

Renault workers say: “Europe without frontiers yes, Europe without jobs no”

By Colin Foster

“EUROPE without frontiers yes, Europe without jobs no”, was among the slogans on a 70,000 strong march in Brussels on 16 March, where workers from the threatened Renault car factory at Vilvoorde, Belgium, were joined by delegations from France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the UK, the Netherlands, Portugal, Greece and Austria.

In the 1970s and 1980s steelworkers fought closures and job cuts all across Europe. But they fought separately. French workers fought to save French steelworks, Italian workers to save Italian steelworks. Within Britain there were rival campaigns to save “Scottish steel” and “Welsh steel”. Militant French steelworkers seized truckloads of German steel and tipped them on

to the railway tracks.

The Renault struggle shows a major step forward from that tragic and counterproductive division. Renault workers in Belgium and France staged a “Euro-strike” on 7 March, and a “Euro-demonstration” on 11 March, singing the *Internationale* outside Renault’s company HQ in Paris. Despite Renault bosses saying that they plan to expand production in Spain when they close Vilvoorde, the strike and the demonstration were supported by Spanish Renault workers.

When Renault announced the closure of the Vilvoorde factory in late February, together with 2,700 job cuts across their French factories, the Vilvoorde workers responded by occupying their factory but also by reaching out to other workers and holding their first demonstration in Brussels on 3 March.

There are special reasons why the Vilvoorde workers should shun the idea that workers in each factory, or country, should secure their future at the expense of others by proving themselves more “competitive”. For some years now the Vilvoorde factory has been held up to workers in other Renault plants as a model of productivity.

The plant was almost totally reconstructed and automated three years ago. The workers gave up their eight-hour shifts and five-day week to accept “flexible” working. Their work rate is electronically monitored, and they have only four minutes’ break each hour. Their quality of production is the best in the combine — or so workers at other Renault factories have been told.

Probably that flexibility is why the Renault bosses thought they could shut Vilvoorde with little protest. But they were wrong.

The left, and Europe

THE British left is still infected by nationalism. There are a number of reasons for this. Britain did not join the European Community — despite two abortive attempts to do so — until 1972, 14 years after the Treaty of Rome came into operation. Initially there was strong ruling-class opposition, and that was reflected inside the labour movement. The USSR opposed Europe, and the Stalinist party in Britain — which had much influence in the trade unions — took this line ready-made, hypocritically purveying British nationalism, the better to serve Russian foreign policy, that is, Russian nationalism. The British trade union bureaucracy was comfortable then in the close links it had with the British national state, and did not want to risk losing them. It all added up to a powerful many-streamed current in the British labour movement against Europe.

