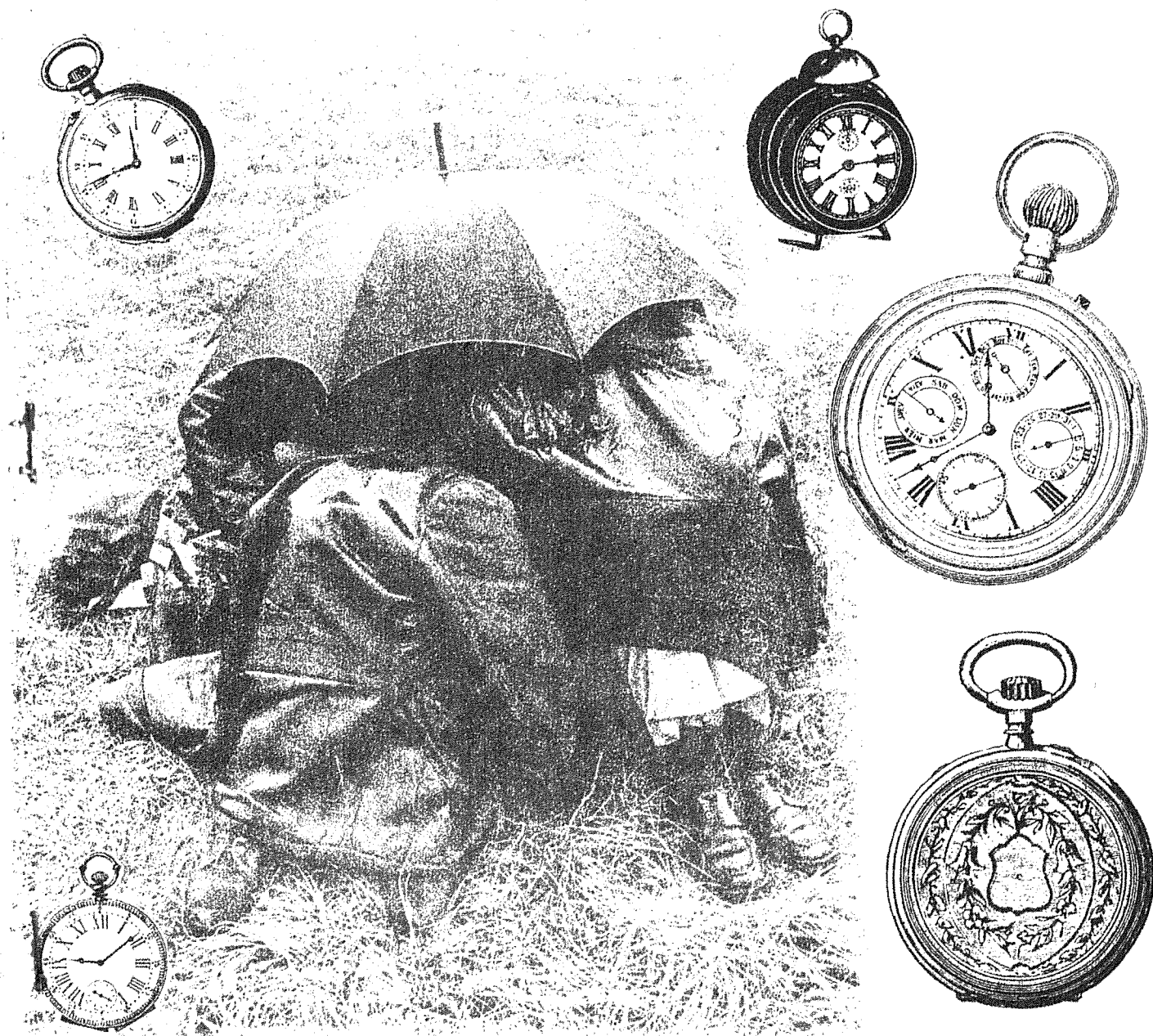


solidarity

for workers' power

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THE MARCH ON BESANCON

This is an abridged version of an eye-witness account of the large demonstration held in Besançon (France) on September 29, 1973, in support of the Lip workers. Of particular interest are the attitudes of the traditional organisations, and how the Lip workers themselves have tried to overcome them.

Negotiations at Lip had been going on for many weeks. They were being held in public, attended by some 50 to 80 employees of the firm, ordinary workers and not just union delegates. They had, however, been getting nowhere. An Action Committee and a 'Popularisation Committee' had been set up, consisting of both union and non-union workers, with some outside aid. These bodies decided to organise a march on the town.

In Paris very little propaganda for the march filtered through the combined union barrage. The P.S.U. organised a support-and-preparation meeting, but largely to put forward their own version of 'self-management' and to bolster their image. It so happens that Piaget, the most 'militant' union delegate of the CFDT at Lip is a P.S.U. member. No other groups, apart from some Maoists and some Trotskyists, publicised the proposed march. There were no union posters in Paris. Some Trotskyists practically sabotaged the efforts of the Lip workers: Lutte Ouvrière (fraternal group to I.S.) organised a meeting on Chile for the Friday night, when people were leaving for the march.

In the factories, the same smokescreen. A friend said that in his factory the CGT made no mention of the march, and that the CFDT were given orders that if the workers spoke about it and seemed eager to go, they should organise coaches and control the delegation. But if no one mentioned Lip the delegates should also keep their mouths shut.

On Friday evening we left Paris. The rain was pouring down in buckets. Hardly an encouraging omen. We arrived at the huge camp site at 11 pm. There was not much animation. Stands had been set up by various groups: Libération (the daily neo-maoist paper), various Trotskyists, local CGT and CFDT branches, other factories on strike, the Aluminium plant at Noguères in the Pyrénées, the blouse factory where women are making their own blouses, the peasants of Larzac protesting about the installation of a military camp proposed in their region, etc. A stage had been rigged up. A concert given by sympathetic singers and groups was attracting sporadic attention. It was very cold.

The national unions had not actually opposed the march but had disclaimed all responsibility. The mayor (a 'socialist') tried to dissuade the Committee from organising the march and refused all municipal aid. On the regional TV he had asked for calm and had looked very frightened.

At about 7 am we got up. It was drizzling. On the bridge leading to the site (outside the centre of the town) was an immense convoy of cars and coaches as far as the eye could see. We saw groups from Carcassonne and Montpellier in the extreme South of France, groups from the extreme North of France, from Brittany, from Belgium, Switzerland and Germany. Many had come in organised coaches. But just as many had come as individuals, by car or train. A group in an old 2 CV camped next to us. They had come from Marseilles. Throughout the morning it poured without let up, destroying practically all possibility to roam around, to discuss, to meet with people sheltering in tents and cars. We had no idea how many were there. It seemed sad.

At 1 pm the march assembled for the 5 mile march through the town. It was still pouring. We met a girl who worked at Lip, whom we had met previously during the occupation. We marched together. We looked behind us. The roads are narrow and winding in Besançon and we could see the cortège stretching out between the two bridges. Halfway along the route we could still see people starting off near the first bridge. Towards the end they were still starting off from there. There must have been at least 100,000 people marching in the pouring rain (radio estimates varied from 40,000 to 150,000).

The girl from Lip told us that when the police had captured the factory, they had been stationed at the local army barracks. The soldiers on National Service had let down the tyres of the CRS police units, and put sugar in the petrol tanks. A leaflet distributed on the march was signed by the National Service men from the barracks. It was obviously authentic, typing and spelling mistakes included, and contained no great revolutionary phrases. It told how the soldiers refused to talk to the CRS, and how they had been insulted by them and had replied by throwing water at them and even throwing police uniforms down the loo. They said they would refuse to attack the marchers.

In the event we did not see a single policeman. The barracks themselves were shut, with only one officer guarding the gate. Later a shop assistant in a cafe told us that the Prefecture, Town Hall and all other public buildings were packed with policemen. Faced by thousands of peaceful demonstrators, they didn't dare show their faces.

