

n°47 Novembre 1986

# échanges

Echanges et Mouvement

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## ECHANGES

The french edition of Echanges has already got n° 49 and not all the materials already published in french are presently translated .The present english issue contains only part of what has been published in french . The remaining part will be the content of n°48-49 to be published soon in english.

## WORKERS' COUNCIL

The two last parts of Pannekoek's Workers' Councils in english are now in distribution :

-part 3 -The Foe ( 50p)

-part 4 -The war ( 1944 ) - The Peace ( 1947 ) - Pannekoek biography and Mattick's interview about the present interest of the whole book ( 50 p)

All Echanges subscribers have by now received the complete book ( 4 parts ).Part 1 is definitely out of print . Part 2 would be soon difficult to find as well.

## Liaisons

is a new publication in french but not a part of Echanges subscription .The issue n°1 can be send after payment of 15 F to Echanges at Mouvement , BP 241 , 75866 PARIS CEDEX 18 ( ccp La Source 31708 40 F) .This is a summary of the articles of this n°1 see page 5

## U S A

The double standard that's setting worker against worker. ( Business Week 8/4/85)

The article describes what is called "two-tier wage system" - i e paying new hire less than old employees .This system saves employers money but the price is lower morale.It may boost profits but can create bitterness and increase turnover says the Wall Street Journal ( 15/10/85 ) ( copy at Echanges )

American workers don't get around much anymore. Labour mobility is declining and that's keeping unemployment high (Business Week 28/10/85 ).Some experts argue that stubbornly high unemployment is increasingly the consequence of a major change now under way in the Labour market:declining worker mobility(it was considered a major strength of the US economy ). Among the reasons : some simply don't have the financial resources to move ;the huge rise in the number of two income families ; big drop of property values where industries are dying' and high cost of housing where you can find jobs ; age ;growing economic obstacles in some industries ( car , steel ) ;greater number of low-paying jobs;growing number of illegal immigrants moving now from unskilled to skilled jobs.(copy at Echanges )

Is big Labor playing global vigilante .The AFL-CIO spends millions a year to fight communism overseas fueling a bitter internal battle (Business Week 4/11/85) The article gives a detailed account of the money (90% coming from the US government )distributed by the US unions all over the world .Key federation officials are working for the CIA , undermining union coalition in El Salvador , sponsoring contra leader tours of the US, bolstering a middle of the road union movement in the Philippines...Nothing new but 'put up to date .

Back to piece work Many US firms now base workers'raises on their productivity.Merit system can prove ruthless but effective .Not all managers like it.(Wall Street Journal 21/11/85).Among other examples the article gives another view of the GM's new Saturn plant (see above ) (copy at Echanges )

What is happening to the integrity of A merican worker (The Orlando Sentinel -Florida - 3/11/85 ) Employees are getting more and more adept at dealing from their employers and feeling les and less guilty about it .The new fangled security devices only challenge a highly motivated thief to be more creative . Falsification is as common place and widespread as thievery (especially in job applications))

Why unemployment sometimes lingers on stires renewed interest (Wall Street Journal 27/12/85 ) Some US economist think business may benefit by paying higher wages.Against classical economists trained in free market theory another one argue "the labor market doesn't behave like onion market" When there is unemployment,wages doesn't fall .The new theory "Efficiency wage theory" provides reasons why there might be companies paying more than the market requires .With some examples it explains that the move had 'improved the discipline of the workers , given them a more loyal interest in the institution and raised their personal efficiency ' .There is a lot of disagreements on the other developments of this theory about recessions, unemployment... Another article 'How wages rise when profits fall(The Economist 7/7/85) deals with the same problem.We give a copy of it:

Endangered species:Black farmers (Washington Post Weekly 10/3/86 ) Debt and generational changes are driving them off the land . The article is with a specific aspect of the agriculture concentration in the US . The decline of black farmers is 2 1/2 times quicker than the decline of white farmers .

Discussion Bulletin PO Box 1564 -Grand Rapids - M1 49501 USA  
n'15 - december 1985 - War and revolution - a lot of letters  
n'16 - february 1986 - Interesting discussion on 'What is socialism?'

Pink collar workers : the next rank and file? (Business Week 24/2/86) A key battle will soon be fought for about half of Blue Cross 's 98.000 employees .A new union Services Employees International Union (SEIU ) ( linked to AFL-CIO ) tries to unionize some 20 millions of white or pink collar workers ( only 850,000 of them are in a union .

News and Letters 59 E. Van Buren - Room 107 - Chicago III 60605  
Vol 31 -n'I - january february 86 - Mass rally foir Chicago Tribune strikers- Massey strike is ended - Rank and file conference against concessions :250 rank and file militants from food industry , steelworks , shipyards , seamen failed to settle some link between them because of the usual political battle involved in such meetings .

Federal strategy of US against crime is found lagging (New York Times 15/1/86 )Nothing really new about the connection of some unions with the maffia and the political protection of some leaders like Jackie Presser (president of the Teamsters ) . The Wall Street Journal (21/2/86 ) gives a less usual account of this kind of crime (Auto Workers Union reputation suffers as series of scandals rock leadership) (copy at Echanges )

Synthesis PO Box 1858- San Pedro Ca 90733

A newsletter and journal for social ecology ,deep ecology and bioregionalism  
n'21 january 1986 -Rainbow warriors - Green activity in US - Literature list for green movement activists - International Anarchist meetings - Green politics in Canada - Canadian ecological publications

Fifth Estate PO Box 02548 - Detroit - M1 48202 - USA

Spring 86 - Anarchism in the age of Reagan - Two views -from Fifth Estate  
:Renew the earthly paradise - from the antiauthoritarians anonymous : Present day banalities - Book reviews

Labor Notes PoBox 20001 - Detroit - Mic 48220

February 86 : New union concessions in secret agreement between UAW Mazda ,signed in 1984 and published only now . This agreement concerns a new factory whose Ford owns 25% and which starts hiring this spring . The agreement aims essentially at getting more flexibility . Lay offs and recalls traditionally done by strict seniority now give 'considerations to such factors as employees abilities , qualifications , experience , physical capacity and length of service .- Others articles on Hormel strike , mine workers , job sharing  
March 1986 - on Hormel,Highgrade Food Products in Livonia (Mich ) - A discussion around workers contracts in the USA .

In these Times (Independant Socialist Newspaper ) Institute for Public Affairs, 1300 W.Belmont Chicago Ill 60657 )

n'4 february-march 1986 .Big business is watching you: on all kind of technological advances to spy employees , not so efficient than it is usually described : "in the overwhelming majority of cases , monitoring degrades the quality of the job and ironically can actually impair productivity " This use of technology to achieve greater control in the work place threatens to change fundamental relationship between employers and employees.

### United Kingdom

Counter Information Box 81 , c/o 43 Candlemaker Row ,Edinburgh  
n'9 march -april -Moving the coal ports-A printer says : 'Break the rules ' - Round the pits - On Southport , Bristol...riots .

