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S U B S C R I P T I O N S

We have received very few new subscriptions for the English language version of Echanges. Most of the French subscribers have renewed and many English subscribers are recent, but to those of you who wish to subscribe for the next period to Echanges (for conditions see Echanges no. 12) this is the last opportunity. We will assume that from issue no. 13 (the present one) those who don't renew subscriptions no longer wish to receive or contribute to Echanges.

G R E A T B R I T A I N

Linwood: "Last Friday Mr. Tom Darby, Chrysler UK director of personnel and industrial relations warned that the company was bleeding to death through losses sustained at Linwood. He told a press conference that the plant was afflicted with deliberate breaches of procedure, restrictive practises, widespread absenteeism, lateness, unofficial stoppages and a lack of flexibility" (Financial Times of 3-11-77). Linwood is the biggest Chrysler car factory in Britain and had only reached half of its production target for 1977 by the end of October despite its specially appointed tough management team, the introduction of a second shift and the taking on of 2,500 more men. Linwood is in Scotland, in a declining industrial area, where the factory was set up specially to absorb the highest unemployment rate for Britain. When Tom Darby said what he did a conflict involving 4 inspectors was temporarily blocking the whole factory. The inspectors refused a change in their work which meant moving 30 yards (a little under 30 meters) down the line to try and reduce the number of faulty cars. 90 Inspectors had stopped work in sympathy. The management had to lay off 7,000 workers for 15 days. The management gave in over the inspectors, but on condition that the shop stewards "co-operate" in the application of company rules.

General: The above conflict symbolises many present conflicts in Great Britain: a complex guerilla war is going on whereby the problem of wages and productivity are inextricably bound up with one another and for the present British capitalism is often the loser. Phases 1 and 2 of the Labour governments "Social contract" was more or less carried through, although there were some serious breaches of the contract, despite trade union support of the government. The number of strikes was greatly reduced in that period (prior to the middle of 1977), but it is becoming clear now that in this waiting period, the rank and file were applying another tactic which could be roughly summed up as "No money, no work". In the mines for example, productivity per head had declined from 466 tons a year in 1975 to 455 tons in 1976 and 440 in 1977 (as against 457 in 1970).

No doubt it was this situation which caused the government in mid 1977 to raise the maximum wage rise guide-lines from 5% to 10% (Phase 3). In doing this the government showed if, however slightly, that it could give in to shop floor pressure and even more so because small individual strikes and movements were beginning to pay off. The firms most willing to make higher wage settlements than this were often modern companies well placed on an international basis and they were not affected by government economic sanctions upon them.

The conflict between workers and industry found its expression seemingly in a conflict between the government and the trade unions on the one hand and some employers and their work forces on the other. Since June 1977 a number of firms have settled above 10%: Fords gave 12,5% to its workers, the major sugar refiners 19%, air traffic control technicians got 20%, shop workers 12,9%, farm workers 13%. (The air traffic controllers won after an 8 week work to rule at London's Heathrow airport). Coal miners have just rejected in a pit head ballot a productivity scheme worked out by management and unions; they maintain their claim, due to be settled this spring, for wage rises that have to bring their average earnings up to £ 135 a week

(a rise very much higher than 10%) without strings attached.

Leyland car workers have, however, accepted in a narrow vote that negotiations should be unified on a centralised company basis for wages, thus robbing the shop floor of some initiative. But for many Leyland workers this they hope will mean wage parity between all equivalent workers in the many different factories of the trust. This has not changed the incessant guerrilla struggle at individual Leyland plants, some of which are at present involved in disputes.

It is impossible to quote all conflicts in detail. By the end of 1977 the same back cloth of daily disputes of the years 1970-74 was reappearing. Even by May 1977 the number of strike days had already equalled the whole of the previous years total. In November 1977 60 electricity power stations out of 137 in the country were affected by a "refusal to co-operate", which in two of three of the country's biggest stations even went as far as an occupation of central generators. For a week there were major electricity cuts. The demands were complex, but could all be resumed in ways of getting round the limit in wage rises. The joint efforts of the government and the trade unions succeeded in breaking the movement after two weeks, but new disputes in the power stations have been threatened. The movement was a rank and file wildcat movement co-ordinated by a shop-stewards "unofficial committee". However, having just escaped a more serious conflict the government found itself against a National Firemans strike (now in its 8th week as of 9th January 1978) and up against growing strike threats from all quarters.

Up to the summer of 1977 the breaches in the social contract were attempted only by specific categories fighting for the maintenance of special advantages; now disputes are becoming more of the type affecting all workers in one industry or working for one company which would seem to indicate fiercer struggles to follow.