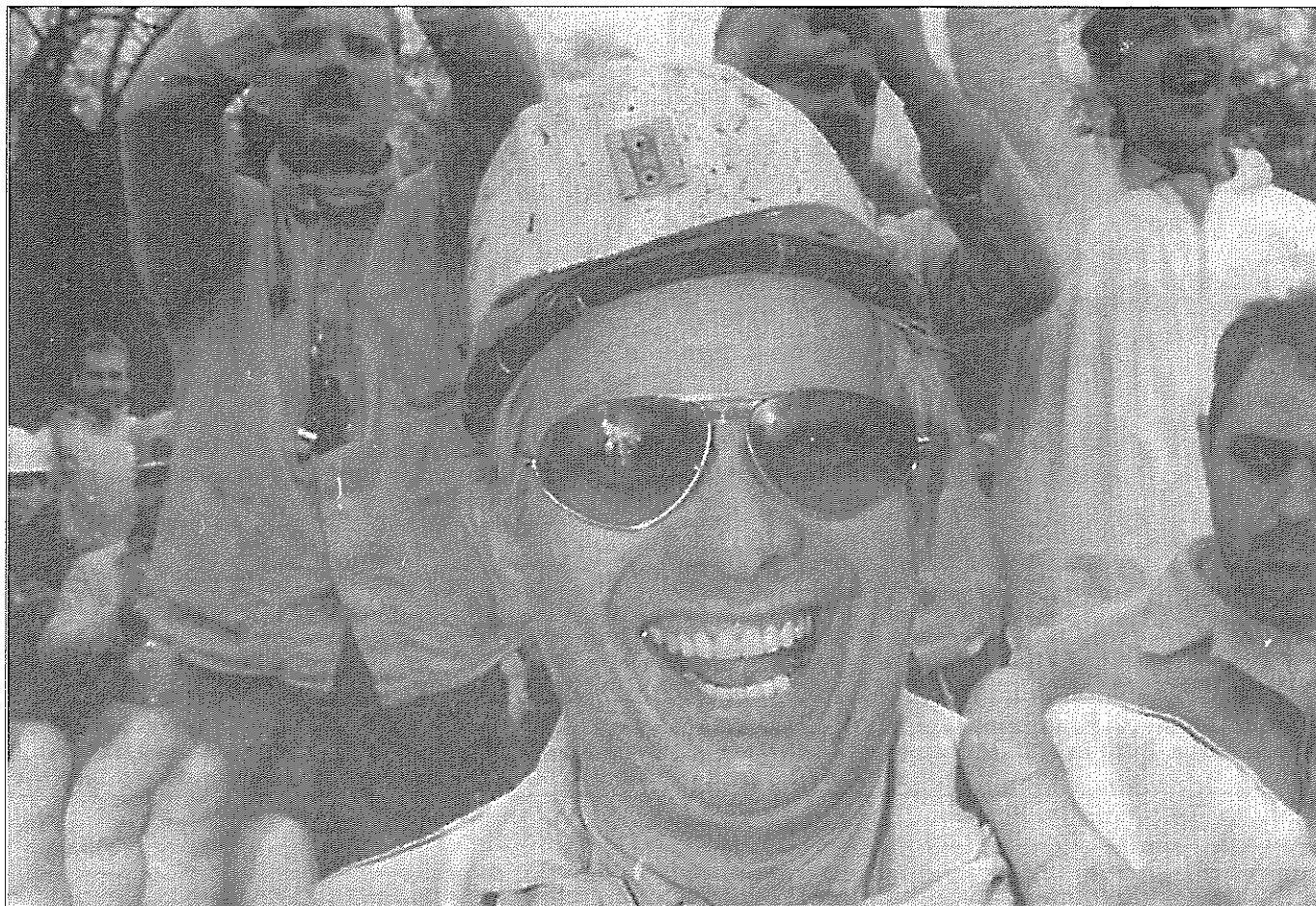
The revolutionary left was swamped by this current. Initially refusing to be tainted by the “little Englandism in the service of the USSR” of the CP or by the other more sincere little Englanders, most of the revolutionary left eventually allowed itself to join the anti-Europe chorus for fear of antagonising working-class militants influenced by the chauvinists. Throwing overboard the Marxist responsibility to orient on the basic issues according to real

working-class interests, the left became wildly demagogic, denouncing the European Union as “capitalist Europe” as if the alternative were not “capitalist Britain”, and a Britain that has become the despised cheap-labour shum of capitalist Europe.

The left let itself be smashed by Harold Wilson in 1975 when it staked everything on a chauvinist victory in the referendum on Europe held that year. It then gradually subsided into silence on the question of Europe. No left group now campaigns for “Britain out!”

Yet much of the left has now reconstructed a cut-price version of that nationalist agitation round the slogan “Down with Maastricht!” Working-class socialists have no brief for Maastricht, any more than we have for the capitalist structure of the European Union generally. Yet to identify Maastricht as the main enemy, or a main enemy, is to ignore the fact that the anti-Maastricht sections of the bourgeoisie — Thatcher and Tebbit in Britain, Le Pen and Pasqua in France, sections of German finance-capital — are as intent on cuts and union-bashing as any Maastrichter.

The Europe-wide workers’ unity shown by the Renault workers is the way to deal with European capitalist integration — not demagogic agitation against a shadowy outside force called “Maastricht” or “Brussels”.



The revolt of the German miners

HALIL Senturk is a miner in Germany's Ruhr coalfield. He told the *Financial Times* (10 March) why he and his workmates have been fighting job cuts in their industry.

"I was in England a few times, in Durham and Yorkshire, and saw what happened to the mining community there. We're trying to stop that happening here."

On 7 March the German government announced that it would drastically cut state subsidies and force the closure of most of the country's pits. Miners struck the same day, occupied their pits, invaded town halls, blocked motorways, and sent thousands of delegates to the capital, Bonn, where they set up a protest camp opposite the chancellery.

They besieged the Bonn headquarters of the FDP, the "liberal" or

"free-market" party which is the junior partner in Germany's governing coalition. A hundred miners dramatised their message that government policies would take the shirts off their backs by stripping to their underpants and marching through the capital. They demanded not only that the pit closures be stopped, but that [chancellor] "Kohl must go."

By 13 March the government had been forced to back down, at least partially. Its revised plan will still shut pits, but much more slowly, and the miners' union has accepted it.

Germany's unemployment, at 4.7 million, is now higher than it ever went in the 1930s, before Hitler came to power. It has increased by a million since 1995. That fact must have added urgency to the miners' action.