New anarchist review - BM Bookserv -London WC1 N 3 XX- february 1986 - Book review in English - subscription :1 pound for 4 issues .(n' 1 free )

Here and Now - Box 2 C/O 340 West Princes Street - Glasgow G49HF  
n' 3 spring 86 - Hard going for the left - Riots and their respondents - Animal liberation - The fireside narcotic - The Womenklaturist State -Poland to day - Mass movements and contradiction : Poland 80-82

Picket c/o Housman's Book , 5 Caledonian Road , London N1 9 DX - UK  
The n' 34 of this leaflet has just been published and the n' 1 was almost one year ago when the strike and demonstrations burst up against the moving of News International (Murdoch ) printshops to Wapping .It is a rank and file picket line newsletter .It is written ,printed and paid for by WGA and SOGAT

members. We met at the picket line, hate capitalism and see the need for a regular bulletin containing accurate reports on picketing actions - from picketers point of view - and also space for pickets to put forward their opinions about the strike and how the picketing might be strengthened. We would have liked to see such a newsletter started by some of the strikers themselves, but we hope it will be taken up by people at the picket line as a useful way of spreading information and putting some of the discussions about this situation into print. The complete collection of the leaflets up to n° 28 can be obtained in 4 booklets (with additions) from the above address. The whole gives a complete report and a very good view of the Wapping saga which is not yet put to an end because most of the sacked workers and their supporters are not at all disposed to give up.

US multinationals - Exploding the myth of GB Inc. (Financial Times 26/2/86)  
Some figures

UK 1984	\$bn	WORLD 1984	\$bn
Petroleum	10.9	Canada	50.5
Food & allied	1.5	All EC countries	78.9
Chemicals & allied	1.9	UK	32.1
Primary & fab metals	0.7	West Germany	15.2
Machinery	2.9	Netherlands	8.3
Electric & electronic	0.8	France	6.5
Transport equipment	1.4	Belgium	5.3
Other manufacturing	3.4	Italy	4.9
Trade	1.9	Ireland	4.4
Banking	1.5	Other West Europe	24.8
Finance, insurance, property	4.2	Japan	6.4
All Industries	32.1	Australia	9.2
		TOTAL—Developed countries	174.1
		TOTAL—Developing countries	53.9

US investments  
in UK  
and in the world

Canada - Open Road Box 51 (-Station G ;Vancouver BC Canada V6R4G5)  
On different 'revolutionary' groups in Belgium, West Germany and their repression - Riots in U K - on the trial of canadian indians.

Poland :Rendez nous nos usines-Solidarnosc in the fight for workers self management (in french) (La Brèche) .The author was one of the Solidarnosc leader in the Lodz district in 80-81. The book is a collection of different articles dealing with the problems of Solidarnosc during this period : social control, self management and radical reform of the polish economy and State .

New Zealand - 25,000 meat workers went on strike on february 25 mainly for wages. The meat companies are on the offensive to maintain their profits in the face of intensified competition on the worldmarket .In recent years they have been able to impose reduction in wages and jobs , and take back working conditions throughout the meat industry by dealing with the meat workers'union at a plant by plant level through local lock outs and threat of closures.The bosses have made it obvious that they are prepared for a long and hard battle.Articles on these strikes in Socialist Action(28/2/86 - PO Box 8734 Auckland ) and in Islington Meat Worker - bulletin of a branch of the New Zealand Meatworkers Union. Another text 'Meatworks are for women too ' is a pamphlet written by Eileen Morgan on the condition of women in this industry (Pilot Books -Box 8730 Auckland )

LLAONS (in French)

Echanges et Mouvement BP 241,  
75866 Paris Cedex 18 France

(This magazine is separate from Echanges - Subscription 15FF to Ccp la  
Source - 3170840 F)

no. 1, 1985. The publication of this magazine is the result in concrete terms of discussions begun a year ago between participants and non-participants in Echanges. This discussion will continue in order to ensure the publication of future numbers of the magazine. The small nucleus that has thus been set up is open to all those who find in the magazine's pages elements for work that they consider worth continuing. Some outlines and an initial debate over the theses (already published in Echanges no. 45) take up the last part of the magazine. Here is a resumé of the other texts published in it:

Great Britain: other forms of class struggle

For almost a whole year (March 1984 - February 1985), the miners strike against restructuring, considering its autonomous tendencies rooted in a trade union traditionalism, took the lime light although all the analyses were off the mark because of the complexity of the strike. Struggles taking place in other sectors of British industry that have already been restructured, especially in car manufacture, were in fact much more revealing albeit less spectacular. The introduction of new technology allowed the old structures of workers' resistance, based on the middle strata of the unions, the shop stewards movement, to be swept aside. The logic of the new system of social relations forced the unions to accept more openly the firms' economic needs. The union attempts to restore conditions for controlling the rank and file movement were unsuccessful. This situation reinforced the autonomous tendencies of this movement, while making it take on new forms of action.

A bus strike in Milan: eye witness account of a strike-blockage of the ATM (Milan City Bus Co.) from Collegamenti Spring/Summer 1984.

Interview with workers active in the strike by a comrade from Collegamenti. "... In April 1984, a strong well-defined workers' sector broke the social peace in Milan, adopting forms of organization on a mass basis that could lead to an impressive struggle opposed to the reduction of public subsidies." This type of interview interests us because it gives an inside view and understanding of the strikers' organization, the struggle's dynamic, the trade union manoeuvring and the different problems linked to the restructuring of the transport system.

The conversion of the Spanish shipyards and the workers' resistance at Gijon (from Etcetera, April 1985)

(An article written during a meeting of comrades from Etcetera with representatives of the CSI in December 1984)

The magnitude of the workforce reduction linked with the conversion of the shipyards led to violent struggles partially supported by the unions (except the UGT which is linked to the socialist party), which became progressively radical as the fact that there was nothing to negotiate spread. Attempts to spread to other sectors occurred in the most affected areas like Asturias, Galicia and the Basque region.

The article deals especially with the general problems linked with the restructuring: the bosses, government and union policies. Appendix: a document on the creation of an autonomous union: the left union current (CSI) created by a split in the CCOO (CF union).

Great Britain: "The winter of discontent", the political and social crisis in Great Britain, 1978-9 (part one)

This text was written just after the fall of the Callaghan labour government in 1979 and the rise to power of the band of conservative dries led by Thatcher, but remained unpublished. It describes the second great post-war crisis which saw a social crisis lead to the fall of the government (the first brought down the conservative Heath government in 1974). These two high points merely represent the most striking moments in the class struggle which has had to stand up to the union apparatus ever since the end of the Second World War. These two crises were replies to attempts to submit this movement to the needs of capital. Just as with the strikes in 1972-4, those in 1978-9 saw the use of the practice of secondary picketing as an autonomous weapon. On the one hand, the struggle slipped from the unions' hands, while on the other it made the pickets masters of economic activity. This intolerable situation led to the political crisis and the the introduction of a government sworn to smash the autonomous movement.

