

ECHANGES

Jan-Feb 1983 nr.33

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Perhaps you don't care, but if the number of subscribers to the English edition keeps dropping down, we shall have to find another form for the english edition or end the english edition.

Great Britain

Be a summer with a thousand July's...and winter seasons (publ. in 1982, avail. from: BM.BLOB, London WC 1 N3XX, England)

Essentially this long text is devoted to the revolutionary dimension of the riots of July 1981 in the cities. It takes the form of a subversive catalogue which puts under review all the different aspects of social life which are confronted by a desintegrating capitalism. Riots are built up in relation to the desintegration in all other areas, like the revealed truth about them. So, starting with the riots themselves, with the characters, scope, intensity, refuting on the way that they are racist riots only, we have the critical analysis of the failure of the English liberal model (which has been largely usurped anyway), of the crisis in the schools and the family, of working class struggle in '70-'74-'79, of the extreme Left and of the Labour Party, of monetarism, of the unions, of rock and roll, of the adaptation of the police apparatus and the modifications in the

denounced as a deliberate action to desorientate the proletariat.

The catalogue is complete. The contradiction between the stated purpose - to rescue England from its 'theoretical underdevelopment - and the method employed - nothing but radical commentary; as if it were a question of pointing out the existence of a 'negative factor' at work throughout the English society, as if a stylised description of the social contradiction à la situationniste, would not eventually emerge as the petrification of social contradiction, of a moment's radicalism: the riot. In this context it is easier to understand how the valorisation of the riots of 1981 can be equated with their hardly reformist evaluation of earlier working class struggles.

The authors challenge as too optimistic Cajo Brendels analysis in his book 'Autonomous class struggles in Britain'. The authors considered comprehensive opinion is determined by their need to exalt the radical if not revolutionary purity incarnated in the rioters as if it were possible for one single sector in class society to reproduce the one and only true revolutionary proletariat.

To be on the same plane as this both new and generalistic irruption of the rioters in British class society seems therefore to be the theoretical task of the authors, because to them, 'the riots were a foretaste of the future.' If this text deserves attention because of its global outlook, let us hope that this will be in the future a less rigid globality. To go further than opposing immediate destructive revolts to profound significant movements in class society requires the criticism of the limitations of short lived movements. It may that a real understanding of proletarian practices is in question.

(Venan Brisset, Nov.1982)

provisional mechanism and in the contemporary management of unemployment and of the poverty of revolutionary in the field in comparison with the development in France Spain Portugal and Italy. In conclusion we have the false idea was and its nationalistic facade.

Whose Benefit? - Changes in the social security system -

(4 pages leaflet publ. by the London Workers Group/LWC c/o Little A, C. Metzropolis

Wharf, Wapping Hall, London E1, England)

The estimated number of unemployed in the UK varies between 3,5 and 4 million, i.e. between 12 and 15% of the working population with enormous disparities in regions or areas or in certain age groups (25% of the young people aged 20 or about) and in certain ethnic groups (50% of the young Carribeans in Brixton). We are not analysing here the consequences of working class struggles, or on work practices, social relations or the totality of movements at grass root level. Neither shall we examine how the situation can become inverted because the unemployed no longer play their traditional role vis-a-vis capitalist work and the values attaching to it.

Those facing unemployment hardly strive now to keep their jobs, those already unemployed no longer strive to find new jobs. As it is clearly put in the leaflet: 'When unemployed people are able to enjoy themselves and refuse to be punished for being jobless, it disrupts the function of unemployment which is to keep wages down and people in their place.'

This situation explains a whole series of measures taken this autumn which are not a frontal attack on the unemployment benefit system (Thatcher herself having declared it too dangerous to tamper with this) but are mere sprinkling of small administrative references seemingly haphazard. But the logic behind these measures is to establish a strict control of those no longer controlled by capitalist work (paralleled incidentally a reform in the method of paying sick benefits which amounts to a legal strengthening of employers control on absenteeism because from now on it is the employers who will register absences and pay benefits up to six weeks of sickness on behalf of Social Security). The cornerstone of the benefit system requires each new claimant to fill a form containing 109 questions, and unemployed workers dossiers to be put on a central national computer making the information immediately accessible to any official agent. The crisis can justify the cuts, but their details can give a idea of the importance and diversity of fiddling in the English system.

As well as dealing with practical details concerning these measures in general and how to cope with them, the leaflet attempt to outline the connexion between unemployment and the economic and political situation:

Bosses 'give' us jobs so we can make money for them. Obviously not all jobs make money directly — for example, office jobs organising other peoples work, state employment in essential services which aren't profitable (health, education etc.), or the apparatus of social discipline and death (law and war). But as long as profits are high there's plenty of work — even jobs doing nothing at all useful. When profits are low however, bosses start weeding out those people that they can no longer afford, whose jobs don't make enough money. All over the world thats been happening since the late sixties — the result is mass unemployment.