Publications on or from Great Britain

A book in French "Lutte de classe autonome en Grande Bretagne 1945-1977" by Cajo Brendel has just been published by Echanges. Available from Echanges for 10 FF or equivalent (the book was originally written in German, but goes up to 1975 only in this edition, for details please write to Echanges, Holland. We hope to prepare an English version soon).

"The crisis of wage labour in Britain" is a very interesting article on recent developments written in "Now and after", no. 2, September 1977 (available from A World To Win, P.O. Box 1587, San Francisco, Ca 94101, U.S.A.). It has been translated in the magazine "Lutte de classe" of sept./oct. 1977 (available from René Togny, B.P. 620 09, 75421 Paris Cedex 09, France).

"Mutinies 1917-1920" by Dave Lamb is a pamphlet by Solidarity National (address: c/o Cowley Road, Oxford) on mutinies in the British Army during the first world war. We can only quote a part of the conclusion here: "... What is significant in these mutinies is the way men come together, in adverse and dangerous circumstances, in a spirit of solidarity and self-sacrifice, that has seldom been equalled ... We can only now begin to assess the mass autonomous movements of this century as an expression of the fundamental drive by ordinary men and women to dominate their own lives, to influence events and to alter the course of history, by themselves and for themselves".

"Motor bulletin" no. 7 (Solidarity London, c/o Lathom Road 123, London E 6). Two articles: a shortened translation of the Strasbourg pamphlet on the strike at General Motors (March '76, French version from Echanges) and a report by W. Johnson on the G.M. factory at Ste Thérèse, Quebec (published originally in "Our Generation", 3934 St. Urbain, Montréal, Canada).

UNITED STATES

After the campaign of former beauty queen Anita Bryant of Florida against male and female homosexual rights, a homosexual was murdered in San Francisco on June 22nd 1977 by four young whites. On 26th June the annual Gay Parade of San Francisco took the form of a demonstration (official figures give 200,000 - 250,000 including passers-by). Nurses, teachers, telephone operators, civil servants, soldiers and religious ministers took part. Other demonstrations took part elsewhere (25,000 in New York). The importance of the Gay community in San Francisco is such that the Mayor was unable to ignore the problem (if only for electioneering reasons) and has promised a reward for the murderer's capture (info. from San Francisco leaflets).

The film by Barbara Kopple "Harlan County" has been available for some time in the U.S.A. but not elsewhere. It has now been released in France (on show in Paris since November 1977). It was made in Kentucky in 1974 and tells of a strike by the coal miners of Harlan County. The ambiguities of previous criticisms of the unions have been clearly surpassed by the showing of rank and file organisations, where the miners wives play a leading role.

One scene shows two women clashing over a personal matter, while a third intervenes to point out that the problem isn't one of personalities but of "the contract". The women organise a picket to prevent scabs entering the mines; the scabs are armed and look threatening (some short time later they were to kill a young miner). One of the women in a meeting reaches the conclusion that the wives should simply do the same thing and to support her argument pulls out a revolver from her bra. The film is enthusiastic, although we should bare in mind that Harlan County is not the whole of the U.S.A., that miners struggles are rather special and that the communal spirit so evident in this small Kentucky mining town does not find its equivalent so clearly in the large northern cities.

We would welcome news of the current 6 week old strike of miners in the U.S.A.

Publications:

"Now and after" no 2 is now available. Contents: Ecology, Britain, Gay rights, Portugal (subscription \$ 1,50 to "A World To Win", P.O. Box 1587, San Francisco, Ca 94101, U.S.A.)

"Synthesis" no. 5 is out now. Contents: an article on the present CNT in Spain; 3 years of struggle by hospital staff in Des Moines (Iowa); letters, press reviews etc. (available from League for economic democracy, P.O. Box 1858, San Pedro, Ca 90733, U.S.A.)

ARGENTINA

"Argentina's recent strike wave was the strongest labour challenge yet faced by the military government ... the strikes halted the railways, the capital's computer network and its underground system. Postal workers, doctors, airline pilots, and other state employees were affected ... The strikes surprised nobody, although their spontaneity was impressive. They began when 40 railway signalmen walked out demanding higher pay and then snowballed. There was no organisation behind them because trade union activities remain banned ... Argentina's 2½ million state employees are often living on wages as low as the minimum of 30,000 pesos (about £ 33) a month ... A clear response emerged only when Dr. Martinez de Hoz (civilian economics minister) returned from a European tour". Between time some employers had given in, some had called out the troops, others sacked employees etc. and the situation was in total confusion. The minister "announced average pay increases of 34% and declared that this was all the state could afford and ordered state corporations to start applying the industrial security law". Work was resumed after one week of strikes. The settlements were far below original demands (the Times, London, 10-11-77).