Spain: The battle of the Euskalduna: example of workers' resistance

(Translation of a text into French written by CAT - Autonomous Collective of workers of Euskalduna) - available from Echanges  
 CAT is a small union in the marine sector which is, according to itself, "based on a left and radical union perspective". Euskalduna is one of three Bilbao shipyards. The pamphlet is not a synthetic work, but consists of notes on articles and extracts about the scenes of fighting. 2,200 out of 2,500 shipyard workers must be dismissed, a far higher figure than in the other two yards. The struggle took on the well known form of, like the other shipyards of the Basque region and Spain (see Liaisons no. 1), of being relatively isolated but basically similar. The strategic position of the yard in the heart of Bilbao gave rise to the possibility of sharp actions which were very effective, but led to violent police repression and the more indirect one of the other unions. The struggle tried to spread out to rally the other workers and simultaneously to make the strike more effective. The occupation of the yards - which had no direct effect on output seeing that the bosses wanted to close them - had thus no other aim than forming a base for the movement. However, the repression reduced this occupation to a "lock in" and slowly numbers fell from 2,000 to 150 at the end of December. This fall off in the movement was largely due to the setting up, under the pressure of the struggle, of an indemnity system in all the yards guaranteeing wages for three years and with a promise of a future job. The majority of the workers accepted this proposal and the strike was restricted to 200 "ready to do anything to save Euskalduna". It is difficult to describe this strike using a text which consciously speaks only of the offensive actions led by a minority seeking radical action: they received real help in the first period of the struggle when people were angered by the brutal decisions of the management; they were ruthlessly repressed by the police. However, neither the repression nor the sapping by other organizations can explain the ebbing of this movement when funds were guaranteed.

The abyss between the action of a minority and the mass of workers thus clearly appears as a critique of the "revolutionary" methods as well as a questioning as to their suitability in the strike. The text is not very clear on the relationships between the various protagonists of the struggle: the "committee" (one supposes this is the factory committee) which "decides to prepare actions", the Workers' Assembly which "decided on the committee's initiative", the "more radical and important left" and the mass of workers. At the beginning of December the text tells us that "participation was highest", while giving the figure of 150 for December 27th of those still in occupation and 85 at the General Assembly. CAT's own critique or that by the various minority union collectives in other yards (INTG in Galicia, CSI in Asturias) hardly provide anything more in the way of explanation except showing different conditions starting from different conceptions of the struggle. It seems that at Bilbao the minority saw the struggle in the street as a goal in itself while the mass saw in it only an occasional means; for them, not to struggle "radically" did not mean "abandoning" the struggle, but only to have a differing consciousness of the need for this struggle, a more realistic view. Faced with restructuring, there could be another way out other than a "struggle to the death" to "save our jobs". Euskalduna could have been "extremely positive in contributing to awaking the consciousness of many workers as a class", but it also made clear that the majority of the workers wanted their methods of struggle as opposed to those of the minority, composed of activists. One could call this "left-argy", but such a label necessarily contains mistrust in the ways adopted by the workers, particularly in daily struggles which nevertheless form a vital part of the class struggle.

La Estiba - Vos de los puertos (Barcelona): A liaison bulletin for port workers (in Spanish). Available from: Etcetera, Apartado Correos 1363, Barcelona, Spain

- September 1985: Spain and the EEC - Latin America - Coordination
- October 1985 : where is maritime trade going? - Parallel case (Liverpool)
- November 1985 : Agricultural workers - On ports: Algiers - San Pedro
- January 1986 : (no. 13) Crisis in coalmining (restructuring, general strike 17-18 Dec. - R. Teruel - The miners against pit closures - National days on maritime transport
- February 1986 : (no. 14) Against port privatization - No to NATO - Port coordination (Valencia, Barcelona, Alicante) - Present situation in collective bargaining
- March 1986 : (no. 15) Ports on strike: dockers' strike called by all the unions for dockworkers and the coordination of the periods, 6-15 March, 20-22 March, 2-6 April. - Rank and file unionism and the autonomous workers movement.
- Nos. 16/17/18 : More on the dockers' strike - a complete text in the next bulletin.

(La Estiba, Coordinadora Estatal Estibadores Portuarios Centro de Estudios, c/ del Mar 97, 08003 Barcelona, Spain - in Spanish)

Sections from a letter from a Spanish comrade (30.1.86.)

"...only two interesting things have happened in Spain recently: the miners' strike in the Teruel field and the two days general strike in the mining sector ... and on the other hand, the referendum campaign on NATO ... The first conflict lays bare the contradictions and the struggle for control of the UGT union apparatus; the submission of this apparatus to government

orders is so patently obvious that some bureaucrats fear a total loss of face with the workers. Even though it raised great problems in changing government tactics regarding social conflicts, it is a fact that the ministerial team preferred to negotiate after dropping the union representatives, including those of the UGT mining organization. That is to say that the government did not even want to try to "maintain the forms" of negotiation usual in bourgeois democracy. By ignoring the unions, even their own one, the government showed that it wanted to deal in an autonomous and authoritarian manner with social conflicts. But what is even more significant is that the miners, even if isolated and mistrusted during their trip to the Ministry of Industry in Madrid, nevertheless managed to have the government plans modified when they showed their willingness to struggle. It had been hoped to impose a solution on the workers and even on the unions, but in fact the agreement made with the government and the Aragon region with the Ministry of Industry accepted in large part what the workers had demanded.

The theme of NATO has developed since the beginning of the referendum campaign (scheduled for early March). It seems that this question is to be converted into a test of the "honour" of the left and all social movements. It consists in expressing discontent with the socialist party and its management, even though the CP (one of them since there is another, the PCE) wishes to split off from the NATO question whatever may be seen as a revenge vote against the PSOE (Socialist Party). As the general secretary of the PCE put it: "it is not a question of saying no to Nato alone, but not saying no to the PSOE. Faced with all the opportunist manoeuvres, one must still say that the PSOE is to the last man for a yes vote for a full integration" (now Spain belongs only to the civil part of the Atlantic Alliance). European and Spanish military authorities are very worried by the possibility of a no vote. Diplomatic and especially psychological pressure on the population has built up over the last few weeks. The reasons the government offers are poor and vague: they even dare to state that NATO will help industrial development and cut unemployment. I think, however, that what really worries the politicians and the military is that, in the case of a no vote, the agreements on American military bases will be on the agenda again. ... the development of the pacifist movements more or less throughout Europe, especially in Italy and Greece, where the situation is similar to that prevailing in Spain ...

Last week, SOC (Agricultural Workers Union) militants, organizing day workers in Andalusia, came to Barcelona with the invitation of the autonomous collectives of the ports and some factories. They seemed like the legitimate descendants of 19th century anarchism, even though they also base themselves on third world "revolutions" (Cuba, Nicaragua). However, this is in no way a stalinist union. On the contrary, their structure is just like any young and militant trade union, assembly-ist, no permanent delegates or professional representatives (paid officials). I think that their fixation with third world nationalist tendencies regards more the need to find model concrete objectives, caused by an ideological gap rather than an acceptance of 'marxist-leninist' principles. They make the same centuries old demands in Andalusia, but in a completely new way: when they call for "agrarian reform", they are thinking of something very different compared with the old day-labourers, because now the reform has been passed... by the agro-industrial capitalists and the southern land owners. In fact what they are talking about is another agrarian reform that is not just in the capitalists' interests.