The girl from Lip said that the first thing she would do on Monday would be to tear up her CGT card. She was disgusted by their behaviour. She told us that the CGT had set up a stall at the camp site but had taken it down during the night, fearing contagion (other groups, such as

Libération, had set up shop beside them). Another demonstrator, not from Lip but from the council estate opposite the plant, told us that contrary to press reports the riots outside the plant, when the police had moved in, had included Lip workers. Arrested Lip workers had, however, been released immediately, so as to make the agitation appear as due to 'outsiders'.

During the march there were cordons set up at several places by the march stewards. There was one, for instance, in front of the barracks. Another barred off a route leading to the Lip factory. Most of the 'stewards' had CGT badges. We asked our friend from Lip if any of these stewards worked at Lip. After close scrutiny she said not one of them did. These were however the only organised stewards we saw.

The Lip workers themselves did not march as a group but scattered themselves among the other demonstrators. The union contingents came first. The CGT had many local sections but no national representatives. The same applied to the slightly smaller CFDT. The P.S.U. was in a sizeable contingent. No organised Maoists were seen. Between the unions, the P.S.U. and a few anarchist groups came the unattached. And behind them the only Trotskyist group that supported the march, the ex-Ligue Communiste (fraternal group to the IMG). Unlike all the other Trotskyists, they had really brought out their forces. We estimated about 10,000 behind their banners (not all members, of course). This only shows they had organised many coaches and were determined to have a presence. They marched like an organised army. This was a disquieting note in a demonstration which did not have the usual dragooned appearance. The non-union contingents were larger than the union ones.

The square at the end of the march was too small to hold all the demonstrators. Most drifted away as soon as they arrived. There were a few very brief speeches. The CGT speaker was apparently booed. As the crowds dispersed, hords of young people retraced the route they had taken during the march, in search of food and drink, this time under no control. No one was in the mood for a punch-up. Everyone was tired, exhilarated by the march, but deflated by the anti-climax.

Practically all the shops in the centre of town had shut. Some posters had appeared on the walls, purporting to come from the 'silent majority', and protesting against the external invasion. Most had been torn down. The shopkeepers, doubtless aided by the panic-mongering mayor, feared that their establishments would be smashed up. Some, nevertheless, had been tempted by the prospect of all that trade. They opened at about 6 pm. But as soon as more than ten people were inside the shop, they would shut their door again. In one rare café, open throughout, a very sympathetic woman served us mulled wine. She complained about the stupidity of the shopkeepers. The baker round the corner gave us free cakes, in addition to the bread we bought. But most shopkeepers acted true to type. Some townspeople watched from their windows, some from the pavements.

Of course some were in the demonstration. In the richer areas many stayed behind closed shutters. Returning to the camping site we again passed in front of the army barracks. This time two soldiers by the window gave us a sign of support.

No one knows what the outcome of the Lip struggle will be. An absolute victory seems unlikely. The 'negotiations' are still dragging on. Many of the workers, who have lost all illusions in the CGT, still think that the CFDT is, nominally at least, with them. This is not so important, because the workers will not accept a compromise. If the negotiations remain public, the workers will continue to maintain a considerable control over the proceedings. Should the CFDT be seen to be a party to a compromise, the workers won't treat the union kindly.

The march has not directly affected the situation, and it is a pity that the rain cut out all possibility of discussion. It must be remembered however that it was essentially the rank and file Lip workers, hampered by the organisations on all sides, who organised and wanted the march. They were supported by 100,000 people, who came from all over the country in the pouring rain and icy cold. This is bound to encourage them and affect the balance of power.

This is a small local battle. It is all the more remarkable that it has caught the imagination of so many. Of course there was no 'Revolution', no storming of the factory. It would have been stupid to attempt anything of the sort. The march was just one more example that the organisations (unions and parties) have very marginal influence. The rank and file can push and organise very effectively. The workers have held out for three months. They have two to three months' wages in hand - the third wage payment took place just before the march. The march itself cannot have hindered them.

Janet J.

PARIS: MAY 1968

This pamphlet, of which we have sold over 6000 copies, is now in print again. This new edition includes not only the original text but also the article 'France : the theoretical implications' which appeared in SOLIDARITY vol.V, No.4, and which has long been out of print. Would those who have ordered this pamphlet within the last 2 years - and whom we have been unable to supply - please write to us again. Price: 15p (+ postage).

RUMPUS AT FORD'S

Recent developments at Ford's Dagenham augur well for the future of rank-and-file action. Throughout this year there have been a number of lay-offs of production workers, intermittently combined with speed-up. Workers became thoroughly pissed off. On August 29, at 12 o'clock on the night shift in the Body Plant, the management calmly announced that they were laying off the men and sending them home immediately - without pay. The situation exploded.

Some workers went home quietly. Hundreds of others marched up to the Administration office and besieged the staff, while a delegation led by a steward went inside to demand full pay for the shift. After a while Paul Sissons (the B shift plant manager) said he'd had enough and was leaving. The steward told Sissons that if he left he would have him brought back. Sissons swallowed this and eventually conceded full payment. For the rest of the night workers slept, played cards and discussed. Subsequently, shop meetings were held which decided that in future lay-offs without pay would not be accepted.

This incident created the pattern for later events. On September 15, Winston Williams, a welder in the Body in White shop of the Body Group, was sacked for allegedly threatening Fred Fuller, a notorious 'tear-arse' foreman. This followed a period of speed-up and harrassment of Williams. For example, Fuller even followed him into the lavatory. A few weeks previously the number of jobs expected of his team per shift was 480. This was pushed up by Fuller to 620 by the time of the incident, and he was trying to reach 714.

Williams was no militant. He had been at Fords for 11 years and had a record as a 'pacesetter'. In fact he had been silly enough to attempt to achieve the company's targets (his opposite number on the other shift hadn't been so cooperative) and had cracked up in the process. His example should be a lesson to us all. Ironically, three years earlier Williams had saved Fuller from (at the least) a good hiding when he had been knocked unconscious in a similar incident.

Many people have tried to compare the Williams case with the previous sackings of McLoughlin and Francis. Nothing could be further from the truth. Instead of a calculated victimisation, decided at the highest level, it was the company which was caught unawares by the strength of the reaction to its standard practice. Dozens of cases similar to the Williams case have occurred without protest. But this time it was the rank and file who took the offensive, although admittedly a limited and uncalculated one.

The stoppage in support of Williams by the other workers in his department halted production. On Tuesday, September 18, management announced that they were going to lay off line workers in the PTA and Body Plants for two days. In both plants mass meetings were held where it was decided that workers would report for work as normal.*

The next day there was chaos in both plants, with hundreds of laid-off workers persuading (sometimes robustly) workers who were still working to stop. In the Body Plant the Administration barracked themselves in their offices. A number of windows were smashed when they refused to come out. There were two incidents of violence against stewards who argued with the demonstrators.**

In the PTA the situation was similar but more people were involved. Over 2000 workers 'reported for work' and they stayed in the factory longer than those of the Body Group. In this case there was quite substantial damage done to vehicles and equipment, but eventually the occupation petered out as people went home.

The situation was out of the control of the Shop Stewards Committee in the Body Plant. At the first mass meeting Macrae and Harroway were booed and catcalled. But at a later meeting, after the trouble had subsided, accepted the proposal to picket outside the plant and that workers should not come into the factory the next day. Instead they would picket the trade union negotiations in Central London. The struggle was thus safely brought under control.

* 'Solidarity' has often commented on the appalling state of communications between workers at Dagenham, and on the role of the shop steward apparatus in actually reinforcing this situation. An interesting example occurred recently when a steward of the Body Group happened by chance to be in the PTA when a shop meeting was being held. He was asked to tell the lads what was going on in the Body Group, which he did. After the meeting Brian Elliot, convenor of the PTA, rushed up to him shouting: 'What are you doing speaking in meetings at my plant', and told him to 'get out of my plant'. Later in the struggle Elliot refused to call a meeting to decide on action. He also used the opportunity to attack the militants who had played a leading part on September 19.

