

Solidarity pamphlet 32

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GMWU: SCAB UNION

BY MARK FORE



GMWU-SCAB UNION

PREAMBLE TO RULES OF THE GASWORKERS UNION 1892

(The National Union of Gasworkers and General Labourers, founded in March 1889, was the main stem from which the General and Municipal Workers' Union, after many amalgamations, was to come.)

'The immediate objects of this Union are the improvement of the material conditions of its members; the raising of them from mere beasts of burden to human beings; the making brighter and happier the home of every worker; the saving of little children from the hard, degrading, bitter life to which they are condemned today; the dividing more equally between all men and women the tears and the laughter, the sorrow and the joy, the labour and leisure of the world. It is important that all members should understand the necessity for and the aims of this Union; that they should accept and loyally carry out its rules; that they should remember that the interests of all workers are one, and a wrong done to any kind of Labour is a wrong done to the whole of the working class, and that victory or defeat of any portion of the Army of Labour is a gain or a loss to the whole of that Army, which by its organisation and union is marching steadily and irresistibly forward to its ultimate goal - the Emancipation of the Working Class. That emancipation can only be brought about by the strenuous and united efforts of the working class itself.

Workers Unite!

The purpose of this pamphlet is to examine the structure and industrial record of one of Britain's biggest trade unions, to shed light on the role of the national trade union machines, and to help demolish the widely held myth that the unions, whether formally 'democratic' or not, in some mystical way 'belong' to the workers.

I will try to keep to documentable facts and steer clear of allegations, however well-founded, for which chapter and verse cannot be provided. Revolutionaries often criticize the 'union bureaucracies' but much of this criticism is general and rather abstract. It lacks teeth. It is in fact one of the indictments of traditional revolutionaries that in none of their literature has the real structure and practice of a modern union been systematically examined. This pamphlet is an attempt to fill

this void. We feel we can say something on this issue because, unlike so many others, we are not concerned with 'changing the leadership' or capturing positions in the union apparatus. This allows us to speak our minds freely and to avoid the usual double talk.

UNION DEMOCRACY AND THE 'RIGHTS' OF MEMBERS

The National Union of Gas Workers and General Labourers was founded in March 1889 as a result of the amalgamation of the National Union of Gas Workers and of the General Labourers of Great Britain and Ireland. Within 5 months the new union had established 60 branches and gained its first victory: the 8-hours day for gas workers. The Union later became the National Union of General Workers. In 1924 it amalgamated with 2 other unions (the Municipal Workers Association and the National Amalgamated Union of Labour) to become the General and Municipal Workers Union.

The 800,000 strong General and Municipal Workers Union (GMWU) has an unlovely reputation, both in relation to its undemocratic internal structure and in relation to its industrial record. The union also has a number of unsavoury connections with blatantly anti-working class organisations. These various points will be examined in turn. In conclusion we will outline what we consider to be the basis of a socialist industrial strategy.

The GMWU is not exceptional because of its undemocratic structure. This is the rule rather than the exception in the trade union movement.* The GMWU is exceptional in that it has tended to be more explicit and less bashful or hypocritical about itself. Its rules do not even pay lip-service to internal democracy.

Restrictions on the rights of members to change the union are clearly laid down in the rules. For example a member is liable to expulsion or suspension '...who makes or in any way associates himself or herself with any defamatory, scurrilous or abusive attacks, whether in any journal, magazine or pamphlet, or by word of mouth, on any official of the Union, or

* Of the 128 largest unions, no less than 86 appoint their major officials permanently. Of those which do hold elections, it is almost unheard of for a sitting tenant to be evicted. For example among the 24 largest unions which have elections there have been, since the formation of the unions, 134 General Secretaries. Of these only one - Jenkin Jones of the A.S.E. in 1913 - was ever defeated while in office. ('Power in Trade Unions' by V.L. Allen (Longmanns, 1954). The facts have changed slightly since this book was published, but the move has been towards even more permanent officials.

Committee of the Union, or who acts singly or in conjunction with any other members or persons in opposition to the policy of the Union, as declared by its Committees under these rules, or for any other reason deemed good and sufficient.' (Rules of the GMWU, 1965. Rule 43, Para 7- my emphasis)

Not only are members barred from working together to change the policy or structure of the union (except in the somewhat unlikely event of the union bosses allowing them to), but they can also be, and are, banned from any other activity, whether industrial or political, which the bureaucracy decides it doesn't like. For example:

'No member shall associate with or cooperate with, or in any manner support any person or body of persons or any organisations whatsoever which the N.E.C. or District Committee has declared to be acting prejudicially to the Union or its policy whether industrial or political.' (Rule 48, para 3)

These rules are not idle threats. They have been fully used on a number of occasions.