Up till now the surplus labour force was forced to emigrate to the suburbs of the industrial towns of the Basque Region, Catalonia, Asturias and other European countries. Now there is an overpopulation which cannot be sent elsewhere because of the industrial crisis. For this reason, first the Franco then the democratic governments took Keynesian measures to avoid a state of potential permanent insurrection. The policy still adopted today is to use hand-outs in cash to reduce an explosive situation to a tolerable level. The history of Andalusia with its periodic insurrections of the day-labourers is burnt deep into everyone's memory.

The day-labourers are agricultural proletarians with characteristics linking them with the 19th century and this situation determines their consciousness ... We discussed their rejection of mechanization and the "cult" of work with them. They complain that young people "do not want to learn to work", and are becoming used to getting by on state charity because they have lost the possibility of gaining the dignity of the worker. While listening to them, I remembered the writings of the old anarchist prophets.

Despite all that, one cannot deny that they are a fighting movement, but this mystique of work recalls a mixture of christian ideology and the principles of the class struggle. We wish to publish a notice of our meeting in Etcetera.

#### West Germany: Wildcat

(available from: Karlsruher Stadtzeitung, Postfach 3644 - D7500, Karlsruhe) No. 36 (in German) In the preface there is an indication as to the present orientation of the group: "... the motive power of a social and political struggle over the last few years was the hope that the social movement would combine with the class struggle ... and in this sense, looking for "the struggle against work" ...

Summary: Struggles at FIAT, Strikes in Germany, Female labour in the West German Electricity Industry, The Spanish Dockers' Struggle, Capital's position regarding the Working Class now, (which contains this sentence: "We wish to understand that capital's problematic in planning and accumulation is the struggle against the refusal to work"), the British Miners' Strike, Economic analysis of the crisis and international monetary problems, Letter from an unemployed worker in Hamburg which describes how he gets by on the dole and what he is really able to do, What goes on in a temporary work office, Prison Revolt in France.

No. 37 (Autumn 1985). In the preface: the revolts in Great Britain are seen as a renewal of workers' combativity - the "copy cat" revolts represent something new - the rebellion of the oppressed caused by their experience of poverty. The producers of the magazine express their voluntarism in "wanting to do everything to help these struggles spread".

Summary: South Africa, Struggle against the building of the Leibstadt nuclear power station, In the FIAT group: the introduction of the new technology and the consequences for the workers, Prison: punishment and its consequence, British Miners' Strike, The Riots in Britain (Tottenham, Brixton etc.), The workers' Situation in the Port of Hamburg, Spanish Dockers' Strike and an interview with Galician dockers.

No. 38 (February 1986). Workers without a contract, The Americans, the ANC and the class struggle, The situation of political prisoners in Italy, The struggle for housing, what's happening in Turin?, The Netherlands: workers' struggle against flexibility.

No. 39 (Summer 1986). The capitalist energy crisis and the nuclear programme, Great Britain: other forms of class struggle, Crisis restructuring and the workers' reply (we shall make a detailed criticism in the next number).

wildcat has published an anthology of some recent articles:

- Keynes, the oil crisis, unemployment, women's work conditions in the bleaching industry, pollution, the Vietnam war, skilled worker training, Taylorism in the USA, employment agencies, interviews with workers on their experience of life and work, today's working class has a different composition from previously.

- Pamphlet on FIAT struggles

- Three volumes on the Imm, selection of wobbly texts;

1 Gisela Bock The other workers' movement in the USA, Louis Adamic Dynamite

2 extracts from Austin Lewis The Militant Proletarian

3 Angelican Ebbinghaus Work and the Science of Work

- A study on the influence of technical innovation on man: Machines against man.

#### A day of strikes and demonstrations

On March 6th there was an attempt by the social democrat trade union organization the DGB, to oppose the new law which makes unions financially responsible not only for the strikers but also for all workers unable to work directly or indirectly due to the strike (they were previously paid by the Federal Labour Office). This reform aimed at forcing the unions to be even more involved in company management alongside the bosses. It is parallel with similar moves in other European countries, like the U.K.. It also illustrates to what extent the traditional room for manoeuvre of the unions between workers and bosses has been reduced to the point that they no longer have any choice in sides to take in cases of strikes: the must openly take a position against the workers in struggle.

#### England - A correction

On the English magazine A Communist Effort (which has since ceased publication) A critique of the publication appeared in changes no. 41 (French ed.) and no. 41-2 (English ed.). In this critique it was said (p. 9 French ed.) that "the stated intention to overcome the theoretical divisions between libertarians, councilists, situationists etc... may appear to be connected to the militant will displayed by ACE...", but in the English edition (p. 19) the section "go beyond the theoretical division between libertarian, councilist, situationist etc..." is in quotation marks as if it were a quotation from ACE. We have received a protest from ACE over this and wish to state that this passage is not a quotation but a comment on their ideas. Their letter of May 12th 1985 considers other points which shall be commented on at greater length in an issue of Echanges devoted to letters.

#### France - A nice Friday (in French by the "Savages" - available from changes)

The parallel between the metro strike in Paris and the seizure of hostages in Nantes (on Friday, December 20th. 1985, hence 'a nice Friday') is taken up in this text, but in a much more balanced way. Can one cast onto the same pan on the scales "two events with such a great difference in meaning" which by chance took place on the same day "but also because of the vindic-

ation of the upholders of law and order"? Even if one can read immediately in this text that the "ruffians were stranded in Nantes" while "the metro workers won their demands", is it not an exaggeration to state that they "in turn shook those who make us shake every day".

It is not because the media associate the two events that one must follow them just where the interests of the ruling class push us. Capital has always tried to amalgamate class struggle with individual acts, to the act of desperados barricaded inside the law courts. They found themselves in the very media trap they thought that they could destroy. As the text underlines: "the way that their image was broadcast naturally remained beyond their control". And it remained so - just like their hope for freedom - because their action remained completely individual and only attacked the superstructures of the system: the media, justice, the police, the prison system etc., and could not go beyond them. That is why it authorized the repressive deployment of these structures. One could right reams on it and attempt to approach general considerations on repression, but one can never bridge the abyss dividing such acts from the class struggle, even if their authors are undeniably proletarians forced to take that path by the inexorable thrust of the system.

The drivers' strike on the metro had no need for all that to strike directly and hard: its very existence became known to millions and thus it was mentioned in other terms than those used for the seizure of hostages, even if one tried to make out that it was only an individual revolt. The text contains a good description of this strike and links it with a recent conflict: that of the railway workers at the end of September. But this is only to state that "when the aim was achieved, the collective force evaporated" and that "the state was no longer obliged to dissolve this force". If it is correct to say that it is the state which represses in the case of the hostage seizure, one cannot say this in the case of the drivers' strike. This fiction derives from the fact that the Paris transport system is a public service, while the drivers are faced with a boss who defines their relation of exploitation: calling into question the state for the drivers, this again reinforces the idea that the class struggle is a collection of revolts, hence the assimilation with the hostage seizure.

