

private ownership the two go together. And yet ownership always seems to us to be a strictly legal business — a stamp on a piece of paper asserting ownership rights — while control implies a far more real and intimate connection with an industrial undertaking. True, to-day, the owner of a works can exercise control over both the works itself and the workers inside it, but that is largely so only if he takes an active interest in the running of the concern. Absentee owners and share-holders, while perhaps having final say, yet do not exercise direct control over the work done, but install managers and a whole graded system of bosses, large and small, to look after their interests which, anyway, are only for the profits and not for the products.

Fundamentally, what is important is control. If the workers were in control of a plant, it would not matter a tinker's cuss that someone, somewhere, had a deed of ownership, except that it would enable him to call up the forces of the law to exert his will upon the real controllers. Thus, *ownership* remains a legal conception, *control* being what really matters as far as production and the distribution of products is concerned, and it is only in a system where the law is backed up by the forces of the State that ownership has any meaning at all.

That is why anarchists tend to avoid the use of the words 'common ownership'. In effect, if the means of production were 'owned' by all, they would be owned by nobody (the *News Chronicle* says as much, but adds, "and that is not good enough") but who wants to own them anyway, except those seeking protection against economic insecurity — which by workers' control would be abolished?

There are many other small ways in which this co-ownership scheme can be attacked. Since the workers will be co-responsible with the managers, for instance, it gives them the right to 'hire and fire' — a distasteful right for any worker, but, more important, the general economy is still to be a capitalist one, and the Liberal's real concern is not so much to democratise society as to give as many as possible a stake in a capitalist society.

These schemes, and there will be others like them — are interesting from only one point of view: they betray the extent to which pressure from below is making itself felt. The growing demand for workers' control will be fed by many such reformist tit-bits, but they leave the main issues untouched — that workers' control entails — demands — a society libertarian in *all* its aspects.
2nd April 1949 P.S.

TUC Weapon of the Corporate State

The Trade Union Congress at Bridlington produced little enough in the way of surprises. Indeed, these annual affairs have settled down in recent years into a more or less fixed pattern. The leaders issue appeals for a 'responsible' attitude from the rank and file, urging that any kind of union militancy upsets the delicate course of the unions and the Labour Government, and may result in disaster for 'the whole structure of Trade Unionism as we know it' or 'everything for which organised labour has striven for many decades' — the phraseology has become monotonously familiar. The atmosphere is like that of wartime, everything must be subordinated to some over-riding consideration, and it is really best to leave things to the wise judgment of 'the leaders of our movement'.

It is, of course, just this blanketing atmosphere which has taken all life out of trade union activity, creating that apathy amongst rank-and-file workers which has seemed the characteristic aspect of organised working class activity during recent years.

Nationalisation

After all the trumpeting about the great advantage to the workers which nationalisation of an industry would bring, the realities are beginning to be seen in just the light in which anarchists (including this paper) described in advance. Thus Arthur Horner, the Communist secretary of the Mineworkers' Union, explained to the delegates that nationalisation does not alter the relationship between employers and employed. 'Management is still the buyer of labour, the trade unions are still the sellers of their labour'. This was not the line of the Communist Party or the Labour Party when they were advocating nationalisation as a boon to workers, but the truth can no longer be hidden in the face of experience.

Rationalisation in Industry

Much of the discussion was taken up with the part that organised labour has to play in the present world of dollar crises and imminent slump. The only way for 'Britain' to maintain her position in the world is for production costs to be cut so that British goods can compete favourably on the export market. This

means that greater rationalisation must be introduced into industry, more labour-saving machinery, more elimination of waste. Workers are not unnaturally afraid that all this means unemployment, and they see only too clearly that unemployment can be used to lower wages and so add another factor favourable to the owners of industry in their struggle on the foreign markets. It falls to the Trade Union leaders to dissipate such fears, and they set to work with the usual vague appeals about helping our country to recover, about not pressing sectional interests against the needs of the workers as a whole, and so on. The Trade Unions see these matters solely through the capitalist framework of capitalist production, which they seem to regard as sacrosanct. Since their idea of socialism does not extend beyond the transfer of ownership — not to the workers but to the State — such as nationalisation brings, it is perhaps not surprising. But even if one did not have years of past experience to guide one, surely this vision of struggling to cut production costs to get markets, this whole business of workers looking at industry through the eyes of the owners is too completely dreary and deadening.