At branch level, democracy in the GMWU also has its imperfections. In the larger and more important branches the Secretary will be full-time.* He is often appointed directly by the District Committee. In those cases where the members are allowed to elect their 'representative' he still has to be endorsed by the District Committee. Once elected, the rules state that the Branch Secretary '... shall be at all times under the control and work under the direction of the District Secretary. Such whole-time Branch Secretary shall not be subject to periodic election by members of the branch.' (Rule 45, para 1. - emphasis mine.)

From 1965 on, the union began to appoint Branch Administration Officers in place of Branch Secretaries. The latter species will be allowed gradually to die out. The B.A.O.s are appointed and controlled by the Regional Secretary 'after consultation with the branch or branches concerned and would be subject to the approval of the National Executive Committee.' (Report on B.A.O.s presented to 1965 Annual Congress). They will eventually take over all branch administration on the average basis of one B.A.O. to each 4000 members. Thus the process of removing even what little residual influence members have over branch administration is still continuing. This change has the effect of doubling the number of directly controlled (controlled from above - not from below) full-time officials in the union from 150 to about 300.

The Regional Committee can close a branch down at any time '... for any reason which it deems good and sufficient, or where in its judgement, it is considered advisable to do so. The Regional Committee shall have the power to suspend or remove from office any Branch Officer in cases of incompetency, dishonesty, failure to carry out instructions or decisions of the General Council, the National Executive Council or the Regional Committee, or for any reason which it deems good and sufficient ... The Regional Committee may refuse at its discretion to state any reason for its action.' (Rule 37, para 12.)

* In 1965 about a quarter of the membership was in branches with full-time branch secretaries. Since then the proportion of the membership in branches with full-time branch secretaries - or B.A.O.s - has greatly increased.

If that isn't enough, and to stop 'anarchy' breaking out, branches are also banned from communication with one another, and members are debarred from attending other branches. It is not therefore surprising that branch life is non-existent. A vigorous branch life is not helped by practices whereby those present at a branch meeting vote for the entire membership of that branch. Half a dozen men for instance can and do vote 'on behalf' of as many thousand, many of whom will not even know of the meeting.*

The Regional Committee has a similar relationship to the National Executive Council as the Branch has to the Regional Committee: complete subordination. Nationally the Union has a General Council of 26 members. Sixteen are 'elected' by the Regional Committees and the other 10 are, 'ex-officio', the 10 Regional Secretaries! This General Council 'elects' from its own members the 10-member National Executive Council, of whom half must be Regional Secretaries. The other half must technically be 'lay' members but these are usually 'whole time' Branch Secretaries who are not technically included in the category of full-time officials! Besides the ten 'elected' members, the N.E.C. also includes two National 'ex-officio' members. There is thus a built-in, guaranteed majority of reliable full-time officials in the 'leadership' of the union.

The union has an effective method of 'electing' full-time officials. In the first instance the new official is appointed. After 2 years in office the appointment is confirmed by an 'election'. Such elections are never lost and are so obviously pointless that the Yorkshire Regional Committee of the union has on several occasions moved that this residual formality be dispensed with. Once elected (barring accident or an outbreak of independence) officials have a job for life. They never need to be elected again, even if they get an entirely new job in another area.

This 'election' procedure was initiated in 1926, following the first elections in the newly amalgamated union, in which the sitting officials had been outraged at actually being opposed. The Executive member proposing the new type of procedure had stated 'that the provision of compelling officials to seek election was democracy run mad and a farce.'**

* On average, about 5% attend branch meetings in the GMWU. See 'The role of shop stewards in British industrial relations', W.E.J. McCarthy, HMSO 1966, p. 68. In my view, this figure is much too high.

** 'General Union' by H.A. Clegg (Basil Blackwell, 1954), p.71. This book, which has been officially endorsed by the Union is, incidentally, a good example of that common bird: the liberal academic apologia for reactionary union policies. The role of such 'academic' contributions would, in itself, make an interesting study.

I WAS A TEENAGE OFFICIAL

With this system of selecting officials it is not surprising that the union has a reputation concerning its 'family tradition'. Less sophisticated observers have been tempted to describe the handing on of the family business as nepotism.

The last two General Secretaries of the union are good examples of the set up.

Tom Williamson, Baron of Eccleston,* was General Secretary from 1946 to 1961. He started working for the union at the age of 14, before World War I. Apart from a short period of war service he worked for the union his whole life (by a strange coincidence his uncle happened to be Liverpool District Secretary). After retirement Sir Tom stepped straight into a directorship of Securicor, a well-known philanthropic organisation, friendly to the working man.

Jack Cooper, Baron of Stockton Heath, started working for the union in 1928 at the age of 20. By a strange coincidence his mother came from the family of Charles Dukes, Baron of Warrington, General Secretary of the GMWU in the 1920s and 30s.** Apart from being a Governor of the London School of Business Studies, and a Director of Telefusion Yorkshire, and of the National Ports Council, Cooper is a Director of the Atlas Foundation.***

* It is an irony of history that one of the best sources of information on the leaders of the GMWU, as well as of other unions, is Burkes Peerage.

