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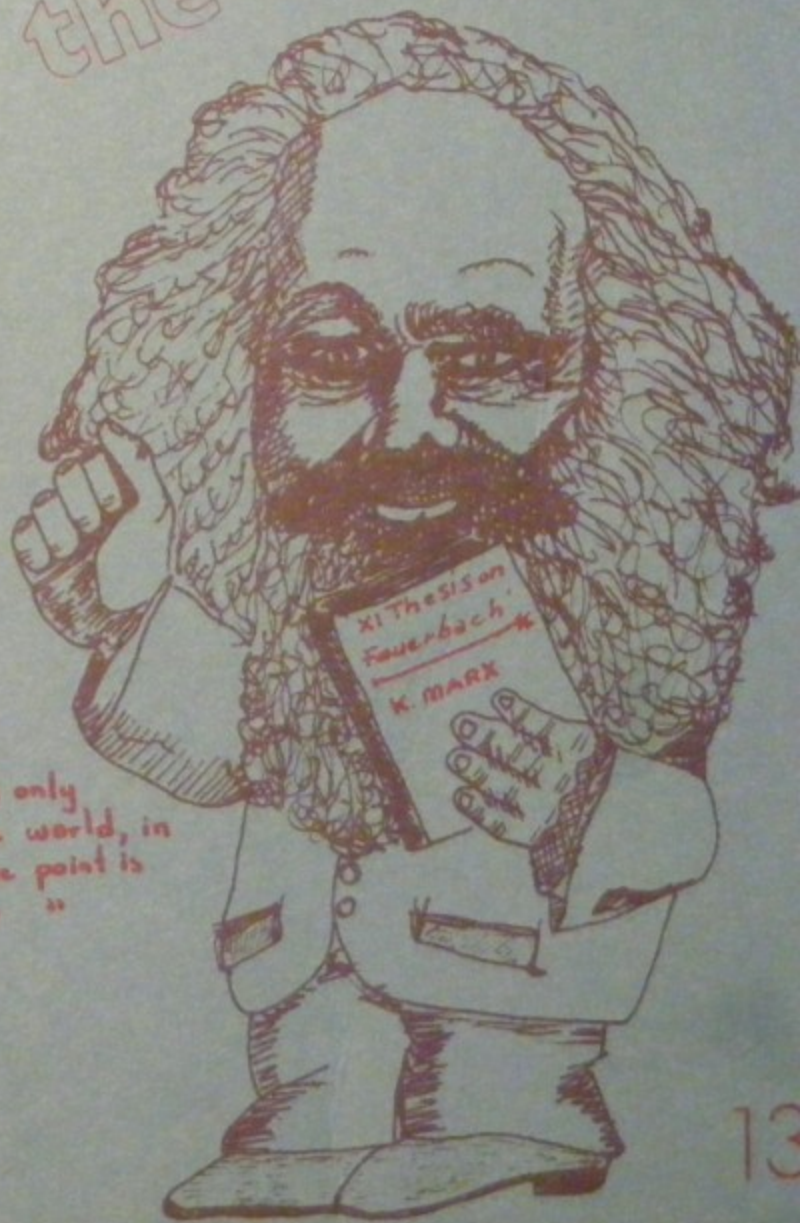
Metaphysics,
dialectics,
materialism,
exploitation,
contradiction
Idealism,
Where does
it all stop?

Yeah, cut it
out! We're
all going
nuts!



RIPENING
of TIME

the other
side



"Philosophers have only
INTERPRETED the world, in
various ways; the point is
TO CHANGE IT"

factory

(iii)

At seven o'clock sharp,
The electric life erupts
As nuts and bolts of machinery
Are greased - steam rises
Over and the iron girder
workers file to their positions.
Noise, confusion, increasing commotion.
The machines are in vibration now
Spirited and vigorous
Impatient for the bottles
Nineteen minutes up - Jump to it!
Get those labels right.
Fill those vessels with gear,
Hurry up! Don't spill it!
Chit-chat! You lazy worker
minutes later noise, commotion,
Increasing tension,
Bangs and thuds
Leopards are steeled, steel is tempered,
In the fellowships of wheel and cog,
Sleep between you and the light
Is this daily prison of work
Where every mother's son and daughter is
Sparkling and getting ready for the
bottles.

(iv)

Look! Here comes the first bottle
Boiled to the top with beer,
Thousands following it,
As if God himself was sending them
Down there on this live belt.
Trap! Trap! Trap! Trap!
A trap for every bottle
Trap! Trap! Trap! Trap!
A mortality for every bottle
Body and soul in a bottle of beer
Moving towards the packing machine,
To get their bottles
Lined up to be lined -
There's no other way to measure it
This electric light never goes off
Labour rides on the enclosed air
A hiss shattered by nails
Seven long hours,
There's no master or ruler
Like an oppressor clock
In this prison of noise and punishment
Time! It huddles your days away.

Wind that bottle top!
And a bottle trips at the mouth
Of the labelling machine.
There are scores of them now
All jammed on top of each other
"God! - Stop the belt -
Look sharp now, you idle waster!
Here everyone speak with the same voice,
Everyone believes in the same creed
More bottles, more money

(v)

Outside the day lengthens
and inside the bottles make their
inevitable way
From cap to label to packing.
With a 'glump' a newly filled bottle
explodes
Nobody is startled here in a life
Between sleeping and waking.
A Turk pulls on a but
A woman-packer tightens her apron
Her grey body stooping:
More bottles, more money
There is a long unshed litany here
Of spectres of the heart
That are never released,
Of pain for which no words exist
More bottles, more money.

(vi)

According to the rules,
Workers are permitted a five minute
break
In every hour.
Sitting on an upturned crate
We rest and unbutton our minds
In the corner, an old beaver tipples
sedratively.
"Smash all clocks on earth",
says the revolutionary.
But his words are even stranger
Than the figures in the clock.
Surely this must be the edge of hell?
Yet over there a Turkish woman laughs
You cannot imagine hell
Except in relation to Heaven.

Sean O'Sullivan

Theoretical journal

Price: 50p., 5FF, 4 DM, \$ 2, 1,000 Lira, 4 DG

Number 13. January 1980 - October 1980.

To the Reader

In this issue, we deal with a number of aspects of the struggle of the working class in Ireland during the 1970's.

In pp. 7 - 22, we examine the growing practice of absenteeism inside the working class. The perspective in this article, is to place absenteeism in a context of working class resistance and struggle - a method used by working people as part of their refusal to accept the role of wage labour subjugated to the rule of capital.

The second article completes the examination of the post World War 2 period, begun in issue 11. It analyses the reorganisation of the economy and the living conditions of the working class through the crisis decade of the 1970's in Ireland.

Two major strikes in the Limerick-Shannon area (one in the 1960's, the other in the 1970's) are the subject of the essay: From E.I. to Ferenka. This article is in the form of a documentation of the day-to-day events, positions taken and outcome of these two strikes - one in the E.I. factory the other in Ferenka.

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The Problem of Democratic Unity was the title of an article written by Roy Johnston, which was printed in issue 9 of the journal. A member of the Editorial Collective, Jim Sloane, takes this opportunity to reply to some of the points made by Roy Johnston in that article.

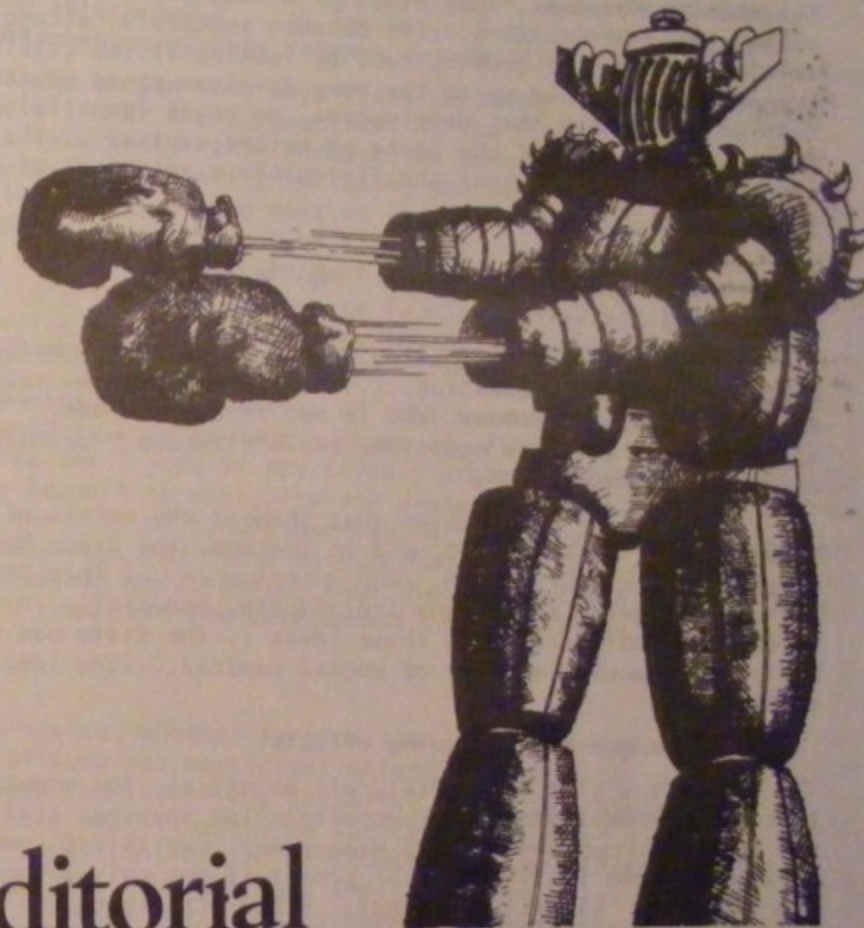
Finally, all our regular features appear, with a long review by Les Levidow of a book written by Daniel Guerin: 100 years of American Labour.

We hope you find it a useful issue, and as usual, we welcome your comments, views and criticisms.



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Editorial

Issue 13 of the Ripening of Time is the outcome of long collective discussion and labour. The articles presented in this issue are, without exception, the extension of political and theoretical work begun, at times individually, about 5-6 years ago and since structured and clarified inside the Editorial Collective.

What is constant in all the articles is our continuing determination to *understand and explain the crisis of capital*. On the one hand, to unmask and lay bare the capitalist initiatives which tend to hurt the struggles of the working class, to disorganise militants, to *deconstruct the political composition of the people*. On the other hand, to examine in detail the struggles and antagonistic behaviour of the people to those initiatives.

We are defining at the outset the much abused word 'crisis' in the following way: "The living product of all capitalist initiatives confronted by the accumulation of working class struggles."

* * *

Looking at the current crisis from this point of view has two relative advantages. One, it undermines the two most fashionable theses current in the Left....the first that crisis is a plot by capital to

smash and divide the proletariat - the second, hegemonic inside the Irish Trade Union Movement, that times of crises are times when the working class should be standing still because successful struggle can only develop at times of growth. Two, by looking at the crisis as an *organic process closely tied up to the very development of capital*, and not as outside or against that development, we begin identifying both crisis and growth as elements of the cycle of mature capital ...their alternating frequency reflecting real and living class relations of power in a given society.

* * *

Even a short reflection on the above must immediately bring forth an inevitable question....the looming *unknown variable X* of the equation Capital v Labour. Who is not tempted to ask, 'What about the State', the X of the equation, Lenin's famous "*primary target of revolutionary struggle*".

It is our perspective that through the crisis of the last 10 years in many parts of the world, and in Ireland, the State has abandoned all utopias of equilibrium and consensus. (This is not to say that there don't exist still many individuals, especially in the Political Parties who hold fast onto these ideas). The state has become, indisputably, *the General Manager of social capital*....the ideal collective capitalist.

This has the following effects:

On the side of capital, all potential for growth is basically left as an embellishment for vote-catching speeches; all serious reflection is concentrated on *Crisis Management*. Capitalist command has grasped by now that the falling rate of profit is not only a long-term tendency but a searing situation of fact. (See article on the crisis in Ireland 1970-79). Thus, all reproduction of the dominant relations of production in the society becomes an element of life and death...of survival. And, as such, it necessitates the growing perversion of Statist law and order...of State terrorism.

Correspondingly, inside the people, as the above process develops and deepens, as almost all conditions of production and daily life are transformed, the very class composition, *the political composition*, of the working people begins to undergo a reflective change. When capital is nothing more except control (*discipline, command and terror*).... when capital is understood and felt to be by people as 'the other side'.....then the productive force and capacity of the proletariat tends to, needs to and wishes to, liberate itself from capital....*to become independent from it*.

The refusal to work of large sections of young and older people, the massive growth of absenteeism and other in-work disruption, the general so-called apathy of the working people towards *participation* and *job enrichment* schemes, are all, in our opinion, irrefutable signs of that tendency....labour liberating itself from capital. A tendency not yet articulated *organisationally* in the national territory but certainly potent enough, as to provide a momentous headache to the intellectuals of capital and State for the past few years now.

* * *

The general implicit theme of this issue is thus our attempt to come to terms with this process....to factual if not theoretical terms. The political consequences of this attempt are immediate.

We are in the midst of a mass-scale political transformation in Irish society....all over the 32 Counties. As the bourgeois project described above articulates itself through the *modernist* Haughey Government, the 'alternativist line' (including the proponents of the Heat Brandt Report) is slowly putting meat on its skeletons. Any bourgeois alternative to the above cannot but be a revamped version of class compromise in order to create a new development and a *new method of producing*. Intellectuals of this line one can locate in many semi-State bodies, in all Political Parties and, in particular, inside the Labour Party and the middle to high echelons of Trade Union officialdom.

We are focussing our attention on this because many well-intentioned people, especially from student background, fall prey to this line. Some blackmailed by the 'jobs at any price' argument, others brought to their knees by Republican ambiguity and propaganda, a few attracted by the sirens of the USSR or euro-Communism. All, at the end, and notwithstanding good intentions, beginning to function like State priests, spewing their collaborationist poison into the veins of the people. Their project no more no less than the development of *their State and their capital*.

To both projects, whether verticalised and authoritarian, or more horizontal, diffuse and participationist, stands opposed the Irish working class both Protestant and Catholic. The rigid responses of the working people, their unwillingness to spectate ball never mind play it, the revolutionary traditions of the 32 Counties....all these barriers to overcome for capital. Plus the fact that there are a lot of weapons around. In such a climate, where crisis envelops a volatile class structure, with weak social democracy, one doesn't have to be a magician to predict that confrontation, mass scale conflict, is on the agenda. On the one side the priests of the State, capital, the repressive forces and among them most real priests....on the other side the working class and its allies....including some working class priests.

Triumphalism has no place in our thoughts. Behind any project for revolutionary communism loom large the defeatist sentiments, doubts, and especially, individualism. The ranks of the people are rife with strife. There is no unity of purpose - not as yet. And certain sectors of the bourgeoisie are beginning to beat the drum of salvation through their projects of unity, their micro-chips and their *new technology*.

The road will be long. But relatively shorter than the days of Tone, the Fenians, 1916 and James Connolly, the Republican Congress, 1968 or yesterday. Have hope. Organise. And we'll win.

The Editorial Collective

December 1980

Supporters Meet & International Journal

We would like to inform readers of two new developments taking place in the near future.

The first is an open READERS MEETING. This has been organised so that readers of the journal and the editorial collective can meet and discuss past and present issues of the journal, and possible themes/material for future issues. Anyone interested can contact the editorial collective at the postal address on page 1 for further details.

The second development is an INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL, the exciting outcome of discussion and debate stretching back over the last 2½ years. We have participated with comrades from a number of organisations and collectives in different countries of Europe and the USA in this process.

This journal is a new and fragile project. It will not replace the Ripening of Time, but the Editorial Collective is involved with its production and distribution. It is a project arising out of a need felt by all participants to confront, debate and share internationally theories which focus around two main areas :

- a) New social practices, methods of struggle and forms of organisation developed inside the movements of the working class and oppressed peoples internationally.
- b) The developing projects of multinational capital and national States - including international organisations (such as the European Parliament), and the emergence of integrated models of economic, political and social control, shared by capital and States across continents.

The pilot issue of the english edition of the journal, which has as its main theme "Trilateralism" will be on the streets this Spring. We invite all our readers who may wish to know more about this project to contact us.



Working Class

Absenteeism

Introduction

A spectre is haunting the capitalist world : the spectre of working class absenteeism. All the fractions and allies of the bourgeoisie have taken up their positions in a holy coalition against this headache - Fianna Fail and Michael Smurfit, the Pope and Schmidt, Ministers of Labour, the Federated Union of Employers and the Trade Unions, Breznev and our very own imported American factory spies, all of them bemoaning, attacking or trying to find a solution to this rigid response of the working people. Two things emerge from this :

1. Absenteeism is already fully recognised by the State and capital as itself a proletarian danger, counterpower, a serious threat to capital and profit.
2. It is high time that communists and progressive people in Ireland should meet this bourgeois hysteria over absenteeism with a clear and thorough understanding of this working class refusal of work.

o o o
o o o

It must be stressed that this article will reject the externality of revolutionary theory (the way to organise to make revolutions, what people call revolutionary theory)... that theory and lessons go into the class from the outside. Concepts such as *Refusal of Work* will be used in order to reassert firstly that social consciousness and theory come from social practice social existence, and secondly that the working class is not simply a passive, suffering object of capitalism; the working class is a subject of history, a class that makes history. It is inside the present behaviour and struggle of the working class that the elements of socialism are to be found.

In Ripening of Time no.9 we asked what does it exactly mean to say that "strategy can only be built around the crystallised needs of the social practice of the proletariat? It means that the 'theoretical' centrality of the working class as the leading force of revolutionary change, and here most progressive comrades would agree that this is so, has to reflect the 'practical' capacity of communists to live, experience, understand and theorise from the daily social practice of the working class". (RoT.9 p.4)

In rejecting the externality of theory we are leaving behind a standard way of looking at working class struggle. That standard, a-historical and non-materialist method focusses uncritically on some forms of struggle (the picket, march or strike for example), while excluding the rich and complex range of other, less 'important' or less 'political', working class ways of fighting. To give a recent example which we have all lived through, take the ALCAN strike. When most was 'supposed' to be happening, most of the workers were at home or in the pub; in contrast to the strike itself, the institutional form of struggle, more workers have been fighting since the strike in a daily social practice that is totally ignored.

This essay will examine absenteeism by the Irish proletariat over the past two decades as part of the working class refusal of work. When we speak of 'work' and 'refusal of work' we are NOT referring to human activity in general; by 'work' we mean wage labour - labour which is controlled and subordinated to the needs of capital for the production of exchange values. Workers are physically, socially and legally alienated from what is produced and how it is produced - your own activity is outside you, objective, alien, outside your control. This alienated form of wage labour, this work that is being refused so strongly, is the very opposite of socially useful, creative and self-expressive labour, labour for peoples' needs.

REFUSAL TO WORK

So what do we mean by the refusal of work? Ever since the struggle between the two main classes began, the proletariat has increasingly refused to accept its role of subordination to the bourgeois class, has fought against being part of the world of capital. The proletariat has fought

against being wage-labour. This great refusal has many different forms such as strikes, sabotage of machines and even entire factories, physical attacks on bosses and scabs, absenteeism and other ingenious attacks on the length of the working week, go-slows and so on. The thread which ties together these and many other working class practices is the refusal of work.

The very assertion of the refusal of work is a theoretical innovation, a new way of looking at old problems. If you don't look for this refusal then you will never ever find it - and the working class will always be 'apathetic', 'reactionary', 'passive', 'irrational', 'stupid' and 'subconscious'. On the other hand, look for the refusal, fight to rediscover it, and you will find it. The task of revolutionaries, after all, is to look for the antagonistic class behaviours which are the basis of revolutions.

The present social practice of the Irish working class didn't spring up out of nowhere. It's only in the last year that the Ard Fheiseanna and the evening papers have gone to town on the 'absenteeism scandal', for example, yet that particular aspect of working class practice has been growing for many years (as this article shall demonstrate). Such practices have subterranean roots, often hitherto uncovered, which must be traced back to explain how and why they emerged and became so predominant and so overwhelmingly clear today. The bourgeoisie itself has had its own formal theories and analyses about absenteeism since before World War Two!

The working class refuses work like the plague whenever and however possible - and in the most imaginative and ingenious ways - both within and out of the workplace. Throughout history working people have struggled against the length, intensity and capitalist control of labour. The proletariat acts in opposition to capital because it IS its opposite, its antithesis, living labour. One of the clearest and deepest expressions of this opposition is that working people do not want their children to have the same lives as them - any job, any life, as long as it's not a working class one... working people know full well that this life of work is a degrading hell.

PETTY BOURGEOISIE

Not only does the working class refuse work; the petty bourgeoisie - shopkeepers, publicans, teachers, office workers etc. - dread the shame of becoming working class... they obviously prefer to be what they are, the petty bourgeoisie. The declining traditional fraction of this class, owners of petty capital, struggle to continue their existence as the 'independent' business, competing "as your own boss" against the hypermarket or superpub down the road. The relationship of the new petty bourgeoisie to the working class and work is a far less understood question which needs further study... this complex relation is characterised by a disgust for factory life, distaste for mass production, ignorance about what the working class actually does, and pride in occupational status; the new petty bourgeoisie simultaneously yearns to have more control, be more creative, have more contact with material things as well as ideas.

And, most important, it is from the very depths of this same class, the petty bourgeoisie, that ideas like the necessity for the externality of revolutionary theory springs up. "After all, the workers can't think for themselves, so we the EXTERNAL brains will have to teach them". This externality, in other words, is the greatest self-justification that the petty bourgeoisie has for its own external existence as a class, a social force, in control over working class struggle.

Finally, the ruling class itself, with its latest 'job enrichment' schemes and 'humanisation of work' Foundations, fully recognises that work enriches the bourgeoisie but does NOT enrich the worker - work alienates, devalues and kills living labour.

The refusal of work - workers' insubordination, antagonism to and attacks on the labour-capital relation - is the bosses' recurrent nightmare. It DESTABILISES CAPITAL. The capitalist world was built, grew and now depends for its very continued existence on the exploitation, control and subordination of living labour. When the proletariat refuses to be exploited wage-labour-the daily ordered theft of human activity breaks down. When workers in Ireland go absent from work to the tune of THIRTY MILLION DAYS in any one year (as we shall argue from our analysis), this means that capital has 30 million less days of labour-power to extract surplus value from. It means an immediate reduction of the working week by one day has already happened; it means that the process of rationalisation and redundancies (less people, doing more work) which is so vital for the rate of profit, is disrupted; with an absenteeism rate of 20%, capital is forced to have overmanning (MORE people, doing LESS work) by 20% to replace absent workers - otherwise its delicately socialised production processes will grind to a halt. A year ago Fianna Fail was attempting to establish a 'Temporary Hire Agency' (like they have in the U.S. and England) to solve this problem for capital as a whole... To put those 30 million days in some perspective, recall that 30m. days absent is twenty times as many as last year's record number (1½ m.) of strike days.

But the working class refusal of work is not simply a tactic to fight against and destabilise capitalism. On the contrary, the refusal of work is a conscious *strategy OF THE CLASS*. Let us dwell on this point...

A STRATEGY

There are many problems facing militants who attempt to study and grasp the present social practice of the class. Firstly the period the class is going through is literally an 'in-between' time. The overwhelming social reality of working people in Ireland is characterised by *refusal, boycott, absence, withdrawal*. Mass responses to capital/state are outside the categories of 'the normal channels' as the class withdraws slowly but surely en masse from institutional politics and practices. Yet - and here's the rub - this practice of institutional withdrawal has not yet converted into any clearly definable new forms of independent working class organisation. This practice itself is nonetheless discernible at a mass level, for example in:

- absenteeism from the workplace
- high labour turnover rates
- non-attendance at Trade Union meetings
- the massive withdrawal from the Party system and the refusal to partake in Euro-elections.

