or elsewhere at their workplace... unofficial strikes became daily events... Or: "If I understand the postwar history of the British working class correctly... it could be summarized by a very simple and general formula: less work, more pay. So much for disregarding the daily struggles of the workers, which contrary to what this reviewer believes is a central starting point for Brendel's analysis. But it is precisely the understanding of and the integration of the workers struggles into a valid analysis, free from all kinds of organisational, emotional and ideological interpretations, which causes problems for this reviewer and for others and who see a contradiction where there isn't one. We could go on like this quoting and arguing, but it seems pointless...

## OUTSIDE AND AGAINST THE UNIONS

(A communist response to Dave Douglass' text "Reflected Perspective")



A **Widcal** Pamphlet



### A correspondance with Douglass

In the introduction to *Goodbye to the unions* it is said that Brendel's letter/answer to Douglass reproduced in the pamphlet wasn't answered and that it was doubtful if it would ever be. The reason why this letter actually didn't reach Douglass, contrary to what we had reason to believe, is of less importance, but since we made this statement we find it correct to publish part of a

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subsequent correspondence between Douglass and *Echanges*, which in addition contains some further remarks from Douglass on the pamphlet and on the question being debated:

**Letter from Douglass 23/8/93:**

*“Firstly in response to ‘to this letter Douglass has not yet replied, and it is doubtful if he ever will reply at all’. Since nobody sent me a copy of ‘answer to David Douglass’ which you describe as ‘a draft letter to David Douglass’ it was a prediction with some chance of coming true... You can rest assured I shall be replying in due course. At the moment intervening in the actual class struggle is most pressing, as you will know we are still fighting a holding action against the massacre of pit communities. We are down to the last 18000 NUM miners, NOT because of any LACK of combativeness, but because we have been a thorn in the side of the ruling class for nearly two centuries (yes we know at times the leaders and the union apparatus has confronted the miners too, it’s a battle not simply through unions but within unions, but we’ll come to that in the debate.) I note that Theo Sander won’t be too bothered about the Union getting wiped out, even though it means our communities have to get wiped out to do it. Remember the U.S.A. carried out a similar programme in Vietnam (in design if not by the same means). I shall be replying to him also, but I must inform Comrade Sander we do not have shop stewards in the mines, there are no ‘convenors’ in the mines, and we have no ‘plant’. This may just be a language problem, but understanding the structure of the NUM as against craft unions (the NUM is an industrial union) is important. (5) Needless to say I had no idea that what I was replying to was not Brendel’s original and complete text.”*

**Letter to Douglass 25/10/93:**

*“...letters were sent; we always had though they would get to you... Your misunderstanding about Brendel’s letter comes from a too fast reading of the pamphlet. I can only quote the paragraph dealing with this question (p. 7): ‘Brendel prepared a draft letter to Douglass to clarify some of the issues raised in his paper. This draft letter was circulated to a number of comrades for comment. Brendel then drew up the final version integrating some of the comments made...’ So what was sent was ‘the final version’ and not at all any of the draft versions discussed internally before. Anyway, all these questions are of petty importance considering the central matter of class struggle. I only want to add that all these disturbing problems could have been avoided if your criticism had been sent to *Echanges* with a personal letter. It is easy to know our address: all the various texts you have published on the subject were sent directly by various English comrades who were in touch with us and with you. I know that it is less easy to write to *Echanges* than to be in touch with *Daily Worker* (6) or *Class War*, but quite a lot of our texts have been distributed in the ‘leftist’ English milieu.”*

In our letter we could also have pointed out the following: Douglass writes that “Needless to say I had no idea that what I was replying to was not Brendel’s original and complete text”. When the pamphlet he was replying to says ‘A summary’ in capital letters on the front page

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and the publishers' introduction also says that it's a summary, what shall we think about this remark? There are several possibilities - most of them not particularly flattering.

