Bored and Angry
The Politics of Youth Unemployment
Steve Munby
(The author is the editor of Challenge)

One of the most striking developments in Britain over recent years has been the emergence of mass unemployment, with official figures of 1.5 million. Of these an extremely high proportion are among youth under 25—roughly 40 per cent of the total, with unemployment levels among 16-25 year olds three times as high as those for older age groups.

The impact of youth unemployment has opened up a major fissure in the existing political framework, with the exclusion and alienation of many young people from our major social and political institutions. This presents both major problems and opportunities for the left. In the past it has proved difficult to develop links between the trade union movement and the unemployed. In a similar, if distinct manner, the labour movement has faced real difficulties in involving young people, generally earning at best a passive allegiance in union membership, or voting. If the left and the labour movement can develop adequate policies in response to youth unemployment, build an effective mass movement around the issue, and are seen to be playing such a role by young people, it could register important advances. The possibility exists of winning young people as a social group to the left, which would have a major impact on the balance of political forces in Britain. For this to be achieved considerably more attention and action needs to be devoted to this issue than previously.

The Youth Dimension
Any assessment of the problem must begin by indicating who the young unemployed are. Public attention has chiefly focused on school-leavers. These are an important group, both in terms of the numbers involved and the rapid growth of unemployment among them, as the table below giving recent unemployment figures for school-leavers indicates:

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1 All statistics here are taken from Full Employment, a collection of articles on this area published by the Institute for Workers' Control.
Widespread concern has been expressed by politicians and the press over the plight of school-leavers. However, this has had only a limited impact on government policy, and at times has tended to obscure the extent to which unemployment reaches far beyond the ranks of school-leavers. More attention has been paid in recent months to the problems of other groups of young people. The catchphrase "socially disadvantaged" has been used to describe the employment and career problems facing such disparate groups as young women, young blacks, and the "educationally disadvantaged" (sic). Apart from obscuring discrimination on grounds of sex, colour and class, this label helps to perpetuate a more general mystification of the problem. The seriousness of the problems confronting the different sections of young people referred to above are clear. Nevertheless an approach which attempts to analyse youth unemployment principally in terms of the distinct problems of these different groups, fails to grasp the specifically youth dimension of unemployment in terms of its causes and effects, and the extent to which young people as a whole are affected.

Thus in July 1977, a peak period for unemployment among school-leavers, after the figure for the latter is deducted (241,600), we are still left with 167,000 under 25 on the dole. The most fruitful conception of youth unemployment is of a continuum ranging from 16 to the mid-20s. This embraces all those entering the labour market from different forms of educational institution ranging from school to university, as well as large numbers of young people who have been unable or unwilling to obtain permanent employment.

Certain features are worth indicating. Firstly, despite the smaller number of women registered as unemployed than men in the 16-25 age group (304,000:404,000), the ratio of women to men is nearly twice as high as in older age groups. Secondly, the incidence of long periods of unemployment has increased, particularly in the 20-24 age groups (only exceeded by male workers in the 60-64 age group). Finally, it should be noted that the overall figures for youth unemployment exclude some 100,000 kept off the register at any one time by special employment and training schemes.

No Return to the 60s

While the incidence of long-term unemployment

2 While statistics for unemployment among older women grossly underestimate its scope, the level of unemployment among young women is still significantly high.

is both alarming and increasing, a more striking feature is that the great majority of young people are liable to experience at least short-term periods of unemployment. This has a number of consequences. It means that unemployment has an impact on young people as a whole, not just a distinct section. Therefore it exerts visible effects within their social, political and cultural life. While unemployment does confront young people with economic problems, their character and scale is quite different from the 30s. The politics of youth unemployment aren't rooted in absolute material deprivation. Instead we have a politics of boredom and frustration at blocked opportunities and the contrast between the consumer society and the experience of the dole queue. There is a risk of young people being forced back into an increased dependence on and subordination to the family, state, educational authorities, and employers.

