

solidarity

FOR WORKERS' POWER

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FOR A SOCIALIST INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

by ken weller

THE CRISIS IN THE UNIONS

The current series of struggles in building, the docks and engineering have illustrated yet again to thousands of ordinary unpolitical workers the true function of 'their' trade union officials. The old illusions are slowly beginning to die. A wide discussion is opening up about possible solutions to the problem.

Only the Labour government, the more stupid employers, and the traditional Left still pretend to believe that trade union officialdom does, can, or wants to represent the interests of industrial workers. Over 90% of strikes are unofficial. 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.

One example was the long and bitter struggle at the Myton site at the Barbican. After failing to get the men back by hook or by crook the officials eventually joined forces with the employers in spending thousands of pounds in putting full-page advertisements in the national press (October 26). The culprits should be named and the act remembered for a long, long time. This advertisement was signed by Les Kemp (TGWU), George Lowthian (AUBTW), George Smith (ASW) and Harry Weaver (NFBTO). It attempted to recruit blackleg labour, saying:

'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 organized at the Barbican by a few unrepresentative individuals have no official union 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 the authority of law and order in the building industry.'

Only a few days earlier (October 18) The Guardian had made some apt editorial comments:

'To suggest that the National Federation of Building Trade Operatives represents the workers at the Barbican site is like saying that General Chiang Kai-Shek governs China. The suggestion is simply an excuse for not facing facts.'

What happened at the Barbican is not unique. Events there were almost a carbon copy of what happened at the Shell Mex site, on the South Bank, in 1958. There too union officials aided the recruiting of blacklegs. There too the unions expelled some of the leading militants. This sort of thing is not confined to the building industry. It is happening day in, day out, throughout the length and breadth of the country. From the Docks to Fords, from Electrical Contracting to the Power Industry, the basic pattern is the same. The role of the trade union bureaucrats in smashing job organization 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 comment 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 predecessor. The trade union scene is littered with erstwhile darlings of the left (Tanner, Weaver, Berridge, Lowthian and Cousins). We would like to take this opportunity of welcoming a new recruit to their ranks: Hugh Scanlon of the AEU.

THE ROOTS OF THE TROUBLE

Since SOLIDARITY was founded six 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 and also the fact that it is impossible to change the function of the trade unions. 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 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 NUGMW and BISATKA 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 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.

* '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 of this year 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'.

SOME FALSE 'SOLUTIONS'

As workers become aware of the fact that the trade unions no longer represent their interests, they begin to discuss potential solutions. The two most commonly proposed are:

a) Bigger and better campaigns to change the union leaderships. The vision of an ever increasing number of left-wing officials 'regretfully' instructing workers to resume normal working isn't particularly appealing.

b) The amalgamation of unions into larger and larger units, or into 'industrial organizations'. At one stage of history, a long, long time ago, this may have been a progressive demand. But today the idea of the creation of ever larger monolithic unions (undiverted in their task of smashing job organization by squabbles between rival officials) is one that has attracted a motley crew of supporters. The Tories and the Confederation of British Industry, the TUC and sundry revolutionaries all sing the praises of 'industrial unionism'.

We are totally opposed to these 'cures' because for workers they will be a lot worse than the disease. Apart from their integral evils or irrelevance these demands could have the effect of bolstering up in workers' minds the fundamental illusion that a solution can come from somewhere else than their own actions.

There are many other traditional socialist demands which are changing their meaning. For instance: the closed shop. We are not arguing against the closed shop but wish to stress the new trend towards a particular kind of closed shop, where union dues are deducted by the company. This is just being introduced in the power industry and is quite openly admitted as being a means of increasing the union's disciplinary powers. Another place where such an agreement already operates is between Ilford and the NUGMW. The situation there was described by the Chief Personnel Officer of the firm. In an article in Personnel Management (Dec. 1965) he said:

'I have been asked what happens if there is an unofficial strike after the final 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.'

The trade union functionaries act in their own distinct interests, which are quite separate from those of the workers they claim to represent. The interests of the officials are better conditions for themselves, a quiet life, less expenditure on things like strike benefit and more income from increased membership and subscriptions. We in Solidarity try to avoid using terms like 'betrayal' or 'sell-out' because we deny that union officials are ever on the side of workers.

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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 workers are and some of the lower levels of union organizations can sometimes be used as channels of communication and organization. But 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

What socialists active in industry have often forgotten is 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. What we try to do is to emphasize this.

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

- a) In helping the development of job organization, directly controlled by the workers themselves.
- b) In 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, publicized, documented - for they are capable of raising working class consciousness.

We think these three issues: job organization, 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 organizations, 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.

THE CIVIL WAR GAME

The following article, reprinted verbatim from the October 27 issue of the Kent Messenger, is interesting because it deals with matters concerning which the ruling class usually prefers to keep a discrete silence. The Folkestone exercise may have been 'realistic' but there was one little flaw to it. Soldiers, ordered to fire on their kith and kin, have been known to turn their gun on their officers. If the 8th Queens are such gluttons for realism, perhaps this could be included in the next 'do' scheduled at Shorncliffe Camp.

A rioting mob, flinging rotten eggs, old tomatoes and sods of turf, attacked police officers and soldiers of the 8th Queen's Regiment (West Kent) T.A. on Sunday.

But the rioters were not really dangerous. They were Army Cadets, from Folkestone, St. Mary's Bay and New Romney, taking part in an exercise at Shorncliffe Camp, Folkestone, to help Territorials and police train together.

The exercise began with four police from the Channel Ports division trying to deal with the 'rioters'.

The boys wrestled with them, knocked off their helmets and played football with them. A sergeant was brought to the ground. Police dealt with four attacks. Then they called in the Territorials.

'Rioters' appeared with banners - 'Food Not Promises', 'Feed our Children', 'No Police Scabs Here', 'No Army Rule', and 'The Queens are Killers'.

Two lorry-loads of Territorials arrived to deal with the ground, as they might be called

on should Britain suffer nuclear attack and frightened civilians get out of hand or criminal elements try to take advantage of the situation.

The troops formed into a square. A white tape was unrolled across the road. They too had their banner.

On one side was: 'Disperse or We Fire.'

But the yelling rioters took no notice. The other side of the banner was shown: 'Anyone crossing this line is liable to be shot.'

Staying safely on their own side of the white tape the boys really let go. The air was thick with flying missiles. But the soldiers did not flinch. In the end the order 'Fire' was given. This sobered up the crowd.

Lt.-Col. James Ogilvie, commanding the 8th Queens, said he was delighted with a realistic exercise. The 8th Queens, who come from Tonbridge, Maidstone and Gillingham, are an Army Volunteer Reserve 3 Unit. In time of war or a national emergency, they would support the police in maintaining order.

THE CAV STRIKE



This article is about a short strike which recently took place in a West London engineering factory. Although over 2000 workers were involved, news of the struggle did not reach the national press.