This withdrawal (from capital AND state) is a concrete expression of antagonism to what goes on. Of course, it is called irrational, idiosyncratic, accidental, impure, 'individualistic' (by which is meant some unexplained negative attribute), even irresponsible, ESCAPISM. It is called this by the participants left in the very same institutional Political arena which the working class is withdrawing from - because the class is withdrawing from that arena, yet has definitely begun to dominate the stage.

The only 'rational' world for these participants is the same sure relation of capital-labour, the only world left for positivist science to measure. Positivist science was built to measure participation, not non-participation.

To comrades who say that absenteeism is 'not conscious', we must ask: what is the consciousness of the working class? Do we find it in the Trade Union Congress or the national wage agreement ballot? Or in the programme of any one of a dozen Parties 'representing' the working class on this island? Or in the Yes/No verbal answers to stock questions of the attitudinal surveys of the U.S. and Brit sociologists? Put it another way - how can we talk about the working class "Right to Work" when over 20% of the workers in this country are missing from the factories every day of the week, exercising their 'Right not to Work'? Are these workers under some 'false' or 'dual' consciousness? Are they wrong to satisfy these individual needs? When vast numbers are doing this every day at the same time - far more than the numbers going on strike even - is it not a very mass response of the working people? And, as such, *part* of consciousness?



Consciousness is a very tricky subject; the working class (as opposed to the Labour Movement) are people who don't tend to have formal vocal or written expression of their ideas and beliefs - they don't make tidy prepared speeches like the I.C.T.U. heads do.

"Working class reality is a totality that goes far beyond the ordinary intellectual view of consciousness. The usual way to view consciousness is in terms of formal statement of belief. Unfortunately, or fortunately, in terms of the working class and its living reality, that simply does not work".

(M. Glaberman: "Marxist Views of the Working Class" ;1974).

Martin Glaberman gives an example from WW2 to illustrate his point. During the war, most of the U.S. labour movement gave a no-strike pledge to 'aid the war effort' ! Many workers resisted this however - did you ever see the corporations sign a " no-profits " pledge ? In 1944 the United Automobile Workers union members voted two-to-one in a secret ballot to re-affirm the no-strike pledge. Less than a majority of the U.A.W. members voted at all...and before the vote, during the vote and after the vote the vast MAJORITY of auto workers were in wildcat strikes. Glaberman asks " What then was the consciousness of auto workers ? Were they patriotic or class conscious ? It seems necessary to say, as a start, that what workers DO is at least as important as what workers say ". (ibid.)

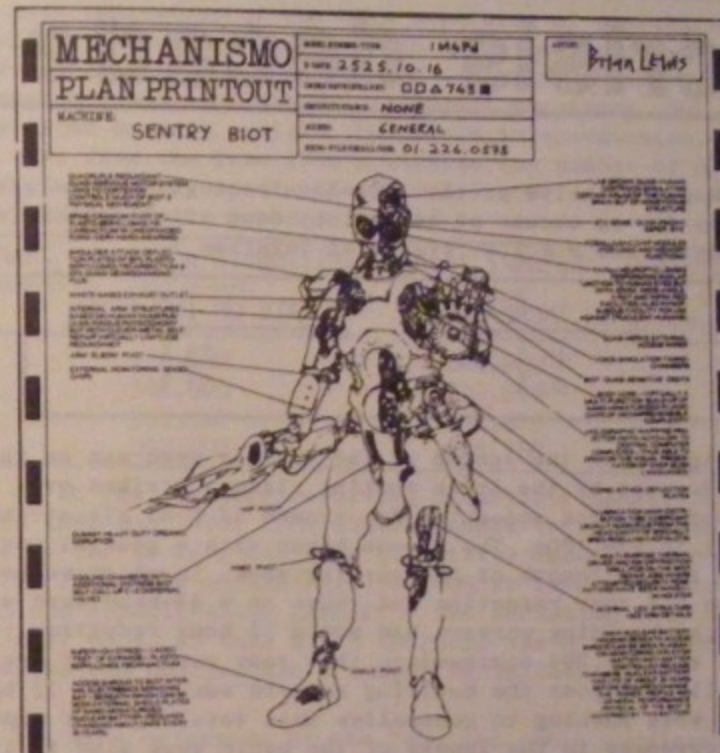
In this complex material reality, working class absenteeism isn't all positive or all negative. And any discussion of absenteeism must take into account the social practice/organisation and culture of the class, how it spends its time not just inside but also outside the workplace. In the Liffey Dockyards of Dublin, for example, out of a workforce of 430, the average number at work during 1978 was 54 %. Of the other 46 %, 16 % were 'casual' (capital's absenteeism) and 30 % were 'absentee' (workers' absenteeism). Many women workers must go absentee from 'work' to do domestic labour. Many working people go to school, to the workplace, sometimes even to church - not because they want work or teachers or religion but because these are social situations ; unemployed workers look for a job not just because they need the money but because they 'miss their mates' and all that that entails. Absenteeism raises many political questions of the nature of non-working time - refusal of work cannot transform society if capital controls non-working time, if the pub and alcohol or domestic labour are the main ways that people use leisure time. Part of the increase in absenteeism is caused by workers needing more time to reproduce their labour-power, such is the increasing vampire thirst with which capital now consumes labour-power. Many working people are the alcoholic and neurotic victims of the crisis decade.

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In the angry fight against the destructive power of capital, in this refusal of the working people to sacrifice all for a cause not their own, a mature class imagination and a billion new needs are being asserted - needs which capital and state cannot meet. The refusal of work organically links the daily fight against capitalism with the question of WHAT ARE WE STRUGGLING FOR ? We have not gone through hundreds of years of exploitation, domination and occupation - costing millions of dead and thousands in prison - for nothing. Working people refuse to fight for a new society where nothing has changed, where capital still dominates labour but more efficiently, under newer 'socialist' names...where the boss is a 'worker' and the foreman is a hero, where (nuclear) machines and mutagenic production is more important than living labour, where you clock on and off as before for long hours of inhuman alienated labour in order to eat.

We have said that the refusal of work is a conscious strategy of the class - it cannot be measured using the old rules of thumb. Workers' absenteeism, for example, doesn't put forward demands in an institutional (hence traditionally measurable) form, but directly takes back, reappropriates time. And since it's often essential for the boss (who never ever GIVES time) not to know you're taking time off, or 'dossing' or sabotaging the line, who would measure it ? Working people themselves do not document

the history of their practice, ideas, forms of organisation and struggle, neither to the same extent nor in the same manner as state/capital documents. In general, workers' absenteeism, insubordination, sabotage are rarely either recorded or made public by the individual boss. The shame and secrecy of the bosses over this subversive normality compared to other methods of struggle (like the strike - which is a more 'open' affair anyway) is startling.



To cap it all, progressive people trying to examine class reality in Ireland find that figures for rates of profit, absenteeism, labour turnover, disabled people, unmarried mothers, stillborn babies' births...these figures as such don't exist or can't be found. The states of an underdeveloped social formation either have a mere fraction of the statistical measures that the imperialist metropolises have, or have statistics that are compressed into - or that are only comparable with - the imperialist's figures. Finding the statistics you need on Ireland north and south is a difficult task.

State/capital recognise that absenteeism was increasing massively in Ireland during the past decade - and hence figures like 15 to 20 % absenteeism rates and 12 to 24 million days 'lost' were thrown around at random. But these are educated guesses by the ignorant bourgeoisie as the state 'discovers' that its official half-century old statistical structures of previous phases of capitalist development are now inadequate, outdated and overtaken by the present period and forms of working class struggle.

We ourselves have had to use the few statistical reports and manuscripts that exist from the Central Statistical Office, the Dept. of Social

Welfare, the occasional scanty analysis and survey by the bourgeois business magazines and state agencies. We have used figures on *Disability Benefits* (paid social welfare by the state for absences) because this is the main way that workers appropriate time in Ireland. Because these records do not include unpaid absences from work, they can only be an understatement of the actual absenteeism situation.

Pre-crisis decade

The mass offensive of the '60s made real gains for Irish workers - wage increases far in excess of inflation, even if we take into account the introduction of the P.A.Y.E. system of taxation :

PERIOD	WAGE INCREASES	RATE OF INFLATION
1960-65	45 %	23 %
1965-70	80 %	33 %

The fight over the length of the working week was an integral part of that offensive by the Irish working class ; strikes over the length of the working week accounted for around 17 % of all strike-days (in the 26 Cos.) in the '60s. The decade began with a general movement for a reduction in the length of the working week, in which workers on a 48-hour week won a 3 hour reduction and those on a 44-hour week won 1½ hours. By 1964 the building workers had won a 1½ hour reduction ; an amazing 85 % of the 545,384 strike-days that year were fought over hours of work. The following year the building workers won another 1½ hours, and all workers were pushing to generalise this total 2½ hour reduction. Such enormous decreases in the length of the basic week also implied a real immediate increase in the basic wage, a weakness in the Pay Agreements highlighted in particular by the building workers' struggles.

During these years absenteeism became far more prominent than in previous decades ; the main way that workers in Ireland go absent from work is through the State system of *disability benefits*, a system that was being increasingly used. For example, the total weeks of time off by disability benefit in the 26 Counties amounted to :

- 1,417,600 weeks in 1936
- 2,458,600 weeks in 1966 (an increase of 73 % on 1936)
- 3,033,300 weeks in 1970 (an increase of 23 % on 1966)

One important reason why more and more people were going absent during the '60s compared to earlier decades was the gradual increase in social insurance coverage and the level of benefit payments. In 1936 about 3/4 (531,300) of the 26 Cos. workforce were insured, compared to 711,800 people in 1966 ; by 1976 971,000 workers (including 25,500 workers in agriculture) were insured under the 26 Cos. Social Welfare Acts. This increase in eligibility for paid absences, the extension of rights which had already been fought for and won by the working class, reflects the general recomposition of the workforce undergone during the same period;

	1951	1971
Agricultural workforce (26 Cos.)	512,500	291,000
As %age of total 26 Cos workforce	42.0 %	30.0 %
Agricultural workforce (6 Cos.)	135,000	62,000
As %age of total 6 Cos workforce	24.7 %	11.2 %

This gives some indication of the mass expulsion of (uninsured) agricultural employees, assisting relatives and small farmers from the land ; much of this surplus labour was exported (emigration) or found its way into the expanding non-agricultural (insured) workforce. But increased eligibility alone doesn't explain the growth in absenteeism. The figures below show that from the late 1960's onwards the number of disability benefit recipients per year (in the 26 Cos.) grew at a much faster rate than the expansion in the numbers insured :

	Nos. receiving Disability Benefit per year	Total insured Workforce	Recipients as a %age of the insured Workforce
1963	123,600	640,689	19.3 %
1967	144,320	710,699	20.3 %
1973	191,940	742,879	25.8 %
1977	310,000	968,750	32.0 %

The number of 26 Cos. workers receiving disability benefit increased by 54 % between 1963 and 1970, from 123600 people to 189992 per year. Expenditure by the 26 Cos. State on disability benefit increased from £4,369,000 in 1960 to a massive £16,486,000 in 1970 - an increase of two hundred and seventy-seven percent ! The inflation rate for the whole decade was only 63 %, so this 277 % increase was a very eloquent working class answer to the bourgeoisie's weapon of inflation.

The mass offensive of the '60s was truly popular - like any popular struggle it was nationalised. Workers' struggles in the 6 Counties - over wages, hours of work, housing, against unemployment and state terror - kept an ever pace with the rest of the class in the 26 Counties. Absenteeism was no exception. The 6 Cos. workers were gaining £15,379,000 in sick benefits in 1970 (almost as much as 26 Cos. workers - even though there were only half as many workers in the 6 Cos. - a figure partially explained by the fact that sick benefit was higher in the 6 Cos.). The weekly average number of sick benefit claims increased rapidly towards the end of the decade (from 5,170 per week in 1967 to 6,400 in 1970, or by 24 %), while the number of insured workers going absent per year stayed around 44,000.

But absenteeism has not been - and still is not - general property of all wage workers and salaried employees. Firstly the systems of time sheets and clocking-on cards show up workers' absenteeism, while time off by most petit-bourgeois employees wouldn't show up in statistics. Furthermore, it is generally far easier for petit-bourgeois (especially state-) employees to get sick money directly from their employer. But there is more than a statistical difference (or difference in method of payment) between working class and petit-bourgeois absenteeism. The NATURE and CONTENT of working class absenteeism differs, as a behaviour in relation to capitalist surplus value production. The intensity of production, control of time and

energy, pressure on the nerves, physical and biochemical systems of the body are far higher and of a different quality in manual rather than intellectual work ; working class absenteeism and refusal to work in general are also different as an antagonistic, destabilising behaviour.

Bearing this in mind, look at the figures (where they exist) of disability claims by sector. In 1966, for example, although about one in seven male employees in the 26 Cos. were general unskilled labourers, these workers alone put in over 1/3rd. of all claims by male employees of less than one year's duration, and over half of all claims by men that lasted over a year. In 1936 and 1966 general labouring men had the longest D.B. claims (19.6 weeks and 12.6 weeks respectively). Of claims lasting less than a year in 1966, compare those of manual workers with those of 'white collar' workers and the expanding new petit-bourgeoisie :

	men	women
AGRICULTURAL WORKERS.....	11.9	10.3
MINERS.....	11.4	--
TURF WORKERS.....	9.9	8.5
WOOD & FURNITURE WORKERS.....	19.4	6.9
WATER TRANSPORT WORKERS.....	9.9	10.5
FISHERMEN.....	10.0	--
GENERAL LABOURERS.....	11.3	--
OFFICE EMPLOYEES.....	6.2	5.9
CIVIL SERVANTS, PROFESSIONALS etc.	7.0	6.9
Other CLERKS, TYPISTS.....	5.1	4.2

This situation persists to the present day. For example, Business & Finance magazine (3rd. April 1980) notes that White collar institutions appeared happy with their attendance records. The 15,000 bank officials and management employed by the Allied Irish Banks and the Bank of Ireland are out less than 3.5 % of their working year.

To sum up the mass offensive of the 1960's : the working class, north and south, made huge real increases in wages, the 'official' basic working week was 'officially' reduced by eight hours to the 40-hour week and, by 1969, absenteeism was reducing it 'unofficially' by another four hours or 10 % ; by 1969 a staggering 18 million days a year (out of a possible 180 million working days) were being gained in absenteeism by the 26 Cos. workers alone - and proportionately the same if not more by 6 Cos. workers. 18 m. out of 180m. is an absenteeism rate of 10 %. Ten percent of the workforce missing every day !

So far we have examined increasing absenteeism as an integral part of the working class offensive in the 32 Counties. In the 'Crisis' article of this issue we have argued that the '60s was a global offensive by the proletariat : the working class was increasing absenteeism during the pre-crisis period in many other countries as well as Ireland. In the U.S.A., paid leave hours as a proportion of all paid hours increased to 6.2 percent in 1968, and 7.6 % by 1977 ; in Britain, days gained through absenteeism increased by 10% from 1960-64 to 1970-74 (reaching an average rate of 6.7% or 300 million paid days absent in 1972).

Capitalism had suffered a fierce and sustained boiling onslaught by the working class on the rate of profit in the '60s.... a global attack that would require a global counteroffensive. In country after country the bourgeoisie unfurled its double-edged weapon of inflation/unemployment, and it became clear that what was at stake in the crisis would be whether or not the working class would pay for it.

Crisis decade

Before examining absenteeism in the crisis decade, we shall look at the crisis itself. The expanding workers' offensive of the '60s had to be contained and smashed, or displaced and dismantled more and more into state structures of negotiated compromises between capital and the trade unions. The state/capital counteroffensive began to gather momentum in the 26 Cos. at the turn of the decade, with the introduction of a new 'national' system of wage bargaining, the *National Wage Agreements*. The 1960s' Pay Agreements hadn't applied to all workers regardless, and gains made by fighting workers over hours, wages and conditions of work were quickly generalised to the whole class. In contrast, the new N.W.A. system of the '70s applied to everyone in congress unions, whether or not you were militant ; the N.W.A.s attempted to fragment the offensive unity of the working class by physically isolating fighting sections of workers from the rest of the class - any gains they made outside the Agreement (and any real gains would necessarily be outside) couldn't go 'across the board', couldn't be taken up by other workers. The fluid wage 'hierarchy' of the 1960's was frozen. In 1971 the N.W.A.s institutionalised 'frozen differentials' or historically immutable facts from capital's point of view - exaggerating the divisive aspects of the division of labour. Workers attempting to prove themselves 'anomalies' because they were a group 'left behind in the wage price spiral', were now forced to argue their case formally against other workers instead of against capital.

The NWAs also marked a higher subordination of wage rises to productivity, incentive and flexibility arrangements - so crucial to state and capital's project of restructuring during the crisis. As the boss of GUINNESS put it at this year's Irish Management Institute Conference :

" Central Agreements leave management to pay for any change in work. Normal technological change, essential for survival, has become part of an extra productivity deal. This produces costs over and above the pay growth already built in. The net effect is that change is getting harder to manage, and the real cost of employing people has risen, so that companies are forced to automate for survival. This is hardly the intended consequence of National Agreements ! ...we appear to be suffering from a national resistance to change. "

The reformist defence of wage levels was also built on this defence of work - defending the 'Right to Work' and therefore the right of capital to increase the productivity, intensity and dangers of work. Output per worker per hour in manufacturing industry increased by 28 % in the 26 Cos. and 23.4 % in the 6 Cos. between 1972-77 ; during the same time as the volume of production increased by 25 % north and south, manufacturing employment decreased by over 2 % in the 26 Cos. (1972-77) and by a massive 17 % in the 6 Cos. (1970-76). The ICTU proclaimed (on the National Understanding) that 'the maximum attainable overall income increase is the increase in national production, since it is not possible to increase real

incomes by more than real production' : While the total wage bill (variable capital) decreased through unemployment and devalued wages, investment in machinery in the 26 Cos. increased by 363 % between 1974 and 1980.

Wage rises, then, underwent a fundamental transformation between the 1960's and the 1970's. They were no longer to be conceded by state and capital as the cost of a proletarian offensive, but a strict hierarchy of labour values determined by the bourgeoisie's counteroffensive, wages to be tightly subordinated to inflation and unemployment, to the labour market and the capitalist cycle of production. In the '70s the ruling class also attempted to take away any room for the working class to manoeuvre over the length of the working week...the struggle over hours of work was almost totally excommunicated from trade disputes per se ; very few strikes and strike-days were over hours of work as an issue by itself except in 1974, a year when 40 % of the 26 Cos.' strike-days were fought over 'hours of work'.

The 1979 National Understanding, which marked the end of the phase of NWAs as we know them, stringently demanded like the other NWAs that standard working hours should remain at their current levels for the duration of the Agreement. For workers with less than 17 days holidays per year, the National Understanding allowed employers and unions to NEGOTIATE 17 days ! The Guinness strike this spring was one notable example where workers had to strike for this minimum 17 days.

So compared to the huge advances made in the '60s, the basic working week hardly changed during the '70s. The slightness of the decrease in 'official' hours worked in transportable goods industries (see following table) shows a continuing dependence of workers on overtime work to supplement devalued basic wages :

<u>Adult men</u>	26 Counties.....	december 1970.....	45.5 hours
	6 Counties.....	october 1969....	45.3 hours
	26 Counties.....	december 1977....	44.7 hours
	6 Counties.....	october 1977....	43.6 hours
<u>Adult women</u>	26 Counties.....	december 1970....	38.4 hours
	26 Counties.....	december 1977....	38.3 hours

During the crisis decade capital - in response particularly to workers' gains in absenteeism and the shorter working week of the '60s - resorted to more intensive control of time within work. Age-old capitalist practices were tried...petty thefts of time (from lunchbreaks, teabreaks, toilet-breaks, starting-up and cleaning-up times), penalty clauses dealing severely with even 2-minute latecomers and early clocking off...alongside a more general overhaul of working time.

Continuous process round-the-clock shifts became a common feature in the workplaces, as many firms - most of all multinationals operating highly destructive and disciplined work processes - gained Ministerial exemptions from the 1936 Conditions of Employment Act (which prohibits shifts longer than 9 hours, industrial nightwork by women and evening/night work by young people). In this way firms like BURLINGTON, WYETH and PENN CHEMICALS introduced 12-hour shifts for men, and firms like SMURFIT CORRUGATED CASES, ASAHI, ABBOTTS and LIRELLE extended the employment of women (often on 12-hour shifts) to from 7/8 am to 11/12 pm. For 'compensa-

tion' of a shift allowance (which in Ireland is generally 20 % higher than the basic rate), the complex and usually compulsory 3-cycle shift system wrecks your concentration, mind (especially sleep) and body rhythms, not to talk of social life.

Lengthened shifts with a shorter basic week (e.g. a four day 36 hour week of four 9-hour shifts) meant four days' worth of lunch-breaks, rest, start-up and cleaning time instead of five, and absolutely more time working and at capital's " optimum " speed than in a " normal " five day 40 hour week. FLEXITIME, too, was used to delicately record, control and regulate work, restoring clocking-in procedures in workplaces where workers had previously won a removal of clocks. With piece-rates, bonus and incentive schemes, job times and minimum output regulations - which were the material basis of productivity bargaining in the '70s - wages apparently governed by output INSTEAD OF time, are really " nothing else than a converted form of wages by time, just as wages by time are a converted form of the value or price of labour power " (Capital Volume I, p.55).

Wages by time (the 'hourly rate') expects a particular minimum output to be achieved in a given time, averaged over a period, even if that output is expressed in less formal terms or norms. With payment by output, by the piece - in all its forms - capital was attempting to fractionalise and discipline the hourly rate into a stricter payment-by-the-minute. And with the introduction of the new technology in production and distribution, the microchips and walkie-talkie 'bleepers' and tachographs, payment and control of labour could become further extended outside the factory and further subdivided into fractions of a second inside the factory. Every split second of labour time, every minute gesture of the worker was becoming more productive and crucial, more tightly controlled and measured by capital. This was why large quantities of constant capital - new self correcting, self cleaning and self maintained machine processes - were brought in to replace whole skilled layers and traditional vanguards of the class.

The NWAs, the complete integration of the trade unions into state structures, the revamped Labour Court and the overhauling of labour time and work, were all designed to take control of the struggle over work out of the workplaces, out of reach of the proletariat. And this was the time of absenteeism BY THE BOSSES - laying thousands off and filling the dole queues, putting thousands more on short time here, shutting factories there, increasingly making labour more casual, part-time, temporary.

Capital was desperately fighting for a breathing space inside the workplace, a space to restructure AGAINST and WITHOUT 'national resistance' and to consolidate the battered social relation of work, of labour power as creator of value dominated and intimately controlled by capital.

WORKING CLASS RESPONSE

Now, what was the response by the working class to this capitalist offensive ? Despite all state/capital's attempts to close off avenues of working class struggle, that breathing space never came. The main objective of the exercise - to boost the rate of profit - was never achieved.

During the crisis years, absenteeism in particular became a generalised working class response to the crisis. As we have seen, numbers of Disability Benefit recipients per year in the 26 Cos. increased by 54 % between 1963 and 1970, to 189,992 people (25.9 % of the insured workforce).

In the crisis years, we find that between 1971 and 1977 the numbers on D.B. increased even faster, by 75 %, from
 *** 177,324 people in 1971 (23.9 % of the insured workforce) to
 *** 309,519 people in 1977 (32 % of the insured workforce).

Expenditure on Disability Benefit increased rapidly every year over the decade, from £ 11,658,000 p.a. in 1968 to £ 61,534,000 p.a. in 1977 - this was an increase of 428%. The official inflation rate for the same period was 217%, so yet again paid absenteeism clearly and effectively outran inflation. Flat rate Disability Benefit in the 26 Cos. Flat rate is paid at the same rate as Unemployment Benefit in the 26 Cos. Flat rate social welfare benefits increased by about 70% between April 1975 and October 1977 alone (much faster than prices, which increased - officially - by 44.5% between February 1975 and November 1977). Divide the total spent on D.B. in 1977 by the average paid per person per week and we find that by that year nearly 25 million days of absence were being paid per year in D.B. alone.

