

The Worker



The destruction of our textile industry

THE IDEA of Britain being virtually unable to produce its own woollen carpets, its own cloths and worsteds, its own woollens seems to verge on the ridiculous. Yet the rate of decline in the woollen textiles trade is so rapid that such a prospect is now on the cards. The industry has been declining and contracting in West Yorkshire for decades: but now we would appear to have entered a fundamentally different phase of extinction.

Throughout the 70s a good deal of workers' money was fed by governments, both Labour and Conservative, in the form of industrial and regional aid, into recapitalising an industry out of which private capital was rapidly fleeing. Thousands of jobs were lost in these 'rationalisations', as companies merged, production fell and plant was modernised. Meanwhile, for some, profits rose: but evidently not enough, for now we are witnessing the wholesale closure of these very self same new plants.

The Thatcher government, too, has abandoned the industry. Regional aid at least paid lip-service to the idea of the industry remaining in some form or another. Joseph's decision to axe £233 million from regional aid and the attitude displayed toward the textile industry by various junior ministers recently, show only too clearly how willing they are to see the EEC and US-inspired measures complete the work started by British capital.

Examples of closures, redundancies and short-time working this year are too numerous to mention: 136 of the 400 firms in the trade have been affected. Take as one example the recently announced closure of Associated Weavers' tufted and printed carpet mill in Bradford. AW are to close the works with the subsequent loss of 1000 jobs. Yet it is

only a few years ago that the multi-million pound investment that AW and others made in new German machinery to produce tufted/printed carpets, to replace their traditional woven carpets, was heralded as the breakthrough British carpets needed.

AW's closure is also significant in that it is the American owners of the firm, Champion International, who

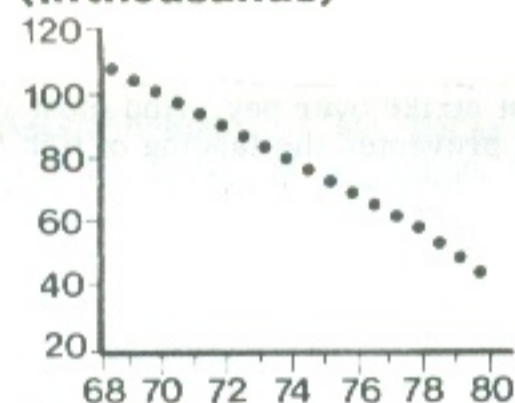
defence of our industries in the same way as we are taking up the defence of our services. They are ours, for we built them and we have need of them even if capitalism does not. Workers in the industry have begun to fight back, even if it is not yet enough.

The National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers is calling for the

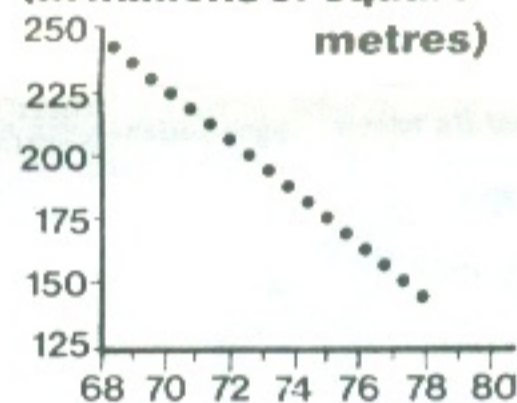
The Decline of Textiles

Some facts and figures

JOBS IN TEXTILES (in thousands)



PRODUCTION 1968-78 (in millions of square metres)



IMPORTS

- Polyester fibre imports up 500 per cent between 1978 and 1979.
- During the same period, US textile imports into Britain went up by 20 per cent; EEC-made imports went up by 40 per cent.
- Imports of woollen and worsted fabrics went up from 13.5 million square metres in 1976, to 23.5 million in 1978.

THIS YEAR

Out of 400 firms in West Yorkshire, 136 have either closed, made workers redundant, or put them on short time.



have made the closure decision. One must assume that Bradford does not fit in the global strategy, for production is to be switched to their Belgian plant. And then where?

The closure will mean the loss of some 12 per cent of total British tufted carpet production, the gap no doubt to be filled by more imports from the EEC or the States.

We must take up the

imposition of import controls, little enough to ask for, and the new mood abroad was expressed by the General Secretary of the Union when on TV recently. He said of job loss: "And what good has it done us quite frankly? For it's not the dark satanic mills that are closing, it's those that have been reorganised with both government and private capital that are going."

INDUSTRIAL Special

IN THIS series of Industrial Specials, time and again we have given examples of how imports have been used as a weapon to destroy our industries and skills and weaken our unions.

The Japanese, for example, prevent the import of trucks, but want to assemble their vehicle kits in Warrington, while down the road Foden's goes to the wall and is taken over by an American firm. Steel is dumped here from Europe and the USA. Motor bikes, sewing machines, typewriters - all are industries which have virtually disappeared. Now machine tools, steel, ship-building, textiles are under threat. And so up goes the cry for 'import controls'.

