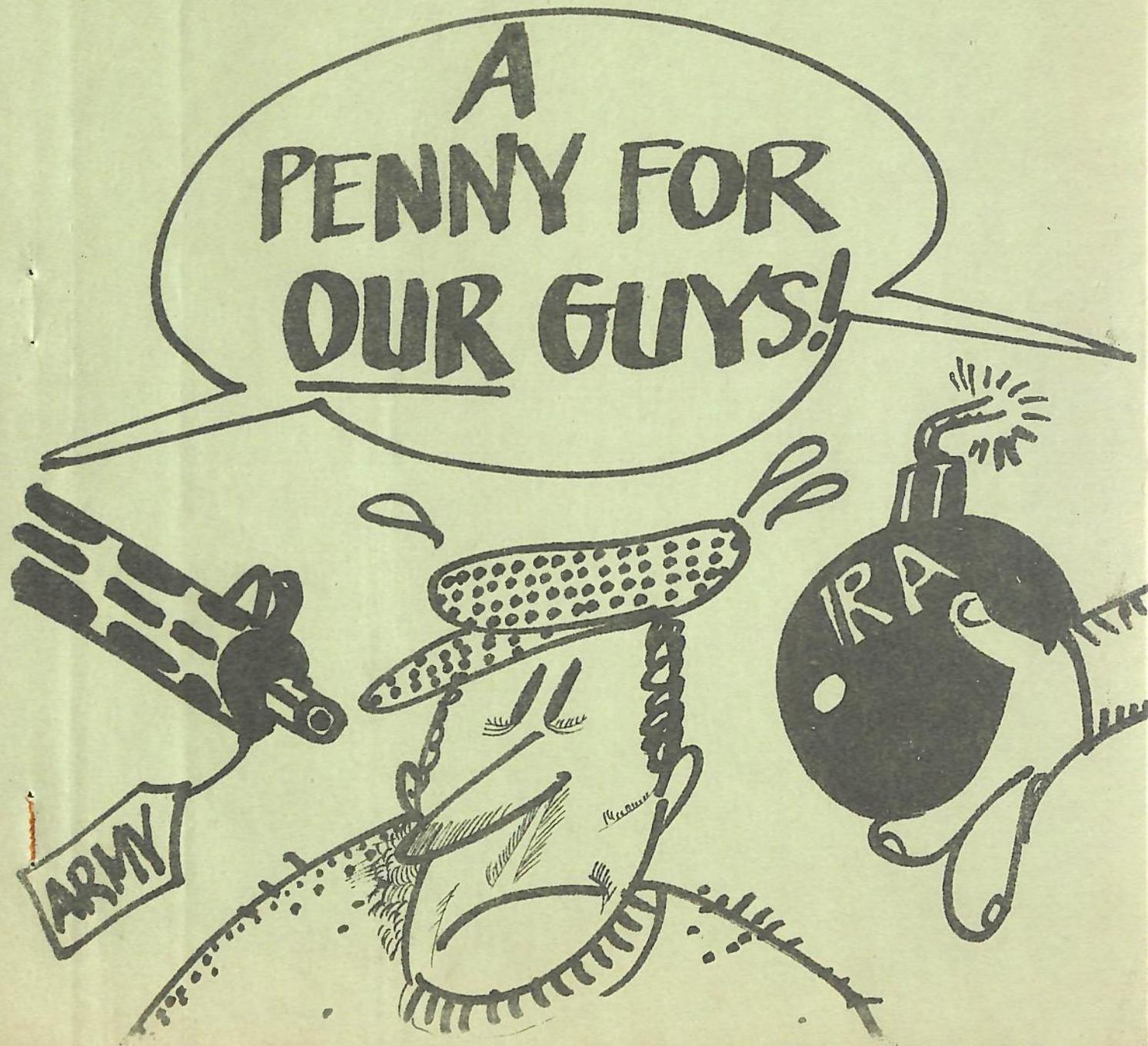


# solidarity

for workers' power

- Ireland ● Docks
- Women & the trade unions
- Focus on Fords

Volume 7, no. 3/5p



# SOME THOUGHTS ON THE DOCKERS' FIGHT

The left has recently gone into raptures about the militancy of the dockers, while tending to ignore the tragedy of two sections of the working class fighting each other on ground chosen by their employers. This article does not try to provide all the answers to the problems which divide workers in and around the cargo-handling industry. We hope however that it will contribute to a discussion between dockers, container depot workers and lorry drivers about the future of their industry, and how they could face it together. We would welcome further contributions on this subject.

'Over the past five years drastic changes have taken place in this country's dock industry. We have seen the reduction of our register from 65,000 in 1967 to 41,000 in 1972.(1) With the ever increasing use of technology such as roll-on roll-off loads the ship-owners have implemented a policy of directing work from the registered ports to inland container depots and unregistered ports. So successful has this policy been that at one stage the employers were saying confidently that registration of dockers was a relic of the past and did not have a part to play in our industry. Furthermore, closures of the docks were to be speeded up'. (Bernie Steer - Vic Turner - The Times, August 18, 1972.)

This development should have been foreseen when the dockers accepted containerisation, as a fact of life, two years after their initial refusal

(1) This decline in the numbers of registered dockers has been going on for decades, as the following figures show:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Number of dockers</u>	<u>Tonnage handled</u> (millions of tons)
1921	125,000	37.00
1938	100,000	66.97
1951	80,088	60.15
1961	71,679	86.29
1970	46,912	121.15

to work the new system which had been installed at Tilbury. When decasualisation (2) arrived many dockers had deep illusions about their future. For example they believed that the process of contraction in the industry would end and that their jobs and those of their sons were secure.

Miners, railwaymen, steelworkers and others had already accepted 'rationalisation', through productivity deals, which promised a 'better future for those remaining'. As a result there have been massive reductions of the work force in these industries. Over the last 15 years the jobs of 500,000 miners (two-thirds of those employed) and over one-third of railwaymen's jobs have already gone. A similar process is going on in the docks.

Employers in Britain have been sluggish in introducing new technology, while their competitors in the USA, Western Europe and Japan have been able to do this at a much faster rate. They have been less conservative than their British counterparts in initiating change and more prepared to 'risk' the necessary investment. British employers also faced a better organised working class, some sections of which were able to resist because of strong rank and file organisations, operating alongside the official trade union structures.

In the case of the dockers this power stemming from shop floor organisation has been steadily eroded of late. Rank and file organisation has existed on the docks for 80 years and has been particularly strong since the war. Their militancy has been a thorn in the side of the employers, slowing down the introduction of new methods of exploitation and speed-up. After several Courts of Enquiry into the dock industry, many strikes, and bitter confrontations the employers have, over the last few years, been able to introduce new methods which have changed the whole cargo-handling industry. As a result the dockers, by themselves, now have a reduced ability to control the flow of cargo. It is becoming increasingly possible for cargo to bypass the main docks, using container depots, the smaller unregistered ports and specialised bulk-handling facilities which are springing up all over the country (and on a world scale too). This process will continue. For example the Royal Group, heartland of London's docks, is threatened with the loss of the vital New Zealand meat and dairy trade. Other ports are being involved and containerisation is taking its steady toll. This could mean a drop of 50% of the tonnage imported via the Royal Group and a consequent loss of its work related to exports.

This has led the dockers to demand that all work at container depots and unregistered ports be allocated to registered men, who have better rates of pay and conditions. Naturally the container and allied workers have not taken too kindly to these proposals which would throw them out on

---

(2) Decasualisation meant that dockers became permanently employed by specific companies instead of working on a day-to-day casual basis.

the cobbles. As they have begun to get better organised and to improve their own wages and conditions, they now have the bit between their teeth and will resist attempts to push them around.(3) Nevertheless when the 5 dockers were recently imprisoned container workers came out in solidarity even before some dockers began to move. This is not to say that all workers in the industry are saints - some of the workers in the unregistered ports were clearly scabbing. Allying themselves with the container workers - rather than fighting them - the dockers would have a better chance of defeating their employers.

The proposals of the Container Workers' Action Committee on this problem are that 'the solution to the problem now before us is for a change in the National Dock Labour Scheme in which the enclosed docks should be legally defined as being registered dock work and that the wharfs, container depots and cold-storage depots, allied to the docking industry, should be included in a new outer dock registration scheme, in which both registered dock workers and the present container depot men would take part on an equal basis'. (Statement by Drivers and Container Depot Action Committee, dated August 7, 1972.) This could provide a basis for joint discussion and action by cargo handling workers, since it would remove the advantages for the boss in shifting work away from the docks.

The bargaining power of cargo workers, taken collectively, is stronger than ever. No one is saying that dockers must engage in an act of self-sacrifice but simply that the old maxims 'divide and rule' and 'unity is strength' still apply. Strong links must be forged between dockers and their brother cargo workers.

Employers are in a better position to resist the more 'costly' demands of the dockers for these jobs, as there now exists a new and growing labour force employed at the container depots. Moreover lorry drivers and other transport workers now work much more closely with this new force than they used to with the dockers. Picketing container depots and cold stores has brought dockers into conflict with other workers at these places. The employers have been quick to exploit these differences between workers.

