

No 64 April - June 1990

# ECHANGES

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ECHANGES ET MOUVEMENT, BM Box 91, London WC1N3XX, United Kingdom

## FRANCE HS

A contre courant syndical et politique (4 rue des Iris, 52100 St Dizier) No 10/Dec 89: Poland and liberal capitalism - East Germany: a revolution ending at the supermarket - Peugeot strike 1989. No 11/Jan. 90: Of the good use of corpse in politics - Peugeot strike: aftermath of a struggle.

Marseille edition (of A contre courant) (11 rue Saint Vincent de Paul, 13004 Marseille) No 3: Mitterand and emigration - Waves in the Berre Banks (power station and pollution) - Black sheep in the education unions (on the disintegration of the unions) - Far right in Marseille - The reaction coming from the sky (on the present role of religion) - Two articles on the underground and politics in Marseille, past and present.

La vie au travail (Life at work) Le Point No 908 - 12/2/90:

This article in French analyses all the tricks developed by workers (including all the hierarchy) in a personal use of the modern techniques inside the place of work: it is sheer recuperation of time, money and conveniences. But the conclusion is that productivity could improve from a permissive attitude on these questions. (copy at Echanges)

Comité d'action de Serre de la Fare (Pont de Chardon, 43370 Solognac sur Loire) Various documents in French concerning the struggle against the building of a dam on the Loire. Two pamphlets: "ALERTE" (Autumn 89): what will be the next struggle against the building of the dam; and "Complément d'enquête sur un aménagement différé" (Winter 90): Plenty of confusion about the dam.. The site is still occupied, discussions still going out of the stage, political bargaining, ambitions, all things in which the Greens have their play .. honorably.

"Epilogue provisoire": leaflet on the present situation with the signature: 'against the ecologist sleeping pills' (24/2/90).

Echanges et Mouvement  
BM Box 91  
LONDON WC1 N3XX  
United Kingdom

brochure  
pamphlet

to

First of May 1990

Rencontres transnationales pour l'autonomie (La Lézarde, BP 161, 75966 Paris Cedex 20) (in French and in Italian): Text for the organization of various punctual demonstrations in Paris on the 1/5/90 to "contribute to the recomposition of a movement for autonomy which overcomes national boundaries".

Libertarian publishers

Leaflet giving a list of publication of small libertarian publishers (all works in French):

ACRATIE, BP 23, 64130 Mauleon.

ANALIS, BP 28, 33031 Bordeaux Cedex.

ATELIER DE CREATION LIBERTAIRE, 13 Rue Pierre Blanc, 690010 Lyon.

LE GOUT DE L'ETRE, BP 403, 8004 Amiens Cedex.

LUDD, 4 bis rue de Palestine, 75019 Paris.

NAUTILUS, 18 rue Oger, 92340 Bourg La Reine.

NOIR ET ROUGE, Samedi soir Dimanche matin, BP 22, 75660 Paris Cedex 14.

NOIR, Beaumont 24, 1012 Lausanne, Switzerland.

Commission Prison Repression (BP 163, 75463 Paris Cedex 10) 3 Documents in French: Open Letter to the parents and friends of detained people association - Two Iranian dissidents taken as hostages - La lettre de cavale (November and December 89).

L'Unisme (Le Frondeur, BP 105, 94402 Vitry sur Seine Cedex) No 6/April-June 90: Federalism - Capitalism and libertarian communism - On the events in Algeria.

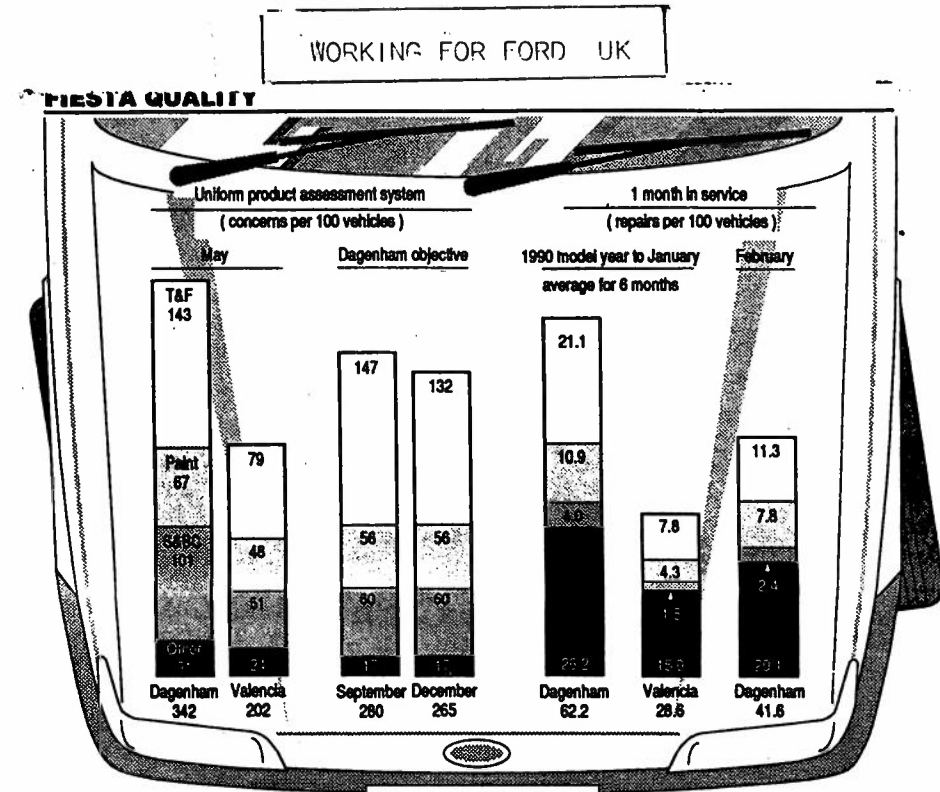
Le Frondeur (same address) will tell more on a disagreement with the people publishing "L'Unisme" and will soon publish a new bulletin. They have sent a pamphlet in French as No 1 of "Cahiers du Temps Présent": Potentialités situationnistes - Reflexions on the free communication and its enemies - Yiannis Ioannidis.

Temps Critiques (Editions de l'Impliqué, BP 874, 38036 Grenoble)

The first issue of this new review to be published soon will contain articles on Germany. Some extracts from the presentation text: "This review should not be purely theoretical but rather a review of critical activity either in France or abroad. It is open to all people refusing to follow what common sense and consensual representation try to impose on our thinking, mainly that the capitalist society would be a definite one. Of course it is out of the question to publish any kind of contribution answering our call; but we want to assert as a definite and positive fact that there is neither possible unification, nor a definite theory for criticism

cars for Volkswagen, with all the parts being shipped to Zwickau from West Germany. A recent report on Volkswagen's experiences in East Germany carried the title "United into chaos", explaining how extremely difficult it is to reach a production target of 50 cars per day now, where Volkswagen plans to assemble 250000 cars per year after 1994. It would of course be wrong to assume Volkswagen engineers and managers were not trying hard enough to reach their production targets. The mood of East German car workers at the Trabant plant is characterized best by the stories they are telling in the canteen: One of the Volkswagen men is said to have insulted them all in the most incredible manner: He described them as working just as slowly as negroes.

T.S. 5/90



The fact that the highly industrialized, densely populated working-class areas in the southern half of East Germany have voted massively in favour of Christian-Democrats in the national and local elections of recent months has been widely publicized, and this has been understood as a clear vote in favour of radical changes in the East German economy and in society in general. On the other hand anybody who cares to have a closer look at working-class attitudes in the factories and offices will be unable <sup>not</sup> to come to totally different conclusions. In fact, why should workers in East Germany want to change a situation which gives them a lot of advantages in comparison with workers in West Germany? One of the fundamental achievements certainly is the five-hour working day for the majority of East German workers, with full pay for an eight-and-a-half-hour working day, of course. A West German research institute recently questioned a representative sample of 2000 East German employees asking for hours effectively worked. More than half of those questioned indicated they were doing nothing on the job (because of breakdowns of machines and lack of supplies) for up to three hours per day. In agriculture and in the building industry one quarter of the employees enjoyed the privilege of three to four hours per day spent on the job without working. This situation has definitely prevailed in the past decades, but it is very illuminating to see that it has not changed in recent months. A continuous effort for a duration of eight hours is something the vast majority of East German workers still has to learn - if they want to learn it at all.

How far West German capitalists and joint-ventures will be able to teach them, still is an entirely open question. For the moment West German car producers who were among the first to move (Volkswagen will take over the Trabant production in Zwickau, Opel the Wartburg production in Eisenach, Mercedes the production of commercial vehicles in Ludwigsfelde) seem to be on the brink of total despair. The Trabant factory has begun to assemble

because there is no class able to carry the future unification of society..'

Courant Alternatif (OCL, Egregore, BP 213 - 51058 Reims Cedex) No 91/Dec 89: The campaign of free Jean Philippe Casabonne - A mutiny at Clairvaux - Eastern countries: where Europe is going? - Europe 1993: formal social politics for more capitalist efficiency - Struggles in the steel industry and education. No 93/Feb 90: Situation in Hungary - East Germany: the movement of the 'united left' - Nuclear waste and the their dumping: guerilla in Segré country - French politics on emigration - Strike at the BNP (bank). No 94/March 90: Working on Sundays means flexibility and effective work - Strikes: BNP (Paris) and Case Poclair (St Dizier) - Gorbachev and Eastern countries).

The share of capital is better in France (in French) (Usine Nouvelle 28/9/89).

A comparison between four Western countries gives the repartition of surplus value between capital and labour between 1985 and 1988 (yearly average as a percentage of gross national product). The best one for capital is the country having had a socialist president for ten years, France.

L'Intersyndicaliste (GSED, 11 rue St. Vincent de Paul, 13004 Marseille) No 29/Jan-March 90: East wind, west wind.. - The beginning of a very interesting article on USSR: "To end with all what forgotten, never said, repressed.."

L'audience des syndicats depuis les années 50 (The union audience since the 50's). A study in French (by H. Bouzonnie) in 'Revue Française des Affaires Sociales' gives a detailed account of the positions of the various unions in France today. (Copy at Echanges)

La course des salaires et des profits (in French - L'Usine Nouvelle 28/9/89): The race between wages and profits in France - some figures and facts on exploitation between 1980 and to-day. (Copy at Echanges)

## BELGIUM

Communisme (et Le Communiste) (in French) (BP 54 - BXL 31 - Bruxelles, or GCI, c/o L'Herbe Rouge, 1bis rue d'Alesia, 75014 Paris) No 30: Communism springs up again in each proletarian revolt - China: the democracy beats up and massacres the proletariat - Notes on struggles in Eastern Europe: a wall is pulled down but poverty is still on - Contribution to the critique of economy, chapter 3: delimitation of our criticism of economy - The marxism as political economy opposed to Marx' work.

**CHINA**How providing lodging to 1/4 of world population?

This long articles in French published in 'Courrier des Pays de l'Est' No 346 (Jan 90) gives a lot of figures and statistics on the consequences of demography in China. Chapters of this study: The rise of inequalities (lodging and national economy) - The system of lodging - Production and lodging level - Principles and first results of a reform of urban lodging. (Copy at Echanges)

Chinese bureaucracy:

Series of articles from 'Eastern Economic Review' (9/11/89):

Cadres keep on accumulation power and wealth: eternal mandarins - Bureaucracy appears to defy efforts to curb its size: bound by red tape - Policymaking improves but is still unpredictable. (Copy at Echanges)

China after Tiananmen: It's a whole new class struggle (The Nation, 22/1/90)  
(Copy at Echanges) HS

**HUNGARY**

Wizard of Ozd: The flame of capitalism is burning bright for this Hungarian man of steel (from Scanorama, March 90). This capitalist fairy tale happened in 'socialist state capitalist' Hungary and could be entitled "From a moonlighting 'socialist' worker to successful capitalist businessman". (Copy at Echanges) HS/RH

**SPAIN**

Etcetera (Correspondence of the social war) Editorial Etcetera, Apartado Correos 1363, Barcelona. No 15/March 90: Essay to understand the present changes in Eastern countries (information and information means) - Total and totalitarian character of capitalism - The October Revolution - The present transformations - Hypotheses for an understanding - Social problems of the perestroika - The big game of Gorbachev - Changes in East Germany and German reunification - Some considerations on the changes in Eastern countries - Correspondence.