** We do not believe that violence should be the primary way of settling disputes within the working class. Nevertheless these actions symbolise the deep frustrations felt by many ordinary workers at the way the Shop Stewards set-up operates at Fords.

MANIPULATIONS AT HALEWOOD

On September 26, on the Body in White lines, the stewards informed the lads that they had been approached by the Labour Relations Department with the proposal to hold a meeting with the rank and file in the Admin. block.

Labour Relations, it seems, had been worried for some time about the ever-increasing amount of alleged sabotage and bad workmanship. They viewed very seriously the number of cars being rejected by the quality control. They now wanted to find a solution, i.e. by picking the brains of the rank and file over cups of tea, plum cakes and sandwiches.

The stewards called a floor meeting and put it to the lads. Unfortunately they had not put up a very good case against the proposals of the Labour Relations Dept. They did at least advise against the whole rotten set-up as being no more than a nasty but clever piece of manipulation. A lot of the lads saw through the proposals. They called for a total boycott, thus raising an uproar. They put it to the 'moderates': 'They'll screw the bloody balls off you goons if you think it's going to be just a cosy chat. The lot of us will be split down the middle. They'll set us at each others' throats as spies and tale-carriers to the supervisors'.

But the moderates appealed for a saner approach. They said: 'Let's be sensible about the whole matter. We do have some layabouts on the line who arse about. We shouldn't be covering for such people. Also we might be able to come to some better understanding with the supervisory staff and win some concessions'.

After a lot of fierce argument a vote was taken on a show of hands. The militants were out-voted by a very narrow margin. Some of the moderates put up the hands of their 'don't know' mates.

A comrade from the Body in White lines came over soon after the fiasco, telling me and my mates what had gone on. He was really pissed off the way his work mates could be so easily duped over the whole affair. I told him: 'Don't be licked by that shower. Go back and fight the buggers. Make sure the stewards and the rest of the lads know about the hand-raising business. Also mention that at present we have a few thousand workers being laid off at Dagenham. And that thousands of other car workers are now facing the boot from Chryslers. In an effort to smash the rank and file into the ground, no car worker, let alone stewards, could even consider the remotest hint of cooperation with the management'.

Two hours later the comrade came back to my section. This time he was not depressed but jubilant. He said: 'We really shook the bastards this time. It seems that the stewards had to go back to the Labour

Relations Dept. telling them it was impossible, on account of a new situation that had blown up among the lads. There was bad feeling over the proposals, especially now that the lads had been informed that the section foremen and supervisors would be in on the meeting, joining in the tea party in fact. This had proved to be the last straw.

The 'moderates' had folded up and got routed. And the Labour Relations boys got booted up the arse. And the foremen are still getting ulcers. And the Escort body shells are still being rejected because of serious defects. And tomorrow brings us to still another shift. And so it goes on...

H. F. Jnr.

LETTER FROM AMSTERDAM

Thanks for the latest SOLIDARITY (vol.VII, no.7). Nothing serious has happened at Ford Amsterdam except for an international meeting of Ford officials on August 20 in the chic Okura Hotel in Amsterdam. They came from Ireland, France, Germany, Switzerland, England, America, Portugal and Italy - to have 'business' talks, while consuming paté, soup, lobster, meat, ice cream, coffee, biscuits, liqueur and a choice of 3 wines ... all to the tune of a small musical ensemble. There were about 100 guys and it had something to do with a new truck. The Public Relations Dept. had also provided 12 girls who were instructed to 'keep up an interesting conversation', while being warned that 'the only thing they are really interested in is sex'.

In the meantime, the workers in the grinding shop are eating lead. In the paint shop, the menu consists of just one course: paint. There are some plans to start action on the working conditions in these departments. We've got hold of the reports of the Medical Department of Ford and the information could be played against the management. Information on working conditions and actions in similar departments in England would be very useful for us. Could you send copies of this letter to other Ford contacts in England?

As a reaction to the last issue of SOLIDARITY (we have not read no.6 yet), we agree on the necessity of an International Ford Bulletin. We are all working for the same boss and the shop floor talk should not be limited to Holland or to any other country with a Ford factory. It must be international. We do not see why such a Bulletin should be beyond the ability of the rank and file to organise.

We've already had experience of distributing information pamphlets, for instance on the strike at Ford Antwerp (this spring). Contacts with Genk have failed until now (any good addresses?). The unions here have never published anything on actions at Ford in foreign countries. Before they start to do so (in order to enlarge their own power) we should have started ourselves. The biggest union over here, the NVV, has financial interest in a car trading firm called 'ENTAM', which is closely linked to Ford Nederland. We think such a bulletin should appear regularly (so that contacts should be less haphazard).

A. R.

WHAT SORT OF CRISIS?

The current problem of inflation has proved a puzzle, both to the economists and to the traditional marxists. The economists used to argue that the best cure for wage-inflation was a good stiff dose of unemployment. Until the late 1960's this seems to have worked, although imperfectly. But since 1968, and until very recently, unemployment has been consistently higher than at any time since the war, reaching in 1971-72 levels unknown since 1940.(1) At the same time inflation speeded up.

The economists have been forced to rethink. The academic advocates of 'laissez-faire' have become an even smaller minority. Very few economists would now argue - like Enoch Powell - that all forms of state control (including wage control) are always pernicious. It is also beginning to dawn on them that economics cannot rigidly be separated from politics or from society. The repudiation of established myths has, on occasion, verged on hysteria.(2)

The marxists have been equally perplexed. Marx had very little to say about inflation. In the first place, it was never a significant problem in the 19th century, when prices fell as often as they rose.(3) Moreover, it is very difficult to apply the labour theory of value to the commodity 'money'. (What is the labour value of a bank deposit, and how does it fall from year to year?)

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- (1) This should be seen in perspective, particularly by those who think it has, of itself, any revolutionary implications - or that it implies any in-built tendency of the system to economic collapse. As far as unemployment is concerned the 'best' year between the two world wars was twice as bad as the worst year after World War II.
 - (2) See, for example, P. Wiles 'Cost Inflation and the State of Economic Theory', Economic Journal 83 (330), June 1973, pp. 377-398.
 - (3) Unable to sustain the argument that there is an economic 'crisis' on grounds (a) of diminished growth of the productive forces, or (b) of increasing unemployment, certain 'marxists' have changed horses in mid-stream and now see inflation as the main yardstick of 'crisis'. This is clearly their right, but don't let them do so in the name of marxism. In nearly all of Marx's writings, 'economic crises' are associated with falling prices (deflation) not rising prices (inflation).

Clearly the present 'crisis' is quite different from that of the 1930's, when the 'death agony of capitalism' could, it seemed, be observed daily. Unemployment (now about 2.5%) has not been above 4%, while in the 1930's it was never below 10%. Real wages after tax (4) have - at least until the start of the freeze - risen rapidly. Heath claims an increase in real wages since the 1970 General Election of 12.5% in three years, as against 9.5% in the six years of the Labour Government, and this probably isn't far wide of the mark. The labour market was never quite as slack as it looked two or three years ago, as is evident from high levels of job vacancies, and sustained overtime working which has continued to provide a major part of the wage packets of most industrial workers. And there is no evidence of any long-run tendency for the rate of growth of the British economy to slow down.

These, of course, are general trends. Regional unemployment remains a massive source of misery, though again there is no parallel with the Jarrow of the 1930's.(5) Some workers - especially among the lower paid - have seen their real wages (after tax) rise very slowly, if at all. There are still short-term oscillations in the economy. It remains true, however, that the current situation is not generally one of 'increasing misery', still less of a 'crisis of over-production'.