** Following the 1926 General Strike Lord Dukes blazed a trail for those who were to follow him in office when, at a special TUC called in 1927 to discuss why the strike had been called off, he said: 'Every day that the strike proceeded the control and authority of that dispute was passing out of the hands of responsible Executives into the hands of men who had no authority, no control and were wrecking the movement'.

*** The Atlas Foundation is a very interesting if little known institution. It has been named (see Essex Left, No.4, May 1967) as a 'respectable' front for British Intelligence and has been used for channelling funds into various dubious causes amongst students, such as bolstering up support for the 'moderate' leadership of the National Union of Students and for the CIA-financed International Student Conference. Other directors of the Atlas Foundation are Edwin William Wilkinson, of Glyn Mills Bank, and Baroness Gaitskell. Following the exposure of the Atlas Foundation and its stable mate, the Ariel Foundation (notably in the New York Herald Tribune of August 15, 1967), its operations have declined. We would welcome more information on this interesting subject.

On the international scale the GMWU has played a very active part in the Public Services International, which has been named as a recipient of CIA cash. The union has consistently worked very closely with the International Affairs Department of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. Until they were exposed this organisation was run by two CIA agents and was responsible in 1964 for organising strikes against the Jagan Government in Guyana (exposed in Insight, Sunday Times, April 16 and 23, 1967).

It would be easy to write a lot more on the 'democratic' ramifications of the GMWU. The main outline is, however, clear enough. This 'Union', in which the members have not a vestige of control, is significant not because it is undemocratic but because it reveals explicitly in its constitution what in many other unions is masked by fine phrases.* It is also important to remember that in the GMWU, as in many other formally more 'democratic' institutions, the constitution is one thing but practice is another.

INDUSTRIAL REACTION

The industrial aims of the GMWU oligarchy are similar to those of their confreres in other unions. Their unchallengeable position allows them, however, to be more outspoken and explicit about them.

The GMWU is an emphatic exponent of union participation ... in industrial discipline. It has signed a number of agreements where, in return for sole negotiating rights and a closed shop, the union actively collaborates in keeping the workers in line. For example in 1965 the union signed an agreement with Ilford Ltd., the large film and photographic equipment manufacturer. Commenting on this agreement the Chief Personnel Officer of the Company wrote (in 'Personnel Management', December 1965)

'I have been asked what happens if there is an unofficial strike after the formal agreement has been signed. The Company clearly has the right, in such an event, to terminate the agreement and with it 100% trade unionism. The point here is that the union might prefer to expel the members concerned and thereby make them instantly liable to loss of employment. The Company would be free to accept this as an alternative to terminating the agreement.'

* 'Permanent officials' are for instance a feature of the National Union of Agricultural Workers; Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers; Union of Post Office Workers; National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives; National Union of Blastfurnacemen, Ore Miners, Coke Workers and Kindred Trades; Amalgamated Weavers Association; National Union of Mineworkers; National Union of Public Employees; Electrical and Electronic Trades Union and Plumbing Trades Union; Hosiery Workers Union; National Union of Seamen ... to name but a few.

Anyone who feels that the Ilford agreement and many more like it * are empty threats should look at the record of the Northern District of the union, in those areas where there is a union shop. The officially endorsed record of the union** reads:

'In 1944 the Northern District replied to an unofficial strike of Newcastle Dockers by closing its Docks Branch and expelling all the strikers.*** A new branch was formed and the chastened strikers were readmitted on condition that they signed a document promising in future to abide by the constitution of the union. In subsequent years famous for their dock strikes, Newcastle has been singularly free.'

In 1947 the same District Committee adopted the same tactics with equal success when the employees of the Newcastle Economic Bus Company struck unofficially. In 1950 the District Secretary refused the contributions of a branch of colliery surface workers who had instituted an unofficial overtime ban, telling them that "the decision would stand until they should accept the services for which these contributions were paid".'

In 1959 the Northern District suspended 112 members for an unofficial strike at the British Oxygen Company.

With such a policy it is not surprising that those sectors which are dominated by the GMWU (such as the Gas and Rubber industries, and many local authorities) are almost by definition those which have low wages and bad conditions. The wages of municipal employees in Liverpool are a good example of the sort of rates negotiated by the GMWU. A night watchman there gets as low as $4/7\frac{1}{4}$ an hour and works a 50-hour week (Sunday Times, November 16, 1969). A record like this is one of the most potent arguments used by the GMWU to persuade employers to grant a closed shop. In their wages local government manual workers come 128 out of 130 industries whose wage rates were collected by the D.E.P. The GMWU 'organises' a very large proportion of these workers.

The GMWU is in favour of state intervention on the issue of unofficial strikes. It advocates the fining of those who break procedure,**** although usually arguing that this is an extreme measure, often less effective than firm action by the National Executive.