La Estiba Bulletin de la Coordinadora (c/o del Mar 97, 08003 Barcelona) No 53/Feb 90: Informations on struggles in various Spanish ports - Changes in the East - Migrations and nationalism in Germany. No 54/March 90: The bankruptcy of the 'real socialism': the end of a myth - Elections in Nicaragua - What Barcelona 1992 represents - Informations on the cooperative 'Tierra y Libertad'.

bureaucracy against the workers. In masses workers gave back their membership books of the SED, and simple strike threats normally sufficed to chase the SED organisation out of the factories and offices. So far the trade unions have not yet lost too many of their more than 9 million members, but they are now far from playing their former role and have not really found a new one, even if already attempting the somersault from participating in capitalist command to mediating in future class conflicts. Many workers have either ceased to pay their union dues or have decided to pay no more than minimum amounts, thus creating a very dangerous financial situation for the unions. The authority of the party and the trade unions is destroyed once and for all, and this is also true for the group of capitalist managers who have tended to distance themselves quickly from the SED, although this has hardly made them less vulnerable. The East German economy, even if ranking before countries like Italy or Spain, even if having a higher average standard of living than Great Britain, is in a pretty bad shape. There can be no doubt about a high rate of absenteeism only as a result of the open borders, about growing problems of supplies for the East German industry because of the abysmal situation of surrounding countries of the Eastern bloc and because of the inevitable closure of a number of factories in the DDR most heavily polluting air, land and water, about a traditionally very low productivity of labour for which there is a whole range of reasons, about the insufficiency of a faltering technological equipment whose modernity is far behind that of West German industry. Under such conditions experts have suggested that up to half of East German industry might have to be scrapped, and the rest would probably have to be handed over to West German business in the manner of "unconditional surrender". Evidently many East German managers do not mind to proceed along such lines, and workers have not been asked so far. Working-class women will probably be hardest hit, with the DDR still holding the world record in female employment.

4) In the past the SED (Sozialistische Einheitspartei - Party of Socialist Unity), formed in 1946 as a result of the unification of the Communist Party and the Social-Democrats, tried to control the entire social system down to the last pissoir (as a West German journalist re-formulated the party's claim to a leading role in society) by establishing almost 90,000 party cells all over the country, the vast majority of them in the factories and offices of East Germany's 150 monopolies, the so-called "Kombinate", a smaller number in the living quarters of town and countryside. A widespread movement of strikes and strike threats has led to the collapse of the party organization in most factories and offices. The party bureaucracy itself, once part of the ruling capitalist class, has had no other choice but to reduce its apparatus in the Bezirke (administrative regions) of the country by 75 to 90 per cent, and at the Central Committee of the SED nearly 60 per cent of all employees lost their job. At the end of last year, just before the hastily convoked party congress and at the congress itself, it seemed for a moment as if the SED delegates would have to decide the complete and final dissolution of the party. In the run-up to the elections the SED has gained renewed confidence only because of the enormous brutality of West German managers and politicians, lending it a sort of new credibility as a radical opposition. Still the hatred of the East German working class for the party bureaucrats is enormous, and in particular the question of privileges still causes a lot of anger. Small groups of workers have demanded access to the homes of former bureaucrats (or gained it by force) in all parts of the country, measuring rod in hand, to gather information for dossiers on the living conditions of party leaders and government members. Activities in the same vein have developed almost everywhere. Popular protest has even prevented former party leader Erich Honecker from finding a home for himself and his wife anywhere in the country, and he had therefore to take refuge in the house of a priest.

4) In most of the 150 "Kombinate", the capitalist monopolies of East Germany, working class struggle has smashed the unholy trinity of capitalist command, formerly uniting management, party bureaucracy and trade union

Odio Al Capitalismo (AVVN, apartado numero 25, 27080 Lugo) No 8/April-June 90: Programme elaboration: the marxist left and the second international - Prepare war and social peace - Counting the world's nuclear weapons.

Cultura Libertaria (Boletin de la AIP, Apdo 1687, Vitoria 01080) No 17/Feb 90: Catalogue of the libertarian papers in Spain - List of libertarian books, publications and documents - The death of Isaac Puente.

Ediciones Madre Tierra (Parque Vosa 12 Bajo, 28933 Motosoles) You can get at this address of books in Spanish mainly concerning the Spanish Revolution seen from an anarchist point of view.

Zer Egin (S. Martzial 2, 4 Ezk, 20005 Donostia) (in Spanish and Basque) The recent issues from No 268 up to No 278 contain various articles: more historical (for instance a lot of texts on the French Revolution) or political (mainly on the Basque problems or Central American struggles). Some are discussions on the present changes in Eastern countries. Very few on class struggle.

Resiste (Apdo 1673, Gasteiz, Spain) No 9: The life in Gasteiz (on the economic and social evolution in a Spanish town).

HS

### ITALY

Collegiamenti Wobbly (Angelo Carusi, CP 10591, 20110 Milano) No 26/Spring 90: Students in Roma - Note on the industrial conflicts in Europe - On Leopardi, Negri and .. - On U.K.: splendour and misery of the iron lady - The historical socialism: China - Interview with an ex red guard.

Comidad Bolletino di collegamento nazionale (Vincenzo Italiano, CP 391, 08100 Napoli) NO 66/Jan 90: The end of Communism (and not communism) No 67/March 90: The moral of power.

### UNITED KINGDOM

Class War (PO Box 467, London E 8 3 QX) (and a lot of other addresses in UK; to know more write to Bristol: PO Box 4999, Bristol, BS 99) No 38: On the ambulance strike - The repression in Salford (Manchester) - Some pages on the recent events in Eastern countries. No 39: On the poll tax - On the corruption of former Liverpool Labour leader Derek Hatton still in the Militant trotskyst tendency - The battle of Trafalgar Square against the poll tax.

Here and Now (c/o Transmission Gallery, 28 King St, Glasgow G1 5 QP, or PO

Box 109, Leeds LS5 3AA) No 10: The institutionalisation of the community - E-romania (Europe on offer and the capital - political and economic - invested in it) - The politics of panic: the Kedichem case - Art/anti art supplement - Rushdie Matters - Full-time, Part-time, Paid, Unpaid.

Direct Action (The Voice of Anarcho-Syndicalism) No 60/Aug-Sept 89: All talk, no action (on how dockers and railwaymen in Great Britain are sold out by their unions) - Manchester United (how the Nalگو rank-and-file remained solid during a strike to the surprise of the union bureaucrats) - Nalگو for it (on the same subject) - Dry dock (on the strike of the dockers) - Health or leather (on the struggle of National Health Service workers). No 61/Nov 89: Worked over (on significant changes to the rights of claimants made by the new Social Security Act) - Party Time (on the way the Labour Party should participate in the anti-Poll Tax federation) - Poll Tax Resistance) - Back to the future (on the situation in Cambodia) - Going nowhere (on Northern Ireland) - Take your pick (on the Poll Tax) - Puppet on a string (on the meaning of a Solidarity-dominated government in Poland) - Red years, black years (bookreview dealing with an Italian publication on anarchist workers resistance to fascism and nazism) - Community Policing (on Northern Ireland). No 62/Jan 90: Public image (on the ambulance dispute) - Red devils (on the All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Organising Conference) - Stuff it! (on anti-Poll Tax activity throughout Scotland) - Rotten Orchard ( on the Birmingham Six) - Off the wall (on Northern Ireland) - Industrial Strategy (a report presented to the 1989 Annual Conference of the Direct Action Movement) - Principles of Anarcho-Syndicalism - Fruitless (on the struggle of the workforce of a fruit juice plant against the sacking of 63 workers) - Road to rebellion (on the growth of the despatch industry and its meaning). No 63/March-Apr 90: Red Herring (on the situation in South Africa after Nelson Mandela's release) - No bulls-hit ( on the activity of the anti-Poll Tax Movement) - Hungary '56 (on the occasion of a reprint of the text by Andy Anderson) - A state of collapse (on the changes in Eastern Europe) - Industrial strategy (part two of the report of which publication started in no. 62) - Out of print (on the situation in Fleet Street and in the printing industry) - Manacled Mutineers? (on Ireland).

## USA

Labor Notes (7435 Michigan Avenue, Detroit, Mich 48210) No 130/Jan 90: Pittston miners strike - The labour movement at a turning point? What happened in the Eastern Airlines strike - Disagreements after the end of the Boeing strike. No 132/March 90: Pittston strike ends by a victory - Eastern Airlines on the road to

are not only threatened by future unemployment, but also by people raising fists against them and throwing stones, and if <sup>one of</sup> the cabinet members of the newly elected East German government is right about the existence of a widespread lynching mood in the DDR, then judges and prosecutors would certainly be high on the list of possible victims. Prosecutors, once having absolute power to decide what kind of sentence a judge would have to deliver against a delinquent, are not feared by anybody anymore. One of them told reporters that even convicted thieves now keep coming into her office and demanding their sentences to be repealed. In court defendants have found out that an effective way of defending oneself is to refuse to be judged by someone who is or was a member of the party, and in fact there are not too many judges who were not.

One of the very well documented events in the DDR has been the revolt of prisoners quickly spreading from one place to another, not the least because prisoners were among the first to realize that their demands would only be heard if they insisted on having access to the media, preferably television. At the end of November 1989 prisoners went on hunger strike in some places, in others they simply refused to do their work assigned to them, and within no time at all the 23850 prisoners had prisoners' councils everywhere in the country proclaim a nation-wide general strike, demanding an amnesty for all. The East German government had to react quickly, and it did so on December 6th by issuing an amnesty for all prisoners serving sentences of less than three years (excluding prisoners serving sentences for sex crimes, robbery and blackmail as well as "hooliganism"). This was certainly an arbitrary decision because many of those not falling under the amnesty cases had received long sentences as a result of the old regime's tendency to regard certain offences as particularly "dangerous" in the context of the "further development of socialism". Nonetheless 15500 prisoners had been released until mid-February 1990 as a consequence of the prison revolt.



3) In the vast array of instruments of repression against the working class the judicial system of the DDR certainly played a major role before October 1989, although signs of its increasing powerlessness in the face of working-class resistance could not be overlooked in recent years. Already the fundamental reform of the law undertaken in 1968 will have to be interpreted in this sense: Among others it introduced specific lay institutions of jurisdiction (called "Konfliktkommissionen" and "Schiedskommissionen") acting in factories and living quarters and dealing with a great variety of minor offences like drunkenness or petty theft and of course with all kinds of contractual problems. All in all there are about 29000 such lay courts in the East German factories alone, with a total of about a quarter of million people as members of these lay courts, and it can be assumed that around 40 to 50 per cent of all delinquents who got caught had to appear not before a court of professional judges, but before a court of lay members. This is why the DDR only has a total of 1200 professional judges - against nearly 18000 professional judges in West Germany. The fundamental problem of the lay institutions in the DDR has always been an extremely tight labour-market situation which expressed just the power of East German workers in keeping the productivity of labour comparatively low (on average it is twice as high in West Germany). Even in the case of repeated or major offences the labour-market situation and the practical impossibility of ending a contract by dismissal prevented the lay courts from taking drastic measures against a delinquent. It need not be explained what effects this was bound to have on the conduct and daily routine of workers.