The factory (CAV) has no tradition of militancy. Both shop organization and liaison within the factory were relatively weak. Only 50% of the workers belonged to a union (and this for mainly reactionary reasons). Class consciousness was at a low level. Such factories are unfortunately as much a part of the industrial scene of today as the well organized factories, with strong shop stewards' committees, so idolised by the left. The very existence of factories like CAV presents militants with serious and unusual problems, when a struggle suddenly erupts there.

When, in 1962, we published Truth About Vauxhall, the Luton factory was one of the most backward in the motor industry. The management ruled supreme and their rule was by and large accepted. We described things exactly as they were, - and for our pains were accused of 'slandering the working class'. Today, shop organization at the Vauxhall plants is much stronger and more self-confident. Things could change at CAV too.

The Acton site consists of four factories belonging to the Lucas combine: a machine factory (producing starters, dynamos, etc.), a diesel factory (manufacturing fuel pumps and accessories), a switch gear factory and the World Service H.Q. (which services customers' returns and acts as stockist for CAV and Lucas spares). These factories are an important part of the commercial motor industry. Their products are widely known throughout the world.

Most CAV workers have been with the company for many years. The factory has a 'quiet' record as regards disputes and no tradition of struggle. Except for a recent half-day stay-in strike, the only 'trouble' CAV has had in the last 17 years was an 'official' token stoppage lasting one day in 1962 (in support of the 40-hour week) and a number of Friday night 'stay-at-homes' by the night shift, three years ago (to enforce the 4 x 10 hour week for night shift workers).

FIRST RUMBLINGS

During the fifties and sixties the company took advantage of lower rates of pay outside London and started dispersing work to new factories at Rochester (Kent), Sudbury (Suffolk) and Fazakerley (Liverpool). Workers on transferred jobs were offered other work or promised new jobs in the switchgear factory. Few of these new jobs materialized however. Some workers, fed up with not knowing if they were to have a future at CAV's, left the firm. The management also started cutting down. The older workers (people over retirement age, allowed to work for the company because of past shortages of skilled labour) were kissed good-bye (told that their services were no longer required).

The 'rationalization' took the stewards by surprise. They had always been informed of things by the management in the past (their bulletin is full of references to 'good will' and such like phrases). In 1966 a meeting was held and the convenors and stewards seemed at last to be waking up. Speeches referred to 'veiled redundancies', etc. An overtime ban was put into operation, but dropped within two weeks.

At this stage rumours abounded throughout the factories. The wilder the story the more it was spread and believed. As the unemployment figures crept up, relationships between management and stewards deteriorated. Stewards formerly treated quite 'liberally' were stopped money for attending meetings. Even disabled employees were only allowed 1 minute (instead of 3) to get out of the factory at lunch time and in the evenings.

After the 1967 summer holiday the management at Acton (no doubt thinking of their Sudbury factory which employs mostly female operators) placed a woman on a machine normally operated by men. But she wasn't going to receive a man's wage. The machine shop came out on strike - but didn't go home. They just sat down, read, did crosswords or told jokes. Most of the factory supported them by doing likewise. The woman was eventually taken off the job.

Many thought that the day had been won. But those who consciously study the realities of modern capitalism know that one skirmish doesn't make a battle. The employing class must squeeze machine and man until all profit is extracted. New attacks on working conditions and wages were to be expected.

ATTACK AND REACTION

We didn't have long to wait. This time the employers chose to take on a relatively well-paid section, which by CAV standards was quite militant. This was an assembly line making the CA45 co-axial starter.

Some years ago the company had experienced a period of poor quality components. To avoid employing extra (non-productive) inspectors,

they succeeded in persuading ordinary workers to act as quality men. Instead of merely putting together components issued to them from the stores, the men were asked to put aside parts they considered faulty. Instead of the faulty parts being assembled into faulty starter-motors (and failing the test at the end of the line), only good starters (mechanically speaking) would be produced. To get the men to carry out this extra duty a suitable carrot had to be offered. It was agreed (verbally) that if the line stopped due to bad quality components, the men wouldn't lose by it. They would receive their average earnings.

This arrangement worked satisfactorily for seven years. Then all of a sudden the management decided to alter it - not by negotiation, but by a miniature blitzkrieg.

On Wednesday September 20, the CA45 assembly line - after days of trouble due to sticky pinions - was stopped by the foreman. This was at 9.30 am - only two hours after starting time. The line remained stationary until Friday September 22, when the foreman calmly informed the men that they would only be paid waiting time, i.e. basic rate (a loss of £2.10.0 per day !). Naturally the men were annoyed. Some thought that the foreman had made a mistake. They saw their steward who contacted the convenors. A meeting was arranged with the management but this didn't prove fruitful. A second meeting proved just as fruitless. The men concerned told their shop steward of their intention to strike if nothing was done to remedy the situation.

On Monday September 25 these men were joined by other assembly workers (also affected by this verbal agreement and doubtless thinking of the possible effects on their own wage packets). Some 70 men stopped work. The fight was on.

The shop stewards' E.C. held a meeting. All the stewards were put in the picture. It was decided that the whole work force should assemble outside the factory on Tuesday September 26 for a mass meeting.

Tuesday came. The weather was bright. At 10 am over 2000 workers from all four factories streamed out of their sections towards the main doors, out of the gloomy factories and into the autumn sunshine. People from the East Acton hardening shop and the Kelvinator stores (at Chiswick) and a sprinkling of night shift workers were also present.

There was an atmosphere of excitement and apprehension. No one could remember anything like this happening before - not at CAV ! The huge crowd completely filled the road which curves round the factory like a U. The convenor spoke clearly and intelligently. He gauged his audience's mood and put the case with considerable skill. He stressed that the majority of existing agreements were in fact verbal and that their successful application relied solely on the good will that up to now (he claimed) had existed.

A resolution was put that unless the management decided to honour their agreement in relation to the assembly (they were given

until 4.30 pm that day), there would be a complete stoppage of work as from 7.30 am the following morning. To the surprise of most militants and stewards, 75% of those present supported the resolution. The count was endorsed by no less than 5 adjudicators! Despite this the local paper (the Acton Gazette) stated in their edition of September 28 that 'only a small majority voted for strike action'.

The workers returned to their jobs, many stopping on their way for a cuppa. Most were back at work by 11 am. During the lunch break some heated discussions took place. People still seemed rather vague about the issues. Sectional jealousies were also evident. Principles were luxuries to many, only their particular pocket mattered. What had shaken this type of worker was the revelation that many agreements were only verbal and that he himself might one day be affected.

The 4.30 pm deadline came and went. Nothing had come from the management to indicate a change of heart. The workers made their way home: they were on strike. Several chargehands and foremen (all good ASSET members) continued to show their loyalty to the bosses by asking people working in their sections to report for work next morning (i.e. to scab).