But Flat Rate D.B. is not the only payment the working class appropriates in going absent - many workers supplement this benefit under their companies' own sick-pay schemes. For example, by 1978 Dublin Corporation was paying over £½ million a year for its 5,000 workers' sick notes. And besides Flat Rate Disability Benefits there is also a pay-related form of Disability Benefit, on which a further £ 8,570,000 was spent just in 1977. Yet another form of paid absence is the 'Wet Time' scheme, where about 55,000 workers (two years ago) in the building, civil engineering and painting trades have over the years won the right to be paid for not working in the rain; £ 945,000 was gained by workers under this scheme in 1977. Similar rights were won by Corporation binmen and cleaners in 1978 after a bitter unofficial strike.

Workers in the 6 Cos. were also increasingly going absent during the '70s. While the following figures show only a slight absolute increase in D.B. claims and absences, this applies (as we have seen) to a workforce rapidly decreasing in numbers - the rate of (paid) absenteeism increased.

PERIOD	AVERAGE NO. OF NEW SICKNESS & INVALIDITY CLAIMS PER WEEK	NOS. INSURED WORKERS ABSENT PER YEAR
1968 to 1972	5,660	43,800
1973 to 1977	6,180	45,300
1978	6,700	n.a.
1979	6,600	49,000

total annual sickness benefit payments to 6 Cos. workers increased from £ 3,428,000 in 1971/72 to £ 23,432,000 in 1977/78. (Note in passing that annual invalidity benefit payments, introduced in 1971 for the long-disabled (3), increased rapidly from £ 5m. in 1971/72 to £ 39m. in 78.)

1978

Towards the end of the decade, state/capital attempted to clamp absenteeism and its effects in a variety of ways such as :-

*** *stricter sick pay clauses* - substantial bonuses for those who keep an unblemished attendance record, and penalties for absentees (e.g. some companies now 'presumed' that on the 5th. day of an unexcused absence a worker had left the company)

*** *medical control* - particularly the strict enforcement of making absent workers immediately produce doctors' notes; increasing use of company-employed doctors - so far there are 126 company doctors in the 26 Cos., most of them part-time (see Business & Finance magazine, 3.4.1980).

*** *company spies* - checking up on absentee staff (see, e.g., the judgements made under the 26 Cos. 'Unfair Dismissals' Act)

*** *changes in method of D.B. payment* since the spring budget this year - FF imposed a 3-day waiting period for every D.B. claim (unless a further claim is made within three days of returning to work). Previously there was no waiting period for benefit within 13 weeks of your previous claim. This new measure was one of several which were designed and aimed to 'reduce state expenditure on social welfare payments by some £ 15m.'

*** *changes in labour contract law* - long term absenteeism has also been hit, coming under frustration clauses in the Unfair Dismissals Act - the employee is legally defined as 'fairly dismissed' if indefinitely available for work. Half the acts of labour law passed and still in force since the 26 Cos. state was established were made in the first six years of the 1970's. This legislation reflects both the struggle of working people AND the changing needs of the mode of production, and severely categorises (as legal subjects), divides and separates off the permanent, skilled, long established workers and official trade union activity from the casualised, temporary, de-skilled, degraded parts of the workforce (the young, the women and the unofficial).

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The state also tried to decrease its expenditure on D.B. by increasing social insurance contributions to compensate for increased payments. For example, in 1978, for the first time ever, the weekly contribution rate to the 26 Cos. 'Wet Time' fund exceeded the amount payable per hour. In the 6 Cos., over the seven years 1970/71 to 1976/77, total contributions to the 'National Insurance Fund' increased by 300% for employers but only 203% for employees; but in the three years between 1976/77 and 1978/79, contributions by employees increased by 20.1%, while employers' contributions only increased by 10.6%. This is in a situation where the Brit state has accumulated a SURPLUS - between 1973 and 1979 revenue to the fund exceeded expenditure on social welfare payments by £ 75 million...a massive rip-off.

Dismissals, suspensions, labour turnover and the capitalist precipitation of strikes were integral parts of class struggle in the factories in Ireland during capital's restructuring phase. Many disputes - sometimes turning into strikes - were head-on confrontations in the workplaces over absenteeism, demarcation, restrictive practices and other rigid refusals to work under the new work discipline. The bosses were attempting to force a recomposition of the workforce by eliminating those most against work - the most insubordinate/rigid/absentee workers.

It is now a well-known fact which side of the fence the trade union movement sits on when it comes to questions like discipline and antagonism. For example, the following quote from the Irish Times two years ago shows how the trade unions take on a role of being accountants of capital, - their reference point is the cost to capital not the gain for labour:

" The annual delegate conference of the ICTU resolved in 1972 that alcoholism was a 'serious cause of loss of man-hours in industry, and a potential source of industrial strife' and went on to list the headings under which the cost of the problem might be calculated. These included absenteeism (particularly following weekends and holidays), faulty workmanship, waste of raw materials... "

The unions' duty is to protect the system against abuse :

" The ICTU accepts the need for an efficient system of control of social payments in order to minimise abuses of the system such as claiming benefit while not unemployed or ill..."

(Trade Union Information, 1978)

The trade unions hire and fire, reprimand for management, as a subsection of personnel. No matter how many Connollys and Larkins they have under their belts, the unions are increasingly not from the working class but part of capital. Before the new factory ever starts up, before a single factory worker has set foot in the place, the I.D.A., the multinational and the one big union have sat down over the still unpacked tea-chests in the naked advanced factory and negotiated the 'trade union package' - the union's right to membership, bargain for, and manage labour. At the same time, workers are absenteeing from both unions and capital ; the difficult role of the unions in such a situation is to get labour back into the work process.



In issue 11 of the Ripening of Time, the Editorial Collective presented an article entitled ' Changing Patterns of Domination since World War II '. That article dealt with the economic and political development in the 32 Cos between the years 1945-1970.

In this issue, we present to the reader an article which deals with the 70s. We are quite conscious that any such ambitious undertaking opens itself to many traps and deviations. Nevertheless, we believe that the urgency we feel is shared by a good part of our readership. Our aim here is the development of political analysis and the furthering of debate so that the 80s move towards a revolutionary direction.

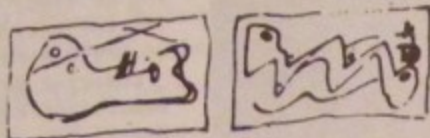
The 70s were **not** socialist !

Section I

World Context

Our objective in this article is to examine the economic aspects of the crisis in Ireland during the 1970's.

The 1970's has been a decade of crisis on a world scale - class war has been generalised, not localised. Confrontation has been generalised and bloody, the bourgeoisie has unleashed the



bitterness and viciousness of a cornered rat in countless battlegrounds, the world over. Time and again, popular movements and working class organisations have asserted their political strength and taken on the State and its repressive might.... Turkey, Tunisia, America, Iran, El Salvador, Zimbabwe, Egypt, Italy, Poland, Nicaragua and more. These are battles for power - less and less can the bourgeoisie survive by concession. The needs of working people are counterposed directly and permanently to the needs of capital.

The bourgeoisie has been faced with a major, recurring nightmare through these years. The rate of profit has been falling across the globe for over a decade. This is the background to the countless changing Governments, reorganisation of State and international organisations, Political Parties which have come and gone, alliances turned inside out and the multitude of Conferences, Summits, Camps and Clubs which have theorised and strategised desperately trying to find ways out of the crisis.

The second half of the 1960's saw the beginning of the decline. By the early 1970's the rate of profit was falling fast. All the available energy, the intellectual and practical resources of the ruling class, have been concentrated and poured into this one crucial task: to reverse the trend. Although there have been temporary and momentary successes, they have not succeeded in checking the slide. This, not because of any unwillingness to resort to whatever weapons and methods available, but essentially because they are faced with politically conscious and organised opposition. It is also because they are constrained by the inherent contradictions of capitalism, based as it is on the private exploitation and appropriation of social wealth.

The figures for the rate of profit are dramatic and general - effecting even those sections of capital which have been relatively dynamic in this past decade.

"The fact that the rates of profit in the U.K., France, Italy and most probably Japan fell, by 1974 and 1975, to less than one-third of the level of the early 1960's, and in the case of Germany and the U.S.A. to about two-thirds of the earlier level, shows the depth of the crisis with which the capitalist class is faced on a world scale."

The following table gives a breakdown of the figures for the rates of profits in these countries, in the decade from 1965 to 1975.

Rate of profit in the major industrialised countries as a percentage of assets/equity in the years 1965-1975.

Year	U.S.A.	U.K.	France	W. Ger.	Japan
1965	18.8	5.4	9.2	11.7	11.9
1966	18.7	6.1	9.6	11.4	12.2
1967	17.6	4.8	2.1	10.9	14.0
1968	17.1	4.7	10.0	12.5	14.7
1969	15.6	4.2	10.4	12.9	14.3
1970	14.2	3.6	10.0	12.4	14.7
1971	14.7	3.7	10.2	11.7	14.2
1972	15.5	3.5	10.3	11.3	13.0
1973	14.7	3.1	99.6	11.5	10.9
1974	13.2	2.2	8.2	10.9	11.9
1975	13.5	2.0	5.7	10.6	13.0

Source: Andre Gunder Frank : The New Economic Crisis of the West.

Frank's figures show a massive drop in the rate of profit in the U.S., a low and falling rate in Britain, a massive drop again in France, a slow decline in W. Germany and a variation within a bracket of about 3% in Japan. This was the reversal, the end of the post-War boom. A boom which in this country took off briefly in the 1960's and lasted just a few years. Expansion, growth, investment...these are the catch-cries of capital, and they are also its driving force, its reason for being. Without growth there is stagnation, without expansion there is contraction. This spells doom for capital - its life-blood is surplus value realised into profits, interest and rent which feed the next cycle of production. The image of the 'entrepreneur', capital's *image* of itself, is one of the intelligent and shrewd business man, locating and exploiting to the full new opportunities for strengthening and extending his sphere of operations. This is the 'success story'. The falling rate of profit sends doubt into the heart of capital - it must be checked fast and efficiently. All obstacles to the survival of capital, to the counteracting of the falling rate of profit, must be removed.

It is the double element of struggles by the proletariat in BOTH the advanced and dominated parts of the globe which are the roots of this crisis. It is the accumulation of struggles of a social, national, economic and political character which has undermined the capacity of the ruling class, on a world scale, to resolve its internal crisis. Despite a process of geographical and political mobility through the exporting of crisis ridden capital via the junior partners inside the imperialist chain (such as Brazil and Israel), capital has not managed to control the extent and depth of the crisis. Capitalist competition has extended to the seas, the deserts and the airspace, fighting for access to labour under conditions which counteract the tendency for the rate of profit to fall.

It is precisely the context of struggle and falling rates of profit which force the capitalist class to fight and haggle

tooth-and-nail over the minutest of demands made by working people, always and anywhere. But the practice of working class people in the centres of capitalism has reached an advanced stage, developing a rigidity and homogeneity in this decade, constantly blocking and checking the process of capital accumulation.

Heritage of the 60s

The 1960's in this country were years when both class and national contradictions converged. We concentrate in this article on the effects primarily of class contradictions which broke through the surface of the society in that decade. Class confrontation during the 1960's contained a number of key elements :

- a) Struggles against the length of the working day : here we are referring to battles for longer holidays, shorter working hours, extra si days as well as the growing practice of absenteeism.
- b) Struggles against the devaluation of labour power : so many of the strikes and disputes of the 1960's centered on the question of wages. Compensation for the ravages of inflation were looked for through direct wage rise demands as well as via a whole series of anomaly, productivity, relativity and equal pay claims. Alongside of this a series of battles over wet time, danger money, mileage time and a host of other special payments.
- c) Struggles against capitalist organisation of labour : these struggles were carried out through resistance to three-cycle shifts, rigidity in the face of capitalist demands for mobility, refusal of new technologies and productivity systems.
- d) Struggles against capitalist authority structures : particularly in the latter part of the 1960's decade workers fought against the various different structures and procedural systems being imposed on them by the State and Capital, designed to contain their struggles. Time and motion studies and job evaluation techniques were attacked the hardest by workers.

Faced with the offensive by working people on these issues during the 1960's, primarily in the 26 Cos alongside a political offensive by the anti-imperialist movement in the 6 Cos - the ruling class responded with a vicious attack on the standards of living of the working class. The two major weapons of this attack were :

- I. Inflation
- II. Unemployment.

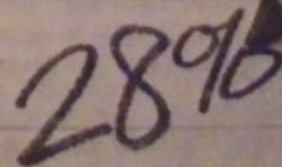
This assault by the ruling class was implemented always with the use of repression, wherever and whenever necessary. Repression was central to the strategy of the ruling class in the 6 Cos faced with a crisis so severe that by 1972 the State itself collapsed.

But inflation and unemployment are both weapons of crisis. They indicate a severe level of anarchic competition inside the capitalist class and between its different fractions. The use of such methods means that the weaker sections of the capitalist class suffer as well. Inflation effects all classes while its effect is felt the worst by workers whose purchasing power is eroded as the prices of commodities spiral. Machinery and equipment become more expensive also, as well as raw materials...and this takes its toll on the other classes. It is a DOUBLE EDGED sword. Finally, unemployment itself is not the heart of bourgeois strategy unless economic crisis is severe. Surplus value is extracted from workers inside production. Rationalisations, redundancies, closures etc generally indicate that the weaker sections of capital are forced to the wall, sacrificed in the interests of the class as a whole.

One of the important changes taking place at the level of the organisation of capital and the implementation of strategy in a period of crisis, is the crucial role of international organisation of capital, such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Trilateral Commission and the EEC. Inside a country it is the internationalised sections of capital which play the dominant role, precisely because it is these sections of capital which are capable of operating across national boundaries.

At a general level, we can say that it is the convergence and accumulation of struggles which make the crisis so intense. It is their worldwide nature which leaves capital no place to go. In a dominated country, like Ireland, it is its weak and dependent nature which subjects the economy to the worst effects of the crisis as it unfolds. The major objective of the ruling class inside a crisis is to prevent the emergence of class unity and organisation which could threaten its fragile projects and prevent its attempts to counteract the falling rate of profit. They attempt to fragment the class within national boundaries, raising sometimes the spectre of national unity to blur the intensifying contradictions between classes - othertimes concentrating on the isolation of the most militant sections of the working class.

The next section of this article will look more closely at the tools we need to use to understand the economic aspects of the crisis. We will examine the rate of profit, its tendency to fall and the mechanisms used by capitalism to counteract this tendency.



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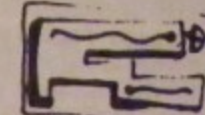
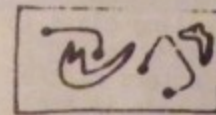
Issue 3 contains an Editorial on the Puerto Rican solidarity movement in the U.S.; a critique of Socialist Feminism; two articles on workplace organizing in Kansas City; Documents on unions and workers' militia by the Puerto Rican Socialist League; a Study Guide to Reconstruction; and Correspondence.

Issue 2 contains Theses on White Supremacy and the National Question; articles on Leninism and the Black National question; Africa; White and Male Supremacy; Unequal Exchange; and a debate on the U.S.S.R.

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Section II

'Iron' Law

Capital accumulation carries within it the inherent tendency for the rate of profit to fall. The rate of profit is determined by the ratio of surplus extracted from the combined cost of labour and capital. The cost of labour is represented primarily in wages. That of capital is made up of the costs of land, machinery, equipment, raw materials and the interest on money borrowed by the individual capitalist. Surplus is extracted from labour and is possible because of the nature of labouring power - its capacity to create wealth or value. Control or private ownership of the means of production e.g. machinery, under a capitalist system, gives the capitalist control over the fruits of labour. Thus the capitalist controls the surplus produced in the cycle of production and realised through the sale of commodities on the market.

The tendency for the rate of profit to fall is tied up directly to the fact that the capitalist reinvests at least part of the surplus extracted in the production cycle. This reinvestment changes the balance between labour and capital inside production, tending to create a situation where the proportion of capital (dead labour) to living labour increases. This situation can occur at a general level of a whole economy through the process of capital intensification of different sectors of industry. In this case the balance between capital and labour gets transformed in the society as a whole.

The reinvestment of surplus realised is the means used by capital to expand and increase its share of a particular industry and to raise the amount of production and thus surplus value under its control. But, and here's the catch-22: reinvestment means that the value of capital inside production has increased. If the rate of profit is to remain constant, then the level of surplus extracted from labour MUST increase. Here is the problem. The bourgeoisie have not been able to increase the amount of labour extracted, through increasing the productivity of labour, at a fast enough rate. On top of this they have been faced with, right through the 1960's a situation where workers were demanding higher wages and better working conditions. Thus the value of labour was also increasing inside production, without a corresponding increase in surplus being extracted. As we have said, the rate of profit is measured as a ratio of surplus to the combined cost of labour and capital. As both labour and capital increase in value then that ratio falls - the rate of profit falls. This is one of the fundamental contradictions of capitalism. The ruling class is forced with the necessity to increase the rate of surplus extraction (rate of exploitation) at a fast enough rate to counteract the tendency for the rate of profit to fall, brought about by the increasing cost of labour and capital.

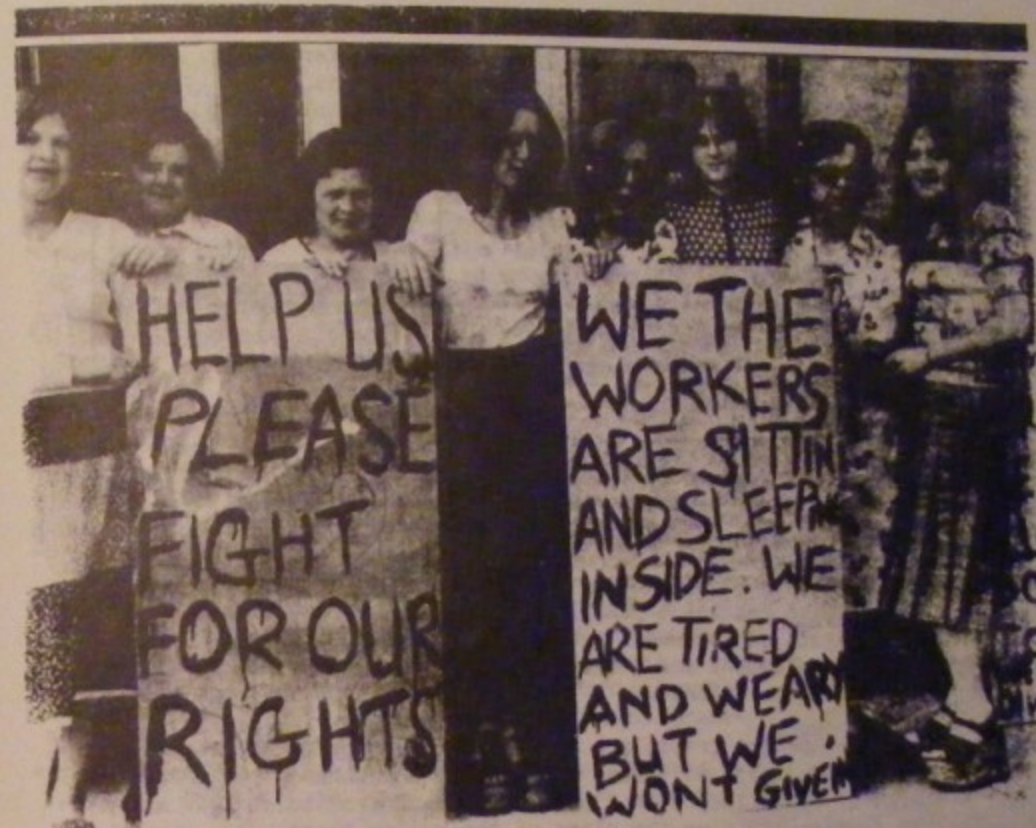
This was precisely the situation facing the ruling class in this country towards the end of the 1960's. This was a decade when there was a massive capital inflow into all sectors of the economy. It was also a decade when real gains were made in the standards of living of working people. Unpublished figures from the Economic and Social Research Institute indicate that the rate of profit fell during these years from approx 11% to just over 4%.

Marx argues that there are a number of methods that the ruling class can use to counteract the falling rate of profit. We will examine these so that we can analyse the strategy of capital during the 1970's in this context:

- a) Increase the rate of exploitation - either by lengthening the working day or increasing productivity levels.
- b) Depressing the value of labour power - this means reducing the value of wages.
- c) Devaluation of constant capital - this involves reducing the value of machinery, raw materials etc. This can be done by rendering processes of production/equipment obsolete or by the destruction of the means of production through war, for example.
- d) Expulsion of labour from production - lay-offs can reduce the overall cost of labour inside production. This only makes sense for capital if the remaining workers keep production at its original level.
- e) More use of *cheaper* raw materials - this was used by capital as a method of reducing the severity of crisis at the beginning of the Century. Struggles of national liberation have cut off this option in a lot of cases e.g. the increasing prices of oil, food stuffs and minerals.
- f) Reduction of amount of capital in production - this is usually done by investing profits into property speculation rather than into production or buying up art treasures, paintings etc or restrictions in the availability of credit.

If the struggles of working people can prevent capital from imposing these mechanisms for counteracting the falling rate of profit, then capital is embroiled in the lengthy, drawn-out type of crisis which has characterised the last ten years. But, it is the attempts by capital to use these methods which mark intense crisis for the working class - as capital attempts to make the working class pay for the worst effects of the crisis. The capacity of the ruling class to make the working class pay is determined directly by the organised strength of the class in resisting the new projects of capital.

In this next section, we look more closely at the battle between capital and labour in this country over who pays for the crisis. We will try and evaluate how successful the assault on the living standards of working people has been, how effective the reorganisation of the economy has been and some of the methods and victories of the working class in resisting the plans of capital.



the 70s

Section III

Issue II of Ripening of Time examined the changing patterns of class relations inside the 26 Counties in the period from World War II to the end of the 1960's. We identified in these years an enormous and far-reaching process of economic and political restructuring of the society, which was moulding the economy and the social structure to the needs of a new international division of labour.

We argued that the decade of the 1960's was characterised by a strong and militant working class offensive on wages and conditions of work as well as a wide spectrum of social struggles provoked by the polarising class contradictions brought about through the reorganisation of society. This offensive divided the bourgeoisie, faced as they were with a deepening anti-imperialist offensive inside the 6 Cos. The ruling class was faced with the urgent need to contain workplace and social struggles, to continue the process of restructuring of the economy by rationalising production and reorganising its educational, legal and ideological organs. This is the background to the 1970's.

We will examine the 1970's through three phases, which are schematically outlined below :

1970-73 :

These years are characterised by the continuing struggle on the economic and social front by the working class as the ruling class develops and begins to implement a strategy of counter-offensive.

1974-1976 :

This counteroffensive reaches a peak in these years and takes the form of an attack on the wages and living conditions of the working class. Unemployment and inflation reach their peak - the working class is on the defensive.

1977- :

The last few years of the crisis are marked by the outbreak of localised struggles inside different sections of the working class - sparks of resistance with a potential to generalise into a full-scale counterattack on the plans of the ruling class. The bourgeoisie itself attempts to reorganise internally, to heal the wounds resulting from the uneven effect of crisis internally and they begin to seek for a more favourable relationship with international capital.

The essential element of bourgeois strategy is the need to counteract the falling rate of profit. In order to achieve this, living labour must be subordinated to the new needs and rhythm of capital in crisis - constantly changing its composition, the level and speed of production and reducing the time-span of circulation. Any attempts to break out of the limits being imposed by capital form a threat to the survival of the ruling class.