### **An old review from *Echanges***

From *Echanges* no. 49/50 we reproduce the following review:

*"Tell us lies about the miners* by D. Douglass (Direct Action Movement) This pamphlet deals with 'The role of the media in the coal strike of 1984-85'. The author is a NUM Branch delegate at Hatfield main branch, Doncaster. The choice of the subject and the role of the author can both explain this focus on a lot of facts as if they were essential to class struggle. These facts on the distortion of events through the media are well known, impressive and accurate, and a lot more could have been quoted. But for what use? Class struggle does not rise and develop from removing such obstacles that are inherent to capitalism, but is rising from exploitation at rank and file level where the truth is perceived in the daily conditions of work. The spreading of conflicts is not a matter of propaganda but of workers knowing from their own conditions what is actually the fight of other workers. Nothing can prevent the spreading of a strike when it is going to spread; nothing can impulse this spreading when it has stopped for a lot of specific elements. The importance given so to this role of the media has to be linked to the general concept of social democracy on the control of means of domination."

### **A recent book by Douglass**

The latest publication in this story is a new book by Douglass we just received: *Pit Sense versus the State. A history of militant miners in the Doncaster area.* (7) Leaving aside the main subject of the book, which we haven't yet had the time to read properly, we will here just remark that it was finished after Douglass became aware of our comments to his critique of Brendel and after he had been in contact with Brendel himself. Despite this one of the chapters, more or less identical with the text of the Class War conference, still contains the remark about Brendel having written 'a situationist work'. In a parenthesis as a kind of publisher's comment, just like in the original article, we also find: "[in fact Cajo Brendel is not a situationist, but a veteran Dutch council communist]". Not that this matters much to us, but it's worth pointing out the ignorant attitude demonstrated by not bothering to remove this unfounded labelling after having put it forward so many times previously. That the whole passage looks rather stupid with the parenthesis added by 'somebody', is not our problem.

### **Some final remarks**

We're not sure under which label Douglass or his supporters want him presented: The grandiose "D. Douglass, National Union of Mineworkers" as in "*Some thoughts...*", "Hatfield Main Colliery NUM Branch Delegate", "Yorkshire miner", associated with the Direct Action Movement, "DD, Doncaster Class War" representing an (existing or nonexisting) network of "Class War Colliers", or other varieties we've seen - maybe it varies according circumstances and time. In "*Some thoughts...*" Douglass writes that "It will be hard not to be 'partisan' as

a miner in looking at this [Brendel's] work...." What we would like to state clearly is that his 'partisanship' doesn't primarily stem from being 'a miner'. In reality Douglass is just as much arguing from and defending his position as not only a longtime, but also extremely committed, union official (although at a relatively low level), as well as from a position of a leftist political being and activist.

For those who have read the above mentioned critiques, until a proper translation of Brendel's book is available we can say little more than what we've said here, and to refer to the pamphlet "Goodbye to the unions" and much other material published by *Echanges* throughout the years. For those reading French, we can strongly recommend a 200 page analysis by a participant in *Echanges* of the 84-85 miners strike, situating it in the context of the trade union movement, the autonomous struggles and the history of the NUM in the postwar period.(8)

RH

### Notes

(1) **THE HEAVY STUFF** presents itself as follows in *Anarchist Yearbook 1994*: "New look and emphasis have been given to the thoughts of Class War activists. Every edition will put our ideas to the front of struggles and help create a real revolutionary movement that is not afraid to muck it, rather than snipe from the rear." Address: c/o London C.W., P.O. Box 467, London E8 3QX.

(2) Available from **121 BOOKSHOP**, 121 Railton Road, Brixton, London SE24. This bookshop is open 1-5 Wed and Thurs, 2-5 Fri, 1-5 Sat and 3-5 Sun. Tel: 071 274 6655.

(3) **FLUX** is a 'Magazine of libertarian socialism' published in Nottingham. In *Anarchist Yearbook 1994* it presents itself as follows: "Aiming to question old dogma and ideas in a constructive and non-sectarian way. Covers a range of issues relevant to libertarian socialism today. Past editions have included debates on anti-fascism, pornography, New Social Movements, the judicial system, veganism, and lots more. Quarterly, nearly. Always looking for people to get involved." The address is: Flux, Box A, The Rainbow Centre, 180 Mansfield Rd., Nottingham. £5 for a year's subscription.

(4) We are making a general statement here about the phrases used by the reviewer and about the differences we've had with Wildcat on such questions - on the latter we can refer to critiques in *Echanges* no. 51 and 53. At the time of writing this we haven't read "Outside and against the unions" carefully enough to have an opinion on it or to know if the reviewer's critique in any way is justified. The pamphlet is 14 pages - write to: Wildcat, BM CAT, London WC1N 3XX.