Their exuberant militancy, much

brasher than is usual from Germany's ponderous trade-union movement, must also have been encouraged by last year's metalworkers' strikes. In 1996 the unions organised months of big protests against the government's £30 billion budget cuts. Strikes in October, in the metal industries, forced employers to back down on plans to cut sick pay in line with new legislation.

As significant as the militancy of the miners' action is Halil Senturk's emphasis on learning from the struggles of workers in other countries, rather than upholding "German jobs" and "German industry" against them. Another miner put the same idea to the *Financial Times*: "Here we stick together. The thing that counts is that you're a miner. Whether you're Ali or Fritz doesn't matter."

INCREASINGLY, "Europe" determines what happens within the member states of the European Union. More and more, what "Europe" decides happens, especially where a second rate power like the UK is concerned. National parliaments are overshadowed. Democratic rights which in countries like Holland, Britain and France took centuries of popular struggle to win have in this way been increasingly nullified.

Now, socialists are for European unity, even under the bourgeoisie. The call for a United States of Europe was for long the cry of the left, not of the right. Undesirable things such as Maastricht notwithstanding, European unity is much better than the older Europe of competing and sometimes warring nations. The basis exists now as never before for working-class unity all across Europe and the basis too for a working-class struggle to create a socialist United States of Europe.

Europe today is under bureaucratic rule because it was united by the bourgeoisie and not by the working class. The development of Europe-wide democratic institutions lags far behind the development of European unity. To put this in perspective and know what needs to be done, we must cast a glance back over the history that shaped the European Union.

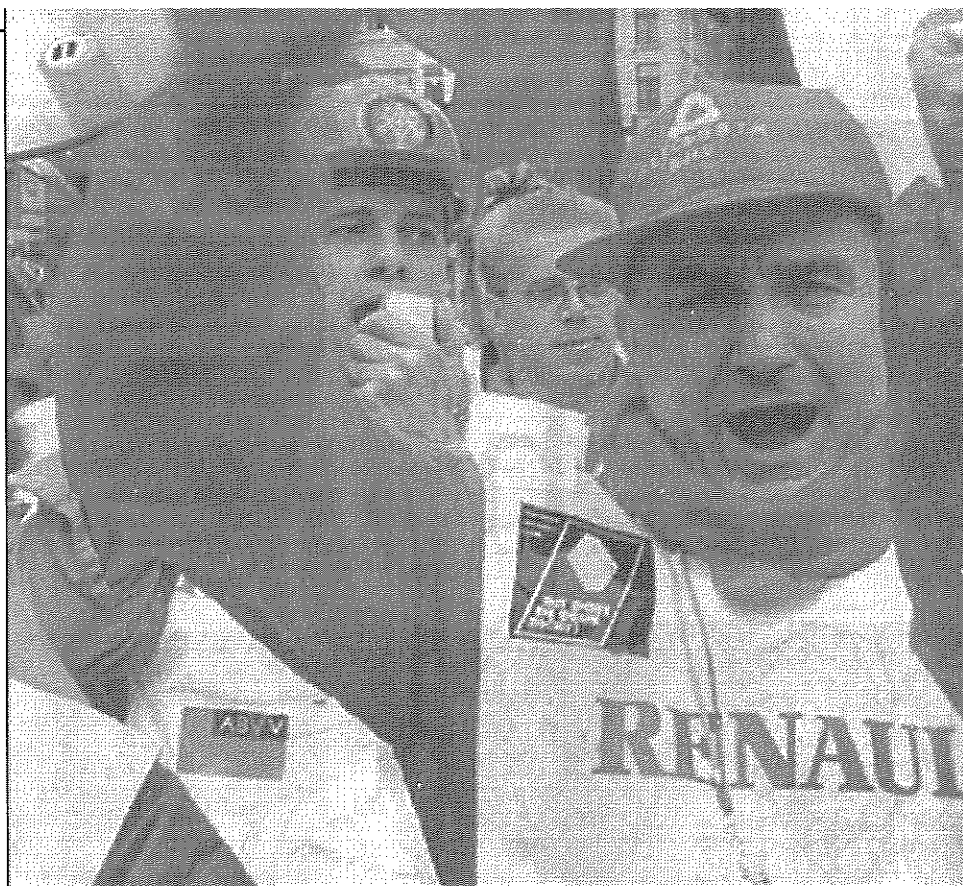
FROM the Pyrenees, on the borders of the Iberian peninsula, north to the borders of Sweden and east as far as Poland, with Switzerland as an island in the middle, Hitler had united most of Europe by 1940.

It was a Europe of peoples united by chains rather than bands of international solidarity, a Europe of enslaved peoples forced together in the maw of German imperialism, by way of conquest, not a Europe of free nations that had voluntarily come together in a United States of Europe.