Some marxists argue that the wage explosion has led to a sharp reduction in the rate of profit, which must inevitably slow down the rate of accumulation. Glyn and Sutcliffe produce a variety of figures which show the rate of profit falling by as much as two-fifths between 1950 and 1970,(6) and a decline in the share of company profits in gross domestic product from about 16% to less than 10% in the same period.(7) It is not at all clear how this can be made to conform with Marx's predictions of an increasing rate of exploitation.(8) Nor are the statistics above criticism: Jackson, Turner and Wilkinson claim that the share of profits in national income, after tax, has increased.(9)

(4) This is important. D.Jackson, H.A.Turner and F.Wilkinson 'Do Trade Unions Cause Inflation?' (Cambridge University Press 1972) show that tax is taking an increasing share of the pay packet, and that one major reason for the recent acceleration of wage inflation has been the need to get huge pre-tax increases in order to obtain quite modest increases in post-tax earnings.

(5) The average real wage of an employed worker in the 1930's was much less than half its present value. It is very likely that a man on the dole today is better off than his father was, with a job, forty years ago.

(6) Andrew Glyn and Bob Sutcliffe 'British Capitalism, Workers and the Profits Squeeze' (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1972), p.248.

(7) *ibid.*, pp.238-9.

(8) We don't think this will worry our marxists. If profits rise they will say Marx was right about the increasing rate of exploitation. If profits fall they will say He was right about the falling rate of profit. Heads I win, tails you loose!

(9) *op. cit.*, p.81, Table 11*.

It is certainly true that Heath's wage freeze favours profits at the expense of wages, though it is doubtful if this can be sustained for long. In any case, the effects of inflation on profits can easily be exaggerated, as Peter Metheias suggests: (10)

'Inflation makes capital appreciation - the inherited wealth of past accumulation - more strategic than income, given the tax structure and the impossibility of taxing capital gains as effectively as salaried income. If wage costs induce inflation, those having to earn their income by chasing around the spiral of price increases - even those gaining in the race - are less well off as a group than those with capital in the form of property, land, equity investments and precious objects whose value has been enhanced much faster than the general rate of inflation.

'A certain conspiracy of silence over the advantages of capital gains in inflationary times has been encouraged by an outmoded accounting convention of what income is, which focuses on the yield of assets rather than their augmenting value. Indeed the recent doubling and tripling of land value which has not been matched by an equivalent rapid or sustained rise in rents can be gloomily interpreted as a fall in the rate of return on land to a mere 1% per annum - as though this marked a fall in income rather than a prodigious gain in advantage from capital accumulation. Public debate on economic policy also bases judgment on relative income rather than on total annual gains from capital appreciation plus income.'

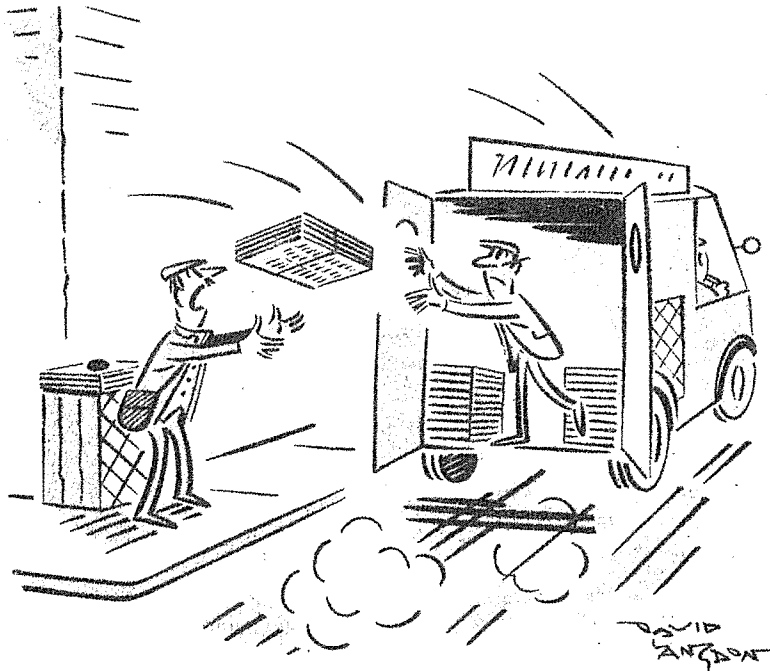
In other words, profits can be carefully disguised as capital gains, and published statistics may tell us very little about the actual effects of inflation on property incomes.

The economists and the traditional marxists agree on one point: they both see inflation, not merely as a problem, but as a dangerous problem capable of leading to a major economic crisis. World-wide inflation is not a new phenomenon: it prevailed throughout several decades of the 19th century (offset by other decades in which prices fell), and has been with us in effect since 1939. It has certainly speeded up - in the case of Britain from perhaps 3% a year in the 1950's to the current 10% or more; and it has been much less readily influenced by the level of unemployment (hence the term 'stagflation', which has however already become obsolete). But why should this represent a 'crisis'?

If the rate of increase of inflation accelerated, so that prices were going up by several billion (or trillion, etc.) per cent each year, capitalism would obviously be in deep trouble. This process of 'hyper-inflation' has happened before - in Germany and Hungary in the early 1920's or Greece and China at the end of the last war. Money lost all its value and this seriously dislocated the economies concerned. There is no evidence

at all that this is happening now, or that it is at all likely, except in the aftermath of world war. Inflation has run at 50% a year or more in several Latin American countries for decades, without bringing capitalism to its knees.

Obviously an expanding capitalist world, which is increasingly integrating on an international scale, finds it very difficult to avoid inflationary tendencies. But it can learn to live with them. This does not mean that they are not troublesome and embarrassing, giving accountants for example all sorts of headaches. Nor does it mean that the burden of anti-inflationary policies will not be imposed on the working class, nor that real hardship will not result from, for example, the current freeze. It does mean, however, that the traditional marxists have completely failed to prove that capitalism has within itself an automatic tendency to collapse, or that any such tendency is connected with inflation.(11) Their strident cries of 'wolf' are at best irrelevant, at worst a dangerous illusion.



"Make a note, our standard 'World Currency Crisis' placard is getting a bit grubby."

(11) Need we repeat, for the umpteenth time, that we are not saying that capitalism has solved its problems, but merely that its cardinal difficulties are not at this level. For an analysis of where we think they are located, see Modern Capitalism and Revolution.

Their mistake is in fact a more fundamental one. There has been a dramatic rise in production since 1945 in the advanced capitalist world. This has led to, and indeed depended on, an equally dramatic rise in working class living standards. The reason for this dependence is simple. Increased output must be purchased. Now 80% or more of national income is paid out as wages and salaries; of the remaining 20% (or less), a large proportion is accumulated. Wage and salary-earners thus account for perhaps nine-tenths of all purchases of consumer goods. This means that capitalism cannot afford massive unemployment, or permanent and sustained reductions in real wages. The economic lessons of the 1930's have been well learned.