STRIKE DIARY

WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 27

The pickets assembled outside Dodd's café which had become the Strike Committee's H.Q. The senior stewards posted them to the various gates. Crude posters made of corrugated paper were issued. It was suggested and agreed that a leaflet be produced to counter the lies and distortions that already abounded about the dispute. Within two hours, thanks to useful connections, the leaflet was written, endorsed and distributed to workers and staff.

Only a few people scabbed on the first day. Many who'd turned up to go to work listened to the facts of the case and returned home. About 30 scabs had their names written down by those who knew them. We learned one lesson quickly: always place your pickets on the entrance they themselves normally use, i.e. near their own work places. This means that any scab will be recognizable. Moreover intending scabs don't particularly like passing their workmates. Two curious cases came to light. First that of an elderly shop steward who is a storeman. He turned up to do picket duty... and then changed his mind and scabbed!! Secondly that of a member of the Socialist Party of Great Britain. He obviously scabbed for the best possible socialist reasons. Unfortunately his workmates still can't distinguish between this and the traditional reasons for scabbing.

There was a good deal of humour. Some workers stood outside the Stanley Suite (a luxurious part of the factory off Canham Road,

reserved for higher management's lunches, etc.) and harangued the Guvnors as they emerged. They were told 'You've had a long lunch hour, mate!'; 'Don't forget to clock in, will yer' and other things. Each was handed a leaflet, which they read. No doubt some indigestion was caused, but that's an executive hazard.

We could hardly believe our ears when we heard that the people we'd least expected to support us (the gate keepers) were also on strike. They had only been members of a union for some two years.

This good news was considerably dampened by the night shift convenor. He told us he'd just been 'turned over' (voted out) by his men. They would be coming in at 7 pm to break the strike. The 500 men on night shift had resented the decision to strike being taken without them. They had demanded their own vote and this had defeated the motion to support the strike (60% to 40%).

An urgent meeting of the Strike Committee was held. It was decided that the night shift should be met by a really strong picket.

During lunch two or three scabs came to the cafe. Their work-mates (in some cases life-long friends) ignored them. Some spat on the pavement as they passed. Nobody said anything - but if looks could speak!

Just before 1 pm two lines of pickets stood at the main (No.8) gate, like some guard of honour at a church wedding, waiting for the return of those scabs who'd had the guts to come out for their grub. But many who'd scabbed in the morning had gone home. Those who hadn't walked slowly down the gauntlet, looking very uncomfortable indeed. Any picket who recognized a face would shout his name and also the department where he worked. Then instead of boos and jeers he was greeted by cheers as befitting a loyal hero (as to the management indeed he was).

Things then quietened down. Several people wandered off, as the next main picket duty was only at 7 pm. At all times someone was on duty at the gates however. Most of the afternoon was spent in distributing our leaflets. We felt this was very important as the management had unlimited capacity to fight us. Lies and distortions which are an almost natural by-product of disputes shouldn't be allowed to go unchallenged. They must be challenged immediately.

Fellow workers in the engineering industry were contacted. Rotax and Lucas of Willesden, Lucas of Acton (all in the combine) were told of the strike. Where possible their convenors were fully informed and leaflets given to them. Their response was very good. Other factories weren't neglected. Our leaflets must have been seen and read by thousands of workers. We realised the importance of producing leaflets early in a dispute of this kind and distributing them widely.

The afternoon faded into dusk. Soon it was time to man the blockades. Tonight would be a severe test: our baptism of fire! Over a hundred pickets were on duty (although the police had limited us to a mere

twenty). Some special action was needed if these workers weren't to smash the strike. Taking the initiative the Convenor preceded by the Chairman (tradition, even in battle!) stood on a box hastily borrowed from inside the factory and addressed the men. He went over it all again, very patiently. Common sense prevailed and the men who had come to scab drifted off amid sighs of relief. Almost in a Christmas mood the pickets adjourned to the 'Kings Arms', in Acton Vale, in many cases still sporting arm bands. There they mixed with some of the potential scabs they'd just succeeded in convincing. Discussion continued

THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 28.

The pickets were out as usual. Confidence had been restored as a result of the previous night's success. When people are new to struggle they are easily depressed by setbacks and unduly elated by temporary successes. A Strike Committee meeting was held in the morning in the upstairs room of a café just opposite the works. In my opinion these meetings were often outrageously protracted. But these men were dealing with new situations, quite outside of their usual routines. Few had been in disputes before or even had any conception how to get things done. Many precious minutes were wasted on trivialities, but such is the stuff of experience.

The Committee consisted in the main of traditional trade unionists with one or two quite harmless 'lefts' (a CP liberal, another muddled SPGBer, etc.). The outstanding personality was the convenor. Gauging the men he had to work with this man was able to embody the majority decisions and coherently to express them in terms of action. His whole objective was to save and strengthen the shop organization.

The Committee decided that another mass meeting be arranged for the next day, Friday September 29, to test feeling and report any progress. As we had experienced considerable trouble with the public address system it was felt necessary to hire a decent set of equipment. Our contacts again came in useful and helped us find someone who could supply reliable equipment at short notice. This was duly collected and tested. Posters were made. They proclaimed some very basic truths: 'DAYSHIFT AND NIGHT-SHIFT ARE ALL WORKERS'. 'OUR STRENGTH IS YOUR SUPPORT'. 'CAV IN DISPUTE: DON'T SCAB'. These posters, held by pickets at every entrance, were seen by lorry drivers making deliveries. Having got the message they would turn round and drive off.

FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 29.

Our meeting was scheduled for 1 pm because the management were going to pay everyone in the works canteen at 1.30 pm. After picket duty the usual Strike Committee meeting was held in the morning. A telegram from Fazakerley was read out. It pledged support and offered assistance. 'Obviously' the convenor said 'news of our dispute must have hit the Merseyside press'. (It hadn't, I checked thoroughly. The news had come from 'unofficial' contacts.) This message plus others from

Rochester and Sudbury cheered everyone up. It was suggested that a delegation be sent to Liverpool. After a discussion this was agreed. Another delegation went to Rochester and Sudbury on the same day. Soon lunch time came. After a snack the public address system was erected and tested. Posters proclaiming the new found solidarity between the other factories were fixed up to the wire mesh which covered the railings. People arrived and soon the road was packed. This was a large meeting as the night shift were also out in strength. It began to rain heavily.

The District officials arrived. We (the Strike Committee) stood with them under a huge parasol in the pouring rain. They told us the old story: 'Go back, get into procedure, etc...'. Why we later allowed them to speak, I don't know.