Although we do not know much about the the situation of the lay courts in the factories and in the living quarters since October 1989, it seems safe to assume that recent developments have meant the coup de grace for their activities, be it only because reunification will certainly put an end to them, if West German businessmen are not doing it before in the process of take-overs or of forming joint-ventures. We do know, however, a lot more about the situation of professional judges who have come under heavy pressure from many sides, in particular from the 'man in the street'. Many judges

(1) see Echanges n° 63 p 22; the first two pages of the present article are a new editing of the two last pages of the previous one .

bankruptcy - Shortage of staff gives strength to the nurse struggle: wages are improving but not working conditions - Korean workers in a independent union federation - Armed gangs attacked Mexican Ford workers. No 133/April 90: Greyhound strike - Pittston strike (Health care issues remain as miners go back to work) - Review of the book "On Strike at Hormel: the Struggle for a Democratic Labor Movement" by H. Green - The strike at Modelo Brewery in Mexico.

HS

### EASTERN GERMANY

RDA: tout n'est pas à jeter (Everything is not to throw away) (in French) Günter Wallraff's interview about an inquiry made last November in factories of East Germany where the workers are presented as having a better qualification than West-German workers .. then their interest for the big German Firms. (From 'S&V Economie Magazine' no 61/May 90 - copy at Echanges)

HS

### U S S R

"The most important oil field ready to go on strike: the ultimatum of Tumen workers" (in French - from 'Les Nouvelles de Moscou' 6/4/90) shows some interesting developments concerning the present role of the official unions. This is even more clear from a text published by the same paper (13/4/90): the union is quickly becoming an intermediary between workers and government, very similar to western developed countries. (Copy at Echanges)

HS

"From Russia with profit" - a short article from Socialist Standard (5/89) on the story of a present Russian capitalist and his fight against bureaucracy. (Copy at Echanges)

HS/RH

### ARGENTINA

The Argentinean group Grupo Impulso Autogestionario (Casilla de Correo 984, 2000 Rosario, Argentina) is together with other groups calling for solidarity support to allow them to keep an accommodation from where they could continue their activities. The following text is part of a leaflet sent by this group:

"Argentina: Poverty and the militarization of society

Argentina, a country with an area of 1.2 million square miles (3 million square kilometers), used to be known as the world's granary. Today, out of a population of about 30 million people, nearly 15 million are recognized as "lacking basic neces-

sities". The state cynically uses this euphemism as a cloak for what is commonly known as poverty, spiritual and material misery, hunger and sickness. The capitalist economic model that President Menem calls the "popular market economy" is condemning the majority of the people, who are becoming poorer by the day, to be sacrificed for the escalating profits of agricultural-export oligopolies. Millions of women, children and old people are deprived of proper health care, education and housing. Meanwhile, the system of financial roulette is emptying the pockets of those who produce the country's wealth.

Recently, more than 200,000 Argentinians have emigrated. Some are convinced that they will find a sunnier, warmer life in the North. Others are fleeing in anticipation of a new genocidal thrust by the military.

In fact, since April of 1987 the military, counting on the complicity of the politicians, has been targeting the civilian population. We have been experiencing an increasing militarization of society. Once again, men in uniform are swarming out of the barracks. Cities such as Rosario are daily overrun with federal police patrols on the ground and in helicopters.

The laws granting immunity from prosecution approved by Alfonsín (who was suitably obedient in the end), the pardons granted by Menem, and the decrees legalizing the intervention of the armed forces in internal conflicts, together open a somber prospect and dissent by those opposing domination, exploitation and, ultimately, capitalist barbarity.

The ruling classes, and their political front men who control the government, are using the foreign debt (which might as well be called the eternal debt, since it is unpayable) as an excuse for continued exploitation. They present as indisputable the false alternatives that public services can only be "inefficiently run by the state" or "efficiently run by oligarchies linked to multinational capital". We libertarian socialists know that there are valid alternatives to both: Public services can be operated and managed by their own workers. We also assert that only through the socialization of health care services can health be assured for everyone. The complex problem of housing can be solved through the creation of cooperatives in which members work together to build and maintain their own homes. But all this would be admittedly quite difficult under the prevailing system of capitalist exploitation and domination.

Still, we don't think that it's necessary to wait for some distant future to fight for dignity and against exploitation. That is why, as a libertarian organization, we are participating right now, alongside others, in the resistance to the state sponsored plundering. We are completely opposed to the social model which aims to create

I thought you might be interested to know that I recently heard on the public radio network an item about the US auto industry. As you probably know, it has been one of the most important industries in the US, and thus what happens to it is highly significant to the entire labor force and the economy. According to industry sources, the auto manufacturers intend to lay off fully half of the current US auto workers in the next ten years. Auto plant closings have already begun, as you will notice from some of the clippings we are sending you. This year for the first time a Japanese-made car is the top-selling car in the US market. For the US-owned auto companies there is also now competition from Japanese-owned plants being set up in the US. These plants are usually set up in the southern United States, where there has been a strong history of repression of labor unions and low wages. Although there have been a number of attempts to unionize some of these new plants, they have as yet failed. The majority of workers there are very impoverished, and not willing to risk their new-found security in union struggles, for the most part. Ethnic and racial divisions have also been used freely to keep out unions. The union organizers have been charged with being Northern Jews. Threats to bring in blacks to replace poor white workers have been used, as has the reverse. There is also competition from US and Japanese companies which have established auto parts plants south of the border in Mexico and in other countries in Latin America and Asia. You will notice we are sending you two pieces about strikes at Ford plants in Mexico.

In Mexico the unemployment rate runs between 40 and 50 percent. The auto companies are able to hire skilled and semi-skilled workers at extremely low wages, even when they do have a union. They are even able to hire middle-level technicians for 15 to 25 percent of the salary of their US counterparts. A former student of Sylvie's is now working for a Ford plant in Monterrey, Mexico. She is a young woman about 25 years old who studied for 4-1/2 years at a technical college, where she received only technical courses, and no humanities or ~~with~~ social and political sciences or any other kind of education. In the US a 4 year course of this sort would have involved some basic courses in other areas, but also would have led to a higher prestige job. Half of the students in her school were women, most of them very disciplined and somewhat timid young people who are fully aware of what poverty they are escaping by getting this kind of education. When these students start work for the various industrial enterprises for which they are trained to work, they get between \$5000 and \$7000 (US equivalent) per year. The young women are especially emotionally abused by their US or Japanese bosses. They are constantly being reminded of their dispensability, criticized if they can't speak their boss's language or can't speak it well, and generally treated like female secretaries have traditionally been treated in the US, and probably in the UK as well. These young women take it for granted that they will cry when they get home in the evenings. These technically-trained young Mexican men and women usually begin their careers with a series of jobs that involve 6-month contracts. They are hired for six months and then let go if they ask for wage increase. Sylvie's student, Anna, got her first job as a product development and control engineer on a 6-month contract in a firm that produces plastic packaging for the US market. Her job was to design a computer program for producing plastic bags of a specific strength and durability, then to train the semi-skilled workers in adjusting the machinery so that the program could run, and to supervise the first run. After that, she was dismissed. Because her mother knew someone who lived here in Seattle, Sylvie's student decided to come and spend six months here to learn English so that she could get a better job, and so that she would be subject to a little bit less harassment from her employer. Since returning to Mexico she has indeed gotten a somewhat better job, working for the Ford Company on the production of bumpers in Mexico. Sylvie is writing to her to try to get a little more information about the social situation there, but we only expect a certain amount of background information from her because she is not really involved with social issues beyond her own context.

Robby



**S**ocorro Leos lives in a concrete block home with an outdoor privy in a colonia on the southwestern edge of Matamoras with her husband Javier, and their two daughters, aged three and seven.

She quit her job with AT&T Microelectronica de Mexico last January for health reasons. Despite working with soldering equipment and various chemicals, there was no extractor—and the fumes caused dizziness, nausea and headaches, Socorro says. Because she sat in the same position for so long each day, her back began to ache too.

Socorro says. When she asked to be transferred to another job, she was told nothing else was available.

Her last AT&T paycheck, dated Dec. 25, 1988, was for 96,000 pesos (about \$40 U.S.) for 42 hours of work.

Socorro says that she came to Matamoras in 1971 from a ranch about 150 miles away in the interior of Mexico. She worked for a General Motors *maquiladora* operation in Matamoras for three years, quitting in 1983 to spend more time with her older daughter, Erica, then two. She now spends her days with the other daughter, Brenda, now three.

Because there is no electricity in the colonia where the family lives, Socorro remembers stumbling about in the dark when she left for work at 5 a.m. to catch a bus to the AT&T plant. Once it had rained all night and the dirt street had turned to mud and she fell, and had to return home to change clothes, making her two minutes late for work. She received a reprimand at the time.

The family's two-room (kitchen and bedroom) concrete block shelter was built by her husband and their friends. They have butane gas for cooking but consider the gas too expensive for heating.

**M**aria has worked at AT&T a year and four months. She lives with—and supports—four sisters, ranging in age from 13 to 23. Their parents are both deceased.

She leaves home at 5:45 a.m. to be at work on time at 6:30 a.m., and she too works 48 hours a week and was hired through CTM. Maria's take home pay is 80 cents an hour. She makes three and four-inch transformers.

Because Maria and her family live in one of the older, more established colonias, they have what are considered super services: water, electricity and sewage. They even have a television set. But, because money stretches only so far, she considers the purchase of a new blouse the only "occasional" luxury in her life.

Like other workers throughout Mexico, Maria's health and pension needs are covered under the country's National Health Plan, which operates with joint funding from employees and employers, and in that sense, is similar to Social Security in the U.S.

When she was off work for several weeks last year for surgery, Maria said, her medical bills were paid by the government plan, and she got a temporary disability treatment which paid her 60 percent of her normal pay. And, because her youngest sister is still in school, when her father died several years ago, she began receiving a small pension (30,000 pesos a month, equivalent to about \$12.50), also from the National Health Plan. The pension will stop when her sister becomes 18 years of age, Maria said.

HS

M. Notes articles provided by RH

first - and second-class citizens within one country. We are struggling and will continue to struggle against this attempt to impose de facto South African Apartheid in this part of the world.

In our city, out of a population of nearly a million, more than 300,000 people are undernourished and living in miserable housing; more than 100,000 men, women and children are destitute. We know that the abundance of the wheat fields is not reaching our children's mouths because of the manipulations by bureaucrats, clerics, politicians and bankers, perpetuating social injustice...."

HS

## HOLLAND

**Daad En Gedachte** (Act and Thought - A monthly in Dutch - Schouw 48-11, 8232 BD Lelystad, Holland). **No 1/Feb 90:** What is the perspective for the G.D.R.? (critical remarks on 'The United Left') - The (Dutch) Social Democratic Labour Party between the two worldwars (bookreview) - The murder of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht (critical remarks on the occasion of a memorial in which participated the German social-democrats) - A very good novel about the life of a Dutch miner (bookreview). **No 2/March 90:** Do we witness the end of communism or not? - Walesa is ready for if their's something to extinguish - The nurses in revolt show their teeth - The Swedish government declares war to the workers - What is and what has been the critique on present Russia? (bookreview) - Strike at the Heineken brewery. **No 3/Apr 90:** The British ambulance-strike (based on information, given by a London friend) - What sort of society has been created by the Russian October-revolution? (I) - Many trees, not seeing the wood (bookreview) - Theses of 'Echanges' - A British Trade Union-secretary calls in the aid of Scotland Yard. **No 4/May 90:** What sort of society has been created by the Russian October-revolution? (II) - An exposition which is causing mixed feelings - After the harvest action could be stopped (a critical note about trade unions which pretended militancy only for the purpose of gaining members) - There's no reason why 'Solidarnosc' should not opt for iron discipline.