The two strikes mentioned above, that of the drivers and the railwaymen, which apparently are individual, are to be linked by their class character and their wildcat nature (the text clearly underlines their illegality which indirectly shows how the union was useless) to a series of conflicts over the last five years (the struggles around 1982 for the 39 hour working week, law, the strikes in the sorting offices in the Autumn of 1983, the strike at Talbot Poissy in the winter of 1983-84 and the movements on the railways in the Spring of 1984). If one looks at all these conflicts together one can identify the elements which appear clearly in the metro drivers' strike. They did not worry about legality, nor about the transgression of some "moral code" or other - they acted for their immediate class interests. From that moment no repression could budge them. To try this would have created even greater chaos. One could only force them to give in by giving in immediately. This did not happen because "the state was forced to destroy such a force", but because it had no other way out. That is the capital difference as regards the seizure of the hostages. The state repressed the revolt because it could do so, and for the strike it gave in because it could not repress it.

"The fleeting aspect of such a movement hinders the constitution of long term links within the strike that could outlast those circumstances and the arising of the need to communicate with proletarians in other situations." Starting from a correct statement that the movement did not adopt a structure later on because it gained its goal almost immediately, this phrase demonstrates, nevertheless, two other ideas:

- that the class struggle should give rise to permanent forms of organization.
- that a "formal" representation should lead the striking workers to address other workers (rather as the Nantes desperados appealed to the media).

In the class struggle, the struggle itself with its momentary characteristics is simultaneously organization and an extension. They needs of the struggle create the necessary formalizations and orientations. There is nothing that outlasts the struggle itself: that is why the metro strike was completely in line with the strikes of the recent past and had nothing to do with the seizure of hostages. When the struggle finished, all that the strike had created disappeared because it was no longer needed. Formally, because this always exists in a potential form. One of these forms is the permanence of exploitation in a certain relation of forces which creates a solidarity of interests and a possibility of action: that is the permanence of the organization. The other, that is the workers' consciousness when there is this possibility: that is the one of communication. All this takes place outside the system's structures of domination and once more that is why the seizure of the hostages and the metro strike moved in two totally separate directions.

#### About the recent social unrest in Belgium

From mid-April to the second week of June, Belgium has been the scene of continuous strikes which culminated in several proper strike waves approaching general strike proportions during several weeks in May -no trains or buses, not postal deliveries, drastically reduced telephone communications, blocked roads, the capital's underground strike-bound, as was the port of Antwerp, the port of Ghent crippled by the occupation of the bridge at Zelzate by pickets which prevented it from being opened to let ships pass etc. etc. The 'normal' life of the country was almost totally paralysed.

It all started in early April with an unofficial strike in the Belgian province of Limburg. This was caused by rumours over redundancies in the coal mining industry with probable pit closures and even more unemployment. A large majority of anxious miners stopped work to protest strongly against these intentions and to protect their jobs. There were clashes between the strikers and scabs in Waterschei and Zolder.

A few weeks later there was widespread working class resistance to big cuts in the government budget and a planned attack on social security.

A Belgian friend told us: "Ever since 1982, the Christian Democrat - Liberal government have wanted to economize drastically. Wage reductions were enforced and the currency was devalued. The budget deficit was to be cut by 200bn Belgian Francs (= £6 bn.), mainly through reductions in the public health service and in the social sector. It was said that "after this Belgium will be a new country". But the government hesitated because it was afraid of social conflicts."

The miners began to move. There was such strong pressure from the rank and file that after a week the strike was made official. Then the conflict spread to other pits, such as Winterslag. Prime Minister Martens promised more money to be invested in the coal industry in this part of the country and guaranteed that there would be no dismissals in 1986. In two pits the miners returned to work, but not in those around the city of Genk.

Straight after this strike was joined by railway strikes, They started spontaneously in Charleroi. The unions had been confronted with a fait accompli on Monday, May 12th. The strike ended on Thursday, but two days later, on Saturday 17th., there were other railway strikes in Henegouwen province. The alarmed trade union bureaucracy made it official the same day.

There are two kinds of trade union in Belgium:

- the so-called socialist ones organized in the ABVV (or the FTGS in French)
- the catholic ones organized in the ACV (The General Christian Trade Union movement. This catholic trade union movement is linked to the Christian Democrat Party and therefore is not a very reliable ally for the other trade union movement which is linked to the opposition.

On Saturday, May 17th., the Belgian daily newspaper De Morgen (The Morning), which pretends to be more or less a 'socialist' paper and is published in the Flemish city of Ghent, wrote:

"Yesterday evening the ABVV decided to adopt a strong stand. Strike action will take place on Thursday 22nd. and Friday 23rd. Meanwhile large parts of the country are paralysed by strikes already. There is hardly any public transport. Nor do other branches function normally. Education has nearly come to a standstill. So too has the port of Antwerp, but here completely."

The quotation makes clear that the ABVV had by no means any real control over what was happening. Our Belgian friend told us that the 'socialist' trade unions did make strikes official, partly to act as a safety valve, partly to pursue political objectives. He also said that the strikes were in part wildcat and in part official under the leadership of both the ABVV and ACV trade union bureaucracies because the catholic trade union movement participated in the struggle from the outset. Certainly the ACV did so in order to be in a position in which it could eventually call off the strikes. Although involved in the action, it behaved as an associate of the government. This was something publicly recognized by the government. On Saturday May 26th., Prime Minister Martens declared "The ACV is our big trump card!" (quoted in De Morgen 26.5.86.)

On Saturday May 17th. De Morgen had written:

"Yesterday there were so many strikes that one could say that there is by now a general strike wave. For some days there have been no trains, or local and long distance buses. The approaches to the capital are jammed with traffic. There is no underground service after 11 p.m. Only 68 out of 351 post offices in Bruxelles are open. The strike in Antwerp started the day before that announced."

Our Belgian friend, who works in the telephone and telegraph service, told us that the strike started spontaneously in the Liège branch and then spread like wildfire to the other cities.

The teachers' strike was stronger in Wallonia than in Flanders. This was because government plans threaten jobs particularly in the former area. What the Walloon Minister of Education Damseaux (liberal) said about the strike caused much bitterness. Most of the teachers were ACV members. This union was worried about keeping its members under control as next year the factory trade union delegates will be re-elected. So on the one hand the ACV wanted to back the government, but on the other it did not want to lose face on the shop floor. As the social tension increased, it took sides against the workers, the rank and file. It called off all officially called strikes or those that it had recognized. This is why a large crowd tried to march on the ACV offices in Antwerp and why an ACV official was maltreated by furious miners at Zwatberg.

However, the ACV was not the only trade union federation that tried to put a brake on the working class struggle. As we have said, the miners' union made the miners' strike official after a week. But in mid-May it suddenly withdrew its recognition. The strike committee in winterslag which had been run by the rank and file from the very beginning, decided to continue the struggle. Women organized financial help and the food supply, just like miners' wives had done in Britain during the big miners' strike.

Just while the miners' union was trying its best to put an end to the struggle in the coal industry, the 'socialist' trade union federation was forced by its members to show a more fighting spirit elsewhere in the country. This led to many kinds of action: 24 hour strikes, 48 hour strikes, work stoppages and so on, mostly, if they were official, with the clear characteristics of a protest or sharp warning, or, if they were unofficial, something far more threatening.

The unofficial miners' strike lasted about a week. Then the strike committee decided that the miners should return to work. There was no other solution because the union refused to award strike pay. However, it declared its readiness to offer strike pay for the first days before the strike was made official. But this was with the condition of an immediate return to work. During the second period of unofficial action there would be no financial aid from the trade union movement.

