

in the centre and the South, whereas these actions have more or less failed in the North where Unionisation is stronger. Also the problem of wages is more urgent in the South because there are no opportunities, as in the North, of finding a second job, or a job for the wife. The weakness of the Unions allows them and the traditional left parties to call these movements and those who lead them "fascist". There is a fascist Union in the Railways, but it has nothing to do with this movement. The C.O.M. at Rome is also the only CUB which hasn't been absorbed by the Trotskyist group Avanguardia Operaia. This CUB assembles workers from different organisations, some political some purely professional, around concrete objectives. It could represent the passage direct from non Unionism to autonomous organisation. The members are against the Union leaders (they don't bother about us) rather than against Unions in general. But their autonomous action is the negation of the Union and has come up against a fierocious "Union" opposition (including the fascists and leftist groups). At rank and file level hostility towards the Union is evident even in the North (e.g. at Rome the Union delegates dare not go to mass meetings because they are afraid of being physically attacked). CUB mass meetings in Rome are open to all "without a card, or an inscription, everyone can come". It is "the reappropriation of the power to make their policies directly and without go-betweens". The leaflets of the Rome CUB are on the themes: "Let's organise at the shop floor and fight against the stealing of our wages"; "denial of accusations and defense of the counter attacks by the traditional labour organisations"; "what counts is whether we are against the boss or not"; "propaganda against the official propaganda about "the national interest" and "equal sacrifices for all"; the "crisis" etc.; differentiation of this movement from that of the so-called "autonomous" rail Unions; very hierarchical strictly professional bodies. The demands are concrete and precise - 100,000L a month (about sixty pounds) equal for all, reduction of the number of different categories and grades, etc...

The liaisons at rank and file level for the elaboration of demands and action are very informal: personal contact and the liaisons through the running of the railways themselves play a big role. The strikes are not started by slogans and official strike calls: the leaflets of the CUB are circulating all the time, but they contain no calls to action, or to "join up"; they simply explain. A lightning strike breaks out in one sector and then catches on like wild fire: in August the strike affected the whole of Italy. There is a sort of permanent spontaneous agitation with 24h and 48h strikes, go-slows, trains late etc. The whole of the "left" and the organised "extreme" left declare that they have nothing to do with these struggles. The quotations are taken from leaflets in Italian. Photocopies of these and additional information from Liaisons c/o Philippe Duguet - BP 2000 - 40000 Liège - 1 Belgique.

Neighbourhood Committees

MILAN - In the Via Ronca, an industrial zone in the North of the city where several small concerns (10 - 30 workers in each) are threatened with closure, there are several occupations. Two buildings in the district have also been occupied and serve at one and the same time as living quarters for squatters, a place for people passing through and a meeting house. Each evening meetings take place between the inhabitants of the sector, striking workers and various "militants", to establish links, strike piquets, produce leaflets etc. Apparently similar places exist in other neighbourhoods.

Groups, intervention and bourgeois legality

The group Lotta Continua found itself forced to act as a police force against those attacking supermarkets. After trying to exploit and organise other lootings on the lines of the quasi spontaneous organised lootings of supermarkets which occurred last winter, chiefly in Milan and Rome, the police cornered the leaders of this group into a choice between prison for incitement to theft or action to stop the lootings. The militants opted for saving their organisation against grass roots action and effectively prevented lootings from taking place by playing the role of policemen to avoid being charged by the real police and thus having their organisation dismantled. After this action much of their working class membership left the group.

GREAT BRITAIN

In the summer the labour government brought out its plan to "curb inflation". Wage rises should be no more than six pounds a week (already more than rises obtained in France, for example, but much less than the rises obtained all last year and the begin-

ing of 1973 averaging 30% the government is also trying to break the strong position of the workers through increased unemployment. 1 1/4 million are now out of work. All the major Unions have accepted the six pound limit.

There is a virtual press blackout on all news of labour conflicts. Nevertheless news that cannot be suppressed shows that already the government's policy is coming under attack. This autumn many major industries are to have their wages reviewed under regular agreements as is the custom in Britain. Already it is assumed that the six pounds represents a minimum right for all, but with increased inflation, it is probable that wage claims will not stop there. Mine workers have expressed a willingness to press for one hundred pounds a week (a 40% rise on present rates) despite their Union's leadership's capitulation to the government.

