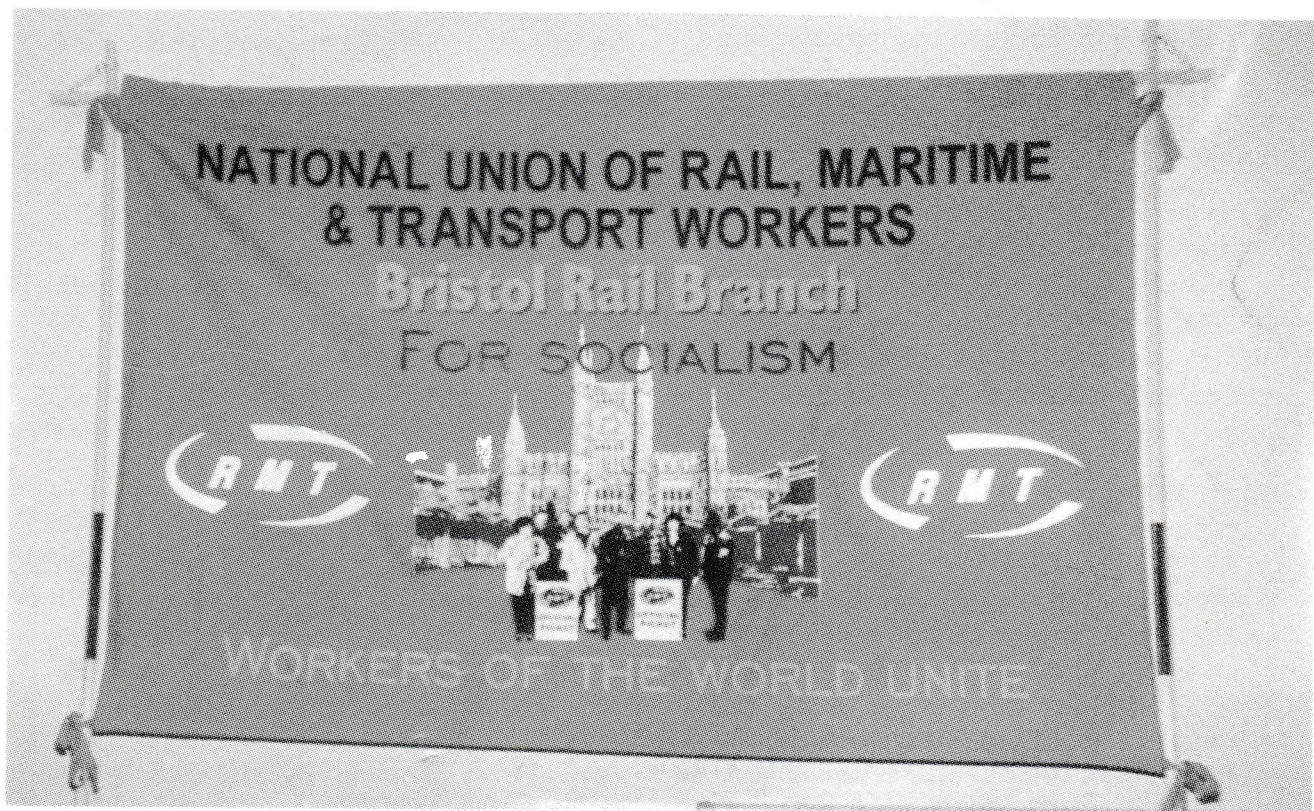


1st Issue June 98

£1

Red South West

RMT MEMBERS - STRIKING & WINNING IN 1998



In this issue

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| Slavery Old & New | A Union Victory |
| The Euro - Monopoly Money? | A Union Sell-Out |
| Views & Reviews | Poetry, Women & War |

This is the launch issue of a new left-wing journal for the South-West ...

Welcome to

Red South West,

written & produced by trades unionists, socialists, marxists, anarchists & environmental campaigners from Bristol, Bridgwater, Exeter & Plymouth. We aim to publish four times a year & intend:-

- to establish a readership of working class people across the South-West, interested in actively opposing all that Hague, Ashdown and Blair stand for.
- to set up an activists' network which will initiate radical campaigns, support disputes & campaigns started by others, & agitate among local working class people to fight for a better life.
- to provide space for all readers' comments, articles, reviews, cartoons, reports, poems of green/radical/left-wing interest.
- to promote genuine, democratic, open debate concerning differences of opinion, tactics, strategy for change, forms of action, history, philosophy that readers will want to take part in.
- to encourage & publish research into the unwritten history of working class people in the South-West.
- to link with other open & democratic journals & organisations in the UK & internationally

We have close links with Anti-Fascist Action (AFA) groups in Bristol & Devon & will work to strengthen South-West anti-racist networks.

This first issue of **Red South-West** is the result of co-operation between the "Somerset Socialist" (formerly Somerset Clarion), Exeter's *Red Rag* and the Bristol Marxist Forum. TV, radio, newspapers & conventional politicians throughout the world pro-

claim that Socialism is dead! Far from it - as we'll show! Left-wing radicalism is alive among workers & the oppressed throughout the world. This radicalism may be peasant or trade union based, red or green, marxist or anarchist, but it survives, & can & will fight back!

Red South-West, with your support, is here to stay, so please think about getting your organisation or trade union branch to order 5-10 copies of each issue. And get in touch yourself!