* In 1966 the GMWU had closed shop agreements with 278 firms and 37 local authorities.

** 'General Union' by H.A.Clegg. Basil Blackwell, 1954. p.132.

*** The strikers probably thought that this action terminated their employment because then, as now, dockers' cards were issued by the unions.

**** Minutes of Lord Cooper's verbal evidence to the Royal Commission on Trade Unions on behalf of the GMWU on 5/7/66 (paragraphs 6799-6801). See also Cooper's lecture to meeting organised by the Institute of Personnel Managers at the Lancaster Hotel on 17/4/69. This is available in duplicated form from the Institute.

'In our evidence to the Royal Commission, we argued for the introduction of a compulsory element into State conciliation. We supported the re-introduction of the Industrial Disputes Order, 1951, which would enable one party to refer a dispute to arbitration. Without discussing this in more detail, I believe that this kind of provision might be more effective than the proposed conciliation pause'. (Industrial Relations and Post-Donovan Government Policy - Speech by Lord Cooper to Institute of Personnel Managers, 14/4/69.)

The GMWU has consistently argued that granting the unions closed shops and union dues check-off would not only increase the power of Union Executives to deal with unofficial action, but would also weaken the base of various shop stewards organisations. In summing up its case before the Royal Commission the Union stated (op. cit., para. 121) that given a closed shop 'there is no need, in the interests of maintaining membership, for shop stewards to demonstrate hostility towards management as a method of convincing members of the value of trade unionism'.

Apart from its policy of securing the interests of the union hierarchy at the expense of job organisation, the union can also boast of a substantial record of well-organised scabbing.

An instance of this emerged clearly during Cooper's evidence to the Royal Commission (verbal evidence, paras. 6809-6811). The discussion turned to the occasion when the GMWU instructed its members at Linwood car factory to scab - and even to do the job of victimised men. Cooper was asked by George Woodcock, a member of the Commission: 'We are told that at Linwood the whole assembly track was dismissed because of continual trouble and that everybody else took over'. Cooper replied: 'This was after the union stepped in officially and told its workers to do it ... it was not spontaneous. I do not think what I have said alters the more general answer to the loyalty down below. This might happen after trade union leaders had intervened in a situation and felt they had good enough reason to say "we appreciate your loyalty, but get on with it". And as you say it has happened.'

Cooper was right. It has happened. And not only at Linwood. In 1958, at a strike at Shell Mex House on the South Bank against an attempt of McAlpine's to smash job organisation by the sacking of 1250 men, Matthews of the GMWU signed a poster saying that there was no dispute and that all those who wanted to scab should apply to McAlpine's Labour Office. Moreover the GMWU is not the only union to become involved in active strike-breaking. At the Barbican strike in defence of job organisation in 1967 the TGWU, AUBTW, ASW and the NFBTO were signatories to a full-page advertisement in the national dailies (October 26, 1967) which read in part:

'There is no strike at the Barbican site. The site is open and trade union members are free to work there with the support of the trade unions ... Therefore the demonstrations and picketing organised at the Barbican by a few unrepresentative individuals have no official authority whatsoever and are aimed at undermining the authority of properly elected trade union executives ... The unusual step of making an announcement of this kind is taken by the undersigned to sustain law and order in the building industry.'

THE G.M.W.U. AND FORD

The record of the GMWU at Ford epitomizes its general role. Fortunately it has recently received a bloody nose there.

In 1960 the union was one of the two unions selected by the Ford Company to sign the secret Halewood agreement (the other union was the AEF). The union leaders agreed to lower wages and longer hours at Halewood, compared with Dagenham, in return for preferential facilities to recruit members. This carve-up was not changed until it was defeated by a massive overtime ban at Halewood in March 1962. (See SOLIDARITY vol.II, Nos.9, 10.)

In early 1962 Jim Matthews,* National Engineering Officer of the union, made a number of proposals for greatly weakening the shop stewards organisation at Ford, and strengthening the power of the full-time officials. These proposals provided the blueprint for the joint Management/National Trade Union officials' defeat of the men, later that year. Matthews and the union played an important role in this defeat.

* Jim Matthews made a name for himself during the major strike at BOAC, London Airport, in 1958. He then not only tried unsuccessfully to organise strike-breakers but, as it turned out later, was systematically handing over to management confidential material from the trade union side. For a full account see 'Blow you Jack, we were right' published in 1959 by the BOAC Joint Shop Stewards Committee.

James Matthews, OBE, as well as being for years a leading official of the GMWU was also on the Board of Directors of Common Cause, an organisation described in the Daily Telegraph (May 11, 1959) as being 'the channel by which money from industrialists was passed on to IRIS (Industrial Research and Information Service)'. IRIS is a well-known witch-hunting organisation run by extreme right-wing trade unionists. One of its current directors for instance is Ray Gunter, ex-president of the Transport Salaried Staffs Association; ex-chairman of the Labour Party and ex-minister of Labour. Mr. Gunter is also currently on the Board of Directors of Securicor (where he rubs shoulders with Tom Williamson, Baron Eccleston, ex-general secretary of the GMWU). Another director of IRIS since July 1968 is Lord Douglas of Cleveland, ex-general secretary of BISAKTA.