This is nothing new, but dock militants, despite their long record of struggle, did not try to establish links with the 'new workers' in the

---

(3) An example of a recent agreement achieved by the action of container workers was the settlement at the five Containerbase Federation yards: 37½ hour week inclusive of meal breaks; £37.50 per basic week for freight handlers, with extra money for shift workers; 17 days' holiday to be increased to four weeks by January 1st, 1974.

According to the Drivers and Container Depot Workers Joint Action Committee, wages have been raised in the London depots from an average of £19 a week to an average of £35.50 a week.

cargo handling industry and ensure that they enjoyed the rates of pay and conditions which the dockers themselves had won. Dockers have by tradition sought to keep their industry closed to outsiders. (For example, it is almost impossible to become a docker unless you are closely related to an existing docker.)

These tactics have been very effective in the past but the new conditions will be less favourable for the dockers if they stand alone. Differences between groups of workers in the same industry could be further exploited by the employers, to wring more profit out of all cargo-handling workers.

When the five dockers were arrested many workers identified with the imprisoned men. It was clear to many people that action could get results. Thousands downed tools without the support of the official trade union or Party leaders. During the 'July days' the movement developed in spite of them.

The struggles in industry are presenting militants with the need for closer ties between sections. This applies particularly to workers involved in cargo handling. Dockers and container and transport workers should build a joint rank and file organisation to ensure collective resistance to their common employers. This is the main issue that dockers should now face up to.

Joe Jacobs.

## BRUM'S EYE VIEW OF THE BUILDING WORKERS' STRIKE

Rumours of a nationwide building strike were first heard in early June when some of the lads tried to organise support in Birmingham for the UCATT (Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians) claim: £30 minimum, for a 35 hour working week. We were dubious, as the small builder has had his own way here for aeons. The constant flow of casual labour has made it almost impossible to unionise or unify the men at all. A huge reserve force of lump men is always available to divide us further. Anyway, in this city full credit for rallying support for the strike goes to the Building Workers Charter Movement and in particular to Pete Carter, a C.P. shop steward. Looked upon as the 'champion' of building workers he managed, with others, to whip up massive support for the strike. One or two ex-building worker I.S. members were hovering round but had to play second fiddle to the C.P.

Flying squads were organised and successfully reinforced the picketing. Encouraged, the men set up a Strike Claimants Union to ensure they got their bread. They forced the S.S. (Social Security, for our readers abroad) to open up a Strike Centre and to recognise the strike. This time, the men used their solidarity to get payments for single as well as married strikers.

Pickets at cement depots were reasonably successful although there was some bother with the pigs at Rugby Cement Depot - where a mass picket was organised and some men arrested. There were some well-attended rallies in the city and a couple of highly publicised crane occupations. The men were not fighting alone. Wives and children were fully behind them in the struggle and formed their own Womens' Committee to help. This Committee had a meeting with the shop stewards and Ken Barlow (Regional Secretary of UCATT) to question them. How's that for a step towards community solidarity? How many strikes have been lost by the mass media setting the wives against their husbands to pressure them back to work?

Just after the Rugby Cement arrests I.S. (on one of their desperate recruiting drives) called a meeting for the building workers with Laurie Flynn an ex-writer for Construction News among the speakers. Some good points were made, but only once did anyone mention that it is the building workers who build houses that they themselves can never hope to buy. They build office blocks, car parks and prisons, while there are still shitty slums that belong to the Industrial Revolution here, on our doorstep.

When the final pay deal was negotiated, without their original demands having been met, the men felt that they had been 'marched up to the top of the hill and marched down again'. Sold out by their union bureaucrats over the negotiating table, the scene of so many crimes against the working class! After 12 weeks on strike, they felt that the union should have stuck it out. In Birmingham there was a call to stay out. A group invaded the National Federation of Building Trades Employers for a sit-in. In our opinion the sit-in should have been in the National Headquarters of the union, in London!

Ken Barlow, who was opposed to the return on the Monday, was trying to negotiate a local deal (over and above the national award) with building employers in Brum. No chance though! On Monday, September 18, there was a slow trickle back to work. A wave of disillusionment with orthodox trade union representation swelled up. Once more it was proved that demands will only be met in full when the rank and file wrest control of their interests out of the hands of the T.U. bureaucracy and realise that their bargaining power lies in their own unity and with themselves.

The next day the building workers held a demo and a mass rally in Birmingham to show their disgust and anger with the national UCATT hierarchy and with George Smith, who had accepted the employers' last offer without consulting the Regional Executive, the regional shop stewards' committee and, most important of all, without consulting the rank and file themselves. Women and children and about 2500 men turned out to march through Birmingham to the Mayfair Banqueting Suite (this was something new in strike meetings: COMFORT!) A large contingent came from Stoke on Trent, another area that refused to go back, after 12 weeks on strike.

Ken Barlow spent an hour trying to appease the men. It wasn't only the union officials who were to blame for the final defeat but also (wait for it) their weakness in picketing! Finally, Pete Carter addressed the men. Filled with anger he shouted out from one end of the place to the other 'THIS IS NOTHING BUT A SELL OUT BY THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE OF UCATT'. We, the building

workers, would not have been in this position had we not been misled for the last 50 years. We are not going to be conned any more. We are building a new house and the new occupants won't be the same as the old ones - we will throw them out. These men must not be re-elected; we do not want them there (loud cheers); we, the rank and file, were not consulted about the agreement and neither was the Regional Executive'. He went on to say that, reluctantly, they had to return. Only three regions, Liverpool, Stoke and Birmingham, were holding out. That was not enough to fight for a regional agreement. But they would not be returning the same as before. This time they would fight any attempt to offset the rise by laying off men, intimidation, employing lump labour or reviewing the bonus system. These would be met with a total stoppage of work with the full backing of Birmingham UCATT. Carter also mentioned the underhand methods used by the employers to try to break up solidarity. For example they sent letters to all strikers asking them to return to work, to accept the deal and telling them that police protection would be available if they decided to go back!

There was a great deal of confusion on sites around the country as the men returned to work. Shop stewards at three sites in London were told that there were no longer any jobs for them and so the sites walked out again. There was a walk-out in Manchester because of the removal of a shop steward and another at a site in London over lump labour being employed. Here in Birmingham, Bryants and some Wimpey and Laing workers did not immediately return to work. These firms said that they would only pay £26 (for a 40-hour week) despite the fact that at the start of the strike the men were on £30 a week! (They had got this because of their militant local action and strikes during the previous year.) WHAT A FARCE! These sites came out in complete solidarity with the rest of the country for £30 for a 35-hour week and finished up being shat on by the National Executive! Some employers have gone out of their way to add insult to injury. Bryants were trying to buy the men off with the offer of a loan of £10 a week when they returned - but which was to be repaid at £2 a week. The mind boggles!

To top it all, the basic pay award is binding until November 1974, which is really a 2½ year period when you realise that building workers are not going to strike over the winter. The men are now aware of the union sell-out and are very angry and confused. They are even wondering if the National Executive were given a big hand-out to accept the employers' offer.

There has been a sinister development in the form of a very brutal attack on one of the leading militants at a Bryant site. Mike Shilvock was attacked in his own home by four masked men who broke his arm and toes, dislocated his shoulder and gave him extensive body injuries. It had all the hallmarks of a professional job. Organised by whom?

More developments are expected.

S.C. Brum.

# FOCUS ON FORD

FORD STRIKE : THE WORKERS' STORY by John Mathews. Panther. 40p.

This book about the 1971 'parity' strike at Ford is a useful addition to the growing body of paperbacks dealing sympathetically with working class struggles. The author makes clear his sense of identification with Ford workers. But identification is not an alternative to analysis and in this respect the book is very weak. There are some glaring factual gaps. It is not enough simply to take sides - one must have some overall conception of the relationship between industrial struggle and the battle for socialism.

## WORKERS, STEWARDS AND UNIONS

The book is critical of the role of the trade union bosses at Ford, although it lets some of the 'left wing' ones off very lightly - for instance Reg Brich, the Maoist AUEW E.C. member and main Ford negotiator. For example it claims 'his hands were tied' (by whom?) and that he could not say anything openly at the crucial stage of the secret settlement masterminded by fellow 'lefties' Jack Jones and Hugh Scanlon on March 30, 1971. This reminds one of the old Communist Party excuse for the peccadilloes of their officials, namely that they were 'prisoners of the right wing'. Mathews also lets off Moss Evans, national secretary of the Automotive Section of the TGWU and Chairman of the Ford NJNC.

The book also has an uncritical attitude towards the shop stewards committees. For example the author accepts at face value the claims made by some of their leaders about the effectiveness of the preparation for and organisation of the struggle. In actual fact some aspects of organisation were very poor. This was particularly the case in the area of communication between workers and control of the struggle by them. Links between factories were weak. In some cases the dominating junta of a Works Committee acted more as a barrier than as a channel of information. Only a small minority of strikers were involved in any way in the day-to-day conduct of the dispute. At best the struggle was run in a hand-to-mouth fashion. There was actual resistance, by some convenors, to the very idea of a discussion among stewards and other militants - whether before or during the strike - about the strategy and tactics to be used (for example on the question of an occupation, which must be placed on the agenda in the struggles to come).

