

THE EMPLOYED/UNEMPLOYED ALLIANCE

WORKING TOWARDS THE POLITICAL ORGANISATION OF THE UNEMPLOYED

FEAR OF UNEMPLOYMENT

An Australian survey conducted in 1984 by AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL OPINION POLLS (ANOP) found fear of unemployment to be the major concern of 80% of young people in the age group of 15 to 24. This was followed by hard drugs (76%) and nuclear war (73%).

There is no doubt that the very urgency of the need to preserve the planet from nuclear war compels young people to take their protest to the streets in ever growing numbers. And the urgency to save the world's starving people, in Africa in particular, brings a similar global response to today's youth.

By comparison, however, the urgency to solve the problem of unemployment reflected in the ANOP survey as so close to their daily lives has not manifested itself in demonstrations of similar dimensions.

There could be two main contributing factors to this. Primarily, the lack of a common approach to organising the unemployed and secondly, a fear among the unemployed that they are on their own as individuals and in their organisations; that the problem is beyond their capability to control; that even wishfully, it may correct itself objectively.

But the fact that unemployment is now considered a permanent feature of capitalism was borne out in the speeches to the INTERNATIONAL LABOR CONFERENCE in 1982 by the government and employer representatives themselves. Not one envisaged any real end to the problem of unemployment outside of more doses of the same "medicine" that created it, that is, capitalist development along with working class organisations to combat the problems of capitalism. But this present crisis is of such dimension and structural depth that new or, to put it better, expanded methods of organisation are called for.

In a number of countries the liquidation of the social contradictions contained in the capitalist system have assured complete or near complete employment. These are the socialist countries of today, where, and it can be quoted from the report of the director-general of the INTERNATIONAL LABOR ORGANISATION (ILO) in Geneva, June, 1982, the right to work for everybody, youth included, is guaranteed by law. There is no such law or constitutional guarantee in any

SEEKING A CLASS IDENTITY

Speaking on the law of capitalist accumulation, Karl Marx once said that the greater the social wealth - the greater the official pauperisation of the society. In today's capitalist world, the concentration of capital and profits has reached unprecedented proportions. In the midst of this, in a cover story by "TIME" magazine on European unemployment are the words of Ivor Richards (European Economic Community Commissioner for Social Policy): "We face the danger in the West of running an economy, one of the by-products of which is the pauperisation of large sections of our community. This is bound to place an immense strain on the social fabric of our societies." The make up of "pauperisation" referred to in "TIME" magazine does not restrict itself to the social paupers of a century ago, or to what Marx termed the "Industrial Reserve Army" - ie the floating workforce, the latent workforce (former peasants, artisans, supplementary workers, etc.) stagnant workers (employed most irregularly) and "Lazarus - layers" ie tramps, invalids and socially unadjusted. On the contrary, it refers to a whole section of capable society including the greatest natural resource - its youth.

It is this recent, unprecedented phenomenon - an emerging generation that has been denied the opportunity of ever partaking in steady, self-satisfying work in the community, that is mainly to be examined here.

On the surface, occasions of youth unrest would suggest that this discontent is directed against society. There is even a view expressed that youth in this state could provide the soil for the development of fascist tendencies on a large scale. This of course cannot be discounted.

But despite the examples pertaining to this in some countries, there are two main things that speak against this general appreciation. Firstly, fascism - ie the dictatorship of the most reactionary elements of high-finance capital, does not preordain the necessity of a mass base. This is especially true when mass media and telecommunications are in the hands of a few and when parliaments become less and less representative. Witness the abandonment of the popular platform by the current Australian Labor leadership. Secondly, the youth of today are not the lumpen-proletariat of the past but rather are very socially and politically aware

far outweigh any negative actions brought on by want and frustration.

What then is the core of the problem?

A milder view has it that youth is alienated from society and has adopted a "just another brick in the wall" mentality. This is another incomplete evaluation, for in fact the large majority still persist in conforming to most of the community's rules, still persist in seeking work despite the frustration and still have aspirations that when they someday return to the workforce they will be able to live a purposeful existence.