Contributions or subscriptions to:

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or
Exeter Left, c/o The Flying Post, PO Box 185,
Exeter, EX4 4EW

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Cook Campaign Newsletter

Manifesto of Syndicalist Alliance

What Is Anarcho-Syndicalism? - IWA

37-HOUR WEEK VICTORY FOR TRANSPORT WORKERS

Train guards & drivers employed by Wales & West Passenger Trains Ltd, members of the Rail Maritime & Transport Workers' Union recently took successful strike action over the implementation of a 37-hour week.

The two-hour reduction in the working week was agreed in 1996, but Wales & West then tried to link implementation to 'restructuring' (rail-speak for job losses & poorer conditions). When members rejected these proposals, the company tried to impose changes to the system of collecting fares on trains, to fund the 37-hour week.

A strike ballot gained a massive 80% "Yes" vote. Wales & West sought a High Court injunction, but the judge threw the case out, refused appeal, awarded the RMT costs of around £40,000, & the strikes went ahead on 19th December & 5th January!

Wales & West then suspended Bristol Rail Branch Secretary, Alex Gordon, for the crime of speaking to the press while on the picket line with his members! Railway employees are gagged from speaking in public about their work, as you'd expect in such a top-secret enterprise! This failed to break the strikers' morale & the RMT gave an ultimatum to re-instate Alex without pre-conditions, before negotiations could continue. At this point, Wales & West realised the strength of support for the strike, charges were dropped against Alex, & the company conceded defeat.

On Tuesday 13th January, under threat of a further two days' strike action, the company agreed to implement a 37-hour week without strings! A victory for strong union organisation, solidarity & strike action!

**...you have nothing
to lose ...**

This example must be repeated by RMT members throughout the privatised train companies, if jobs & services are to be defended against the dem&s of rail bosses seeking profits for shareholders above safety, job security etc. London Underground workers are preparing for industrial action against the Gov-

ernment's planned privatisation under cover of Private Finance Initiative. Banned by law from organising a "political" strike, they'll do it instead in protest at threatened changes to their conditions of service which privatisation will bring.

For thousands of rail workers, privatisation & "restructuring" has meant job losses, deteriorating conditions, increased workloads & greater stress. Travellers face increasing levels of unreliability, discomfort, lateness, cancellations & high prices, as well as having to continue to subsidise the private companies through taxes!

Investment by the new companies seems to be concentrated on painting their trains in pretty colours & dressing their staff up in daft uniforms, rather than improving a rail network chronically underfunded for the last 20 years. It's present absurdly fragmented state offers rich pickings for the fast buck makers, but will be the death of a safe & reliable transport system.

The only solution today, as in 1948, is an end to private ownership within the public transport system.

A Railworker in the South West

LIVERPOOL DOCKERS MAKE FINAL SETTLEMENT

Source: Jimmy Nolan, Liverpool Dockers

After 2 years and 4 months the Liverpool Dockworkers have decided to end their dispute following a recommendation from the shop stewards.

Over the past 4 weeks the shop stewards had been debating in what direction the dispute had been moving. The conclusions that we came to were, that in certain key areas, the campaign

had started to falter and that, in order not to see good men and women lose everything or risk a collapse from within, we decided to conclude a collective agreement on the best possible terms achievable.

We felt that following the last secret ballot, in October 1997 in which we gained 70% rejection of the employers offer, a springboard for greater supportive actions should have been launched. We saw this in terms of a political intervention from the new Labour government by the use of their 14% share holding that they have in the company and a far more positive role from our own union leadership in calling for an increase in both the national support through the TGWU industrial branches and international support via the ITF. That support never materialised - in fact both of these organisations decided to support the line of the Mersey Docks and Harbour co. in stating that the dispute was over.

This was also compounded by the fact that the two biggest container companies that use the port of Liverpool ACL and CAST had not been touched by industrial action for some time. We also suffered the sad loss of two of our stalwarts from the picket line who died over the Christmas and New Year period making a total of four

during the course of the dispute.

These elements, along with the extreme hardship that the men and women have had to endure over the past 28 months and the more hard line tactics of the police on the picket lines, were major factors in our decision to bring the



heroic struggle of the Liverpool dockers, their families and their supporters to some form of conclusion.

The terms of the settlement were based on up to £28,000 redundancy payment for all ex-Mersey Docks men. Approximately 80 of our dockers are excluded from this process and it is our intention to raise some financial package to ease the obvious debt burden that has accumulated over the last two and a half years. A number of jobs are on offer in the port and we continue to examine the practicability of this option. A joint approach will be made in relation to the pension entitlements of the majority of dockers. We have to recognise that work in Liverpool is a rare commodity and we expect that all our comrades will experience great difficulty over the next few years.

It is with a great sadness in our hearts that we write to all our magnificent supporters and express our deepest gratitude. We have to build upon our internationalism, upon the experiences of all our struggles, lest the words of a great Irish trade unionist capture our thoughts;

“Who is it speaks of defeat? I tell you a cause like ours is greater than defeat can know it. It is the power of powers.” - James Larkin

VICTOR SERGE - Geoff Barr (Exeter)

For an Age Without Heroes

Ed. Susan Weissman, The Ideas of Victor Serge: A Life as a Work of Art, Glasgow, Critique, 1997

Victor Serge was a remarkable man. During his life (1890 to 1947) the world was transformed by two world wars, the Russian Revolution, nuclear weapons, etc. and Serge was involved in the most significant actions.

