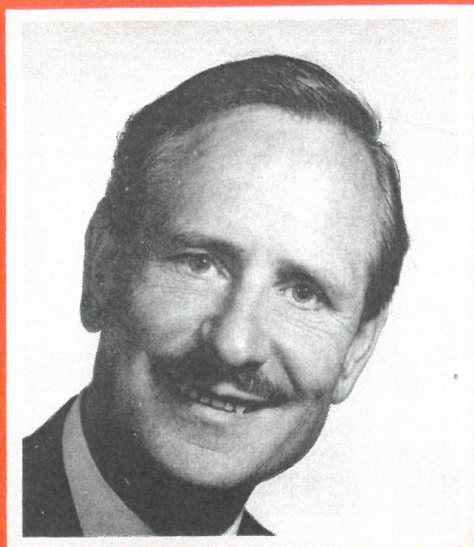


THE FIGHT AGAINST UNEMPLOYMENT



by
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THE FIGHT AGAINST UNEMPLOYMENT

*“Work, boys, work and be contented,
As long as you’ve enough to buy a meal;
For if you will but try, you’ll be wealthy by and by,
If you’ll only put your shoulders to the wheel.”*

— Music-hall song, about 1910.

*“‘Oh, why don’t you work like other men do?’
‘How the hell can I work when there’s no work to do?’”*

— International Wobblies’ Song, USA, 1930s.

One of the disastrous results for the working class of the international concentration and centralisation of finance capital, is growing unemployment due to mergers and closures of industries; also the various countries’ capitalist governments’ efforts to solve their economic problems by financial manoeuvres and other economic protectionist policies against foreign competition. This means that the burdens are increasingly put on the backs of the working class. Unemployment and attacks upon wages are the means the employers and their governments use to do this.

Mass unemployment has fluctuated widely over the years. The number of workers denied the right to work in 1920 was 691,103, but within a few months, by March 1921, this number had increased to 2,171,288. The numbers of unemployed workers varied during subsequent years, but by 1933 they had reached dramatic proportions. *British Labour Statistics*, published by the Department of Employment and Productivity, gives the registered numbers of unemployed workers in the United Kingdom as follows:

January	1923	—	1,460,400
December	1928	—	1,565,300
December	1930	—	2,725,000
September	1931	—	2,897,000
January	—1933	—	2,979,400

In 1966, the number of unemployed was 330,000, but after the Labour Government's wage-freeze policy, the number went up to 600,000, and remained at that level until 1970. Since then, it has risen under the Tory Government, and it was correctly forecast by many trade union leaders that the numbers of their members denied the right to work would reach a million by the end of 1971.

The number of workers declared redundant through mergers and closures totalled 80,000 from about 200 companies in the first six months of 1971, under the Tories. In a single example of "rationalisation", a company declaring profits of £36 million (20% increase on the previous year) has made 33,572 workers redundant since 1968. The company? Weinstock's giant GEC-EE-AEI combine.

Not all redundancies are on such large scale, but they are all equally hard-hitting to the workers concerned. A BBC Television programme, *Conflict in Industry* (18th November 1971), revealed that a redundancy agreement concerning 400 workers at Delta Metal, Birmingham, was signed by the district union officials two years before the redundancies were due to take place. Yet the workers whose "painless sacking" had been agreed upon so long before, were shocked when they were told of the decision at the time of the closure. Why were they not consulted in the first place? Does redundancy pay make such a predicament any easier to bear? Of course it does not, especially to workers who have given forty or more years of their life to producing wealth for their employer.

Some of the redundant employees who are finding themselves on the streets quite unexpectedly, should take this opportunity of taking stock of themselves, and deciding where their interests lie. These are the executives and managers who, after years of allying themselves with the owner against the workers, suddenly find that their situation is no more secure than that of any other worker who barter his labour for cash. The Professional and Executive Register — a department of the employment exchange — is suddenly full of discarded executives looking for new jobs, whereas its main task until now has been in searching for better opportunities for executive climbers. Perhaps this boom in business is the reason why the Government is considering charging for the Professional and Executive service. Be that as it may, executives feeling the pinch of unemployment could do with bearing in mind that defending the owners' interests loyally carries little weight in the last analysis. The manager who works for a salary had much better throw in his lot with the wage-earner, since both are equally likely to suffer in the crisis of capitalism. The identity of interest which the executive is encouraged to recognise with his capitalist employer is largely illusory, and benefits no-one but the employer.