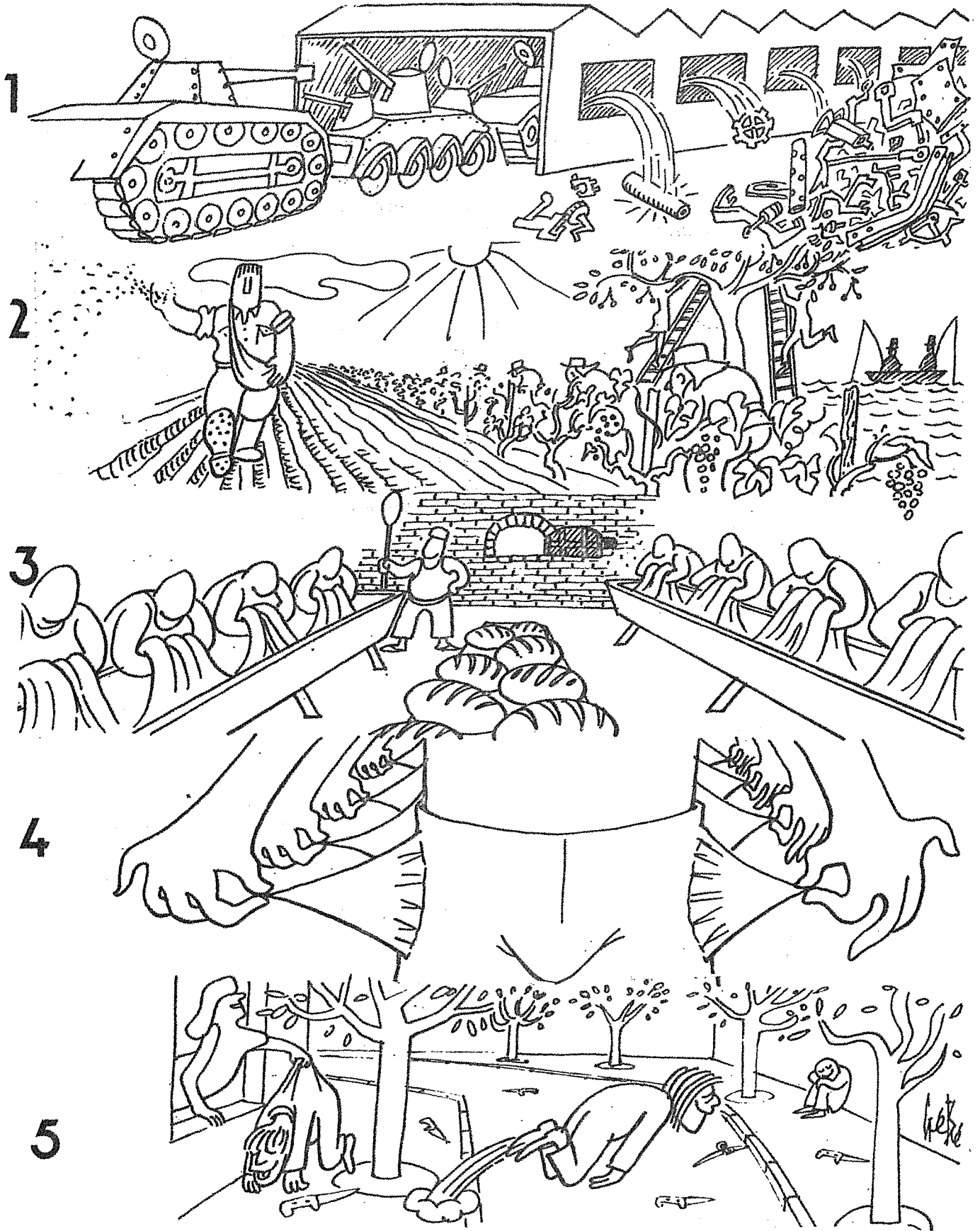
The real crisis lies elsewhere. (We don't mean international monetary 'crises', which occur about once every six months, each one hailed by the traditional marxists as the beginning of the end.) Capitalism invites us and needs us to participate in its drive for greater production and consumption. It cannot, however, allow us to take decisions which challenge its control over the pace and nature of accumulation, decisions which will lead to a genuinely socialist society based on self-management in all spheres of social life. The sausage machine is still capable of producing more and more - occasionally even better - sausages. It cannot survive our decision that we don't like sausages, and want to run the machine ourselves.

J. K.

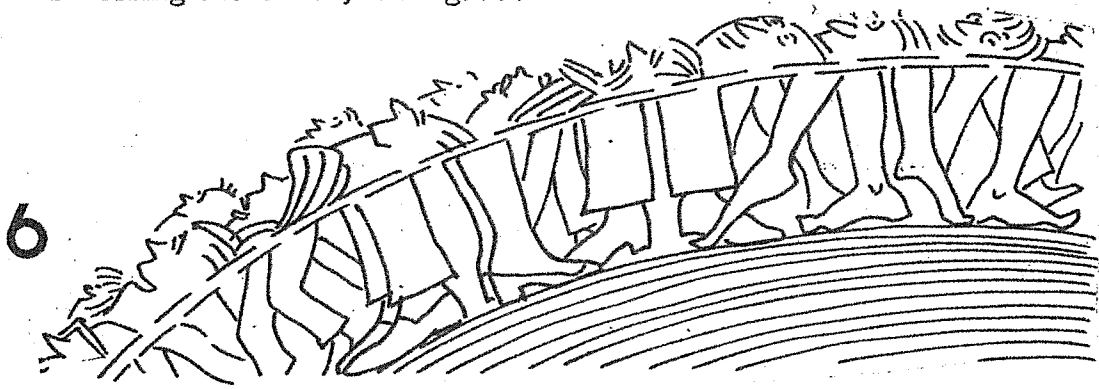


"I believe in the status quo—robbing the poor
and keeping it."

Socialism: utopian or scientific?



1. The people take power and transform assembly lines into lines for taking tanks to pieces
2. Soldiers are sent to the fields, cops to gather grapes, insurance clerks to pick strawberries. Bankers are sent fishing
3. Workers in arms factories are asked to join the bakers in preparing good bread
4. Money is abolished. No more small savings. No more large fortunes. No more nervous Capital with dangerous reflexes. Dancers dance for the fun of it.
5. Absolute freedom is proclaimed. When the sexual maniacs have had their fill, people will walk the streets and woods again without fear of assault.
6. The commodity-economy is abolished. The general confusion, predicted by so many, does not materialise. People quietly allocate themselves the necessary tasks. Everyone eats to his hunger. There is even a surplus. One starts looking at the sky, smelling the earth, living....



That would have been a real challenge. Utopian? No more utopian than trying to build socialism within capitalist structures. Not serious? Was Allende serious when he thought the rich would accept to be a little less rich - or that the Army might help in selling left-wing papers, on Sundays, to people coming out of church?

REVIEW

THE TYRANNY OF STRUCTURELESSNESS by Jo Freeman. Published by Leeds Women's O.R.A. From 29 Cardigan Road, Leeds 6. Price 5p + postage.

This 12-page text has already been published three times, originally by the Women's Liberation Movement in the USA in 1970. The present edition should spread it around to more of the people who will find its ideas relevant, and has a useful introduction by the Leeds O.R.A. women's group. As well as relating it to the British situation, they point out the pamphlet's serious limitations, in particular its restricted scope. Organisation is treated too much in isolation, and the critique refers to 'structureless' rather than to hierarchical forms.

The problem of how to organise faces a wide variety of groups who reject traditional structures, either through conscious libertarianism or dislike of much of what they see on the left. In the women's liberation movement there was a strong inclination to avoid copying male-dominated organisations, and to enable every woman involved to take a full part. The small group, usually locally-based, was seen as basic and essential to the work of the movement.

Jo Freeman pinpoints the ways in which such groups fall short of the unattainable ideal of structurelessness. She describes the formation and functioning of informal élites, the domination of a group by a few of its members, the operation of the 'star' system. Perhaps her view of the inevitability of these developments is a shade too rigid, but there is no doubt that they do tend to occur where no formal structure exists. She points out correctly that there is nothing inherently bad about organisation and structure - but fails to differentiate them from authority, power, hierarchy, which are inherently bad from a libertarian viewpoint. However, most of the principles of democratic structuring outlined at the end of her pamphlet would be acceptable to those of us who do not reject organisation altogether.