CB

## SOME REMARKS ON 'THE UNITED LEFT' IN THE GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

Anybody, following events in Eastern Europe through the media, i.e. tv, radio or press, involuntarily gets the impression that *Neues Forum* has been the only oppositional movement which was against the SED and its dictatorship. However, this is a false impression, caused by the fact that the media mainly pay attention to *Neues Forum*. By doing so, they give distorted information. Besides *Neues Forum* there are other oppositional movements, for example, the Vereinigte Linke (*United Left*) and the Bund Unabhängiger Sozialisten (*Ligue of Independent Socialists*). Both are against any form of unification of the two German states and both devote themselves to 'a socialist alternative'.

Recently the German magazine Die Aktion published a number of documents (texts and declarations) from which clearly appears what the group means by a 'socialist alternative', how they differentiate themselves from *Neues Forum* and how they see the future of the G.D.R.

'*The United Left*' and the Ligue of Independent Socialists have been carrying on a campaign long before events in Eastern Germany accelerated. "What those people wanting reforms are asking for", one of the documents tell us, "is that socialism in the G.D.R. should be built up at last". A few lines further on, they declare straightforward that the so-called 'socialism' in the GDR doesn't deserve this title.

In another document '*The United Left*' makes it clear that it is very critical of any attempt to introduce a parliamentary system in the G.D.R., a system by which the citizens can express their demands by nothing but the ballot and making a choice between various parties. Without any doubt the 'United Left' favours freedom and democracy. But, it says, such a parliamentary system is far from the socialist democracy it has in mind.

'*The United Left*' is opposing political parties or political groups pretending to represent the people, i.e. the working class. '*The United Left*' favours the forming of workers councils and a revolutionary change of the political system and the economy of the G.D.R. It doesn't want to replace "the bureaucratic oppression by the Politburo by capitalist exploitation".

In spite of all this, one should not entertain illusions about its character. '*The United Left*', as its name indicates, rallies a number of 'left' groups and factions which met in September last year in the city of Böhlen to draw up a common 'platform'. Those groups and factions were of a very different character. Because the 'platform' should express what they had in common and what they endorsed,

from CW News n° 6, June and July 89, paper of the  
union Communication Workers of America.

**I**melda Cortinas is 19 and has worked at the AT&T plant in Matamoras for 20 months now. She was one of the early workers.

Imelda got her job through CTM. She had gone to the union office on Mondays and Fridays—the normal hiring days—out to AT&T. Her union dues are four percent of her gross pay, and are deducted from her paycheck.

Imelda rides two buses to get to her job by 6:30 a.m. and two more buses to return home at the end of the workday at 4:30 p.m. She gets two 20-minute and one 15-minute rest periods each day, and works 48 hours a week. She is entitled, by law, to six days vacation a year.

Although she and other workers in the plant all got a raise in January, her net pay is only 83 cents an hour—and she works nearly one hour a day just to pay the bus fare. The bus she rides is the equivalent of a mini-van, it's not air conditioned and workers cram themselves into it like sardines.

Imelda says some of her co-workers walk miles to and from work to save the cost of the bus fare.

She lives in a colonia that has no water, sewage facilities or electricity and where large storage barrels sit near the dirt path that leads past the family shelter. Water trucks pass by several times a week to fill the barrels. The water is used for drinking, washing and cooking.

The barrels cost about \$4 each (half a day's wages) and were used for chemical storage before becoming water barrels. (Several persons inter-

**T**his is a tale of two plants—one in Radford, Va., and the other 3,000 miles away in Matamoras, Mexico, just across the Rio Grande River from Brownsville, Tex.

The plant in Radford is steadily shrinking. Some 1,020 union jobs have disappeared since 1985. The workforce is now down to about 876 hourly workers.

The plant in Matamoras is blossoming. A 50,000 square foot manufacturing facility employing 600 workers opened in 1987—and an even larger plant nearby will open about June 1.

The Radford workers know exactly what is happening but they're powerless to do anything about it: their jobs are being exported to Mexico.

Workers in both plants make electronic components, such as transformers, inductors and rectifiers, for AT&T Microelectronics.

The big difference is that the workers in Radford make about \$8 to \$9 an hour, are buying homes and cars and are trying to live the American dream; the workers in Mexico are paid less than \$1 an hour, and their only benefits are those provided by the government sponsored national health plan. They live in poverty, in neighborhoods called "colonias," often without running water, electricity or sewage facilities.

The AT&T venture in Matamoras is part of the U.S.—Mexico *maquiladora* program

The following extracts will give a view of what was at stake in this strike. (from Labor Notes (see Publications USA))

by Matt Will

U.S.-Mexico Labor Project

American Labor Education Center

A key strike to defend workers' rights in Mexico has led to the boycott of two imported beers—Modelo and Corona.

The strike at the Modelo Brewery, which began February 15, has become a test of wills between Mexico's democratic union movement on the one hand, and the Mexican government, employers, and the official government-dominated CTM labor federation on the other.

Pledges by U.S. unions, other organizations, and individuals to support the boycott are particularly important because the company is the world's largest exporter of beer to the U.S. and dependent on U.S. sales for much of its profits.

The Modelo struggle has taken on national importance in Mexico because it symbolizes the workers' demands for militant, democratic unionism; humane and safe working conditions; and respect by the government of workers' legal rights.

The struggle dates to the summer of 1988 when the 5,200 workers gained control of their union after decades of a corrupt leadership controlled by the CTM. With new democratic leaders, workers planned to raise basic pay above the current \$9.60 per day and to upgrade benefits for the first time in ten years.

Most important, they wanted to improve working conditions and health and safety practices. Union leader German Reglin explained that "the company has modernized productivity, but they have never modernized conditions for the workers."

#### HAZARDS

Hazardous grain dust uncontrolled by proper ventilation causes lung damage in some workers.

Others endure temperatures ranging from 140 degrees to as low as 26 degrees—sometimes both in the same shift. Vision problems due to poor lighting and lack of variety in the job are common among those who inspect about one million bottles of beer each shift on each of 17 production lines, six days a week. Back problems plague packing workers who lift up to 33,000 pounds each day.

In addition to demanding control of such hazards, the union is seeking the right to retire with 30 years service, regardless of age. Reglin said that many workers never reach retirement age, and that most who do are physically unable to enjoy their retirement years.

Although the right to strike over such issues is enshrined in the Mexican constitution, the government followed its common practice of declaring the Modelo strike "non-existent," or illegal. That allowed the company to fire all workers, withdraw recognition of the union, and abolish the union contract.

CTM chief Fidel Velasquez has never accepted the democratic leadership elected by the Modelo workers. Taking the government's side, he criticized the workers' demands and their strike.

When the workers went to court to challenge the government's ruling that the strike was illegal, the judge gave them five days to post a cash bond of one billion pesos (about \$370,000) or forfeit the right to a full hearing. Because of the national significance of this battle, workers from the Mexican operations of General Motors, Ford, Chrysler, and many other unions, grassroots citizens' organizations, and the opposition Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) contributed to help post the bond.

the result was a text with loose phrases, deteriorating the words we just quoted from 'The United Left' documents. The 'platform' and texts lead to the conclusion that what 'The United Left' does understand by "a socialism which is characterized by freedom and democracy" is a very vague conception in spite of what is said about workers councils.

Let us speak first about what 'The United Left' understands or does not understand by socialism, because this determines its position and everything that follows from it.

'The United Left' sees socialist democracy as "the expression of the people's sovereignty as a result of the people's power", not as the expression of the economic fact that wage-labour and exploitation don't exist anymore. 'The United Left' seems to believe that socialist democracy is based on certain legal relations instead of social relations, or on certain relations of production.

The 'platform of Böhlen' clearly shows that 'The United Left', in spite of its criticism of the parliamentary democracy and in spite of favouring workers councils, has endorsed demands which are detracting this. The 'platform' advocates "the existence of several parties, guaranteed by the constitution", "elections for proportional representation", "division of income according to merits" and "workers control of the production".

To start with this sort of control: it points to a situation which has nothing to do with the abolition of the wage-system which postulates that the separation of the producers from the means of production no longer exists. It means a situation in which those who have the means of production at their disposal are controlled by those who have not. Anything can be the characterization of such a situation, certainly not socialism!

Moreover 'The United Left' advocates "freedom for co-operative societies and private firms on the basis of own labour" and it also declares the "right to work". Here it shows again the wrong view that social relations are based on the law instead that the law is seen as based on society and on social relations.

Among the practical demands one finds the prohibition of "capitalist wage-labour". Does it mean that 'The United Left' really believes that something like non-capitalist wage-labour does exist? Yes, this is the only possibly conclusion from other texts of 'The United Left'. And what about the demand that the exploitation of one by another should be prohibited? It clearly contradicts some other demands. As for the demand that the "inequality of the different classes has to disappear", the point is, that inequality is marking classes and in socialism classes, instead of being equal, don't exist anymore.

What to think of the demand for new elections in the G.R.D.?) If one would ask: 'Elections for what?', there's no answer. Anyone can interpret this demand just as he likes. It confirms what we have just said, namely that it weakens the criticism of parliamentarism and the preference to workers councils.

'The United Left' advocates "a radical change" in the G.D.R. What is meant by the word "radical" is not clear and this is not surprising considering the confusion with regard to the wage-labour. Sure, 'The United Left' undoubtedly wants to go further than *Neues Forum*. In one of the texts it has been declared that "no sole masters could come in the place of those who had been forced to resign under the pressure of public opinion". But what's favorable then, one could ask. 'The United Left' is asking for the call of a national congress of worker's deputies. The election of workers councils has to be a "second step". How then are the deputies to the national congress chosen? Certainly not by the workers councils, because these councils are to be formed later (the "second step"). From a socialist point of view, such a national congress is to be mistrusted.

One of the texts of 'The United Left' deals with the economic foundation of the G.D.R. It is severely criticized. However, the insight is lacking that with "the abolition of capitalist private property" capitalism as such was in no way abolished, because under the new system wage-labour and therefore the production of supervalue remained. 'The United Left' emphasizes the hitherto existing political oppression in the G.D.R. independent from the economic oppression on which it is based.

'The United Left' says that socialist democracy must be anchored in the factories and that self-management of the workers has to be installed. Here we repeat that we've written above about the so-called 'workers control of production'. If self-management really exists, for what reason should there be then such a control? It can only mean then that the managers of the production have to control themselves, which is meaningless.

And what about the demand for political democracy? The real point is, that the political, i.e. the middle-class democracy has to be overcome and stand aside for working-class democracy. This can only be the result of the class-struggle. About the class-struggle however 'The United Left' seldom or never speaks.

Here lies the main difference between 'The United Left' and us! 'The United Left' is a voluntarist group. It tells the workers what they should do, how they have to act and what's to be done. 'The United Left' is offering an alternative, it has a program which has to be realized and the only possible conclusion is, that it must be considered as a vanguardist group.

by CTM attack the factory at 5 am and expel the 1,300 workers still inside .

The situation became more complex when the work in the factory started again partially , as CTM completely deprived from its basis agreed reluctantly with a negotiating committee settled by the workers while Ford refused to discuss a new contract with a 'Committee of Revolutionary Workers '(COR) set up by militants hostile to CTM .More than half of the workers were still on strike and Ford had not succeeded in getting a normal run of its factory with scab labour . Ford workers were no longer isolated; another Ford factory at Chihuahua (on the US border ) was on strike and 800 workers got a minimum 22% wage rise after one week . General Motors plant in Mexico City gave 20% rise to avoid a strike .A strike was going at a brewery in Mexico City (see next chapter ) and would last six weeks.On the 5/3 Ford agreed on a return to work of all the previous workforce ,the recognition of the factory negotiating committee and the discussion of a new agreement with CTM as well.A door was open for the transformation of the unions .