On unemployment the battle is already on. All attempts to nationalise and modernise are being resisted. All through the summer there have been conflicts in the National and local press over the introduction of new printing methods. In the Liverpool area a constant battle over redundancies is being waged most notably at Swan Hammers and at Camel Laird's ship-yards where open conflict has broken out between workers threatened with redundancy and the Union, accused of inactivity. Lastly a strike threatening to include all the steel workers in Britain, scheduled for September 21st was narrowly averted at the last minute. Blast furnace men in Britain's major steel works began a walk out the week before, leaving the furnaces in mid process in protest over the new 65 million pound new furnace built at Llanwern in South Wales, which local workers refused to start up as scheduled.

Union leaders were forced to proclaim a national strike to try and manage the unofficial movement which was escaping their control. One reason for the Unions' "militant" action is that towards the end of the protracted negotiations over the South Wales issue, they were virtually by-passed by the (nationalised) British Steel Corporation who tried to take on the workers locally but came unstuck. In fact the use of a vital piece of machinery was held up for six months while the men battled over wage rates. Finally the men were persuaded to return to work with the promise of an official enquiry by the govt conciliation and arbitration service and the prospect of greatly increased earnings, if they accept the new conditions. The men already earn up to one hundred pounds a week and at Llanwern they can expect to earn up to 140 pounds which makes nonsense of the government-Union six pounds pay rise limit. The enquiry is an attempt to restore the former Union-boss relationship by-passed in recent events.

However, all is not resolved as the men are demanding that they should be paid for the time they were on strike. The return to work was far from complete on September 21st, above all at Llanwern, although the 3,000 men who had walked out at Southwales in central England were back. Struggles continue. See Sunday Times 21-9-75

"The corporation aims to make the enquiry into something of a test case, in which it will explore the whole question of union rights and customs liberties where important pieces of publicly financed new equipment are being brought on stream"

British Airways has had similar disputes over the introduction of Tri-Star and Concorde ~~jet~~ aircraft. The Steel Corporation fears that the conflict over Llanwern could be repeated over an even larger furnace being built at Redcar in N.E. England.

Another new factor on the labour scene is the formation of workers' co-operatives following on occupations against factory closures. The famous Fisher Bendix occupation has produced one example where the co-op is under the leadership of ex-shop stewards. Also in the same situation is the Scottish Daily News, an important Scottish newspaper produced in Glasgow. Both co-ops were supported by large sums of government money and by the Energy Minister Tony Wedgwood-Benn a well known Labour party "left-winger". The Fisher Bendix plant is prospering but the Glasgow press is in difficulties and needs more government aid. These attempts to self-manage factories are facing very difficult practical problems, but it is too early to dismiss all this as entirely "recoveryism". Such events raise interesting discussions.

UNITED STATES

Wildcat Miners' strike

In 1973, a new bureaucrat, Miller became leader of the U.M.W. (Mineworkers Union); his whole campaign was for a rank and file Union and for a contract for the rank and file and exploited the gap between the men and the bureaucracy in power who ignored the real grievances of the miners in all contracts between the

broers and the Unions.

The new bureaucracy behaved in exactly the same way as the old one. The new 1974 contract more or less outlawed all use of strikes to deal with the day to day problems of exploitation. The mine companies had obtained Supreme Court nulling in 1970 enabling them to get injunctions to get the men back to work when miners walked out (the injunctions were accompanied by various fines and prison terms, if not obeyed). They systematically used this possibility above all against miners reactions provoked by deliberate violations of collective contracts by the companies, above all on safety problems. The difficulties of American Capitalism have led to increased pressure on miners and in response to very many limited and localised wild-cat strikes; 1,400 since 1-1-75. The companies, therefore, recently stopped up action and at once mine obtained an injunction forbidding all strikes until the end of the contract in two years time. All walk-outs would be punished by a fifty dollar fine per worker, per day.