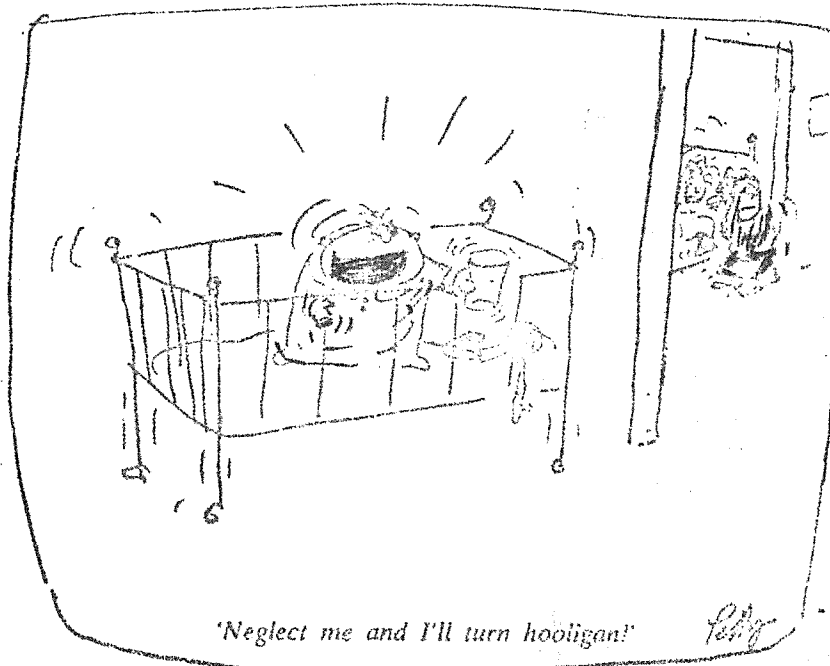
We need to emphasise, though, that we are still working for a libertarian alternative. The solution does not lie solely in finding a structural formula, however flexible and easily understood, but in the constant, conscious involvement of self-active individuals in the group. Responsibility to the group can always be demanded, even from an informal leadership, if this involvement is present; without it, there is no guarantee against domination by a minority.

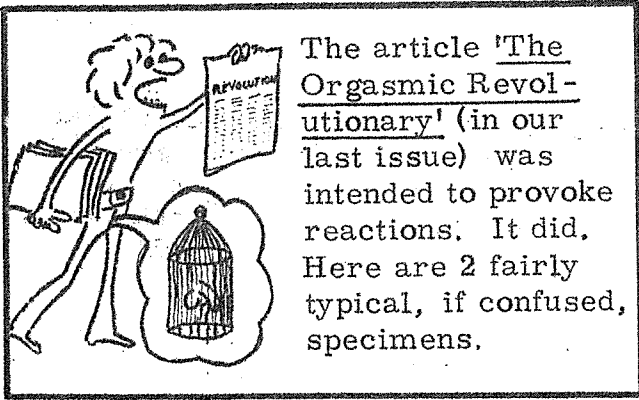
In the context of women's liberation, isolating the organisational factor begs some important questions. Leeds women's O.R.A. recognise this, attributing the disorganisation of the women's movement to an initial lack of analysis, and stressing the mutual interaction between theory, practice and organisation form. A related problem is whether a movement on such a broad base as women's liberation can ever be anything but an umbrella for varying political views, assorted activities, and localised struggles.

The criterion of political effectiveness is not highly relevant to something which has no agreed political perspective in the first place. As sections of the movement develop coherent views, in conjunction with others and under pressure of events, it is probable that splits will occur. This is not to be feared, or avoided by compromise; it may lead to an effective regrouping of some women. Nor does it invalidate the original, generalised movement, or condemn those who joined in it. The assertion of women's determination to liberate themselves is entirely valid, not only because of its opposition to significant facets of class society, but because of what it represents positively.

Consciousness-raising, contrary to what Jo Freeman says, is hardly obsolete. It is very doubtful that the women's liberation movement, as a whole, will find an alternative 'main function' to replace it.

L. W.





The article 'The Orgasmic Revolutionary' (in our last issue) was intended to provoke reactions. It did. Here are 2 fairly typical, if confused, specimens.

Here are a few comments about your rather forced effort at humour in the last issue 'The Orgasmic Revolutionary'. It takes one theme - the relation of politics to repressive sexual attitudes - and 'flogs it to death'. There follows a rather loose and facetious description of all sorts of different types into the 'orgasmic revolutionary' category. A nice piece of amalgam technique in fact.

All those who have ever worn political badges or black leather coats, carried a banner or belonged to a left-wing group fall into this category. Which of us can claim innocence of all these sins? It strikes me as an example of the rather smug elitism of Solidarity as well as a certain puritanism - confusing sex as such with repressive or 'chauvinistic' behaviour. Would Solidarity (like the Barcelona CNT) end up as being more efficient at cleaning up vice than the Catholic Church?

Do we all have to become short-haired clean living workers before we are allowed to be a (?non-orgasmic) revolutionary?

John B.

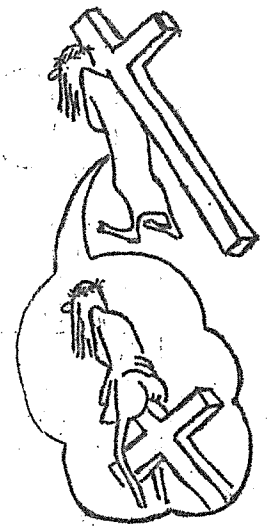
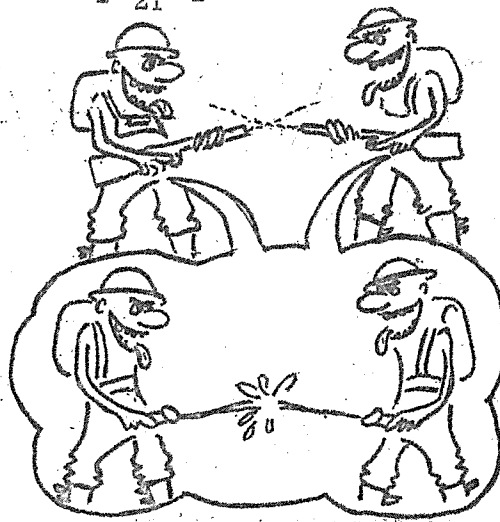
Wilhelm Reich wrote that a 'pure revolutionary' can be recognised by 'outwardly natural behaviour, lack of pomposity, a natural attitude towards sex, not only an emotional, but primarily a rational commitment to socialism', among other things, and could be opposed to those who showed 'forced exhibitionist display of revolutionary feeling', etc. Fair enough. Point taken, if that's what the article 'Orgasmic Revolutionary' is about. But is it necessary that the Solidarity Super-Rev refrain from black leather jackets, banners, badges, demonstrations, and 'group fetishism'?

Sure football's a nice game and personally my own mistress stands up at White Hart Lane where judging from their 'position' (nudge, nudge) in the league (boots fetish) they are suffering from premature ejaculation (or an inability to score - possible reference to drugs - wink, elbow). But do we have to wear cloth caps and wander around mumbling 'oo gor blimey' and 'cor luvva duck' to prove that 'Revolutionaries prefer Proles'?

Good ol' Solidarity. Talk about perverse. 'May-June '68 ... only a beginning'. Can't be orgasmic though ... that'd be hypocrisy. Still as we all know Ford workers don't wear leather jackets, T.U. militants don't wear badges, and mass strike meetings go off in complete silence, unaccompanied by branch banners, or noisy chants and slogans. Perfect gentlemen, perfect revolutionaries.

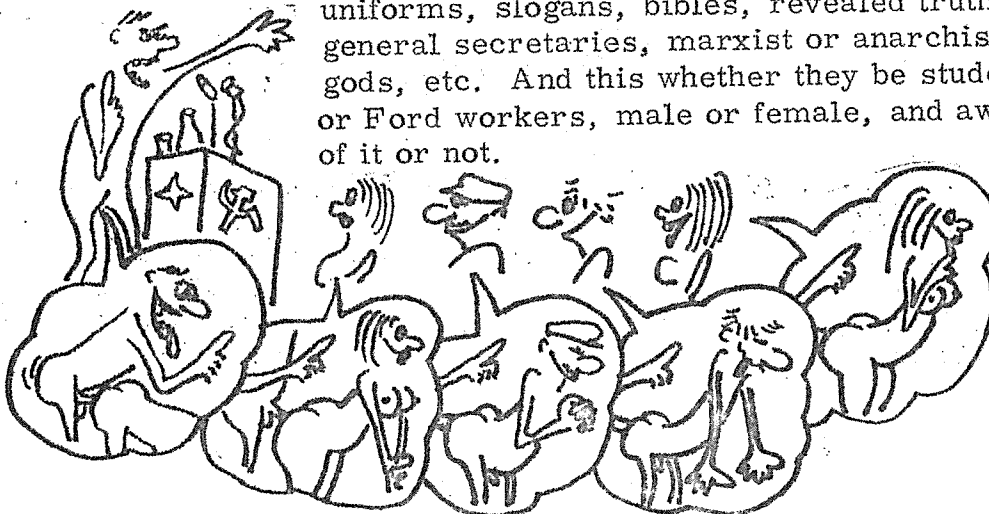
Steve X.