The book does not deal with the contribution made by various shop stewards committees to the bolstering up of workers' illusions in the very officials who were to be responsible for the final carve-up. For

instance every single mass meeting at Dagenham, whether before or during the dispute, was totally dominated by full-time officials (usually six or seven officials spoke one after the other, and there were no rank-and-file spokesmen at all). The officials told us that 'this time would be different: the unions would support us all the way'. Another case was that of the weekly Bulletin produced by the Dagenham Strike Committee. Every issue praised the officials to the skies. Even the last edition (the one for the 9th week, which was produced after the Jones-Scanlon carve-up) had no criticisms. It stated that the 'unions are still standing four-square behind us' (a very long way behind, in my view).

The book does not deal with the problem of lack of confidence of the workers in some shop stewards committees. This is particularly acute at Dagenham, but is also a serious problem elsewhere. It was highlighted by two events. Firstly the acceptance by the men of the paltry £4 rise in January 1970. Secondly by the overwhelming vote to end the strike, on April 2, 1971 (albeit on a less than 50% poll). Both of these events took place against the recommendations of the shop stewards. Another example was the two months-long overtime ban which started in September 1968 and which really started the movement of Ford workers, but which was opposed by the Dagenham shop stewards committee.

This lack of confidence is not simply due to mistakes. That would be bad enough. It is the result of a long-term policy of manipulation of workers, where facts are distorted, mass meetings manipulated, debates silenced and opposition slandered. It is what happens when those at the top are more anxious to retain control of the situation than to let the real movement develop. It is not good enough to say the objective of these manoeuvres are often 'militant', namely to get workers out of the gate. In the short term they might even be effective. But in the long run the manipulators are 'twigged' by workers. They have cried 'wolf' too long and they find themselves isolated.

This characteristic is best illustrated in the interview which Jock Macrae and Sid Harroway, convenor and secretary of the Body Group shop stewards committee at Dagenham, gave to Black Dwarf. The interview was published on the day the strike broke out (January 30, 1970). In it Macrae and Harroway attack the left in general, all those who dared criticise the shop stewards committee, and the very idea of occupation as a valid form of struggle. Macrae then went on to describe his ideal mass meeting in the following terms:

'You get to the meeting. In five minutes you tell the workers the salient point and you say "we're on strike". You don't have interminable discussions because that leads to no bloody action. The longer a meeting goes on the less chance you've got of getting strike action carried ... It's better to have a well-planned, well-organised meeting with all your own people ready to say the right things and do the right things, and you're in. You get your strike vote and that's it.'

The tragedy of this situation is that most of these men are militants. They want to fight the boss. But they don't see the workers they 'represent' as being active and conscious participants in this struggle. This attitude is endorsed and reinforced by the traditional left. The book implicitly shares this view.

A frank discussion of these problems and weaknesses is needed if militants are to gain the full benefit from the struggle waged in January 1971. Despite his good intentions Mathews is doing no real service to the development of job organisation at Ford by ignoring these problems. The value of such experiences as the Ford strike is not to provide others with a vicarious thrill, as they witness workers coming into conflict with employers. It's real value lies in the lessons that workers learn from it. The problem is not to laugh or cry - but to understand.

## CONDITIONS WITHIN THE PLANT

At another level the book plays down the demands put forward by Ford workers for control over the tempo of work and over condition within the plant (mutuality and 'status quo'). It accepts the excuses of the officials - in particular those of Reg Birch and of Moss Evans - for ratting on these aspects of the claim, in spite of their repeated promises to achieve them. It is obvious that wage parity, if and when it is achieved, will be a meaningless sham if in the meantime Ford workers are driven even further into the ground.\* Higher wages or even shorter hours are in the long term meaningless unless they are accompanied by real growth in the strength and power of the shop floor. Indeed management have been known to make concessions on wages and hours, under pressure, provided that their total domination within the plant is not challenged. It is the job of socialist industrial militants to do everything they can to bring about precisely such a challenge.

It is already beginning to look as if the current 'shopping list' of demands is going to be dealt with in the same cavalier way as previously, with everything except wages and hours going straight into the waste paper basket. On September 10, 1972 shop stewards from all British Ford plants

---

\* In 1969 each Ford worker produced 10.5 vehicles worth £8,270. This should be compared with 5.5 vehicles, worth £4,950 produced by each BLMC worker, and with 8.2 vehicles, worth £5,830 produced at Vauxhall. (Labour Research, July 1970). Incidentally, this problem was highlighted at the World Automotive Conference of Trade Union Bureaucrats, held in London at the height of the strike. At this conference the delegates of the Italian Metal Workers Union, under pressure at home, seized the opportunity for a bit of verbal window-dressing. They refused to support the final document of the conference. In their own document, issued on March 25, 1971, they criticised the totally economic character of the main conference document. They criticised in particular its refusal to accept that what goes on inside the factory is also important (not simply the price workers receive for the work they do).

met at Coventry to finalise their claims. These include 'a substantial increase in wages' (this demand is deliberately ambiguous. Militants think it means £10, while it is no secret that quite a few T.U. officials, actual or prospective, would accept £4 tied to a further 2-year freeze); a 35-hour week; a fourth week holiday; and improvements in pensions and average earnings for holidays. Mutuality, as always, is well down on the list.

If the workers accept a paltry settlement on the 1971 pattern - as seems possible - the trade union machines, who have done nothing to mobilise workers and who have actually opposed attempts by workers themselves to get things moving, will be able to use the results of their own inertia as an excuse for 'accepting' a further carve-up.

## THE WAY AHEAD

In spite of these major criticisms and of several unimportant inaccuracies and mistakes, the book is to be welcomed. It does document the role of the trade union leaderships in creating the situation in which Ford workers now find themselves. It is this aspect which has caused some leading convenors and secretaries - as well as officials - to oppose its circulation. The book provides a mass of information about the hypocrisy and mendacity of Ford top management. And it is informative about the day-to-day organisation and development of the struggle providing much inside information. For this reason alone the book should be read and kept not only by Ford workers and industrial militants generally, but by all those who want to understand what industrial struggle is all about.

The serious shortcomings of the book reflect, to a certain extent, the faults of the newly emerging radical movement, whose turn towards working class struggle we welcome. These shortcomings are all the greater pity because of the book's considerable circulation among Ford workers (for example 2,000 copies have been taken by the P.T.A. shop stewards committee, at Dagenham alone). With a more critical and analytical approach the book would have been a much better tool for preparing Ford workers for the next round of struggle, which might start early next year.

Militants should now urgently be considering the problems raised by the next conflict. Is it going to be the same carve-up as last time, with the situation inside the plant left exactly the same as it was before? Or is a basis going to be laid now to turn things into something qualitatively different? How do we make the creaky shop stewards committees responsive to the wishes of Ford workers? How do we radically improve communications? It is a scandal that there is no paper run by and for Ford workers - and I don't include the 'Voice of Ford Workers' in this category. When are we going to get down to seriously thinking

about international communications?\*

The company is preparing for the next round right now. It is building up stockpiles of components and completed vehicles, transferring machinery and press tools abroad, so that production of key parts, on which continental models are dependent, can continue. Ford workers should also be preparing, from now. In this respect they have much to learn from the workers at the Thornycroft factory at Basingstoke, owned by British Leyland. These workers have been occupying the plant since August 15, against mass redundancies. Nine weeks' supply of gear boxes, the factory's main product, had been built up by the management. The workers had a work-to-rule/go-slow, which reduced production to 10% after 5 weeks. The supplies were down to a few days' work. Then the men went for two weeks' holiday. Then they had the sit-in, a classic case of how to do things, of how not to go off half-cocked.

There have been one or two unconnected efforts by Ford workers. On September 8, 2,000 men at the key Halewood transmission plant had a 24 hour stoppage against the taking of work to Germany. A series of demonstrations in support of the four night shift pattern are planned at Dagenham. But a much more substantial and coordinated campaign is needed. And this means planning and discussion now.

There is a need to strengthen financial resources by building up shop funds. And it is necessary for some hard thinking to be done about

---

\* The emphasis here needs to be on rank-and-file contacts. Too many jacks in office are jumping onto the international band-wagon as an opportunity simply to engage in a bit of meaningless rhetoric. Rather than rely on this sort of eyewash in future disputes, groups of Ford workers could for example go to Belgium and Germany to make direct appeals at the factory gates - over the heads of the officials - to fellow-workers at Genk, Cologne and Saarlouis. In the past these factories have busily gone on producing standardised models which have seriously reduced the effect of strikes at the international level. It would probably be necessary to produce material stating the case of British Ford workers and making a direct appeal for support in the appropriate languages (continental Ford employs many immigrant workers, especially from Italy, Turkey, Portugal, Spain and Yugoslavia). It might even be necessary to throw pickets around the main European plants, if necessary calling for support from the widest sections of the workers and socialist movement in these countries to beef up the picket lines. Miners, dockers and building workers have shown the way to picket on a national scale. Ford workers will have to spread the struggle abroad, if it is to be effective.

what forms of struggle would be best suited to the current tactical and strategic needs of Ford workers. An occupation, perhaps judiciously concentrated at one plant each at Halewood and Dagenham, would be worth considering in its own right. Workers in occupation would be able effectively to discourage attempts to transfer dies, machine tools or components to keep production going abroad, in the likely event of a knock-down, drag-out struggle. Such a tactic moreover would be particularly effective in the likely event of a union-led 'back-to-work' movement.\*

We would like to hear the reactions and comments of Ford workers and others to the points made in this review. It is only through the widest and frankest discussion that the real lessons about the struggle of Ford workers will be drawn and then acted upon.

