

turn now telling us the downturn is over.

The evidence simply does not support this judgement — indeed, the 1988-9 period appeared in many ways more favourable. Yet ultimately it produced only an intensification of our difficulties. Yet, of course, and it should be kept in mind continuously, the whole upturn-downturn periodisation is schematic and misleading.

Examples of strong workplace organisation should be utilised for emulation. To fail to anchor them in the general picture where the tide is still running against workplace organisation, or to deduce from them any *general renewal of trade unionism* is to exaggerate present prospects. Simply observing general tendencies may produce pessimism and paralysis. But we cannot substitute the specific for the general. Two swallows don't make a summer.

Privatisation, fragmentation of the enterprise, decentralisation, may provoke new engagement, self-reliance, participatory workplace organisation. Or, through cutting smaller units off from wider sources of solidarity and power, these changes may produce weaker or non-existent organisation. Sectionalism is far from a source of strength, as we can see from examining the progress of shop stewards in the 1950s. It is impossible for workers to escape from the wider 'bureaucratic' union by building democratic workplace organisation that does not eventually *relate to the wider union* and try to change it. And that, often, is where the problems begin.

The bright side, if we can call it that, is: the necessary conditions for strong workplace trade unionism persist and intensify:

- insecurity;
- casualisation;
- arbitrary management;
- intensification of labour;
- growing inequalities of reward;
- exclusion from any voice in decision-making.

All are on the increase. These conditions are proving *insufficient* because changes in the economic and industrial structure and changes in the class structure create barriers.



TUC General Secretary John Monks: his services are no longer required to police the working class. Photo: John Harris

ers. One big barrier is weak, uninspiring trade union leadership. But though the remaking of economy and class creates barriers, they are far from unsurmountable. Workers themselves emphasise the continuing relevance to them of trade union organisation as an independent collective means of promoting their interests⁹.

Certainly such organisations will have to break from their past models. If they are to be more successful than their predecessors of the 1950s and 1960s, whose virtues have been exaggerated. Shop stewards will have to reach far more beyond the sectional, beyond the workplace, beyond the economic. They will have to develop positive programmes of policy and strategy for transforming and democratising both the enterprise and the wider union.

Links across industry will have to be broader and deeper. Workplace organisation will have to be built on a more explicit political basis involving initially the reclaiming, democratisation and radicalisation of the political wing of the labour movement.

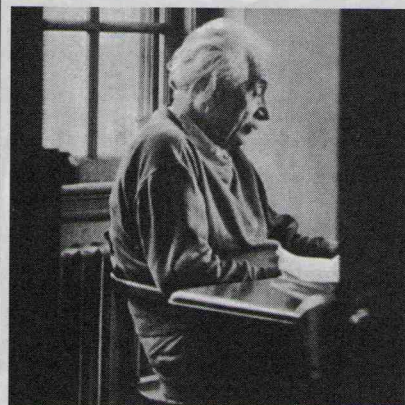
At the moment, this appears Utopian. There is a mood of resentment and anger against the Tories and against the speed-up and the deterioration of working life. It is reflected in a number of disputes which must be supported, encouraged, *built upon*. It is not reflected in any *general increase in militant action*. Weakness and a low level of struggle continue to characterise the situation. The right has strengthened its hold on the TUC and the Labour Party.

While important struggles will continue, any qualitative change is unlikely this side of a general election. The hope of a Labour victory will increasingly structure the industrial situation, and a "waiting for Labour" mood reinforced by the leadership will quite probably limit militancy. It is only with a Labour government in place that we are likely to see any radical change in the current conjuncture. ■

Notes

1. P. Fosh, 'Membership participation in workplace unionism: the possibility of union renewal', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, November 1993; P. Fairbrother, J. Waddington, 'The politics of trade unionism', *Capital and Class*, 41, 1990.
2. Cited in D. Guest, 'Human Resource Management, Trade Unions and Industrial Relations' in J. Storey, ed. *Human Resource Management: A Critical Text*, Routledge, 1994.
3. N. Millward et al, *Workplace Industrial Relations in Transition*, Dartmouth, 1992, p.352.
4. N. Millward, p.353.
5. T. Elger, 'Technological innovation and work reorganisation in British manufacturing in the 1980s', *Work, Employment and Society*, Special Issue, 1990, p.57.
6. J. McLroy, *Trade Unions in Britain Today*, Manchester University Press, 1995, pp.127-8.
7. N. Millward, pp.129-30.
8. D. Guest, *op.cit.*
9. C. Whitston, J. Waddington, 'Why sign up? New trade union members' reasons for joining', University of Warwick, 1992.

Another Day



Dropping in on comrade Einstein

RECENTLY WHILE driving through Princetown, New Jersey we stopped briefly to talk with Professor Einstein. During the short conversation we quickly came to the point i.e. his opinions on certain Marxist teachings, and asked whether or not the Professor recognized the class struggle. After that, part of the conversation went about as follows;

Einstein: Yes, of course. The German and English and American capitalists have also caused this war. And fascism everywhere is very possible... very possible.

We: In America also?

Einstein: Yes, in America.

We: And when do you think the working people will realize this?

Einstein: The workers in America will not understand soon. They still have the best conditions in the world, among the working peoples. The French workers understand... the British... but the American workers will be the last to wake up.

We: What do you think of Marx's principles?

Einstein: His main thesis is right. I agree with Marx but not with his teacher, Hegel.

We: Then what is your opinion of dialectics?

Einstein: Well, I haven't found the dialectic approach too useful, but still the only answer is socialism.

**Jeanne and Pete Morgan
The Militant, New York
16 June 1945**

• Albert Einstein born 14 March 1879, died 18 April 1955.