Also turning to the Professional and Executive Register for jobs are the thousands of graduates who are unable to find work, six months or more after leaving university. Estimates of unemployed graduates at Christmas 1971 — those who have had no job at all since graduating in June — varied between five and ten thousand. Mr. Neil Chrichton-Miller, managing director of the Graduate Appointments Register, has made the point that, with 70,000 executives out of work, it is hardly to be expected that newcomers will walk straight into a job:

“In other words, when an employer is laying off the father, he doesn't recruit the son.”

A university degree is no longer a passport to the good things in life, and “graduate today-tycoon tomorrow” no longer holds good. It must be recognised by both graduates and manual workers that their interests both in and out of employment are the same, since both are mere pawns in the capitalist system. This becomes clear, when it is considered that:

- the number of graduates in 1971 increased by 6% over the previous year, while the demand for their services (according to the Confederation of British Industry) fell by 15 — 20%
- unemployment throughout the country rose to about one million during 1971, while the Treasury boasted a 6¼% rise in productivity in industry in the same period.

Productivity is increasing, but the number of workers required in the process of production is falling, and the workers who are surplus to requirements include “workers by brain” as well as “workers by hand”.

Of course, the “workers by brain” are supposed to have nothing to worry about. They have at least been trained to work, and ought to be grateful to society for their education, even when there is no work to do when the training is finished. This “training for unemployment”, having succeeded in producing ten thousand unwanted graduates is now being applied to prospective manual workers also.

The Engineering Industry Training Board, for example, finding that applications for off-the-job training courses fell by about 5,000 in 1971 (from 26,000 a year), has decided to offer a year's full-time course to 2,500 school-leavers who have been unable to get apprenticeships and are unemployed. This training course, which would normally be part of a young worker's apprenticeship to a company, will count towards the normal period of apprenticeship when a company can be found to employ a new apprentice; but no guarantee is offered by the EITB that entrants to the course will find jobs at the end of it — and indeed plans are under

consideration for a further period of training if job opportunities are not forthcoming.

One area where the "employment business" is booming is the area which provides secretarial and typing jobs — the employment agencies. The bosses of the agencies attribute their £4 million profit in 1970 to their sheer professionalism in finding the right job for the right person, and to the congenial surroundings and convenient siting of their branches. In short, a "better service" than state employment exchanges can offer.

And where does the £4 million come from? The office workers get a "free" service; the employer pays, on average, two weeks' pay when the agency fills a vacancy. And where does the employer get it from? Ultimately, of course, out of the pocket of his new recruit, who is happy in the thought that the agency had expanded nothing.

As long ago as 1933 the International Labour Organisation called for these agencies to be banned, yet in recent years their business has rocketed. Clive Jenkins, speaking at the Labour Party Conference in 1971, quoted the 1969 profits of Brook Street Bureau alone as being £632,000; the Alfred Marks agency had expanded by 7,783% in nine years, he said!

We already pay for a state service to provide job information for those who need it. Yet an increasing number of office workers go to a private bureau rather than the employment exchange. In this way, the workers pay twice for a service which ought to be providing solely by the state — and in doing so, they line the pockets of a few exploiters. Tempting advertisements encourage frequent changing of jobs, and the agencies presumably thrive on dissatisfied customers. And advertising costs are all in the price of the "service", of course.

We can do without these employment sharks. They offer no service which cannot be provided more efficiently and economically by the state exchanges, although there is room for improvement both in the service and the environment in which it is offered. The conditions prevalent in employment exchanges are far from adequate; unemployment is depressing in itself, without the added misery of prison-like conditions and an almost complete lack of privacy. The "Professional and Executive" departments boast a much higher degree of comfort, privacy and attention, and there is no reason why equally good service should not be offered universally.

A large number of school-leavers are now becoming acquainted with employment exchanges, gaining firsthand experience of

unemployment before they have had the opportunity of working. Straight from school to unemployment. Every year, thousands of teenagers come onto the job-market, and swell the figures of registered unemployed, until they are absorbed into the system. However much the Department of Employment try to disguise the fact, the process of absorption is taking longer each year. Two entries from a Government gazette illustrate how the job-prospects for young people are worsening — and how the Government attempts to brush the facts under the carpet:

Employment and Productivity Gazette — October 1970

“Between August and September, the number of school-leavers registered as unemployed fell . . . to 20,696. . .”