Mark Fyfe.

---

\* For additional discussion and ideas on this subject, see 'Strategy for Industrial Struggle' by Mark Fore (Solidarity Pamphlet no.37 - 10p.), 'The Great Flint Sit-down Strike against General Motors, 1936-37' by Walter Linder (Solidarity Pamphlet no.31 - 10p.) and 'Under New Management? The Fisher-Bendix Occupation' by Joe Jacobs (Solidarity Pamphlet no.39 - 5p.).

## BACK ISSUES

We still have a few back issues of SOLIDARITY with articles on Ford. These can be obtained (5p each, including postage) by writing now to our usual address.

The defeat at Fords: more lessons - vol.III,no.9,p.19

The Kevin Halpin story III, 9, 21

Inside the Fords defeat III, 11, 10

After the Fords defeat IV, 2, 9

Too old at 50 IV, 3, 20

Murder at Fords IV, 4, 15

Stalemate at Halewood VI, 10, 1

# review

DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM AND PSYCHOANALYSIS by W. Reich. Socialist  
Reproduction, 57d Jamestown Road, London NW1. 25p (postage included).  
April 1972.

Socialist Reproduction are to be congratulated for popularising this little-known text of Wilhelm Reich's which appeared simultaneously, in 1929, in Unter dem Banner des Marxismus (the theoretical journal of the German Communist Party) and in its Russian equivalent Pod Znameniem Marxisma. It is a symptom of the void in both psychoanalytic and meaningful radical literature today that we have to thread our way back for more than four decades to find a sensible discussion of these interesting matters.

Unlike previous texts of Reich's to which we have referred in reviews (see What is class consciousness? in Solidarity, vol.VII, No.2) and pamphlets (The Irrational in Politics) the current text is of no immediate relevance to an understanding of human needs or of the founts of human action. It is something very different: an attempt by Reich to reply to some of his critics (in both the psychoanalytic and marxist movements).

It is important to situate the text in the Germany of the late twenties. In 1929 Reich's break with Freud was on the horizon, its roots clearly understood. Personal relations with Freud, however, were not as yet embittered. The break with the Stalinists was also in the offing. Relations were bitter but had not as yet been traced back to their ideological source. In 1929 Reich is walking two tightropes. He uses Freud to argue against Freud and the Freudians - and Marx to argue against the Marxists. It is a difficult endeavour, as we have learned from our own experience.

Reich starts by pointing out (rightly in my opinion) that most of those on the left who were criticising Freudian psychoanalysis or marxism were doing so on the basis of an inadequate knowledge of either - or both. He sought to define the proper object of psychoanalysis as 'the study of the psychological life of man in society', an 'auxiliary to sociology', 'a form of social psychology'. He defines limits for the discipline. He freely admits that the Marxists are right when they reproach certain representatives of the psychoanalytic school with attempting to explain what cannot be explained by that method. But, he points out, 'they are wrong when they identify the method with those who apply it ... and blame the method for their mistakes'.

Both psychoanalysis and marxism are seen by Reich as 'science' (psychoanalysis as the science of psychological phenomena and marxism of social phenomena) and by implication as unarguably valid. That the categories and values of science might themselves be products of historical evolution is barely envisaged. In this whole approach Reich is echoing the 'scientistic' ethos of the epoch, which had its roots in the rise of the bourgeoisie and its drive to control and dominate nature, rather than to live in harmony with it.

Reich vigorously defends psychoanalysis against the charge of being idealist. To the indictment that it arose 'during the decadence of a decaying bourgeoisie' he retorts that marxism did too. 'So what?' he rightly asks. He dismisses those who crudely attack all knowledge as 'bourgeois knowledge'. 'A culture', he points out, 'is not uniform like a bushel of peas ... the beginnings of a new social order germinate in the womb of the old ... by no means everything that has been created by bourgeois hands in the bourgeois period is of inferior value and useless to the society of the future'. Reich attacks the simplistic mechanical materialism of those who would claim that psychological phenomena as such do not exist, that 'only objective facts which can be measured and weighed are true, not the subjective ones'. He sees this as an understandable but nevertheless misguided reaction against the Platonic idealism still dominating bourgeois philosophy. He demolishes Vogt's once popular thesis that 'thought is a secretion of the brain, in the same way that urine is a secretion of the kidney'. To dispose of this nonsense Reich calls Marx to his rescue, the Marx of the Theses on Feuerbach, the Marx who wrote that it was not good enough to say that 'changed men were the products of ... changed upbringing' because this forgot 'that it is men that change circumstances'. Psychological activity, Reich correctly insists, has a material reality and is a force in history that only the most short-sighted would deny.

There is no reason, Reich argues, why psychoanalysis should not have a materialist basis. He boldly plunges the Freudian categories and concepts into the reality of the class society around them. 'The reality principle as it exists today', he writes, 'is a principle of our society'. Adaptation to this reality is a conservative demand. 'The reality principle of the capitalist era imposes upon the proletarian a maximum limitation of his needs, while appealing to religious values such as modesty and humility. ... the ruling class has a reality principle which serves the perpetuation of its power. If the proletariat is brought up to accept this reality principle - if it is presented to him as absolutely valid, e.g. in the name of culture, this means an affirmation of the proletarian's exploitation and of capitalist society as a whole'. Reich submits other Freudian categories to the same kind of historical and sociological critique, while seeking to retain their essence. The 'unconscious' too, he points out, may acquire new symbols in an era of technological change. Zeppelins, in dreams, could assume the same sexual significance as snakes.

Having argued, more or less convincingly that there can be - and in fact that there is - a materialist basis to psychoanalysis and that the

subject requires no roots in metaphysical morality, Reich goes on to try and show that psychoanalysis is also dialectical. And here he comes unstuck. Like Lyssenko and his genetics, Reich has to 'tidy up' the rich reality of his own insights (not to mention Freud's) to make them fit into a ludicrous mould of 'unity of opposites', 'transformations of quantity into quality' and 'negations of the negation', all drawn straight from the simplistic pages of old pop Engels' 'Dialectics of Nature'. Paul Mattick laid this particular ghost a number of years ago and it is sad to see Socialist Reproduction resurrect it without comment. These pages are certainly the Achilles' heel of the whole essay. For all his protestations that psychoanalysis is an empirically verifiable set of propositions, Reich shows that he is nevertheless caught in a methodological trap of his own making ... and that he is not really an unhappy prisoner. Someday, someone should write about the anal-eroticism of the system-makers, from Marx and Darwin, via Trotsky, to Reich. Why did they all suffer badly from piles?

Reich finally discusses the sociological position of psychoanalysis. He is here on firmer soil. Like Marxism, psychoanalysis is a product of the capitalist era. It is a reaction to that era's ideological superstructure, the cultural and moral conditions of modern man in society. Reich brilliantly analyses the ambivalent relations to sexuality of the nascent bourgeoisie and the role of the Church during the bourgeois revolutions. The bourgeoisie now had to barricade itself against 'the people' by moral laws of its own. Double standards of sexual morality emerged, well analysed in other Reich's writings. 'Just as Marxism', Reich concludes, 'was sociologically the expression of man becoming conscious of the laws of economics and of the exploitation of a majority by a minority, so psychoanalysis is the expression of man becoming conscious of the social repression of sex'.

In lines of great lucidity, but already seeded with that bitterness that was later to consume him, Reich even foresees the frenetic commercial exploitation of a debased psychoanalysis. Capitalism rots everything. 'The capitalist mode of existence was strangling psychoanalysis', both from the outside and the inside'. 'In bourgeois society psychoanalysis was condemned to sterility, if to nothing worse, as an auxiliary science to the science of education in general'. Psychoanalytic education would only come to fruition with the social revolution. Psychoanalytic educators who believed otherwise were living in a fool's paradise. 'Society is stronger than the endeavours of its individual members'. They would 'suffer the same fate as the priest who visited an unbelieving insurance agent on his death bed, hoping to convert him, but in the end went home with an insurance policy'.

The pamphlet is well produced. There is a good introduction, marred only by the fatuous statement that 'through the twenties ... Leninism in the hands of Stalin was rapidly becoming transformed into the ideological litany of the new managerial class that was being established throughout Russia'. Alas, Leninism was not 'becoming' anything. It had been just that for many a year - certainly since October and probably from much earlier. Whether we discuss Lenin's views on sex (see The Irrational in Politics) or his views on the virtues of 'one man management' (see The Bolsheviks and Workers Control) the clues are there for those who can read them.