The Question of Dismantling

Some light is shed on this question by the discussion on the dismantling of German factories. German Trade Union leaders had appealed to the TUC on the matter of dismantling, claiming that many factories scheduled for dismantling were not engaged in war production at all. Walter Padley pointed out that such attempts to destroy German industry would result in lowered wages for Germans, and hence would permit a later revived German industry to compete favourably with Britain and so force down wages here. One is here very near to a most absurd paradox; 'responsible' trade unionists will look with approval on wage levels abroad higher than here because such wages hamper competition with British goods, while at the same time a 'realistic' tightening of the belt and abandoning of wage claims by British workers is extolled as needful for the sake of successful competition in the world markets! Such a position is not stated in so many words, but it is the logical implication of much that was said at Bridlington.

An interesting comment on this matter of competition from low wages abroad was provided by the discussion on the Polish coal mines. Large numbers of women are employed as surface workers in these mines while much of the underground labour is provided by German prisoners-of-war. It is interesting to know that this new

socialist Poland employs such methods, and keeps German slave labour at work four and a half years after the end of the war. But the seconder of the resolution which brought forward these facts was no other than Abe Moffat, the Communist Scottish Miners' leader!

Role of the TUC

Apart from all this, the Congress confirmed another trend which *Freedom* has frequently pointed out — that of the increasing incorporation of the Trade Unions as part of the State structure. Before the Congress, Ministers apparently conferred with TUC leaders to brief them for putting over some of the less palatable of the government's pills. The *Manchester Guardian* remarks that, "The TUC is apparently intended as a shock-absorber between the government and the impact of unpopular policies upon the people who will have to bear the brunt of them. The same political technique was followed over the decision to re-introduce direction of labour and over the attempt to enunciate a wages policy, when

What the Labour Party Means by Workers' Control!

	1945	1949
Lord Citrine	Gen. Sec. TUC.	Chairman British Electricity Authority, £8,500.
Mr Ebby Edwards	Gen. Sec. National Union of Mineworkers.	Labour Relations Officer, Coal Board, £5,000.
Mr J. Benstead	Gen. Sec. National Union of Railwaymen.	Member of British Transport Commission, £5,000.
Mr W. P. Allen	Gen. Sec. Amal. Society of Loco motive Engineers and Firemen.	Member of Railway Executive, £5,000.
Sir Joseph Hallsworth	Gen. Sec. National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers.	Chairman North-West Electricity Board, £4,000 (succeeded Mr George Gibson).

it was left to the TUC to put its own interpretation of last year's White Paper."

This is another way of saying that the government increasingly regard the TUC as the interpreters of its policies. But, as the *Manchester Guardian* goes on to say: "It is not a technique that has worked happily, because it has increased suspicions of national trade union leaders among the very people they are supposed to represent". The vilification campaigns in the press against unofficial strikers perhaps indicate the way in which a government might act in giving powers to trade union leaders which would make them independent of the suspicions or distrust of their rank and file. In several countries we have seen the trade unions degenerate into mere disciplining bodies for bringing the workers to heel. The attitude of TU leaders here makes such an outcome by no means impossible.

17th September 1949

The Role of Syndicalists in Industry

The extent to which revolutionaries should allow themselves to get mixed up in reformist activities is always a matter for argument and the question is certainly not such an easy one to solve as appears at first glance.

Our immediate reaction is, as a matter of principle, to state firmly that the revolutionary should not waste his time in any activity which has not a revolutionary end in view and which has not a revolutionary character as to its means. This is the attitude which most individualists take up and which they quite definitely *should* take up. After all, if you have only yourself to please, and your actions affect no-one but yourself, you can be as intransigent as you like and no-one has the right to do other than praise you for it. If society were composed of such intransigents, it is obvious that governments and all the institutions of domination would not last very long.

Unfortunately, however, society is not composed of such people, and we have to take it as it is. The revolutionary,

therefore, has to make a choice: either to cut himself off from all other trends of thought but his own in his determination to prevent any watering-down of his ideas, or to be prepared to enter the *melée* of day-to-day activity within the context of present-day society, hoping thereby to influence others even at the risk of compromising himself.

Both Sides Right?

The difficulty lies in the fact that there is a lot to be said for both sides, and that those on both sides are inclined to regard the others as completely wrong. The middle course (horrible phrase!) is that taken by the comrades who produce *Freedom* and — as is usual in such cases — lays them open to attack from both sides. The individualists and intellectuals accuse *Freedom* of being too propagandist and the more syndicalist-inclined comrades say it is too intellectual. As if it were not equally important both to discuss anarchist ideas on all aspects of human existence and at the same time put them over in a vigorous manner in the hope of stirring others to similar action!