The worst aspect of being unemployed from an immediate point of view, is the boredom, isolation and powerlessness one feels. It can lead to a reduction in expectations, self-confidence and a willingness to take militant economic action. At the same time it can promote a more distinctive youth identity. There are signs that the blocks being placed on young people's opportunities and the threat to their autonomy are provoking something of a backlash. Given their effective exclusion from or impotence in other spheres such as work, politics, the family and education, young people have tended to channel their responses into the area of culture and leisure. Here it has been possible to experience a greater sense of collective identity, enjoy more autonomy, and achieve a bigger impact. Some manifestations of this are of an extremely negative character, e.g. football hooliganism, vandalism, etc. Others, such as the new currents in popular music, are far more positive, with long-term implications both in the cultural arena and the broader field of youth politics. One of the important features of punk rock has been the manner in which it has expressed and channelled these feelings. The new wave has spearheaded a new anti-authoritarian trend in youth culture within which the experience of youth unemployment is a recurrent theme.

Politics and Morality

Despite their lack of "bargaining" power as a social group, the young unemployed exert an

3 For a more detailed theoretical discussion of this area see "Youth in Contemporary Capitalism" by Bob Lentell, in the January 1978 issue of Marxism Today.

4 e.g. Chelsea Right to Work. Clash Career Opportunities etc.
impact on the political sphere insofar as the problem is fairly emotionally charged for many people. The major political parties have all recognised this and attempted both to avoid appearing insensitive to the issue, and earn praise, where it can be won, for actual or proposed measures to deal with the problem. Nevertheless within their existing economic and political strategies, it is impossible for the Tory, Liberal and Labour Parties⁵ to put forward effective long-term solutions. For all of them it has been necessary to avoid a link being established in popular consciousness between overall economic strategy and youth unemployment.

One effect of this has been to "depoliticise" youth unemployment, projecting it as a "moral" issue, and consequently dissociate it from strategic political debates. The manner in which this has been effected varies from party to party. The Tories have tended to narrow the issue down to one of a "party political point" scoring, as in the Young Conservatives' demonstration at the last Labour Party Conference. Criticisms of the Labour Government's "impotence" and neglect of the young unemployed have not been linked to any clear policy proposals. The Liberals and the Labour Government have been forced to handle the issue more delicately, given their greater accountability. Thus they have implicitly admitted that there is only a limited amount which can be achieved given existing economic policy (or, rather, the existing economic "situation"). Instead, they have attempted to propose and (in the latter's case) implement a number of piecemeal measures. These, while generally useful in themselves, are completely inadequate given the scope of the problem. Nevertheless within their existing framework of the merits and demerits of particular schemes.

Real difficulties also face the left and the mass popular organisations in tackling the issue. To a certain extent the left has accepted the terms of debate set by the establishment. There has been a tendency to over-stress the "moral" aspects of youth unemployment at the expense of its strategic political importance. Within the various alternative economic strategies put forward on the left, the means for creating full employment has sometimes been insufficiently detailed in character. Measures to deal with youth unemployment have often had the character of an afterthought rather than playing a central role in the formation of policy. In the campaigning priorities of the left, while youth unemployment has been recognised as a major issue, it has sometimes been seen as marginal to key areas of struggle and insufficiently located within the overall perspectives for mass struggle. These weaknesses are related to objective factors which impede the development of a more fully formed strategy.

Youth Opportunities Programme

An important aspect of youth unemployment is the threat it poses to training and career opportunities for young people. The recently published Holland Report has led to the implementation by the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) of a massive training scheme aimed at school-leavers, called the Youth Opportunities Programme (YOP). Despite big weaknesses which I shall discuss later, it represents a major advance in official approaches to youth unemployment on a number of levels. The amount of funds provided and the numbers of young people involved, are substantially greater than in previous schemes. The emphasis on training opportunities for those involved reflects a more serious approach than the earlier, effectively cosmetic Job Creation Programme (JCP). Lastly, the administration of the programme by 28 regional committees allows significant opportunities for intervention by progressive forces in the implementation of the scheme. Many on the left and in the labour movement have been critical of the new programme and dubious about participation in the Area Boards which administer it. Previous experience of "responsibility without power" in the JCP has led to an understandable hesitancy in relation to the new scheme. This is mistaken, I believe, given the greater opportunities presented for intervention within the framework of the YOP. However, an interventionist strategy needs to be very clear both as to its objective and about the limits of such an approach.