He was born to Russian parents in Belgium. He came to prominence, first as an anarchist in France, then as a Bolshevik in Russia. Later he was a leader of the anti-Stalinist left in exile in Mexico.

He combined his role as a political organiser and pamphleteer with that of serious novelist and critic.

Until recently, Serge was known to a tiny group of highly literary leftists and very few others. For this he only had himself to blame. He was permanently unorthodox (perhaps fitting the well-known saying of Marx: "I wouldn't join any club that would have me as a member").

As an anarchist he upset many of his comrades by criticising the wilder illegal methods of French anarchism. Despite the hostility around his opinions Serge defended 'anarchy and did 5 years in gaol for his anarchist beliefs (pp. 121 - 7). He was part of a group who turned away from anarchism to support the Bolsheviks. Once a Bolshevik he never turned back and he advocated Marxism (that of Karl not Groucho) for the rest of his life. He also defended the Russian Revolution from then on.

Anarcho-Bolshevism?

As a Bolshevik, Serge also cut a rather odd figure. Philip Spencer uses the phrase 'libertarian Leninism' to sum-up Serge's unique variant on the ideas of Lenin. Spencer argues that Serge's defence of the Russian Revolution has been

justified by recent historians. It is a view that not only set him against the Stalinists but stood apart from Trotsky. Serge thought that the setting up of the secret police (the CHEKA) and giving this body the right to impose the death penalty was crucial in the decay of the revolution. The point, for Serge, was that the revolution was based on the model Lenin outlined in State and Revolution. This was Lenin at his most libertarian, at a time when the masses were at the high point of their revolutionary energy. The workers' energies soon subsided, while Lenin lost his enthusiasm for worker initiative.

Perhaps Spencer is right to mix Serge's words with his own to sum up Serge's implicit criticism of Trotsky:

On the one hand there were those 'who resisted totalitarianism in the name of the democratic ideas expressed at the beginning of the revolution:' on the other hand are those whose 'defence of doctrinal orthodoxy, while not excluding a certain tendency towards democracy, was authoritarian through and through.' The latter led in the end to a defence of a 'version of Leninism...clearly polluted with the vices of Bolshevism in its decay.'

Serge was one of the few oppositionists to escape Stalin's Russia. Could history have taken a different turn? Of course, we can never know. Perhaps Trotsky and Serge together could have led a far more potent movement than the one Trotsky actually headed. They fell out over a number of specific issues but more to the point over the whole way they approached things. As Trotsky tried to hold fast to a number of fundamentals

and fight them through to the bitter end, Serge wanted a more open and critical movement. For example, Trotsky had to defend the whole of the Bolshevik's position over the Kronstadt rebellion against Bolshevik power in 1921. Serge was more critical. He accepted that the regime had to be defended, but in a quite different way to that of Lenin and Trotsky. The sailors and their allies who rebelled against the regime were not for Serge fundamentally opposed to the revolution. They were not, in his view, tied to counter-revolution. They were sound but desperate and confused. Their rebellion was, sadly, vulnerable to being hijacked by counter-revolutionaries.

Thus Serge objected to two points: firstly that the Bolsheviks lied when they said that the sailors were acting for White (counter-revolutionary) generals. Secondly the Bolsheviks massacred the defeated of Kronstadt.

Suzie Weissman has put together a fine book. It gives a good starting point to any examination of Victor Serge. The first two pieces are written by his children. His daughter has produced a moving essay about an all too human parent who lived under inhuman pressures. If the first step to discovering Serge is to read this book, then the follow up is to read Serge himself. A taster is in this collection - the last essay is Serge's Thirty years after the Russian Revolution.

Suzie Weissman (who sometimes appears disguised as Susan Weissman) has combined putting it all together with writing her own piece on 'Serge on Stalinism'. This deals with Serge's post-war thinking. In many ways it shows why there could never be a Sergist movement. A man who is full of insight and ideas is likely to move in contradictory directions and to fail to sound the trumpets. Serge faced a problem that all of post-war anti-Stalinist left had to

face. Are we essentially anti-Stalinist or can we try to work with the Stalinists against the larger enemy - capital. Whichever way people turned they faced problems. It is a short step from being mainly anti-Stalinist to becoming a kind of tame 'State Department socialist' (note that George Orwell was willing to name British communists to the secret services). A step the other way and the anti-Stalinists become apologists for the Russian regime, as any true Spartacist could tell you.

Serge describes the Stalinist regime as totalitarian (as also Trotsky did in The Revolution Betrayed). Does it follow from this that it was essentially the same as Hitler's regime?

Weissman shows that Serge never quite answered questions like this.

A Socialist for Today?

In some ways Serge emerges as a man of a different age. He was facing Stalin the victorious leader and a Stalinist movement which hunted down and killed Trotskyists. The cold war was soon to start when Serge died. We live in a post-Stalinist age. The cold war has been fought and won.

And yet here is a man who insisted on a Marxism of real people not paper dogmas. He was a man who could communicate with Marxists and anarchists. He stood for party and truth rather than either one at the expense of the other. In many ways he stood where many Marxists would like to be now. His dogged determination to say it how he saw it marked him out as somebody whose time has now come.

This book is available at £10 from:

Critique
c/o Bob Arnot
Dept of Economics
Glasgow Caledonian
University
Glasgow G4 0BA

Welfare to Work - 'Gateway'

Gateway To What?