FOR CLASS IDENTITY

Youth unemployment is linked with the problem of ALIENATION FROM CLASS or depreciating awareness of CLASS IDENTITY. This tendency is understandable for a generation of young people who have never experienced work or who see themselves as only tolerated in the workforce at intervals in jobs far below their expectations. It is understandable despite the fact that most come from working class backgrounds and in many cases still live with their families; it is understandable even though most would have, under circumstances of their own choosing, entered not into the "industrial reserve army" but into the organised labour workforce itself.

As this problem facing youth has developed, the trade union movement has developed within itself, and today covers most professions in most industries. This is especially so in Australia with one "umbrella" Australian Council of Trade Unions. There is little doubt that before anything else that it may achieve on their behalf the trade union movement, by its class base, is best situated to provide this elementary sense of class identity for today's youth.

And this is within the area of activity of the trade union movement.

President of the World Federation of Trade Unions, Sandor Gaspar, recently debated this point: "...this does not prevent (the trade unions) from realising more and more that they must not restrict themselves to problems of everyday politics. They need to think in terms of historical perspective, extend their activity beyond the economy to all other public spheres..."

Surely the generations to follow

without consultation and cooperation.

THE ROLE AND TASKS OF TRADE UNIONS

Many trade unions have already established links with the unemployed movement. This has led to successful activity though restricted for the most part to the regional level. The links created have usually taken two forms either an unemployed movement that remains apart organisationally from the active workers such as an "UNEMPLOYED WORKERS UNION" or an integration that takes unemployed workers into union activities.

The balance being called for is a worker and unemployed alliance which would grant the autonomy to manage individual affairs and yet unite organisationally the reserve and active labour armies.

The close links would enable the unemployed to promote a continuing awareness of their problems and enable unions to assist organisationally, morally and materially.

Trade unions long ago achieved a political voice. Bureaucratic solutions were not the answer to the problems of yesterday and are not the answer to this problem today.

This alliance would give a political voice to the unemployed, caring for the old while at the same time strengthening the young. It would strengthen the sense of class identity for the employed and unemployed and further develop class unity. Such unity is essential to provide a brick wall against encroaching fascism and to overcome and overthrow all forms of exploitation and reaction.

If the basic concept of an alliance between the reserve and active labour armies is accepted in principle, the forms of organisation of such must be determined according to prevailing local and national conditions.

In Australia this movement is already being considered by worker organisations and those of the unemployed.

The steel city of Wollongong, NSW, is named after the aboriginal "Land of Many Winds". This town of 270,000 people also has the greatest unemployment percentage in Australia - 33%: 43% among the youth.

In February, 1985, Wollongong was host to a national meeting of

Attending this meeting was the Maritime Union Socialist Activities Association (MUSAA) - a political organisation for maritime and other workers.

The prevailing wind at this meeting in Wollongong was the concept of an alliance between the employed and unemployed, on a class basis.

A further meeting was held on the 18th of August, 1985, to discuss the following draft proposals.

STRUCTURE AND AIMS

A. Those involved:

Employed - trade unions and working class organisations with a basic program of developing class unity.

Unemployed - those groups representing the organised unemployed

B. Meetings:

To be held on a national and regional basis.

C. Representation:

To be on the basis of an equal number of delegates per organisation.

D. Decisions:

By mutual agreement (Note: all organisations will maintain their autonomy.

E. The National Body:

Joint Secretaries - 1 trade union, 1 unemployed (elected by their own groups)

Joint Chairperson - as above (Chairing on an alternate basis)

Executive Committee - five per organisation

Meetings - to be on a on a three monthly basis

Other areas - finance, publicity and education to be discussed by the National Executive and recommendations to be sent to Regional groups for discussion.

F. Programs:

The national body can, after proper consultation, initiate programs of its own or those that have been requested by the regional groups.

G. National Conference:

To be held yearly if possible. The first such conference proposed for March/April, 1986.

H. Regional Groups:

HI Programs:

Regional groups will be able to undertake campaigns which generally affect their area only, as well as joint campaigns on a region to region basis or a national basis.

I. Name of Organisation:

Employed/Unemployed Alliance.