Education, Training and the NUS

One of the major innovations of the Holland Report was the implicit recognition that all young people should have access to some form of post-school education and/or training. This represents a significant advance in "official" thinking on this subject and has been rapidly seized on by the NUS and other educational unions. Negotiations have been taking place between the NUS and the MSC for the former to obtain rights to represent the young people on the YOP. This would be a positive step in terms of the ability of the NUS to represent and involve young people in the struggle for better educational and training opportunities. In the long-term, it could strengthen moves to a

⁵ My references here to the Liberal and Labour Parties are somewhat misleading since I am principally concerned with the Liberal MPs and the Labour Government. Very different approaches are put forward both by sections of the Labour Party, including some MPs, and the Young Liberals.
broader unity among young people as a whole on these issues.

Problems and Possibilities

However, while real possibilities exist for advance in this area, considerable problems remain. Much uncertainty exists over the character of the new schemes. There is a strong possibility that they are going to rely on "work experience", where jobs are carried out on employers' premises. One of the tasks of NUS and the trade unions will be to attempt to ensure that the schemes really are educational in character rather than simply providing employers with a cheap labour supply.

Any organisation attempting to represent the young people in the YOP schemes must place as its central task their involvement in self-organisation and the development of mass militant struggle around democratic demands. This raises perhaps the most obvious problem involved in an "interventionist" strategy in Government Training Programmes—the risk of political intervention being confined to the committee level rather than the priority being given to mass struggle. Only the future and a careful approach by the left both inside and outside NUS can ensure that the latter rather than the former course is pursued.

Even if these pitfalls are surmounted a strategy that confined itself to questions of education and training and saw the NUS and the YOP as its principal organisational axis would be fundamentally flawed. Even within the age-range to which the new Programme applies, large numbers of unemployed young people will be unaffected, whilst provisions for the 20-24 year olds, who have equal problems, are minimal. Indeed, the problems of the latter could become even more serious, since without the creation of new employment on a massive scale, a new "bottleneck" is likely to arise: when those who have been involved in the YOP finish their course and join others on the dole queue. In this sense the YOP simply ups the age of those most affected by unemployment.

Since unemployment among "older" young people is a less emotive issue at present than school-leaver unemployment, it serves a very useful public relations function for the government. To state the obvious, which can be obscured by an over-concern with training opportunities, the central problem in youth unemployment is the lack of jobs for young people. NUS lacks the power on its own to effect a major shift in the job prospects of young people on the YOP. Furthermore, even if a substantial number of the people who go through the Programme are able to find work once they have finished, there is no guarantee that these will be of a kind where they can use and develop the skills they have begun to acquire.

Technological change in the service of the giant firms is leading to an increasing reduction in the demand for skills in a widely differing range of spheres of employment. This poses fairly sharply the limitations of the traditional labour movement demand for "improved educational and training opportunities for young people". We need to start asking what kind of work the training is for, and the scope and function of education provided.

The Economics of Youth Unemployment

A major element in the emergence of mass unemployment has been the economic policies pursued by the present right-wing Labour Government. Wage controls have led to a drop in demand for goods, which in turn leads to a drop in demand for labour. Low wages have also led to increased overtime working, which has taken up work which might otherwise have gone to the unemployed. Parallel to this, the savage attacks on the social services arising from cuts in central and local government expenditure have caused a massive loss of jobs.

Within this overall growth of unemployment, specific mechanisms have operated to make young people more susceptible. As already indicated, those new to the labour market are more susceptible to unemployment than those already at work. On top of this, however, specific processes operate which directly discriminate against young people. Thus natural wastage agreements, under which posts left vacant remain unfilled, can blunt the awareness of the threat to jobs by shifting the problem from the immediate workforce to others outside—chiefly young people. Redundancy payments have had a similar effect in taking the edge off the struggle. In a cumulative sense the existence of a large pool of available labour makes it easier for management to discriminate against certain groups in hiring and firing. While this has been clearly highlighted in terms of racial and sexual discrimination, the extent to which discrimination takes place on grounds of age is less well known. Thus personnel managers in many engineering factories in the North won't employ young single people for unskilled and semi-skilled manual jobs since they are deemed unreliable—more prone to militancy and more likely to change jobs. A rather different device is the use of apprentices as a form of cheap labour, who, when they become eligible for the skilled adult rate, get the chop. Similar devices occur in other areas of employment where young people obtain work for only a limited period of time at lower rates.