(5) For readers who haven't seen *Goodbye to the unions*, this remark by Douglass refers to an article in this pamphlet by Theo Sander, with the title "Rise and decline of the shop stewards movement as a mediating force". Although naturally with some emphasis on the miners union, it is a very short and general article on the subject. It is this - and not a question of 'language' or of knowledge - which is the reason why general terms like 'shop stewards', 'convenors' and 'plants' are used. The references to Vietnam, and to not caring about unions and communities being wiped out, we don't go into here - the latter is a purely polemical remark meaningless to try to discuss.

(6) This is a reference to that Douglass for a while had a column in a communist party paper, the *Daily Worker*.

(7) D. Douglass: **PIT SENSE VERSUS THE STATE**. Phoenix Press. £4.50. ISBN 0 948984 26 0. Write

to **PHOENIX PRESS**, PO Box 824, London N1 9DL for a list of all their titles and for a loan system whereby its publications can be supported. In Anarchist Yearbook 1994 Phoenix Press presents the book as follows: "Important document from the miners' strike of 84/85, showing how the picketing was organised. A working class, insider's account, not the usual middle class outsider's one. Attacks the left for their ignorance and irrelevance."

(8) Henri Simon: *"To the bitter end. Grève des mineurs en Grande-Bretagne (Mars 1984-Mars 1985)"*, Editions Acratie. Available from Echanges for FF35 or a similar amount in English money.

## LETTER FROM AN AMERICAN COMRADE

The pamphlet "Goodbye to the unions", read three times, interested me, but also disappointed me. I am neither surprised nor upset by the quotations about the British unions in general given by C.B. and in particular the quotation concerning the miners union. I could give similar quotations myself... among many I suggest the book *'King Labour (British Working Class 1850-1914)'* by David Kynaston published in the UK. All the unions have skeletons in their cupboards and perhaps the English more than the others because their movement is older than in other countries. We also have to consider the specific conditions of this country. If I am right, in 1854 Engels complained about the *'l'embourgeoisement'* of the English working class. David Douglass (bureacrat of the English miners union NUM who launced the polemic) even though beautifying the present advantages of the unions, recognises mistakes, errors, corruption and bureacratism. Maybe he irritates us with his seductive implications about the unions which, according to him, still embodies principles which can allow them to go beyond what we can think. (It is evident that the unions, or at least the members!, can and must go 'further'. It is also clear that in a period of social tension any organisation can become a catalyst). But DD don't say for sure that they are instrument for a social revolution... I have no knowledge of this milieu to have a well founded opinion on the various facts given by CB and DD...

It is not the heavy 'attack' on D.D. about the actions of the unions which bothers me, but a certain attitude of C.B... I have often seen the same thing with some ultraleft people on the question of the party.... To sum up: we have the 'workers' and/or the unions on one side and

the other side a mythical working class hanging between the sky and the earth and accepting in fact the crumbs (it would be stupid to refuse them, CB tells us) brought by unions certainly built by some little green men imported by the bosses who, not being silly, have invented the union to castrate the working class. See page 30, 7th line: *"In this sense the origin of the trade unions... have nothing to do with the simple defence of working*



*class people or workers' rights.*" Myself I believe that generations of proletarian militants risked and gave their lives and freedom to build the unions. In the same paragraph he tells us about mediation. That is TRUE, but there has been mediation since the beginning of the world.... everything is mediation. Belonging to a tenants union means to accept the principle of ownership and of renting, exactly as to get a wage or a retirement benefit from the state also means accepting the wages system and the state. Of course we are not talking about obtaining the democratic freedoms.... that is also mediation. The only solution would be the ideal suicide like 'the Bonnot gang'... the permanent insurrection?

C.B. is somewhat joking with us (p.32-33) when with despise he's pushing aside the 'achievements' of the trade unions. Of course I agree that it is better to keep your ten fingers than to get an invalidity benefit, but can we completely eliminate accidents? Accidents happen every day on the street or at home. In fact, with this example (well chosen I admit) all social regulations are concerned. The workers fought for these regulations 1) politically to get it 2) forming their own solidarity funds. It is a very superficial view of the proletarian conditions to neglect that...