It is crucial that we stress the level of reorganisation, change and continuous mini-crisis faced by every class during these years. To attempt to graphically represent this, we present below a fleeting glimpse at some of the tumultuous events of 1970 - the year which marks the beginning of the crisis-decade. Certainly this decade was one of instability and uncertainty, during which both the projects of the ruling class and the responses of the working class are untested and unsure.

* 1,405,000 workdays were gained in strikes in the 26 Cos - second only to Italy in the International

Strike League. This was the highest of any year up to 1979.

- * The first meeting of the Dublin Housing Action Committee took place in Dublin, intent on building a city-wide coordination of tenants organisations.
- * The National Industrial and Economic Council released its document on Prices and Incomes Policy. This document was to the 1970's what Whittaker's Programme for Economic Development was to the 1960's.
- * The first National Wage Agreement was imposed on workers in 26 Cos, following the ICTU acceptance of the 'prices and incomes' project of capital.
- * 1,000 workers attended a rally called by the Shop Stewards Committee to oppose the National Wage Agreement.
- * The Labour Party released its document in full, declaring by title that 'The '70's will be socialist'.
- * Bank workers went on strike for 8 months and many small capitalists went to the wall.
- * The Fianna Fail Government went into crisis. The Cabinet split and Ministers appeared in court to face charges of gun-running.
- * The anti-imperialist Movement was engaged in a major offensive against the 6 Co. State. Violence and rioting were escalating on a daily basis.
- * Sinn Fein and the IRA split in two at their Annual Conference into The Official and Provisional Republican Movements.
- * In Britain, the Tory Party was in crisis both in relation to the 6 Cos and also internally over the Industrial Relation Bill.
- * The U.S. ruling class conceded defeat to the Vietnamese people by sitting down to peace talks in Paris.

Phase I : 1970-73



Re-organisation

Foreign capital rapidly increased its control over whole sectors of the economy through the 1960's and 1970's. The first years of the 1970's saw a change in the make-up of foreign capital. U.S. capital began to form a large share of foreign investment, displacing British capital from its traditional dominant role. In 1971/72, only 4.7% of grant-aided foreign companies which set up in the 26 Counties were British. In the 6 Cos, a similar pattern was emerging. For example, in 1972 during the first 6 months, 16 foreign companies set up in the 6 Cos from Germany, Holland, U.S., and Denmark. Only 2 British companies set up in these 6 months.

Foreign capital was increasingly concentrated in specific sectors of the economy. The result of this was a transformation of the industrial structure in both parts of this island. Chemicals, pharmaceuticals and electronics were the new growth sectors of foreign capital in the 26 Cos. Traditional sectors, such as clothing, footwear and leather goods went into decline. In the 6 Cos, it was engineering, computer and precision tools along with electronics which were the 'growth' areas, displacing the linen, ship-building industries from their dominant position. The Industrial Development Authority (IDA) in the 26 Cos and the Northern Ireland Finance Corporation (NIFC) along with the Northern Ireland Development Council (NIDC) were the key State agencies in this process. The level of grants, equipment, advance factories, training, tax exemptions and locally raised money capital demonstrates that in the final analysis, foreign capital is rarely an INPUT into the economy but rather takes control over local resources.

Foreign capital was gradually subordinating the entire manufacturing sector of the economy to its needs. This meant a transformation not only of WHO OWNS WHAT, but of the structure and functioning of the entire economy. Rather than the hundreds of labour-intensive factories in the clothing and shoe industries, using substantial indigenous raw materials and supplying the home market - the new foreign-dominated sectors were capital-intensive, export-oriented and used primarily imported raw materials. The economy was rapidly becoming a BASE for international capital rather than a structure with its own internal needs and rhythm. The majority of companies in the manufacturing arena were operating as part of an international economic environment rather than in the context of the national economy. What the ruling class has called 'modernisation' is in reality a dependent and distorted form of industrialisation. This is the case today.

Parallel to the huge changes taking place in the manufacturing arena, the drain from the land which had continued right through from World War 2, began to accelerate. Mechanisation of agriculture, concentration of the land and the expulsion of labour went hand in hand. But the crucial development which underlay this process was the increasing concentration of agricultural production on a few commodities - primarily beef and then dairy products.

Only certain parts of the economy retained any thread of continuity in this process. Parts of the food industry, sections of State industry and some elements of commercial capital stayed clear of the main brunt of reorganisation. There are few examples of this in the 6 Cos. Overall, it is true to say that the transformation of production was pervasive, involving reorganisation at the social and political level as well. There was substantial movement of people into urban areas, changes in jobs, life-styles, skills and the living conditions of thousands of people right across the country. The content of newspapers, televisions, pubs, shops, roads, villages and transportation changed dramatically. Every aspect of peoples' lives were subjected to upheaval in the interests of higher productivity and increased rates of exploitation for capital.

* * *

The ruling class entered the 1970's with the urgent task in front of them of blocking the struggles of working people and breaking the pattern of gains and victories of the late 60's. In order to concentrate their energy and resources in this direction, many other areas of the economy and the social structure which required attention were left aside. Transport systems, urban planning, education and many other areas were left to fall into deeper crises (which they all recognise today). The focus of attention was the primary contradiction: the relation of capital and labour

Already inflation was beginning to creep up in the early years of the 1970's - by 1973 the rate of inflation was TREBLE the level of 1967, running at about 11% per annum. During these same years, taxation levels were also on the increase, both on goods as well as on wages and salaries. By 1972, taxation made up over 30% of Gross National Product (GNP). This amounted to a double attack on wages: inflation and taxation were both eating away at the real value of wages in the hands of thousands of workers. Wage demands remained at a high level and time and again the bourgeoisie was forced to concede.

Here we can identify the first elements of a longer term strategy of the ruling class which began to show its face. The introduction of the National Wage Agreement (NWA) in 1970, incorporated a DIFFERENTIATED approach to wage rises across different sections of the working class. One of the key issues that the ruling class was trying to resolve, was the situation of the 1960's when wage concessions won by one group of workers (the most organised and militant) were spilling over into the class as a whole. Their strategy was to reverse that process. The late 1960's saw the better paid workers leading the workplace struggles over wages and conditions. Under the first National Wage Agreement, differential wage rises were worked out for different sections of workers.

The lowest paid were to get the highest increases - about 30%. The highest paid workers were to receive only a 10% increase. Many of the lower-paid workers were women, many of them working

shop steward organisation and the havoc created by militant groups of workers was to be curtailed with the full weight of State machinery - within which the trade unions were the primary structure, in this instance.

The strategy of devaluing labour power and undermining traditional forms of organisation inside the working class were implemented using the NWA as a crucial weapon. Alongside of this, there were other elements of ruling class strategy which focussed on the issue of PRODUCTIVITY and the rationalisation of production - these elements begin to develop an importance in these years. The numbers of unemployed began to rise sharply - from 57,000 to 71,000 in the space of two years (71 - 73), in the 26 Cos. Redundancies were happening at the rate of 8-10,000 per year. These parts of the strategy of capital become more obvious and more widespread in the next phase of the crisis decade, where we will examine them in more depth.

While the ruling class in the 26 Cos was focussing on direct labour, and concentrating its efforts on counteracting the falling rate of profit through an assault on the living and working conditions of working people - the situation was quite different in the 6 Cos. The room for manoeuvre of the ruling class in the 6 Cos was far more constricted. They were faced with a political offensive by a popular movement, armed attacks on the State - the focus of their strategy was repression. Desperately attempting to impose political stability on a polarising situation, internment was brought in in 1971 and thousands of militants were incarcerated without even a trial. While economic reorganisation was taking place inside the 6 Cos, there was one crucial difference. The penetration of foreign capital was taking place against a background of a traditionally strong industrial base. Restructuring of the economy was undermining the traditionally dominant section of the Unionist bourgeoisie and throwing up new sections causing fragmentation on the political arena. The popular offensive provoked deep rifts in an already fragile ruling class - and Stormont (the 6 Co. Parliament) collapsed in 1972.



Phase 2: '74-'77

The ruling class in both parts of this island were in difficult straights by 1973. They were trying to manage an economy which was being turned inside out by the penetration of foreign capital. To compound this situation, the crisis was deepening internationally and a whole series of new elements began to play a role. This in the context of a highly internationalised economy, dependent and dominated, and open to the worst effects of the crisis being laid on its doorstep. Oil price rises, the devaluation of the dollar and the pound, massive unemployment in Britain and the effects on agriculture and industry of membership of the EEC (The 26 Cos became members in 1973 of the EEC). These added factors sent the economy into an accelerated rhythm of crisis.

Everything began to hit their peak. Price rises and unemployment reached levels comparable only with the 1930's. The chronic weaknesses of the economies north and south, were thrown into relief. The standards of living of working people suffered heavily in these years. In one year 1973/74, male unemployment rose by 17% and female unemployment by 22% in the 6 Cos. Unemployment in the 26 Cos was officially running at 112,000 (12%) by 1974 - double the figure of 3 years earlier. Output levels fell by 7% approximately, north and south.

During these same peak years of crisis, U.S. capital continued and in fact INCREASED its rate of penetration of the economy. The overall value of U.S. investment increased by 90% in the years 1974-76, in the 26 Cos. The result of this increase was a situation in which U.S. capital made up over 50% of all fixed asset investment in the 26 Cos by 1976. British capital was dislodged from its dominant role. 103 U.S. companies, a rate of one a fortnight, set up in 26 Cos in the years '74-76. Pharmaceuticals and chemicals were the main area of concentration of U.S. capital, followed by engineering industries. The rate of profit of U.S. capital in the 26 Cos in 1976 was 29% - the HIGHEST rate of profit for U.S. manufacturing capital anywhere in the world. The rate of profit for U.S. capital INSIDE the U.S. was about 3% those years. The rate of profit for Irish capital in Ireland was 6%.

If we look back at the years 1971-76, 93,000 'new' manufacturing jobs were created in 26 Cos. Yet overall manufacturing employment decreased by 5,000, from 199,000 to 194,000. So, the 93,000 'new' jobs actually *displaced* and replaced 98,000 old jobs. In the 6 Cos a different picture emerges. Between April 1971 and 1976, 'new' jobs totalled 29,443. The decrease in manufacturing employment was 24,440. Here the situation is far worse: the 29,443 'new' jobs displaced and replaced 54,000 old jobs. This is the reality of the ruling class 'modernisation' projects.

If we examine more closely how the crisis was hitting the different sectors of industry, it is clear that the impact of the crisis was very uneven. The traditional industrial sectors show the sharpest decline, while for example the chemical industry shows rapid growth in both the volume of production and the level of employment. Closures were daily announced in the clothing, footwear and food-processing sectors, while new factories were setting up in the chemical and pharmaceutical areas. But the capital-intensive nature of the 'growth' sectors meant that the number of jobs destroyed was consistently running way above the number of jobs 'created'.

Industry	1973 - 77 Change in Production	1974 - 77 Change in Employment	1976 % of workers unemployed
Chemicals	+58%	+900	9%
Metals + Eng.	+12%	-800	11%
Textiles	+15%	-2,800	15%
Food	+16%	-2,400	5%
Drink + Tob.	+ 8%	+200	6.5%
Wood + Furn.	-16%	-1,700	13%
Clothing	-18%	-5,600	19%

Clearly, the effect of the crisis was felt very unevenly by different sections of capital and also by different groups of workers. It is also true that the 'growth' sectors dominated by foreign capital are very often located in rural areas and employ a significant proportion of workers coming off the land. Thus, the traditional sectors of the working class have only marginally been able to take advantage of 'new' jobs.

Reorganisation of the economy has hit the traditional skilled workers very hard. These workers are concentrated in certain parts of the economy which have suffered hard inside the crisis. It is also these workers who led the offensive of the 1960's. A wide range of elements of ruling class strategy hit this section of workers :

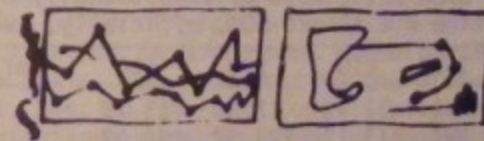
- Massive redundancies among skilled workers - e.g. building workers.
- Destruction of traditional inner city areas in Dublin and Belfast with strong traditions of working class militancy.
- Deskilling and rationalisation of the docks areas of Cork, Dublin, Limerick, Belfast and Galway.

- IDA regional plans scattering new industries through traditionally rural areas.
- Rationalisation and automation within key parts of the public sector e.g. transport and communications.
- Differential wage rises involving the devaluation of the wages of the skilled worker.

* * *

The working class was experiencing a double pronged attack during these years. What we have described above are the main elements of the effect of the crisis among those at work. Unemployment is the other side of this coin. The size of the population was growing during these years BUT the labour force was shrinking. There was a huge increase in the numbers of young people, and up to 17,000 people emigrated from the 26 Cos alone. By 1976, 50% of the people of the 26 Cos were under 25 years of age. Official statistics demonstrate that for every person at work 3 others were dependent on that wage, on average. (Dependency rate of 73%). ONE WAGE SUPPORTING FOUR PEOPLE.

The housing situation was also deteriorating rapidly. Depopulation of rural Ireland meant that people were moving fast into urban areas. The population of Dublin increased by 30% over a short span of years. CARE, an investigation team of child-care workers reports that 50% of Corporation (State) housing is shared by two families and 20% of children under 14 years live in officially overcrowded conditions. Rapid escalation in private housing prices also affected the petty-bourgeoisie who were experiencing the instability of the credit-economy. Speculation was rife during



the peak years of the crisis as the ruling class poured its profits into land and property rather than risk the falling profit rates in production.

Years of crisis have deepened the class divisions in this country. By 1976 one-third of the population in the 26 Cos were dependent on social welfare payments for survival - one million people in all. Yet 30% of wages and salaries go in taxation and overall 87% of Government taxation revenue comes out of wages and salaries. The following figures give an idea of the concentration of wealth in the 26 Cos :

- 62% of all adults own NO personal wealth
- 1% of all adults own 33% of all wealth
- 10% of all adults own 69% of all wealth

The dependent nature of the economy takes many forms. We have already examined the control by foreign capital over manufacturing industry. But the level of the National Debt was rising fast inside the crisis too. By 1977 the National Debt was 77% of

the value of Gross National Product (the value of everything produced in the country in that year). The figure was £4,229 million. In that same year £400 million was paid out by the Free State just to service the interest on that debt. Overall 20% of the money that the Government takes in taxation is paid out to the Marshall Aid Fund, world banks and the European Investment Bank. For every £1 we pay in taxation, over 20p goes to the international organisations of capital.

Re-organisation

Agitation inside workplaces continued relentlessly during these years. In both 1974 and 1976 the number of workdays gained in strikes rose and large numbers of workers were involved. Many of these disputes were short and bitter - over half were unofficial, outside the direct control of the Unions. In 1974, workers succeeded in reducing the working day by one hour. But, in general the disputes were defensive and did not spill over to other groups of workers. The NWA were containing the effect of workplace battles. But they do indicate a deep swell of discontent and anger among working people at the attempts by the ruling class to make them pay for the crisis.

Year	No. of disputes	Workers Involved	Days
1974	219	43,459	551,833
1975	151	29,124	295,716
1976	134	42,281	776,949

Despite the level of agitation, workers in many sectors were losing out on their income levels. The real effect of the differential wage increases were being felt by traditionally higher paid workers as inflation hit almost 20%, officially, every year.

Basic Pay on Dec 31st 1970	£10	£20	£30	Inflation
% increase under 1970 NWA	31.7%	17.9%	13.2%	8.4%
Basic pay after 1970 NWA	£13.17	£23.57	£33.97	
% increase under 1972 NWA	34.6%	21.1%	17.4%	8.9%
Basic pay after 1972 NWA	£17.73	£28.55	£39.89	
% increase under 1974 NWA	33.6%	29.4%	27.5%	17.9%
Basic pay after 1974 NWA	£23.96	£36.95	£50.85	
% increase under 1975 NWA	16.9%	16.6%	16.6%	18.9%
Basic pay after 1975 NWA	£28.02	£43.07	£59.28	
% increase under 1976 NWA	10.7%	7.6%	6.4%	18.9%
Basic pay after 1976 NWA	£31.02	£46.36	£63.06	
% increase after 1977 NWA	12.9%	9.4%	8.3%	13.5
Basic pay after 1977 NWA	£35.02	£50.73	£68.28	

Total % increase	250.2%	153.7%	127.6%	
% price increase	158.0%	158.0%	158.0%	
% change in real wages	+37%	-0.1%	-10.4%	

This table shows us that for the majority of workers wages were falling under the operation of the NWA. The worst years were 1975-77, when wage increases fell way behind inflation. Only those workers on the LOWEST wages of £10 in 1970 gained in percentage terms. By the end of a seven year period, high percentage increases had only succeeded in bringing these wages up to around the £30 level - what skilled workers were getting 7 years earlier. The worst hit workers were in fact those who started off as the highest paid, on £30 per week in 1970. Their wage loss was over 10%, without taking tax and social welfare into account.

The average womens' wage during these years was £11.80 (1970) - the average male wage was £24.91 in 1970. Many women were on abysmally low wages. They got a 37% increase over the 7 years - but whatever way you look at it £10 was not a living wage in 1970 and £35 was not a living wage in 1977. Both the trade unions and the government have presented us with a picture of the general average effect of the NWA's, arguing that wages have increased faster than prices. THIS IS A LIE. High percentage increases on a tiny wage base means damn all. Behind the averages it is clear that all those earning over £20 a week (the majority of workers) lost out under the NWA. Those who had won the highest wages lost the most.

If we take inflation into account it is likely that the real loss in income for skilled workers was over 15% and the widening tax brackets were drawing more and more workers inside their net. Wages were increasing to deal partially with inflation, but taxation brackets stayed the same - thus more low-paid workers were being taxed.

To top it all the Free State was implementing in these years a battery of repressive laws. Fianna Fail established the Forcible Entry and Occupations Act before being thrown out of office in 1973. The Coalition of right-wing social democracy with Fine Gael and Labour together in Government consolidated further repression within the State. The Amendment to the Offences Against the State Act, Special Non-jury Courts, military detention camp and seven day detentions were the order of the day. In the 6 Cos internment by remand replaced official internment and selective and systematic assassinations were regularly taking place. Unionism was in deep political crisis, marginalised on the political arena by the 1974 Loyalist Workers Council Strike, a right-wing fascist style action which successfully smashed the Council of Ireland project of the Tories in Britain and brought the 6 Cos to the brink of a fascist take-over.



Phase 3: '77

While the strength of the attack by the ruling class on the standards of living of the working class, north and south, succeeded in containing the working class and halting its stride, it did NOT manage to crush the militancy of that class. The deep economic and political anger had provoked a climate of anger and tension which was spreading fast across the working class, the marginalised proletariat outside production and the petty bourgeoisie whose status and incomes had suffered inside the crisis.

The bourgeois political parties were also in crisis. 1977 saw a massive defeat at the polls of the Fine Gael/Labour Party Coalition. It was an election marked also by the rising level of abstentions and 'independent candidates'. In the 6 Cos. the Demo-

cratic Unionist Party (DUP) - a right wing petty bourgeois party - was stepping into the vacuum left by the crisis in bourgeois Unionism.

Re-organisation

The peak crisis years had left the non-monopoly sections of capital in disarray, squeezed by the internationalisation of the economy, at the level of production as well as the market. Foreign control over the economy increased. The trade deficit doubled in the space of two years 1976/78. The National Debt rose to £5,236 million in 1978 and to £6,500 in 1979 - at 83% and 85% of the GNP respectively. The percentage of public sector borrowing coming from outside the country rose from 37% in 1977 to 38% in 1978 and to 51% in 1979. According to the Central Statistics Office records the flow of income from capital (profits and interest) changed from +£10 million in 1974 to -£80 million by 1978. Different imperialist interests were carving up the land, labour and the resources of working people in this country.

This is the background to the rise of a new fraction of the ruling class, organised and articulate for the first time in 30 years of Irish politics. This is a fraction of the ruling class looking for and demanding a BETTER DEAL, a more beneficial partnership with international capital, thus ensuring for themselves a greater share of the surplus produced by Irish workers, even though they have abandoned the hope of a truly independent economy. We call them the INDEPENDENTIST fraction, or the bourgeoisie of the 'interior'. Its primary, though by no means only, base of political organisation is inside the Fianna Fail Party in the 26 Cos and the DUP in the 6 Cos. By 1979, Charlie Haughey, the champion of this part of the ruling class, emerged as the leader after a bitter struggle inside Fianna Fail and only a decade after his spectacular trial for gunrunning in the 26 C-os.

These years also mark a new era in the domination of foreign capital inside the economy. Sectors of industry dominated by multinational capital begin to rationalise. No longer are we dealing with a case of the 'decline of traditional industries' but of re-organisation and restructuring within the 'growth' sectors. This trend has been particularly marked inside the 6 Cos.

While the 26 Cos continues to record a long list of new plants, particularly in the electronics sector, setting up shop here - the 6 Cos economy has been subjected to a frightening list of factory closures many of them in the new industrial sectors: electronics, synthetic textiles and electrical goods. Approximately 50% of redundancies over the past few years have taken place in the new industrial sectors. The 6 Cos economy has not emerged from the depths of the crisis of the mid-seventies. New multinational projects are few and far between - a process which has been successfully blocked by the continuation of the war. Unemployment, as a result, has remained extremely high, running officially at 15% of the workforce. This can only be partially explained by the existence of a traditional industrial base inside the 6 Cos. Redundancies are daily announced among this small workforce of 550,000.

The British State, engaged in a policy of containment of the war, has for a number of years artificially propped up employment through the services sector. 313,000 people are employed in services, yet only 120,000 in manufacturing - the mark of an extremely fragile economy. Over the last 18 months, The Tory Party under Thatcher in Britain have reversed the policy towards the services area (other than defence) and it looks like unemployment will go sky-high over the coming period. Already figures of 40-60% unemployment in ghetto areas are being admitted by the Brits.

In the 26 Cos, the ruling class have turned their attention in the closing years of the 1970's to what they refer to as the 'bottlenecks' of the system. Confident that foreign capital will continue to penetrate the economy, their strategy is to reorganise the social, economic and legal infrastructure to meet the needs of foreign capital.

a) Rationalisation of the entire infrastructure of the economy, from transportation, to telecommunications, to energy to education. This is a project riddled with contradictions. First - a cash problem - how to finance multi-million pound telephone/road/power station projects, given the steep level of the national debt. This project also implies confrontation with the pettybourgeoisie and sections of the ruling class who wish to confine the 'modernisation' process to the industrial arena and not allow it to spill over to the social and ideological areas. They do not wish to enter the inevitable battles with the Church for control of education, with local authorities over transport networks, with the constitution over family law muddles and the rest. But increasingly these confrontations are being forced on the ruling class by the demands of an economy dominated by foreign capital.

b) To bring to a new level - a higher level - of development certain sectors of the economy with a possible 'indigenous' content. Examples of this are the food industry (particularly meat-processing, crop growth, fish-processing), alternative energy projects and engineering industry (agricultural machinery). The bourgeois dream here, is to combine foreign dominated sectors of the economy along with sectors dominated by national capital tied to indigenous natural resources. Their long-term aim is a more stable economy.

But the big uncertainty for the ruling class is its capacity to implement this project and here the demands and needs of working people are the key element. The ruling class is desperately trying to present the image that these projects will meet the needs of working people (speeches on the 'national interest') but with little success. Their attempts to convince working people that such projects will satisfy their desire for a decent income - control over their lives - and human working conditions have failed time and again. Instead angry picket lines, resistance to new technologies (particularly in the State sector), demands for



less taxation, higher wages, growing absenteeism and a rejection of the work ethic have become widespread.