ALGERIA

In the text of the National Charter of 1976 Boumedienne the president had already been forced to recognise the existing social tensions, which he attributed to the bad functioning of the bureaucratic system. It would appear that in 1977 social conflicts of all sorts increased, especially in Algiers. "The cascade of strikes recorded in the last few months show that many workers are no longer passive and will no longer allow their demands to be canalised and sometimes suppressed by the National Union of Algeria Workers (U.G.T.A.). Following in this instance the social bureaucratic model of Eastern bloc countries, the union federation has become a conveyor belt for the transmission of orders from above" (Le Monde, Paris,

14 Sept. 1977). This same article quotes the Algerian newspaper El-Moudjahid of August 26th 1977 : "The difficulties which certain sectors have just experienced could have lead to the carrying on of a debate, which could have been transported, if it had proved necessary, to a higher level. A little more responsibility, courage and determination from the unions and the authorities just as much from the workers would have been needed for this to happen. But the fact that all these conflicts occurred at once shows clearly that the party and the union federation were placed in front of a 'fait accompli'". A few days later, Boumedienne "who was speaking to the executive commission of the U.G.T.A. was very critical of many sectors and denounced several calamities. Talking frankly of the strikes which took place this summer, he implicitly criticised union leaders, making it clear, that from the spring that he had sounded the alarm bell, but had been informed that all was well." (Le Monde, Paris, 27 Sept. 1977). On September 26th the U.G.T.A. "condemns all stoppages and strikes and their instigators"... A little later they made an appeal for increased productivity and a "constant struggle against wastage, carelessness and absenteeism at all levels" (Le Monde, Paris, 1st October 1977).

C H I N A

The June number 9 of the Hong Kong review "Minus 7" (written in English), subscription \$ 10 to Minus 6, 140 Lockart Road, 1st Floor, Wanchai, Hong Kong) has articles about Li-I-Che and Yang Hsi-Kwang (or Yang Xiguang in Pinyin), author of the manifesto entitled "Where as China going" (printed in French in "Revol. Cul. dans la Chine Pop.", published by 10/18) belonged to the sengwulian (committee of the union of proletarian revolutionaries of Hunan, known for their ultra-left positions). One of his friends, Fang Kuo, a red guard arrested with him in 1968, after 8 years of prison escaped to Hong Kong and tells in an article of the political evolution of Yang and the atmosphere of the time. Li-I-Che, author of "Concerning democracy and legality in the Revolution" (published in French in "chinois si vous saviez, by 10/18) has been violently attacked by the authorities who quote parts of his text as being "counter-revolutionary". Yang and Li's writings exist in English too in a book "The revolution is dead, long live the revolution", available from Minus 6, price \$ 10. Unfortunately for the authorities all texts singled out as counter-revolutionary are either by Marx, Lenin or Mao. Li was sent for "re-education" in the coal mines of Shek Yan Chang in August 1975.

An action committee to "free Li-I-Che and Yang-Hsi-Kwang" has been set up in Hong Kong. During an international solidarity campaign in June 1977 some groups friendly to Minus 7 in different parts of the world, put stickers of support for Li and Yang on buildings around Chinese embassies and legations. For more information contact "free Li and Yang action committee", c/o Minus 6.

G R E E C E

We have received a long letter concerning the death of the members of the German Red Army faction. The letter tells mostly of clashes with police and anarchist groups in Greece at the time protest demonstrations about this and the legal battles which followed. We have not discussed such events in Echanges very much. Since we are not a political group we have no intention of participating in or giving support to any solidarity committees as requested (however the letter will be communicated to any individuals on request who might wish to do something - write to Echanges).

E A S T E R N E U R O P E / R O M A N I A

This summer there was a coal miners strike which began, as often in eastern block countries, because of a gap in food supplies and thus in a round about way because of a reduction in wages, because of the high price of scarce food-stuffs. 30 to 35,000 miners were affected. There were violent clashes with the militia and two high ranking port officials were sequestered. The cry "Down with the proletarian bourgeoisie" was heard. President Ceaucescu had to go the mines and after being shouted down and insulted promised not to sanction the strikers.

As in Poland the almost total absence of intermediary "representatives" in the structure of government leads to direct physical confrontation and forces the highest authorities to intervene personally in conflicts. Following this strike, however, repression was as harsh as the strikers had feared. Nearly 4,000 miners either lost their jobs or were transferred to other posts. Military and police surveillance was installed in the mining regions.