On Friday May 23rd., De Morgen published an interview with a miner. "If the ABVV or ACV calls another strike," he told the reporter, "we certainly will not heed that call."

On Saturday May 24th., Grauwels, the chairman of the unofficial strike committee told De Morgen "The miners' strike collapsed because of splitting tactics of the trade union movement. Also hunger helped to defeat us."

The employers in the port of Ghent tried to buy off the pickets blocking the bridge at Zelzate, stopping ships from entering the port. Large sums were offered, but the pickets refused them.

During this turbulent May there were also strikes on the railways and in the port of Antwerp even though the dockers risked police action to force them to give up. Letters containing orders of this kind were prepared by the local authorities, but they were not distributed until the end of the strike. Obviously they feared massive civil unrest with violence as their last card, which would have made things even worse.

The trade union movement used much more subtle methods. The ABVV federation called a mass demonstration in the streets of Bruxelles on Saturday May 31st. Its significance was very clearly formulated by the Walloon Ce Soir (Tonight) newspaper. It wrote four days before the demonstration was due to be held that "Social unrest will last until the demonstration on the 31st." Apparently the paper understood that the demonstration was called as the swansong of the struggle, a means to calm things down. Certainly this was so. But after the demonstration the strike wave did not ebb, despite all the trade union efforts.

On Monday June 2nd., the Flemish paper Het Laatste nieuws (The Latest News) informed its readers about the difficulties the trade union movement was meeting. One of its headlines read; "Trains cannot yet get back on the tracks". In other words, the strikes had been official in many cases so far, but the rank and file had done what they wanted all the same and only listened to their 'leaders' if they said what they wanted to hear. This was not clear at the beginning when the unions were forced to follow their members. It became obvious at the end when the members refused to follow their leaders for a short while.

This situation was also well formulated in Ce Soir. On May 30th., the paper wrote that the trade unions had signed contracts with the employers which guaranteed social peace. But these contracts were not respected... The paper should have added, by the rank and file.

The trade unions, according to our Belgian friend, called many strikes and then called them off as soon as possible. But for weeks and weeks there were strike actions throughout the country, both official and unofficial, with no clear division. Apart from the miners, railwaymen, the Antwerp dockers, the postmen and some cities' dustmen, apart from the bus drivers or teachers, there were many other branches on strike. In Antwerp there was a mass meeting one day and the crowd shouted that the trade union movement should call a general strike, but the trade union official on the platform refused to give a satisfactory reply. It was just one of the moments when the difference between the workers' struggle and the 'struggle' of the trade unions could be seen. Our Belgian friend said: "I would not be surprised if I were told that the planned cuts in the government's budget weren't deliberately leaked to afford the trade unions an opportunity to let off steam."

#### Footnote

The Financial Times (10.6.86.) wrote under the headline "Belgian protests abate" that "Belgium yesterday enjoyed its first day in four weeks free of strikes and demonstrations against planned government spending cuts." The government has won "a week's respite from the unions with the promise of new talks on the cuts, following the first round of negotiations the week before. If the government insists that the package must be maintained, it is evident that these discussions aim at softening the most drastic cuts." There is no doubt that the revolt of the rank and file obtained this result without it the original plans would have been implemented with the agreement of the unions or no more than lip service opposition.



The following article has been written by a dutch comrade for the bulletin of the group 'Action and Thought'. We will discuss in another issue some minor criticisms about secondary picketing and what was the role of the South Wales NUM in the action against Port Talbot.

### The British miners strike of 1984/1985

a retrospective view of some events at St. John's Colliery in Maesteg, South Wales

to the memory of Charley White (1952-1985), the last president of the local lodge

In the september issue of 1984 I wrote an article on the British miners strike based upon some events in South Wales. This summer I revisited some of the miners because I wondered how they were since then and I want to write about it in this article. I will briefly go into the course of the strike until its end in march 1985, and I will pay more detailed attention to one particular action. After that I will try to depict the relations in the mine after the strike and finally tell about the struggle against the pit closure. I have dedicated this article to Charley White who died on december 1, 1985. From the beginning of the strike Charley had been a stimulating and motivating power who was constantly active at picketing and at all other things that were important to the strike. Being a black man probably caused him many arrests by the police, very often for ridiculous reasons. In the struggle against pit closure, too, Charley displayed a ceaseless energy. Maybe that was too much for him: 27 days before the final pit closure he died of cerebral hemorrhage. Some miners were so much affected by his death, they could not attend his funeral. Though he did not live in Maesteg, he was buried there amongst his friends and colleagues who will never forget him nor the strike. The miners have put a stone on his grave in his honour.

The further course of the struggle.

The whole year through the strike was characterised by secondary picketing (which by the way is not illegal as I erroneously wrote in september '84)<sup>1)</sup> and by collecting money and food. Since I have already told the most important things about that, I will restrict myself here to some examples. In a solidarity paper issued by union branches in Birmingham of june '84 some reports are given of meetings that were addressed by South Wales miners. The paper further writes that in a meeting of a branch of the Labour Party £75,- was collected. It mentions food collections in Birmingham outside supermarkets on every thursday and friday evening and on saturday afternoons. It announces a public meeting on "Women in the pit strike". The 50 p. that is paid for tours in Sikh temples ( a religion in

India, from where many people emigrated to Great Britain ) were given to the miner. A miner from St. John's wrote in this paper: "When we have meetings they got our view which is entirely different to the media. They walk out with a new outlook on the dispute and are grateful to us for having told them about the struggle that's going on. (...) We put our case from the heart and get a better response even from people who are sympathetic anyway, than if the strike was discussed with out anyone directly involved being there."

By the way, I have been asked to thank very much the readers of Act and Thought who either directly or via the paper donated money. It amounted to £63,13. The article from september '84 has been translated and sent to Maesteg, so that the strikers could read what was written about them; the same will be done with this article. The solidarity from very many British workers as well as from workers from other countries has been tremendous, but the miners themselves have worked hard to achieve this.

Secondary picketing was another feature of this strike. As has been mentioned, picketing at the pits in South Wales was not necessary, not until the end were there on a total number of some 19,500 strikers about 300 scabs. Because of the crazy amount of police and their very rough behavior, this form of action actually was not very effective. The convoys of lorries loaded with coal and iron ore that drove several times a day from the BSC-plant in Port Talbot to the works in Llanwern, could not really be stopped. As a result of these experiences the following plan arose: if we cannot stop the lorries, we will make sure that the lorries cannot be loaded. In other words: some miners figured out a plan to occupy the cranes that are used to unload the coalships. Since I have been informed in detail by some participants on this drastic action, I can give a rather complete report of it.