But if workers want import controls to help save their industries, it is of little use to call on the Government to implement them. Its policies have deliberately made an already serious situation even worse. While other capitalist governments have adopted protectionist policies and given subsidies to protect their own industries, the Tories have cynically used the dogma of 'free trade' as an excuse to do nothing.

The party, which claims to contain the 'true patriots', stands by while foreign capitalists use their advantageous position to destroy vital sections of our industry, and helps to accelerate the process by encouraging the coupon clippers of the city to export their capital.

If all these industries are to be saved, then import controls have to be imposed by workers themselves, the real patriots. Already, dockers have assisted miners in South Wales by refusing to unload imported coal. During the steel strike, a blockade of imported steel was a great success when lorry drivers and railwaymen refused to cross picket lines. The firm and principled

Thatcher out!



**Put her in the
dustbin of history**

IMPORT CONTROLS

stand brought steelworkers international support: as did the Ford workers in their last strike over pay. And most recently, fishermen on the west coast of Scotland prevented the landing of fish caught by foreign trawlers.

Such actions will doubtless bring down the full retribution of the EEC and Employment Act upon us. That is why we have always said Britain must get out of the Common Market and Thatcher must go.

Nor can the action stop at preventing these damaging imports: we must also stop the asset strippers from taking out the machinery from the factories they have closed, to sell abroad. This is already beginning to happen in the textile industry as we reported two weeks ago.

The articles below are just two examples of what is happening in widely disparate industries. Both have great potential for action, whether by the blacking of imported newsprint, or the blockading of French Golden Delicious, or Danish bacon at the docks.

Dockers have recently demonstrated their resolve not to sell their own jobs: let them now help other workers to do the same. Transport workers must also show their solidarity with action, which can only help to save their own jobs in the long term.

We must not allow phoney internationalism, or the fear that we will be thought 'little Englanders' to prevent us from taking such actions. Real internationalism begins with what we do at home. Self-reliance is the basis of a socialist economy. The fight for import controls to save our industries will help to lay the foundations of such an economy. The new Battle of Britain will once again help to shape the world.

This collection of articles first appeared in 'The Worker', over the last 12 months. The Textile Industry is under sentence of death. If this sentence is carried out West Yorkshire will die.

We must save our skills, jobs, Trades Unions from Thatcher's tide of destruction. The future of the Textile Industry lies only with the Working Class.

No to Closures!

No to Thatcher!

West Yorkshire Branch,
Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist).





MARCH 9 was a major step in the formation of the sort of working class unity that is needed to defeat Thatcher's Government. Photo: THE WORKER

Historic Notes

Leeds clothing workers strike

FADING slogans demanding 'Equal Pay Now', and 'We Want the Full Shilling', etc, on derelict and moribund factory walls, are sad reminders of the Leeds Clothing Workers Strike which welcomed 1970 and a new decade.

The National Union of Tailoring and Garment Makers, representing over 350,000 workers, 85 per cent of whom were women, had entered negotiations in late 1969. Wage levels and conditions in the industry were and are appalling.

In 1969 the average earnings for men working a 40 hour week were £21 and £11 for women. Averages lie. Not unheard of wages in Leeds for men on a 40 hour week were £12 and for women on a 31 hour week were £8. Victorian wages in Victorian factories, presided over by the Masters Federation.

At the end of the negotiations, the Union had agreed with the Employers 9d per hour increase on basic Union rates, for those above the rate 4d for women and 5d for men was agreed.

In February 1970, John Colliers one of the then larger clothing firms in Leeds, struck over the full shilling. Within 14 days between 35,000 and 40,000 tailoring workers were on strike, the Leeds Clothing Strike was on with a vengeance.

Thousands of striking workers-

the then hallmarks of British tailoring - Hepworths, Burtons, Maensons, Mabgate, Albion etc, were out on unofficial strike. If a firm was working, hundreds of women marched, besieged, brought out and closed them. There was little debate of picketing, the factories came out, if need be by storm.

But years of decline and complacency towards the union were reflected in the strikers establishing the Strike Liaison Committee, and turning away from their traditional union structure.

The division and divorce between union officers and members was immense. The former were seen as corrupt, time-serving people (almost as custom, retiring Leeds Executive members were rehired as management personnel).

Similarly, the question must be posed, where were the workers in their own organisation? Why such complacency, demoralisation, defeatism? Why such fatalism at the point of production?

The Strike Liaison Committee epitomised the strength and weaknesses of the members. It was the motivator and organiser - the huge demonstration to Woodhouse Moor, the Town Hall and Shaftesbury Cinema Meetings, the Cardigan Fields Rally, the pickets, propaganda, hardship collections,

etc. But as with any parallel organisation, it stood apart, soon to become isolated and impotent. Buried within 18 months by the Employers offensive and vicious purge.