'THE RIGHT TO WORK? OR THE FIGHT TO LIVE! by Keith Paton. Available from  
102 Newcastle Street, Silverdale, Staffs ST5 6PL. 10p

The 'Right to Work' slogan, popular in rallies against unemployment, implies under capitalism an acceptance of exploitation. But the 'alternative' proposed in the title of this pamphlet ('The Fight to Live') contains reformist illusions as well. As it stands it suggests mere subsistence in this system - hardly something for revolutionaries to campaign for. The antithesis in the title is difficult to locate. The peculiar legend is, however, consistent with the content of this anarchist pamphlet which lacks both a revolutionary theory and a coherent purpose despite a predilection for hip, angry (ANGRY) oaths, which all of us can understand.

Part I is concerned with the effects of 'guaranteed' 'Equal Living Incomes' (E.L.I.). The demand for such incomes is intended, amongst other things, to stimulate revolutionary consciousness, thereby changing people's attitudes to capitalism's ills and presumably bringing about social revolution:

'When the equation WORK EQUALS MONEY EQUALS NECESSITIES is broken (by E.L.I.) people will be free to ask WORK EQUALS WHAT? FOR WHOM? WHY?. Is the product necessary and to whom? ... Is the work being arranged in the most efficient way? Instead of a single control pyramid, is there a complex, crisscross, many-centred pattern, with everyone arranging short cuts with everyone else in the light of a clear plan? Was the plan drawn up by various groups of workers and submitted to everyone for criticism and debate before being agreed upon by a mass meeting?'. (p.6.)

Thus socialism would ensue. Or again, more blatantly:

'Equal living individual incomes would destroy the nuclear family dominated by the male adult'. (p.8.)

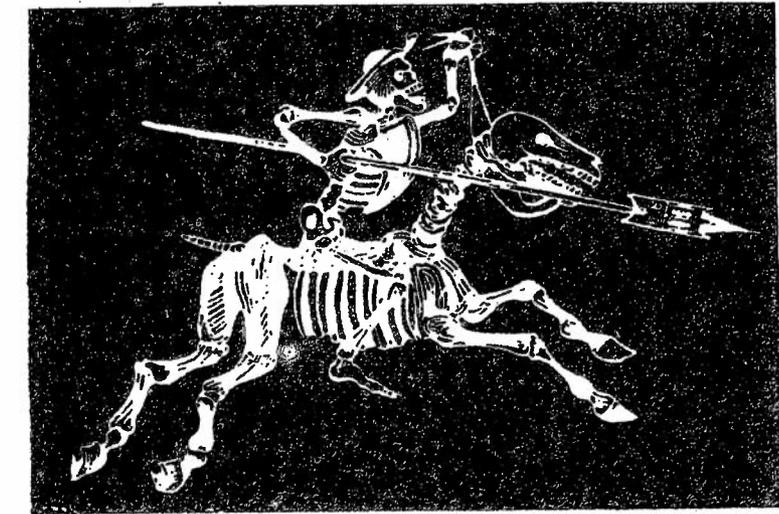
Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that everyone could get E.L.I. 'as of right' in capitalist society. Why would this guarantee, as Keith suggests, that people would think and act differently? It doesn't necessarily follow. By the beginning of Part III ('Fighting for Equal Living Incomes') the issue is complicated when Keith suddenly realises that E.L.I. could never be granted in capitalism anyway:

'In the first part I considered what would happen if the demand for Equal Living Incomes was "introduced". This was false, because the state neither would nor could introduce such a demand'. (p.16)

E.L.I.s are to be achieved through genuine, self-managed, 'revolutionary' struggle (detailed in Parts II and III). Yet in Part I we are told that the demand for E.L.I.s will help generate revolutionary change! Thus revolutionary consciousness is needed to get E.L.I.s which are needed to obtain ... revolutionary consciousness! The most logical explanation

of this ludicrous confusion is that Keith's perspectives for revolutionary struggle are severely deficient, even to himself. Hence the substitute of the mechanistic E.L.I. Throughout the text Keith fails to come to terms convincingly with such an essential and simple question as 'how can revolutionary change actually come about?'

The best clue to the author's insufficient answer to this question is in Part III. This contains a resentful attack on the 'respectable' employed worker, the 'skilled, white, middle aged and male ... with these workers suits and respectability are the rule, tradition directs their "thinking", for whatever motions they pass their lifestyles are 100% cons-



tipated'. (p.17) This sort of arbitrary divisiveness is excellent so long as you are not trying to encourage working people, as a class, to a revolutionary point of view. For while Keith supports 'non-integrated' and rebellious workers, the importance of the working class (however uncool or integrated some sections may be at present) in changing the system never emerges from his ideas. Keith never refers to his revolutionary prodigies (claimants, women, blacks, 'whites', schoolchildren, etc) as being - or not being - members of this economic class. They are merely members of various social groups. Their desire for socialism is insuf-

ficient to destroy capital. Socialism, as I see it, would require firstly that capitalist relations of production be changed along democratic lines, industry being self-managed by the producers themselves. Although socialism would require the breakdown of all capitalist relationships, e.g. sexist or racist, the destruction of those concerned with production are basic to a revolution in social power.

A revolutionary working class is necessary, then, for socialism. Those outside of production altogether (students, some white collar workers, etc.) can only become revolutionary insofar as they link their actions with the revolutionary proletariat. In place of even such a brief and schematic perspective as this. Keith's prospects for revolution are based on a loose identification with people fighting oppression:

'Anybody who feels oppression and fights against it is in the revolution centrally'. (p.18)

'We shall fight against all oppression as we experience it'. (p.18)

'The demand (for E.L.I.) can only be realised by us, all of us fighting together...' (p.16)

It is important to note the purely subjective tenor of these statements. They suggest a lack of meaningful analysis of society, which is essential for the reasons described in the previous paragraph.

The significance of the working class is sometimes glimpsed, in a common sense way, but not explained fully:

'Probably it is still true that the mass of white, skilled, middle aged workers have got to get off their knees and fight the system if we are going to have a revolution and not just revolts'. (p.18)

But the outline of a political theory based on the social analysis that the quotation implies is missing. In a similarly perceptive moment the correct statement that 'claimants do not have much economic power' does not lead to a class theory. On the contrary, a perverse attempt is made to justify claimants' isolationism:

'We will be forced to use more imaginative methods, symbolic action, disruptive actions, mass actions...'

This merely emphasises the lack of revolutionary effectiveness of such methods. If genuine working class unity (i.e. revolutionary unity) doesn't exist at present, as the author rightly stresses on p.17, then the obvious task is to help encourage it. It doesn't excuse a liberal attitude to the anger of oppressed minorities, simply because that anger does exist.

Industrial reorganisation, fundamental to socialism, is barely mentioned. We are told that industrial workers 'will only really fight when the outlines of a whole alternative way of living everyday life has become clear, through the struggles of claimants, women, students, etc.' As in the E.L.I. demand, illogical inferences (workers 'will' follow the example) are needed to cover up for inadequacies in the basic ideas. The alternative life-style referred to by Keith, however democratic, would surely be quite different in scale and function from that of industrial work in a socialist society. The nature of self-managed production will derive from the bitter everyday experience of capitalist production itself. Keith's alternative



WORK GETS SORTA TEDIOUS, DONT IT?

life style is not related to those embryonic social structures which could prefigure workers' councils as the organs of socialist society (for example strike committees, composed of elected delegates revocable at any time by rank and file workers). Instead he seems to be talking about such schemes as 'self-managed projects', 'social initiatives', 'non-boss' and 'unalienated work'. The pamphlet's examples include: making toys, showing blue films 'socially', duplicating mutual aid sheets, and even robbing mail trains. We don't oppose these things for moral reasons but because, when considered as forms of revolutionary activity, such notions could lead to the most reactionary consequences. Why not support, for instance, the 'self-managed' activities of Jesus-freak communities?

As long as the problem of changing the system of capital is evaded in this fashion, it becomes more difficult to solve. False solutions sooner or later help to stabilise capitalism. Self-management on its own is not sufficient to change society. It must be linked to politics. Only when applied to the economy as a whole and to all other institutions of society, within a socialist perspective, will revolution come about. In the end Keith himself loses confidence in his 'alternatives':

'I began to suggest ways in which we could build it (the welfare society) - or at least survive, while unemployed, far better than the bosses want us to'. (p.16)

When talking about revolutionary self-management we place the emphasis on the collective working class, and not on social 'experiments' or 'fighting oppression'. What does this mean for the activity of revolutionary groups? It means that we must recognise that certain sections of the class (claimants, housewives, students, O.A.P.s and certain white-collar workers) cannot, because of their isolation from production, develop a revolutionary struggle on their own. They are unable to threaten the real locus of power in society. On the other hand, industrial workers have the potential power to prefigure the foundation of a socialist society, namely production run for use, on egalitarian and self-managed lines. Logically then the working class is, at the moment, the only section of society where revolutionary self-organisation can meaningfully be encouraged. Job organisation is the necessary beginning of a desired general revolutionary movement for workers' councils, which could link all social groups to the working class. To maintain, as Keith does, that 'fighting oppression' is the essence of revolutionary politics in effect opposes this general movement. It is a confusing expression of, rather than a solution to, 'oppression'. Keith's theory is influenced by resentment towards the socially integrated workers ('We're ANGRY, Mr. Goodworker') rather than by an objective look at the essential dynamics of capitalism. Social isolation is thus proudly asserted, and a revolutionary class position avoided at all costs, for the sake of the Ego. A genuine revolutionary critique must undoubtedly include a critique of 'welfare', sexism, racialism, ageism - as well as of exploitation - and would include a discussion as to the nature of revolutionary change. But as far as Keith's pamphlet is concerned such a revolutionary critique is hardly apparent.