From about 15 pits around Port Talbot some men who could be trusted were asked and the action was thoroughly discussed. They looked for volunteers for "a radical action that may last a couple of days". From St. John's some 15 men volunteered. On thursday the 29th of august at 22.30 h. they drove in 2 vans to Port Talbot, a distance of some 15 miles. At the old police station in Port Talbot, that was being used as a barracks for policemen who fought the picketers at BSC they met the vans with workers from the other pits. At 3 to eleven the 8 vans drove up to a gate of BSC. One guard came out of his box and said: "What's happenin boys? Is this an invasion?" The moment he said that he realised what was going on and ran back to his box to give the alarm. One of the miners ran after him, grabbed him in his neck and swung him over his desk. He pulled all the wires of the switchboard and the wall, from the telephones and the electric water boiler, and crushed

a walkie talkie. After 30 seconds the convoy drove ahead. Another guard who had noticed something was going on, stepped on the road and jumped aside just in time (later, in courts, he declared that a van had driven over his leg. But even the Judge wouldn't believe that: a van with 12 men inside driving over ones leg without the leg breaking, was too incredible a story he thought). In full speed they passed along the offices where a lot of policemen and dogs were also gathered. They had not yet been warned since the guard at the gate had been put out of action. Now however a general alarm was sounded. After arriving at the pier, the miners parked the last van with flat tires on the road. The other vans raced on to the cranes. A lucky coincidence had put the three cranes together, ready to unload a ship. The crane-drivers fled immediately. In a big hurry the miners carried the supplies they had brought along upstairs (cans of food, water, walkie talkies, a radio) and barricaded all possible accesses to the cranes with braced wire that they had also brought along.

After this action which was carefully prepared and very accurately carried out, 109 miners were 200 feet above the ground at 23.05 h. and they could study the whole situation. Why the cranes were standing together was quickly clear. Right underneath was The Argos, a Spanish ship that on its maiden trip had brought 90,000 tons of coal to Fort Talbot. A good catch, indeed.

In the meantime the police had come into action and cut off the electricity and they directed two big searchlights on the cranes. This could have easily blinded the miners with all the risks involved. The workers answered attempts to persuade them to give up by throwing down big poles that were on the cranes. This of course could not scare off her majesty's police force and they prepared to storm the cranes with the workers shouting and laughing at them. Once within "100 yd-range" the workers threw big bulbs, about the size of a rugbyball, at the police. In the panic caused by the exploding bulbs it was hard to see whether it was the police pulling back the dogs or the other way around. After this the police kept at a distance.

At night two workers sneaked out, after another worker had already withdrawn from the scene. This man had such fear of heights that it would have been irresponsible for him to stay in the cranes. The two strikers who went away in the middle of night were on a special mission. They were to fetch extra food in case the action would be going on on Monday. These two miners were sports divers who knew the neighbouring waters well and who had taken their equipment. They managed to get away unnoticed.

The next morning at seven thirty the routine started that was to last for several days. One of the cranes had been made the 'cantine' and the first shift had its breakfast there. Between every two men there was a can of beans in tomato sauce and of course tea, for which the empty can served as a cup. At eight o'clock the second shift had breakfast and the third at eight thirty. The rest of the time was spent on guarding the cranes, keeping an eye on the police and fighting rain, cold, storm and boredom. Under normal circumstances the cranes are not being used at a windspeed over 40 m.p.h., but the miners have had to endure windspeeds of more than 70 m.p.h. (heavy storm).

The crew of The Argo were very afraid and did not venture on deck. The ship was tight to the pier and could not sail. It was in serious danger however, since there was not enough water underneath the ship at low tide. Outside the harbour there were seven more ships waiting. Therefore it came as no surprise when they were ordered to leave by the High Courts. The normal procedure in handing over the order, however, could not be followed, for when somebody wanted to give the piece of paper to the miners, they threw several things at him. The constable got away as fast as he could and then they told the miners on a megafone to leave. Then the president of the South Wales NUM asked the men to stop the action, because they had reached their goal and he did not want them to go to jail. After heated discussions the occupiers decided after some time very reluctantly to cease the action. Sunday-evening at five thirty they left the cranes, deadtired but very proud for having carried out a very effective action. Before coming down they had made some demands: a. a luxurious meal from a first class restaurant; b. decent treatment and no violence; c. inspection of the cranes by the police and BSC only in the presence of representatives of the NUM.

The Spanish crew of The Argo gave a big applause when the miners descended the stairs and split up in groups according to the participating mines. The police too, showed respect for the action, not in the least because they couldn't believe their eyes when they saw how many workers were involved. They had not counted on 106 men and so there were not enough police-vans. Since the local police station could not have such a big group, the workers were spread over villages in the neighbourhood, where their first demand was given in to. After having been in jail for 24 hours the miners returned home where they faced very angry housewives. They had been informed by the union immediately but they had been in great fears for 2 days and nights.

In the courtmeeting, where great numbers of miners in the street showed their solidarity in a loud voice, the prosecutor dropped several charges on the condition that the workers pleaded guilty on "unlawful assembly". According to the original charges the workers were accused of having caused £10,000 damage to the cranes;

the owner of The Argos claimed £30,000 damage and the workers were accused of assault. It is easy to guess why the prosecutor was so moderate. They didn't want to give too much publicity to the case, since it might inspire other miners to similar actions. They probably also wanted to prevent such a big group of workers becoming martyrs. Whatever the reasons: the miners were condemned to a fine (that was paid by the NUM) and got two years probation. Yet there was a dark side to the whole matter. One of the men, a 19 year old miner, was so scared that he would have to go to jail for a long time, that he committed suicide before the trial took place.

After the strike

The strike itself ended just as sad as the action at the collieries. On tuesday march 7, 1985 all miners in South Wales went back to work; the strike had lasted a whole year but for two days. Because the number of scabs were increasing more and more in the various striking areas, the decision had been made to a joint return to work. On monday the 6th of march 100 miners returned to the pit enticed by extra bonuses by the NCB. The majority however refused to become a scab at the last moment. At six thirty in the morning the 700 remaining strikers walked back to the pit under the union banner.

Working conditions had deteriorated drastically and, in the middle of april '85, it quickly became clear that the NCB wanted to close down St. John's, although this pit had always been considered as a long life mine. In order to hasten the closure the management tried to provoke a strike by making it as hard as possible for the workers to dig coal. As a result of a strike the production quota for the rest of the year would be very low and because the reason for that do not appear in the books, it would seem that St. John's produced very little. Miners who dig coal while standing in water, normally get higher wages and were allowed shorter hours to give them time to get dry clothes on. This was abolished. Maintenance used to be carried out at night, but the management stopped that shift. As a result the two remaining shifts only had some 2 hours to actually dig coal. A shift lasted seven hours and a quarter; over 2 hours were needed to walk to and from the face and from the remaining 5 hours a considerable part now was lost on the necessary maintenance. Yet the miners managed to produce some 400 to 500 tons a shift compared to some 300 to 400 tons before. The miners worked so hard because they wanted to show that the mine was profitable, while they could also use the extra money after a year of bitter poverty.

A completely other way in which the miners of St. John's tried to make sure that their pit stayed open was organising a public inquiry where the advantages

and disadvantages were thoroughly discussed. This public inquiry has been used here for the first time as a means of action, at least in the nationalized coal-industry. The action committee approached four experts, one of whom was Alan Fisher a former president of the TUC. These four men thoroughly prepared the inquiry and listened to a lot of experts. The NCB refused to participate. I want to mention some conclusions from the report that resulted from this inquiry. According to moderate estimates there is over 4 million tons of high grade coal in St. John's, a quality that is very scarce in Great Britain. This means some 20 years of work for about 450 miners. Keeping the pit open would mean enormous savings for the government in unemployment money and the such. Further the skill and experience of the miners would be saved. At the end the report states: "... there is a powerful case for keeping St. John's open ... The coal is there, and a willing workforce to mine it; narrow commercial considerations indicate that the pit is far from being a lost cause; and it makes no sense to remove a major source of jobs from an area already suffering the adverse consequences of economic change when there are few alternative sources of employment."