Assault on the class

There was a small decrease in the rate of inflation during the last few years of the 1970's : from a rate of 20% of the mid-seventies, inflation fell to 14% (officially) by 1979. During 1977 and 1978, wage rises were on average higher than inflation. Also, the policy of differential wage increases suffered a setback. Mounting discontent among skilled workers forced the State to concede higher percentage increases to these workers. But the levels of taxation continued to rise, creating a situation in which the majority of workers were just managing to sustain their wages. (See Trade union Information 1978/1979). Between 1975 and 1979, inflation was 125%, hitting particularly at working class people due to the removal of 'food subsidies'.

For the entire decade, inflation on food prices was 283%, one of the highest rates across all the items, according to State inflation figures. Overall, prices of BASIC NEEDS rose the highest, showing just who is bearing the brunt of the crisis. The following table shows the full breakdown of inflation figures for the decade. FOOD, TRANSPORT, FUEL/LIGHT and SERVICES show the largest increases.

Inflation between 1969 and 1979

Food.....	283.8%
Drink.....	245.0%
Clothing/Footwear.....	255.0%
Tobacco.....	137.0%
Fuel/light.....	376.0%
Housing.....	134.0%
Household durables.....	237.0%
Transport.....	316.0%
Services.....	301.0%

	254.0%

Workplace agitation developed a faster and faster rhythm during these years, concentrated mainly in the public sector, and reaching by 1979 the highest ever recorded figures for industrial agitation in the 26 Cos since the inception of the State. Mass mobilisations developed in these years with a strength that had not been seen since the early 1970's, both North and South. The focal point of agitation in the 26 Cos was income: wages and taxation. But alongside, a series of social struggles over nuclear power, noxious industry, housing, prices, contraception, divorce etc. were breaking out some sporadically, other nationally. In the 6 Cos, the demonstrations were increasingly focussing on the prisoners and the battle for 'political status' inside Long Kesh. The British State in these years was forced to reverse their statements of the mid-seventies, that the anti-imperialist movement had been

defeated - faced as they were with both street protests and military attacks.

In response to the deepening discontent and agitation over incomes, the ruling class turned to the issue of productivity. Employment in the 26 Cos had increased marginally between 1977 and 1979, by a figure of 7,000. This still left LESS people employed in manufacturing than in 1973. The employment increase was shortlived. By 1980 both inflation and unemployment levels move back up the steep incline. The National Wage Agreements are gradually extended in these same years to incorporate areas such as taxation, social welfare, employment 'creation' as well as wage levels and negotiation procedures. The focal point of the wage aspects of the NWA are fully related to productivity. *Simultaneously* the ruling class extends its propaganda on the question of rationalisation of the trade unions. They are intent on undermining the increasing use of informal coordination methods, national organisational structures which workers have *attempted* to develop, reducing their dependence on the trade unions. The ruling class is seeking to ensure that the trade unions CONTROL THEIR MEMBERS and that competition between unions be stopped.

Right through the 1970's, this attempt at rationalisation of the trade union structures was followed. In 1971, a new Act was introduced restricting the capacity and the right of organisations to get a 'negotiation licence'. Another Act in 1975 provided for a STATE SUBSIDY for amalgamations of trade unions. In the words of Gene Fitzgerald, Minister for Labour :

"The intention was to encourage the evolution of a strong and cohesive trade union movement as an integral part of the fabric of the State ."

But what was emerging as a major problem for the State and for capital was the elements of independent working class organisation being thrown up inside the working class. These years of militancy forced the ruling class to make concessions. Mass mobilisation on a national scale forced them to postpone their nuclear project. So many different sections of people have been fighting: post office workers, nurses, transport workers, car workers, catering workers, bank workers, dock workers, coal workers, social workers, oil workers, building workers and so on. The demand is always for MORE. In the Spring of 1979, 750,000 workers marched in different parts of the 26 Cos against the Government's taxation policies - the result of years of seeing wages eroded by taxation and inflation. Some concessions have been made as a result.

This counterattack by working people has broken certain aspects of bourgeois unity. Some sections have turned in attack on landed capital - demanding a greater share of social surplus to be controlled by the State - desiring to make some concession to popular demand, but not at their own expense. The struggles of the people are localised, without a unified political focus or method of attack BUT they are taking their toll on capital. The threat of a generalised and politically organised thrust to this offensive is the nightmare of the 26 Cos ruling class. The possibility of a bourgeois dominated resolution of the national question, in which

a 32 Co. unification project of national development would provide the means to blur class contradictions is a major desire of the ruling class. They are as yet divided and not strong enough to pull this off. Because of this the process of resolution of the national question, the reunification of the island; is likely to mean deeper instability for the ruling class.

On the daily level, the ruling class is forced to confront class militancy in a rigid way, using force and hysteria often interchangeably. The capacity of the institutionalised organs of the State to manage this discontent (such as the trade unions and the political Parties) has been seriously undermined through the process of withdrawal by working people from State projects and Statist organisations. The frustration and paralysis experienced by the State sector workers and top managers inside a crisis-ridden and debt-ridden economy compounds this for capital. Time and again workplace and social struggles confront the various parts of the State apparatus in struggle in a form which the State cannot control. It will depend on the political strength and maturity of the working class in its battle for independent organisation trying to satisfy its basic needs, that will form the parameters of future battles for political power in Ireland. It is certain that the militancy, courage and will to fight of the working class is already there.







Reply to Roy Johnson

Introduction

This article which will run over two issues of 'Ripening of Time' is an editorial response to contributions made in issues 9 and 11 of R.O.T. These articles entitled "On the Problem of Democratic Unity" and "Irish Republicanism, Socialism and Imperialism" were written by Dr. Roy Johnson and Derry Kelleher respectively. This reply deals primarily with the former.

Both articles have to a greater Kelleher or lesser (Johnson) degree given a useful and necessary overview of many of the recurrent problems of the revolutionary movement in confronting the primary task of the Irish Revolution - the resolution of the national question. Their overview comes from their active participation in the Republican Movement for many years.

One of the difficulties of writing such a critique is the obvious danger that many readers are not familiar with the objects of criticism and for that reason it is necessary to at least try to summarise the central themes and arguments of both papers. For this reason also, this article will attempt to go beyond a critique and try to situate the changes and development in the Irish popular movement inside the changing balance and composition of class forces in Ireland. The danger in any such process is evident and perhaps that is one reason why so few have made a serious effort with the exception of Johnson and Kelleher. The danger, I refer to is the fact that, particularly in dealing with such a recent period, we are exploring contradictions inside the people, which each of us as militants have to confront daily and are subjecting our actions to a vital self-criticism which too often in our history has been substituted with a criticism by arms.

This task is obviously huge and must be seen in the context of previous articles in R.O.T. and particularly those dealing with the development of working class struggles since World War 11 to the present day. This is not merely a technical question of dividing our areas of political analysis but is central to the critique of both Johnson's and Kelleher's approach. For if there is one common weakness which permeates both papers, it is their inability to situate their analysis of the Republican movement and the broad left in Ireland inside the general dynamic of class struggle.

In particular, they have both all but ignored the dramatic changes in the balance of power between labour and capital provoked by the intense struggles of the working class in the past two decades and the consequent re-structuring of society and the methods of production instituted by capital.

While both Kelleher and Johnson have extracted important moments of "democratic unity" or of working class struggle as reference points, these choices are almost exclusively divorced from the generalised movement of the class.

By this, I do not refer to the Labour Movement but the total practice of the class in its struggle for a greater share of surplus and control over time and of course in its various and daily response to capitals attempts to increase its share of surplus created by working class people.

Such an analysis is one however which 'Ripening of Time' (notwithstanding changes in collective) has from the outset four years ago set as an objective and it is

hoped that this article can encourage the deepening of that criticism even at the expense of some anguish and with the risk of incorrectly preparing for the future.

In this sense we are not involved in the writing of a programme of the most correct demands which is an unfortunate tendency in much of Johnson and Kelleher's writing, but an investigation, however limited, of the direction and dynamic behind the actions of the organised movement of opposition to imperialism in Ireland over recent decades.

■ ■ ■

This section deals with a summary and political commentary of Roy Johnson's document entitled "On the Problem of Democratic Unity" (R.O.T. No. 9 Dec. '78).

Part I : _____

The "central problem facing the Irish people.... the achievement of a successful nation state, in the form of an independent democratic republic". Johnson in addressing the problem "often labelled as the unification of the democratic forces", traces the root of that problem to the "failure of the Labour Movement since 1916 and Connolly's departure."

His analysis of these problems rests on that of George Gilmore and Peadar O'Donnell, the former of which appears in R.O.T. No. 5, 1976.

"We live in a multi class society, politically divided into two regions, one under direct British rule, the other having political independence but without the political will to use it".

This opening gives an opportunity to put forward a different and as we will see a contradictory starting point. We live in a capitalist society divided by British Imperialism and dominated north and south, politically, economically, culturally - increasingly dependent on imperialist powers - U.S., British, German, Dutch and Japanese and reproduced by a bourgeois class. Marx makes a comment about the political will of the capitalist.

Marx deals with the question of the political will of the capitalist in wages, prices and profit (P5,6).

"If in one country the rate of wages is higher than another, in the United States, for example than in England, you must explain this difference in the rate of wages by difference between the will of the American Capitalist and the will of the English Capitalist, a method which would certainly very much simplify, not only the study of economic phenomena but of all other phenomena. But even then we might ask, why the will of the American Capitalist differs from the will of the English Capitalist? And to answer the question you must go beyond the domain of will..

..... What we have to do is not to talk about his will but to inquire into his power, the limits of power and the character of these limits" (Marx's emphasis).

The Good and the Bad

For Johnson the bourgeoisie is divided into

(1) a parasitic bourgeoisie - speculators, asset strippers, multi national pawns "which contribute nothing to the production of real wealth"....."responsible for stifling of any state initiatives"....."influential in top state circles and dominate the formulation of economic and financial policies" with a prime aspiration "to strengthen its links with its colleagues in Britain, E.E.C., U.S., and elsewhere". Elsewhere presumably refers to pro-U.S. states and not pro-Soviet or 'non-aligned' This minority in Johnsons' analysis are the baddies of Irish society.

(2) The entrepreneurial bourgeoisie - with a "productive function" (good) - owners of means of production or state managers - origin sometimes in the strata of salaried workers and self employed(good) though... "individual success is often registered by doing a deal with a multi national", which can at times bring a person out of the entrepreneurial and into the parasitic class (bad).

This is the "national bourgeois" which Johnson argues is sometimes rejected as a positive development by progressive forces (wrong).

"There is a parallel with Wolfe Tone's computation as to how many French he needed to get rid of the English successfully without becoming a French colony." This historical reminder betrays more, than any Johnson's own class prejudices. Wolfe Tone, and the United Irishmen in 1798 was precisely the expression of a newly emerging, yet national bourgeoisie, a leader of that class which despite its weak but existent capital base sought the creation of the bourgeois democratic republic - but failed. This objective despite the 20th century reformulation to the up-dated version, the (Socialist) democratic republic, still dominates the politics of the Republican Movement in general, and is expressed in the programme of the republican movement of which an earlier version "Eire Nua" Dr. Johnson was co-author.

Despite his membership of the Wolfe Tone Society, a group that has done much to stimulate debate between different organisations Johnson seems to forget much about Wolfe Tone.

Marx comments in the 18th Brumaire

"Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutioning themselves and things, in creating something that never yet existed, previously in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from their names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time honoured disguise and this borrowed language. Thus Luther donned the mask of the Apostle Paul, the revolution of 1789 to 1814 shaped itself alternately as the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire, and the Revolution of 1848 knew nothing better to do than to parody, now 1789, now the revolutionary tradition of 1793 to 1795. In like manner a beginner who has learnt a new language always translates it back to his mother tongue, but he has assimilated the spirit of the new language and can freely express himself in it only when he finds his way in it without recollecting the old and forgets his native tongue in the use of the new "

Marx P96 M/E Selected works.

So does Johnson, the Republican Movement and indeed SF-WP refer to the bloody revolution of the Jacobins as their reference point for the present.

(3) "Working-owner managers and self employed, including the vast majority of farmers"

What we call the traditional *petty-bourgeoisie* or more accurately in this instance the controllers of small and middle capital

"This class as well as recruiting from the working class, is also being decimated by shedding its failures into the working class, typical being the part time farmer".....
"the role of part time farming is to stabilise the role of small property in the economy" (Bad)

...and then the Working Class

Finally into the working class "salaried workers, owning their own houses, wage earners, public service employees"... "the numerical scale of the Dublin working class gives it a special character".... In the North "in all cases the Protestants tend to more numerous in the more favoured stratas in each class, this being the consequence of the politics of partition and the primary means of maintaining British rule".

This sociological i.e. bourgeois description of classes manages to avoid mention of any fundamental contradiction between labour and capital. Beside the national problem, maintained not by British military and repressive force but by the Protestant working class, the country's main problem is one of management. The struggle between bourgeoisie (controlling national, private or state - dependent on imperialist-capital) and proletariat (having nothing) is presumably relevant only after the achievement of the national bourgeois revolution and after a period of building up the working class through state development engineered by the (Progressive and intelligent) entrepreneurial bourgeoisie.

This quantitative increase in the working class is achieved also with the abolition of small property. This mechanistic interpretation of class is divorced from any conception of class struggle as the motor force of history and obscures the basic reality of exploitation in capitalist society whether or not in the phase of national liberation.

The model is an old and tried on, whose consequences have in all corners of the globe lead to the disorganisation and at times the destruction of the working class. Even where communist forces have engaged in such momentary alliances with national bourgeois sectors with an anti-imperialist character (e.g. China, the anti-Japanese war)

and survived to overcome their nationalist allies in the ensuing civil war, such alliances had different and contradictory foundations, than Johnsons'.

It is this analysis, without contradiction, that allows Johnson to develop his particular strategy to deal with "The central problem for the democratic forces in Ireland..... how to gather together the forces necessary to remove this roadblock"..... i.e. a Protestant ascendancy based on British rule, being used to "stop the march of a nation and its developing Labour Movement." These democratic forces include the base of Fianna Fail which draws support from the (good) entrepreneurial bourgeois despite a strong parasitic element in key positions. Fianna Fails' failure to tackle the "political divisions of the nation" was, Johnson believes, due "to fear of the consequences of awakening the political consciousness of the working class, for which the 32 county trade union movement constituted a ready made vehicle". What Johnson omits in this statement is the fact that the survival of F.F., a party of capital, which supervised the alliance of (Pro-British) landed and industrial and banking capital and increasingly growing pro U.S. finance capital, depended for its existence on the direct exploitation of the working class. Besides it was the strengthening of imperialist domination (paralleled by a weakening of national capital) which in a contradictory way permitted the increasingly dominant pro-U.S. compradore and even independist fraction of the bourgeoisie to loosen its dependence on Britain and become a force seeking the end of its colonial occupation of the 6 counties. Times have changed since 1930.

"Whether it hits the headlines or not (and more and more it does) that social practice of workers is the motor force of struggle, of class history. It is that social practice which finally determines the rate of extraction of surplus value.....

Partition and the national question sweep away that centrality of the working class into the quicksand of class collaboration. That is perhaps the greatest reason why communists and revolutionary socialists must involve themselves directly into the national struggle and help the anti-imperialist movement to a swift victory" March '78 R.O.T. editorial No. 9.....

Johnson approaches the question from the opposite direction, concerning himself with strengthening the bourgeois component of the national movement of democracy - the national bourgeoisie inside and outside the state, and inside political parties of the left as well as F.F. The Left becomes the representative for Johnson of the working class - once again the petty bourgeoisie substitutes for the proletariat and is asked to enter dialogue with the bourgeoisie on behalf of the "politically unaware" class.

The 'On Behalf' Left

Within this convenient exclusion of the working class in struggle, it is now a simple question of formulating a programme and achieving a unity of the left around it. A "Co-operative Democratic Federation" - a transition to socialism that is acceptable to the self-employed and small entrepreneur - "a process whereby a small private enterprise expands with the aid of public money to become a socialist enterprise, rather than a capitalist enterprise with the aid of the stock exchange or a subsidiary of a multi-national." The relations of production do not seem to require much alteration in this process - merely the means by which capital is accumulated. The existence of capital itself is not in question merely those who will control it. In the long run the controllers will be the political left which "draws its forces from the working class, self-employed and entrepreneurial bourgeoisie...." (in varying degrees??).

This requires for Johnson the reformation of some form of "Left Alternative" a brief alliance in 1976 made up of the Communist Party of Ireland, Liaison Committee of the Labour Left (since to become the majority of the since divided Socialist Labour Party) and Sinn Fein The Workers Party. This short lived alliance was primarily based on the exclusion from their programme of the national question although, as Johnson points out, they all agreed that British imperialism was the primary cause of partition and violence. The Left Alternative was followed by an alliance of C.P.I., The Irish Republican Socialist Party, the Irish Sovereignty Movement, Provisional Sinn Fein, Peoples Democracy, and other individuals known as the National Alternative. This new alternative had its eyes on the conference table for British withdrawal and excluded S.F.-W.P. which at this period (1977 / '78) was accelerating its movement to becoming a fully fledged party of (state) capital, defender of the multi-nationals and proponent of a return to majority rule in the 6 counties

The National Alternative floundered on the refusal of P.S.F. to discuss a ceasefire which would be the condition for the creation of an all Ireland convention including the Left and bourgeois forces to discuss British withdrawal and the transfer of power, as Johnson put it, to "all Ireland institutions and with all the Irish people involved in developing the new constitution without interference from the British". This is the key political objective of Johnson's Co-operative Democratic Federation alongside "the isolation of the landed speculative parasitic element of the bourgeoisie and the achievement of a democratic independent

economic development policy with a leading role played by the state sector rather than the multinationals, based on the alliance of the organised working class, the self-employed, and the productive entrepreneurial bourgeois:

The suspicion of communists for this project rests on the underlying conception of how working class interests are guaranteed in transition. We presume that this suspicion was shared by the partners who made up the National Alternative.

Unity inside the class is a primary desire of any communist - for this reason more than any other the national division of the working class through partition must be ended - but that unity is not achieved by the agreement of groups or organisations (sometimes calling themselves partners) whose base inside the struggle of the working class is at best weak and at worst whose practice is divisive, as is presently the case with S.F.W.P.

Johnson's conception of unity is for him, at best, a means by which sections of the (progressive) petty bourgeoisie can gain a semblance of power on the backs of working class struggle and resistance. Unity and debate in struggle is an indispensable weapon of the class - one that can be achieved if the starting point is the interests of the most exploited in struggle, controlled firmly by working class people. Suffice it to say that exclusively working class struggle is not mentioned once through out Johnson's paper and any conception of the centrality of the working class or the need for independent working class organisation around its own needs and interests is glaringly absent and substituted by abstraction of left unity.

Nuts and Bolts

One of Johnson's most valuable contributions at this stage is his criticism of the sectarianism which has dangerously dogged the left over the past decade. He attacks both "conspiratorial republicanism and authoritarian communism", both of which he has had direct experience. He calls on the leadership of the left parties including the L.P. and sections of F.F. to come together to discuss common theoretical development and to engage their militants in mass struggle around social and economic issues - housing, education, taxation, civil liberties etc.

On this basis a grand unity would be formed and F.C. and right wing of F.F. would be isolated to clearly become the "real bourgeoisie".

Even given the benefit of hindsight (the article was written before the 1977 general election) Johnson's dream of left unity based on an understanding between the L.P. and "entrepreneurial Fianna Fail" must send shivers up the spine of those who endured the repressive years of the Labour supported Coalition government and of the F.F. government since 1977.

Indeed at the time of Johnson's writing we had just come through a most depressing period of intermittent inter-republican feuds, (in most cases sticky inspired) and simultaneously extreme state repression against the Left. The Murrays were fighting a campaign against their hanging, the I.R.S.P. were under brutal attack with their leadership assassinated or imprisoned on evidence beaten out of them. In the 6 counties the Provisionals were only emerging from a period of isolation and intense repression of nationalist working class ghettos by the British army that saw a dramatic increase of prisoners and the withdrawal of political status that started the H-Block blanket and dirty protest.

Thus on the surface, the call for unity appears as a cry from the heart for a light at the end of a dark tunnel that so dominated the years 1974-77, years of the Coalition overseeing of savage anti-working class austerity measures. (see article on crisis).

Johnson calls on all parties of the left alternative and any others from the National Alternative to enter a period of "Guerilla politics" i.e. mass agitation with less emphasis on electoralism.

This period, involving "inter group co-operation" and requiring a lowering of the red flag by communists and an acceptance of the need for state intervention/property by small farmers could then bring the left to the much awaited point of "electoral credibility" as he reminds us the anti E.E.C. campaign had achieved in Nenagh town during the 1972 referendum when the left for once stood on a joint platform.

Only reality could disrupt such a grand scheme and as usual it did. These "historic millstones around the neck of the embryonic movement" just won't go away and still hang heavy. These millstones according to Johnson are the mistrust between organisations that derive from "shadowy armed wings" and the unknown "international links" of different parties to foreign powers. "Who rules", he asks - "the political committee or Moscow, the army council or the Ard Comhairle"

As one who probably knows Moscow better than most and who has known to have straddled the political

military divide at times; rhetorical questions for Johnson. Indeed to throw in these questions appears as a mischievous attempt to expose sensitive debates inside sections of the Irish Left.

Yet these national and international questions are at the centre of the problem of left unity and must be confronted as such. Democracy, internationalism, armed struggle as a strategy or tactic - these are some of the vital questions involved, which unfortunately Johnson does not explore. An examination into the attitude of different organisations to these questions would reveal much about their class nature and interests.

Leaving aside the outright bourgeois nature of Johnson's plan for national development to be controlled by state capital over exploited labour, Johnson conceals the class nature of the left organisations too.

This class basis is expressed as much in their approach to international alliances as it is in their internal structuring.

To be allied to the interests of the Soviet Union state / party in 1980 is to be tied to the most powerful state capital in the world which in its imperialist activities is no less repressive than those of the U.S... Afghanistan, Eritrea, Ethiopia are a few far off examples. F.F. and the Gaullists, S.F.W.P. and that most advanced party of capital - the Italian Communist Party, Provisional S.F. with a mixture of alliances involving everything from bourgeois nationalist to social-democratic and a few revolutionary communist organisations give us a pointer to class interests as well as to ideological influences.

To discuss other features of these organisations their practice or internal functioning is outside the immediate scope of this article.....

Johnson's article unfortunately has been overtaken by history and this must lessen the weight of criticism to some degree. His call for a radical theoretical journal to act as a platform for debate is welcome, and his view that the R.O.T. could play such a role even with the qualifier of a "respected editorial consultative committee" is a pleasant compliment.

But that doesn't justify opportunism or ignorance of political reality in the 32 counties. (6 county references are almost absent in Johnson's paper). In particular, the almost total exclusion of the working class as an independent force in need of its own autonomous organisation to protect its own interests, rather than once again the cannon fodder hidden under the glorious programme of petty bourgeois opportunists for national development.

This critique will be continued in Ripening of Time No. 14, concentrating on Derry Kelleher's analysis "Irish Republicanism, Socialism and Imperialism" from R.O.T. No.11. We will in the next article expand on criticism made above and welcome in the meantime any further contributions towards the task of analysing the popular movement in Ireland



1961

from E.I. to FERENKA



Preface

Capitalist society has its laws of development: economists argue and debate about them, governments do their best to impose them and workers suffer under them while capital profits grow according to them. The author of 'From EI to Ferenka' - a member of the Editorial Collective - proposes in this article a 'method' for the groundwork needed to commence the path of the discovery of these laws - especially as they bear down on the working class.

Taking two major strikes, of two different decades, the 60s and the 70s, strikes with national consequences, he examines the different paths taken in these disputes. Paths as they happened - not as 'we' would have liked them to have happened.

