Workers Solidarity Movement
How do we fight back?
As unemployment breaks all previous records
1991

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TRANSFORMATION

Whether or not the I.N.O.U. can be transformed into such an organisation is a matter for debate. It is clear that this would involve making the government take over the direct funding of the services it and it's affiliates provides. It would have to rid itself of the layer of professional 'unemployed' and poverty pimps that now dominate it. At the current time a very small percentage of I.N.O.U. affiliates would favour this transformation.

Unemployment is a problem fundamental to the workings of the system. The government will not be persuaded to create jobs by endless lobbies and reports showing this is a good idea. Under capitalism unemployment is necessary to the bosses. For this reason there is a clear line between the needs of the bosses and the need of the workers. Those who try to fight unemployment by saying it is in the interests of the bosses to do so are pissing into the wind.

We must fight unemployment by making the bosses preserve and create jobs whether or not it is in their interest to do so. This means fighting all job losses through strikes and occupations. It means fighting for the state to create jobs by providing the services working people need. This means building houses, hospitals and schools. It means employing more teachers, bus drivers and nurses. We should fight against the expansion of S.E.S. type schemes and for those working on schemes to be employed at trade union rates and conditions.

The bosses will tell us they cannot afford to do this, and the country cannot afford it. Our answer to this should be simple, if your system cannot satisfy even our most basic need then it is time it went.

the fact that it did not meet their modest criterion on job creation is yet another example. The unemployed movement is silent not so much because it wants to be but because it has to be. It is dependant on government funding to the hilt and a gentle squeeze will bring it running into line.

BUILDING A REAL CAMPAIGN

So how do we go about building a real, fighting unemployed campaign. The first thing to realise is that this will be a very difficult process. It is important to realize the problems any unemployed organisation will face. Workers who are unemployed tend initially not get involved in unemployed action groups as they do not expect to be on the dole for very long. By the time those who are long term unemployed recognise this they will be demoralised and isolated by the experience of being a year or more on the dole.

The key part of fighting unemployment will be forging real links with the trade union rank and file. Unemployed and workers need to fight for full membership rights for the unemployed in unions, with unemployed sections in branches. Some unions like the A.T.G.W.U. already have unemployed members but these schemes are restricted.

There is also a place for a national organisation of the unemployed but one that is very different from the I.N.O.U. The urgent need is to mobilize large numbers of the unemployed in a fight for socially useful work at union pay rates and conditions. For such an organsiation funding will always be a difficulty as neither the state or the union bureaucracy will provide the necessary resources. A fight within the unions at a rank and file level will have to be won in order to obtain 'no-strings' funding.

Over the Summer unemployment reached an all time high. It would have seemed fair enough to expect some kind of militant response to this by the unemployed organisations in Ireland but in fact very little happened. In this article we look at why these organisations are so unable to mobilize unemployed people, either to demand work or to fight for improved social welfare. We go on to look at how unemployment can be fought and what exactly should we be fighting for.

In Ireland most unemployed groups are affiliates of the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed. It is a sizeable organisation with offices in Dublin (Funded by S.I.P.T.U.) and 67 affiliates. On paper all this is very impressive but most unemployed people are probably unaware of the existence of the I.N.O.U. and the only contact they have with their local unemployed centre is when they need advice or a C.V. typed.

LOCAL GROUPS

The first thing to be said about these local groups is that the vast majority see politics in general as irrelevant. They put their energy into providing advice for the unemployed or trying to create jobs in their community. In a survey carried out by the I.N.O.U. only an average of 20% of activities could fall into any sort of campaigning activity. What they are about is the provision of services for unemployed people in their areas rather than seeking to mobilize these people in the fight for socially useful, well paid jobs.

Obviously the services carried out by these centres like C.V. typing and the provision of welfare advice are necessary to the unemployed. The question however is why should these be provided on a voluntary basis by unemployed organisations relying on non-government sources for 51% of their funding. Why should the

workers in these centres either be receiving no wages or being paid as a F.A.S. scheme worker.

Such services are needed by the unemployed but we should fight for complete state funding of them. In addition we should be fighting for the workers in these centres to be made permanent and paid at proper union rates rather then accepting SES schemes. It is also a nonsense that unions like S.I.P.T.U. which pay their top bureaucrats £60,000 a year should use S.E.S. schemes to run these centres. This seriously undermines their opposition to such schemes.

I.N.O.U. CAMPAIGNS

In practise the I.N.O.U. and its affiliates does not campaign seriously against unemployment or for better conditions for the unemployed. In the Autumn of 1991 a special conference of the I.N.O.U. on the P.E.S.P. decided to use it as a basis for progress rather then rejecting it outright. Yet the plan contained almost no concrete provisions on unemployment except for a few new schemes to provide cheap labour for the bosses and victimise the long term unemployed.

The approach to the limited amount of campaigning carried out is one of lobbying government departments and producing reports on various aspects of unemployment. No attempt is made to inform, consult or mobilize the vast numbers of unemployed besides the occasional token picket to back up a lobby of government ministers. The I.N.O.U. no longer tries to become an organisation of the unemployed. Rather it is a group that lobbies on behalf of the unemployed.

Part of the reason for the inaction of the I.N.O.U. and local groups is funding. The same survey showed that the majority of groups received financial support from government and religious bodies or various voluntary trusts. This funding also comes with a price, the funding body always has a veto (official or unofficial) over the activities of the group. In an I.N.O.U. survey almost 50% of unemployed groups admitted that they had been "…limited by the restrictions placed on them by funders".

THE UNEMPLOYED AND THE TRADE UNIONS

There is considerable funding supplied by the ICTU to some unemployed groups (ICTU centres) but the strings of this funding are held by the union bureaucrats. In the campaign to get the I.N.O.U. to partially accept the P.E.S.P. the I.C.T.U. unemployment centres were unofficialy told that if the I.N.O.U. rejected the PESP they would not exist the following year. This meant the I.N.O.U. was forced to go against the anti-PESP sentiments of the unemployed as expressed in a survey just before the special conference carried out by the Portobello, Thurles and Portlaoise unemployed action groups.

Another problem with the unemployed groups is the lack of contact between these groups and the rank and file of the trade unions. There are very strong links between the union bureaucracy and the I.N.O.U. itself as well as some centres. But as the example above demonstrates these are used by the bureaucracy to buy off unemployed opposition to the PESP. At the time of the 'Trade Unionists & Unemployed Against the Programme' campaign only one unemployed group out of the 67 was involved (individuals from a couple of other groups were also involved). Some groups do have links with local trades councils but with the demise of trades council radicalism these links are token rather then real.

The fact that these factors severely limit the ability of the unemployed organsiations to fight unemployment is fairly clear. There were no unemployed groups involved in the Gateaux fight against job losses. This was the biggest fight in recent years by workers against job losses. The I.N.O.U.'s, acceptance of the P.E.S.P. despite