The frequently shorter periods of employment which young people "enjoy" in contrast with older groups mean that alongside the higher overall rate of unemployment among young people, far more
of them as a social group are likely to experience brief spells of unemployment or at least the threat of it. This is increased by frequently different attitudes to unemployment among young people. The combination of higher expectations of what work should offer, the lack of dependents, and the lack of experience of a previous situation of mass unemployment means that young people are more likely to leave a job which they find dull, tiring, and poorly paid. It's a widespread attitude that an unemployed person should take the first job that comes along. For those whose approach to the problem of unemployment is essentially moralistic, it may seem a scandalous admission that young people are prepared to risk unemployment in search of job satisfaction and a decent living standard. I would argue that it is a potentially positive attitude among young people insofar as it reflects a reluctance to acquiesce in the economic forces that threaten them.

The Trade Union Movement

Mobilising the trade union movement on the issue of youth unemployment has presented several problems. While general concern has been widespread at all levels of the movement, often cutting across traditional political boundaries, it has proved difficult to translate this into effective action. This requires some examination. For the ultra-left there is no problem involved. It is simply a question of betrayal and capitulation by right and left-wing “bureaucrats” and “reformists”. While superficially attractive, this fails to tackle the problem of why there has only been limited engagement at the grass roots with the problem. A more sophisticated explanation in terms of the ideological effects of the social contract and loyalty to the Labour Government, while providing part of the answer, is insufficient: we must look still further. The social contract clearly had an initial effect of lowering the level of struggle on the shop floor. However, in the last year or so, the picture has changed dramatically with a rapid increase in the man hours lost through strike action and unrest on the wages front apparent among widely differing groups of workers. However, the great majority of these struggles have been of a sectional or isolated character. Perhaps the most significant long-term effect of the social contract has been its divisive character, both in the consciousness of the mass of the workers and of trade union leaderships, which has led either to groups “going it alone” as a deliberate policy (as in the case of the toolroom workers) or being left to fight on their own, through the role of the TUC (seamen, firemen, etc.). This climate has tended to encourage a defensive attitude and made it even more difficult to win key sections of the trade union movement to take up the cudgels on behalf of weaker sections such as the unemployed.

Past Problems

However, even given a different political climate on the shop floor, obstacles remain. The organisation of the unemployed and the mobilisation of trade unions on this issue has historically been a problem which the labour movement has found it difficult to tackle. Successful mobilisation has usually been achieved in two kinds of situation. One is where existing jobs are threatened and the actual workforce spearheads the fight to defend jobs in the context of problems facing the local community—the UCS struggle was a classic example of this. The other situation is where direct links exist between employed and unemployed sufficient to forge the basis for unity in struggle. Thus in the 20s and 30s the leadership of the National Unemployed Workers Movement was principally composed of men like Wal Hannington, with a background of involvement in the shop stewards movement and the industrial battles of the earlier periods. This gave both a ready-made “cadre” to the unemployed and strengthened the awareness (and the fear) of unemployment among those in work.

By and large today, however, the most militant and well-organised sections of the trade union movement are least affected by unemployment—e.g., skilled engineering workers and miners. Indeed, in both areas there are sometimes shortages of labour. Consequently the awareness of the problem among key groups is blunted. This makes it a more difficult task to win them to take up the battle against natural wastage and for the 35 hour week etc. A major ideological struggle will be necessary to win the trade union movement, both its traditional “core” and as a whole, to take up the struggle against youth unemployment. This isn't just a question of more “moral” exhortations or putting “correct” demands, but of developing a framework whereby contact can be built between trade unionists and the young unemployed.