The public meeting then started. It was scheduled as a progress report but to be brutally frank, there had been no progress to report. The convenor gave a good, militant speech. One by one the officials then spoke. The skinny guy in a béret (O'Brien of the NUGMW) told us we'd 'fought a good fight' (3 days!). We'd 'made our point'. 'As good, sensible people we should now go back'. A large man in a trilby hat and glasses (Bro. Mills, TGWU) said the same. But ye Gods, our little mustard-and-pepper-suited, mutton-chop-whiskered Bro. Jones (AEU) seemed to have a different line. He made a fighting speech. We'd got a good case. He seemed to be on our side - until he concluded (surprise, surprise) by saying he'd been advised to instruct us to resume work. Together the rain and the officials drove hundreds away. Hearing the convenor, people reckoned that the strike was still on. They were drenched and didn't want to be last in the pay queue. They drifted off. Who can blame them? The meeting melted to about 60. This hard core obviously wanted to return to work. Many weren't union members. Their spokesman demanded a vote. He was asked if he believed in democracy. 'Yes' he said 'I do'. That was all that was wanted. 'Then how do you think 60 people can represent over 2000?'. That rather finished the argument and the meeting ended.

While we waited in the pay queue many people argued. Cracks had begun to appear. Some insulted the Strike Committee, but when the shouts and insinuations were exhausted most still saw the logic of the strike. But they hadn't reckoned on being out more than a day or two. They were very new to it all. The principle at stake was a simple one but not one on which I would have chosen to fight (but one has little choice in these matters). Because of its relatively high pay the assembly was treated by lower paid sections with a certain jealousy. Instead of thinking in terms of raising their own shops up, many seemed to want to reduce better paid sections down to their own level (an inverted sense of equality!).

SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 30

At 6.15 am I was waiting for the car to arrive that was to take the Strike Committee's delegation to Liverpool. We couldn't stop there overnight - so had to travel over 200 miles there, have a meeting and return.

After an uneventful journey we arrived and met stewards and convenors from the Fazakerley site. One of our delegation gave a report on the situation at Acton. The Liverpool men listened carefully and made certain proposals and offers of support.

If nothing else came of this strike, at least a link had been forged with our fellow workers in Liverpool. On no account must this link be allowed to erode. Constant contact must at all times be a reality based on common understanding of the relative positions. Apart from their concern at our strike the stewards at Fazakerley know that their own agreements, like ours, are also mainly verbal - and at lesser rates than at Acton.

MONDAY OCTOBER 2

Monday came and the pickets were on duty as usual. A second leaflet was distributed to staff and others. This had been produced over the weekend. It gave a brief report of the strike and threw the ball back into the management's court, by challenging them to pay the measly amount. It stressed the Committee's desire to discuss a new agreement.

Over the weekend every striker had received a personal letter from one of the firm's directors, a Mr. Ewing. This cleverly worded letter contained phrases which could be interpreted as an indication that the firm was prepared to talk. Some phrases could even be interpreted as a formula for a resumption of work.

This was a fresh development. Many in dispute would interpret it as a partial victory (whereas in fact it meant very little and might even have been a manoeuvre). The Strike Committee decided to hold a mass meeting on the following day to report this development to our members and to recommend a provisional return to work. It was felt by some that the management's position had changed slightly. (I would have preferred more concrete guarantees, both about the rate in question and about future ones.)

More important, many were now feeling the pinch. They were prepared to grasp at straws and clearly didn't want to prolong the strike. As a Committee we couldn't ignore their wishes, although the only way to have won the strike without prolonging it would have been to extend it. A recommendation to return - together and not in dribs and drabs like a defeated army - was considered the best we could hope for at this stage.

Surprisingly few people turned up on the Monday. Some approached the picket line waving their letter from Mr. Ewing like Maoists waving their little red books. One big guy, a Hungarian, said 'I hev letter'. He was greeted by shouts of 'lucky you'. He seemed to regard himself as a special case and seemed disappointed that others had also received them! Another illusion shattered.

Only a few scabs went in that morning. They had become an embarrassment to the management and had to be sent home. A joke circulating the picket line told of a couple of scabs who went into the factory and were unable to do any work. They were told by their chargehand that they would only receive 'waiting time' and walked out!

Posters went up advertising the mass meeting for the next day. The night picket was also quiet despite the letters. It was the most uneventful period of the whole strike.

TUESDAY OCTOBER 3

In the morning the pickets were out but weren't really needed. So few scabs had turned up that they'd not been worth the expense of a light bulb and had been sent home again! At mid-day the loudspeakers were again erected and tested. The weather was fine. The stewards' banner, a huge white affair with red letters, was fixed to the railings. Posters declared the usual exhortations. The officials arrived and were rather rudely ignored. It was made quite clear to them that this was our meeting and we didn't want them to speak.

~~When everyone had gathered the convenor gave a good speech thanking all for their support. A resolution to return to work the following day was carried by a large majority. Most people were pleased but those who had given the matter some thought knew that all the main problems still remained. The groundwork, however, had been laid.~~

THE LESSONS OF THE STRUGGLE

- 1) An organization capable of producing leaflets quickly is necessary to workers in dispute. The first few hours are often critical. This is when a lot of time is often wasted.
- 2) Workers in a combine such as Joseph Lucas' must realise that when in dispute they aren't merely up against their own local management. They face the whole weight and power of the Combine. If the balance isn't always to be weighted in favour of the employing class, workers must see the necessity of extending the struggle.
- 3) The liaison formed during the strike must not be allowed to fall by the wayside. It is not enough to say 'we'll help if needed'. A constant link must be sustained.
- 4) The almost criminal neglect of liaison between day shift and night shift must be eliminated.
- 5) Whatever our criticisms of the unions, the call for a 100% union shop is a necessity in places like CAV. It is disgraceful that trade unionists should be held to ransom by those who willingly accept wages based on negotiated terms and yet don't contribute towards the maintenance of shop organization.

- 6) Even partial struggles can raise the level of consciousness of the workers. More frequent meetings where workers can question their stewards and convenors are now necessary to maintain what has been recently acquired. Such meetings will not only help the rank and file. They are essential if stewards are to do their work properly.
- 7) The debunking of misconceptions about officials and about 'official' and 'unofficial' action is essential. The officials are only paper pussy-cats (not even paper tigers).
- 8) Unless the stewards begin to understand the class nature of the society in which we live (and the relative positions in it of workers and employers), they will only see struggles in 'local' terms. In this strike the nature of the employing class was exposed to workers who had always 'respected' them. They saw that the only thing that motivates the employers is profit and the only thing that hurts them is loss of it! One day the employers wouldn't talk. Three days later they were most willing to do so.
- 9) The stewards should resist the blandishments of management-sponsored committees. These are pleasantly disguised forms of deviating the stewards from what should be their true objective: the progressive improvement of conditions and the economic advancement of their members. This lesson at least seems to have been learned. (See below)
- 10) During struggles many workers (other than stewards) emerge as militants. This is a spontaneous development, but unless it is harnessed it dies as quickly as it appears, leaving no trace of its existence. It is therefore necessary for the steward in whose section these men or women belong to help them by sharing his responsibilities with them and by discussing with them all things which pertain to their department. These workers are the nucleus of a shop committee. They can and will strengthen a weak steward and can and will support a strong one. Keeping these people informed of all events will help eliminate their sense of isolation. Only a truly informed rank and file shop committees can stand up to the tasks imposed on it. The shop steward is only as strong as his shop. The workers must not hesitate to remove a man whose interests are not theirs. This is their right and it must be exercised.