Workfare is what. It's part of the 'new deal' signing-on process, whereby new claimants who are homeless, who admit to having drug habits, or who lack 'basic skills' will be directed to agencies and organisations where their 'immediate needs' which 'prevent them getting a job' will be addressed.

Helping You Into A Job

By itself this sounds reasonable, but there's a sting in the tail as usual. The availability of such 'help' will depend wholly on there being appropriate organisations to hand and their willingness to sign up. Of course, they'll be helped by the present 'project funding' regime which guides the voluntary sector into those areas of policy the government has allotted to it.

Voluntary groups, who provide a real service to those who come to them, rely on trust and confidentiality. As 'partners' in 'New Squeal', they'll be liable to report on their clients' progress, compliance, etc, or lack of it. Unless they fall in with the system their financial backing is likely to 'wither away'.

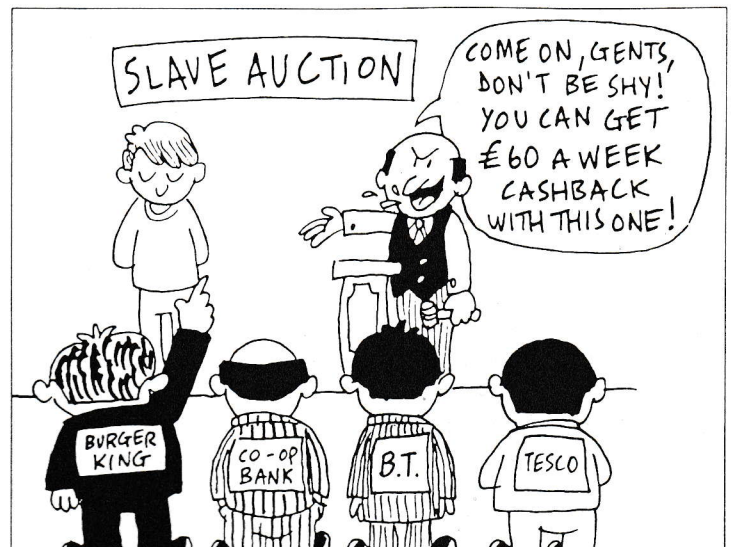
... Or Helping You Onto The Streets

The other side of this is the situation of those who may need support to sort out their problems. If they don't go along with Job Centre directives, they'll be presumably left to rot, only this time with no money. Whereas previously claimants could get 'Severe Hardship' benefit - 60% of their JSA - now they won't be entitled to this, because they're not following instructions.

Work Ethic?

Thinking about a suitable graphic for this, I was tempted to use the well-known photo of the gates of Auschwitz with its slogan "Arbeit Macht Frei", but this would be offensive to some people. However the underlying principle is the same. As Jeremy Hardy wrote in the Guardian, March 28: "I don't know whether the Nazis had a sincere roman-

tic belief that working people to death would purify them spiritually, or whether they were simply taking the piss."



The Labour movement's long history of involvement with work and related issues has left them with no answer to the question: "What's the point of it?" It has become a virtue in itself. The ills of society are now blamed, not on the lack of a decent living, but on the lack of a job. The aim of Ronald McReagan's war on the poor - continued unchanged by Bush and Clinton - was simple enough: if you blame welfare for the run-down economy, workers and bleeding-heart liberals will be neutralised when you force the unemployed into any kind of work.

It's Your Job They're After!

The real targets of this harassment, as opponents of workfare keep telling trade unionists and Labour supporters, are those in employment. Whatever soft soap government ministers may use, job-substitution is on the cards. Bosses will be able to sack workers who still have some rights and replace them with 'Welfare to Work' placements. It has already happened in North America that people have been fired and then given their old job back on workfare rates and conditions.

It can happen here!

Nigel Cook is one person who tried to act positively when given a place on one of these schemes - he tried to organise fellow workers in a union. Not only was he sacked, his benefit was cut "for disruptive behaviour". Don't say you haven't been warned.

Exeter Claimants

'Welfare is Workfare' - Checklist



1) 'Welfare to Work' is workfare - invented in the USA under Ronald Reagan as a more sophisticated system than the old schemes of the 1930s by which the unemployed were conscripted into forced-labour to render them safe and to stop them coming under the influence of agitators.

2) It's the same old lie that unemployment is caused by high wage-demands, lack of skills and dependence on welfare, rather than disinvestment, mass-redundancies and deskilling in existing industries to produce more profit for capital. It's blaming the victim for the crime.

3) Those who say "the unemployed should work for their benefit" has never been on the dole. The endless hassle to keep hold of the basic means to survive requires more patience and stamina than most of our critics with jobs are capable of.

4) "The unemployed don't contribute to the economy." This piece of folk-wisdom is deliberate stupidity. The unemployed still have to consume and thus keep other people in work. Not only that, people on benefits or low wages pay a higher proportion of their total income in

taxation than any other part of the population.

And all those bureaucrats who service and control the unemployed? Add them up: Job Centre, Benefits Agency, snoopers, police, social workers, prison warders, training-scheme staff, etc, etc.

One major component of the Job Seekers Allowance scheme was to make redundant thousands of DSS staff, who deal with unemployed claimants by a merger with the Employment Service. This is still underway and the more conscious civil servants were making common cause with anti-JSA groups before their union stitched them up.

5) The principal aim of all these measures (to use the word 'reform' is to abuse the English language) is to divide the population, to keep down wages, to prevent workers with jobs from ever allying themselves with those without. 'New Labour - the Party of Business' is following exactly the same line as the Tories before them, in the hope that they'll be allowed to stay in government by those who hold the power on the planet.