The Left Alternative—Problems of Technological Change

A broad degree of consensus has emerged on the left around a counter-crisis programme—widely referred to as the “left alternative”. Whilst it represents a clear programme for advance, it needs filling out in more detail, as a strategy for creating full employment.

More attention is required to the effects of the introduction of new technologies and forms of organisation of the labour process. These are linked to the recession and have been accelerated by government policies. Thus the cuts in the social
services have been marked by a considerable "rationalisation" of work organisation and the workforce.

Until recently the left has failed to tackle the role of technological change as a factor in the employment situation with sufficient thoroughness. The attention given to this question at the recent conference of the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions and the STUC, represents a welcome advance in this field. The left's alternative strategy needs to be deepened by incorporating two major approaches to this problem. We must fight to ensure that labour-saving new technologies are used not to create mass unemployment, but to allow longer holidays, early retirement (where desired), a shorter working week and where possible to reduce the degree of tedium involved in a job. The growing demand for a 35 hour week is a key element in this. We need to use technology as a means of enhancing not degrading the skills of a worker. Secondly, whilst avoiding a Luddite approach, it is important that technological innovation be assessed in terms of its social impact. We need to consider its effect on the number of workers required, the degree of job satisfaction and the usefulness or desirability of the final product, since all three are often intimately linked. Quite often reductions in jobs and skills involved in a particular production process are justified on the basis that the outcome in terms of quality and cost of the final product (i.e. "consumer interests") outweigh the interests of the producers. This frequently doesn't stand up to a careful examination of the final product.

The left must begin to incorporate a more detailed approach to specific areas of employment, which tackles these issues, for its alternative programme really to be able to create full employment.

Building a Movement

The need for deepening the understanding of what is involved applies to the left's approach to the problem of unemployment as a whole. There are further problems in its approach to the position of young people within that. Recognising the differences between today and the 1930s, the Broad Left has rejected the idea of an unemployed workers' movement on the lines of that which existed in the inter-war period, preferring to concentrate on work within the existing trade union movement. This has led to a concentration on struggles within the workplaces. This is of considerable importance, particularly if the struggle against natural wastage and redundancies and for the 35 hour week can develop a mass character. However, it fails to take into account certain specific problems posed by youth unemployment.

Older workers on the dole are likely to have had some contact with the labour movement, possess some experience of collective organisation and in some cases maintain union membership. None of these are likely to apply to young people. As a result there is a serious danger of a lack of contact between young people and the labour movement.

The National Front

Alongside the risk of losing a generation of activists to the labour movement is the threat posed by the ultra-right. Despite the relatively crude politics purveyed by the National Front, they have grasped a point which most political forces, including the left, have missed. This is the extent of the political impact of unemployment on a generation of young people. To some degree the NF has developed a more coherent response than either the left or the Establishment to the feelings of frustration, powerlessness and dislocation from society experienced by many young people. While not attempting any campaigning work on the issue of youth unemployment, the NF has been able to use racism as an accessible way of extending their "ideological" influence on the dole queue, using the simple idea that "it's the blacks that are taking our jobs". Alongside this, the stress on organisation—marches, banners, uniforms, etc.—can enable some young people to experience a false sense of "belonging" and "power". This has registered some success. Therefore not only on moral and social grounds, but also in basic self-defence, the trade union movement must attempt to reach out to unemployed young people. The creation of a movement bringing together trade unionists and the young unemployed becomes a central political task for the left.

The Right to Work Campaign

The first attempt to create a movement uniting employed and unemployed was the Right To Work campaign, established in the autumn of 1974 on the initiative of (and as rapidly became apparent, as a "front" for) the International Socialists (now the Socialist Workers Party). Whatever its failings, this was the first body to pose the important question of building unity in struggle between these two sections. It was opposed by many sections of the labour movement, including the Communist Party. Unfortunately despite the very real problems involved in the approach of the Right To Work campaign, opposition was sometimes based on wrong premises. Nevertheless, the RTWC did acquire initially a considerable degree of support both inside and outside the labour movement. Much of this derived from powerful fears of a return to the conditions in the inter-war period—a theme
of support it enjoyed, it already possessed important features which represented an advance on previous initiatives on this question. It was orientated specifically towards the problem of youth unemployment. It put forward policies such as an Emergency Training Programme open to all unemployed young people, which could immediately begin to tackle the problem. Finally it recognised the importance of a campaign bringing together the trade union movement and other social forces, particularly among young people.