P. 36: "Let me just add a final word. It has always been my point of view that workers themselves know better than anybody else or any sort of group or organisation what's good for them and what their interests are..." Pure demagoguery! If the working class knows what is good for it and where its interests are leading it, what is the need to go ahead with such an useless discussion? Either 1) everything is well in a blue sky and the working class has got what it wanted or 2) it has been manipulated and emasculated since the very beginning, and after so many years there is no hope and we can discuss something else.

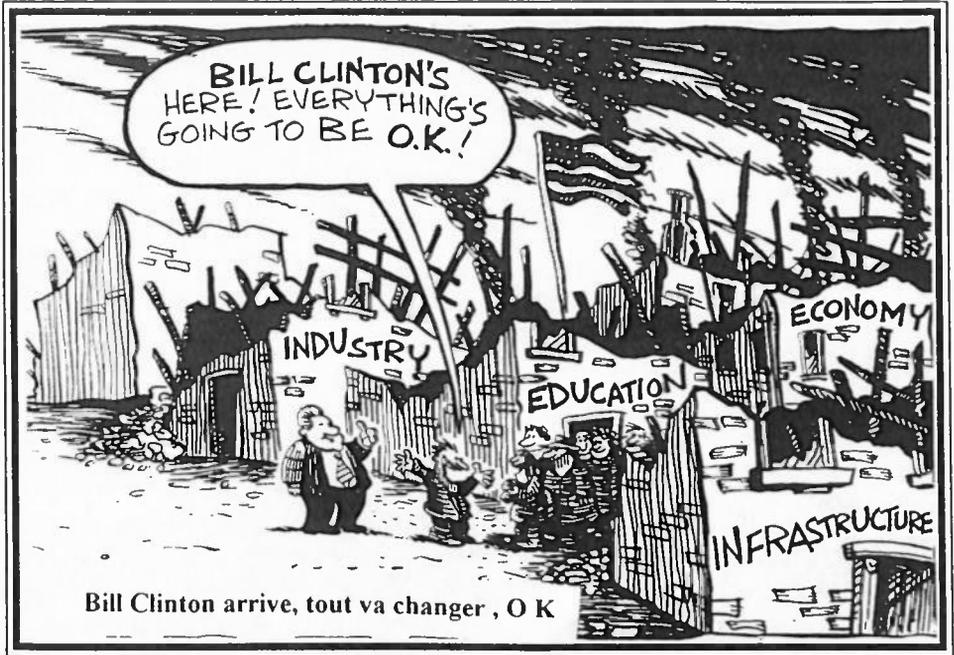
The key to these surprising declarations is perhaps page 33, where in the second paragraph C.B. reproach to the unions to ignore that capital and workers are natural enemies... C.B. has without doubt a reason for saying this - I am not one of those who maintain or propagate illusions about the role of unions, and I see that their membership number is diminishing. A member of Solidarity (1) told me some time ago that "we spend too much time in the union". In a certain meaning C.B. is fighting ghosts, but I don't agree with his abrupt declarations on the origin and role of the unions. Limited, corrupted, reformist if you want, the unions are a creation of the working class... I think that by definition a union can't be revolutionary in an advanced capitalist system. Changing society has nothing to do with a wage rise. It is for this reason that anarchosyndicalists (or the different varieties of factory workers groups) are futile in their endeavours (see Spain).

PL 3/93

(1) Note by Echanges: A leftwing US socialist organisation, many of whose members contribute to journals like *Against The Current* and *Labor Notes*.

# USA

## ON THE DEMOCRATS COMING TO POWER



### LETTERS FROM TWO AMERICAN COMRADES

Clinton's victory in the elections has palpably raised many people's hopes - particularly among groups who have been excluded under the past 12 years of Republican rule. There is a vague but widespread feeling, "things will change". Already Clinton is being very cautious, warning people not to get their hopes up high. Significantly, a few days after the election, the Chamber of Commerce, a very influential business group, issued a statement stating that the recession may very well have a third wave coming and that no comforting indications of any sort of recovery are on the immediate horizon. But expectations are there - and the new rulers may not be able to dampen them. And as these expectations are dashed - as they inevitably will be - there is of course the possibility of new cycles of struggles erupting...