James Matthews and the entire Board of Directors of Common Cause were also directors of Flute Ltd., another organisation which used to compile files on left-wingers in industry, until it was wound up in July 1967. Wide ramifications of this kind still undoubtedly exist today, and we would welcome any details that readers can unearth.

In a situation such as exists at Fords no Union alone can improve labour relations. It is true, however, that one Union alone can do much to wreck harmonious relations. Improvement in labour relations must be the object of a combined effort by all concerned. Since 1962 this has been the case at Fords. We appear now to be reaping the benefits.

I hope that by enclosing the Handbook of Agreements and the Reports of the Courts of Inquiry I have given you a fairly full picture of the past difficulties and troubles at Dagenham. To obtain an idea of the atmosphere in which all this took place may I suggest that you take advantage of the Company's conducted tours round the Dagenham Works.

If you have any further questions to ask perhaps you will write to me again and I will endeavour to answer them.

Yours sincerely,

J. Cooper

General Secretary

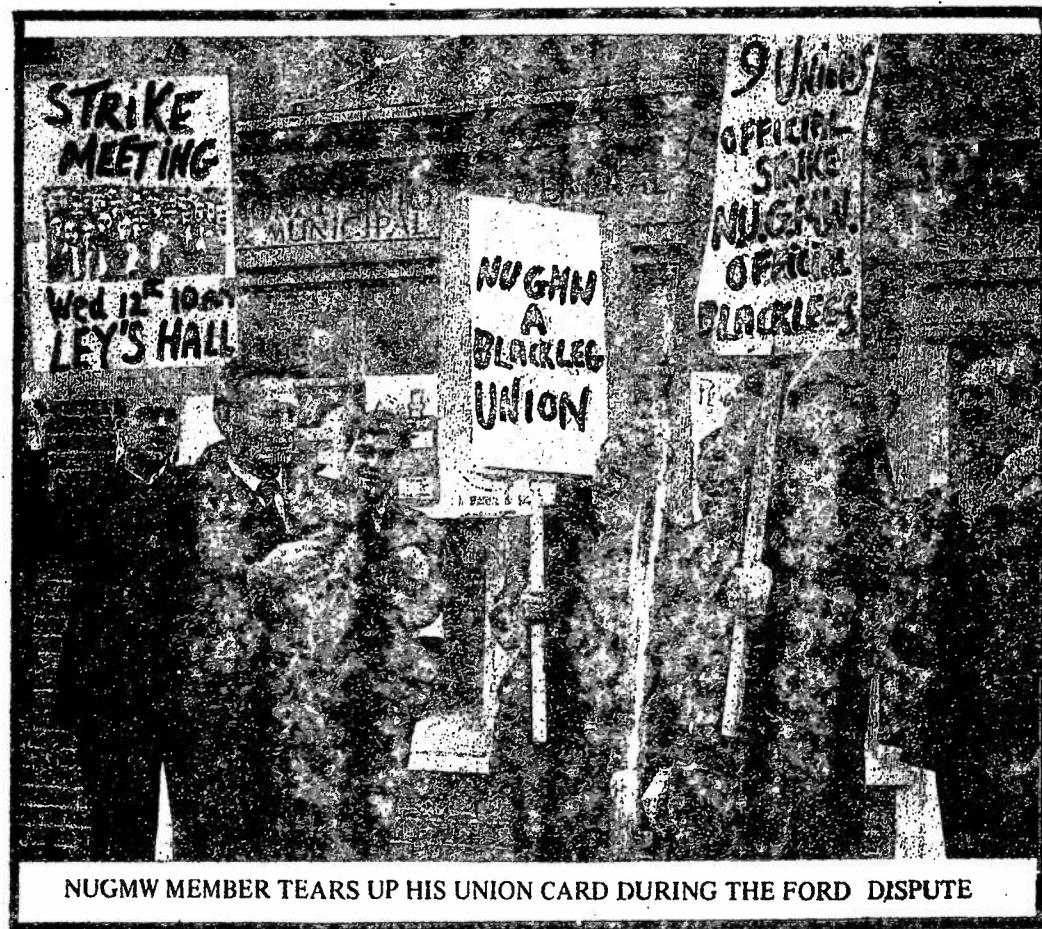
From 1965 letter by
J. Cooper, General
Secretary GMWU, to
sociology student. (see opposite)

1969 :

'Reaping

the

Benefits'!