AIMS

a. To unite the employed and the unemployed of the Australian working class

b. To develop a national body of the Employed/Unemployed Alliance with a regional area base.

c. To put forth a united approach on the agreed political, economic and social questions facing these two groupings, while maintaining the autonomy of all organisations involved.

d. To initiate major campaigns on a national and regional basis, on all agreed to issues concerning the employed and unemployed.

e. To discuss areas of concern involving the two groups.

f. To educate the employed and unemployed in the Australian working class, on the need for and benefit of having, not only this alliance, but also on the benefits of having trade unions and an organised unemployed people's movement. This would include pensioner and welfare organisations.

g. To initially look at the concerns listed below as a starting point.

CONCERNS

1. The Right To Work - this to be a constitutional guarantee.

2. That the benefits of society should be shared equally amongst those who make up the society, without discrimination.

3. That the minimum level of benefit paid to the unemployed, pensioners, students and low income earners be above the poverty line.

4. That concessions on rent, telephone, electricity, rates and travel be granted to all unemployed and pensioner beneficiaries.

5. That all families have access to childcare facilities that provide full time, occasional and emergency care as needed. Cost should be based on the ability to pay, and that the people providing the service should be adequately trained and paid in accordance

conditions. Although this will provide some jobs, it should not be seen as the answer to unemployment, as unemployment is an integral part of the crisis which the capitalist system is in.

8. That some job schemes should be recognised as being short term and in many cases exploitative. Also that while working on any of these schemes or any long term scheme which hopefully would be implemented in the future, those people involved will be required to join the union covering their area of work and be paid the appropriate award wages and conditions.

9. That the maintenance of 'real wage' standards be recognised by all.

10. That indirect taxes have an unequal effect on the community, especially on the unemployed, pensioner and low income earner, thus should be opposed. On the other hand such taxes as 'wealth tax' and a 'capital gains tax' which are intended to make those who are not presently paying their fair share of the tax burden shoulder their responsibility, these should be fully supported.

11. Special concern to be adopted by the trade unions in areas where they have a specific voice. For example:

Accord - The ACTU/ALP Accord adopted in February 1983 stated on page one "The parties 'prime objectives' was 'full employment' While the document falls far short of providing practical measures to work towards this objective it does state (on page 17):

"It is agreed that the current economic situation and future trends demonstrate the hopelessness of policies which seek to obtain full employment by use of market forces alone. Interventionist policies which are closely monitored and comprehensive in nature are necessary to bring about the growth which is required on a sustained basis if unemployment is to fall on a continuous path".

Pressure must be applied to ensure the trade union movement pays increasing attention to such programs.

The ACTU is primarily an organisation representing employed members of the working class. It is understandable to a degree that the ACTU/ALP Accord would therefore primarily concern itself with issues directly affecting those members.

But the ACTU has strong policies in other areas not directly related to the trade union movement and much stronger policies must be

and the review of the Accord take place later in 1985.

This provides a ready avenue of work for any unemployed- employed alliance.

SOME SUMMARY POINTS

The alliance of employed and unemployed is not meant to replace any existing organisations, on the contrary, it requires existing organisations to build upon and in doing so unite such organisations.

Such an alliance as outlined here is only submitting the concept in basic form.

The question of mass unemployment touches every part of our social fabric and hits the underprivileged and unrepresented sections of society first. It exacerbates the problems of women in society, feeds off racism, forces division between rural and industrial worker, makes the poor poorer and brings age to the youth.

It increases the exploitation of nation by nation, stifles development, increases international tension and stokes the fires of war.

Programs to specifically deal with the effects of mass unemployment in all these areas can only come from a class alliance of all peoples affected.

The working class is international. Dialogue and action on this problem of mass unemployment will not only strengthen the working class in the countries involved but also bring greater unity and strength to the international working class as a whole.

This concept of an unemployed/ employed alliance as outlined in this document was put forward in an article contained in World Trade Union Movement, the journal of the World Federation of Trade Unions, Issue No. 10, 1982.

This current proposal and its application to Australian conditions was compiled by the author of that article Wally Pritchard and Rodney Paterson and assisted by material provided by Wollongong Out of Workers Union.

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