Mass unemployment is nothing new. It was constant in Britain from 1920, until 1940 and jobs for everyone making war. After the war we had 'Full Employment'. 'Full' meant only a few hundred thousand unemployed. The Welfare State benefit system was designed as a safety net for this relatively small number of people. Till the sixties the number of jobs grew. Larger numbers of women and young people than ever before found relatively well paid work, especially in the expanding state and service sectors. In the fifties immigration was encouraged to fill low paid and 'dirty' jobs. Wages rose and benefits followed.

Of course not everyone was usefully employed or well paid. The theory however was that a high level of steady, comparatively well paid work led to social stability and permanent expansion. This was disproved at the end of the sixties, which saw a whole series of struggles, not about poverty, but because having been given a taste of a better life people wanted more. While profits were high it had been easy to buy off wage militancy and raise benefits. But militancy had reached the point at which it bit into the bosses share of the cake. And simultaneously profits began to drop as the boom ended. Immigration was ended, and women youth and ethnic minorities found themselves first out into the slowly expanding dole queues.

Financially those were the good old days for claimants. Benefits were worth more than they had ever been. (Indeed they'd overtaken many low paid workers wages). On the negative side unemployment was still low enough for the dole office and SS to be able to police claims — forcing the unemployed into low paid jobs, trapping women under the cohabitation rules etc.

Twelve years later the situation is totally reversed. Benefits have dropped to bare subsistence levels. (In 1978 20% of workers would have been better off on the dole. Today, after the ending of earnings related supplement and last years 5% cut only 4% would be better off. This despite the fact that 7 million families are living below the official poverty line.) On the other side mass unemployment has swamped the dole and

SS with too many claims to police. With over a million long term unemployed the system is on the verge of collapse, and benefit offices are striking over workloads. The Welfare State, designed for times of low use and high profits is breaking down.

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For the bosses the need is to redesign the system on the basis of mass unemployment. The first stage of this — widening the gap between those with jobs and the 'poor' — is almost accomplished. For ten years every government has been preoccupied with reducing 'surplus employment', reducing state expenditure and holding wages down. The Tories didn't introduce monetarism (the Callaghan govt. did), and nor did they 'create' mass unemployment. They have happily encouraged it however — to maintain incentives to work harder for less money, by making benefits as unattractive as possible. To use the fear of unemployment to chip away at the safeguards and benefits workers have won in the past. For Tories disciplining the poor is a matter of 'law and order'. More Fraud Squad officers, more riot trained police thugs, longer sentences. In the future they promise more of the same — more cuts, more stick for those who protest, more of the 'discipline of the market-place' until the 'upturn' arrives, and the economy takes off with low paid jobs for all.

Labour offer us the other half of the double act. The Tories call for lower wage settlements — Foot calls for an 'understanding' on pay. While the Tories threaten to dismantle the Welfare State, Labour promise to 'save' it — but of course there won't be money to restore cuts or improve it. Labour offer a fair deal for claimants — no more cuts in benefit. But of course there won't be money to raise them above bare subsistence levels. Labour promise an 'end' to unemployment, or at least a reduction to one million over five years. What they're offering is only another shortlived economic reflation, with jobs for a year or two building houses or roads or drains, before the project ends (North sea gas conversions anyone?) or the money runs out in another economic downturn. For Labour disciplining the poor means more social workers and more benefit staff. It means more Govt./TUC unemployment centres with paid workers, treating claimants as individual 'cases' with problems. It means more resources into keeping claimants isolated and impotent, more help for them to 'cope' with poverty. Better that than more police? Well of course welfare cops smile as they prosecute 'scroungers', or take the kids into care.

Mass unemployment is here to stay. Its quite conceivable that levels may drop at some time, its quite certain that the fall will only be temporary. There's no sign today of any recovery — and after years of decline Britains in the worst possible state to benefit from one if it came. We have to be clear about it. Mass poverty is here to stay and so is the discipline needed to police it. Whether you're wacked in the guts by your Tory 'Community Policeman' or just nauseated by your smiling Labour 'Community Worker' the only choice is to vomit.

France

Usinor Dunkerque— June 4th 1982 - two

(Pamphlet by an independant union called 'Syndicat de lutte des travailleurs' (SLT), publ. July 1982, price 10 FF, available from: SLT, Usinor DK, Centre Social, Place de l'Europe, 58760 Grande Synthe, France)

Echanges (nrs 19 and 29) has already referred to the evolution of these steelworkers of the Usinor factory of Dunkirk. During the 1979 general strike against redundancy in the steel industry, they were expelled from the CFDT because of their successful attempt to overtake the unions. For a time, they belonged to the CGT-union, dominated by the communist party. But they had to leave and tried to build an 'independant' union SLT (see as good presentation of their evolution and of the present, a pamphlet in IRL, oct/nov 82, price 10 FF, avail. from ACLR, 13 rue Pierre Blanc, 69001 Lyon). We will study later the problem of such attempts to build a permanent structure of struggle in a factory mainly when it tries to give itself the form of an union and to short circuit the legal unions.