Department of Employment Gazette — October 1971

“Between August and September, the number of school-leavers registered as unemployed fell . . . to 34,733. . .”

Fell? From 20,696 to 34,733? There is generally a month-by-month improvement in the figures of unemployed school-leavers, following the end-of-term bulge in the summer; but the figures issued by the Government indicate a 75% worsening of the situation between 1970 and 1971.

“Hundreds of thousands of extra families suffering the hardship and insecurity of unemployment. Increasing problems of poverty and homelessness. Pensioners helpless as they watch the extra shillings eaten up by the fastest price rise for twenty years. Housewives struggling to make ends meet.”

So read the Tory Party Manifesto of 1970. And Ted Heath has made it all come true!

What is the Tory answer to unemployment? We must, apparently, count our blessings. The Newcastle-upon-Tyne Evening Chronicle finds this advice a bit hard to swallow:

“Homilies such as that addressed to the unemployed of Wearside by the Under-Secretary of State for Employment yesterday are more likely to anger than to inspire. At the very least they suggest a dangerous complacency.

An unemployed rate of 9%, said Mr. Dudley Smith, is “obviously too high”. So obvious, one would have thought, as not to merit the breath wasted on saying it when what is needed is action.

But then, it appears, Mr. Smith thinks we should remember that 90% are *not* unemployed. Clearly we should be as grateful for that as for the fact that 50,000,000 people are neither killed on the roads every year, nor end up in jail.”

(17.9.71)

But let us not imagine that this is the full extent of the Government's concern for the unemployed. The Minister of Employment announced in September 1971 new measures for the re-training of Britain's unemployed workers, who at that time totalled nearly a million. Government training centres, said Mr. Carr, already provide 10,600 training places, and he planned to increase this to 14,000 "as soon as possible".

If each training course lasted six months, it would — at a generous estimate — take 35 years to train all the people who were unemployed when Mr. Carr made his offer. Not that they could be guaranteed jobs after training, of course. And, to be honest, it would not be in the interests of the employers if jobs could be found. This was disclosed with undisguised honesty by the monthly publication of the banking world, *The Banker*, which declared that "more demand, faster growth and *less unemployment* would surely intensify the militant union pressure for an ever-growing share of wages in the national income".

National governments after the 1939/45 war took the responsibility for creating conditions of "full employment". This was later changed in government statements to read "a high and stable level of employment". Now governments go back to pre-war days of mass joblessness, with "control of the level of unemployment".

D.N. Pritt, in his book *The Labour Government 1945 – 1951*, outlined the "crisis" situation under Stafford Cripps in 1947; the balance of payments problem, a high level of overseas expenditure, and the arms bill, brought the crisis to a head, and the Government attempted a wage-freeze. The General Council of the TUC was asked to "consider the possibility of securing 'greater stability' of wages, and it agreed to do so." Pritt continues:

"A few days later, on 23rd October, 1947, in the House of Commons, Cripps reviewed the whole economic position. He painted, correctly enough, a glossy picture of our economic position, stating once again that the root of all our troubles lay in the overseas balance of payments, and in particular in the dollar balance. He made no mention of the true cause of the lack of balance, nor any suggestion for easing it by reducing our military expenditure either at home or abroad; and he preached the orthodox Tory remedy of curing the problem by importing less, consuming less, and exporting more."

The problem about this solution was, in the words of Cripps, that "there may well be a growing tendency for all nations to restrict imports and to attempt to force their exports." Two of his measures for combating the crisis were:

- cutting capital construction and equipment by two hundred million pounds a year.

- reducing the purchasing power of the people by a wage-freeze, the removal of some subsidies, and more indirect taxation.

Write “Harold Wilson” for “Stafford Cripps”, and “1967” for “1947”, and the picture is still the old one of squeezing the workers to pay for the deficiencies of capitalism.

The game’s the same – only the names change!

Reducing the purchasing power of the people, cutting capital construction, wage-freezing, putting on the selective employment tax – every little helps in the battle to increase unemployment to the level where capitalism can refloat itself. Capitalism needs unemployment – but sometimes it is needed more than others.

Cripps obviously considered that his job was to make capitalism work more efficiently; this was Harold Wilson’s plan, too, as it is clearly Edward Heath’s. The fact that this must be done at the expense of the working class is a minor consideration – the balance of payments is infinitely more important.