Referring to the 1962 debacle (in a letter to a student of sociology dated January 6, 1965) Lord Cooper, General Secretary of the union, stated: 'Improvement in labour relations must be the object of a combined effort by all concerned. Since 1962 this has been the case at Fords. We appear to be reaping the benefits'. Meanwhile, back in Dagenham, job organisation had been almost destroyed. The workers had been driven into the ground. According to Blakeman's evidence at the Jack Court of Enquiry track speeds had been increased by a third. According to the official 'Facts about Ford' (1969 edition) 'British Ford production took its biggest percentage jump ever in 1963 - to 670,000 vehicles compared with 529,000 the year before'. Some benefits!

During the Ford strike of February and March 1969 the GMWU played its usual scabbing role. It encouraged its members to blackleg even after the other major unions had made the strike official. At its subsequent annual congress at Douglas, Isle of Man, Ken Baker, the union's National Officer responsible for the Motor Industry, defended the union's action. He described the dispute as '...one of the most senseless disputes in the history of the company'. It had been a 'particularly disgraceful and unpleasant industrial stoppage'. He was outraged because pickets at Dagenham had physically opposed scabs, because his union's blacklegs had been assaulted, and because acid had been thrown over their cars. One car had even been overturned. (Guardian, June 6, 1969). We cannot say we share Ken Baker's dismay. We hope that in the struggles to come blacklegs - whatever their origin - will be dealt with even more effectively.

The role of the GMWU in the 1969 stoppage had big repercussions amongst its own membership, even during the strike. Union members were unwilling to be scabs. They demonstrated in front of the union's East London offices, where many of them publicly tore up their cards. In the months following the dispute, the union was virtually excluded from a number of areas at Halewood, Dagenham and Swansea, partly as a result of a mass exodus, and partly by shop stewards ceasing to recognise its cards. The union has even had to close its large Halewood branch. According to some estimates the union has lost well over half its claimed seven and a half thousand members at Ford. Something similar has been going on amongst Local Authority employees, following the union's despicable role during the 1969 Dustmen's strike. We hope this process continues unabated. The weakening or demise of the GMWU will be no loss to anyone except those who run it. The GMWU 'represents' workers about as much as Hitler represented the Jews.

Read SOLIDARITY

A paper for militants - in industry and elsewhere. Attempts a total critique of modern society, and a systematic 'demystification' of its values, ideas, and forms of organisation. Discusses what libertarian revolution is all about.

BETRAYALS? OR SOMETHING DEEPER?

The leadership of the GMWU has been systematically opposed to all forms of rank and file action. It has opposed such action day-in, day-out, year-in, year-out, at home and abroad. It has consistently fought attempts by workers to organise themselves on the shop floor. To achieve this end it has been prepared to collaborate with the employers, with governments, whether Tory or Labour, with British Intelligence and the American CIA and with witch-hunting organisations. Some of its operations, documented here, are only the tip of the iceberg. Nevertheless what is known clearly exposes the obscenely intimate integration of union hierarchies with the rotten system in which we live. Anyone who believes that the union leaders in some way 'represent' the workers needs his head examined.

It would be a mistake to think of the GMWU as an isolated case. Many other unions are as bad.* It is important to understand that more democratic formal structures serve to mask a fundamentally similar reality. (We intend to deal elsewhere with the role of 'democratic' unions, like the A.E.F.)

Revolutionaries know that capitalist states may be dictatorships or 'liberal democracies' but that this does not alter their fundamental essence or absolve one from criticising their capitalist nature. We don't say they are all 'exactly the same'. The differences are meaningful inasmuch as in a liberal democracy revolutionaries have more room for operation. The same applies with the unions. In the last analysis they are all instruments of integration of the working class into capitalist society. It is moreover obvious - even within the terms of reformist trade unionism - that the GMWU fulfils no useful function whatsoever - at least not for the workers. But it remains necessary to distinguish between the GMWU (and similar unions) and those unions which, however corrupt, can still, at their lowest levels, provide a basis for organisation and communication between militants.

It would be a similar oversimplification to say that all trade union officials are 'the same'. Some are aware of their specific role in society. Others are not. But whether 'left' or right they have their own particular interests which are quite separate from those of the workers they claim to represent. The interests of the officials are better conditions for themselves, infrequent elections, a quiet life, less expenditure on things like strike benefit,** and more income from increased membership

* The industrial record of the ASW, BISAKTA, the National Union of Agricultural Workers, the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives, not to mention the EETU/PTU, are certainly no better.

** Between 1958 and 1964 the GMWU averaged £17,500 per year on dispute benefit (from evidence before the Royal Commission on Trade Unions, HMSO, 1967). This was far less than it spent on cars for its officials.

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and subscriptions. We in 'Solidarity' try to avoid using terms like 'betrayal' or 'sell-out' when describing the repeatedly reactionary behaviour of the union hierarchies, for we deny that they are ever on the side of the workers.