Within the framework provided by the CAYU, local initiatives began to emerge to give the campaign stronger roots. Thus in the summer of 1976 Liverpool Trades Council Youth Committee proposed a lobby of Parliament for November 3 on the subject of youth unemployment. Subsequently overshadowed by the massive demonstration against the cuts on November 17, the lobby was fairly small involving some 500 people, although reflecting a fairly broad range of social and political forces. However, in the long-term it had a significant effect in stimulating the establishment of local CAYU groups and encouraging activists to initiate ongoing work among young unemployed people themselves.

The approach of CAYU represents a major departure from previous efforts in this area either of campaigns or specific organisations such as NUS. It takes its starting-point from the recognition that youth unemployment is a structural not a cyclical problem. Unless major structural changes are effected in the economy, large-scale youth unemployment will continue to exist. Given the current balance of political forces, this is an unlikely prospect in the short-term. Therefore it is necessary to develop a strategy that can deal with long-term youth unemployment.

**Government Schemes**

This has a number of aspects. In immediate terms we are confronted by the existing realities of government schemes, in particular the Youth Opportunities Programme. There are two important elements in this. CAYU needs to take up the issues of education and training for young people opened up by the YOP, bringing together those involved with students in Further Education colleges and schools, and raising these issues within the trade union movement. While this is equally a task for the NUS, CAYU can play an important and complementary role at the grass roots in mobilising activity. Work of this character is already under way in several areas in conjunction with student unions in FEs and NUSS around the demand for "parity with the YOP" (i.e. that those in further education should receive similar sums to those on YOP).
Bringing together large numbers of unemployed young people, the YOP provides real opportunities for the collective organisation of those involved. Given the character of the scheme, this should take the form of dual membership of the NUS and a trade union. The moves afoot for NUS to launch recruitment drives is a welcome step. CAYU will attempt to assist this while also stimulating trade union recruitment. The trade unions could see a welcome re-invigoration of their youth sections through the new perspectives opened up by this project. While recognising the possibilities of positive intervention in the area bodies administering the schemes, this is a task which devolves upon the mass organisations such as NUS and the trade unions. Two major objectives of their representatives on these bodies would be to fight for direct representation of those involved in the schemes and to ensure that their educational and training aspect is real and not a cover for cheap labour.

Organising the Unemployed

It's necessary to respond to the feelings of powerlessness, isolation, frustration and passivity which unemployment can provoke among young people. Particularly, given the fact that the majority of unemployed young people will remain outside the YOP, it is imperative to develop structures within which young unemployed people can begin to organise themselves to deal with the problems that confront them, as well as developing links with other forces.

CAYU is attempting to tackle this in a number of ways. Within its own organisation it aims to develop a membership structure to involve the young unemployed alongside the existing basis of delegates from sponsoring bodies, trade unions, student unions, etc. This is already the practice in a number of local committees. On a broader level CAYU is working to establish drop-in centres where young unemployed people can come together in the day and use as both a social and political base. One has already been established in Leicester by the local CAYU group, and in a number of other areas moves are afoot to open them, either run directly by CAYU or under the auspices of local organisations, ranging from Trades Councils to Youth Action Groups. The establishment of a national network of drop-in centres would represent a major advance in the formation of a local and national identity for young unemployed people and strengthen moves towards alliances with other forces, particularly the labour movement. A great deal of concern exists within the trade union movement about youth unemployment. Assistance in the form of premises, money and bodies to help establish drop-in centres would be a concrete measure which would begin to bridge the gaps that exist.

In the longer-term, I suspect we must consider the question of organising the unemployed within the trade union movement itself. This is being carried out in Italy, where under the auspices of the CGIL a separate union of the unemployed is affiliated to the general federation. A similar structure could be considered in Britain, affiliated to the TUC and given material assistance from other trade unions.

