

# Redundant managers

Unemployment has particularly hit workers in manufacturing, shipbuilding, textiles and construction, but another section of the working class whose jobs have generally been protected until now has also suffered. This is the "executives", those workers who are employed as managers of one kind or another. The Professional and Executive Register (PER), a department of the Manpower Services Commission, had 30,000 unemployed executives on its books in March 1974 but the total stood at 117,000 at the end of 1980 and is certain to be even greater now.

Until recently companies which wanted to economise during a slack period would get rid of shop floor and clerical workers readily enough but would continue to carry managerial staff on the grounds of "mutual loyalty". Nowadays, the slump is biting so hard that, just to stay in business, companies are compelled to have a clear-out right up to the highest level, even the boardroom, and the result is a flood of redundant executives.

Who are these executives, and can they really be classed as workers at all? The Executive Post, which is the PER's job finding magazine, is mailed to registered jobless executives each month and the advertised jobs are almost all for "managers", "officers", "administrators" and The like, but this cannot hide the fact that these are merely fancy titles for what are, in the main, only higher paid workers' The truth is that they have to sell themselves on the labour market in order to live just as mechanics, shop assistants, bus drivers and bricklayers must. Incidentally, many of these executives are not all that highly paid; although the salaries advertised in the Post go as high as £30,000 they go right down to £3,000 and many shop floor workers earn a good bit more than that.

All these redundancies have given birth to a whole new industry in the shape of a horde of private agencies which, for a fee, will provide a course designed to teach jobless executives how to look for a new employer and maybe even find them one. Some of the "quality" newspapers regularly feature ads from these agencies in the job columns:

We offer the UK's first Redundancy Counselling Programme designed exclusively for senior people. A concentrated, intensive programme to help you to resume your successful career path.

(Daily Telegraph, 28 | 4 | 81)

Help from such agencies. can cost as much as £2,000 so many of the jobless rely on the free course provided by the state-run PER or cheap courses run by other organisations like the Institute of Industrial Managers.

And how this help is needed! Many of the jobless executives have spent all their working life with one company and simply haven't a clue about how to look for a job. After all, getting the sack had always been something that happened to somebody else. The sacked executives are actually in a worse situation than their shop floor counterparts because they have further to fall. They will almost certainly have much higher financial commitments such as a huge mortgage and perhaps children at expensive private schools. With the job will have gone various perks like the company

car, expense account or private medical cover. Also, their chances of finding a similar job are poorer. They can expect to spend six weeks job hunting for each £1,000 of salary they want, so a job at £8,500 a year will, on average, take a year to land. And because there are so many in the same boat they can also expect to follow up 200 leads with only one in ten of these producing any response.

So despite the ego-massaging and corner-cutting techniques of the agencies the prospects of finding a job at all aren't rosy because there are many more applicants than vacancies. According to the Sunday Times (14/12/80) all of his causes the redundant executives to suffer loss of confidence and become depressed and bad-tempered. All very well for the course organisers to tell them to "suffer no indignities" while job hunting, but how do you keep your dignity after you have attended several interviews, written dozens of letters and been either turned down or ignored? In any case, indignity doesn't end with landing a job: having to sell oneself to an employer is an indignity in itself.

The same article in the Sunday Times described how one redundant executive lost his £20,000 a year job. Having just planned the sacking of ten fellow executives and 750 other workers he found his own head was next on the block. How ironic that he had been employed as a "long range planning director": the anarchy of capitalist production means that it is nearly impossible to plan with any certainty what will happen next month never mind Years ahead. How could he have forecast that the strength of the pound last year against the dollar would force his American employers to switch production back to the United States?

The popular notion that all redundant executives receive a "golden handshake" is untrue. For example, the chief executive of a big toy manufacturer which went bust last year earned £25,000 a year but left with only one month's salary. The reason is that many executives are on a "service contract" which means they only get the outstanding amount of their salaries when they leave, just as sacked football managers do, and are not entitled to redundancy payment. This wangle is gradually being introduced onto the shop floor. Marathon, the big oil-rig builder on Clydeside, employs its workers on thirteen week contracts which can be renewed at the end of the period but there are other companies whose workers are employed on contracts lasting as little as one week. That way you never qualify for redundancy payment. If the history of reform teaches us anything it is that a way can always be found round any reform which gives temporary benefit to the workers.

Doubtless, many of the redundant executives will find new, equally well paid jobs but many more will probably have to move down a notch or two on the salary scale. All of them, however, must be painfully aware that they are no longer a protected species where unemployment is concerned. Their position as members of the working class is being forcibly demonstrated to them along with the fact that, just like any other workers, their future job prospects will depend less on their "loyalty" to the company than on whether or not it is profitable to employ.

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