This capitalist orthodoxy is apparently also the philosophy of Roy Jenkins, Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, whose speech on unemployment at the 1971 Conference was littered with references to the fine balance of payments surplus which the Labour Government built up during its 1966/70 period of office. This surplus was to have been used, he said, “as a springboard for sustained and rapid growth”, industrial expansion, and ultimately “more jobs and greater prosperity”. In fact, another great and glorious never-had-it-so-good capitalist boom.

Talking of future Labour Party policy, Roy Jenkins declared that, while nobody wanted a return to the past, we must have

“a solution freely agreed and compatible, of course, with collective bargaining which will not merely be a form of words to get us over the next General Election, but which will stand up to the pressures of office.”

This, coupled with a later comment that “uncontrolled economies subject to no social disciplines have never succeeded in producing tolerable material standards for a whole nation”, forewarns a return to prices-and-incomes policies under a new labour Government, and no more effective handling of our economic situation than we have seen under previous Labour administrations. We cannot afford to permit the Labour Party to prop up capitalism any longer, at the expense of our livelihood. The Labour Party must be a socialist party, committed to socialist policies, and we must see that it becomes so, through the efforts of its rank and file members.

All the old “policies” to deal with unemployment have failed; not once, but time and time again; not only under Labour Governments, but under Tory ones, too (and who could be expected to administer Tory remedies with better success than the Tories themselves?). What then can be done?

NEW FORMS OF STRUGGLE – OCCUPATION

All the workers involved must take part in discussions on the meaning of the occupation and the methods to be used, and on the theory and practice of workers’ control. A carefully-planned and united occupation, backed up by strong support from workers not directly involved, was successful in America in the 1930s, and can be successful again.

From December 30th 1936 to February 11th 1937, workers at two General Motors Fisher Body plants protested against low wage levels and production speed-ups – carried on in spite of massive profits being made by the workers for the company – by occupying the two factories.

In addition to taking precautions against attack, such as building barricades and preparing stockpiles of car-parts to use as weapons, the workpeople elected committees to deal with the planning of the strike, defence of the plants, food, health, education and recreation; a shift-system ensured that the plant was manned at all times; a union paper began to be published, and union membership, which had fallen during the ‘thirties when workers saw their interests being sold out by union leaders, began to grow again.

Outside the occupied plants, financial support was forthcoming from all over America, and physical support was organised in the form of the workers’ wives, who formed an Emergency Brigade, to protect their husbands against attack by the National Guard. In spite of increasing the National Guard, utilising the police force (fully-armed with gas bombs, grenades and revolvers), and attempting to break the occupation by issuing an injunction in the law courts, the employers, the State Governor and the state administration failed to smash the unity of the General Motors workers. Armed attacks were met and repulsed, both by the workers within the plants and by the tens of thousands of their supporters who had come from other areas. The attack through the law courts was called off when it was disclosed that the judge had a financial interest in General Motors.

On February 11th 1937, the company signed an agreement, recognising the United Auto Workers as sole bargaining agent for the workers, and this success snowballed, as more occupations

throughout the country brought wage-increases and improvements in conditions for many thousands of employees.

In the same year, 1937, a Royal Navy torpedo factory was established at Alexandria, in Scotland. After many years of competition with private companies, the Alexandria plant was fitted out with costly machinery for the purpose of building a new type of torpedo. Unfortunately, after ten years' and £50 million in research, the Navy decided that the torpedo did not work, and would take too long to redesign. It was the Labour Government, in 1969, which decided to make a clean sweep, start a new project – to be put entirely in the hands of private enterprise – and close the Alexandria plant, making 1,200 workers redundant.

It was a stroke of luck for the Government that Plessey's (who coincidentally, were to manufacture the new torpedo for the Navy) showed an interest in buying the plant in Alexandria, although not, as they made clear, to make torpedoes. There were six hundred machines in the plant, all expensive precision instruments; one and a half million pounds had been spent on the building in 1968; there was £250,000 worth of steel in store. Plessey's bought the whole plant, lock, stock and barrel, for £650,000, and hinted that, instead of redundancies, there would be jobs for 2,000 in the manufacture of computer controls for machine tools.