In case you think this last part is paranoia - within an hour of my writing it, the BBC was reporting how Tony Blair had been asking the Italian President if his friend Rupert Murdoch could take over the TV empire formerly owned by the fascist Silvio Berlusconi.

Exeter Environmental Network

is a new group which is open to ALL environmental and animal rights activists who want to act on local and national issues and keep up-to-date on campaigns in this region.

The principal target at the moment is genetically-engineered food. They have already leafleted in Exeter High Street and held demos outside Sainsbury's and Tesco's. They are also in touch with groups in other parts of the country.

Meetings fortnightly: Wednesdays at the *Exchange*, Mary Arches Street, Exeter.

To contact: Exeter Environmental Network, c/o The Flying Post, PO Box 185, Exeter EX4 4EW

Socialists oppose EMU

Few readers will need to be reminded that most socialists have opposed the Common Market & European Union (EU) for a host of reasons. This article deals mainly with aspects of the Maastricht Treaty & the stages of Economic & Monetary Union (EMU) leading to a single 'Euro' currency in 1999. To single out current EMU developments is not to ignore the considerable opposition to other features of the EU philosophy & institutions, not least the Common Agricultural Policy, imposition of Common Market-inspired Value Added Tax & the wide-ranging debate about loss of sovereignty, & recent developments which presage an inward-looking "racist fortress Europe".

There are differing views among socialists on concepts like sovereignty & "nation states", but there is general agreement that the EU is a capitalist bloc whose institutions operate to serve the interest of powerful multinationalist companies in their global search to maximise profits. The Rome Treaty (1957) left "the gate open" for powerful companies to achieve a dominant market position, in the hope they could then compete with American, & later Japanese, multinationals. Since then, globalisation has proceeded at an alarming pace. An increasing number of global industrial sectors are dominated by a handful of giant corporations. A recent report indicated that in 1995 just 200 companies had a turnover of 30% of world GNP. Of these 23 are based in Germany, 19 in France & 11 in Britain. Faced with the "globalisation challenge" the EMU is an attempt by the capitalist class to strengthen its trading base with a strong currency to "stand up to the dollar & the yen", & the foreign exchange reserves to resist international currency speculation.

EMU & MAASTRICHT TREATY CRITERIA

The Treaty demands that prospective members of EMU must meet five requirements - the "Convergence Criteria": 1) Annual Budget Deficits of no more than 3% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP); 2) Government debt no greater than 60% of GDP; 3) Inflation within 1.5% of the average of the three lowest inflation rates of candidate countries; 4) Long-term interest rates within 2% of the three candidates with lowest long-term rates; 5) An exchange rate within the normal (Euro) Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) bands for the preceding two years.

Once the above are met, there is an overriding requirement to control public expenditure on an ongoing basis, with sanctions against member countries who exceed prescribed borrowing limits. There is the further requirement that participants must produce balanced budgets in the medium term.

EUROPEAN UNION, THE MAASTRICHT TREATY, ECONOMIC & MONETARY UNION & THE SINGLE 'EURO' CURRENCY - Ron Thomas

Each member country must have an independent central bank linked to a Central European Bank which will control interest rates & related monetary policy.

Gordon Brown has boasted that the UK can meet the 3% budget deficit & government debt requirements, because of New Labour's 5-year plan to cut public expenditure to an annual real growth of 0.75%. But Brown was advised by Treasury officials that measures to meet the rest of the convergence criteria would require public expenditure cuts or tax increases of some £20 billion.

We are told that the UK is at or near the peak of its economic cycle, with short-term interest rates twice those of Germany & France. We are told that France & Germany are about to emerge from recession & that their economic cycles will converge with that of the UK - a good time to join, say EMU supporters. William Keegan, however, (Observer - 2.11.97) argues that "since 1981 there has been a negative correlation between UK & German growth rates. I fear UK & German convergence will amount to a meeting of two lifts moving in opposite directions."

After much fudging & creative accounting & under considerable political pressure the Euro Commission announced on 25th March that 11 European countries had achieved sufficient convergence to join EMU. The report of the European Monetary Institute warned that further substantial consolidation would be necessary.

It is generally agreed that the Blair government will join EMU when they can persuade Rupert Murdoch to withdraw his objections. It is also agreed that Blair is encouraging Murdoch's European media ambitions in the hope that he will drop his hostility to EMU & European institutions.

PUBLIC EXPENDITURE, WELFARE STATE, UNEMPLOYMENT

In essence the EMU package is a clear example of the militant monetarist policies we are all familiar with. The package demands immediate & continuing attacks on public expenditure & social welfare provision. Public expenditure & public borrowing are outlawed as some kind of vice, while private spending & borrowing are deemed a virtue. The package is clearly deflationary & likely to increase unemployment in the EU, where it already exceeds 20 million.

While there is a good deal of rhetoric about employment policies, it is clear that the philosophy of EMU will resist any demands to reduce unemployment. The emphasis is on "structural labour market reforms" - a euphemism for labour "flexibility", less state "interference" & weak trade unions. We should not be surprised that such a package emanates from a monetarist policy which insists on a pool of unemployment to avoid inflationary pressures - thus using the jobless as an economic weapon. The deflationary mechanisms in the package will be tightened as the meltdown in Asia imposes itself on the EU - Asia accounts for about 30% of Europe's out of region trade.