P.S. orgasm isn't a dirty word; enjoying your revolution isn't a crime.



Our title 'the orgasmic revolutionary' may have been ambiguous. It wasn't meant to imply that we were against orgasms, in any form, shape, variety or frequency. It was meant to imply that for many trad revs political life was an orgasm-substitute. It is in this light that we should discuss the significance of a certain type of Party-sponsored demonstration, with standardised banners and slogan-shouting, of the type so dear to the trad revs. Des' article perhaps dealt with all this too superficially. Or perhaps it assumed a sense of humour some readers obviously didn't have.

Where on earth does Steve get the idea that we subscribe to 'prolier than thou' ideas? Or believe in the virtue of cloth caps? He seems to forget we coined the term 'workeritis' to describe this particular malady. And where does John get the idea that we confuse sex with repressive or 'chauvinistic' behaviour? How beside the point can you be? We believe the very opposite: that it is precisely repressed sexuality which is sublimated into this type of behaviour. May-June 1968 not orgasmic? Surely our pamphlet on Paris brought out that what happened there was an explosion of joy unparalleled in modern times. (It was also of course many other things too.) Enjoying revolution a crime? There can be no meaning to revolution if you don't do it for the hell of it. It is precisely those who don't enjoy revolution (because as a rule they can't enjoy anything else) who need badges, uniforms, slogans, bibles, revealed truths, general secretaries, marxist or anarchist gods, etc. And this whether they be students or Ford workers, male or female, and aware of it or not.



I.C.O. NOGRAPHY

In our last issue, under the heading 'On the Solidarity Wavelength', we published an article by C.S. in which many references were made to the French group I.C.O. (Informations, Correspondance Ouvrières). We have received the following reply from one of the comrades who has recently left I.C.O., after being in it from its inception.

Your conclusion argues that a certain level of class struggle in Europe explains the spreading today of some ideas close to those of 'Solidarity'. It would have been better for the article to develop the idea (which it so rightly mentions) that similar capitalist situations lead to similar types of struggle, and show how - for more than half a century - traditional ideas have begun to erode, above all because of the conflict between autonomous forms of workers' struggle (e.g. workers councils) and workers' organisations (such as Parties and Unions).

Two points would then have emerged more clearly: (1) the appearance or the disappearance of groups, the propagating or the ignoring of certain ideas, the theoretical conflicts, are not abstract things but the direct product of the development of capital and of progressive or retrograde forms of class struggle. In this particular case the Workers Councils movement clashed with Leninism and with Social Democracy not through a theoretical debate about philosophical or political ideas, but firstly and above all in the actual context of the confrontations between classes in Russia, in Germany and elsewhere (see on this point 'The Bolsheviks and Workers Control' published by 'Solidarity' (about Russia) and 'Les Fondements de L'Economie Communiste' (The Foundations of Communist Economy) published by I.C.O. (about Germany).

(2) 'Solidarity', like 'Socialisme ou Barbarie' and many other scattered groups who try to understand how everything changes, are only the links in the chain (if very fragile ones) of this movement as a whole. This movement is first of all a real movement, then a process of thought, and then a system of ideas. From the incessant dialectic between what happens and what is thought, according to the specific circumstances of certain situations, one link can appear progressive on one point and traditional on others. The question is not to discuss whether Pannekoek remained in favour of an outmoded Marxism or Cardan in favour of a party of a more traditional kind, but whether what they expressed corresponded to what capitalism is now and to struggles in the world today. It is

interesting to see how Pannekoek evolved from a Social Democratic position to envisage concepts which surpassed even those of the Workers Councils, and how Cardan evolved from Trotskyism to a fundamental questioning of traditional concepts of Marxism, but also for example to read the correspondence between Cardan and Pannekoek (published in 'Cahiers du Communisme des Conseils', No.8, May 1971) which shows that they were fundamentally opposed to each other in their ideas on organisation.

Finally the 'Solidarity' article contains certain errors of fact: (1) the Dutch group 'Act and Thought' did not get its ideas from 'Socialisme ou Barbarie', or from the Dutch 'Provos', or from 'Solidarity'. This group sprang directly from the Council Communist movement. Its relationships with 'Socialisme ou Barbarie' are defined in the preface to the correspondence between Pannekoek and Cardan referred to above. As far as the Provos are concerned, a text published by I.C.O. as a pamphlet 'Les Provos et la lutte de classe' (the Provos and the class struggle) written by a Dutch member of 'Act and Thought', with such subtitles as 'Ideas alone do not change society', 'Resistance without a class basis', is without ambiguity. The coming together of this group with 'Solidarity' is more the result of a convergence of ideas than a respective direct influence of one on the other.

(2) 'Socialisme ou Barbarie' was founded in 1946.

(3) The split between 'Socialisme ou Barbarie' and I.L.O. in 1958 occurred when two practical organisational proposals opposed to each other were put forward; as always the theoretical texts came before and after this event (see the relevant issue of 'Socialisme ou Barbarie' on this subject. The statute proposed by the minority (I.L.O.) was closer to the method of functioning of 'Solidarity' in 1973 than that proposed by the majority (Cardan and others) in 1958. The two motions presented to a General Assembly in June 1958, which resulted in the split, are explicit and pertinent to this point (they were never published).

(4) The articles referred to on Vietnam (in ICO nos. 61-70) were not translated from 'Solidarity' but written for ICO by a Vietnamese comrade who lived in Vietnam at the time of the first Indo-Chinese war. Certain of these articles were used by 'Solidarity' in its writings on Vietnam.

(5) The postscript of the 'Solidarity' article seems to present the present break-up of I.C.O. as the concerted action of some members close to 'Solidarity'. The reality is much more complex and confused. Since September 1972 several people have successively left ICO. The first group who left (about 7 or 8 people, ex-members of the group 'Archinoir', who now publish 'Negation' and 'Le Voyou') have a position very far from that of 'Solidarity' (see their attack on the 'Solidarity' pamphlet on Fisher Bendix in ICO no.120 and their collective statement on leaving I.C.O. published in ICO no.120). After this, separately and without

declaring their positions in any texts, several people left I.C.O. Two of them did so because they held a position closer to that of the Council Communist stream of thought and the others left more because they were increasingly alienated by the lack of seriousness and the incoherence of the discussions which held little interest for them.

(6) The translation of 'As We Don't See It' was the project of several comrades (some of those who had left during the second wave of departures from I.C.O., plus a group of people in Rouen, whose experience in their own group had brought them closer to these last dissidents from I.C.O.) and was undertaken independently of the changing fortunes of I.C.O. The work relating to 'Strategy for Industrial Struggle' (there is no direct translation projected as such) is a very long work project on present new methods of struggle undertaken by an ad hoc work group, only some of whose members formerly belonged to I.C.O.

H. S.

NOTICE TO SUBSCRIBERS

There has recently been a marked increase in postal charges. For instance, the despatch of a single copy of Solidarity, within Britain, used to be 2½p (50% of the cost of the issue itself). It now costs 4p (80% of the cost of the issue). We could have reacted to this state of affairs by increasing the cost of the paper. We prefer, however, to continue with our policy of sending subscribers issues up to the value (including postage) of the £1 they have subscribed. Don't be surprised, though, if warnings that your subscription is about to lapse are now sent you more often. A £1 subscription will ensure you get about 11 copies of the paper (or 5p items).