Steve Place.

# discussion

## I. IRELAND

We publish below a letter received from the Workers' Association for the Democratic Settlement of the National Conflict in Ireland (a maoist organisation) together with our reply. Some copies of SOLIDARITY, vol.VII, no.1, which contains the Theses on Northern Ireland referred to are still available.

Your Theses on Northern Ireland (Solidarity, vol.VII, No.1) seemed to me to reveal a certain callousness and disregard for the troubles of real people in real situations.

You say 'We would rather struggle for what we want - even if we don't immediately get it - than struggle for what we don't want ... and get it'. But in a situation such as the N. Irish one, it's not a question of pressing for something we want. There is a confrontation between two kinds of nationalism, which is causing immense and useless suffering and preventing the emergence of class consciousness. This being the case, it is the job of those who want to see a strong united working class capable of tackling the bourgeoisie to resolve this national conflict, even if it means putting forward an ordinary, dull, unrevolutionary, unromantic bourgeois-democratic solution.

Marxism teaches that new forms can only emerge out of forces present in the forms that precede them. Nationalism is losing its effectiveness as a reactionary force in Britain as the bourgeoisie needs to expand its market into Europe. Southern Ireland, too, is having to accommodate itself to this situation - hence the dwindling support for the reactionary protective nationalism of Sinn Fein, as shown in the massive vote in favour of entry to the Common Market. The 'jingoist' nationalism of the North - which you make no attempt to analyse or explain, except with the usual cliches used by Socialist apologists for Catholic nationalism about an 'Orange' bourgeoisie wanting to keep the workers in check - is a defensive nationalism. The people of the North - bourgeoisie and workers - who were at the time participating in a confident and expanding industrialism, had no reason to wish to separate from Britain as part of an 'independent' Ireland whose culture was an expression of the desire of small commodity producers to work on a safe home market, protected from all 'foreign' influence.

The Unionist bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century were very much opposed to Orangeism which represented the landlord interest in opposition to them. They only joined with it to oppose a common enemy, and this common enemy has ensured the reactionary nature of Unionism ever since. Without a threat, Protestant nationalist culture - which is functional rather than romantic - loses its force. The same is largely true of the 'nationalism' of the Northern Catholics, whose support for the IRA is dependent on the degree to which they feel themselves threatened by the Protestants. It was because this nationalism was so lukewarm that the current anti-partitionist campaign had for so long to disguise itself as a campaign for civil rights.

It is clear from this that the people who are keeping primitive nationalism alive in Ireland are Sinn Fein, whose existence is 'justified' by the continued efforts of the Southern ruling class to propagate among Catholics (they've never really tried it on the Prods!) the historically incorrect view that there is only one nation in Ireland, and that the Protestants had no right to secede from it. Of course talking about and campaigning for the rights of nations to self-determination is very tiresome for Internationalists. But while nations and national consciousness are real forces in society the problems they raise have to be resolved to pave the way for Internationalism. Six years ago, national consciousness was fading away from N. Ireland because there was no need for it: now it is everywhere rampant. It is not our job to dismiss it as 'just' a bourgeois illusion, keeping ourselves and our revolutionary consciousness pure and untainted. Those concerned with the freedom of the workers have to connect with the problems experienced by the workers.

Of course, in recognising that the IRA are a reactionary and not a socialist force, and that their nationalist campaign should in no way be supported, you are half-way towards an understanding of the situation. But you yourselves admit that you have very little to offer Irish workers in the way of a practical programme to resolve it. The 'Workers Association for the Democratic Settlement of the National Conflict in Ireland' puts forward two principles that any safe settlement will have to take into account:

- 1) Full recognition of the right of the Ulster Protestant Nation to remain within the UK State.
- 2) Full recognition and accordance of the democratic rights of the Catholic minority in the N. Ireland/UK State, and of the Protestant minority in the Southern State.

There is nothing remotely revolutionary about this programme. Any responsible bourgeois party could have proposed it. As long as the Tory Mr Whitelaw is working in this direction, we support him wholeheartedly. Our demand for an immediate plebiscite has been picked up by the Alliance Party, Paisley and Faulkner in succession. The fact remains that the implementation of this programme is essential if any sort of working class

politics is to emerge in N. Ireland. We're not supporting Protestant nationalism (a large proportion of our members come from Catholic Nationalist backgrounds). We simply want to disarm it, by removing the threat to it.

As an idea, Internationalism is as progressive as Esperanto. It will only become a reality when the forces that create and maintain nations cease to be effective.

Peter Brooke  
Workers Association for the Democratic Settlement  
of the National Conflict in Ireland

## our answer:

It may well be true to say that in N. Ireland today there is no question of pressing for something which we, as socialists, want. But it does not follow that we must choose between the available options. We do not accept the job of 'resolving this national conflict' - helping the rulers, on their terms, to solve their problems. The 'bourgeois-democratic solution' is not simply dull, unromantic, etc. It involves definite social evils, constant exploitation, manipulation, and callousness inflicted on real people in real situations.

In fact we do make attempts to analyse and explain, though not to justify, such phenomena as nationalism. And not only in the economic/historical terms indicated by P. Brooke. Given that the conflict evolved along those lines, Protestant nationalism may be termed defensive, but there is much more to it than natural reaction to a recurring threat. It could be said of many forms of reactionary ideology that they are kept alive basically by fear, and the manifestations of Protestant nationalism are not typically defensive in character. Nationalist culture is always romantic as well as functional. The non-functional, or irrational element, deep-rooted in the psychology of the masses and fostered by the whole process of social conditioning, is indeed vital to its survival.

And the function served is that of class collaboration, based on a mythical identity of interests between rulers and ruled. (P. Brooke makes this explicit when he defines 'the people of the North' as comprising bourgeoisie and workers.)

No doubt any militant assertion of one nationalism is liable to intensify adherence to the other, but it is a very simplistic view to blame the existence of 'primitive nationalism' on one section of one side (Sinn Fein).

The consistent practices of Unionism and Orangeism could equally be seen as presenting a threat to the minority in the North, and as justifying the pretensions of the Southern bourgeoisie to defend that minority. In any case, the conditioned acceptance of the mythology ensures its survival in at least folklorique forms when no threat is present (as among Irish exiles) and as a tendency to over-reaction when a threat appears.

All nationalism is primitive in terms of class consciousness. There is no acceptable, sophisticated variety. The 'Two Nations' view of Irish history, the entire Workers Association analysis, grants a validity to the concept of nationality which socialists should surely question. Fair enough, if you use certain criteria (as propounded by those who have an interest in preserving such notions), you can make out a convincing case for the view that there are two nations in Ireland. But it's all, at best, rather beside the point as far as we are concerned.

For us, as Internationalists, campaigning for rights of nations to self-determination is not just 'tiresome'. It would be in clear contradiction with our ideas and aims. Supporting nationalist claims does not tend to pave the way for internationalism. We have to demystify on all sides, rejecting such claims as a totally wrong orientation. It is only by refusing to compromise our revolutionary consciousness that we can avoid working against the freedom of the workers. It is only by explaining the real nature of apparent 'problems', even if we have to dismiss them as irrelevant to socialism, that we can meaningfully connect with the workers' experiences and indicate the issues at stake.

We can agree that recognising the reactionary, non-socialist nature of the IRA is to understand no more than half the situation. However, would not the second half consist of an identically demystified attitude to Protestant nationalism? The Workers Association could be accused of enunciating only a partial critique in the mainstream of its publications to date. Consistently to attack Republican mythology may have seemed the most urgent task, and some useful work has been done here (e.g. re-assessment of aspects of Irish history). But the failure to present a more general critique can only result in distortion of the picture as a whole - and the position of the Workers Association within it.

It might be argued that the two principles put forward by the W.A. are of dubious practicality in the real situation; or alternatively that the course of events will not be affected by small groups with no influence on the political manipulators. But it is enough for us to repeat that we do not, as revolutionaries, accept any obligation to offer a programme that is 'not remotely revolutionary'. We do not wish to add our voices to those of 'responsible' bourgeois parties. Our interests are not theirs. As long as the W.A. does not differentiate itself from such parties except by a formalistic adherence to socialism, it will offer nothing of value to Irish workers. And the bourgeois and/or nationalist parties will continue to get the workers' support.

P. Brooke's letter betrays a fundamentally alienated view of revolutionary politics. Our politics are not fantastic/utopian/romantic/unattainable: they are closely integrated with 'real' life, here and now. Our daily experience of, and alienation from, bourgeois democracy is what leads us to reject it completely. A precondition of human freedom is the comprehension and progressive elimination of all that tends to limit it.