At the end of march the consequence of this wave of strikes came from both angles .On the workers side 121 organisations joined together to form a new trade union to challenge the CTM called 'United Front in Defence of Workers ' The general secretary of the C O R , part of this united front sent a message to the mexican president stressing the 'need for dialogue and national unity but not to the whole detriment of the well being of the majority', a very reformist position of course having the support of the new oppositional party PDR and of the Roman Catholic Church .On the other side came closer trade links with the US and economicl reforms ; it is evident that class struggle has modified the conditions of exploitation of mexicanlabour by US firms and that some adjustments are needed.

#### Another example ; strike at Mexican brewery

On the 26/4 an agreement has been reached on an end to the 10 week strike at Mexico City's Cerveria Modelo brewery.As the other strikes in maquiladoras the dispute has been a heavy blow to CTM.The dispute was in the end mediated by the mayor of Mexico City and it is difficult to know to what extent the pay and other demands had been answered .

The Ford strikes ; a recent example of a complex situation .

Two years ago ,using the pressure of the crisis , Ford had cancelled all the existing contracts in its Mexican factories and offered new contracts speeding up the lines for \$ 165 a month erasing totally the seniority workers had accumulated .CTM agreed with this management diktat and last december the same team union- management announced a reduction of a special benefit called 'profit sharing ' and of bonuses despite increased productivity , Struggles against this new squeeze burst out and it was directly repressed by CTM which did not use the 'democratic ' method of unions like AFL-CIO for instance but violent methods not very compatible with the modern function of unions ( though in certain circumstances 'modern' unions did not refuse to use these violent methods ).Actually the function of the union was not contested but the method used to perform this function . When the workers revolted against a pressure that had halved their buying power in two years for 42-48 hours a week with a break only of 30 minute per shift they were against all those trying to implement the new management proposal , the CTM first.Fighting the repression of CTM , they made room for the union reformists who would have to discuss new proposals with this management and anyway to look for the acceptance of a new agreement by the workers to have them resuming work ;exactly the function of a 'modern ' union .

On 8/1/90 at the Ford Motor assembly plant of Cuautitlan ( 30 km of Mexico City ) the protest was growing against the new conditions,CTM and Ford organised a punitive expedition ,250 gunmen carried in CTM buses and wearing Ford uniforms enter the plant and beat up protesters , open fire killing one worker and wounding quite a few others.Immediately 1,500 workers out of 3,800 occupied this factory. Ford asked the official organisation 'Federal Committee for Conciliation and Arbitration' to cancel the collective contract , got this cancellation , sacked the whole workforce and proposed to reintegrate only the 'good workers ' .Anyway the pressure was such that the government could not do less than arrest some of the CTM thugs ; but to balance this concession, Fidel Velasquez , the perpetual leader of CTM for more than 50 years ,asked for the police to expel the workers occupying the factory,400 Ford workers tried to invade the CTM headquarter claiming the eviction of the corrupted head of the National Union Ford Committee-the usual executor of all dirty work at Ford.On the 22/1 the cops paid \$200 for this job

Social reform in the G.D.R. and how radical it will be depends on the action and the militancy of the working class. If there will be no change of the economic basis, of the social foundation of the East German society, there will be no question of socialism, even if there will be what is called 'freedom' and 'democracy'.

'The United Left' is against a selling-off of the G.D.R. in favour of the G.F.R. and western capitalism, but forgets that hitherto there was capitalism in the G.D.R. as well. If it depends on 'The United Left' it will not be abolished!

CB

\*) The article has been written in January and has been originally published in the Dutch monthly Daad en Gedachte, last February.

WORKING FOR FORD

HOURS PER CAR	
Plant	1988
Valencia - Fiesta	33
Genk - Sierra	40
Dagenham - Fiesta	57
Dagenham - Sierra	67
Halewood - Escort	59
Southampton - Transit	79

Source: Ford internal management report (1989)

FORD OF EUROPE vehicles per employee	
Plant	1988
Dagenham	22
Halewood	29
Southampton	23
Genk	34
Cologne	34
Saarlouis	42
Valencia	38

Source: Ford internal management report (1989)



## UNITED KINGDOM : The Ambulance Strike

### Almost 6 months of fight with the unions

The 26 week ambulance strike ( september 1989 -february 90 ) all over Britain offers a lot of similarities with the nurses strikes (see Echanges n°60, march-june 1989 ) ;their strike was about wages ,they were connected to the National Health Service (NHS ) and they have to answer the difficult question of withdrawing emergency services or not when it was a matter of life or death for the patients ,

Though the 'official' beginning of the strike was on 13/9/89 the dispute started on 31/5/89 when 71% of Britain 's 19,000 ambulance staff voted by two to one to reject a 6,5% offer agreed by the Unions with the NHS and which acceptance was strongly recommended by them .The dispute was of course a conflict between the government (Department of Health) and the ambulance men but it was more a conflict between the rank and file movement and the union bureaucracy,Every time the action threatens to take a more radical stance , union leaders defuse the class conflict by some tricky tactics with the hope of capitalising little by little on the effects of the discouragement , of the lack of money and of the well cultivated isolation of the strike,

The ups and downs must not hide the constant escalation of the rank and file actions up to the last moment opposed to the constant refusal of the unions to call for a general radical action,As in the nurses strike, unions can play with the workers dispersion in small centers all over Britain and with the patchy answers to local situations,eager to stop any wildcat initiative and to prevent the spreading of what they could not have prevented at the start,

### More than 20.000 workers united by their claim

22,500 ambulance workers ,most of them being what Clarke , the Health Secretary called one day 'professional drivers ',among them 3,500 officers and control assistants,scattered all over Britain in small local units independant of hospitals but working constantly with them ,having to transport all incapacitated people from emergencies up to any kind of disabled for their day to day needs,Emergency calls are centralised in special centers ,part of the ambulance organisation ,which

state union leaders because the teachers union is a centralized national union and they had to get their union leaders to take it to the national level. The union leaders ignored it. That's when they started the political-type issue. It took off from there. They organized about 100% of the teachers in about a year. In May 1980, once they had everybody behind them, they physically seized the union, going in and kicking out the old leaders. Then they re-designed the whole system. However, they did not then change the curriculum or the pedagogy.

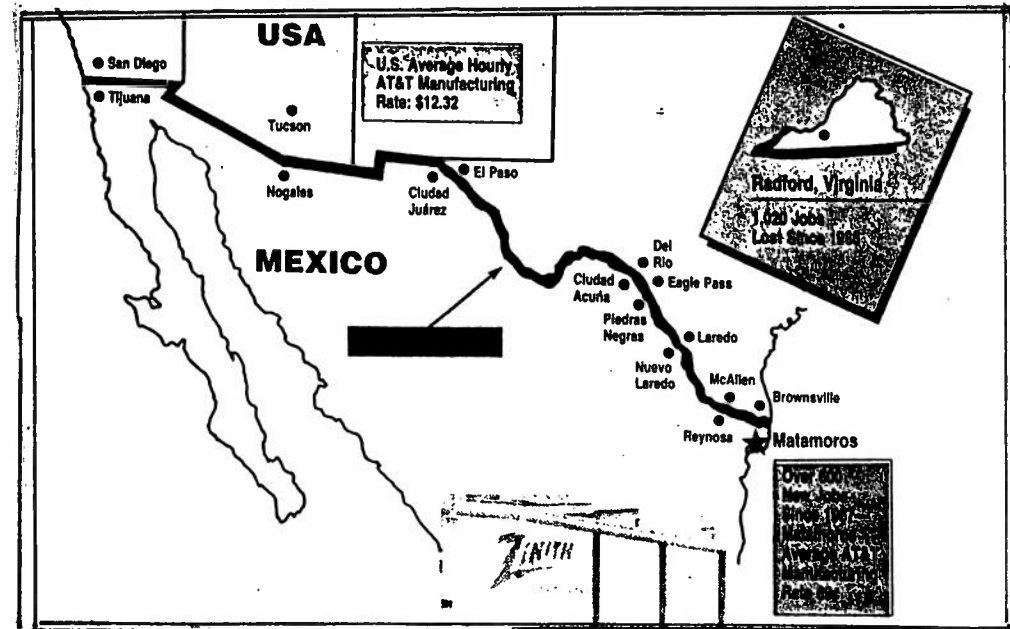
Teachers talk about the movement in economic terms and political terms. By economic they mean salary, by political they mean the union. Over time, the demand has become to democratize the union, throw out all the union leaders who haven't done anything for them

and are blocking the demands. It also means throwing out the supervisors and school directors and anybody who gets in the way of the movement.

The movement led teachers to organize to take over the schools and school districts. They demanded that the supervisors listen to and respect the teachers. There's a whole story on what the supervisors had done to teachers' work conditions and professional mobility.

In 2-3 years of struggle, they gained hardly any economic benefits. But they did get control of the union in Chiapas. They designed an entirely new, democratic union. Teachers now make the decisions about who goes to what school or zone, and all administrative and union decisions related to personnel are in their hands. To the teachers, democratization means taking control of the workplace and work-life. The movement became an organization that started to threaten the state.

All these texts were published in  
Midnight Notes n° 9





Nonetheless, by the summer of 1987 the women had suffered substantial defeat in their ability to develop recognized unions of costureras. Within the union, many were now arguing that las costureras should not have tried to build an independent union but should have become part of the CTM and thereby entered into the efforts to democratize that union while insisting that the CTM do at least the minimum to ensure legal wages and benefits. The question is whether that sort of retreat, which would likely create despair, pessimism and a gradual withdrawal from union activity, would have ultimately been more disheartening and destructive than the clear cut defeat at the combined hands of CTM, employers and state that they suffered at Comercializadora and other plants.

In any event, and the matter is far from settled, the history of the union indicates the capacity of even the least powerful sectors of the class, very low-waged women, to organize autonomously. Las costureras put the state, the unions and the companies on the defensive and forced concessions from them, and they created international networks and independent organizations to meet their needs.

*[Information for Las Costureras came from interviews with Guillermo Orozco & Susan Street, the "International Bulletin" of the costureras, and discussions with supporters of the struggle. For information about the union, their tour and film, or to receive their "International Bulletin" (in English and Spanish), contact Sindicato "19 de Septiembre," Apartado Postal M-10578, Correo Central, 06000 Mexico D.F., Mexico.]*

## Teachers' Struggles in Chiapas

The teacher's movement started in northern Chiapas in response to inflation based on the influx of oil money, which hit with the world-wide inflation of the mid-70s. Prices went up tremendously. Teachers' salaries did not go up, while other people's did, like the engineers.

S: It would be fair to say a lot of the teachers in Chiapas are sons and daughters of *campesinos*. In the rural sectors, men teach. In the urban areas, most of the teachers are women. This is true in most of the southern states in Mexico, the *campesino* states. Chiapas is probably the most "backward" of all, in terms of living conditions, the most "underdeveloped." It has a very high indigenous population and there is a large indigenous section of the teachers. It is the indigenous, bilingual teachers who are the most radical, well organized and active, and these really are the children of the *ejidatarios* and *campesinos*.

In Chiapas there is a small state school system and a federal system. When the movement began there were almost 15,000 Federal teachers, primary and secondary, and maybe 2,000 state teachers.

In 1979 the teachers organized and united all of them to overthrow their old union leaders. It began when a small group of teachers got together and said: "We can't take this inflation any more. We've got to do something." They spread the word to different school districts in the area and it caught on. They started organizing to demand a salary increase. The special demand of the area was to increase the cost-of-living indices. For years all the regions of Mexico have had extra pay based on the standard of living. In Chiapas the extra pay hadn't changed for something like 50 years.