Only the Labour government, the more stupid employers, and the traditional revolutionaries still pretend to believe that trade union officialdom does, can, or wants to represent the interests of industrial workers. Today, over 90% of strikes are 'unofficial'. This surely means something. An increasing number of these disputes are against managerial actions in which the unions have cooperated up to the hilt. More and more workers are refusing to accept agreements in which they have had no say (or sometimes even no knowledge until after they have been signed, sealed and delivered). These agreements nearly always ignore the real interests of ordinary workers.

From the Docks to Fords, from Electrical Contracting to the Power Industry, the basic pattern is the same. The rôle of the trade union bureaucrats in smashing job organisation has been absolutely methodical, systematic, and absolutely consistent.

It is time militants and socialists began to recognize the obvious: it is impossible to take over and reform the trade unions. It is impossible to convert them into vehicles of industrial or social change. If it were possible one would have expected a success or two in the course of the last 50 years or so. In fact not only have there not been any such successes, there haven't even been any significant occasions where a sitting officer has been turned out of office by the rank and file.

The fluctuations which have taken place have been of an extremely limited character. They have usually taken place when the previous incumbents of various posts have either dropped dead or have retired, to be replaced by someone else, usually in strict order of seniority (the meteoric rise to power of that messiah of the left, Frank Cousins, was due to precisely such causes). In each case the socialist press makes learned comments about this representing a decisive swing in this or that direction.

As each new representative of the left achieves power, he is welcomed with hosannas by all and sundry. And everyone is then repeatedly 'surprised' when, on industrial matters, he behaves in precisely the same way as his predecessors. The trade union scene is littered with erstwhile darlings of the left (Tanner, Weaver, Berridge, Lowthian, Cousins, Jones, Scanlon, Horner, Daly, etc.). Since 'Solidarity' was founded nearly 10 years ago, one of our major emphases has been to hammer home the fact that there is a fundamental conflict between the full-time officials and workers on the factory floor. We have also repeatedly stressed that it is impossible to change the function of the trade unions and make them militant organisations, fighting to defend the rights of 'their' members. Our reasons for this contention are numerous. The major ones are:

- a) That the formal constitutions (and even more so the informal practice) of the unions are undemocratic by any standards. For example,

THE LORDS' WORDS

'Today we have the strange situation that a man carrying out the instructions of his elected leaders and loyally supporting his trade union's policy has the words (scab, blackleg) flung at him with a scorn born of belligerent ignorance and utter disregard for the future of the trade union movement.'

Harry Douglass, then General Secretary of BISAKTA, in the union journal 'Man and Metal', July 1955. Harry is now Lord Douglass of Cleveland and, since July 1968, has been a director of IRIS.

THE WORKING CLASS CAN KISS MY ARSE

I'M IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS AT LAST

'I was referring to our splendid system of industrial relations in most of our industries. Many of these industries have never had a serious strike in their history, and others cannot remember when they had a serious strike. But there is a grave danger that if the small sections of industrial recalcitrants who from time to time indulge in lightning unofficial strikes are seen to be cashing in on it, then it is elementary that others will assume, and rightly so, that this is the way to get things. The sort of anarchy we have recently witnessed can be highly contagious, and it could be quite dangerous if it is shown to be paying dividends. The trade union movement is not without its private enterprises who have no compunction whatever in taking whatever opportunity may present itself to grab what they can without regard to others who often have a better claim. Clearly, this is unfair and it is not in the national interest that it should continue. ...'

'My Lords, no unofficial strike is justified. And many of these unofficial strikes, lightning strikes, sit-downs, and go-slows, take place in the factory or firm where there is ample negotiating machinery to take charge wherever these grievances exist.'

Lord Williamson (ex-General Secretary of the GMWU and ex-Chairman of the TUC). House of Lords, March 19, 1969.

many of the major unions appoint officials for life. Others ban Communists from holding office, a ban which could rapidly be expanded in the event of a serious threat from any other quarter. In virtually all unions direct communication between branches is forbidden. Electoral addresses are censored. Sitting officials get special electoral privileges. Rules are manipulated and 're-interpreted' to an outrageous extent according to the needs of the situation. But these points only scratch the surface of the problem. Anyone who believes that the Communist-dominated ETU was the only union where there was ballot-rigging must be very naive. Moreover the constitutions of some leading unions (the GMWU - as we have shown - and BISAKTA for example) are such that rigging will never be necessary. There are built-in mechanisms for the self-perpetuation of the leadership.

b) Every union has signed binding and complicated procedural agreements with the employers which make it virtually impossible for a union leadership to back its members in struggle - even in the unlikely event of them wishing to do so. In fact the industrial policy of unions dominated by the 'left' is virtually indistinguishable from those run by the 'right'.* And it is on their industrial policy that unions must be judged.