Only by principled adherence to ideas like Internationalism will progress ultimately be made. Among the forces that create and maintain nations, the misleading ideology of 'national self-determination' is paramount.

Liz Willis.



## 2. WOMEN AND THE UNIONS

The pamphlet reviewed here tackled questions which have received scant attention from revolutionaries, SOLIDARITY included. We have developed our critique of trade unions and the traditional left without specific reference to their failings vis à vis women, and we have expressed general support for women's lib. with no detailed critique of the problems involved. Anna's review does not express SOLIDARITY's ideas about the unions (or about women's liberation), but the views it represents are widely held. We publish it, together with Selma James's reply, in the hope of initiating further discussion.

WOMEN, THE UNIONS AND WORK by Selma James, Notting Hill Group, Women's Liberation Workshop, 1972. Obtainable from E. Runay, 46 Scarsdale Villas, London W.8. 5p + postage.

This pamphlet was produced for the Manchester Conference last March. It appeared at a time when the movement was beginning to feel the need for involvement in activity beyond the consciousness-raising for which some local groups had deliberately restricted their size. Sisters wanted to draw together, in a wider political perspective, the forms of struggle in which they had taken and could take part. Selma posits the need for an autonomous women's movement, in the context of virulent criticisms of left organisations and trade unions. She puts forward a new set of demands to provide a focus for the movement, around which women could mobilise. Initially the pamphlet was welcomed because it covered hitherto largely unexplored ground. Many sisters are now less enthusiastic, because of its lack of clarity. They feel it to be escapist in denying the validity of work in unions, at a time when a large section of women are wage-earners. The pamphlet is, however, of value, if only as a catalyst for further discussion in the movement. Much of what it says is relevant criticism of the role played by many revolutionary groups in struggle.

Selma sees a danger of capitalist co-option of the women's movement, both through women being drawn into new fields of exploitative relations, and through the agency of left organisations. She claims these see the class struggle as being that of the white male over thirty, thereby blocking the women's struggle and that of other groups considered 'marginal', such as blacks and claimants. She considers that these left groups ahistorically adopt Lenin's pre-1902 demand for the arousal of 'trade union consciousness' although recent industrial action (such as that of the miners) has shown

the power of the class to organise and develop methods of struggle outside of and often counter to the union bureaucracy. She demonstrates how the unions consistently act against the interests of women. For example there have been no official (though plenty of unofficial) equal pay strikes; differential grading has been encouraged; women are often hindered from joining the union; and despite woman as housewife being the double slave of capitalism (as slave to the wage slave) she takes no part in union decision making. Selma concludes that by dividing the class into wage-earners and non wage-earners unions structurally prevent generalisation of struggle and become bureaucratised. She does not deny the need for organisation against conditions of slavery on the shop floor and in the office, but emphasises that it is the power of the workers which abolishes such conditions and which produces organisation. Unionisation of women, she suggests, may occasionally be useful as a mobilising tactic, but never as an end in itself. She calls for a new analysis of the whole of the class struggle to replace the male analysis of the wage-earning male.

The basis for Selma's attack on the unions is largely her experience in the U.S. (where unions take their place alongside other large corporations in supporting Nixon and capitalism) and in Italy (where there has been widespread rejection of the unions and fairly successful organisation outside of them). Her eulogies over workers' self-activity in the miners' strike are not justified by the facts. There was no serious challenge to the NUM leadership, although workers were able to exert pressure on it with some success. In Britain, we have not seen a tremendous growth in conscious, organised, self-active militancy outside the unions. On the other hand, while the unions are not revolutionary, most of them see their interests as opposed to the capitalist class.

All but the richest women work, at least in the home, and most of them outside as well. Selma sees them as pawns in the cooperation between the capitalists and the unions, expendable as labour themselves, and servicing the male wage-slaves. She points out that women are already involved in some organised unofficial industrial action, and that individual rebellion, especially absenteeism, is rife. She says that the only thing wrong with not working is not receiving a wage, and that it is workers' unconcern with the possibility of unemployment that poses a real threat to capitalism by disarming it. Women must be liberated from the home, without entering the wage slavery of capital. They must organise against their oppression, uniting where capital divides.

The realisation that the demand for 'the right to work' (i.e. the right to produce surplus value) is reactionary is hardly dawning on the left. The danger of Selma's conclusions to the women's movement is a total withdrawal from involvement in the struggle at the workplace. Women are exploited most by capitalist production, receiving a fraction of the wages of men and to some extent they are socialised into reduced expectations (pin money, etc.). The logical conclusion to much of Selma's argument is surely that methods must be developed linking the factory, the community, and the home, involving the whole class, whether male or female, old or young, in its struggle as a class.

Anna.

In her attempt to give her analysis practical implementation, Selma enunciates six demands which she suggests may be adopted by the women's movement as a whole. The aim is to articulate in few words the breadth of our rejection of the oppression and exploitation of women, and to raise possibilities of new kinds and areas of action in each local situation from the beginning, while always keeping the fundamental issues before our eyes. But instead of starting from the foregoing analysis, she seems here to base herself on the historical evolution of the present movement. Hence the formulation of 'demands' as such, their close relation to the original 4 demands adopted by women nationally early in 1971, and hence perhaps the ambiguities and confusion which arise from this section.

The 4 basic or minimal demands which have hitherto provided an easy answer to the question 'what do you stand for?' are: equal pay now; equal education and job opportunity; free contraception and abortion on demand; 24-hour child care centres. Selma's six are: 1) the right to work less; 2) a guaranteed income for women and men, working or not, married or not - wages for housework; 3) control of our bodies, the right to have or not to have children; 4) equal pay for all; 5) an end to price rises; 6) free community-controlled nurseries and child care. She has explained how these issues affect people and pointed out some of the far-reaching implications they might have.

However, the main purpose of the programme is not quite clear. Is it transitional, or a prefiguration of future society? Are these conditions pre-requisite for change, or the ideal to work for? Items like the struggle against price rises or for a shorter work week can be seen as analogous to trade union demands. The 'guaranteed adequate income' fits in with current thinking in the Claimants' Unions, but how does it relate to equal pay? Then the idea of wages for housework would tend further to entrap women in their traditional role, and to institutionalise as employment what should surely be a minimal background activity shared by all. And are we to ask for control of our bodies, instead of assuming it from the start and resisting any attempt to interfere with it? (On the other hand, if everyone was free to dispose of her or his body with no constraints, the revolution would practically be achieved.) Lastly, the type of nursery and other welfare provisions envisaged places emphasis on community caring and a degree of self-management now.

In considering possible methods of struggle, the pamphlet recommends that women be organised where they work for wages, where they shop, where they live and work, initially by leafletting on hours of work, wages, inflation, child care and slavery. This would give quite high priority to industrial action, but there is little indication of how the struggle in production might be waged. How can women working together best organise on immediate demands and towards control of their work, avoiding co-option of shop floor militancy. Given that job organisation is basic, should they be prepared to fight the battle against discrimination inside the unions, or

try to by-pass male-dominated structures? How do they relate to rank and file male workers - and to the potential union bureaucrats in their own ranks? Posing such questions might have provided a more direct link between the two sections, analytical and practical, of the pamphlet, even if their answers could only emerge from lengthy discussion in the movement. As it is, the ongoing debate has tended to pay disproportionately little attention to these problems.

The idea that the struggle itself can provide a social existence for women outside the home is attractive. But if all this activity is to be meaningful, it must be founded securely on the consciousness of those involved, consciousness that must go beyond accepting a list of demands. The nature of a demand, and the content of this pamphlet as a whole, is to come up for discussion at the National Women's Conference in November. Perhaps the attempt of the Notting Hill Group to give a new orientation to the movement will then bear fruit, though probably not according to their prescriptions.

Liz.

## NEW PAMPHLETS

We have produced 2 new pamphlets. 'AS WE DON'T SEE IT' (5p + postage) was specially written (after long discussions in the London group) to eliminate certain ambiguities in previous statements of our views. It is a response to repeated questions put to us concerning (1) our analysis of various types of contemporary societies, (2) our concept of socialism, (3) our view of the trade union and political bureaucracies, and (4) our attitude to other political tendencies on the 'left'. It has been sent to all subscribers and we hope it will become the quickest and most accurate introduction to our ideas.

CEYLON : THE JVP UPRISING OF 1971 (25p + 5p postage) is a detailed analysis of last year's events in Ceylon. A movement of disaffected youth, drawn mainly from the petty-bourgeoisie (both urban and rural) almost brought down the Coalition Government of UNP, Stalinists and ex-Trotskyists. The State Department and Mao's China, the Tory government and Russia's rulers, India and Pakistan, all sent money, weapons or moral assistance to Mrs. Bandaranaike. The pamphlet contains a full background to the events, an interview with a Ceylon revolutionary, an epilogue on what has happened since the uprising, and an article 'Third Worldism or Socialism' outlining our views on Third World struggles in general. The pamphlet is being sent to all subscribers whose sub is well on the credit side (it is being counted as the equivalent of 5 issues). If you don't receive the pamphlet before the end of October, it means that you sub won't stand it.