The Labour Government defended the sale by professing to be anxious to prevent further unemployment in an area where the numbers unemployed were already far above average. But only a few months later 440 of the workers at Alexandria were made redundant. The machine tool market had dropped, said Plesseys.

In August 1971, Plesseys decided to close the factory completely, and the remaining workers there occupied the factory premises. The *Sunday Times* (10.10.71) stated that Plessey

“has merely done what most companies would do in a time of stringency: close down its least profitable plant, which just happened to be in Scotland”

The Plessey workers themselves could not be expected to be so complacent about the issue. They issued a statement outlining the causes of the occupation, and declaring their objectives in occupying the plant. Demonstrations, solidarity with UCS workers were unsuccessful – their only defence was to occupy. The statement continued:

“... we have no illusions in protest. The Plessey issue is political.

What we say is this. Here in the Vale of Leven and 20 miles away on the River Clyde workers have started something that they cannot finish alone. We need the support of an army and that army is the organised working class.

We ask you, brothers, to come to our aid, not out of charity but to guard your own class and for the future of your own children. Let us tell you about the Vale of Leven. Here in the thirties, like many other working-class areas of Britain, the employing class laid waste our community as the textile bosses closed mill after mill. Now it's happening again. . .

If you count ten men in the Vale, one will be unemployed. The dole queues have doubled in two years. If Plessey get their way well over 15% of all male workers will have no job. In the past we migrated like dogs looking for work. We won't do this any more!

. . . Now the offensive must start before the shadow of the 1930s falls across every working class family in the land. Workers at the Plessey factory in Ilford have already blacked machines the Alexandria management want to ship down there. Now we ask you to join in our struggle. It's Plessey, Alexandria, today. It will be your factory tomorrow.

We ask you above all to call on your leaders at local and national level to start an offensive against the government by mass industrial action.

We ask you to demand that TUC to organise the unemployed now by affording them full trade union rights.

We ask the Labour Party to pick up the Tory challenge now. Declare the socialist programme to take the property, without compensation, from the greedy few who control it."

The last three points are of major importance: first of all, we must not suppose that "somebody" is going to save our jobs, stop closures, reduce unemployment. We ourselves must accept responsibility for doing this. The success of the General Motors occupation in the thirties was due in a large measure to the concerted efforts of not only the workers directly concerned but also of many thousands of workers not even in the same industry.

Workers' control cannot be achieved overnight. Nor can it be achieved piecemeal. Even small victories are the result of unity. Disorganisation wins nothing. The Plessey workers demanded action from all trade unionists, asking them to spur their leaders to "start an offensive against the government." We must explode once and for all the idea that leaders lead, and workers simply follow. The workers must instruct their elected representatives, and make sure that they are leading in the right direction, which means action from the shop floor upwards. We can't afford to wait for the employers to give us job-security and satisfactory wage-increases. We must press for these things ourselves — and that means lending full support to our trade union brothers in *their* actions, as well as expecting full support from them in *our* claims.

Secondly, there is the demand for "full trade union rights" for the unemployed. The trade unions and working-class parties will be making a profound error if they continue to allow unemployed workers to drift about defenceless. They have a right to be protected; they are still trade union members, and we must show that

“the right to work” is not just a slogan, but also a basis for action by the employed on behalf of those without jobs.

In spite of mass unemployment and short-time, the working of overtime still continues. We must support overtime bans in all industries hit by unemployment. The AUEW instructed its District Committees in November 1971 to cut out overtime working; and the southern division of USDAW carried a resolution which stated that unemployment must be recognised as a deliberate Tory policy “aimed at dividing the working class and weakening the struggle against the employers’ onslaught on wages and living standards.” They called upon their executive to campaign for the TUC to organise the jobless:

“The TUC must:

Call on all affiliated unions to give the unemployed full trade union rights.

Demand that unemployment benefit is tied to a cost of living index prepared by the unions and the TUC.

Unite the employed and the unemployed in a common struggle to drive the Tory Government out of office and return a Labour Government pledged to nationalise all basic industries under workers’ control.”

This resolution recognises that “the right to work” will be obtained only through the joint action of the employed and the unemployed, since it is the employed who have the greatest opportunity to exert pressure on both government and employers. *All* the working class must have the right to work. Our fight against unemployment must therefore be on a sound working-class basis; we must make clear the class nature of capitalism, and expose the role of its apologists in the trade union and labour movement.

