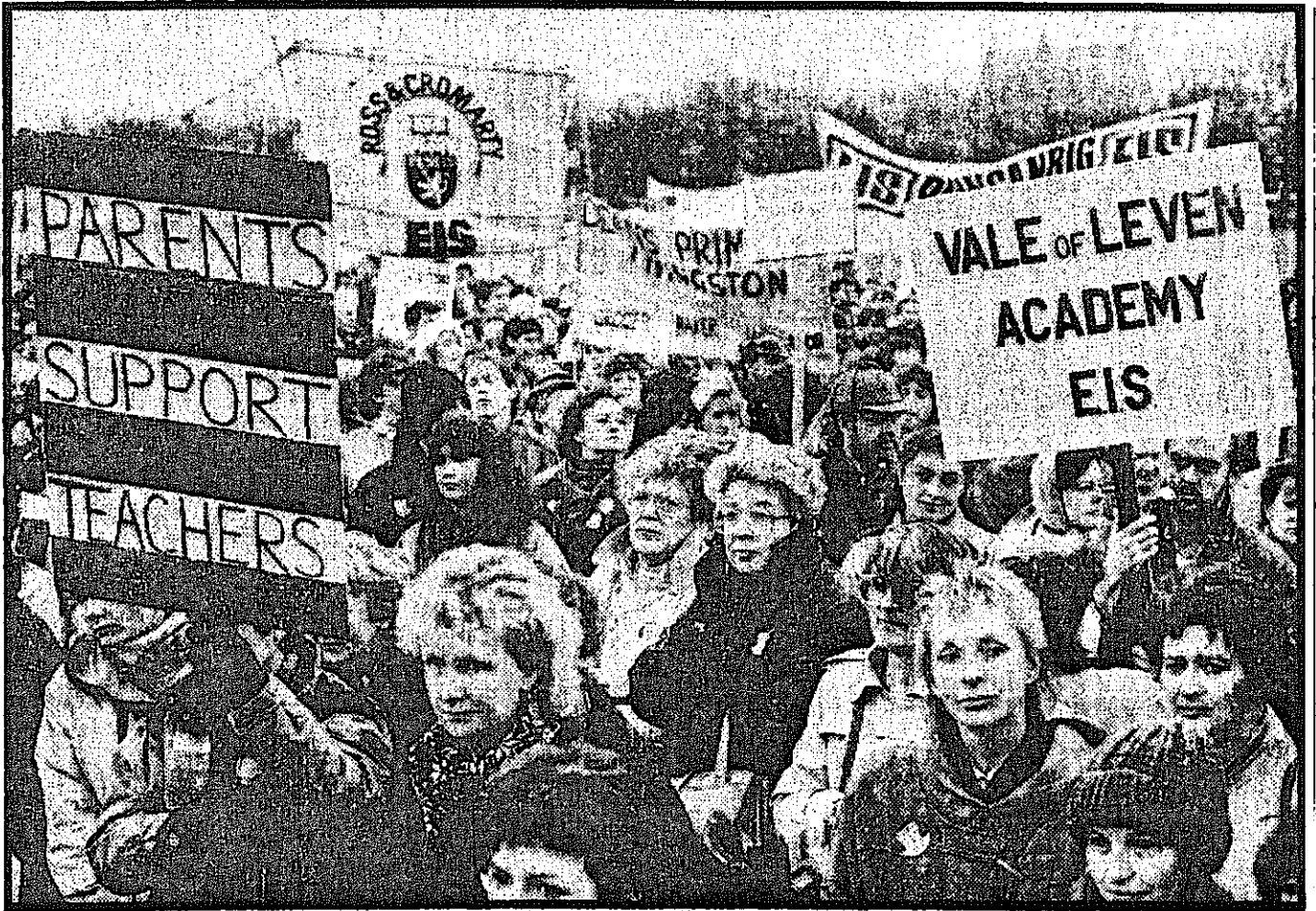


Teachers

Back to the Chalkface?



Teachers Face Up to the Reality of Capitalist Austerity.

The teachers dispute has now dragged on for two years. As we pointed out in Bulletin Nine, the teachers are a marginalised group within the working class, hamstrung by their ambiguous role as both workers and administrators of capitalist discipline. Their essentially individualistic working conditions - alone in the classroom - further makes them prey to bourgeois ideology. Nevertheless the current dispute indicates how the crisis is forcing even this group to defend their working class interests. The two-year struggle has seen them gain militancy rather than, as government and unions hoped, become demoralised.