CP 11/92

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The Clinton 'operation' has already lost its brilliance... Saw an article in *The Nation* which mentions that Clinton took only two minutes to impose his austerity programme while it took Carter two years to do the same. Every twelve years one has a Democratic president to do the dirty work that the Republicans don't have the guts to do. In fact Clinton has done little until now... Almost all his plans have to be discussed in the Congress. The idea of 'sacrifice' seduced naive Americans, but this was shortlived. For the average man there is nothing... there was a big fuss about the health insurance and now there is practically nothing... This morning I heard that in fact the project was to organise a competition between the 'groups' providing medical care... A dream... It is frightful... this makes you frightened to be sick. There are too much capitalist interests in the health business to think about imposing a real national health system. The unions are in favour of such a system but their opinion has less weight than the pressure of any politician. Wall Street is going well... after all, the companies are still sacking workers.

PL 3/93

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## THE DEMAND FOR HUMAN SACRIFICE

(Extracts from *Workers Solidarity* no.5, March 93):

On January 20th the Clinton administration officially took power... able to win the presidency with fewer votes than M. Dukakis received when he lost the election in 1988. The reason for this strange turn of events can be traced to the spurious campaign of millionaire industrialist H. Ross Perot, who managed to soak off sufficient support from Bush to allow Clinton to win. It became very clear during the election campaign that no substantial difference existed between the candidates. The biggest differences were in style and circumstance. Clinton claimed to represent "change" (as did Perot and, pathetically, Bush), but he also professed to "care" more about people. All candidates embraced the trickle-down economics of Reagan, believing that deregulation and tax incentives for capitalists would revive the economy.... All three agreed that any hope for American capitalism would entail sacrifice on the part of the American people...

By any analysis, Bush was a failure as a conservative president. He had tried to "hold the course" set by Reagan... but unlike Reagan he was unable to advance the conservative cause and was beginning to face opposition from the American people and congress... If we jettison the belief that the ruling elite of the US has some overwhelming loyalty to either of the capitalist political parties, the idea that they could seek to engineer the defeat of the candidate of the most conservative party... does not seem infeasible. If their interests are viewed as maintaining capitalism above all else, then facilitating the election of the candidate most capable of doing that... seems a logical move. It's no accident that Clinton owes his election to the overt actions of a millionaire industrialist. He probably also owes it to the covert actions of many others.

The capitalist reorganization began under Reagan could no longer continue under Bush. With that reorganization pushing more and more people into poverty, a crisis of legitimacy was looming on the horizon. A social system which can no longer provide the basic needs of a large portion of it's population can expect nothing else. So, in steps Clinton with... a calculated similarity to Kennedy... Clinton's fiscal conservatism and sales ability... made him an extremely

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attractive candidate for the ruling elite. As a Democrat, his potential ability to control congress... likewise increased his appeal.

The course of the Clinton administration has already become clear... The promise of a middle class tax cut... has been immediately abandoned. The promise of a reorganized healthcare system has been turned into a program of "controlled competition" which benefit no one but the insurance industry. The Clinton cabinet is so full of pro-business conservatives that any chance of "change" can be immediately dismissed... Clinton's inauguration speech, with it's overriding stress on sacrifice, bodes ill for the working people...

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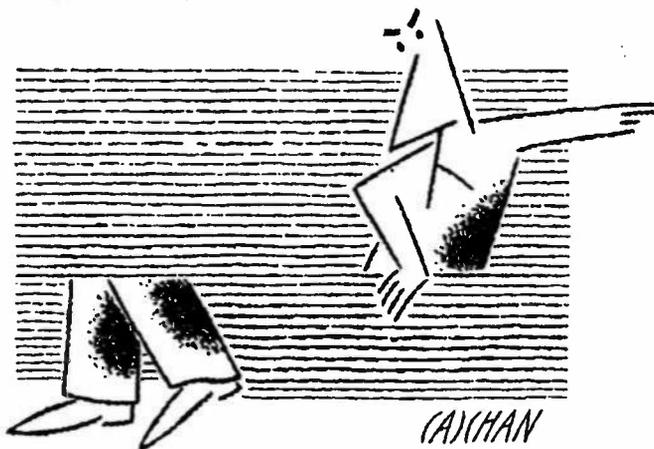
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### PHILADELPHIA SOLIDARITY

This US publisher and distributor has published a catalogue with a great number of "anti-authoritarian socialist publications", most of them written/published by or in the tradition of the English Solidarity group and Castoriadis, but a lot of other things also. Write to Box 25224, Philadelphia, PA 19119, USA.