/ EAST GERMANY

There were violent clashes between young people and the police on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the founding of the G.D.R. As opposed to say Romania or even Poland, where agriculture is still a major employer of labour, East Germany, like Czechoslovakia, is a highly developed industrial country. The social conflicts could be paralleled to those in Poland in '70-'71 and '76, but at the same time they are fairly close to street confrontation which have taken place in western countries over the last ten years.

In the G.D.R. and especially in East-Berlin the similarity with the West is becoming more apparent, in terms of urban development and the growth of a consumer orientated society; little by little the "shop window" is becoming a mirror. The traditional war between the medias of the two Germanies is abandoning the old formula of sewing confusion and a system almost of free competition is gradually growing up. The G.D.R. is invaded more and more by western consumer goods, even though the socio-economic structure of the country hinders the development of exchange and consumption.

The integration of the G.D.R. into the world market is at one and the same time blocked and demanded by the population. Coffee, an essential commodity shows an example of how blockage works. Here conflicts are similar to those in Poland or Romania. When trying to adapt to the rise in world market prices of coffee, the government substituted for the old coffee an inferior but more expensive brand. The overwhelming opposition to this forced the government to lower the price again, and improve the quality. In fact, all attempts to unfreeze the price of basic foodstuffs risk ending in general confrontation and hampers to government power to align prices with world market rates.

At the same time the rapid development of exchanges between the G.D.R. and the G.F.R. (West Germany) (exchanges which have resulted in a very sharp rise in the national debt in the G.D.R.), as well as a rise in East German wages not covered by an equivalent production of consumer goods, accelerates the integration of the G.D.R. into the world market. Little by little with the development of "Intershops" (shops open first of all to foreigners buying in foreign currency, then to East Germans themselves possessing foreign currency) has created a parallel market, whose official currency is the West German Mark. This parallel market is open only to one privileged section of the population, which increases tension and the general desire for everyone to get these goods straight away and also to get the "democracy" in which these goods are wrapped up.

It is in this context that the clashes occurred at Alexander Platz in East Berlin (similar clashes with youths have already occurred in Czechoslovakia, when the cancelling of a rock concert provoked a riot between the audience and the militia). After the traditional military parade always held for the anniversary, the square was invaded by several thousand long haired young people, who had come to listen to modern music. The tension rose progressively and in the evening violent fights broke out involving the police, during which several shop windows were smashed. It is interesting that in a country where sport is used by the authorities - in the way that terrorism is used in West Germany - to try and unite the country, the rioters used sport slogans as well as anti-police and revolutionary slogans and revolutionary and modern pop songs. (rioters shouted the name of the Berlin football club union; this club is the main rival of "Dynamo", the police club).

/ POLAND

A decision by the Polish government has just been issued, which allows private individuals to take over the running of retail shops employing less than four people, with the exception of outlets selling meat, jewellery and alcohol. 60% of all retailers will be affected. The "managers" will be able to pocket all profits and will only have to pay a fixed fee to the state. The new authorisations will not be limited in time and can only be withdrawn in case of fraud. This extension of private enterprise into trade and commerce (already well under way - see pamphlet in French from Echanges "Le 25 Juin 1976 in Pologne") is certainly the result of rank and file pressure for a better choice of goods in the shops and of the impossibilities encountered when trying to solve the problems of distribution. This new extension of the "middle class" section of the population and of small scale enterprise (already quite extensive in agriculture, artisan trades and small scale industries) is part of the political and economic result of workers pressure; they cannot fail in their turn to have political and economic consequences. (source: London Financial Times of 11-11-77).

In a protest against the lack of meat, some stoppages and go-slows took place in the Silesian mines at the beginning of October '77; these movements only

stopped when meat stocks were back to normal. One of the mines affected - Sosnowiec - is the one in which Gierak is member of the rank and file party cell, which has led to speculation, that the strikes might somehow have been manipulated with a view to setting up meat rationing (Financial Times of 6-10-77).

BELGIUM

Liège : Cockerill Dugrée, one of the biggest steelworks in Belgium, has been attempting to put a break on absenteeism. The joint contract agreed between the company and the two main unions (F.G.T.B. linked to the Belgian Socialist Party and the C.S.C. linked to the christian-democrats) planned the setting up of a medical centre outside the factory, run jointly by the parties to the agreement and with a special mission to check on leave of absence for sickness. This agreement was extended to the 12 largest factories in Liège including the National Arms Factory (F.N.) making a common medical centre under the guidance of the local area union federations. From its origin the centre had a reputation for being very tough.