Recent moves by the State reflect the general tendency of state control today. The general atmosphere of social insecurity is now being codified in the new teaching contracts being created. As Bulletin Nine pointed out, the notion that Scotland and England/Wales have separate and independent systems of education has always been

a myth and this has become clearer as both areas drew up 'separate' but identical new contracts. An 'independent' committee of enquiry was set up in Scotland first to head off the widespread militancy there. This 'Main' Committee duly produced a report which called for an increased working week (up by 7.7%), hugely increased headmaster patronage (to veto appointments, determine salaries), an end to job security, an increased use of temporary staff (with the scrapping of the old agreement whereby such staff were made permanent after one years work), increased class sizes, and a limitation of future industrial action - only strikes would be permitted henceforth and even the legitimacy of these should be queried. This last item is, of course, directed against the fact that teachers have been able to screw state plans for restructuring education for the demands of the crisis by Work To Rules, refusal to do Curriculum Development and exam boycotts. Teachers have been showing for some time that the strike is often not the most effective weapon in workers' armoury.

The 'Main' Committee, then, with its 'secret and independent' deliberations, rather cleverly came up with an identical package to that being offered to English and Welsh teachers. The pay awards included in the package were trumpeted as being huge. And so they were - for headmasters. For teachers the news was all bad. As Bulletin Nine pointed out, there is an elaborate pay structure scale to divide and isolate teachers within schools, as well as between Secondary and Primary sectors. Thus a Secondary teacher at the top of his/her scale will receive 13.5% over 18 months (taking into account the increase in hours of 7.7%, this means a 5.8% increase.) A Primary teacher on point 3 on the scale will receive 7.3% (in real terms a pay cut of 0.4%). Furthermore headmaster patronage will reward some 'good' (ie.cooperative) teachers by some £1600 to £2000 more than their colleagues on the same pay scale. And the gap between the highest paid ordinary Secondary teacher and his/her Primary counterpart will increase to £400.

The State's strategy is clear. Patronage is further increased by the use of temporary staff. Already, widespread use is made of such workers. Their position is such that their employment can be ended without any notice being given, they are not paid for holidays or even for interval breaks or lunch hours. The new package ensures that teachers will become permanently 'temporary', a clear attempt to discipline a sizeable part of the workforce whose very livelihood will depend on continuing headmaster approval.

Funding for this package is to come from massive school closures. Already pupils are being bussed from school to school in search of subjects (one school doesn't teach biology, one doesn't teach German - and so on.), so that pupils have to make cross town visits to get such instruction and then are bussed back again for the rest of their timetables! School closures will greatly increase this process: working class education, already a caricature of real education, is about to get even worse.

Reaction in Scotland to 'Main' was immediate. Union field officers raced round schools gauging reaction. In school after school they were given short shrift. It was clearly time for the State to bail the unions out - which it duly did. The Scottish Office declared that it would stage the payment of the wage 'increases' and the unions were thus immediately able to start a campaign of protest. Thus Scottish teachers found themselves being dragooned into protecting a package that they originally wanted to reject. Once again the unions were trying their old trick of exhausting militancy through phoney battles. Union goons visited schools and appeared on the media warning teachers that they couldn't afford to reject 'Main'. In England and Wales a similar scenario was being played out with the six different unions having secret meetings together and with employers in a desperate attempt to impose the package. As we write there is a news blackout descending on these meetings but their outcome is clear.

Isolated by unions, secondary and primary sectors, and by the actions of the unions, teachers are going to be hammered. The process is not unique to Britain - Paris recently saw huge teacher and student demonstrations against similar state attempts to restructure education. Everywhere the Capitalist state is responding to the crisis by increasing social discipline. A cowed and subservient teaching workforce is but one element of that process. However, the signs are there that although the unions and the government will succeed in imposing a vicious settlement this time, teacher militancy, even though limited, is here to stay. Sizeable numbers of teachers have realised during two years of bitter struggle against the state that their role is fundamentally that of worker. The shattering of carefully nurtured illusions is both a blow for the state and a hopeful sign that schoolkids may after all learn something positive from their teachers.

G.M.

TRANSLATE?

The C.B.G. desperately needs the services of translators.

We would like to make our material available to non-speakers of English, we would like to be able to have some of the material being produced by fractions of the proletarian movement in other languages accessible to us and, in our attempts to learn from the experience of the revolutionary movement of the past, we would very much like to be able to have much of the material that exists in French German, Dutch and especially Russian translated into English.

If any reader feels he can help us in this task we would urge them to contact us at our group address.