GETTING IT TOGETHER

On September 15 and 16 some 40 comrades from Britain, France, Germany, Belgium and Holland met in North West France to discuss problems of common interest and concern. A feature distinguishing this gathering from previous ones was the presence of more than a dozen German comrades from at least 5 different parts of the country (Hamburg, Kiel, Berlin, Cologne and Wurzburg).

Themes proposed by the sponsoring groups included the self-presentation of the various groups, and such subjects as the meaning of the class struggle today, the concept of autonomy and the concept of intervention, the international crisis at the level of ideas, and trade unionist efforts at recuperation of dissent, through the setting up of various 'left' trade union bodies (CFDT in France, Institute for Workers Control in Britain). Not all these subjects were discussed - and others, unscheduled ones, found their way onto the agenda. One of the best discussions of the whole conference was in fact an entirely unprepared one, on the Sunday morning, on the implications, in advanced industrial societies, of absenteeism and other direct action methods of resistance to production. To what extent were such methods 'well established', 'defensive' techniques, of a reflex and often inarticulate kind, and to what extent did they (or could they) now embody something new: a more or less conscious resistance to the work ethic? What was really happening? And what should revolutionaries read into it?

Rather than describe the meeting in its chronological sequence, we prefer to stress certain specific points made, which in our opinion highlight some of the problems now confronting us all.

The question of the political basis of regroupment was discussed at some length. The statements AS WE SEE IT and AS WE DON'T SEE IT had been translated into French and German. It was felt by several of those present that even a fairly explicit text (like As We Don't See It) was still not explicit enough. French comrades who had recently left ICO stated for instance that people on both sides of their own recent split could have endorsed most of that document. The question was what one did with ideas of this kind. Some comrades, particularly those from Kiel and Hamburg, felt that these ideas had to be lived, deeply, by the revolutionaries themselves. For them, self-consciousness and self-understanding were essential ingredients of (although of course not substitutes for) a meaningful collective consciousness, of a kind that could transform society. Others stressed that people might subscribe to particular ideas, believing them to be the basis of meaningful action, only to discover that common work could be very difficult with others also claiming to subscribe to the same ideas. This led

logically to the question of what held groups together. The belief that ideological agreement was a necessary and sufficient basis for common action was superficial: it ignored a whole dimension of political life, that based on relations within the group itself. The question of affinities, and the question of attitudes to agreed ideas were also relevant. Members of the group had to help one another, without the group degenerating into a therapeutic community. Although ideas were fundamental, the group had to be more than an exclusively ideological association.

Some comrades felt that relevant new ideas were unlikely to arise in the absence of a renewed autonomous activity of the working class itself. The Dutch comrades had consciously called their group 'Action and Thought' (and not 'Thought and Action') to stress the way they saw this relationship. Others felt that this was a mechanistic and non-dialectical way of positing the real relationship between thought, its sources and the effects it could have.

Other themes were also discussed. One of these was the role of the working class. Differences on this issue underlay many of the contributions, influencing not only their content but the very way in which ideas were formulated. Some comrades previously associated with ICO seemed to us fairly 'orthodox' in this respect. While correctly stressing the concept of working class autonomy, they tended to attribute an entirely marginal role to other struggles going on in modern society. One comrade dismissed the whole women's liberation movement, for instance, as 'merely a consequence of the requirements of modern capitalism'. Another voiced his opinion very concisely. It was all very well, he stated, to talk about change but it was important to distinguish between what had changed and what had not. Was it still true, he asked (a) that all previous history was the history of the class struggle; (b) that only the Proletariat was capable of overthrowing capitalist society; and (c) that the struggle between Proletariat and Capital was the central conflict in modern society? He was prepared to answer an emphatic yes to all these questions. Other comrades felt that it was not a question of correct answers, but perhaps of looking a little deeper at the questions themselves. In particular they felt it difficult to answer the last two questions without first discussing what was meant by the working class. Former definitions (such as 'those who lived only through the sale of labour power' or 'those who produced surplus value') were today characterised by too many exceptions or special cases to be methodologically meaningful.

Some comrades stressed that the very difficulties we were experiencing in reaching useful definitions illustrated the fact that historical categories were themselves products of historical development. One comrade said that if by proletariat one meant manual workers, engaged in the production of commodities, the answer to the forementioned questions was 'no' (the working class, thus defined, comprised a declining segment of the population in all advanced industrial societies, and advocacy of its rule was tantamount to advocacy of the rule of a minority). The working class,

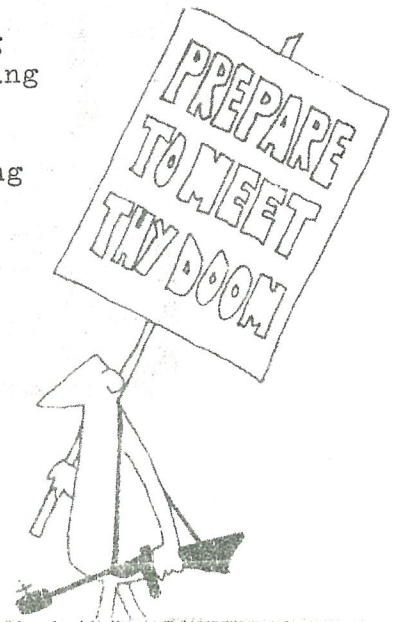
in the wider sense, had however a central importance in the process of social change and without its active support no real social change could take place. One had to question the view of the incarnation, in the working class, of some messianic mission, allocated to it by 'History'. The working class was the main victim of this society: it was deeply permeated by bourgeois factory discipline, the work ethic, and the acceptance of hierarchy, etc., etc.* The question was whether, because of its real material conditions (and the resulting need to resist collectively) the working class also embodied the negation of these characteristics.

One of the most interesting discussions in the conference took place between the German groups. A group operating in Cologne described its activities in relation to the Ford works there. They stated that the development of the recent wildcat strikes there had been influenced, in part at least, by their activities. The same group, which operated under a formal anarcho-syndicalist label, was active in the Red Help movement, which sought to help prisoners and had grown rapidly in Germany in the recent past. The comrades were all activists and had been disappointed by the 'over-theoretical' nature of the discussions at the conference. It was easily shown however that their absence of a theoretical framework led these same comrades to some strange conclusions. We have often stressed that there can be no vacuum at the level of ideas, and that in the absence of ideas of one's own one can only become a vehicle of the ideas of others. When (correctly) campaigning for the release of maoist, stalinist or trotskyist political prisoners, the Cologne comrades had not once linked that campaign to any kind of explanation of what these tendencies represented in terms of the 'autonomous working class movement' they themselves claimed to support.** What, historically, had been the attitude of these tendencies to political prisoners?

The Cologne comrades stated that, not being students, they were not interested in participating in discussions about education, schools or universities. Other comrades pointed out that in voicing such feelings they were merely reproducing

* The French comrades reported that during the recent take-over of the Lip factory at Besançon (in the course of which production had been continued under workers' self-management) a full assembly of all the workers of the plant had voted, by a large majority, to maintain the previously existing wage differentials and had rejected a motion demanding equality of wages.

** In this respect see the article 'Change the political prisoners' in Solidarity, vol.VII, no.4.



within their own group the division between manual and mental labour prevailing in the bourgeois society around them. A revolutionary group was the only place in which an honest discussion could take place about all the aspects of domination in modern class society.

Another element which appeared from time to time in the conference was the confrontation - usually only voiced in muted terms - between those who felt that many traditionally accepted views (such as the basic tenets of marxism) needed reviewing, and those who reacted as if such a review in some way threatened long-established political identities.

Most of those attending the gathering felt it had been worth while and that further regular meetings of this kind should be held - if possible with a better preparation of the agenda and a fuller pre-conference discussion. Despite the difficulties of simultaneous translation into 3 languages, and the absence of a chairman at the various sessions, the meeting proved a reasonable illustration of self-discipline and of the capacity of even a meeting of this size to exercise self-management. As usual, the most positive outcome will probably prove, in retrospect, to have been the small informal discussions taking place outside of the formal sessions. Many useful contacts were established.

M. B.