The two disputes were turning points for the Irish working class: the first, EI, in IMPOSING UNIONISATION ON THE BOSSES, established a pattern which multinationals were to follow, or, at least, respect, in the years to come. The second, Ferenka, a high point in the public disintegration of the Trade Union Movement solidarity, also set a pattern to be followed in many other disputes since; Alcan and the current petrol tanker drivers strike to mention but two such recent strikes.

The article is condensed from a larger text drawn from the author's personal experience and knowledge, enriched by library research, interviews with retired Trade Unionists and participants in the different events. One of the sad discoveries in the course of our work, was that important records had been lost or destroyed. Branch records of the ITGWU and the MPGWU, other financial records were not 'available' or had been 'lost years ago'.

For the reader hopeful of lifting strategy and tactics from the pages to follow, there is disappointment in store. 'From EI to Ferenka' is no tested aircraft taking on new passengers...this is more of a test flight into, literally, outer space. The first task on return is to describe 'WHAT HAPPENED'. And that alone was not, and will not be, easy. To cite two examples, was the kidnapping of Herrema part of 'what happened'? Was the arrival of 'The Brotherhood of Electrical Workers' from America to support the EI strikers part of 'what happened'? Did these events determine subsequent developments? Certainly, uncanny was the appearance around tables and picket lines in EI, 14 years ago, of big 'personalities' of today's I.C.T.U., of today's reactionary Union group on the Alcan site, in Aughinish Island.

There are other themes we would have liked to examine deeper; for example, the finances of the disputes, the material supports available to the workers. Ferenka may have cost the MPGWU anything up to £ 35,000. This is a large sum to raise for a non-Congress Union. These and other questions remain unanswered.

Finally, regular readers of the Ripening of Time will know that this is the first article of its type to be printed in the journal. We are honoured to have been trusted with the rich material and personal experience put at our disposal. We are pleased to share with the reader this journey into the working class...among those who have no voice, those whom AKZO (the Ferenka mother company) considered "maoists, communists...or just anti-society...", those who the Unions considered "...dissidents..." or "...seeking power for themselves...". Our brothers and sisters, our comrades in struggle.

Introduction

This article deals with two major strikes which took place in the Limerick-Shannon area in factories owned by multinational firms. These strikes have been chosen because they were struggles involving large numbers of workers (1). Almost ten years separated them: the one at EI took place from March to June 1968 while the FERENKA dispute went on during October and November 1977.

In some ways, both strikes were similar. As already stated, both took place in multinational firms which were receiving grants from the IDA (2) and SFADCO (3). By Irish standards, both firms employed large workforces: EI employed 1,200 while FERENKA employed 1,400. A large proportion of these workers were from a rural background without any previous experience of working under advanced industrial capital or of Trade Union organisation. (4).

However, they were dissimilar in other respects. EI is an American firm, FERENKA was Dutch controlled. In EI the strike was over Trade Union recognition; in FERENKA it was caused by intolerable working conditions which arose from Management-Union collaboration in the form of a sweetheart deal. EI was operating in an expanding branch of industry, i.e. electronics. FERENKA, on the other hand, was operating in a market which was in recession: steel cord for the tyre industry. Finally, the workforce at EI was predominantly female (5) while at FERENKA it was primarily male.

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- (1) EI employed 1,200 and Ferenka employed 1,400.
 - (2) IDA - Industrial Development Authority. The Act setting up this body went through the Oireachtas during the 1949/50 session. However, it was revamped in the late 1950s with the abandonment of protectionism. It was given the task of persuading overseas companies to set up factories in Ireland.
 - (3) SFADCO - Shannon Free Airport Development Company. This Company was set up in 1958. Shannon became the first customs free airport in the world in 1947. In 1958, the duty-free zone of the airport was extended to take in the new industrial estate. In 1968, SFADCO's area of operations was enlarged to include the whole of the Counties of Clare and Limerick.

together with North Tipperary. In a number of matters, such as grants to firms coming into the area, SFADCO duplicated the work of the I.D.A. However, since 1978, there has been a division of labour between the two organisations. SFADCO became responsible for the development of small industries in the area. Many of these small industries are intended to provide services for the bigger multinational companies. The present Board of SFADCO includes:

- * F.McCabe (Chairman) Until recently Managing Director at E I ; he is now with D I G I T A L .
- * J.M.Donovan - former President of the CII . A Director of a number of Companies such as A.C.E.C. and Wellworthy.
- * M.J.Killeen - Chief Executive of the I.D.A. and a member of the Trilateral Commission.
- * J.P.Liddy - former Mayor of Limerick . Prominent member of Fianna Fail.
- * B.O'Regan - former Chairman of SFADCO ; chairman of ' Co-Operation North ' - an organisation of businessmen from both sides of the border.
- * Dr. E.Walsh - Director of N.I.H.E. - Limerick

- (4) For example, at E I , Joe Skerritt who was Chairman of the Shop Stewards Committee during the strike, worked as a fisherman before taking up employment with the firm. It was estimated that in 1968 approximately 68% of the workforce were people from rural areas. (See Report of Committee of Enquiry into the Dispute at E I). At Ferenka, the Chairman of the Shop Stewards Committee during the strike in 1977, Philip Byrnes , came from a farming community . A Labour Court recommendation in early 1975 mentions the fact that "...the labour force at FERENKA is drawn from a radius of 30 miles in the counties Limerick, Clare, Tipperary and beyond....." . The Editorial Collective of the Ripening of Time are currently working on a large study of the rural based ' new ' proletariat.
- (5) See ' Report of Committee of Enquiry ' into the E I strike. It was estimated that 70% of the workforce in the factory was female.

Section One

E.I.

The advent of the WHITTAKER policy (1958) of bringing in multinationals to set up industries here was dealt with in Ripening of Time no.11 . (1) With the implementation of this policy came many of the present-day landmarks on the Irish industrial scene....such as the I.D.A. estate in Shannon, which was one of the earliest set up.

In 1958, the Shannon Free Development Company (SFADCO), was established to attract foreign firms into the area. BRENDAN O'REGAN became its first Chairman and an Irish Management Institute (IMI) official, PAUL QUIGLEY, was appointed its first Manager.

The adoption of the WHITTAKER policy by the State also meant a new changing role for the Trade Union Movement , and especially the ITGWU, Ireland's biggest Union, which helped and facilitated the entry of these firms into Ireland by signing deals with them. These sweetheart deals, as they became known, gave the ITGWU a pre-entry closed shop in return for an agreement by the Union to accept working conditions heavily weighted in favour of Management. All this dealing took place well before a worker set foot in the factory.

Although the sweetheart deal became the pattern in the 60s , many of the first batch of firms which came into Shannon in the period 1959-61 were non-Union and, in fact, refused to deal with them. S P S (U.S. controlled multinational manufacturing steel pressings and fasteners), S O N Y (Japanese controlled electronics firm) and De B E E R S (South African controlled firm dealing in industrial diamonds) were among that first batch.

Workers in the Shannon Estate who worked in firms who had signed deals with the ITGWU, (like LANA KNIT or RIPPON PIANOS), initially belonged to the Union's LIMERICK Branch....workers at the Shannon Airport had belonged to this Branch since 1945. However, in 1962 the ITGWU set up a Shannon Branch. Its first Branch Secretary was JOE POWER, from Quilty , a local man, and a favourite of the then leadership: CONROY, PURCELL and BROWN. This man spent a lot of time and energy disciplining members of the Branch for taking part in ' unofficial ' strikes. He has since moved up the social ladder and has become Personnel Manager at I X in Sixmile-bridge. (2) .

(1) See R.o.T. no.11 Sep.'78-Feb '79 pp.25-26

(2) For a deeper insight into Power's outlook, readers should see report of a speech made by him at a ' Liberty ' seminar which was held in Ennis early in 1963; it appeared in the April 1963 issue of ' Liberty ' (paper of the I.T.G.W.U.)
For more recent news on this man, readers should consult the paper ' Rebel ' (of Revolutionary Struggle) , especially during 1979, on Power's manipulations around a picket and a sacking of an I X worker.

E I set up its factory on the Estate in 1962. It was to manufacture transistor radios and other electronic equipment. E I was a subsidiary of General Electric of the USA and it employed a workforce of 50 in the beginning which by 1968 had expanded to 1,200. Wages at E I were higher than at any other factory in 1962; but as years went by, there was a levelling up of wages.

E I would have no dealings with Unions and refused to recognise one for negotiating purposes. An E I employee who had a grievance was expected to process it through an 'In-House Works Council'. However, this body had no real muscle and worker representatives on it were, in the main, notorious licks. Three important factors in the E I situation militated against the establishment of a Trade Union within the works:

- (1) A large proportion of the workforce was of rural origin with no tradition of Unionism behind them.
- (2) Workers within the factory were under the thumb of harsh and tyrannical supervisors. It was quite common to see girl workers crying after being reprimanded by these individuals.
- (3) Female employees from outlying areas stayed at MOYPARK HOSTEL which was owned by E I. This implied that industrial action immediately translated into loss of accommodation.

The following quotation from the Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the strike, illustrates well E I's attitude to workplace organisation:

"The Company told us that its reluctance to recognise a Union is based on the philosophy that the viability of a manufacturing concern competing with 100% of its output for trade in a worldwide market is dependent on a high degree of efficiency....where a third Party, e.g. a Trade Union is intervening, this efficiency is being risked....."

E I expanded its business in the years following its establishment by undercutting its competitors. (4). This cut-throat competition is characteristic of the electronics industry during that period. E I benefitted greatly from SONY's decision to pull out of Shannon in 1965. In 1966, the output from E I accounted for 6% of the country's entire export value (5). This gave the Company a good deal of leverage when dealing with Government Departments.

The first Managing Director of E I in Shannon was ROBERT PAGE, an anti-Trade Union bigot, who left in 1965 to become Managing Director of one of the mother Company's plants in Australia. He was succeeded by fellow American WILLIAM J. MILLER, who had been at Shannon since the early days in a Managerial capacity. It was Miller who was MD during the strike.

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- (3) This information was obtained from people who were employed at E I during this period.
 - (4) Its main competitors were primarily SONY and WESTINGHOUSE.
 - (5) In 1967, exports of goods from E I accounted for 4.7% of Ireland's total exports (See Report of Enquiry into the E I dispute p.12) In a speech to E I employees, William J. Miller gave the figure as 6% for the year 1966.

Sometime between 1962 and 1965 a few E I workers joined the ITGWU secretly. This Union is the ONLY General Union which operates in Counties Clare and Limerick with full-time officials. Fear of victimisation kept the whole deal extremely hush hush. Slowly they were joined by other workers who came to E I from Unionised jobs and who had kept up their Union membership. By 1965 there were Trade Union members in every Department of E I - the most organised section was the transistor department.

Claim

In June 5th 1966, the ITGWU served a claim on the E I Company on behalf of its members for revised wages and conditions. The firm declined to enter into negotiations....it did not recognise the Union!!! Very little happened during the next twelve months. The Shannon Branch, and especially Secretary JOE POWER, dragged their feet. On August 30th 1967, 14 full months after the first claim, a meeting of ITGWU members at E I passed a resolution calling on their Executive Council to serve strike notice on the Company "....in support of the members' claims and also because of the failure of the Company to recognise the Union...." The Executive responded favourably. Strike notice was served to E I on 6th October 1967.

At this point, the Labour Court intervened. Prompted by the Fianna Fail Government, it initiated talks; the ITGWU, relieved, postponed its strike notice and participated in talks, presided over by one of the Court's conciliation officers. These talks were lengthy and held behind closed doors. Eventually, it was agreed to hold a ballot to see if the workers at E I wanted Union representation or not. The ballot was scheduled to be held on March 14th 1968...nearly TWO FULL YEARS after the original claim.

For some weeks beforehand, the Supervisors were engaged in a whispering campaign designed to influence the outcome of the vote. Rumours were put around that the place would close down if it became Unionised. A circular from the Company came to light (6) encouraging the Supervisors in their actions. A week before the date set for the ballot, FINTAN KENNEDY, speaking on behalf of the ITGWU, announced that the Union was withdrawing from the ballot because of intimidation....he advised Union members not to vote. E I went ahead nonetheless. On the ballot paper, each worker was asked to place a mark opposite ONE of the following statements:

- (a) I want to continue my present relationship with the EI Company
- (b) I want to be represented by the I.T.G.W.U.

The result of the ballot showed that 599 workers had voted for (a) and 404 had voted to be represented by the ITGWU. In the meantime, on March 10th the Union had reactivated its strike notice and preparation went ahead for the strike.

★ There is a small branch of the ATGWU in Limerick but this Union has no full-time official in the area.

- (6) This information was also obtained from E I workers.

Strike

The strike commenced on March 19th 1968, five days after the ballot was held. Approximately half of the manual workers came out on strike. There was no question of the office staff being involved as none of them, as far as can be ascertained, were in a Union and there was no obvious desire on their part to join one.

E I, and the parent GENERAL ELECTRIC, were determined to win; £250,000 was allocated for the purpose of breaking the strike. The firm's top Industrial Relations officer, Mr. HEIN, was sent to Shannon. Buses were hired from local and Dublin based coach tour operators to bring the blacklegs to work. The buses drove right into the factory every morning so that the scabs did not have to face the pickets. Early in the dispute the firm took legal action to get injunctions against picketing. The High Court granted an interlocutory injunction in favour of the Company. However, the ITGWU appealed to the Supreme Court and on April 9th, the High Court decision was reversed.

If the multinational was determined to win the strike so was the ITGWU !! MICHAEL MULLEN, then a Secretary to the Dublin District Council of the Union and a Labour Party TD, was sent to Limerick to direct operations. Union reps FINTAN KENNEDY and JOHN CARROLL appeared regularly on the picket line. The Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, the electrical Trade Union in the USA, sent two of its officials to Limerick to advise and help out. Members of the ITGWU from different parts of the country came to help with picketing...as did students from U.C.G. Collections were taken up for the strikers and support was forthcoming from all sections of the Trade Union movement. However, there was some lukewarmness about the dispute too...the ICTU Vice-President JAMSIE DUNNE was less than enthusiastic about the strike. The Limerick Branch official of the ITGWU, VINCE MORAN, also kept a low profile during the dispute.

One characteristic of the strike was what is today known as secondary picketing. Homes of supervisors and Managers were picketed. On May 8th, it was discovered that IRISH WIRE PRODUCTS was supplying metal chips to E I. A picket was placed on this factory...the Management agreed more or less immediately to cease supplying material to E I until the dispute was over and the pickets were withdrawn.

The strike was biting; during the first week of May, Dr. HILLERY the then Minister of Labour, who had refused to intervene back in March, was forced to play his cards. He met the ITGWU and the company separately but nothing came of his efforts either. "...It is the workers who will suffer....", he commented.

Around this time, the Shannon Branch Secretary Joe Power, became ill and he was replaced by Rory Cowan from Dublin. During the second week of May, the Annual Conference of the ITGWU was held in Arklow; a resolution was passed calling for the support of the Union's 150,000 members of the E I strikers. John Carroll in a speech said that he would...." see the grass grow over E I (rather) than have it function as a non-Union establishment. " The following week the ICTU held its annual meeting and a resolution of support was passed there as well.

Buses

The turning point of the strike was the burning of the buses which were used to bring the blacklegs into work. This event occurred on the night of May 28/29th. The following day a statement was issued to all papers and signed by Desmond Fitzgerald - Adjutant General IRA which stated: " The operations which took place.....in Limerick, Meath, Kildare and Clare were carried out by units of the Irish Republican Army". The action was taken against the vehicles concerned as well as their owners' premises because, the IRA continued "...they were being used to transport strike breakers to E I Shannon.."

A howl of rage went up from all organs of the establishment, from the ' Irish Times ' which published an Editorial condemning the act, to Jamesie Dunne, now President of the ICTU who also issued a statement condemning it. Over the years there has been much speculation about who really burned the buses and on whose instigation it was done. The operation was very precise and it is my opinion that it was certainly carried out by the IRA. This raises the question of who prompted the action....it looks doubtful that it was the Strike Committee; it could have been the local Republican Movement. What is undeniable was that during the late 60s the Republicans, throughout the country, had taken a leftward turn. This was particularly so in Clare where its members were involved in agitations on local issues such as the closure of the school at O'Brien's Bridge.

End Strike

During the month of June, there were a number of meetings held which were aimed at bringing the strike to an end. Dr. Hillery let it be known that if the strike were called off, he would set up a Committee of Enquiry to investigate the dispute. P.D. McCarthy, a Senior Adviser of the Department of Labour held talks with the E I Management and the leaders of the ITGWU. A package was worked out which included a phased return to work and the setting up of a Committee of Enquiry. While this Committee was carrying out its investigation, full-time officials of the Union were to have ready access to the E I Management but NOT the shop stewards in the factory. On June 14th, Fintan Kennedy, Carroll and Donegan went to Shannon with the intention of ' selling ' these proposals to the strikers. However, they were turned down by the Strike Committee. The proposal of a phased return was regarded as particularly objectionable. Eventually, on June 22nd, a ballot was held and the proposal was rejected.

A week later a variation of the phased return to work was put to the strikers....the culmination of weariness and stiff pressure was the acceptance of the proposal. 50% of the strikers were to get back to work immediately and the other half were to be back by the end of July. The E I strike was over. The integration of the workforce dragged on, but some workers were still out of job by September, some workers left....but in the main the return to work can be said to have worked out effectively enough.

Looking back

There are a few comments which can be made on looking back at the dispute. While the ITGWU should be given credit for "taking on" a multinational such as General Electric in 1968 (and should be remembered that very few Irish Unions would have had the resources to do this), Unionisation of the E I plant in 1962 or 63 would have been less difficult and would not have required the same resources and effort as were used to maintain the strike in 1968. For example the ATGWU unionised E I's sister company ECCO in Dundalk in 1965 (7), shortly after it was set up...without a major struggle. But, it must be said, that Dundalk, unlike Clare, has a long established Trade Unionist tradition.

The attitude of the State during the whole of this dispute needs to be scrutinised. As was stated earlier, the output from E I in 1966 accounted for 6% of the Free State's exports. In the months prior to the strike, the State, through its various agencies, tried to avert it. The Government prompted the Labour Court to intervene. Talks were held under the Chairmanship of a Reconciliation officer. Shortly after the strike began, Dr. Hillery, the Minister of Labour, refused to intervene when asked to do so. While this may have been a reflection of Hillery's own anti-Trade Union prejudices, the most likely explanation is that the Government did not want to offend a multinational...when the IDA was busy trying to entice other foreign firms to set up here. Besides, the Government was busily adopting a "get-tough" policy in relation to strikes as was demonstrated during the ESB day-workers' strike at the end of March 1968. In fact a 'get-tough' line was adopted in the face of any form of dissent. This was evidenced during April 1968 when Minister of Justice O' Morain sent Gardai into Trinity College to baton students who



(7) The Board of Directors of ECCO in Dundalk consisted of the following people in 1965:-

* Lewis Berkley Davis, J.R. Donnalely, F.W. Gifford, Theodore E. Jamro, Leonard Cheney Maier Jr., Robert G. Page (Director of E I), William R. Smart (Director of E I)

They were all Americans !

were protesting against the visit of King Baudoin of the Belgians to the College. It would seem that the policy of getting the Unions involved in the machinery of the State through National Wage Agreements was still being worked out in the backrooms. As the strike continued, the Government used its influence more and more to try to get a settlement. The failure of putting the ESB workers in jail may have been responsible for this. The need to bring the Unions into the machinery of the State was now more urgent. At the end of April, the Labour Court recommended that E I recognise the Union but the firm rejected this. The ITGWU finally called off the strike in return for the setting-up of a Committee of Enquiry.

Another aspect of the E I situation which is worth mentioning is that of *de-skilling*. One would have expected the maintenance staff to have been members of a craft Union...the AUEW or NEETU for example. This would have paved the way for the unionisation of the production workers. But in E I, the maintenance men were not craft workers but *house fitters*...i.e. men who were promoted from production and who were familiar with the machinery...thus capable of keeping it in good order. But these workers would not have been able to get jobs elsewhere as maintenance workers. They did not take part in the strike...neither did they join in the national maintenance workers strike of 1969. Much later on, some of them became members of the ITGWU.

The main effect which the strike had on the rest of the Shannon Estate was that no firm which set up there resisted Unionisation from then on. A few of the original firms which had come to Shannon in its early days held out for a while but, eventually, they did their deals with the ITGWU. S P S, the last place to hold out, did a deal with the Union in 1974.

But then, throughout the seventies, the *sweetheart deal* became the rule, not only in Shannon, but throughout the country. Despite, of course, exceptions such as DIGITAL in Galway and MEASUREX in Waterford.(8)

(8) These firms, both of them American, have a policy of granting pay and conditions better than average in their respective localities just to keep the Unions out.

Section Two



The £20m. Ferenka Plant under construction at Annacotty, Co. Limerick

Ferenka reopens ICTU Rule 47 blamed for Ferenka closedown

THE SIEGE at Monasterevan, Tiede Herrema has been held captive. Herrema entered his seventh day this morning while the Ferenka factory at Limerick was reopened at midnight and, in a further development, the president of Provisional Sinn Fein, Mr. Ruairi O'Bradaigh, called on the kidnapers to release their victim.

FERENKA

After the mid-1960s, industries which set up shop in the Limerick / Shannon area did not always go to Shannon Estate. KRUPS set up their factory in Galvone in Limerick City in 1965 and Raheen Industrial Estate was established in 1974. In 1969, the year following that of the E I strike, the IDA began negotiations with representatives of the Dutch firm ENKA for the setting up of a steel cord plant.

ENKA GLANZSTOFF N.V. , to give the firm its full name, is part of the Dutch based multi-national AKZO . AKZO is a pharmaceutical firm which has diversified its activities into synthetic fibres and engineering.

By the end of 1969, the decision to go ahead and build the plant in the Limerick area was made. ENKA was influenced by the availability of relatively cheap labour, the Government training grants, the closed shop with the ITGWU and the proximity of Limerick port. AKZO already had one subsidiary in Ireland : BRITISH ENKALON in Antrim. The building of the factory, at the site at Annacotty, 5 miles outside Limerick City, started early in 1970.

The story of FERENKA from 1970 to 1977 is dramatic and full of incidents. In many ways it resembles a three-act play , in which the first act deals with the construction of the factory and the early period of operations, the second with the kidnapping of Dr. HERREMA - the FERENKA General Manager and the final act with the strike of 1977 and the closure of the plant.

ACT I

Turning the sod

The building of the factory, at its peak period, involved 1,200 workers. P.J.Hegarty & Sons, Keenan Brothers Ltd and the Smith Group were some of the building firms which combined to build FERENKA. According to the *Irish Times* (8.7.72), the project absorbed 2,900 tons of structural steel, 41 tons of paint and ten miles of window-glazing rods. The roof covered thirteen acres of factory buildings.

A number of strikes took place on the site during construction. The last of these took place in March 1972 when 47 mechanical fitters employed by a sub-contractor went on strike because of their employer's failure to pay the then current phase of the National Wage Agreement. They picketed the site and most other workers refused to pass the picket. By this time (in spite of the fact that the building of the factory was not yet complete) production had commenced. A separate entrance was built so that production workers did not have to face builders' pickets.

The original workforce was hastily recruited from the surrounding rural areas and went into production by spring 1972. A 'sweet heart deal ' had been arranged with the ITGWU. The work itself was boring and noisy. The process of producing steel cord from solid steel bars is a very noisy one.....workers were compelled to work in fast-moving machines.

wearing ear muffers to protect them from the din. There was a four-cycle shift system. An example of how this affected a worker is as follows: On the first week of the cycle he worked from 8.00 am until 4 pm on Mondays & Tuesdays. Then on Wednesday and Thursday he worked from 4pm until midnight. He had a day off on Friday but on Saturday he was back working from midnight until 8.00 in the morning....and the same on Sunday and Monday. Tuesday he was off. Cycle two began on Wednesday with 8.00 to 4.00 working and so on. This system destroys cruelly and permanently any human living pattern, any family situation, the nervous system. In EEC countries this system has been devised to be re-enforced in factories where the workforce is largely immigrant. Certainly Belgian and Dutch workers would not put up with it.