In six months, they pretty much had an organization and a movement behind this demand. They took it to the

dispatch them to police, firefighters or ambulance; this fact is important because it will be the hard core of the argument for a pay similar to other people depending on emergency calls. We can understand from this short description how these workers could have been very strong locally and got a strong steady support from local people. Their determination and this financial support gave them the possibility to go ahead with their strike for six months; most important, having to fight the lack of support and coordination from the unions and all the manoeuvres to emasculate their combativity, this same determination brought a unity without any kind of formal national organisation: if we look at the details of the strike in each unit we could be surprised at the patchy answer to this usual attitude from the unions. Even if we neglect the copy cat effect of some radical local actions, the fact that the workers even isolated tried to find some new forms of action to give strength to their fight was the most effective and original unity beyond the appearance of dispersion. This situation pushes the unions to control the movement which means on one hand to publicise unifying claims and on the other hand to give them the possibility of manipulation.

Five unions -NALGO, NUPE, TGWU, GMB and COHSE -were the fair godmothers around the cradle of the strike; they are all member of the TUC; only another small dissident union APAP will try to break later the united front of these five unions, actually playing the role the five could not play because of the pressure of the ambulance workers. The beginning of the strike was the rejection of the 6.5% agreed by the unions: this objective situation sealed the unity of all ambulance workers and obliged the unions to find together an even more unifying set of claims. It was not only the rate of the increase though other public workers have got recently between 8 and 9%, it was not only asking for 11.4% given to police and firefighters, it was getting the same automatic adjustment of wages already given to other people working on emergency calls. The following figures can give an idea of what was at stake:

	Basic Pay (£pa)
<b>On Entry:</b>	
Police Constable	9,690
Firefighter	10,594
Ambulanceman/woman	7,340
<b>Qualified:</b>	
Police Constable (3 years)	11,676
Firefighter (4 years)	12,047
Qualified Ambulanceman/woman	10,093
<b>Long Service (scale maximum):</b>	
Police Constable (15 years)	15,123
Firefighter (15 years)	12,580
Qualified Ambulanceman/woman	10,093

The unions had to pretend to support these claims despite knowing perfectly well that the government would never concede them otherwise than pressed by strong action. The government had a direct say in the ambulance agreement: the Health Secretary, controlling the NHS has to approve any settlement for the ambulance men. But his opposition to automatic adjustment was more than a NHS problem; it would be a breach in the wage policy of capital, at first would open the door for such similar claims for all public services. On the other hand the government was considering a restructuring of the ambulance work, separating the emergency qualified work and the non urgent work (which could be eventually privatised); such a restructuring would allow a new method of discussion of wages giving more authority to local units, i.e. more division among these workers. These plans for restructuring were unveiled expressly one month after the start of the strike in an attempt to divide the ambulance men in promising more money to para medical crews. So the unifying common claim was a mean to fight for the preservation of this unity in the future.

#### How ambulance workers escalate their own action.

The unions were not at all eager to enter into a strike. From the very beginning they expressed very clearly they would never propose or order an all out strike. Even choosing to propose for a vote a ban on overtime and rest day they first delayed the vote on these proposals and then the effective start of this action. The rejection of the 6.5% was in May, the result of the vote on the unions proposal was proclaimed on the 7/9/89 but the action started only on the 13/9. During all this period, the unions tried to escape the action with discussions to find an exit door. It was evident that the action met strong support all over Britain and this support was even reinforced when on the 5/10 officers and controllers decided to support the ban: quickly the shortage of services was around 30 and 50%.

It was evident that this ban was not enough: only the non urgent services were affected and they were easy to replace. A journalist could comment:

'The dispute which started tentatively gathered up on a swell of public sympathy and finally confronted a government implacable in refusing to grant a pay formula'.

At first, the public did not even know these women were there, and their families could not get any insurance money. Some of the bosses attempted to destroy the buildings quickly, to bury the women in the rubble and prevent anyone from knowing about them.

The surviving women organized themselves and formed one of the most democratic unions in Mexico, "Sindicato 19 de Septiembre." Las costureras set up tents in the area and insisted they would not move until the all the bodies of the workers were pulled out. They remained for weeks until all the dead were recovered. Meanwhile, they carried away the machinery before the bosses could get it, saying that after so many deaths they had the right to the means of production. The police came to the tents and threatened and pressured and beat the women to get the machinery back and to stop the organizing.

The women linked themselves to independent unions. Most unions are part of the state, both officially and practically, but there are a few independent unions and democratic tendencies in some of the official unions. These democratic groups have challenged the *charro* leadership that controls the vertical union structures and makes corrupt alliances with government officials.

Before the earthquake, there was either no union or one that had a "sweetheart" deal with the owners to protect the company from the workers, a deal negotiated by the Mexican Workers Confederation (CTM) that the workers usually were not even told existed. The women denounced the official unions because they never did anything for them. When the women organized, the official unions tried to absorb them, but las costureras resisted, ensuring the enmity of these unions.

The 19th of September Union was officially registered on October 20, 1985, just one month after the earthquake. The quick recognition was due in part to the massive support the women received as their story became known. Since then, however, the union has faced a difficult battle for the actual right to represent the workers. Employers have responded with mass firings, verbal, physical and sexual abuse, and forced overtime.

At union elections at one plant, "Comercializadora," workers from other factories were brought in to vote and CTM goons attempted to prevent workers from voting. Despite this, the 19th of September Union won the vote. However, the local Labor Arbitration and Conciliation Board refused to recognize the union's victory.

To protest, the union staged a ten-day sit-in in front of the National Palace. At two in the morning of May 1, 1987, the police drove the workers from the square to clear it for the official International Workers' Day March. (The state had been using the police to ensure that independent worker organizations were excluded from the March.) Finally, the government certified the PRI-controlled CTM as the "representative" of the workers at this one factory.

The union, in addition to continuing the fight for recognition at various factories, has moved in other directions. They opened a childcare center for 100 children of las costureras and started adult education and training classes for the workers. They began to develop contacts throughout Mexico and across the border into the southwestern US. They developed a tour of speakers and a film about their struggle that has reached out to US unions and groups of women, Chicanos, students and cultural workers.

factories ,new political groups unified to form new political parties to call for and propel 'democracy' .Though we can find the same general tendency , there were big differences between Mexico and other developing countries due to the historical background and the specific conditions in each country ; some of the following articles illustrate these differences in various branches of industry; such struggles rising from the old indian tendency and models of community life were on one hand autonomous self organised struggles , on the other hand either object of control or take over by revolutionary militants and groups wanted to build an ' democratic ' or 'revolutionary ' alternative to the present political system , an alternative aiming at solving the present difficulties of the capitalist system , to answer its need .The same evolution could be seen either inside the factories where opposition rank and file groups merged before violent repression to set up an alternative union , or outside the factories where different opposition groups merged to carry out, legally or illegally the political contest. So class struggle took the form of battles between rival unions inside the factories and rival parties in the country ; these fights were partially supported by the workers and could only exist because of the rise of the workers fight but at the same time masking the actual deep tendencies of this fight .A dissident union leader could declare recently : 'The company has modernised productivity , but they have never modernised conditions for the workers ";saying what he thought of improving working conditions and health and safety practices but it could mean the same for the union ; his fight for a democratic union was part of these "modernised conditions ".Of course they have to fight hard and long to get all that but the end would be a new function for the union

#### Some examples of class struggle in Mexico:the garment industry

For a large number of women garment workers, las costureras, sewers, the earthquake and its aftermath was catalyst to a struggle to unionize and to obtain better working conditions and higher wages. Prior to the earthquake, they were working under terrible conditions and few outsiders knew of their situation. They worked in the basements of old, decrepit buildings for 8-10-12 hours a day, making less than

the minimum wage, not receiving benefits they were legally entitled to, and subject to harassment from company goons.

The women started before seven in the morning, so that when the earthquake hit many were already working. Because each basement had but one door, the women could not get out and many were killed. It was a disaster

From the 23/10 the strike became more or less a wildcat one :ban of all services usually done by an immediate superior ,total refusal of transport of non urgent cases ,ban of all non-urgent clerical duties, working a strict 39 hour a week .The ban subsisted but it was completed by a work to rule strike.

#### Army , police and...unions on the move to stop the extension .

This new action was particularly effective in the London district and the ambulance chiefs retaliated immediately :London crews who refused to work 'normally ' were suspended without pay.62 ambulance stations out of 71 were closed .Police ,army , the RAF, St John ambulances , the Red Cross and a lot of casual strike breakers moved to supply -badly - the work of the 71 stations often occupied by the workers. In other parts of Britain the escalating of the action was more patchy :25 regional health authorities had to take the same measures .It was the first time since the winter of discontent 78-79 that the troops were provided in such a number to break a strike.

For months the dispute concentrated on the dispatching of the emergency calls. People working in the centers taking these calls were strong supporters of the strike and they refused most of the time to put emergency calls to the police unless ambulance crews were reinstated and diverted the requests to ambulance stations occupied by crews and working according to their own rules. It was one of the most important aspects of the strike and it could not stay like it for a long time .

As the TUC unions had no possibility at this time of imposing any agreement on the workers ,the government tried to use the break away union A P A P to get an agreement which could be imposed on a minority and break the strike .At the same time a new organism 'Ambulance Pay Body 'was presented as answering the claims for an automatic adjustment. This attempt backfired:most of the 2,000 members of AFAP left this union and joined the strike and AFAP had no other solution than to call its members to join the overtime ban ...All through december the center of the dispute was about diverting the emergency calls to the police in order to stop the ambulance men themselves organising the emergency

work. Something had to be done and the wide popular support for the strikers allowed them to go ahead .

### The threat of an all-out strike and more original attempts

On the 18/12 ,the first call to overcome this deadlock came from Manchester; union leaders were quick to move there to have this call for an all out 24 hour strike withdrawn. But such calls came again and again from other sectors and were not withdrawn ; troops were called out in Birmingham , Dorset, Hereford, Surrey and Worcester and in January the London crews and some stations in Middlesex refused to answer the calls from controllers. This escalation was total when on the 11/1 /90 ,four West Sussex stations walked out in unofficial total strike, breaking the pledge made by the unions they would never take action which would affect the emergency calls

It was the turning point of the strike; some other stations followed the example of West Sussex ;15 stations in North London, some in Essex, in Manchester but the unions resist the pressure to organise a national ballot on this strike action. To prevent the extension of these wildcat strikes, they press the government to open new talks , they sent leaders to stop the less decided. In some places locally active solidarity burst up in some wildcat actions from non ambulance workers ;of course unions could not organise such actions which would have been illegal but they manage to defuse this push from the rank and file with the usual inefficient day of action or a 15 minute silent protest at the end of January .

Nevertheless ,the situation after five months of strike became more complicated for the union; all out strikes still spread on the Merseyside for instance .Ambulance staff in South Glamorgan , in Oxford , Surrey , Manchester tried to start their own accident emergency service ;it would have been a completely new turn of the strike ;they were prevented from going ahead by an injunction from the High Court on 18/2/90. Something has to be done to prevent the strike going wildcat in an unforeseen way.

imported parts .Most of the labour force were young women (70% ) working for \$ 3 to \$ 5 a day without any fringe benefit; all the top jobs were held by foreigners .There was no safety regulation and no health protection .Workers were immediately sacked when they developed some slight sign of disease or fatigue; the turn over was more than 50% and the CTM was a very good recruiting agent for new blood. The fast development of border new towns with no superstructure to solve the problems of housing , water distribution, transport...gave an appalling size to all the problems of life in the maquiladoras vicinity ( see the following letter of a friend of Seattle on the conditions of employment of young people in Mexico and the eye witness of the AT&T factory in Matamoros )

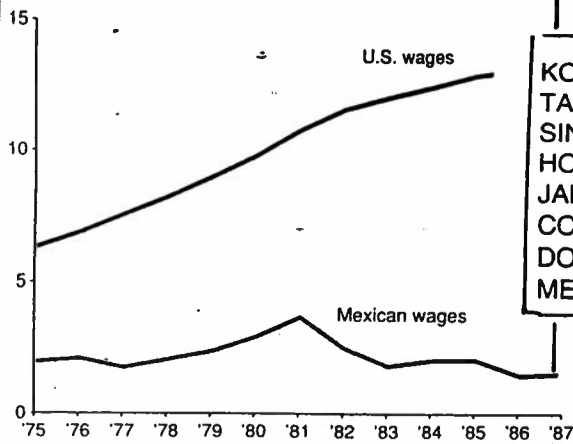
### Industrialisation brings class struggle

Mexico had at the same time not only an industrial proletariat (different from a moving mass of unemployed coming from the country ) but in a certain sense a modern proletariat working on modern machinery with modern techniques ( see the quoted letter). This newly grown proletariat could not be ruled and dominated by the old methods though these methods were still needed for the system to cope with millions of new mostly unemployed proletaires and to keep up the pressure to maintain the high rate of exploitation; it was the required condition to have the whole system working but at the same time, it contained a unsolvable contradiction .The 'dream ' situation for the foreign capital was still there but it was more fragile and implementing it also means developing this contradiction and bringing problems which sap the benefits of the system .