The US magazine *Business Week* (27.10.97) is in no doubt that this will mean massive cut-backs. EMU, it insists, will lead to merger mania: "In the next few years a handful of trans-European giants will emerge to dominate the financial services industry" - they will be offered rich pickings as governments cut back on pensions, public health care & other welfare benefits.

LURCH TOWARDS FEDERAL EUROPE

EMU & the handing over of control of interest rates, exchange rates & levels of public expenditure to an unelected Euro Central Bank & Commission must represent a major step towards a Federal Europe. EMU, it is argued, must lead to harmonisation of all other forms of taxation. The Commission has plans to harmonise taxes on capital & business. UK Corporation Tax, for example, is 8% below that of other EU members & is accused of fiscal dumping. Former Commission President Jacques Delors predicted that 80% of legislation would soon come from Brussels.

It is no secret that Chancellor Kohl dreams of European political union. But what kind of federal state will best serve the interests of European-based (and other) multinational corporations which increasingly have no national home? Will this federal state be any more able than single nation states to reconcile the challenges & constraints posed by the global economy & the expectations of the electorate? Will its institutions be able to deal with the conflicts within a capitalist class with different profit-maximisation interests? And will the inherent crises in this capitalist bloc generate the conditions for a socialist alternative arising from a Euro-wide class struggle?

EMU & the lurch towards a federal Europe will give further impetus to the creation of a world economy divided into 3 major trading blocs, with the subsequent possibility of trade wars & protectionism.

These possibilities are strengthened by the economic crisis in Asia & the resentment felt in certain Pacific rim countries towards the demands of the IMF & the response of Western capitalism in general to the crisis.

OPPOSITION TO EMU - STRIKES & DEMONSTRATIONS

Cuts in public expenditure, a consequential 5% cut in GDP & lengthening dose queues to meet the requirements of EMU led to strikes & demonstrations across Europe, bringing a change of government in France & a shorter working week for many French workers. In June of last year, a Euro March was organised on the demand for a genuine people's Europe & rejecting the single currency at the expense of working people.

The EMU-EU reminds us - if we need reminding - that attacks on workers' conditions by the capitalist class are not constrained by national boundaries or "nation states". In response, workers' struggle becomes European - indeed Global. A Marxist analysis refutes notions of workers' interests being linked to nation states, & reminds us that workers have no country. Workers' struggle on a European - indeed global - basis is a daunting prospect & challenge for many of us. It is the only response.

Ron Thomas - Bristol Marxist Forum & MSF

E G Y P T

LAND AND FREEDOM?

Police in Egypt detained dozens of tenant farmers without trial. They reportedly used flogging, starvation and torture to force them to sign over to landlords land which in some cases they have fanned for decades. Similar incidents this year, in which farmers fought back against eviction, have resulted in 27 deaths, some 200 injuries, and about one thousand arrests.

Farmers are resisting implementation of a 1992 law under which, starting this October, land values and rents frozen since the land reform laws of the 1950s and early 1960s are now subject only to market forces. Rents are expected to treble over the next few years, from an average 850 L.E (about £170 sterling) per feddan, to 2500 L.E, or £500. Annual profit on the most profitable crops is about £600 sterling per feddan.

The new situation affects an estimated three-quarters of a million families, living on one million feddans - about one-sixth of Egypt's total agricultural land. Those who cannot afford the new rents will become day labourers at the equivalent of 1 or 2 a day, or join the drift of the unemployed to the cities. Some, one newly evicted farmer predicts, will turn to robbery to survive. "The crime rate will increase."

National agricultural income is expected to rise by one-fifth over the next five years, as landowners use the recovered land to grow fruit and vegetables for export, rather than the staples of wheat, rice, maize and cotton for which ninety-five per cent of farmland is currently used. Wealth will, however, be concentrated in fewer hands. "The tenants' revolt will certainly happen", she says. As elderly villagers, who remember the bad old days of feudalism before the 1950s land reforms, insist:

Farmers' petitions to the Ministry of the Interior over the past five weeks have been totally ignored, while security forces under the Ministry's control have evidently been given free rein in the countryside. Peasants in some areas complain they are caught between the terrorism of local Islamic groups, who support the rent increases, and that of the police. The Land Centre for Human Rights, which is currently pursuing 24 cases of alleged illegal seizure of land on behalf of tenant farmers, has repeatedly called for compensation for farmers: re-settlement on new land, job training or cash. These demands, too, have been ignored.

The government seems unperturbed about likely social consequences of the continuing evictions. 'Y am sure that landlords and tenants will remain on good terms', Essam Radi, president of the People's Assembly agricultural committee, was quoted as saying, in a recent interview in the government-controlled press. 'If there are problems', Radi adds, "It's the tenants who are to blame for opposing the enforcement of the law." This same press reports that the countryside is now quiet - that the wave of evictions, and resistance to them, is over. All but one of 97 political activists detained for protesting the evictions have been released. However, veteran activist Shahinda Maklad, a leading member of the left-wing Tagammu Party, is convinced that the battle for the Egyptian countryside is only beginning.

whatever the outcome may be for the embattled tenant farmer, it's not over yet.

Letters of Support: Land Centre for Human Rights, c/o Al-Ahaly, 23 Abdel Khalek Tharwat Street, Cairo, Egypt. (Fax: 00-202-3900412)

Report from: Dr. Margaret Jones. (I am an independent activist, affiliated to no group or political party.)