Together with the four cycle shift, a rigidly authoritarian regime operated inside the factory. Workers were forbidden to pin photos, pictures, even medallions to their work areas. Other things which were forbidden were selling raffle tickets, advertising football matches, lending money to another worker and distributing political or religious literature.

The Board of FERENKA was all Dutch with one exception: the Fine Gael Alderman TED RUSSELL of the Limerick Corporation (A Ports & Docks man). Some local business firms did well from contracts with FERENKA. The National Institute for Higher Education (NIHE) of Limerick enrolled its first students in 1972 - the same year as production started in FERENKA. There were close links between the two establishments. Students from NIHE were sent to FERENKA from their co-op education. Middle management personnel from FERENKA linked in to courses at NIHE and this was facilitated by the physical proximity of the two places. Dr. E.Petty, the Head of the Materials and Industrial Engineering Department of the College advised FERENKA on technical problems.

1972 also saw a recession in the world's fibre market. The AKZO bosses referred to this as "...over-capacity...." and in order to deal with the situation announced their intention to close five of its synthetic fibre plants. These were at Breda in Holland (1,700 workers), WUPPERTAL in West Germany (3,000 workers), EMMERCOMPASCRUM in Holland (500 workers), FELDMUEHLE (Switzerland) and FABELTA in Belgium. This caused some anxiety in Government, IDA and SFADCO circles but a FERENKA spokesman in Limerick reassured everybody concerned. that the announcements made in Holland would not affect FERENKA. Later on, AKZO was forced to abandon the plan for closures because of worker opposition in the three countries concerned: West Germany, Belgium and Holland. The story of what happened is told in the *Irish Press* of 22.9.72:

"... The various Unions have bitterly fought the company's plans since they were first announced last May....Because of over-capacity in the synthetic fibres industry, AKZO decided to close five plants..... The Unions halted the implementation of the closures by demanding an independent Enquiry which....sharply criticised the Company for ignoring the social implications of its intended moves.....Union resistance intensified to the point where the plant at Breda in the south of Holland was occupied by the workers at the beginning of the week. This was followed by a sit-in at the Wuppertal plant in West Germany....."

During this time, the industrial scene at FERENKA was far from quiet. Dockers at the Limerick port were refusing to handle container traffic and the firm was forced to use Waterford for importing raw material

and exporting finished goods. In 1972 alone 25,000 man/hours were gained by the workers at FERENKA. On St. Stephen's day 1972 a worker was dismissed following a dispute with a member of the staff. His 50 colleagues in his Section went on unofficial strike to obtain his re-instatement. Early in the New Year, ITGWU officials persuaded them to return to work pending an investigation of the dispute by the Labour Court. Around this time, another worker went on hunger strike in protest against a Management decision to keep him on additional probation which would mean he would not be entitled to full pay until the extended period had expired.

On May 8th 1973 an unofficial strike took place over the appointment of two foremen who were brought in from outside FERENKA. The *Irish Times* (9.5.73) said:

"... The workers want the appointment to be made from the existing staff. The Management said it was their policy to promote from within where possible, but that they reserved the right to strengthen the Company in labour and management ability from outside if required...."

On May 11th, FERENKA's Managing Director, Mr. Jacques Jacob, issued a dire warning about the future of FERENKA in Limerick. He said: "...Because of the unofficial work stoppages, the plant is losing credibility with the international AKZO organisation. It is also failing to meet orders from America and the Continent on time and it is becoming more difficult to convince customers that it could be relied on to deliver the goods.....90% of the workers are good decent people who want to learn their trade and their work. I am convinced that a few trouble makers - call them what you like Maoists, Communists or something else had got in and are just anti society....."

The dispute was settled shortly after this. In September of 1973 Jacob was replaced as Managing Director by Dr. Tiede Herrema. Still later, an ex-official of the Transport Salaried staffs Association (TSSA) Jack Ridgeway was appointed Personnel and Industrial Relations Manager. The scene was set for Act II.

ACT II



Dr. Tiede Herrema was a Dutchman; he was born in 1921. It was Herrema who had re-negotiated the original sweetheart deal covering production workers with Limerick ITGWU Branch Official Vincent Moran. Many of the clauses of the new Agreement were concerned with time-keeping and absenteeism. It was stipulated that a worker who was 5 minutes late and lost 15 minutes pay; one who was 15 mins late lost half an hour's pay; one who was half an hour late lost an hour's pay. If a worker was even a minute late he would be marked down for an *infraction*. If the same worker was late five times (even if it was only a total of 5 minutes) he could be suspended or dismissed for 'persistent late-coming'.

Herrema was an anti-absenteeism man. He campaigned against absenteeism by posters which were pinned to pillars showing a picture of a man drinking. The poster read 'Miss a day, your mates will pay'. Other posters extolled the qualities of the 'ideal worker' whom they dubbed *Mr. McQuality*. People absent for a day were not paid. Workers missing three full days in six months were liable to be dismissed for 'persistent absenteeism'. If one was sick the Company doctor was called in.

Herrema's objective was to win the Union leadership within the factory to his side. Members of the ITGWU Committee were sent to trips to Holland. McGrath, the Committee Chairman, was given ample time to conduct Union business. In 1973 40,000 man/hours were gained through unofficial stoppages....2% of the total man/hours worked during the year. The figure fell to 20,000 in 1974 and to a miserable 4,000 in 1975... Herrema was successful in introducing discipline into the factory.

The world recession of 1974 did not help matters for the FERENKA workers either. World demand for steel cord dropped dramatically. While in late 1973 Herrema was able to announce that capital investment in FERENKA was being increased by £5 million to £25 million, that increase was cancelled in 1974. The number of people employed at the factory reached a peak of 1,500 by the end of 1973...but by early 1975 redundancies reduced that number to 1,200. Industrial action was no easy matter in FERENKA in 1975.

In February of that year the FERENKA Section of the ITGWU were due to hold its AGM. As the factory still operated a 4-cycle shift, the Union asked permission to hold the AGM in the factory canteen. This was, inexplicably, refused. Management said they were prepared to allow roughly one-third of the workers in the factory to attend the meeting. The workers in the packing section decided they were going to the AGM, with their steward, irrespective of the antics of Management. FERENKA bosses were quick in their reaction...they dismissed the steward, Byrnes, immediately. The ITGWU took the case to the Labour Court. Byrnes was re-instated but transferred to the maintenance department.

Late in September, maintenance staff, members of NEETU and ITGWU, including the man Byrnes, went on an unofficial strike because of the failure of FERENKA to pay the then current phase of the National Wage Agreement. They were still on strike when Dr. Herrema was kidnapped.

Kidnapping

On Friday morning October 3rd 1975, Dr. Herrema was stopped about 200 yards from his home and taken away. Some three hours later, anonymous phone calls to the Dutch Embassy in Dublin and to a paper announced that Herrema was captive and demanded the release of 3 prisoners as an exchange. The 3 prisoners were:

Dr. Rose Dugdale
Kevin Mallon
James Hyland



Rose Dugdale was then serving a 9-year prison sentence for receiving stolen paintings from a valuable collection belonging to Sir Alfred Beit. Dugdale is British and has been active in the national struggle. She has since been released from prison.

Kevin Mallon, from Coalisland Co. Tyrone, was a leading member of the IRA. While serving a 12-month sentence for membership he escaped from Mountjoy Prison in a helicopter - together with Seamus Twomey and J.B. O'Hogan. Re-arrested in June 1974 he was put to Portlaoise...he escaped from there in August 1974 by blasting their way out together with 19 other prisoners. Re-arrested a second time in January 1975 he was serving a 10-year sentence.

James Hyland was from Portlaoise and was serving time for possession of firearms.

The caller said that if they were not released within 48 hours Dr. Herrema would be executed. Other demands by the caller were that the FERENKA factory be closed for 24 hours as "an act of faith" and that no road blocks be set up by the Gardai. Patrick Cooney of Fine Gael, Minister of Justice in the Coalition Government, firmly rejected all the demands. "To concede anything would place the State in jeopardy" he said. On the other hand, the Dutch Prime Minister Mr. Joop Den Uyl asked the Irish Government to do everything in its power to save Dr. Herrema.

The first break for the Coalition came when the Provisionals issued a statement denying responsibility for the kidnapping. The FERENKA Management announced that it was complying with the second of the demands and that the factory would be closed the next day Oct. 4th. Dr. Newman, the Bishop of Limerick, denounced the kidnapping.

On Saturday October 4th there was a march of FERENKA workers through the centre of Limerick in support of Dr. Herrema. Some carried placards with the slogan: "We want our boss back". The ITGWU Committee in FERENKA, under the leadership of Nicholas McGrath, issued a statement that

".... Dr.Herrema had always shown a keen awareness of the problems of the workforce and a genuine concern for their well-being...."

Mr.T.Coughlan (son of Steve Coughlan - Mayor of Limerick) called on Dr.Rose Dugdale to publicly disassociate herself from the kidnapping; he asked for a meeting with her in Limerick jail....she refused to see him.

The Coalition stance was gaining ground....on Monday Oct.6th the Executive of the ICTU condemned the kidnapping. During the next few days, there were no further messages from the kidnapers and hopes began to find. On October 9th FERENKA issued a statement asking for proof that its man was alive. Gardai issued a questionnaire to all FERENKA workers and house to house searches started by the Free State Army. Also on Oct.9 Dr. Hugh Krayenhoff , Chief AKZO Executive, flew into Dublin. On the same day the Dutch Government disclosed that they were urging Fr. Donal O'Mahony to act as a mediator....the Capucin priest said he had been contacted by the main actors of the event. The next day, FERENKA announced that they were closing the plant indefinitely....in response to kidnapers' demands, they added.

On Oct.13th the Irish Government publicly turned down a plea from the FERENKA Company for the release of the prisoners. The next day , Fr. O'Mahony announced that he could not continue to act as a mediator because of Special Branch harassment. Surprisingly, Phil Flynn, Deputy General Secretary of the Local Government and Public Services Union (LGPSU) and member of Sinn Fein, became the new intermediary. On Oct.15th he announced that he had made contact with the kidnapers, that he was satisfied Herrema was alive, and that he would be continuing his efforts for the man's release.

The searches and the propaganda continued unabated. The first break came on October 20th and the Gardai discovered the car used in the kidnapping. It was found in Tullamore and two men, Walsh and McGowan, were arrested. The next day , in a surprise dawn raid, a small house in Monastereven Co.Kildare, was located as the hide-out. Detectives and the Army surrounded the area, occupied the ground floor, and started squeezing the kidnapers who were cooped on the floor upstairs with Dr.Herrema. What was later to become known as *The Siege of Monastereven* had begun.

Gardai informed the Press that there were two kidnapers , a man positively identified as Eddie Gallagher , and a woman who although not positively identified was thought to be Marian Coyle. The siege continued through the week...on the Wednesday, Oct.22nd, two Scotland Yard officers arrived to Ireland , bringing with them an experimental listening device....to become one of the SAS's prime toys subsequently.

On Monday Oct.27th, the Limerick factory opened its doors. Hugh Krayenhoff, Chairman of AKZO, addressed the workers in the canteen . He said that there was no question of the factory being closed down "...on emotional grounds ". But he went on to say that it would have to ".... compete in a competitive world...".

Vincent Moran, Secretary of the Limerick no.2 Branch of the ITGWU , in a Press Statement said that "....the workers are terribly pleased at the re-opening of the factory...." . According to the *Irish Times* of Oct.28th 1975

" There was 100% attendance again at the 4 p.m. snirt... A shop steward implied that if those who took unofficial action before the closedown appeared, violent action might be taken against them....."

No such action ever occurred.



More than three weeks had gone by since Herrema had been kidnapped. The tactics of the Gardai seemed to be unsuccessful. But on Friday Nov. 17th at 10p.m. the kidnapers threw their pistols out of the window, came downstairs and surrendered.

Many things have been said about the surrender. There has been talk of a *deal between the Gardai and Gallagher/Coyle* ; it also seems that the decision to surrender was due in no small part, to headaches from which Eddie Gallagher began to suffer. The siege of Monastereven was over.

Dr. Herrema went to Holland for a three-week vacation. When he came back to Ireland, he was made an *Honourary Irish citizen* and a Freeman of Limerick City. Minister of Justice Cooney received a decoration from the Dutch Ambassador....he became *Commander of the Order Orange-Nassau* . Eddie Gallagher and Marion Coyle were both sentenced to 20 years in jail.



The period of truce Between Management and the workers at the FERENKA factory, brought about by the kidnapping, did not last long. Early in 1976 Dr. Herrema returned to Holland to take up an appointment as ' Group Personnel Manager ' for AKZO ; one of his last acts before leaving Ireland was to plead that FERENKA could not pay the then current phase of the National Wages Agreement. The matter was referred to the Labour Court. The Labour Court recommended that the 1975 N.W.A. be paid as follows:

From July 1st 1975	8%
" Oct. 1st 1975	5%
" Feb. 1st 1976	2.8%

Herrema was succeeded by Mr. A.F. Meerdinck who was sent to Limerick in a 'temporary capacity' . In April 1976, Meerdick returned to Holland and Dr. Fritz Lambert was appointed Managing Director. Other personnel changes took place around this time. Mr. Jack Ridgeway left and the Personnel Department came under the direction of Richard Coveney and Sean Coffey. Sean Hennessy became Production Manager.

While the work situation at FERENKA improved with the number of people employed there rising to 1,400 in 1976, the overall position of AKZO continued to be unsatisfactory. During 1975, there had been a drop of £200 million in the company's international turnover . It was unable to pay a dividend and its losses in the first half of 1976 came to £19 million. By October 1975, AKZO was implementing a major rationalisation plan throughout the group. Dr. Patrick Hillery, who was now EEC Commissioner for Social Policy, told the European Parliament that month that the Company planned to reduce its European workforce from 43,000 to 37,000 by the end of 1977.

During 1976, discontent in FERENKA began to grow. The militant Philip Byrnes replaced pro-Management man Nicholas McGrath as Chairman of the Shop-Stewards Committee. In August 1976, a walk-out took place by a section of the workforce because of excessive heat. 35 workers were suspended because of this incident. In the October 1976 issue of *Bottom Dog* (a Limerick based newspaper) an article appeared which was written by a FERENKA worker. It dealt with the discontent within the factory, the high turnover of staff and the havoc caused to workers' health and happiness by the four-cycle shift.

This situation continued into 1977. Also dissatisfaction with the Union, the ITGWU, grew. Instead of standing up for the members, Vincent Moran and the other officials, acted as police for the Management. For instance, when the ' Works Rules ' came up for renewal, the officers of the Limerick no.2 Branch of the ITGWU issued a circular letter to members in FERENKA in which they claimed that if the agreement was rejected , there would no obligation by the Company to implement the clauses which favoured the workers - such as extra holidays and pay for public holidays. During that year, a number of approaches were made by FERENKA workers to the MARINE PORT and GENERAL WORKERS UNION (MPGWU). There was nothing new about this. The MPGWU had made its first approaches to FERENKA workers as early as 1974.

At this stage, it is important to deal briefly with the MPGWU, in order to understand one of the protagonists in the final act of the FERENKA story:

MARINE PORT & GENERAL WORKERS UNION

CUMANN NA HOIBRÍCHE MUIRÍ, POIRT ILSAOCÁIR

Telephone 726564

14 GARDINER PLACE,
DUBLIN 1

The Marine Port and General Workers Union had its origins in 1933 when a group of seamen in the port of Dublin left the British based National Union of Seamen(NUS) with the intention of setting up an IRISH seamen's Union.

They were joined by some dissatisfied deep-sea dockers who, around the same time, had left the ITGWU. The new Union became known as the Seamen and Port Workers Union. It was, somewhat, left-wing and its first General Secretary, Sean O' Moore was involved in the Republican Congress.

In the mid-50s, Des Brannigan succeeded O'Moore as General Secretary. Also around this time the Union began to recruit workers from factories in the North Wall area of Dublin - for instance in the Exide factory (which it has since moved to Dublin's Ballyfermot) . It was at that period that the Union changed its name to Marine Port and General Workers Union.

There was much hostility to Brannigan, both inside and outside the Union, because he was considered to be left-wing. This was the period of Catholic triumphalism .

In 1959, the seamen broke away and formed their own Seamens Union under William Stacey. Brannigan resigned and Jamsie Dunne became General Secretary of what remained of the MPGWU. Dunne was a very reli-

gious man. A friend of Archbishop McQuaid of Dublin, he relied on the Archbishop for help and advice. He was on the Executive of the ICTU during the 1960s and became President in 1968/69. He distinguished himself during his Presidency by trying to undermine the Maintenance Workers strike . He died in 1972 and was succeeded by Seamus Redmond, General Secretary at the time of writing.

Other prominent officials of the MPGWU are John 'Slim' Browne, Seamus Murphy and Frank Ellis .Over the years, the Union has made intensive efforts to recruit members in industry to make up for the loss of the seamen in 1959.

In 1973, the MPGWU was expelled from Congress for *poaching* members from NEETU at *Ericson Ltd.* It has been outside the ICTU ever since. Herein lies the attraction of the Union for potential members, especially since the advent of the National Wage Agreements: the MPGWU is not bound by Agreements or National Understandings or the restrictive rule 47D of the ICTU which governs the transfer of members from one Union to another. Because of the latter, members of a Congress Union who are dissatisfied find it easy to transfer to the MPGWU. Groups of workers who have done this in recent times are those at *Plessey Ltd.*, Swords, who left the ITGWU and those at *Portion Foods*, Coolock, who left the FWUI .



FINAL ACT Bearing the Fruit

On Monday 26th Sept. 1977, the man who normally cleaned the toilets at FERENKA was absent from work. A young machine operator named DAVIS was allocated the duties of the absent man. When he refused to carry out these tasks, on the grounds that they were not those of a machine operator, he was given a final warning. When he refused again he was suspended.

His colleagues agreed with him and the minute he was suspended they went on strike for his re-instatement and the removal of the final warning from his file. This dispute would have gone down in history as just another walk-out amongst many which occurred at FERENKA...but for the fact that a new and serious situation was developing in the factory.

During the summer of 1977, an 'unofficial' group of Shop Stewards had been formed....Management seemed unaware of the existence of this group. With the support of most of the Factory Committee and the Chairman of the Shop Stewards Committee Philip Byrnes, a meeting was called two days after Davis' suspension. The meeting which took place at the Savoy Hotel in Limerick, was attended by nearly 600 workers. An overwhelming majority decided to apply to join the MPGWU. Many of those who attended the meeting had travelled from as far as Nenagh, Roscrea and Thurles.

On the next morning, production resumed at the factory. As to what happened next, the pamphlet 'FERENKA', published by the Bottom Dog, takes up the story:

"..In negotiations with Management, the ITGWU officials had been given assurances that machine operators would not be asked to do cleaning work again. Also, the workers were later to claim that Richard Coveney, a Staff Industrial Relations Manager, gave assurances that there would be no victimisation of the workers involved in the stoppage- this should have been the end of the dispute which, to most outside observers, seemed to be the result of misunderstandings aggravated by petty and heavy-handed management reactions...."

However, this was not to be. On October 3rd, less than a week after the return to work, Management placed the following announcement on the factory Notice Board:

Following last week's unofficial work stoppage, your Company has found it necessary to again emphasize that it will not accept efforts to enforce a solution by actions outside of the procedures agreed between the Company and the Unions.

Consequently, we have, as on previous similar occasions, taken disciplinary action against persons seen to take a leading role in the unofficial picketing. The actions are as follows:

The Chairman of the Shop Stewards Committee has been suspended pending an investigation by the Labour Court

of his recent activities in regard to the unofficial stoppage.

In deciding upon this action, we have borne in mind that the Labour Court, in its report dated April 7 1975, criticised the present Chairman, who was then a Shop Steward, for his persistent refusal to abide by agreed Company/Union procedures. The report recommended that a period of suspension and a final warning be imposed for the offence.

In the events of last week, the Chairman again demonstrated his unwillingness to follow agreed Union/Company procedures. This resulted in necessary financial loss to both employees and the Company.

A number of Shop Stewards who were positively identified as having taken part in the unofficial picket have been suspended for one week, from October 3, and have been given a final warning.

This action has been carried out in accordance with the 'Works Rules'. Similar action taken by the Company in previous situations has been upheld by the Labour Court.

The Management of your Company wishes to emphasize that it remains available to discuss with authorised representatives any outstanding grievances on matters of mutual interest.

It should be remembered that the Company took these decisions after, for all practical purposes, admitting that it was responsible, or at fault, in the dispute. However, it soon became clear that there was more involved than a heavy-handed Management sticking to the letter of the Works Rules.

As word of the suspensions got around, picketing was immediately resumed and respected by all production workers. However, members of other Unions at the plant, i.e. maintenance staff who were members of NEETU and ETU, did not respect the picket. Also members of AUEW - TASS, the white collar staff Union, who had become unionised a year before the strike, passed the picket.

It would seem that since the Savoy Hotel meeting, the MPGWU had accepted the FERENKA workers into its ranks. On Wednesday Oct. 6th, some leading officials of the MPGWU came to Limerick. They included the President Frank Ellis, the General Secretary Seamus Redmond and others. A Limerick Branch of the Union was set up there and then with 'Slim' Browne as Branch Secretary. At a meeting of FERENKA workers which was held at the SAVOY that day, Ellis received a standing ovation when he declared the strike official. He said:

"...the MPGWU will back the workers all the way in the big struggle ahead...."

Philip Byrnes in a speech, attacked the record of the ITGWU. He said:

"... We don't want to work under the ITGWU. We would sooner be in the Legion of Mary...."

It was not long before there was a reaction to these events from the ITGWU. The Union sent a circular letter to all production workers at FERENKA. For this exercise, Company notepaper and envelopes were used. The letter warned that "...Under present conditions, the Company cannot survive and the jobs of our members will be put at risk..." The letter was signed by Vincent Moran (full-time official), Tone Kennealy and Tony Walsh. (the latter to take full prominence in the Alcan dispute of 1980). Moran also sent a letter to the *Limerick Leader*, which went as follows:

"...The ITGWU has a commitment to the whole area in the matter of wages and conditions, industrial expansion, job creation etc. The Marine Port has none. We, in the ITGWU, will not be deterred from pursuing these objectives by false propoganda and distortion of the facts by a hardline minority of dissidents within the Community....."

Later on that week, the leadership of the ITGWU gave their few remaining members at FERENKA the status of a Branch and Tom O'Dwyer, who had been Chairman of the Shop-Stewards Committee at FERENKA in the early days, and is now Branch Secretary of the ITGWU in Kilkenny, was brought back to become its Branch Secretary. Tony Walsh became Chairman. In his first public statement, after his appointment, O'Dwyer claimed that workers were being intimidated by the pickets.

On Monday October 10th, a cold grey dawn broke over Annacotty. Eleven full-time officials of the ITGWU, including Paddy Donegan, the Group Secretary and Branch Secretary Frank Prendergast, were seen hovering in the vicinity of the factory gates. They said that they were there as a gesture of solidarity with the workers who had responded to their call " to go to work and get production going..." However, only about 60 workers went into work that morning and that number was not sufficient to restart production. There was no sign of any intimidation.

The October 11th issue of the *Irish Press* published a statement by Vincent Moran in which he said:

"... That the workforce was recruited too quickly, which was no one's fault as the Company wanted to get into production. He considered, however, that there was a need for screening, as it was certain that a number of dissidents were bound to get employment..."

John Carroll, Vice-President of the ITGWU, stated that:

"... This strike is the work of a small group who are seeking power for themselves and are willing to close the factory in their attempt..."