Those who defend the employers on the grounds that “the economic situation” demands that we must all tighten our belts, can rarely support their claim with facts. Plessey is faced with an occupation in Alexandria, because they are “obliged” to close down the plant owing to a severe recession in their industry. Yet the company made a profit of £32.1 million in 1970, increased its dividend payment by 8%, and paid two of its directors £61,388 and £50,000 respectively, in addition to their dividends for the year of nearly £100,000 each. Yet there are still “trade unionists” who defend the plight of the poor employer, faced with the occupation of an “unprofitable” plant.

Radek, at the Second Congress of the Communist International, in 1920, spoke in support of factory occupation as a means of fighting closures:

“One of the methods of fighting against the mass closing down of factories, wage cuts, and worsened conditions, is occupation of the factory by the workers, who will continue production against the wishes of the employer.

With the prevailing hunger for goods, the continuation of production is particularly important, and therefore the workers should not permit the deliberate closing down of factories. . . .

Capitalist arguments about foreign competition should in all circumstances be disregarded. The revolutionary unions must consider questions of wages and labour conditions not from the stand-point of competition between the robbers of different countries, but from the stand-point of maintaining and protecting labour power.

If there is an economic crisis in the country and the capitalists employ the tactics of pressure upon wages, it is the duty of the revolutionary unions to prevent piecemeal reductions in one industry after another, that is, they must not allow themselves to be split into several groups. The workers from the most essential industries — miners, railwaymen, electricians, etc. — must from the first be drawn into the struggle.”

It is these very industries, plus other nationalised concerns, such as the steel industry, which bear the brunt of the Tory Government’s attack on wages, and which face the prospect of being sold off to private enterprises at give-away prices. (The Plessey fiasco is a warning of what can happen if this is permitted by the workers). The unions representing workers in these industries have already united to press a joint wage claim. They should also be prepared to act together in the event of proposed hiving-off in any of their industries.

Let not this poem of Thomas Irving James, the son of an unemployed miner, to the epitaph of the unemployed in the future:

“Will they stand in groups again
shabby, hungry, broken men,
coughing, cursing, pacing . . . pacing,
smoking, talking football, racing,
hands thrust deep in trouser pockets,
fingering their pitmen’s docketts,
wishing it had been a shilling,
killing time, while time is killing —
killing body, killing soul,
dying slowly on the dole?”

The slogan of the unemployed in the past, “work or full maintenance”, is not the answer. A redundancy payment and dole money are no substitute for a wage.

The comparatively new Claimants’ Union, composed of those people claiming benefit from the state (including the sick and disabled, but largely the unemployed), scorn the “right to work” demands of the trade unions. They say that the right to work is “nothing but the *right to be used*, and does nothing to challenge the boss’s *right to manage*.” The trade unions, it is claimed, are simply fighting for “a few more jobs”, even at the expense of the benefits which trade unionists have won over the years, and the answer offered by the Claimants’ Union is this so-called “sell-out”

is to reject the trade unions, the TUC, and the Labour Party, and "to get, by fair means or foul, every last penny that can be got from the state." Furthermore, they claim that their objective is not simply to get a few more paltry jobs, but "to struggle to build a society which is based on the real needs of all of us".

Their argument has a number of serious flaws in it. First of all, "getting every penny out of the state" means getting every penny they can get out of taxation, which comes largely, and bears most heavily, on the working class; so their aim of "letting the Government carry the can" for its policies hurts their own class more than anyone else. In other words, they reject the organised working class in the form of the trade unions, but wish to draw on their financial support while they fight their battles alone.

Secondly, the Claimants' Union aims to "build a society which is based on the real needs of all of us", yet from the publicity which they hand out, it appears that only the unemployed are sufficiently virtuous to join in the fight. The houses, the schools, the hospitals we need will not be built by those who remain unemployed. The combined strength of employed and unemployed *within the trade unions* will be required to force the Government to release sufficient resources to increase job opportunities in the public sector, and to make a start on the redevelopment which is urgently needed throughout the country. It is ironic that, with a million workers unemployed, workers are living in slums, or in the streets, sending their children to slum schools, and suffering in slum hospitals. The *Sunday Times* of 28th November 1971 made a similar point:

"There are grave needs for improvements on hospitals, schools, and other public services. And, of course, new long-term projects as well. But we have Mrs. Margaret Thatcher trying to dodge the comprehensive issue by not building secondary schools, we have local authorities frightened of the implications of expenditure for the rates . . . and worse still, we have some local authorities using restricted land-use planning as an excuse for avoiding needed expenditure."