The interest of this pamphlet is double: On one hand it shows with the good example of a very modern factory that the modernisation is only governed by capitalist profit and that the security of the workers (in dangerous work) is secondary. On the other hand that the nationalisation (the factory was recently nationalised by the french socialist government) and what is called presently 'the new rights for the workers' mean only a tighter domination over the workers (management and unions being closely linked in the new politics). In this particular situation, the aim is to eliminate by all means all those who try to oppose these politics, to break all separations and to tell everybody what happens really inside the factory. Unions have now more legal power but the workers are no longer following them (less than 10% of the workforce in the Dunkirk factory is unionised). The size of the factory, the isolation of the different shifts and of the workers of the same shift is a handicap for the links between the workers and a help for the bureaucracy. The integration of the unions into the management system at all levels (state, firms, and departments inside the factory) prevents them to become (or try to become) the necessary link during the struggle in such factories. They couldn't prevent the workers to build some kind of links between the most of the time underground, because they will be repressed if they are too openly active. This character is dictated by the scale of the repression with the threat of sacking or redundancy in such periods of crisis and restructuring. The evolution of the SLT (or more precisely of some radical unionists from the CFDT local during the strike of 1979) is a good example of what happens to open permanent structures of struggle. In the future, the links between the workers will take perhaps another form because the past struggles and the repression will shape the new tendencies of autonomy

(H.Simon, dec.1982)

To please and reassure the capitalists, the Union declared some months later that it would "fundamentally oppose collaboration with the Alianza Popular." Suarez tried to calm down Fraga, but didn't succeed with this man, whose Alianza didn't even want to suggest a democratic image. Other people got impatient, because a democratic image alone wasn't enough for them. They lost faith in Suarez and their doubts grew when minister Fernandez Ordonez had to resign. His plans for tax reforms had made the government a bit more acceptable.

Conservatives and liberals in the Union split up. The conservatives liked Fraga more. The liberals were won by Felipe Gonzalez' PSOE. They hesitated to join the PSOE because of its 'radical' reputation. So, the Union could still survive the elections of 1979.

But shortly afterwards Gonzalez got rid of this radical reputation. Temporarily he resigned as president of the party, only to control it even more and to convince friend and foe, that he didn't aim at all at drastic changes in the Spanish economy, but at a modernisation of old-fashioned institutions and relations. Gonzalez' political aims coincided completely with Spain's needs. The last remnants of a so-called 'marxism' - ~~take~~ taken seriously only by credulous people - disappeared from the PSOE's program. From that moment on the fate of the UCD was decided.

Suarez, first of all an opportunist, realised the danger. Instinctively he felt that he had to choose a more leftist direction. But the opposition of the conservatives broke his neck. The UCD got another president, Calvo Sotelo, precisely on the day that the threat to the old structures became clear for everybody (the attempt of colonel Tejero to take over the government by a military coup). Suarez formed another more leftwing-centre party, the 'Democratic and Social Centre' CDS, because he supposed that his 'centre' would live longer than that of Sotelo.

There he made a mistake. Of course, the UCD hanged itself as it refused to accept the small group around Antonio Carrigues as an ally. This man was a progressive lawyer in Madrid. The refusal of the UCD increased its isolation. Suarez didn't escape either, because his CDS didn't fit in the new order anywhere.

During the most recent elections, the PSOE have said again and again, that it was "their historical task to execute the bourgeois revolution, which the Spanish rightists had tried to prevent." That's really the essence of Gonzalez' election victory. Gonzalez is damned right when he says, that his real enemy isn't the bourgeoisie, but "a tiny minority who want to stay in command positions it has held for more than twohundred years." It explains why banks and some chiefs of industry have supported, also with money, Gonzalez' election campaigns. It also explains why a Catalan bankboss has written the economic program of the PSOE.

The PSOE's program looks like the programs of the French radical-socialists, who were the ~~spiritual heirs~~ intellectual heirs to Jacobine thought. It explains why Gonzalez declares that he has a 'political purpose', no social one, that he wants a 'moral revolution', that he goes against tax frauds and other Spanish customs that don't fit in a modern lifestyle of an industrial nation. It explains why modern capitalists have declared to work together with and support the PSOE-government and why they call this collaboration 'constructive.'

Almost two centuries after the French revolution (of 1789) and almost 100 years after the complete triumph of the french bourgeoisie at the time of the defeat of general Boulanger, Spain prepares itself finally to complete its bourgeois revolution. It could not be postponed any longer. From now on Spanish politics will be dictated by the interests of capital.

(C.Brendel, dec.1982)