If all these points are remembered then the strike will have been worthwhile. It has been said that workers learn in struggle. It is not disputed that they learn - but it what they learn that counts!

POSTSCRIPT

~~Following the return to work the management and Shop Stewards' Committee met several times. The Company offered an ex-gratia payment of £1 to the CA45 assembly men involved in 'waiting time' on the mornings of September 20 and 21. This offer was made 'without prejudice' (in other words it wasn't to become a precedent).~~

This offer was turned down by the Shop Stewards' Committee who furthermore refused in future to cooperate in quality problems and advised members to refrain from 'involving themselves in quality problems or attending quality meetings of any description such as National Quality and Reliability Year or the Joint Production Committee' - adding the warning that such participation could lead to loss of earnings!

- 17 -

REVIEWS

"MARXISM IN MODERN FRANCE", by George Lichtheim
Columbia University Press (1966), 50/-, pp. 212.

This is an infuriating book, interesting in parts, in others pathetically confused if not frankly misleading.

The author traces the implantation and development of marxist theory in France and of the organizations it inspired or who sought to make use of it. Starting with the bloody aftermath of the Commune he first guides us through the difficult 1880's and 1890's to the formation, in 1905, of the S.F.I.O. He then discusses the impact of the Russian Revolution on the French worker's movement and finally outlines the evolution of the two main parties professing marxism and of the marxism they professed.

This part of the analysis is fairly conventional. It is conventional in its bureaucratic identification of working class history with the history of working class organisation. And it is conventional in its assessment of theory as something which has to be 'brought to the movement' from the outside. Doctrine is dissected learnedly enough, but its development is nowhere related to the changing conditions of life of those on whose behalf the 'theoretical weapons' were allegedly being forged.

This is not to say that the tale lacks piquancy. There are interesting sidelights on the part played by Sorel. Before his views became the common heritage of Syndicalists, Leninists, and Fascists alike, Sorel (who read Italian and was aware of the important contributions to Marxism made by Croce and Labriola between 1893 and 1898) played an important role in bringing 'real Marxism' to France and in amplifying the rather simplistic views on the subject held by Jules Guesde, the leading French Marxist who had been 'converted' to the new ideas in 1880 by none other than Marx himself. According to Lichtheim this lack of a deep marxist tradition in the French Labour movement had important repercussions. Conjoined to a Blanquist hangover it accounted for the ready implantation of Bolshevism in France, in the years following the First World War.

The second half of the book deals with the changes and emphasis and later with the modifications and outright challenges to marxist doctrine witnessed in France since the end of World War II. These are clearly sensed as a response to profound changes in the structure of French society, to its evolution in an increasingly managerialist direction, as well as to such external events as the Polish and Hungarian uprisings. Unfortunately this part of the book, which could have been most interesting, is totally lacking in perspective. We are consequently served a sort of philosophico-sociological bouillabaisse in which existentialist red herrings (from Temps Modernes) float side by side with indigestible - and undigested - chunks of "Christian Socialism" (from the pages of Esprit). Quotations from the Stalinist hatchetmen of Pensée and Nouvelle Critique mingle with Mandel's tortured apologetics for last-ditch Trotskyist orthodoxy, and the watery revisionism of Serge Mallet and of the Nouvel Observateur are given the same emphasis as the radical critiques of Socialisme ou Barbarie (described on p. 132 as a 'semi-trotskyist monthly' and on p. 183 as 'more or less in tune with the Syndicalist tradition').

The author's own philosophical beliefs inevitably emerge in the course of this discussion. The working class is no longer a force for social change. The rise of a technological bureaucracy is more or less inevitable. One might as well ride with it.

Lichtheim seems totally unaware of the contribution, both practical and in the realm of ideology, of the self-styled marxist organisations to the rise of the bureaucracy which he deplures. He still sees 'communist militancy' (sic) in modern France as 'drawing emotional strength' from a vision of 'the class struggle as a conflict pitting the manual workers against the rest of society'. This really won't do! Anyone familiar with the French industrial scene over the last two decades will regretfully recognise this as unadulterated rubbish. But the author goes further. Berating the Communists, the author tells them that the main task confronting France after 1945 was 'the urgently necessary formation of an alliance of workers, technologists, and planners against the conservatism of the business community'! This is described as 'the only basis on which socialism could be made to rhyme with democracy and with the national interest'. One might be dreaming (and I don't mean that bit about 'socialism' and the 'national interest'). For Lichtheim's lecture to the Stalinists (on what they should have done after the War) echoes virtually every phrase of Stalinist propoganda uttered during the 'tripartite' honeymoon of 1945, 1946, and 1947! That Moscow (in 1945) and Columbia University's Research Institute for Communist Affairs (in 1966) should be advocating much the same thing is real food for thought. It should provide matter for another kind of study, on what has happened to marxism in modern France.

M.B.

"THE GERMAN REVOLUTION OF 1918", by A.J.Ryder
(A Study of German Socialism in War and Revolt)
Cambridge University Press (1967), 63/-, pp. 304.

Waste-production, a characteristic of present-day capitalism, displays itself in intellectual as well as material forms. Ryder's book falls in this category by telling once more the dreary story of the German Revolution of 1918. Its extensive yet selective bibliography names its numerous predecessors and, due to the strange proceedings of the academic world, it will undoubtedly find just as many successors. This is not to say that the book is not worthwhile; on the contrary, it is a serious and well-written study of German socialism which, however, adds nothing essential to the large library on hand.

While in Germany with the education branch of the British Control Commission, Ryder began to wonder about the "failure of German democracy," which led him to this "investigation of the unsuccessful revolution which gave the Republic its unpromising start." The failed German revolution was, of course, a failure of German socialism and not a failure of German...

democracy. In fact, it was political democracy which destroyed the revolution. Ryder feels, however, that somehow a more successful revolution would have led to a better democracy and therewith to the possible avoidance of fascism. But he does not go into the matter for his book ends with the year 1920.

It starts with the familiar story of the evolution of German Social-Democracy from an oppositional to a class-collaborationist movement. From its very beginning there existed a noticeable discrepancy between its ideology and its reformist practice which, in the course of time and with growing opportunities, widened into open support of bourgeois society. This was not peculiar to German socialism, for the socialist parties of other nations experienced a similar development. The war of 1914 merely revealed the transformation in a dramatic way. But the war also revived revolutionary attitudes in both the working classes and the socialist movements.