However at the moment we are concerned with the syndicalist side of the argument, for there is a growing interest in syndicalism and a growing desire to see some sort of movement growing which is specifically concerned with industrial activity. This is an extremely welcome trend and one for which the time seems to become increasingly ripe. Industrial experience, in view of the obvious failure of nationalisation, and the growing interest in the idea of workers' control, both help to lay a fertile ground for the syndicalist seed.

Syndicalist Principles

So we come to our question of what exactly is the rôle of the syndicalist today? Perhaps first we had better briefly state the principles of syndicalism (*anarcho*-syndicalism, that is, although the word is so clumsy that we try to avoid it where possible), so that we know exactly what we are talking about.

Firstly, then, syndicalism represents a form of industrial organisation which differs from trades unionism in several very important fundamentals:

(a) *It is revolutionary*, not reformist, i.e., it is not satisfied to remain an institution within capitalist or governmental society, even representing the workers in that society, but aims at the

abolition of capitalism and the establishment of a system of free workers' control.

(b) *It organises industrially not by craft*, i.e., instead of workers *being organised* in craft unions whereby those in the same industry (same factory!) belong to several unconnected unions, they should *organise themselves* according to their industry, not their craft, so that no divisions exist within working units. Each industry should have its own syndicate which at local, regional and national levels co-ordinates with every other syndicate for the organisation of production and distribution.

(c) *It is opposed to the wages system*, believing that money and wages represent one of the chief means by which competition and inequality are maintained. Instead, *free distribution* of goods according to need is proposed, since the abolition of the profit motive and the control by the workers of the means of production would mean abundance of all we need.

(d) *It denies the necessity of paid officials*. Such organisational work as needs full-time organisers shall be done by workers taken from their productive work, either for that specific work or for an agreed short time, and shall be rewarded by no more wages than they were getting before. This prevents officialdom and careerism and ensures that those who take on work for the syndicate do so for the sake of that work and not for personal gain.

(e) *It demands direct action, not political action*. The aim of syndicalism is workers' control of industry, not control of society through the government, so that its methods should be aimed directly at the means of production. That is where the strength of the workers lies. Political activity is mere deviation from the real issue. The methods of direct action are the strike, boycott, sabotage and non-cooperation.

Syndicalism, like anarchism, has a double function. First, it is a means of struggle in present-day society; second it is a means of reconstruction and organisation in a free society after a social revolution. But syndicalism, it should be stressed, is a *means*. Anarchism has a wider message, and Anarchy is the goal at which both aim.

A Hard Task

The rôle of syndicalists then, boils down to this: the need to-day is for a vigorous propaganda and educational body to present the case for syndicalism at every possible opportunity and in every possible place. But syndicalists should beware of organising

others. They should encourage workers to organise themselves upon syndicalist principles according to the nature of the job. They should be prepared to set an example in militancy and solidarity in their own place of work while at the same time scrupulously avoiding setting themselves up as leaders. As far as the trades unions are concerned, it is up to each syndicalist to make up his mind whether his revolutionary aims can be served by his going into his union or not. It seems unlikely, somehow, but it may bring him into contact with other workers who can also be militant outside the union branch.

Finally, let no-one think the rôle of the syndicalist any more than of the anarchist, is an easy one. He is faced with apathy and prejudice, and if he is over-impatient may easily become discouraged and cynical. But it is nevertheless essential that the task be undertaken by men of integrity and vigour, and that the opportunities presenting themselves at the present are not wasted.

30th April 1949

P. S.

Coal!!

The advocates of economic planning and centralised organisation should have been blinking and gulping a little during the last few weeks as information has been forthcoming about production in our premier nationalised industry.

Hard on the proud announcement that long-term plans had been devised by the National Coal Board to spend £500 million on the development and modernisation of British coal mines, came the news that the production of coal was falling, that stocks were below danger level, that miners were leaving the industry and that, most surprising of all, we shall now have to *import* coal in order to get through the winter.

When the mines were nationalised in January 1947, we were promised great things. Not only were the miners to be treated to a new deal, with marvellously new conditions and rights, but because of the new spirit that public (?) ownership would engender, strife in that struggle-torn industry would vanish and harmony between worker and management would send production soaring.