### WORKERS SOLIDARITY

This is a very useful 8 page newsletter produced by the syndicalist Workers Solidarity Alliance (PO Box 40400, San Francisco, CA 94140). Subscription for six issues plus one issue of their bigger journal *Ideas & Action* costs \$7,50. No.4/Jan. 93 contains: The situation in Germany (interview with German syndicalists) - On General Motors in Canada, USA and Mexico - Houston transport workers - Short articles about a number of struggles in USA and Canada. No.5/March 93: A number of articles on struggles and union organising efforts in USA, and on various anarchist/syndicalist meetings.



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## “WORKERS AGAINST WORK: LABOR IN PARIS AND BARCELONA DURING THE POPULAR FRONTS”

In no. 56 we published a short review of a pamphlet reprint of Michael Seidman's essay "Towards a history of workers' resistance to work: Paris and Barcelona during the French Popular Front and the Spanish Revolution, 1936-1938". Seidman's work on this subject is available as a 400 pages book with the title in the headline above. The following review written by an American comrade was originally published in the journal *Discussion Bulletin*. We might return to Seidman's book and other material on the same subject in another issue.

The underlying thesis of "Workers Against Work" is a provocative one: despite their phraseology, both the Spanish and French Left during the Popular Fronts essentially functioned as agents of modernization in their respective countries for a bourgeoisie that was either too lazy (as in the case of Spain) or too wrapped up in authoritarian parochialism (as in the case of France). As for the workers, they were expected to work and increase production. But it didn't come off quite that way. In both countries during the Popular Front period, a massive resistance to work and work discipline in the form of sabotage, absenteeism, slowdowns, theft and other factory related actions erupted in the wake of rising expectations. According to Seidman, this resistance, 'apolitical' and hidden, and ignored by traditional historians' emphasis on what political parties were saying or doing, can be measured in reports from both management and revolutionary militants who seem curiously united in denouncing the 'laziness' and 'irresponsibility' of workers in meeting production goals. This spontaneous resistance against work, which had no ideological platform or conscious expression, left no memoirs or reports, nevertheless lay bare a tremendous gap between the expectations of ordinary workers and the expectations of the minority of militants and activists in all groups of the Left claiming to represent the workers' interests. In just one of the many examples, while in power, Leftist parties' 'anti-fascism' led to political and electoral alliances, workers on the shop floor interpreted anti-fascism quite differently. "Fascist" became a popular everyday epithet applied to particularly hated foremen and managers. Thus, from an ordinary worker's viewpoint, the struggle against work discipline also became a struggle against 'fascism'.

In a book that is nearly 400 pages, Seidman backs up his arguments with a fascinating wealth of documentation from the period. If there is one complaint I could make - beside the outrageous price of the book - it is that perhaps he treats the categories of ideological militant and apolitical worker in too static a manner. In periods of ferment and change, where everything becomes open to questioning, probably there was a much more fluid interchange between the two layers, especially on the shop floor, than is credited here.

Certainly, the questions raised here are still far from being dated. In fact, they are relevant to today's issues and struggles and it is to the author's credit that he challenges many of the orthodox 'liberal', 'marxist' and 'anarchist' interpretations of the time period.

**C.P.**

Michael Seidman: *Workers Against Work: Labor in Paris and Barcelona during the Popular Fronts*. University of California Press, 1991. ISBN 0-520-06915-3. \$42,50.

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## THE REFUSAL OF WORK

This Echanges pamphlet (£1,50) originally published in 1978 but being reprinted regularly, was for the most part a discussion on the meaning of the then trendy ideas around the 'refusal of work'. The debate started with some comments on Paul Lafargue's book 'The Right to be Lazy' and other more recent publications on the subject (e.g. Zerzan's 'The revolt against work'). Some considerations could seem out of date and irrelevant to the world crisis, but the various texts still bring a lot of material and diverse opinions not at all out of date and still useful for an analysis of the some present tendencies of the class struggle.



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