The revival was foreshadowed in the discussions around the questions of reform and revolution which divided Social-Democracy ideologically long before its actual split into three factions - an extreme right and left and a centre - was brought on by the war and the opposition to it. This split led to the formation of the Independent Socialist Party and of the Spartacist League which constituted its left wing and which became in 1918 the Communist Party

After 1916 opposition to the war expressed itself in anti-war propaganda and in industrial strikes which, due to the social patriotism of the Trade Unions, had to be organised by way of workers' councils. The events of the Russian Revolution led to increased revolutionary activities in Germany. It was following the experiences of the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917, as well as by the force of its own circumstances, that the revolution in Germany found its organisational expression in clandestine workers' and soldiers' councils and their seizure of political control.

However, the bourgeoisie was only temporarily stunned. With the aid of the social democrats it was soon able to restore the capitalist order. The mass of the working population mistook the political for a social revolution. With the monarchy gone and the war ended, it expected a socialist government to socialize production. The social democratic ideology had left its mark on the working class. Despite the party's class collaboration and social patriotism - to which the masses themselves had only too readily succumbed - the illusion prevailed that there was a non-revolutionary way to socialism. The revolutionaries were a minority, even though they had large masses on their side during various spontaneous reactions to counter-revolutionary provocations. With the aid of empty promises and the help of mercenaries the social democrats managed to suppress the revolutionary forces.

The goal of the revolutionaries was "all power to the workers' councils", that of the bourgeoisie and its social democratic allies, the rule of the national constituent assembly. The realization of the revolutionary goal implied the disfranchisement of all non-working layers of

society - the dictatorship of the proletariat. Universal suffrage meant the reinstatement of bourgeois power - the dictatorship of capital. Although the workers' and soldiers' councils were a reality, they were composed of people of all political persuasions. The actual content of the revolution was not equal to its revolutionary form, and by opting for the national assembly the councils voted themselves out of existence. All that was left for the social democrats to do was to destroy the isolated revolutionaries by military means.

This is all there is to the story of the German revolution, the details of which fill Ryder's book. Although the revolution, such as it was, was destroyed by the German socialists, the latter were themselves eliminated by the fascist regime through which German capitalism tried to find an imperialist solution for its economic problems. In Ryder's view, however, democracy in Germany came to its sorry end not because it no longer served capitalistic needs, but because social democracy had not been consistent enough in its revisionism. "What can reasonably be argued," he writes, "is that had the S.P.D. adopted revisionism in theory as well as in practice and shed its revolutionary objectives it might never have provoked the reaction from the right which proved its ultimate undoing." But the socialists had no revolutionary objectives to shed and in 1918 its revisionism did embrace both theory and practice. It was replaced together with democracy because its services to capitalism had become inadequate.

P.M.

REVOLUTIONARY LEADERSHIP ?

'My Lord, of the six I represent my instructions are that none were either leaders or organizers of the demonstration..... they were not responsible, not any of these six, for bringing the implements, the wedges and so forth to the demonstration.....'

Mr. C.L. Hawser Q.C.,
defending some of the Greek
Embassy demonstrators...

Was Mr Hawser really instructed to say this? If not, when will his clients publicly repudiate him?

THE PROPHET VINDICATED

"From many indications the KAPD in the person of its present anarcho-adventuristic leadership will not submit to the decisions of the International. Finding itself outside our ranks it will probably try to form a 'Fourth International'..... There are extreme leftists in Holland too. Perhaps in other countries as well But in any case their number is not excessive. A 'Fourth International', should it arise, runs the least danger of becoming very large numerically."

LEON TROTSKY, Moscow, July 1921.
In 'First Five Year of the Communist International', vol.II, p.26.

SEXUAL THERMIDOR - 2

We here continue the discussion on this subject started in vol.IV, No.8. Important issues are raised in J.J.'s article and we would welcome readers' comments. We would also welcome factual information or documents concerning official attitudes to sexual morality in the years immediately following the Russian Revolution. How real was the libertarian ethic of the first few years? And how easy was it for the new authoritarianism gradually to replace it?

Maria Fyfe's emotional expression of opinion (Solidarity vol.IV, no.9) cannot be met with factual argument and the inclusion of such views in Solidarity will have annoyed other readers as much as it did me. However, let us consider some of the points she raises, for Maria's views are held by a large section of the population.

"Most people enter and stay in monogamous marriage "quite voluntarily and to their mutual happiness," she writes. If Dr. Kinsey's statistics for white American society can be accepted as roughly comparable to our own, then 50% of men and 26% of women indulge at some time in extra-marital intercourse (not pre-marital - here the figures nearly double). It would be surprising if "revolutionary socialists" were any exception. Considering the enormous social pressures against any kind of extra-marital activity, these figures speak loudly of the dissatisfaction experienced within the conventional marriage set-up. No large-scale surveys have been conducted into people's happiness, but we have only to look around us to see countless thousands of couples, young, middle-aged and old, living together in hate, disharmony or indifference, "making do", "trying to make a go of it", through fear of censure from friends, neighbours or family or through fear of loneliness. The compulsive nature of most of our actions, the power of convention, tradition and convenience, can hardly be over-emphasized.

Fear of loneliness in our empty, segmented society is very real and understandable, and one of its products is jealousy. In a starving community a man may fight furiously to keep his food from others: our society is starved of sex, emotion and love. Thus our partners become a commodity, become 'property'. But for one human being to be owned by another is as wrong in the home as it is in the factory. It is quite absurd that to share with someone the pleasure of a sexual embrace should have any more evil implications than sharing with him the pleasure of food and drink.

The supposed flowering of sexuality at the age of 16 ("here in Scotland one can marry at 16 without parental consent ... inhibition of young persons' sexual activities is not necessarily consistent with repressive, church-and-state-dominated society!") is typical of a view of life based on prejudice rather than fact-finding. Left to themselves,

babies and toddlers show an active interest in sex. Marriage at 16 solves nothing: we are all ruined sexually by the age of five and rarely can even the most enlightened treatment restore full sexual potency in man or woman: it is like forbidding someone to speak or to listen to speech until the age of 16 and then expecting them to show a full mastery of language.

The man who has done most to investigate in detail the sexual aspects of state-organized tyranny is Dr. Wilhelm Reich. Long before Alain Gerard and Marc Noireau* he traced, in "The Sexual Revolution", the total correlation between increasing authoritarianism in the USSR and the abandonment of revolutionary sexual attitudes. In this and other works ("The Function of the Orgasm", "The Mass Psychology of Fascism" etc.), he has shown in great detail how there is no more effective and efficient method subtly to control people than by undermining their sexuality. Sexual repression leads directly to anxiety - from the more dramatic neurotic fears to the everyday ones such as fear of meeting people, fear of authority, of the dark, of spiders, of oneself. To condemn a young human being for its sexuality is to reduce that being to half its size, to make it hate itself and others too. This initiates the vicious circle of sadomasochism - the need to inflict and receive mental or physical pain, whether in schools, hospitals, the local national assistance office, the police force or the army.