This could not be compared with the present class struggle in modern capitalist countries which had to take place in a completely different context of production techniques and labour relationship. With differences , the situation in Mexico was the same as in South Korea , Taiwan and most of Eastern countries mainly in USSR. The same kind of development was shaking the dictatorship of a party opening the way to 'democratic ' reforms. In Mexico ,as elsewhere, the class opposition took the form of a dual struggle ; inside the factories, the domination of the CTM was opposed by new rank and file groups aiming at setting up 'revolutionary unions' with the central claim of 'democracy' inside the union and with the workers ;outside the

Chart 6  
U.S. and Mexican Wages

U.S. dollar-denominated wages



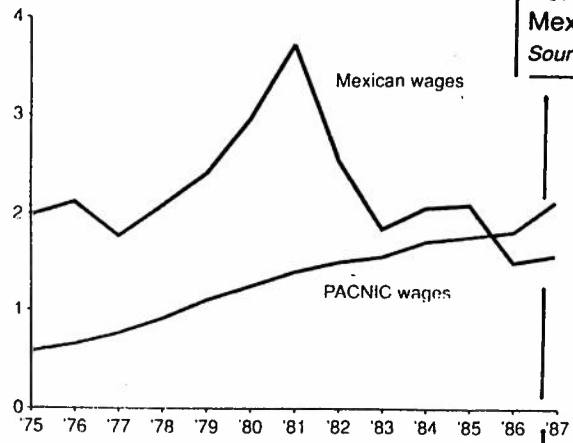
SOURCE OF PRIMARY DATA: U.S. Department of Labor.

### Comparative Labor Costs In Production Sharing Countries

KOREA .....	\$3.65
TAIWAN .....	2.95
SINGAPORE .....	2.30
HONG KONG .....	2.05
JAMAICA .....	1.25
COSTA RICA .....	1.05
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC .....	.95
MEXICO (Maquiladoras) .....	.89

Chart 3  
Mexican and PACNIC Wages

U.S. dollar denominated wages



SOURCE OF PRIMARY DATA: U.S. Department of Labor.

Workers in Hong Kong receive two times as much as Mexican workers. Workers in Singapore receive 2½ times as much as Mexican workers; Taiwan Workers get 3 times as much; and in Korea they get 4 times as much as Mexican workers.

Source: Am. Friends Service Committee, 1987

### Unions have waited a long time to break the strike

Throughout these actions the unions have not been inactive not only doing their best to prevent an extension of the wildcat action but everytime such actions were threatening, proposing new discussions, dropping each time some point of the initial claims (cut in the working week, longer holidays, ...). Even with the widespread financial solidarity ambulance workers were more and more feeling the pinch of the lack of wages. On the 20/2, just when new all out strikes were spreading again, the unions and the NHS agreed to ACAS (national arbitration body) talks and a deal was agreed on the 24/2/90 which was 'exceptional in its complexity and ambiguity'. It was effectively very difficult for the ambulance workers to decide what was better between the 6.5% a year they have rejected eight months before, the 9% over 18 months they have been offered without result during the strike and the 13.3% over two years included in the agreement.

The main point of the strike - indexation - was dropped by the unions; just what Clarke and the government had asked for. To hide the fact, the agreement used words: future negotiations on pay differentials and some kind of revision body. As the agreement on wages was to take effect from april 89, a lump sum between £ 615 and 915 would cushion the financial scar of the strike. As usual in such circumstances, the reactions were opposite; some attempts to extend the all out strikes, some early return to work. The strike was broken and the vote of 74% of the ambulance men gave 80% for the agreement; 40% still disagreed.

~~they~~  
Have/fought for nothing?

Long strikes all over Britain with a constant fight between the rank and file and the unions are a constant factor in recent class struggles in Britain. Once again the determination and the unity of the strike come from the workers themselves involved in a common situation: we have seen the same situation in the nurses' or the postal strikes ( see Echanges n°58, february 1989 p.36 ).

Again this long campaign was sustained by faith, hope and charity 'as wrote a journalist: it was only solidarity, a common solidarity common to a lot of conflicts. We can measure the deep

social and political discontent existing when such a long strike which could have aroused much hostility could sustain such a widespread lengthy support.

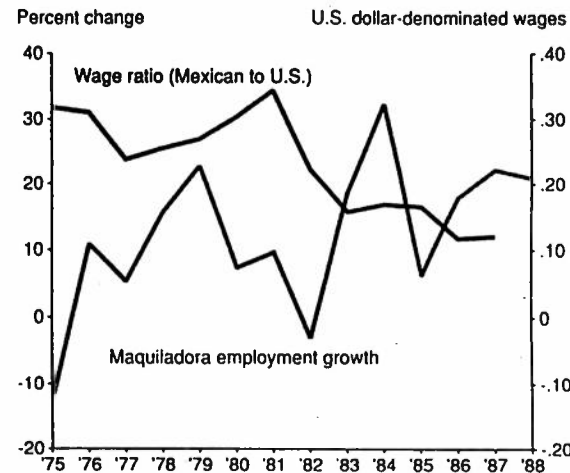
The peculiar characteristics of the ambulance men's work made it possible for them to go beyond the usual stoppage of work. Having to cope with a special responsibility involving life and death, they tried to overcome the consequences of an all out strike in organising their work themselves; at first it was a selective choice to follow or not the orders, to answer or not the calls, to operate some services or not; at one moment some stations organised a lock out of the hierarchy. The decisions were theirs even if the general pattern had been drawn up by the unions; at the local level, in small units nobody could decide for the workers; they have on one hand to organise their action themselves fixing its content, on the other hand going everywhere to collect money and support. The autonomy of their action was partly the consequence of their situation but this situation was partly as well bringing about their isolation. This autonomy slidden little by little towards some more effective forms of autonomous organisation concerning the work itself; the attempts to directly manage the ambulance stations appear as the last effort to overcome the problems of the strike. Court injunction and union agreement stopped short any path along this new original way.

HS

France is better for capital  
How surplus value was divided (85-88)  
In % of the G N P

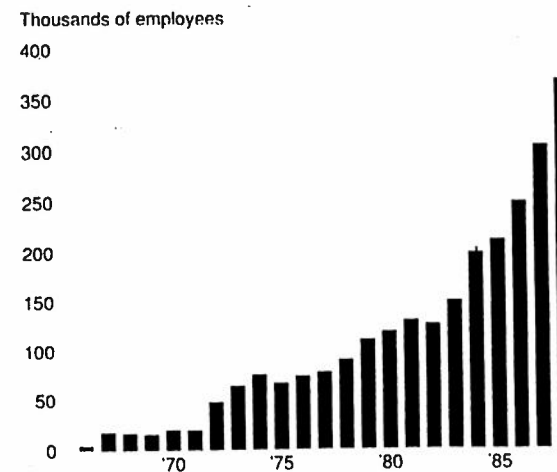
LA FRANCE RÉMUNÈRE MIEUX LE CAPITAL			
LA RÉPARTITION CAPITAL-TRAVAIL ENTRE 1985 ET 1988 (moyenne annuelle en % du PIB)			
	AVANTAGE ALLANT AU CAPITAL	AVANTAGE ALLANT AU TRAVAIL	GAIN DE PRODUCTIVITÉ
FRANCE	1,9	2,8	1,5
ALLEMAGNE FÉDÉRALE	0,9	2,6	1,3
ÉTATS-UNIS	0,8	3,3	1,1
GRANDE-BRETAGNE	0,6	4,3	2

Chart 5  
Growth in Maquiladora Employment and the Ratio of Mexican Wages to U.S. Wages



SOURCES OF PRIMARY DATA: Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática, U.S. Department of Labor.

Chart 1  
Maquiladora Employment



SOURCE OF PRIMARY DATA: Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática.



ready to guarantee any condition of exploitation ,the prevailing conditions in Mexico (wages , education , trade barriers , etc..)were not attractive enough compared with other developing countries to give a strong impulse to maquiladoras .The crisis in the world and in Mexico would bring about these conditions .

Around 1980 oil prices dropped sharply ;the world crisis obliged the mexican ruling class to a U-turn to maintain its position; mexican doors were widely opened to foreign capital.But far more important in some years the economical miracle transformed into economical disaster for mexican people.Peasants , low middle class and workers had to pay for the enormous debt ,the corruption of the leaders and the international pressure of capital via the IMF medicine .Oil revenues were not there to cushion the exploitation pressure on workers as the bureaucracy and slowly growing capitalism needs even more money to keep its power and to repay debts .Average weekly wages which have climbed from \$ 20 in 1950 to \$70 in 1980 fell to \$40 in 1985.In 1983 , Mexico had the lowest average wage among semi industrialised countries and in april 87 it was said that 1/3 of the population was below the subsistence level.During th same time , prices rocketed;a roll costing one peso in 80 , cost 25 in 86 ; a tube ticket costing 1 peso in 80 cost 50 in 87.The following charts are more than words (PACNIC is the average wage in four developing countries -Hong Kong ,Korea , Singapore and Taiwan);the exponential development of maquiladora explodes just when the mexican wages line crosses down the PACNIC wage line.

Maquiladoras became very attractive even more after 1987 when restrictions to maquiladoras were relaxed .Factories both sides of the american border multiplied and even moved into the center of Mexico.In 1983 50 out of the 100 most important US multinationals had factories in Mexico and GM had become the largest mexican employer.The most frequent trade was triangular : US multinationals bring goods into Mexico from all over the world , processes them into the finished product exported to the USA .For instance , the Ford factory built in Hermosillo used mainly japanese components and took no notice of the agreement limiting exports to the USA .In 1987 only 2% of components used by maquiladoras were produced in Mexico;so the 50,000 to 60,000 new jobs created every year through maquiladoras not only were a small percentage of what was needed ( 900,000 new jobs needed every year in Mexico ) but these new jobs had no secondary effect on employment because it was only assembly lines working with

## S P A I N

Letter from Barcelona ( 30/4/90 )

"...I agree with what you wrote in your letter (see Echanges n°63);on the use of the expression 'militant attitude ' perhaps I could have used 'fighting attitude'.Anyway I wanted to refer to the dialectical situation between individual resistance (as it always exists everywhere) and the syndicalist function,i e the always contradictory relationship between what I call the 'fighting attitude ' (of the worker who himself takes his own decisions ) and the principle of 'delegation ' which leads putting the decisions in the hands of the union representatives

On the other hand , I agree with you about the link between the possibility of union actions and the development of the productive forces ( more exactly of the techniques of production ).In fact , the place of the CNT-Renovados ( if it has one ) is determined by the transformation in the productive organisation in Spain .This place for an intervention is just during the passage from the old towards the new techniques (and relations ) of production .This period of adaptation to the new technology, which causes a lot of individual resistances,is the only period where a union has some chance to intervene if it has the possibility of harvesting the discontent rising up among the workers threatened by the management diktats.