The unemployed alone will not force the Government to give the workers some of their money back, in order to provide more jobs and improve public services. The Claimants' Union attacks trade unions for not doing enough, for accepting too little and paying too high a price; but as I said before, the members must lead the leaders, and have no real excuse if the union moves in the wrong direction. This is one good reason why the unemployed should have full trade union rights, for they have even more reason to be militant than those in work.

Improvements in working conditions and wages have been won by the trade unions which the Claimants' Union so much despise.

Yet one of the declared principles of the claimants is to refuse “the stinking, low-paid jobs” offered to them, and hold out for better opportunities. This means, in effect, holding out for jobs in which wages and conditions have already been improved by trade union activity, and rejecting those where the workers’ organisation has not been strong enough and militant enough to win improvements. If they really wished to “build a new society”, the poorly-organised industries and services would be a good place to start.

The whole of the working-class must unite, employed and unemployed, black and white, Labour, Communist and Catholic, inside the trade unions and working-class parties which we have created over 150 years of struggle. They are our weapons to use in our struggle, and their power is there to be used by workers to take control of industry, land, banks, the social services, and all those things necessary to give the majority of the people – the working-class – a secure and happy life, free of capitalist control and exploitations.

Bent on retaining their power and maximising profits for private industry, the Tory Government have persistently blamed unemployment on high wage settlements – workers pricing themselves out of the market. Barbara Castle, speaking at the Labour Party Conference in 1971, accused the Tories of shedding crocodile tears over the unemployment figures, and quoted Robert Carr as saying that “the immediate cause of the present crisis in both prices and unemployment is the excess level of pay settlements”. We must not forget, of course, that in spite of Barbara Castle’s scorn of this idea, the same theory was the keynote of the Labour Government’s approval of *In Place of Strife*. The following figures refute this contention absolutely:

“DO HIGH WAGES CAUSE UNEMPLOYMENT?”

What truth is there in the repeated assertions of CARR, DAVIES, BARBER and HEATH and other Tories that wages are too high and this causes unemployment?

Mr. Barber, 21st April 1971, said “I am in no doubt whatever that the major cause of the increase in unemployment is the absurdly high level of pay settlements which we have experienced since the autumn of 1969”.

This is an absurd statement. One only has to look at wage increases and unemployment figures in other countries for 1969/70.

Italy – Wages increase by 22.6%, unemployment fell by 2.2%.

Japan – Wages rose by 17.9%, unemployment down by 2.8%

West Germany – Wages up by 12.1%, unemployment dropped by 0.7%.

Denmark – Wages up by 9.8%, unemployment down by 2.6%.

The poor countries like India confound these assertions. Wages in India average 60p a week (£30 a year) and unemployment runs at over 25% – with wages

as low as this, unemployment is a worse problem. In Rhodesia and South Africa where white workers' wages are ten times higher than black workers'—white workers enjoy full employment while unemployment among black workers is as high as 30%.

Nearer home the unemployed rate for men in Londonderry is 16%, but wages are at least £5 a week less than the National Average."

These statistics were circulated during the TUC - organised lobby of Parliament on November 24th 1971, when thousands of workers lobbied their MPs to demand the right to work. In Scotland, in June 1971, a demonstration of 100,000 Scottish workers high-lighted the problems faced not only by workers on the Clyde but all over the country. A Youth Conference held in the Central Hall in London, and attended by 1500 Young Socialists focussed attention on the situation of school-leavers, walking from the classroom into the Labour exchange. The Institute for Workers' Control, planning a conference on the unemployment problem, decided to hold it in Tyneside, where 90,000 were currently unemployed.

These demonstrations of wrath over the Government's policy on unemployment were backed up by practical action from the AUEW, in the form of a national claim for improved wages and conditions. The claim included substantial wage-increases for all categories of workers and increased annual holidays and a shorter working week of 35 hours. This would put more money in the workers' pockets, thereby increasing the demand for goods and opening up job opportunities. The Tories are naturally opposed to wage increases at any time, and are notoriously opposed to a redistribution of purchasing power in the form of a wealth tax. Our aim must be to get rid of this Tory Government as soon as possible.

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