As evidence of the fact that sexual suppression in the infant and adolescent is not the prerequisite of cultural development, social sense, diligence and cleanliness but in fact its exact opposite, Reich reminds us of the work of Malinowski, an anthropologist, amongst the people of the Trobriand islands. The children of these people "know no sex repression and no sexual secrecy. Their sex life is allowed to develop naturally, freely and unhampered through every stage of life and with full satisfaction. The children engage freely in the sexual activities which correspond to their age. The sexual life of adolescents is monogamous; a change of partners takes place quietly and in an orderly manner, without violent jealousy." The result? "The Trobrianders knew, in the third decade of our century no ... functional psychoses, no psychoneuroses, no sex murder; they have no word for theft; they are spontaneously clean, orderly, social without compulsion, intelligent and industrious." At the time this study was made, "there was living a few miles away on the Amphlett Islands, a tribe with patriarchal, authoritarian family organisation. The people inhabiting these islands were already showing all the traits of the European neurotic, such as distrust, anxiety, neuroses, perversion, suicide, etc." And amongst the Trobrianders themselves, there was just one group of children who were kept from a natural love life. These were children destined for a particular kind of marriage economically advantageous to the tribe. Their sexual abstinence had the function of rendering them submissive. Sexual suppression is an essential instrument in the production of economic enslavement.

*Sexual Thermidor Solidarity vol. IV, no. 8.

Reich sees the so-called cultured human as having three layers: "On the surface he wears the artificial mask of self-control, of compulsive, insincere politeness and of artificial sociality. With this layer he covers up the second in which sadism, greediness, lasciviousness, envy, perversions of all kinds, are kept in check, without however having in the least lost any of their power. This second layer is the artifact of a sex-negating culture; consciously, it is mostly experienced only as a gaping inner emptiness. Behind it . . . live and work natural sociality and sexuality, spontaneous enjoyment of work, capacity for love. This third and deepest layer is unconscious and dreaded. It is at variance with every aspect of authoritarian education and régime. It is, at the same time, man's only real hope of mastering social misery. All discussions on whether man is good or bad, a social or anti-social being, are philosophical pastimes. Whether man is a social being or an irrationally reacting mass of protoplasm depends on whether his fundamental biological needs are in harmony or in conflict with the institutions which he has created."

The creation within us in our most tender years of a psychological police force which automatically punishes, with nightmares and all manner of terrors and uncertainties, the slightest wandering from the path of sexual suppression, is the primary weapon in the hands of those who rule us. It is a weapon that has been used for centuries - those in power are most likely unaware that they use it. It renders the working individual "helpless, incapable of freedom and craving for authority, for he cannot react spontaneously; he is armored and expects commands, for he is full of contradictions and cannot rely on himself". It is hardly surprising that an authoritarian society, considering the base it has to work on, finds it easy to convince its emotionally distorted objects that War is good, to spend a whole lifetime working is a virtue, that the accumulation of material possessions constitutes the main Purpose of Life, that happiness is not to be found in this world - etc., ad nauseam.

When we urge people to stand up and take action for themselves, to make their own decisions and always to question authority, it is just as important to show them how they have been manipulated into a state of submission as to point out to them to what ends this has been accomplished. Unexpressed sexual emotion is everyone's problem (birth control is a red herring which I have deliberately ignored). It is not a problem to be left to the Aunties of the women's magazines. It is the urgent concern of every revolutionary, not only on a par with, but part and parcel of, industrial misery.

All quotes are from Wilhelm Reich's 'The Function of the Orgasm' (Noonday Press, New York 1956, pp. 201 to 205,)

JENNY JAMES

KING HILL REVISITED

' 1965. Two left-wing groups arrived at King Hill Hostel, in Kent, to organize residents in a bitter 12-month campaign against conditions. Kent County Council spent thousands of pounds on legal action to High Court level, hired a private detective to catch husbands living in (several were gaoled for contempt of court) and won the right to evict families... Minister of Health Robinson said he could not intervene...

' 1966. Total victory for King Hill campaigners. Kent revised their hostel system. Public pillorying had succeeded where 12 years of admonitory Whitehall circulars failed...'

Colin McGlashan, The Observer, April 16, 1967.

Homeless families are again in the news. The campaign waged by the tenants at Durham Buildings against the Labour-controlled Wandsworth Council has already achieved considerable success. The lessons learned at King Hill (Kent)* and Abridge (Essex) have proved invaluable. How lasting can such victories be?

We recently revisited the King Hill Hostel. What are things like there now? The wooden, barrack-like hutments are still there, as ugly as ever - despite (or perhaps because of) the fact that doors have been repainted in pastel colours. But we were immediately conscious of a freer and more relaxed atmosphere.

The first thing we saw on entering the hostel was a prominent notice board announcing a weekly 'Infant Welfare Clinic' (a notice had previously stood at the entrance, more or less telling husbands they were trespassers.) Three dogs were bounding about the square in the centre of the hostel (in the days before the campaign the mere possession of a mongrel pup was a symbol of bold defiance). These things may seem normal and trivial enough - in fact they represent a considerable change.

Before the campaign started the homeless families were treated like dirt. The idea was to make their stay at King Hill so intolerable that anything would be preferred. A ruthless campaign of intimidation was waged against them. They were hemmed in by petty rules, viciously

* See 'KCC versus the Homeless' for a fully documented account of this now classical struggle (1/6, post free, from Heather Russell, 53A Westmoreland Road, Bromley, Kent).

and systematically enforced. The resulting catalogue of silent human misery is impossible to list: dozens of families permanently broken, hundreds of children taken 'into care' by the local authorities.

Now husbands are not only staying with their families. The new 'rules' explicitly state that they may do so. All the families are now officially free to stay at King Hill until rehoused. Families stay on average 6 months. The spectre of eviction after 3 months has been permanently removed. Not a single child has had to be taken into care for some two years. Other rules - although still in the book - are neither obeyed nor enforced.

King Hill has been converted from what many (including Eric Lubbock, MP) have described as a 'concentration camp' into a humanely, though still bureaucratically, run institution. The authorities have been informed that the campaign will be renewed should there be any slipping back.

A mere reform? Sure. But one imposed by revolutionary, direct action methods, when reformist traditional methods had failed. And one only made possible by the fact that the homeless families themselves both initiated the resistance, and were constantly in the forefront in maintaining and extending it.

'The Friends of King Hill' did not disband following the success of their campaign. The Committee remained in being a) to keep an eye on what was happening at the hostel - hence this report; b) to expose the Sunday newspaper The People. At the height of the campaign against the KCC, The People published a scurrilous and libellous article, attacking Roy and Mildred Mills, one of the homeless couples most active in the campaign. In February 1967, the matter was taken up (without illusions) with the Press Council. A document containing 45 separate complaints was lodged. We still await their adjudication. We will shortly be commenting both on The People and on the Press Council itself.