Yet — and fifty years later there can be no doubt of it — that European unification, even under Hitler, was a distorted expression of a long-felt historical necessity. Europe needed unity because the existing big nation states were too small for the enormous economic dynamic which had developed within them. In the leading place was Germany.

The Anglo-American invaders of Europe in 1944-5 came to break German hegemony and to break down the walls of the Nazi prison-house of nations which Europe had become. All across Europe the invaders were supported by uprisings of peoples seeking national self-determination — French, Belgians, Italians, Poles, Czechs. After Germany was beaten and overrun, the peoples of Europe — outside of Stalin's new East and Central European empire — reverted to independent nation-states.

Indeed, one consequence of Hitler's brutal German-imperialist attempt to over-



There is only one on Europe: wor.

ride the peoples was a new upsurge of nationalism and chauvinism all across Europe, especially in the East, where ethnic Germans were its main victims. Germans to the number of perhaps thirteen million were driven out of East Prussia and Czechoslovakia and other areas where Germans had lived for many hundreds of years.

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And yet, though much of Europe was economically in ruins. European unity was still economically, politically and militarily necessary. Political and military unity was made very urgent because it was likely that soon there would be war with Russia, whose vast army could in the mid '40s have advanced quickly from the centre to the

Western end of Europe.

Politically, however, formal unity was impossible, less possible than even before Hitler's "unification". An attempt in the late 1940s to create a single West European army proved still-born.

Yet unity could not be postponed. Now the European bourgeoisie drew on the experience of German history, where the dozens of big and little German states had been drawn together inside a customs union, the Zollverein, from 1833, and the basis laid for the unification of most of Germany under Prussian predominance in 1871.

FIRST, they created the Iron and Steel Community (1951), and then the Common Market (Treaty of Rome, 1957-8). This was movement towards union by way of bypassing insoluble political questions such as the recently re-won and therefore sacrosanct sovereignties of the various states and concentrating on economic knitting-together of the independent states. It was a bit like knocking down the internal walls in



the socialist answer workers unite!

By Annie O'Keeffe

a row of houses, making them into one entity while preserving the facade.

Over time the economic barriers came down, and the original six countries of the Common Market achieved, despite the separate sovereign statehoods dividing them, a level of economic integration in some ways more intense than that achieved within the USA.

And, over time, a ramshackle growth of Europe-wide political and economic institutions grew up alongside and on top of the institutions of the nation-states. These institutions bear all the marks of their origins.

This Europe, which is at its core economically united, still resembles a political shanty-town. It is something thrown together higgledy-piggledy. It is neither rational nor properly and directly democratic.

There is now a European Parliament, which, though it increased its powers not so long ago, remains a feeble shadow of what a sovereign parliament should be. It does not yet effectively control the civil servants or the Council of Ministers. Relations between

the component states and the EU are disabably ill-defined.

In short, much that the nationalist and other critics of the EU say against it is true. That is why *Workers' Liberty*, which believes in European unity, backed the call for a referendum on Maastricht: support for European unity does not have to imply back-

"Campaigning for a constitutional Parliament, the left across Europe could undercut the rightists and the chauvinists."

ing what the dominant capitalists and their servants do, or the way that they do it.

European unity is as necessary now as it was in 1914 when Germany launched its first ill-fated attempt to unite Europe under its heel — and socialists such as Leon Trotsky raised the call for a United States of Europe. The anti-EU nationalists and chau-

vinists, even when they raise valid criticisms of the EU, have nothing to offer instead of "Europe", this imperfect, capitalist, and not yet democratic, West European unity. The alternative? Wars of the sort that two times in the first half of the 20th century brought Europe to ruin and devastation and turned it into a vast abattoir.

The only progressive way ahead lies in democratising Europe, not in a vain and reactionary attempt to scramble it back into its national components. That is why socialists must advocate the creation of a fully democratic European parliament, with full powers, and why British socialists must unite with European socialists to win it.

But how will such a parliament be achieved? By piecemeal evolution? That is how the European Union has developed and develops. It is simply not adequate. It is slow, it is uncertain; where the mass of the people are concerned, it is blind. It leaves both power and initiative in the hands of bureaucrats.

When great democratic states — and that is now what the European Union is — have been in the making, a Constituent Assembly or Parliament has been called to work out constitutional arrangements for the new state. That is what the USA did over 200 years ago; what revolutionary France did 200 years ago; what England did at the dawn of Parliamentary sovereignty, 300 years ago.

It is what Europe should do now. The European Union needs a Constituent Assembly.