The Labour Movement

A key task of the Campaign Against Youth Unemployment is to win the labour movement to a greater understanding of and involvement in the fight against youth unemployment. This must take place at a number of levels.

It is necessary to win support for an alternative economic strategy with particular reference to youth unemployment, not only at a leadership level, but also at the grass roots. A broad degree of consensus exists among the very different forces involved in CAYU as to the main points such a programme should incorporate. However, in the interests of involving the broadest possible forces, CAYU has refrained from adopting any programme in this sphere. Its chief aim has been to stimulate discussion on the subject of contributing to existing debates, and providing new forums for discussion.

Concretely, local groups are attempting to make demands such as "a reduction of overtime" and the 35 hour week operate in practice by approaches to selected workplaces and industries. A systematic drive against practices which discriminate against young people, such as the use of apprentices as cheap labour, and natural wastage, is needed. To be successful such approaches must be linked to the immediate concerns of trade unionists. Thus CAYU must offer perspectives on the problems facing trade union youth, raising demands such as the adult rate at 18 and for increased apprentice intakes, as part of the overall fight against youth unemployment.

Sectionalism and Alliances

A different level of struggle is that of the role to be played by mass organisations, such as the trade unions and NUS. While both have made some positive contributions to the fight against youth unemployment, there have been significant weaknesses. This can be defined fundamentally as one of sectional responses to the problem. There are two major aspects to this. Both have conceived of the problem in terms of their particular spheres of concern and consequently have had a limited analysis of the problem, which has been
reflected in policy formation. Secondly, they have failed to place enough emphasis on building a wider unity with other forces, in particular the young unemployed, in the fight against youth unemployment.

There are two principal reasons for this. In the first place their objectives as organisations are limited—relating primarily to the problems facing their membership in the particular spheres within which they operate. In a sense this is both inevitable and necessary. CAYU must respond to this (as indicated earlier) by formulating proposals relating to their specific spheres of work. Secondly, the impact of economic recession and government policies has stimulated sectional responses and led to a reluctance to become involved in disputes over broader issues and on behalf of other groups.

I have referred earlier to its effects in the trade union movement, but parallel developments are apparent in the student movement.

Mass unemployment among young people has a sapping effect on the strength of both sections in pursuit of their demands. Both NUS and the trade union movement can both help win support for their own objectives and create the preconditions for unity on other issues by developing alliances with each other and the young unemployed, both in supporting CAYU and at the level of the fight for a change in government policy.

In our new programme, *The British Road to Socialism*, we see the central process in left advance as the development of a broad democratic alliance. The labour movement must play a leading role in this. To win both the necessary unity and a position of leadership, the labour movement must identify with the problems of other groups and take up their struggles in its own right. The creation of a mass movement against youth unemployment could play a major role in this. To achieve this the trade union movement must make more effort to identify with young unemployed people and to lead the struggle on this front. Within the youth movement, the NUS enjoys a unique position as a mass, progressive organisation. It could play a similar role within the youth movement to that played by the trade union movement within the broad democratic alliance.

**Rock Against the Dole?**

Given the character of much of the previous discussion on the left on this subject, this might seem a suitable ending-point. However, to do so would be to neglect a major question. How do we develop an image that will capture the popular imagination, particularly of young people for the fight against youth unemployment? What are the means whereby this is best communicated? Current presentation of the issue in the press, while frequently emotional in tone, tends to encourage passivity. "No return to the 30s" as a slogan is inappropriate to the situation today, and is particularly weak in pulling-power amongst young people. Unemployed marches have a similar dated feel. Perhaps punk bands like the Clash have come nearest to capturing a contemporary image, capable of "moving the masses", with their emphasis on boredom, frustration, blocked opportunities and wasted creativity. It is from within the arena of contemporary youth culture that such an image must be drawn. As the Anti-Nazi League, Rock Against Racism and the Carnival Against the Nazis have shown, the sphere of music and culture is of crucial significance in mobilising masses of young people on political issues. A major priority for CAYU must be to develop a relationship with and be seen to be part of the progressive trends in youth culture.