THE LIFE & TIMES OF A REVOLUTIONARY

A Lifelong Apprenticeship
Volume 1 (1920-1959)
by Bill Hunter

A political autobiography with a difference. Born into the Durham working class six years before the General Strike. Bill Hunter has stayed loyal to his class & dedicated his adult life to the fight for the independence of the working class against capitalism & against capitalism's apologists in the Labour Party & Communist Party.

A Trotskyist from the age of 18, factory shop steward at 21 & borough councillor at 32. Bill has taken some hard knocks - including bureaucratic expulsion from the Labour Party in 1945. He recalls those battles with humour, anecdote & documentary evidence.

The pages are crowded with Trotskyist & working class fighters of the period: Harry Wicks, Hugo Dewar, Reg Groves, Gerry Healey, Ted Grant & John Lawrence, & dockers' champion Harry Constable. There is an affectionate portrait of Bill's lifelong companion Rae. The book's heroes are the rank & file dockers, engineering workers & miners in whose struggles Bill played a part, either directly as a shop steward or as editor of Socialist Outlook, 1948-54.

"They Knew Why They Fought" still available at £5 plus £1 p&p from same address

This is a major contribution to understanding the development of Trotskyism in Britain. It is Bill's second book, following his account of the dockers' historic struggle in the Blue Union: "They Knew Why They Fought".

It shows Bill Hunter's part in the struggles of the Fourth International against capitalism & Stalinism, & includes an inside account of the Trotskyists' response to the 1956-57 crisis in the Communist Party. It ends with the launching of the Socialist Labour League in 1959.

Bill is now working on a second volume, covering the years since 1959.

450pp. £15.00 plus £2.50 p&p

Available from: Living History Library, PO Box 9, Eccles, Salford M30 7FX. (Cheques payable to "Living History Library")

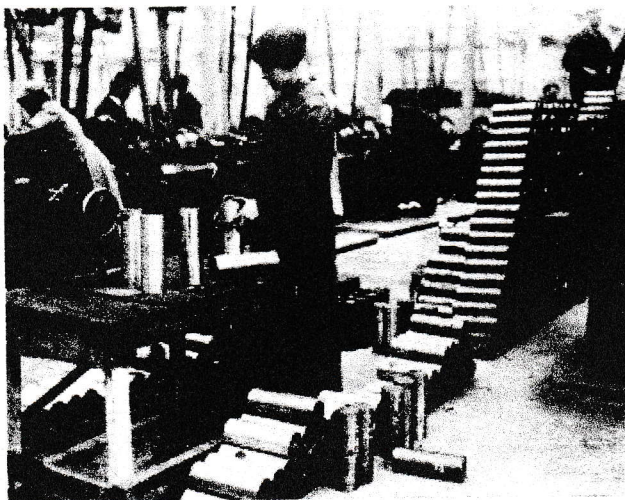
BRISTOL MARXIST FORUM

Bristol's only open socialist discussion group. Meets monthly in the Miners' Arms, St Werburg's, to chew over issues chosen by the group. For details of how to get on the mailing list contact Jeremy Clarke 01179 423435.

TWO REVIEWS - ONE BOOK

WAR, WOMEN, AND POETRY 1914-1945

Joan Montgomery Byles. Published by Associated University Presses. £25.00



Betrayal! About one hundred years ago the Second Workers International was founded. Among its key principles was "the condemnation of colonialism and war", as pointed out by Roger Morgan, who recorded dryly: "All the main socialist parties of Europe (in 1914) found good reason to support their national governments in moments of crisis." An appalling failure in international co-operation when most needed.

I am reminded of this example of betrayal from reading Joan Montgomery Byles' *War, Women and Poetry 1914-1945*, covering a period when betrayal occurred at many levels. The study embraces literary, historical, sociological and militaristic aspects. "I take a humanist rather than a strictly feminist view of these issues" she writes in her forward. As I read it her humanism is subsumed by her feminism - at its most rational.

She writes of the division among suffragists in their attitude to the 1914 war. Many of them, writes Byles, "transferred their military tactic from winning emancipation to winning the war". Thus Christabel and Emmaline Pankhurst be-

came ultra jingoistic; not so Emmaline's older daughter, Sylvia, who was unswervingly against war.

Joan Byles highlights the contributions by two particular pacifists - Olive Schreiner in the First World War and Vera Brittain in the Second. "War" wrote Olive Schreiner "will pass when intellectual culture and activity have made possible to the female an equal share in the control and governance of modern national life."

An army nurse in the Great War, Vera Brittain used her experience, energy and literary skill in promoting the pacifist cause, urging individuals not to fight, prompting thousands of us in the 1930s to join the Peace Pledge Union.

In protest against war, in the spring of 1915 the Women's International Conference was held in the Hague. Despite being rubbished by the press there was a significant outcome of the Hague congress. It led to the formation of the Women's international league for Peace and Freedom which happily still survives. The body's first congress after the war, in Zurich 1919, produced an overwhelming indictment of the Versailles Treaty. It would, said the congress "create all over Europe discords and animosities which can only lead to future wars". Prophecy both inspired and horrific.

Stan Hayward **Nailsea, Somerset**

Until I read this book I thought there were few women war poets. Vera Brittain, perhaps, and Edith Sitwell, whose poem "Still Falls the Rain" spoke for all of us who experienced the nightly deluge of the 1940 raids on London. My pacifist father guided me through pre 1939 war poetry. He, like Siegfried Sassoon, was "a man rerieved to go"... "the haunted gap in your mind has filled with thoughts that flow/Like clouds in the lit heaven of life; ...". The poems were written by men who had also known the horrors and pity of the trenches.