A European Parliament should be elected to work out a constitutional framework for the United States of Europe. In that way the boundaries between the present national parliaments and the future sovereign European parliament, and similar perplexing questions, can be democratically worked out.

Campaigning for such a "constitutional Parliament", the labour movement and left across Europe could undercut the rightists and the chauvinists who make legitimate criticisms of the presently chaotic European political structures the basis for a reactionary attack on European unity.

Unfortunately it is not only the chauvinist right who oppose European unity. People on the left, too, oppose European unity under cover of just criticism of what exists now. The serious pro-European left must both take on board their legitimate criticisms, and disarm them.

European unity is better than any other capitalist alternative; and European unity is a prerequisite for European socialism. By campaigning for a Constituent Assembly we can point the way forwards towards a democratic Europe, and towards the Socialist United States of Europe.

Europe needs a European Constituent Assembly!

An East London Jewish credo

The Thirteen Articles of Faith

1. I believe with a perfect faith that all men, whether sons of the covenant or not sons of the covenant*, are born free, and that freedom is their portion throughout life.
2. I believe with a perfect faith that the man who derives wealth from the labour of others, himself not working, is an impudent plunderer.
3. I believe with a perfect faith that poverty will never cease from the earth until communal labour be organised — until every man be compelled to work according to his strength, and receive of his labour according to his needs.
4. I believe with a perfect faith that man will be a "slave of slaves" so long as one individual is suffered to rule over others, and a few are allowed to legislate and make laws for the many.
5. I believe with a perfect faith that stupidity will prevail over knowledge and darkness over light, so long as men cannot acquire education and train themselves according to their several capacities.
6. I believe with a perfect faith that men of religion will persecute those of other religions so long as poverty and distress exist and that the majority of mankind will be, as now, smitten with blindness.
7. I believe with a perfect faith that war will exist and thousands will be slaughtered upon the battle-field as long as "force" prevails and one country derives profit from the ruin of another.
8. I believe with a perfect faith that women will be but the slaves and playthings (Shashuim) of men so long as they are dependent upon them and do not enjoy the fruits of their own labour.
9. I believe with a perfect faith that labour — which supplies all the needs of man — will be despised in the eyes of all so long as the working men toil to fill the pockets of those who sit still and idle.
10. I believe with a perfect faith that murderers, thieves, adulterers, and all kinds of criminals will not cease so long as poverty remains to give birth to them.
11. I believe with a perfect faith that men will devour each other alive, unless a new light soon dawn upon humanity and the working men rise as one to throw off the yoke of capital, and put under foot those who oppress them.
12. I believe with a perfect faith that the upright intellect can achieve all: that the rule of reason is at hand, when men will live as a band of brothers and all nations form one united family.
13. I believe with a perfect faith that the end will come speedily and in our days.

* Adherents of the Jewish religion.

Confessing the socialist faith

THE working-class socialist movement always has to begin by asserting its own ideas in terms of the prevailing ideas in bourgeois society. It has sometimes seized on the forms in which antagonistic bourgeois ideas are expressed and used them for its own purposes. It has adapted existing forms and rituals to new ends. Thus the Chartists sang "God Save the People" where others sang "God Save the Queen."

Thus in the period before the First World War, socialist Sunday schools existed all over Britain, paralleling the official church Sunday schools for children.

This "Socialist Ten Commandments", paralleling the Ten Commandments of Moses and the Christian churches, was used in some of them.

Jewish socialists too sometimes paralleled religious forms in their way of propagandising for their socialist ideas. This credo — confession of faith — expressing secularist and socialist ideas in



religious style, appeared in an East London Yiddish language paper in 1887. It was translated and printed in *Justice*, the paper of the Social Democratic Federation, to which the East London Jewish socialists were affiliated.

The Socialist 10 Commandments

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Love your school-fellows, who will be your fellow-workmen in life. 2. Love learning, which is the food of the mind; be as grateful to your teacher as to your parents. 3. Make every day holy by good and useful deeds and kindly actions. 4. Honour good men, be courteous to all men, bow down to none. 5. Do not hate or speak evil of anyone; do not be revengeful, but stand up for your rights, and resist oppression. 6. Do not be cowardly, be a friend to the weak, and love justice. 7. Remember that all the good things of the earth are produced by labour, whoever | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> enjoys them without working for them is stealing the bread of the workers. 8. Observe and think in order to discover the truth; do not believe what is contrary to reason, and never deceive yourself or others. 9. Do not think that he who loves his own country must hate other nations, or wish for war, which is a remnant of barbarism. 10. Look forward to the day when all men will be free citizens of one fatherland, and live together as brothers in peace and righteousness. |
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