Later on that week, the Limerick Trades Council held a meeting where a proposal was accepted that a Committee be elected from among ALL FERENKA production workers. This Committee would then meet with the Trades Council to discuss the problem of industrial relations in the plant. The workers were to return to work in the meantime.

'Slim' Browne of the MPGWW said that he favoured this proposal because a ballot would remove any suggestion that the workers were being forced to join the MPGWW. It seems that the ITGWU considered the proposal but did not respond to it. At the beginning of the following week, FERENKA issued protective notices to its entire workforce.

On Wednesday, Oct. 19th, FERENKA production workers attended a meeting in the Savoy Hotel called by the MPGWW. The Ge. Secretary of the Union, Seamus Redmond, announced that the Union was going to pay £7 per week strike pay to their FERENKA members. Up to that time, the workers had survived on Home Assistance and money raised by collections. Immediately after the meeting, a march took place through the streets of Limerick. Some of the participants carried posters bearing slogans such as ' No More Sweetheart Deals with Multinationals ' and ' No More Cheap Labour at Ferenka ' .

On October 24th, Alderman Mick Lipper T.D. announced that he had met a group of striking workers and that they asked him to find a formula for a return to work. The spokesman for the group was one Paddy Tobin and he made a statement to the effect that the Strike Committee was "...being dictated to from Dublin" . Pointing out that the Strike Committee was the only body with the power to issue statements on behalf of the workers, the MPGWW withheld Tobin's strike pay and that was, it seems, the end of the matter. It is most likely that the incident was a stunt, contrived by Lipper to attract publicity to himself. If he had wished to intervene constructively in the strike, he could have approached the Strike Committee and offered his support.

On Oct. 25th, Gene Fitzgerald, the Minister for Labour, announced his proposal for ending the dispute. It consisted of the setting up of a three-member Tribunal to "...investigate the causes of the discontent among FERENKA employees....". While this was going on, all Trade Union activity was "...to cease in the plant for six months..." . During this time, a person appointed by the Minister would represent the workers when necessary. These proposals were immediately rejected by both ITGWU and MPGWW. Three days later, Fitzgerald was back with an amended version: The idea of a Tribunal was dropped in favour of the Labour Court. These new proposals were again rejected...the MPGWW called for "...the Labour Court to investigate the circumstances relating to the indefinite suspension of Mr. Phil Byrnes and make a recommendation....."

On Nov. 1st, another mass meeting of the MPGWW workers was held in the Savoy. Frank Ellis, President of the Union, who addressed the meeting, said that the basis for a return to work was for the Company to take back Philip Byrnes and that if the factory closed, the responsibility would lie solely with the firm. The same day, FERENKA began to put its protective notice into operation. The few production workers who had been passing the picket were now "...suspended indefinitely...". Rumours began to grow about the possible closure of the plant. The new Managing Director, Mr. J.K. Van Wijngaarden, who had replaced Fritz Lambert, issued a statement in which he declared that "...The outside world is slowly closing around our necks. It's like a nightmare !! ..." It was at this

stage that this new Managing Director had been sent to FERENKA shortly before the strike for the purpose of "...bringing stability to the Limerick plant...."

The lay-off and the rumours of closure brought a meeting between the Minister of Industry, Commerce and Energy O'Malley and two members of the ENKA Board. The meeting was secret and the outcome inconclusive.

On Sunday, Nov.6th, the clergy took a hand in the dispute. At all Masses in Limerick statements were read out advising the congregation to seek out FERENKA workers and explain to them the error of their ways and the likely consequences of their actions !! The priests also called for support for the women's march which was planned for the following Tuesday. Around this time also, the Southill called for support for the women's march. In a Press Statement, the Comm. Council claimed that 290 FERENKA employees lived in Southill. Among the things they warned about was "...the danger to children who see adults behave in such an irresponsible way..." (The Strike Committee was later to point out that only 25 production workers from FERENKA lived in Southill)



The womens march had been planned the previous week. One of the organisers, Mrs. Sheila Mc Carthy, in a letter to the *Limerick Leader* asked the question:

"... Could the wives of the FERENKA workers march through Limerick to get their menfolk back to work ? .."

Another of the organisers denied that the march was purely directed at getting the man back to work. She said that they just wanted to highlight "...the urgency of the situation...."

Despite these disclaimers, the march could only be seen as putting pressure on the workers to give in. Not once did the organisers put forward the demand that the Company re-instate the suspended shop-stewards.

The much publicised march took place on Tuesday morning, Nov. 8th. When one considers the publicity it received IT WAS A FLOP. Only 120 women, most of them representing 'concerned organisations' took part. It was estimated that about 25 wives of FERENKA workers were present...and most of them were wives of middle-management and of staff.

During the first two weeks of November, the Limerick Trades Council continued its effort to find a solution to the dispute. Also a Support Group for the FERENKA strikers, consisting of workers from other jobs and other Unions such as the ITGWU, ASTMS and the NBU was set up and held a number of meetings at the MPGWW's offices in Roches Street.

On Nov. 15th and 16th, a series of meetings were held in the ICTU Headquarters in Dublin. Representatives of the ICTU, the ITGWU, the FERENKA Management and the FUE attended these meetings. As a result, the ICTU and the FUE issued a six-point settlement plan:

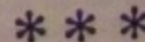
- *1 There shall be a full resumption of work at normal starting time, on Monday next, Nov. 21st, commencing with the 8 a.m. shift and day workers.

- *2 All employees, including the seven suspended workers, should report for work without prejudice to the Labour Court making a recommendation on the disciplinary issue referred to it on 5th Oct. 1977.
- *3 That the terms and conditions of employment as applied before the stoppage shall operate on a resumption of work.
- *4 That any problems arising after a resumption of work, should be dealt with in accordance with existing agreed procedures.
- *5 Nothing in this recommendation shall preclude the company or the Union having discussion with any other party provided no arrangements are made which will prejudice the terms and validity of the Company/Union agreement.
- *6 Any problems arising from such discussions shall be referred to the Employer/Labour Conference for consideration.

It was startling how the MPGWW was ignored in all this. Besides point *3 of the settlement proposals was unacceptable, because it meant that the workers would have to return to work as members of the ITGWU. A meeting was consequently held at Roscrea, Co. Tipperary, between the FERENKA Management and the officials of the MPGWW. The outcome of that meeting and the settlement proposals were considered at a mass meeting of the strikers which was held in the Savoy, on Saturday Nov. 18th. Both the MPGWW Executive and the Strike Committee advised the workers to reject the proposals which were described as ridiculous. The meeting voted by 441 to 64 to REJECT.

It was around this time that it was announced that the Boards of ENKA and AKZO were meeting to decide the fate of the Limerick factory. Rumours began to increase ...closure was imminent. Also bitterness began to grow among the workers who had been on strike. According to the *Irish Times*, scuffles took place in Cappamore and Murroe between members of the MPGWW and the ITGWU. The ITGWU were accused of scabbing.

A week passed by. Suddenly Harold O'Sullivan, acting President of Congress, offered his services as a mediator. His offer was immediately accepted by the ITGWU. On Nov. 25th, he travelled to Limerick and had a three-hour meeting with Seamus Redmond, the Gen. Secretary of the MPGWW. After the meeting, Redmond stated that he had accepted Sullivan as a mediator. He went on to say that his Union had complete confidence in any handling of the situation by Mr. O'Sullivan. That night, the MPGWW Executive held a meeting in Limerick and it was decided to call another mass meeting of the FERENKA workers the next day.



UNITED WORKERS OF FERENKA



The meeting took place in the Savoy on Nov. 26th. The original proposals worked out during Nov. 15/16th had two new clauses:

- *1 Once work was resumed, the Marine Port and General Workers Union would be able to meet with the Company to discuss recognition and procedures.
- *2 Any matter arising out of the problem of Union recognition would be dealt with by Harold O'Sullivan of the ICTU.

These proposals were accepted by 418 to 13. In the meantime, Mr. Aidan Bunyan, a Conciliation Officer of the Labour Court, had meetings with the FERENKA Management and with O'Sullivan.

On Monday, Nov. 28th, the men who had been on strike returned to work. Many of them were, no doubt, thinking that they had achieved their aims. However, no attempt was made to restart production. Later on that day, Management sent word around the factory, telling the workers to go home and tune in to the 6.15 News on T.V. This was how the multinational AKZO told its 1,400 workers that they were now out of work.

The bourgeois Press went out of its way to blame the Unions for the closure of the plant. So did Councillors at a meeting of the Limerick Corporation which was held that night. Councillor Kiely called on the workers to "...pull up their socks...". Councillor Jack Burke of Fianna Fail said that he would have to lay the blame for the closure on the Unions.

The workers decided on an occupation of the factory and this commenced at 2.00 am on the 29th November. They were supported by Harold O'Sullivan. The workers involved were mainly from the MPGWA but there were some ITGWU and AUEW-TASS members as well.



Next day, Dr. Newman, the Bishop of Limerick, offered his services as an 'intermediary'. He issued a statement in which, among other things, he volunteered to tackle the multinational in its own den - the Netherlands. The implication was here that the workers should call off the occupation of the factory. The cue was taken by Ger South of the Limerick Trades Council who said:

"... They have made their point... to carry on with the sit-in now might divert the main issue and I advise them to leave the premises..."

The Press carried stories of attempts to get other multinationals interested in taking over the Annacotty factory. BAHART of Belgium and TOKYO WIRE of Japan were mentioned. It was hinted that if the workers called off their occupation it would pave the way for such a take-over.

Harold O'Sullivan changed his position and joined those urging the workers to call it off. Attempts were made to enlist support of Dutch Trade Unionists for the occupation, but the efforts were nullified by an ITGWU delegation, composed of officials of the Union who went to Holland... ostensibly to try to save FERENKA but who spent their time giving their version of events.

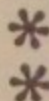
Finally, the leaders of the MPGWA came out in favour of calling off the occupation. On Dec. 2nd all FERENKA workers were called to a mass meeting in the plant. Mr. Ger South of the Limerick Trades Council told the gathering that the only hope of saving jobs lay in the outcome of a proposed meeting between Bishop Newman and Jack Lynch - the Taoiseach. The workers called off their occupation.

On Dec. 9th, Dr. Newman led his delegation to meet Lynch. Nothing came from the meeting. The final curtain had fallen on the FERENKA story.

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Babel

Book Reviews



100 Years of American Labor by Daniel Guerin
Published by Inklings, London, 1979, 252 pages £3.50
- first published by Maspero, Paris, in 1976 as ' Le Mouvement
Ouvrier aux Etats Unis de 1866 a nos jours '

"Society cannot tolerate work stoppages which endanger the
very existence of society " (p.209)
Victor Reuther , President of the UAW (auto workers Union)
denouncing the 1966 New York City transit strike.

Daniel Guerin's book is an attempt to get beyond the limits of the way the New Left has tended to deal with the apparently successful integration of the American working class into the capitalist system. The author's entry point is his own reading of Marcuse, according to whom the American working class can still become *subjectively revolutionary* - and so fulfill its objective historical mission - but only by being drawn into anti-capitalist struggles by the radicalised minorities. Criticising Marcuse for overestimating the role of such forces, Guerin rightly points instead to conflicts within "American Labor".

However, Guerin proceeds to do so through one-dimensional categories based on Marcuse's own moral notion of "...integration.." as the Fall of Man, the 'corruption' so to speak of some pure essence. The working class, Guerin would have us think, did not create itself out of pre-proletarian social life - rather, it, somehow, pre-existed and then was corrupted by capitalism. Even worse, in his patronisingly generous attempt to find some (literally) saving grace in the existing American working class, Guerin locates all historical possibilities within reform of the Trade Union apparatus. In so doing, he loses whatever subversive strands he could have drawn from Marcuse to help analyse how the class contests the rigid character of capitalist work-organisation. So, far from getting beyond the quandary of New Left ideology, Guerin ends up regressing behind it.

As against Marcuse's *homogenisation* of the American working class, Guerin rightly points out to the successive waves of immigrants who came to compose the class. However, Guerin projects onto them modern aspirations for acquiring "...all the material advantages of their precursors' full Americanisation..." (p.40). On the contrary, many later immigrants, especially those from southern and eastern Europe who came to comprise the unskilled industrial working class, were actually displaced peasants and artisans who originally saw their American residence as a temporary emergency. They struggled in ways better described as resistance to Americanisation, so as to preserve their communal social life which they'd brought with them. Guerin, miraculously, labels this ethnically fragmented pre-capitalist stratum "...a proletarian Tower of Babel ..", as he can see them only as an already formed working CLASS aspiring to the American Dream, albeit held back by national divisions.

In the case of the Knights of Labour (1870-80), "those forerunners of the Industrial Unions...", he lauds them for being "ahead of their time...", for organising unskilled workers, in contrast to the snobbish craft Unions. At the same time, he regrets that the organisation "...had not fully freed itself from a Utopianism which had been, at least initially, the characteristic feature of the workers, in the US as much as in Europe; the hope of escaping wage labor..." (p.55). Yet to portray that feature as a defect is to ignore what the organisation was about, in its daily practice - a mass resistance to proletarianisation by recently dispossessed farmers, artisans etc.

Guerin fails to tell us that the Knights' first principle was their refusal to sign contracts with employers - in other words, their refusal to recognise the wage-labour relation, to accept the existence of a separate class of wage-earners, the separation of the producers from their means of production. But what does that make the Knights? Ahead of their time? Forerunners of the CIO? Class conscious? We do not believe so.

Guerin sees only successive wave after wave of immigrant workers corrupted by "...the relatively privileged status which had earlier been won by sheer hard work by previous immigrants..." (p.41). The earlier waves became the labour aristocracy; the Craft Unions developed some official representatives, who in turn became, literally, "...capitalists", even more 'corrupted', it would seem, than their already-privileged membership. So, for Guerin, the leading edge of integration arises ultimately from differences in personal income and wealth.

It would, indeed, be important to ask how Trade Union leaders form part of the bourgeoisie, how the inherent responsibilities of Trade Union officialdom have led them to help organise the capitalist mode of production, to assist the regulation of labour power by exchange value. But that is not even what Guerin has attempted to do. Instead, he has given us a morality play.

To be sure, Guerin's political argument does rest upon a real enough historical distinction - between the AFL Craft Unions and the more recently organised CIO industrial Unions. But the distinction is made from the stand-point of petit-bourgeois moralism: "...the traditionally most reactionary sections of ...Labor.... from those which, in the relatively recent past, have shown themselves to be the most progressive and combative..." (p.48). The distinction is important for Guerin...he says that the latter strand "...though no less bureaucratized and integrated than the craft Unions....has even today not lost all its fighting spirit" (p.49). Let us follow his arguments:

AFL v CIO?

The bulk of Guerin's book can be seen as his attempt to fit the history of American Labor into his morality play. He is always looking for historical antecedents of the virtuous CIO Unions as opposed to the AFL craft Unions "...blinded by their selfishness and their stinginess..." From Guerin's account one would never imagine that people's aspirations had undergone any qualitative historical transformation; it would seem rather that all that changed was the ordinal magnitude of their consciousness on the one hand and of their integration on the other -- the two in inverse relation, of course.

Another act in Guerin's morality play is Eugene Debs' proposal for the two major Miners Unions to secede from the AFL and thus catalyze "...the forces of revolutionary Unionism". For Guerin, this means that "...Twenty years before its time Debs was launching the idea of the CIO" (p.84). Presumably what Debs had in mind was the extension of his own craft lines. Yet, again, this is out of historical context. Though Debs, as Guerin tells us, became a socialist while in prison (p.65), he, to tell us the evangelical character of that conversion and how Debs' socialism never abandoned his earlier vision of redemption and how Debs' workers' co-operatives (for which he privately solicited funding from John D. Rockefeller). The idea of the CIO?

Social-democratic Corporatism

Fortunately, try as he may to vindicate his models of good and evil, the actual historical material presented by Guerin belies any simplistic distinction between "progressive, combative" CIO Unions vs the AFL Unions which were "conservative, integrated". It is this material which provides the real value of Guerin's book for revolutionaries, though we wouldn't know it if we took his argument at face value.

For example, at one point Guerin lauds the male-garment workers Union for its break with the AFL in 1914, after which it became the ACWA, "a pole of attraction for all progressive trade unionists" (p.85). Guerin later refers to the President of the ACWA, Sidney Hillman, who, as President of the Mens Garment International took his industry "...through the experience of worker-employer planned economy..." and even aimed "...to transpose his experience to the national plane..." (p.93). What we are not told there and then is that Hillman got his opportunity with the New Deal. Of all the Trade Union officials on the War Labor Board, Hillman became "...the only one not to complain about the overtly small share given to the workers in the war-time economy..." (p.120). So, it's only after nearly 30 pages that the reader discovers that a true forerunner of the CIO turns out to be also the vanguard of integration, far beyond the narrow scope of the AFL's 'business unionism'.

The history of the 1955 AFL-CIO merger provides another intriguing example of how Guerin's simplistic categories break down. When the merged Union Federation united in support for the post-war Marshall Plan, for Guerin this meant that "...the CIO fell into line with the AFL's anti-communism..." (p.185). Yet, earlier, Guerin described the stages by which the CIO leadership (which, by the way, conducted the merger) had come to power precisely by purging all Communist Party members and sympathisers, culminating in the CIO's 1949 Convention. In other words, CIO support for the Marshall Plan (and all it meant for the European workers movement) well predated the merger -- indeed, it predated even the McCarthyite repression of the early 50s.

RACISM

On the question of racism, Guerin broaches the possibilities of the AFL-CIO merger in terms of whether the virtuous CIO would be corrupted by the venal AFL, or whether the CIO would uplift the AFL. While the distinction, one more time, may have a real enough historical basis, as with the UAW's lone endorsement of the 1963 Civil Rights March on Washington, Guerin tends to base his hopes on the "anti-racist President of the Autoworkers Walter Reuther..." again the theory is based on the assumption that the 'old labour aristocracy' of the Craft Unions became racist in order to protect their privileges. This theory would seem scarcely adequate to explain how, and why, in the early 1970s, the UAW

came to organise its shop stewards into vigilante squads to physically smash the revolt of the black autoworkers. But Guerin, one more time, deigns not to inform us of this inconvenient fact, and so spares us having to rethink the problem of Trade Union racism more broadly, in terms of how even (or especially) the ' progressive' Unions collude in managing an entire system of production.

To be fair, at one point Guerin does sense that historical reality doesn't quite fit his categories, but still he tries to portray the Corporatist aspects of the CIO's visionary Trade Unionism as defects rather than as substance:

" The social program worked out by Walter Reuther in opposition to the narrow routine of the craft unions naturally had reformist aspects to it. Reuther was not a revolutionary but a follower of European social - democracy. His vision was warped by the illusion of the general interest which was contradicted by the reality of the class struggle...."(p.222).

'Progressive' v 'Combative'

Guerin ultimately evades whatever contradictions his facile distinction cannot explain. At the risk of kicking a dead horse, we will belabour a few more examples from his final chapter, where he reaps the political harvest of the seeds he has sown.

Guerin describes Leonard Woodcock of the UAW as having shown "particular reserve" towards taking part as one of five Trade Union members on the Pay Board of Nixon's Phase I. On the contrary, the Trade Union participation was most actively sabotaged by the ' conservative ' George Meany - not ' in spite ' of his economism , but precisely because of it. Woodcock, on the other hand, was concerned far more consciously with the problem of governability and so showed particular reserve, as Guerin tells us, towards rupturing the social stability represented by the Pay Board. Guerin cannot explain this because he lacks totally any historical category which could explain social-democratic integration ...the more sophisticated role of social democrats in containing class struggle .

And what does Guerin make of the Teamsters Union President remaining on the Pay Board ? America's most notoriously violent Union, despite its industrial structure, has come to treat politics as a mutual backscratching exercise (e.g. giving ad hoc support to Nixon in return for Jimmy Hoffa's release on parole) - in the tradition of American craft Unions. For Guerin, however, the Teamsters become "...even more integrated than the others into the system and more tied than they were, if that was possible , to ' Tricky Dick '...." (p.229) . Guerin speaks as if institutional integration and ad hoc deals were nearly the same thing !!

How does Guerin treat reform movements within the Unions ? He laments that opposition caucuses have not "...so far made any real progress or succeeded in getting through the bureaucratic barriers which keep them in check. There is only one precarious exception: the triumph of the democratic rank-and-file opposition in the Miners International.." (p.248). Yes, Arnold Miller of the ' Miners for Democracy ' did win the UMW Presidency in December 1972 , but not - as Guerin states - at the Miners Congress (p.239) but in a special election called and enforced by Nixon's U.S. Department of Labour and at a time when Miller's truly corrupt predecessor Tony Boyle was losing control over the wildcatting

ranks. Because Miller is ' honest ' - which at most meant that the man refrained from embezzling Union funds - for the moralist Guerin this means that "...all is not rotten as one might think...".

Again here Guerin ignores Miller's insistence to substitute a legalistic grievance procedure for the right to strike..... Guerin says the acceptance of this contract by the bosses was a great victory for the Union....he doesn't tell us that the following year the very same bosses used that contract to smash a national wildcat strike with the help of Federal injunctions and Miller's complicity. So whose triumph was Miller's victory ? Were the ' Miners for Democracy ' an exception or an exception which proves the rule ?

Long live the CIO?

Let us get, finally, to the crux of the matter. Though dishonest Guerin is not MERELY so. He is, rather, falsely conscious. Accepting the limits of Trade Unionism as the limits of the class struggle, he needs to believe that the Trade Unions themselves can (at least in principle) embody the bourgeois-democratic aspirations he consistently projects to his ' American Labor' . In the revolt of younger militants Guerin can literally see nothing but "...the militant tradition of the 30s and the 40s being reborn..." pursuing "...a wish to democratise their organisation to the highest degree...."(p.243)

So, at a time when the class struggle is increasingly bursting the boundaries of trade unionism, when workers contest the capitalist organisation of work, the regulation of their labour power by exchange value, at a time when only careerists bother to stake their claim within the Union apparatus and militants (especially younger ones) refuse to take part in such bureaucratic formalities, Guerin criticises the Trade Unions not for how they mediate capitalist relations of production but for how they exclude members and other sections of the working class from access to their otherwise virtuous exercise in democracy. In other words, Guerin laments the militants' exclusion: "...young delegates are perhaps intimidated by the size of the gathering or the authoritarianism of the chairman..." (p.248). Pity ! No doubt capital, perhaps aided by the Left, will have to try to find a solution to that problem.

L. Levidow

Issue 14

The next issue of the journal will contain a reply to Derry Kelleher's article in issue 11 "Irish Republicanism, Socialism and Imperialism". We are also hoping to begin an analysis of the new working class in Ireland - those workers who have left the land and entered capital-intensive industries around the country. We would also be very interested to receive articles for possible publication in the journal.

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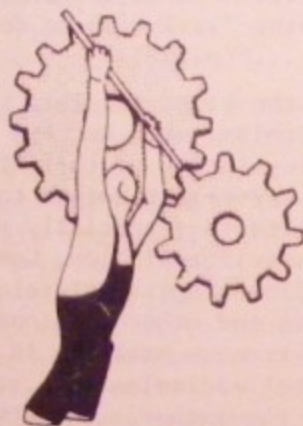
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('Factory' continued from inside front cover)

(vi)

The clock steals its way
(and the day)
Did today really happen ?
It was dark. It's dark now .
There go Lowry's worker - ants.
Chattering as they troop
Homewards through the gates
and as we leave , a certain
Pride walks within us
Which no clock could strip from us.
Trap ! Trap ! Trap ! Trap !

The above is an ' unofficial ' translation/interpretation of a poem called ' Monarchs ' by Michael O Siadhaill in his recent Irish collection called ' Runga ' which was published by ' An Clochomhar Ita ' Dublin 1980.



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