The production of these two pamphlets in offset litho has knocked us back financially to the zero line and we are facing a liquidity crisis. We appeal to readers and supporters, who feel this kind of documentation is useful, to help us urgently with some bread.

# SELMA JAMES REPLIES ...

Dear Anna and Liz,

Though I'm glad to have the opportunity to put my point of view along with yours, it is difficult to raise disagreements with you in a journal of an organisation dominated by men. I am conscious that my view may be used against you or your view against me, not to disprove our arguments but to discredit us. Those who have more power tend to retain that power by the principle of dividing and dominating the less powerful. I think I'd better explain this because it is bound to be scoffed at by some men who believe they know all there is to know about 'politics', certainly more than women do.

All organisations in which men and women work together are inevitably dominated by men. I am a feminist and a Marxist; I don't believe democracy, which is based on 'equality', works. The men have organisational skills which we women are only learning. They are not worried about the dishes they left in the sink or whether there are clean nappies for the morning - their heads, then, are more able to concentrate on 'important' things, rather than on the decimating details of routine women's work. Most of all, they are used to authority over women. Therefore they have more confidence, in themselves and in other men. They listen to each other more easily than to us, and give each other's views more careful consideration. All this doesn't stop when they join an organisation that calls itself socialist.

We've become aware in the women's movement of the pressure on the women in these organisations. Though we complain and fight against the male supremacy we meet there, yet we tend to feel on the defensive, feel we must justify the autonomy of the women's movement and its exclusion of men, must convince them that Women's Liberation is not 'unpolitical'. It's precisely this defensiveness that justifies the movement's autonomy and its exclusion of men. And it's precisely the great gap in the politics of male-dominated left organisations that lies at the basis of their male supremacist theory, attitudes and practices.

It was to shatter the outdated politics of the male-dominated left as it had invaded the women's movement that the pamphlet you are reviewing was written. I see by your review, Anna, that you know this.

These politics are based on the factory. But women have as their primary relation to society, their primary mode of exploitation, the home. Workers in factories get wages. Workers in 'private' - more precisely, individual - homes don't. In relation to the wageless, waged people have

power, and this is the basis of male supremacy and the super-exploitation of women in the whole of capitalist society. Even when women enter that factory, as 50% of the women in this country do, precisely because their base is the home, a wageless job, they are even more exploited than men are. It is assumed that women don't need money of their own. But look how the left shed tears when unemployed men don't get a wage. We are told they lose their self-respect!

So the pittance that bosses pay women is called pin money, though women work as hard, often harder than men.

Women are not the only traditional wageless people. One of the reasons that young people run away from home is that, while capital is preparing them in schools to be efficiently exploited, they are wageless and their parents' wages are a power over them. Recently a 16-year old girl was put in Holloway by her father for stealing something to eat. Her father had decided not to feed her because she couldn't or wouldn't get a job. The unemployed are also wageless. The sick are wageless, and the old. But the unions don't organise them. The structure of unions is based on this division between the waged and the wageless. Unions are for people with wages, and for nobody else.

And unions are for work. If anybody thinks they're entitled to live and get back some of that surplus value they are making or made when they were young or not sick or that their parents made, unions are against them. Unions are for a fair day's work, fair, that is, to the capitalist.

OK, you may say, but they fight for the worker. Nobody can fight for the worker. Anybody who comes along and says, leave it to me, I'll fight for you, is going to negotiate your struggle out of existence. That's what the unions do all the time. This is not because they are bureaucrat-ised; they are bureaucrat-ised because they have to ram negotiations and work down workers' throats. The unions only betray workers who have not yet understood that, no matter how hard we fought to establish them in the past, they have now become part of the State apparatus. Younger men workers and women in factories, homes, hospitals and telephone exchanges show by their action that whatever the unions once meant is not going to blind them to what the unions are today. The unions can't betray these workers because they expect what they're going to get. To say the unions betray is like saying the Tory Party betrays. Especially for women, and most especially for housewives.

By the way I notice, Anna, that after giving a splendid summary of the pamphlet, you say: 'The basis for Selma's attack on the unions is largely her experience in the U.S. where unions take their place alongside other corporations in supporting Nixon and capitalism, and in Italy where there has been widespread rejection of the unions and fairly successful organisation outside them'. I'd like to take you up on that.

Yes, my widest experience with unions is in the U.S. I have also worked a little in factories in England. But do you really think that the unions here are different from unions all over the world? Do you think British capitalism is 'different' or 'better' than elsewhere, or workers in Britain not militant enough for the state to need the unions against them? Do you think that when the unions here support Harold Wilson they are not supporting Nixon and capitalism? A good deal of industry in Britain is owned by American capital. The Labour and Tory governments' function is precisely to defend capital, their own and Nixon's, against the working class here. And when you say that in Italy there has been 'fairly successful organisation outside' the unions, where do you think that came from? It came from workers and the extra-parliamentary left together working out clearly and precisely what the role of unions is (at least as far as men are concerned!) and organising autonomously. The result of the struggle in Italy and the U.S. against the unions is that the unions' demands in those two countries make Vic Feather, Jack Jones and Hugh Scanlon look like 19th century reformers. The more we organise autonomously, the more we'll be able to use the unions, instead of as now trying to tie women up into male-dominated adjuncts of the capitalist state. The miners didn't have to challenge the NUM leadership in words. They used the union structure when it suited them and ignored it when it didn't. That's autonomy. It made the state tremble and put the NUM in a crisis it hasn't got out of yet. It's scared of the miners. There is no 'British road to communism'. Capital is international and though its negotiators differ in language and style, they are international too. Unions in Nigeria and Israel are not qualitatively different from unions in the U.S. and Mexico, Italy and England, France and South Africa.

The purpose of the programme is not 'transitional' - transitional to what? - or a 'prefiguration of future society'. No. Notting Hill made that clear in their preface. 'They are not a plan for an ideal society, and a society based on them would not cease to be oppressive. Ultimately the only demand which is not co-optable is the armed population demanding the end of capitalism'. The purpose of these demands is to have a basis for organising an autonomous struggle of women, autonomous of men's domination (though not necessarily of men - see below), autonomous of unions, autonomous, that is, of capital and all its negotiators. They arise from where we are, and we are everywhere in the society, at different stages of struggle, facing different obstacles and different modes of exploitation, all based on the fact that we are born with a uterus. When the Unsupported Mothers call for a wage for all regardless of sex, age or marital status, they are implementing these demands, bringing men in under the leadership of women, teaching them a new way to struggle, to struggle not only for better conditions in which to be exploited but against exploitation, against work. And who has worked more for capital than women!

In this space it would be pointless to try to articulate each demand, and also in a sense impossible. Only a movement in action can do that, once it has set its sights against any co-option of our struggle from the

right or from the left. We'll make mistakes and have failures, but we are attempting to do what has never been done, to organise and connect the struggles in every area of exploitation, under the leadership of those who are exploited. We women must break the power over us of the meagre wage men receive. As I tried to say, for every demand we need time and we need money, the two things that capital robs us of. I can't see, Liz, how this relates to the previous four demands which were a call, in my view, for a more efficient Welfare State.

We in the women's movement must ensure that our heads are clear about what capital is. Men have not understood it up to now, because they didn't know we were exploited and they didn't know that in the home, they were the instruments capital used to exploit us. So we have a lot to tell them. But more important, unless we work out what capital is as we know it, we will never understand or be able to assist the persistent day-to-day revolution which women (you know who women are - those backward, flighty, non-political appendages to men) are waging daily.

There are a lot of things the pamphlet doesn't say. It's a pamphlet, not a book, first of all, and secondly there is so much I don't know and that we all can only learn from the struggle. If you want to know more about the general political view from which the pamphlet emanates, however, there is one book. It's called THE POWER OF WOMEN AND THE SUBVERSION OF THE COMMUNITY by Mariarosa Dalla Costa and myself, and is published by Falling Wall Press and a group of women who love women, the women's movement and therefore themselves, and who hate the ruling class. It's available from me for 25p.

You are in a male-dominated group, and I feel very much that this is a failure of the women's movement. We have not offered you enough as yet. We hope to change that soon. My hope is that the ideas in the pamphlet, when put into practice, will hasten that change.

Much love and much power,

Selma.

P.S. I don't like all the quoting that goes on and the general tone of debate on the left in which I also for many years engaged. But I'd like to quote one thing which will clear up a misunderstanding. You speak, Anna, of 'Lenin's pre-1902 demand for the arousal of "trade union consciousness"'. The left certainly gives this as Lenin's view. It was never his view. Listen to this: 'The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness...' '...the spontaneous labour movement is pure and simple trade unionism ... and trade unionism means the ideological enslavement of the workers to the bourgeoisie. Hence our task, the task of Social-Democracy, is to combat spontaneity, to divert the labour movement from its spontaneous, trade unionist striving to go under the wing of the bourgeoisie, and to bring it under the wing of revolutionary Social-Democracy'. This is from WHAT IS TO BE DONE (Lenin's emphasis). In 1902 Lenin obviously didn't yet understand the working class, but, oh god, how he understood the unions!