The following account concerns the women working at the FN making ammunition. One of the women after her statutory maternity leave was not able to resume work straight away: her own doctor said she needed more rest at home; the doctor at the medical centre ordered that she was fit to return to the factory; there was a new control from the medical centre, which again decided that she should return to work immediately. The very day that she returned to the factory she died on the shop floor. The management called the police and an ambulance to take the body to the hospital, without informing the girl's own mother who was working in a nearby workshop of the same factory. The police was less careful and brutally informed the woman straight away of her daughter's death. More than 500 women stopped work immediately and went to find other workers in the factory, who left en masse for the medical centre. When the police were warned they only sent one police inspector along. When he tried to stop the women getting into the centre he was jostled and the women stormed into the centre. The doctors and staff had just had time to get out by the back door; all the medical equipment, all the files and medical dossiers were destroyed. The next day a spontaneous stoppage took place in the eleven other factories concerned by the centre. Work was only resumed when the unions announced officially that they were withdrawing from the medical centre and that they recognised the strike, which meant that strike pay would be forthcoming. The centre has been closed since and the old procedure restored. The Belgium leftist newspaper AMADA (maoists) had articles about this story but did not mention that the centre in question originated as a result of management agreements with the unions and that it was run by the unions.

GREECE

Strike at the Philips factories in Athens, i.e. 1. Kalithea/TV-production and telecommunications 2. Tavros (Athens suburbs)/electric light bulb production 3. Kokinia (at Piraeus)/stocks and repairs and 4. in central Athens/offices and showrooms.

The two factories of Kalithea and Tavros are only assembly plants. The parts come from above all from Holland, but also from Germany, Belgium, Italy and Austria. The outlets for the Greek production is home based. Other Philips machines are imported and stocked at the Kokinia warehouses.

Conditions: after 12 years seniority a worker here earns 10,000 drachmes a month, which means that his standard of living approaches that of an equivalent Italian worker. Since the fall of the colonels in 1974 the price of some staple foodstuffs and other products has risen by as much as 200%, while there has been a virtual wage freeze. Some of the office workers earn as much 16,000 drachmes a month, but half of them took part in the strike. To give an idea of the gap between management and employee earnings, employees tell now the managing director at Athens G. Vos has a bath each day in a heated swimming pool, which consumes 5,000 drachmes worth of electricity. An unskilled young worker earns sometimes less than that a month and in addition he is warned not to use too much electricity! Wages at Philips vary between 7,500 dr. and 250,000 dr. for top management.

Strike demands:

- wage rises equalling between 15% and 40% according to each category;
- family allowances (if paid this is done by the firm in Greece);
- regulation of working hours;
- bonuses for dangerous work;
- a firm based health and social welfare scheme;
- lowering of productivity and productivity bonuses.

The strike: the list of demands given above were originally presented to the management by a joint delegation formed by representatives of committees of the factories and offices and of employers representatives.

But since nothing happened, the factory and office committees demanded that their demands be satisfied and put into application by January 1st 1975. To support their demand they went on a 48 hours strike at the beginning of November. The management promised to consider the demands as long as the men went back to work. They did so but during the next week carried out stoppages of 4 hours a day. On 10th November the management replied with a lock-out at the Kilithea factory and one of the Athens factories. The employees in the other factories replied with a strike which was 100% in the factories and had 50% support in the offices. But those against the strike were unable to work and became strikers despite themselves.

When this information reached us - on November 25th - the conflict had been going on for 22 days and gave no sign of weakness. At present, the management proposes a 13% wage rise and a productivity bonus from 4% - 7%, but refuses to answer any of the other demands.

The workers are trying to organise themselves directly now and to remain together to protect themselves against sackings, which will inevitably take place at the end of the strike. They would like to appeal to all workers of Philips in the world for any form of solidarity (for contact write to Echanges).

GERMANY

The trade union leaders are becoming openly critical of the government with whom they were hitherto on the friendliest terms (see speeches of the leader of the I.G. Metal union supported in Le Monde, Paris of 23th September 1977).

This would seem to be the result of rank and file pressure and growing shop floor demands. At the same time lots of meetings are taking place in Germany on the edges of the Washington talks of the International Monetary Fund.

"... Everyone has noticed the extreme anxiety, if not to say, demoralisation, that the Germans feel about their country. A Bonn government minister has more or less said that the inhabitants of the Federal Republic are for the first time questioning their society" (Le Monde of 27th September 1977).

We wonder where the disciplined Germans have gone whom all the press were shouting about during the Baader/Schleyer affair.

What is happening in Germany now ?

Any answers to Echanges ?