A. Anderson, Secretary, Friends of King Hill.

A vital document of our time...

REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALIST MANIFESTO
FROM A POLISH PRISON

by Jacek Kuron and Karol Modzelewski

This is not just an heroic call for freedom but a brilliant analysis of a state capitalist society and a programme for its negation - workers' power.

74 pages. 4/6, post paid, from International Socialism,
36 Gilden Road, London N.W. 5.

BARBICAN POSTMORTEM


The Myton strikers have been defeated. After holding out for a year, the alliance of employers, state, union officials and police has forced them back to work without their stewards.

The strike showed both the strength and weakness of the rank-and-file movement in industry. The workers remained firm in the face of flagrant incitements to scab by the union officials. But such a strike cannot be won without supporting action from the rest of the labour movement. A good deal of moral and financial support was forthcoming throughout the year, but when it came to the crunch, the strikers had to face the police thugs alone. On the picket line with them were only a small number of supporters from various left-wing groups. The call for token stoppages of work and for a mass solidarity demonstration on November 2 met with no response. Even the neighbouring Turiff sites (which had been the strike's strongest supporters) remained at work.

In these circumstances there is no doubt that the Strike Committee were justified in calling off the strike. Only a fool would shout 'betrayal!'. The question which is posed is whether this defeat was inevitable given the existing level of working class consciousness, or whether a rank-and-file movement could have rallied the support which might have won a victory. A discussion on the strike should concentrate on this rather than on the decision to return to work. However bureaucratically proclaimed, the decision itself was correct given the situation the strikers were in. The problem is, why were the Barbican men in such a situation?

Many of the reasons are unwittingly yet very clearly revealed in the final leaflet issued by the Strike Committee, calling off the strike. The leaflet recognized that the strike could not have been won in isolation; it realized that they had taken on the combined power of the state, the employers, and the union bureaucracy; it castigated the officials who had accepted the Cameron Report and had signed joint advertisements with the employers inciting men to blackleg.

Yet, the leaflet went on to ask workers to elect better officials to replace the existing ones. It does not recognize that the union hierarchy is being progressively incorporated into the state machinery. Replacing right-wingers with 'lefts' changes nothing. Some of the leaders who scabbed on the strike were 'lefts'. Danny McGarvey of the Boilermakers was one of the signatories of the infamous Cameron Report. The notorious advert inciting to scab was signed by an official of the 'left' TGWU. None of our prominent 'left' leaders supported the strike.

The leaflet showed a complete lack of understanding concerning the nature of the union officials. It naively proclaimed: 'Myton could have been beaten in a week if our union leaders had had the guts

to call out all Myton and Taylor Woodrow sites. This would have curbed every employer and inspired every worker. Thousands would have joined the unions too.' Such statements sow illusions and prepare the ground for further demoralisation and further defeats. The idea that union officials could rush from site to site rallying workers to the cause is really ludicrous. What is needed is to warn workers to expect nothing from 'their' officials and to rely solely on their own strength.

The worst feature of the final meeting, at which the leaflet was distributed, was that it presented defeat as victory. We repeat, no one can be blamed for returning to work when faced with hopeless odds. But a defeat should never be presented as a victory.

An indication of the fragmentary nature of working class consciousness at the present stage was the complete absence of the dockers from the picket line. The two most important and fiercely fought struggles of the time were completely separate. This tells us a lot about the level of consciousness: great militancy combined with extreme parochialism. It also tells us a lot about the Communist Party leadership of the docks struggle. Instead of trying to raise consciousness by forging links between different sections of workers it merely reflects the existing parochialism and fragmentation.

While the press presented the strike as a communist plot, and while some of the leading stewards were C.P. members, Party support did not go beyond reports in the Morning Star. There were very few C.P. militants on the picket line or present at the march on the final day. The YCL did call a solidarity meeting... after the strike was over. Significantly a report in Comment, the Party weekly, is illustrated by a picture of a crowd of left deviationists applauding a speaker.

Revolutionary socialists have in the past been able to compensate for their impotence by analyzing the role of the C.P. This necessary if undemanding task is now in danger of becoming superfluous as the C.P. ceases to be the dominant faction in industrial struggle. Its withdrawal leaves a vacuum, which has yet to be filled by an independent rank-and-file movement.

One of the best examples of a rank-and-file initiative concerning the Myton strike was provided by the leaflet issued by The Printworker*. This showed in clear, simple language that the Myton struggle also concerned the printworkers. But such initiatives have up till now been few and far between.

However it should not be assumed that this position will last. Throughout many industries militants are becoming increasingly aware of the line-up that faces them in any struggle of any magnitude : employers, state, and union officials. This is a big step forward. Only a few years ago trade unionists asked their officials 'whose side are you on?'. Now they say 'We know which side you are on!'.
J.S.

* Published by the Association of Rank-and-File Printworkers, 29 Love Walk, London S.E.5.

~~MORE~~ FROM VAUXHALL

In our last issue we discussed the background to the recent struggle at Vauxhall Motors, Luton. The cumulative effects of the work-to-rule and overtime ban started on September 13 led to fairly prompt chaos. P.A. writes:

" That a seemingly tame type of industrial action could lead to so much havoc in such a short time can be seen as condemnatory of an inept management. It was quickly seen that unless some areas were prepared to work in excess of 50 hours per week it was impossible to produce enough components to keep other areas working the standard 40 hr. week.

We worked strictly within the limits of the station area for the performance of the given task on the tracks. This quickly showed that a far larger labour force would be needed if the track speed was to be maintained. Two alternatives faced management: either a drastic slow-up of the track speed or allowing unfinished vehicles off the end of the track. Management opted for the second alternative and incomplete vehicles were quickly filling every yard of storage space.

Some operators, especially those in the Paint Shop, receive a 'Dress Allowance'. This amounts to 20 minutes per day. To obtain this the operators clock-in 5 minutes before starting time in the morning and after their lunch break. And they clock-out 5 minutes after the shift finishes. In this way they are dressed in their protective clothing ready to start as soon as the hooter sounds. This allowance was completely banned. Clocking-in therefore commenced as the hooter sounded, with the consequent result that the track was each time at least 10 minutes late starting.

It was found throughout the three plants that there was no need to break any rules: a strict observance of the 'company rules' was enough. If ever evidence was needed that without cooperation of the workers factories would grind to a halt, it was available in plenty at Vauxhall Motors.

Electricians and other maintenance workers observed every 'safety' rule in the book. This led to a considerable increase in the time needed for even the simplest repair. Areas that had in the past been unwilling to join in any industrial action were prepared to give full backing.

Whether we have gained anything worthwhile from 'working to rule' and the overtime ban is as yet uncertain. It is however the first time that the management of Vauxhall Motors have met a really united shop floor. There is no doubt that they experienced a painful shock and that the shop floor gained a lot of experience from this first exercise in real solidarity."