It was all in vain. On december 28, 1985 St. John's Colliery closed down, the 13th mine in South Wales after the strike. Once again the ruling classes had shown their true face: workers are only needed if money can be made off them and when they have the "insolence" to challenge them, they will use all means to keep them under control, if necessary in using the most brutal force. The closure of St. John's meant that the group of miners fell apart completely, those who had stood together so closely, who had for over a year formed a genuine unity. Part of them retired early, some of the men work in one of the few pits that are left in South Wales (now they have to travel quite a distance to their work and back), some work at BSC, the company where they fought with the police for a year, some are unemployed. The scabs have disappeared from the mining-industry, too: they would never have been accepted among other miners. The silk purse they had received from BSC during the strike turned out to be a sow's ear. Also because of this the community in Maesteg has fallen apart even more: many houses are for sale, shops are closed, the pubs are empty. Traditionally these are socially important places. The early shift e.g. had a pint there in the afternoon, but there is no early shift anymore. Two years ago, during the strike, the pubs were crowded every evening, now only in the weekends. "You don't see each other anymore", one of the miners said. When I was in Maesteg and some of the workers whom I had met, heard that I was in town, they came together again. This was one of the rare occasions they met. On the one hand it is a pity that Act and Thought can not publish photographs so that the readers could see the dreary sight St. John's offers now. On the other hand, there are many examples in Holland too of closed and broken down factories.

## Notes.

1) Formally secondary picketing is not illegal indeed, but by means of a complicated set of laws and regulations it has been made practically impossible. First of all there is a legal prohibition of what is circumscribed as "violent" picketing. In the second place one of the "union laws" that were passed by the Thatcher government says that secondary picketing may not "disturb the public order" and that the police have the authority to determine to what extent the public order is being disturbed in concrete cases. If the police judge that secondary picketing is disturbing the public order, then picketing is for this reason "illegal". In the third place a company that feels itself being disadvantaged by secondary picketing, can submit a complaint to a court, which then will forbid illegal picketing. For purely tactical reasons, in order not to push the matters to extremes, the NCB did not do so during the dispute. This, of course, does not alter anything on the matter of secondary picketing.

2) Not only from the Sikhs, but also from other people from Asia the miners received much sympathy and also concrete support. Though neither the Sikhs, nor the other people are miners, some of them collected money and food at shops in Birmingham. From these groups individual donations came in from everyone from 6-year olds to pensioners.

## How wages rise when profits fall

In the past decade, the ageing industries of Europe and America have faced stiff competition from low-cost manufacturers in the third world. In spite of that threat, these industries raised wages faster than industries that were less affected by competition. Why?

Figures for America, with its supposedly flexible labour markets, show that wages in the beleaguered car and steel industries went up faster than the average for the manufacturing sector during the 1970s. In the face of competition, wages not merely failed to slow down, they actually started to rise faster than in other manufacturing industries.

This casts doubt on the conventional explanation of industrial stagnation in Europe and America: jobs vanished because workers maintained their demands for steady wage increases, even though

cheap imports were reducing what their employers could feasibly pay. Economists usually expect falling demand for a product to lead to slower wage growth for the workers who make it. Especially in Europe, the argument goes, workers managed to resist that pressure. But the figures for both Europe and America hint at an odder link between foreign competition and wages; they suggest that falling demand raises, not cuts, pay rises.

Almost all of America's steel and car workers belong to unions, but by itself this does not explain how they could

stretch their wage advantage when their industries were in deep trouble. Much of the rest of American manufacturing is unionised, too—though not to the same extent. If the strength of unions were the only factor, these workers should have done better still in the 1960s—when profits were higher, when demand for labour in their industries was still growing and before international competition started to bite. Yet the ratio of pay in the steel industry to pay elsewhere in American manufacturing fell 7% in the "good" years between 1960 and 1970, and went up a remarkable 27% in the "bad" years between 1970 and 1980.

Mr Colin Lawrence of Columbia University and Mr Robert Lawrence of the Brookings Institution may have found an answer to the puzzle\*. They think that, in certain kinds of industry, unions have more bargaining strength when their firms are struggling than when they are doing well.

Union power, they argue, depends partly on the ability of managers to substitute capital for labour. Any industry can do this when output is rising and managers are adding to the capacity of their plant. Firms can then take the opportunity to buy more capital-intensive machinery if wages are rising too fast. But if output is stagnant or falling—because of a lack of demand or new foreign competition—the balance between capital and labour tips.

Companies may no longer be unable to afford new machines, and so can only try to switch existing plant to more capital-intensive use. In some industries it is especially hard to make that switch. Large-plant, capital-intensive factories typically offer few opportunities for substituting existing capital for labour. If the machinery in these factories has a long working life, so much the worse for the bosses—they cannot rely on using replacement investment to switch over to using less labour. If, in addition, they cannot sell their machinery for alternative uses, the managers may be well and truly trapped. As long as their operations can make at least a small contribution to covering overheads, it makes sense to stay in business. But, in the meantime, big wage increases may produce a thumping loss.

Steel fits this description well. Falling demand softened the threat of new labour-saving investment, and with it the strongest discipline on union bargaining. From the mid-1970s, it seemed that the American industry could never regain its international competitiveness, whatever happened to domestic labour costs. But it still made sense for firms to stay in business until their plant wore out because their earnings were helping to cover fixed costs that would otherwise have to be written off. (Buyers for second-hand blast furnaces are scarce.) As long as firms were in this bind, the union could press its advantage and increase its share of the remaining revenues while the going was good.

The steel business is now in such dire straits, according to the Lawrences, that some firms can credibly threaten to close down at once. Thus, in the closing stages of what they call the "end-game", the union can be pushed by management into making concessions in order to keep plants open. This has happened in the American steel industry since 1982, with a series of deals in which low wage increases were traded for job security. But until the threat to shut down looks credible, the union has the upper hand.

Figures for the rest of American manufacturing seem to agree with the theory (see chart). On average, the 57 industries that make up America's manufacturing sector increased their output by 27% between 1970 and 1980. But the 10 industries that paid the biggest wage increases over that period increased their output by only 16%. (The increase in steelworkers' pay was the highest of any sector; their output fell by 16%.)

Those 10 industries had a higher rate of union membership, a higher proportion of capital to labour and a higher proportion of production in large-scale plants. They also had higher concentration ratios—the proportion of the industry's output produced by the four largest firms. That suggests they once benefited from economies of scale but suffered from capital inflexibility in the face of falling demand.

This seems to fit with the Lawrences' theory—especially since, as the chart shows, the industries' high wage growth was not caused by untypical location or demographics. The ten have no more than their fair share of workers in high-growth southern states. Their workers are no younger than average.

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