↓ The distinguishing feature of 'left wing' unions is that they support sheaves of good, left-wing resolutions at Trade Union Congresses or at Labour Party Conferences. They subscribe to Anglo-Bulgarian Friendship Societies or send delegations to Yugoslavia. They vote resolutions on such subjects as East-West trade, support for Clause 4, and similar earth-shaking issues, resolutions which are forgotten as soon as they are passed. In fact, even some quite 'right-wing' unions have 'leftish' political programmes. The reason is that such a programme is a good harmless sop for keeping the 'Left' happy. In our view the only way a union can be judged is by its industrial actions. On this level, they are all found wanting.

c) That the trade union machines are fundamentally part of the capitalist system and that they are subjected to an increasing measure of direct influence by the society as a whole. They are deeply penetrated, at many different levels, by the ideology of the system in which they exist. This ideology is that of 'leaders and led', of the 'good of the country', of 'law and order in industry'. The tendency is more and more for unions to be run as efficient businesses, computerized and costed. Thus the AEU

* 'Unofficial' movements in the electrical industry were denounced in November 1960 by Foulkes, then Communist President of the ETU. 'Absenteeism' in the mines was denounced in March 1967 by Will Paynter, Communist Secretary of the NUM. It was a standing joke in the AEU that whenever the leadership wanted to talk the men back to work they would send the only Communist on the Executive, Claude Berridge, to do the dirty work for them. Which of course he dutifully did, 'to keep the position'.

has had an ICI efficiency expert seconded to it on full pay. Commenting on this Jim Conway, General Secretary of the AEU, said: 'We want to become as efficient as ICI or Marks and Spencer'. (Daily Telegraph, 22.1.65) The moving of such a body towards a militant position seems somewhat unlikely.

The last false solution is that one should abandon the existing unions altogether and create either breakaways or new unions based on some revolutionary panacea or other. We are against this. We are for working in the movement simply because that is where some of the workers are, and because some of the lower levels of union organisations can sometimes be used as channels of communication and rank and file organisation. We are also for building independent channels of communication between workers wherever possible, which cut across formal union loyalties and formal union structures.

We have no illusions that the unions can be transformed, 'democritised', restored to the rank and file or converted into instruments of 'encroaching workers control'.* We are not in the movement to change the structure of the unions but to change men. And the way to do this is for us (and people like us) to state as clearly and loudly as possible what our views are, so that we can contribute towards a clearer understanding of the situation. That is why we say publicly what others only whisper or discuss in their 'internal bulletins'.

SOCIALISTS AND INDUSTRY

Socialists active in industry have often forgotten that they are socialists. They fail to relate the day-to-day struggle in industry with their vision of the socialist future. The struggle in industry for self-activity, for man's domination over the machine, the whole struggle against ever-intensified manipulation, domination and coercion, are all directly related to our ultimate objective. We should always strive to emphasize this.

* The supporters of the 'Institute for Workers Control' are, by an ironical paradox, among the most mystified on this issue. They seem to believe that 'workers control' (sic) can be exercised through the unions - an easy enough intellectual feat once one has mentally identified the workers and 'their' unions. In their book 'Industrial Democracy in Great Britain' (McGibbon and Kee 1968, p.363) K. Coates and A. Topham write: 'it seems sensible for us to speak of "workers control" to indicate the aggressive encroachment of Trade Unions on management powers, in a capitalist framework'. The supporters of the Institute claim to believe that the struggle for workers control should start here and now. We agree. But we challenge their operational methods as making any helpful contribution in this direction. If they really believe that workers should control their own organisations, we suggest that at their next Conference they deny to union officials elected for life the right to prattle from their platform about workers control in the future. The platform should also be denied to any official who has ever denounced striking workers as acting 'unofficially'.

The development of a socialist strategy in industry is of primary importance. In our view there are three main growth points:

- a) the development of job organisation, directly controlled by the by the workers themselves.
- b) publicising and campaigning for the greater use of methods of struggle which take place inside the factory. Apart from being often more effective and cheaper for the men, these methods implicitly raise the question of control of the factory. They challenge all sorts of managerial assumptions.
- c) an increasing percentage of struggles today are concerned with work. They are about who controls the factory, about the right to be a human being at work. They basically challenge managerial prerogatives. These are the struggles that revolutionaries should see as the most significant. These are the struggles that should be encouraged, publicised, documented - for they are capable of raising working class consciousness.

We think these three issues: job organisation, methods of struggle, and conditions of work can form the framework of a really sound and viable long-term socialist industrial programme. Such a strategy would basically challenge all the fundamental tenets of the present industrial system.

The chickens are coming home to roost. The function of the trade union machines has been obvious for many years to those who observe the real world rather than their navels ... or what the great leaders wrote several decades ago. The situation is ripening rapidly and presents a great opportunity for a mass development of consciousness and the creation of really substantial and self-aware job organisations, capable of taking a hand in events on a national scale. We would like to participate in this process with all like-thinking militants or groups.

Mark Fore

CORRECTION

We regret that in the footnote on p.9 we seem to have resuscitated the late Jim Matthews. For 1968 and 1969, read 1958 and 1959.

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