The first anthology of women's poetry of the First World War "Scars Upon My Heart" edited by Catherine Reilly was published in 1981. She rescued the work of seventy-two women from near oblivion. It had been felt that experience of war had cut men off from women. However, many felt guilt at staying at home while nurses and ambulance drivers did experience the effects of war at first hand. Like several others Mary Henderson, an army nurse emphasised the reality of pain endured "...both his brave shell-shattered hands/His boy hands, wounded more pitifully Than Thine, O Christ, on Calvary." Conversely, some jingoistic verse written by women appeared regularly in newspapers, portraying war as a glorious game.

Women in Germany and Britain were given the vote after the war. Ms Byles poses the question what did they do with this new power? The insidious onset of fascism in Germany meant that protest of any kind by women was suppressed, usually cruelly. Although there were numerous women's peace groups here they never co-operated effectively. It was felt that to overcome the evils of Nazism the horror of war had to be endured and participated in.

"Chaos of the Night" also by Catherine Reilly is an anthology of 137 poems by 87 women written between 1939 and 1945. Women's experience was as wide as men's in this war. The poems are varied, sometimes describing the destructiveness of war and sometimes personal loss. There is more focus on children. They were the most pitiful victims, suffering evacuation, separation, bombing, the misery of being refugees or in the concentration camps, not to mention the enduring guilt of being a survivor.

Pamela Holmes spoke for those who would never know their fathers in *War Baby*. "He has not even seen you, he who gave you your mortality. And you, so small ho??? His courage or his loveliness???"

She spoke for my sadness, too that my son has no memory of his father, who died three years after returning from the Far East War Zone.

Ms Byles has written a moving history of tragic events in our century. Her obvious painstaking research has been immense. It is expensive but please ask your library to stock it - it deserves to be widely read. "All poets can do is warn; it is up to the rest of us to heed them.

Joan Eggmore

Notes on reviewers

Stan Hayward was a conscientious objector and from 1940 worked in Peace Service Units. Joan Eggmore's registration as a conscientious objector was ignored and she continued her training as a nurse in Paddington Hospital from 1942.

NO MORE ENSLAVEMENT

TO THE PAVEMENT

Hey, you, start jay-walking.
 Step out - let your body do the talking.
 Stop the traffic - look them straight in the face.
 Stake your life to take back the space.
 You're the one with amazing grace.
 So why should some lump of metal set the pace?
 Make them slow.
 Let them know
 You've got out the habit
 Of being a scared rabbit.

You should step back - instead you stay put.
 You could let it pass & forget about it -but
 You've given already - given all you're gonna give.
 Their right of way versus your right to live.

Other people freeze, you breeze across.
 You make it look easy cos you don't give a toss.
 Seize the moment, it's an act of pure will.
 "If you're in such a hurry, yeah, go on then kill me."
 They've got Vorsprung Durch Technique
 - what you've got is a stubborn streak.
 They've got the wheels, but you've got will-power
 When push comes to shove in the rush hour.
 You used to cower, now you just stare.
 "Slow down pal, you ain't going nowhere."

MICK PARKIN

A PERMANENT REMINDER OF BRISTOL'S PAST

A plaque has recently been unveiled on Bristol Docks to mark the city's involvement in slavery.

It is situated on the outside of the Bristol Industrial Museum in Wapping Road and carries the inscription "In Memory of the Countless African Men, Women and Children whose enslavement and exploitation brought so much prosperity to Bristol through the African Slave Trade".



The unveiling ceremony was conducted by Mr White, Labour MEP for Bristol, and Philippa Gregory, author of "A Respectable Trade", whose novel has just been serialised on the BBC. Dr Gregory was educated in Bristol and wrote the book based on Bristol's crucial place in the Triangular Trade.

Mr White launched the activities for "European Year Against Racism" January 1997 with a discussion on slavery at the Georgian House, the home of a black slave Pero. He then ended the year by providing the plaque as a permanent reminder of that past. Dr Gregory is due to return to Bristol to give the Annual Jessie Stephen Memorial Lecture on the theme of slavery.

Attending the unveiling ceremony were leading actors from the series, as well as local historians and activists who have worked throughout the year to establish an exhibition on slavery at Bristol's Georgian House and a Slavery Trail highlighting many local buildings connected with the trade.

Said Mr White: "As someone who was born and bred in Bristol, I am unsure when I first learned about Bristol's past.

Erecting such a permanent reminder will ensure that anyone visiting Bristol, as well as those who live here, will know how the City's prosperity was achieved. I am pleased to erect this plaque during European Year against Racism in the knowledge that its message will last much longer."

Dr Gregory added: "Being born in Africa but attending a school in Bristol, the founder of which drew his fortune from slavery, provided the original inspiration of the novel "A Respectable Trade". The history of slavery has been well researched except for the almost-secret history of black domestic slaves in England. I wanted to write about the black slavery culture in Britain, and I wanted to write a fiction about a Bristol slave trader which described his business and his life in a way which was fair and non-judgemental. The horrors of the slave trade speak for themselves."

After the unveiling, those attending the ceremony moved inside the Industrial Museum to view the exhibition which forms part of the City Docks display on the first floor where they had the opportunity to meet Mr White, Dr Gregory and the actors.