No more to add to what you wrote there is no room for a 'revolutionary union '...In fact the radicalism of the CNT-renovados stems not only from the need to pick up the workers vote leaving the majority unions (what we see at the SEAT factory) but from the attempt to be recognised by the managers to perform the mediating function (representative and legitimated by its electoral success ) in the new productive conditions imposed by the new owner (Volkswagen ):

To day is the 15 th day of a strike of bus drivers in Madrid .The press mentioned it only to stigmatise the assembleist movements and the spreading of COBAS in the negotiating process ; apparently , the unions have been overcome (you will find a more complete article in La Estiba ).Unions and the government signed an agreement some weeks ago with some concessions on the claims CC00 and UGT publicised on the 14/12/89.But we have to

understand that these pretended 'concessions' are no more than what the Gonzalez government formerly proposed. The new 'flexibility' of the government can be explained to a certain extent by the bad result the PSOE got in the October general elections. The unions CCOO and UGT on their side have stepped backwards with the 'Priority union platform' (P S P) which is far behind the formal radicalisation proclaimed with the 14/12 strike. Government and unions have conceded something, but the unions a bit more.

The differences proclaimed between UGT and PSOE and the relative boycott of the PSOE candidates have had some positive results for the unions bureaucracy: the political technocracy of the 'socialist family' was obliged to step down its pretence to remove the old union bureaucrats from political power. Anyway this unions-government agreement at the end of January was the end point of a lot of odd manoeuvres, private and secret meetings between the Economy Minister and the general secretaries of the unions. At the same time, the government decided not to raise for 1990 the enterprise contribution to the Health Service. The government strategy is to get the unions agreement for a new 'political and social pact' which will renew the 'Moncloa pact'. To get the approval of the Parliament and the cooperation of the other parties, the government first needs the unions agreement. Doing so will prove its ability to build a national economic plan which could get the union support and the confidence of all parliamentary forces. In the unions-government agreement some claims concerned child benefits and pensions whose rise had a negative effect on the social budget. As the enterprise contribution was not to rise, the workers' one had to go up. Thence the need to have the workers looking elsewhere. End of February a government decree (the old dictatorial style of making laws) imposed a rise in the workers contribution not in raising its rate but in raising the gross wage on which it depends. In other words a trick to lower wages in bringing more money to the Health system without disturbing the private accumulation process of capital. Of course, the unions stayed silent: it was the first consequence of the unions-government agreement after the cooling of their relationship which had followed the 14/12 strike.

When the unions-government agreement was published, the boss organisation -CEOE- withdrew from all discussions (even though the agreement was the first step towards a national economic plan) giving the pretext that it disagreed with controlling the

high. These facts were more or less hidden behind the 'economic miracle' when oil revenues could somewhat answer the accumulation needs and lessen the burden of accumulation for workers. From the early 50's to around 1980 the real value of the average Mexican minimum wage rose from \$ 20 to over \$ 70 a week. Such a situation could elicit some support from the workers for a system which in a few years had made of Mexico the most indebted country of the world after the USA and Brazil.

### THE MAQUILADORAS

US capital was very well placed to use the enormous Mexican potential of cheap labour: instead of having problems with the Chicanos illegally crossing the border, they had only to move the factories, no further than any American state but far from any kind of labour regulation and union activity; the Mexican State, i.e. the bureaucracy of the PRI was not that strict with its state capitalist line as long as it could profit from any kind of trade and not strict at all with its principles.

The maquiladora program developed in response to the cancellation of the US bracero program. During World War II, labour shortages in the railroad industry and agriculture led the US to admit Mexican labourers, or braceros, to work. Many farm workers left the interior of Mexico and established permanent homes on the northern border they could so easily cross. In 1964 the US cancelled all programs when 185,000 Mexicans were still working as braceros; in some north Mexican cities unemployment rocketed to exceed 70% in some places; for US capitalism a pot of gold lay just over the Rio Grande. In 1963, the USA amended its tariff code to allow US products exported to assembly plants abroad to be reimported and subject to duty only on the value added during the assembly process (which means practically very little considering the low rate of Mexican wages). Following this measure, in 1965, Mexico established the Border Industrialisation Program along the US border with the name of MAQUILADORAS for assembly plants established by foreign or joint domestic-foreign ventures; they were exempted from laws requiring a majority Mexican ownership. At first Mexican law required maquiladoras to locate on the border, but later allowed plants in the interior.

It took off very slowly; by 70 only 454 plants employing 20,000 workers (textile, electronics) had been settled on the border. Even though foreign capital found a dream union in RTM

Class struggles and the strike at FordSome considerations about Mexico

From 1910 up to 1930 with the ' Revolution ' Mexico went through a difficult labour to give birth to a totalitarian bourgeois democracy: peasants and workers were given 'rights ' : to own land, to vote , to unionize , to have access to education and health.As everywhere and more so in Latin America ,these 'rights' blanketed deep class inequalities , as deep as before but within more differentiated classes : poor and landless peasants and farmworkers were to be partly transformed into a mass of displaced and very precarious 'workers ' , a huge pool of more than cheap labour wherein capital could choose which was the most convenient for it to exploit .

This bourgeois revolution was to transform mexican society from a landowners society into an entrepreneurial capitalist society.As this transformation was going on and as a consequence poor peasants moved from country to town, a minimum of health and education had to be guaranteed to answer the growing needs of industry;this has become even more true with the recent modern US factories .The consequence has been a high speed growing population from 14 millions in 1917 up to 83 millions in 1989, which greatly increased the labour force pool but at the same time brought about difficult problems of control .

As everywhere building national capitalism among imperialist capitalisms required state capitalism and a totalitarian control to allow for the accumulation process, even more so in Mexico to protect it fom its greedy neighbour : the USA.Mexican democracy was a de facto dictatorship of the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Intitucional ).The money for the bureaucracy and for indutrial development came largely from oil and from bank borrowing.Private national and State capitalist industrial development were helped by a monopoly union CTM (Confederation of Mexican Workers ) completely integrated with the State and with the PRI and working by any means to maintain low wages , good productivity and social peace:: the right to unionise was only the right ot agree with the compulsory union(strong amongst its 5 million membership ) where corruption and bureaucratic practices were running

contracts signed by the workers when they are engaged by the union factory committee .It was a ridiculous position because in Spain a boss has all the possibilities he could hope for to engage or to sack a worker.This position reveals how backwards industrial relations are in most spanish factories.Spanish firms are a declining political and social force because they are more and moresqueezed by the pressure of transnational capital between disappearance or take over by foreign companies.The latter happens only when there is a prospect of profit.Foreign capital has penetrated in Spain for a long time but has largely increased over the last years in important sectors like electronics or food industry ; more recently ,services ,properties and exchange were the prey of EEC capital.

The 'pact for competitiveness'

When he was looking for a vote of confidence in the new parliament in march F.Gonzalez called all the political forces to support his 'pact for competitiveness ".The real meaning of this call was to rediscover the political consensus obtained years ago with the ' Moncloa pact ' which was needed for the transition to democracy ;the period to come need again such a consensus in a situation even more difficult for Spain.Suddenly the political,financial and industrial authorities discovered that spanish industry (and economy in general ) could not resist the consequences of the common market in 1993.Even considering the growing rate of the economy for the past years,the triumphalism of the Economy Minister (Spain , the country with the best possibilities for profit in Europe), the consumerism euphoria of a big part of the spanish society , the so called curbing of the crisis and the restructuration at any cost, etc...the structurzal weakness of this development itself threatens the continuity of the performance of the modernisation of capital in Spain and the strategy of the socialist party in this aim .Events in the Eastern countries brought about negative effects on Spain,because they raise the question of the anticipated investments ,one of the tools used by the PSOE in their plan for modernisation .Up to now the social democrat strategy was to remove the backward structures and production units in industry and in the country to invest directly in public sector or push forward technical change in private enterprises with loans and special programs with the aim to have them ready for take-over by foreign capital .Neither the size , nor the nature, nor the technical level,nor financial or productive capacity give any chance to the spanish enterprise in

the common market exposed to european competition .It was the main reason for the PSOE policy to accelerate the take over of spanish firms by foreign capital because the national bourgeoisie was unable (historically was always unable ) to face the new imperatives of modern capital .The government looked for the help of common market money (special grants for less developed countries , etc ...) to limit the consequences of a possible destabilisation resulting in an unbalanced development between the different parts of Spain .But these hopes are now cast down by the situation rising frm the events in Eastern countries and the impossibility for even the most developed parts of Spain to follow the pace of capitalist evolution .A long report ordered by the EEC for the University of Louvain (Belgium ) on the situation and the prospects for the industrial parts of Europe sentenced to industrial death the spanish regions of Catalonia ,Basque country , Asturias , Cantabria .It is too early to risk an evaluation of the amount of investaents which will go East but it is a real threat for Spain very well understood now by government and bank managers .Moreover ,we have to consider that most of the foreign investment money coming to Spain in 1989 was at a level of 40% speculative capital going to financial institutions, insurances , wholesale trade, properties ...).The share of the EC budget supposed to go to Spain has been reduced to get more money for Eastern countries .Tourism , the main economic resource of Spain is threatened with people deserting the spanish beaches .Spain has become a dear country,services are bad, and the deterioration of the economic situation on the coasts is more than serious ....The governement macro economic previsions to contain inflation have broken into pieces.Some factory or even branches agreements ( in the building industry in Barcelona for instance ) are already far ahead of the limit rate fixed by the government ( some 2 points ahead ).The rate of accumulation , though still high , is not high enough to narrow the gap with european capital.Most of the profits accumulated by the small enterprises has been used either for luxury consumption or for any kind of speculation pushed by a liberal legislation mainly concerned with capital circulation ; very little has gone to the formation of capital through industrial investment.This is the situation in Spain and it explains why the PSOE is trying to push an emergency plan , the 'pact for competitiveness' .Once again it is a plan to rescue the national economy .

Even the FMI gave its 'advice 'end of april on the need to get such an agreement in order to have real wages progression under productivity progression ;the tool should be a strict and general control on wage-rises in the new social agreements;the government projects have IMF support ...We have to add that these 'new ' plans are not new at all; since the Moncloa pact the relation wage/productivity has already come down on the side of productivity,But it seems not enough .

It is this serious crisis in the accumulation process of capital in Spain which is in the background of this first agreement between government and unions ; other discussions are in the pipeline to go ahead on the method defined by the 'pact for competitiveness' .

I told above how a certain number of local or branch agreements brought to a significant number of workers more than the limit fixed by the Economy Minister , only to prevent strikes,.But in other sectors ( public transports in Madrid , cleaners in Madrid airport ) stikes burst out which brought clamours in the media and again discussions on the 'regulation' of the right to strike ( e g its limitation ).Presently unions are for 'self regulation ' and are opposed to the government' seeking a law with compulsory minimum services during a strike ,something unions cannot even guarantee either because frequently the rank and file escape the union bureaucrats control,or because these bureaucrats use such a means to regain some influence on the workers and on the other side as a means of pressure on the government and managers, having it both ways.During the cleaners strike at the Madrid airport the press complained that the unions (CCOO & UGT ) members emptied the dustbins in the waiting rooms.In a certain sense all are frightened by the prospect of wildcat actions and this fear is used by the union bureaucrats against the social democrats ; till now , unions are still the most efficient weapon against the autonomous workers movement .In this new phase of the development of capital in Spain ,unions are badly needed ;to be persuaded of this need we have only to consider the role they played in the 'democratic transition' during and after franquism.As the present crisis is deeper than was thought, the unions help is fundamental as a part of this 'neo corporatist state' which is the constant form taken by the democratic system during difficult periods of capital accumulation."