August 4th, UMW local 1302 president, Roger Thomson was sacked for interfering with lay-off plans. The next day a strike broke out. The federal judge for that district K.K. Hall ordered the men back to work. The strike spread to the 30 miners of Logan County, West Virginia. The Union local was fined six thousand dollars. The strike still spread. Sam Howe the black president of the mostly white local 8414 was imprisoned for at least 90 days after having been given the choice of returning to work or going to prison. This only made the strike spread further into the whole of West Virginia, then Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois and Alabama. Miller the UMW president tried to appeal to the violation of arbitration regulations to draw the movement back into the framework of the contract and the men back to work, of course. The result was mil. rallies, mass meetings and flying pickets were organised by the rank and file. Among the most active in the strike have been the locals of districts 17 and 29 in West Virginia who were among the districts who voted by an overwhelming majority for the restrictive 1974 contract proposed by Miller. On August 29 80,000 miners were on strike.

To get round the fines and injunctions which hit the miners in their own mines a new tactic has been organised. The miners of one pit man the pickets of a totally different mine and are replaced at their own mines by miners from elsewhere. Thus the strike has caught on like wild-fire. A Virginia miner told reporters that miners from Pennsylvania said to the contingent "Where have you been? We have been waiting. Shut our mine down and we'll take care of the rest of the state".

August 25th after the arrest of Sam Howe, a demonstration was organised in Charleston. The roads were all blocked, there was considerable shouting and shouting of the local union headquarters in which demonstrators placed a notice "closed for strike". The reply of Judge Hall to the growing strike has been to increase fines against the UMW 500,000 dollars and 100,000 dollars each day the strike continues. But the UMW can do nothing. Miller has ordered the presidents of the sections to give their members orders to cross the picket lines. A striking miner said at a mass meeting "We have got a foot in the door, and we won't stop until we're all the way in" another "I worked hard for Miller three years ago, and I'm going to work just as hard to get him out", such responses met with great applause. Despite the spontaneous spread of the strike, its strength and ~~was~~ self-organisation, articles in the "extreme left" press talk of the weakness of the strike, which according to them was no organisation and liaison at a national level. By mid September, however, the miners talked of blocking all the transport off coal including in the ports. (Information direct from contacts in USA and from American newspapers)

ARCADE ONE

There appears to be widespread grass roots industrial action. Information is needed on the background to the reported government orders. The fall of the July government and the concessions made by Madame Piron following the national unions general strike seems to have originated with the wildcat movement of Ford car workers. An article in the English newspaper The Guardian July 15 (photocopied of article from Exchange) speaks of a strong undisciplined labour force and of possible conflicts between labour and the army.

SINGAPORE

Solidarity London (123, Latham Road, London E.9., England) in their issue Vol. 16 no. 2

contains an article received from Singapore on labour problems which shows "how far the techniques of 'paternalistic' management and domination have developed in a 'third world' country.

PORTUGAL

Documents on the autonomous struggle

Translated from the newspaper Combate - Avenida Santos - DuMont - 40 R/L Dto Lisbon in French are some new documents on the company commissions and workers' councils. (In La Laine Noire - Blochin - BP 14 - 92360 - Meudon-la-Forêt - don't mention the name of the magazine in correspondence)

Manifesto of Combate in English

Manifesto of the Portuguese revolutionary group contains a short analysis of events since 25 April 1974, on the class struggle replacing this in the international context. 10 theses already formulated which will soon be brought up to date. Obtainable from Contra a Corrente - a new book shop and publishers, who plan to open centers of documentation and information in Portugal and who wish to have more contacts and ask to see publications outside the main "leftist" stream for possible translation. They have already produced several publications such as -Sindicalismo e accção directa. Address: Porto - 50 Rua do Brincaz - Lisbon - Rua da Alameda 204

ITALY

Autonomous Organism of the proletariat and the "autonomous zone" - platform of the C.C.R.A.P. (Communist Centre of research on Proletarian Autonomy) an inter-enterprise group from Milan has been translated into French in the September-October issue of the Journal Lutte de Classe (10087 Renoir - BP 126.02 - 75741 - Paris Cedex 09)