The Strike Committee failed in that it did the groundwork the union should have been doing for years.

It characterised the divisions, frustrations, weaknesses within the workers camp. It was transient, ephemeral.

The Strike Liaison Committee claimed to represent the strikers, but the Employers would talk only with the union appointed officials. Contradictory instructions were issued to the strikers by both the union and the Strike Committee, with the vulture-like Masters Federation hovering, threatening in the background. The drift back to work was in the air.

The full shilling was paid as settlement of the strike. This was paid in two parts over a period of 6 months. Victory, but shortlived. The return to work began and the employers attacked.

Leeds was the heart of tailoring. A tentative transference of production to the North-East (Sunderland and Durham) which had started before the strike, became a flood to an area of cheap labour, government grants and little union organisation. Within

weeks all but a few members of the Strike Committee had been sacked, made redundant, victimised. The employers, believing their title, the Masters Federation, gave them divine rights, began the 'disciplining' of the workforce. The destruction of the tailoring industry as producers had occurred by massive use of redundancy - an estimated 30,000 jobs lost in 10 years. A fatalism - the inevitability of destruction had taken root.

The strike of 1970 is unparalleled in tailoring history. It raised questions of class, organisation, structure, place of work and the union. It opened the possibility of a strong, well organised workforce - capable of taking on and beating the employers, and of preserving the industry. The questions were not answered. The strike could well have been the death rattle of tailoring in Britain.

It is an object lesson doing too little too late. For workers to have ignored, moth-balled, grievously misused their union is a tragedy. What honour the tailoring workers redeemed in the weeks of strike action, the employers dissipated in their following onslaught.

Tailoring and clothing production was one of the prime industries of Leeds. It is now skeletal

Accepting low pay is not the answer as mills shut and machinery goes abroad

THIS YEAR already 14,000 people have had their livelihood stolen from them as mill after mill has been shut down in the North of England - 14,000 workers made redundant as the factory gates close for the last time. And what of the textile machinery they leave behind? Does it lie rusting away forgotten like the 14,000 who previously operated it and produced British textiles renowned throughout the world? Ah no!

industry being destroyed, but further we are going to be flooded with textiles produced abroad on the very machinery we paid for! And all this in the name of 'reason' and 'progress'.

And what are we to do? The National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile-Workers aided by the National Union of Seamen has been blocking the export of spinning machinery from the Courtaulds factory at Spennymoor



The employer has taken dutch courage from Thatcher, and replies to wage claims with threats of sackings and closures

The tragedy goes deeper than that. This machinery is now being sold again at 'bargain' prices to those very countries like Italy, who by the consent of Her Majesty's Government and with the wholehearted approval of British capitalism, have decimated our textile industry. For example, Sulzer looms considered the Rolls-Royce of weaving machines are largely going to Italy. After James Ives of Yeadon closed, 30 of the 50 machines were despatched to Italy and others went to Egypt, Saudi Arabia, India, Thailand and Pakistan. When one of Britain's major carpet manufacturers closed, Associated Weavers of Bradford, all but one of the advanced tufting machines were sold abroad. And it is highly probable that modern machinery provided in the 70s through government grants (our money) is being auctioned off as the 'deal' provided for repayment of the 'loan' if the mills are closed within five years!

but they are faced with great difficulties as the machinery is often stripped out very quickly. While this obviously needs to be done it is like the cart chasing the horse. What of those mills that are still producing? What of the future of the whole of the British textile industry, for that matter of British industry itself?

If ever there was a perfect example for the need for import controls this is it. But what do we mean when we talk of about controls? Do we mean that we wait for some government to legislate that industry here shall not be destroyed? Consider the speed with which Britain has been de-industrialised over the last ten years and the lunacy of that position becomes apparent. We do not have time to luxuriate in that illusion. We must decide what goods come into this country and we must ensure that our decisions are implemented.

We must be farsighted where we have been previously shortsighted,

we must see which factory, mill, school or hospital they seek to close and we must prevent its closure. Thatcher and her mates the coupon-clippers and the asset strippers are bent on closing down Britain and destroying the working class. Export Them!

In the last decade alone closures and redundancies have cost 60,000 jobs, half the workforce.

Meanwhile, for those who remain, in 1979, one in six men and eight in ten women were reported to be on earnings below the official poverty line. What price loyalty ... ?

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off Great George Street
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The employer is less likely to concede workers' demands today without the strength of the class being used

In the face of this evidence, who has been shortsighted and who has been farsighted? That is, it is patently obvious that the Department of Industry together with the industrialists did not foresee what could be termed a long-term view for the British textile industry other than that it would cease and soon!

Not only have 14,000 people been put out of work, not only have we as taxpayers been swindled by these oh so respectable criminals, not only is our

The Worker

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Thatcher - 'a criminal ignorance of how manufacturing works.'

Many textile workers at risk