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- Miners' strike
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THE MINERS' STRIKE

This article reflects a collective viewpoint which emerged from a 'Solidarity' (London) group discussion.

Congratulations to the miners! They have won the pay award which everyone from 'Socialist Worker' to the 'Daily Express' agreed they deserved. In so doing the miners unequivocally rubbed the Government's face in the dirt; its status and authority were severely shaken.

We did not expect such an outcome at the beginning of January, when the CEGB was boasting of stocks of coal sufficient to last eight weeks. With memories of the failure of last winter's postal workers' strike, under similar conditions, it seemed that the miners could not hope to succeed without the support of other unions, particularly the TGWU. As no other union had declared support, a victory in only four weeks was even more remarkable. How did it happen?

The victory was due to rank and file militancy which took the struggle far beyond the limits originally conceived by the N.U.M. leadership. First, the miners largely ignored the N.U.M. directive to carry out safety maintenance work in the pits during the strike. In only 60 of the 289 pits were there adequate 'safety' arrangements. Who felt they had most to lose by this? Certainly not the miners. When Ezra presented them with the spectre of unemployment in the shape of further pit closures, the miners' reaction was 'to hell with the pits!'. Thus despite the experience of the last 15 years in which the work-force has been reduced by about two-thirds, the miners showed no concern to preserve 'the right to work'. They had emerged from their holes to get a better living wage, and they didn't care if they never went back down them again. Asked after the death of a work-mate in the struggle whether they still thought the strike was worthwhile, miners replied that they had so far saved four lives (which would have been lost through the 'normal' incidence of fatal accidents underground).

Second, and more important, was the picketing. Initiated by the rank and file, it transformed the situation. Not only was picketing extended beyond the pit gates to places such as coal-fired power stations and coke depots, but it became a mass action, rather than the usual small token presence. Moreover, the picketing introduced a new element into the strike, namely that of physical confrontation. This led to the arrest of over 200 miners, the death of one of them, and to scores of injured (including at least 2 policemen). The best example of this new, offensive mood was at Saltley Coke Depot where several thousand miners, engineers and students defeated the police and forced the local Chief Constable to shut down the Depot. (See page 5 of this issue for a participant's eye view of this event)

There was a widespread refusal by other workers to cross the miners' picket lines (despite much publicity given the exceptions). Some railmen went further by refusing to deliver oil to power stations. The movement of fuel to power stations was thus brought to a standstill. Many groups of workers (such as engineering and car workers), housewives and students acted to support the miners in many different ways.

What about the leaders of the other unions, in particular Jack Jones, boss of the key TGWU? Well, as soon as someone mentioned the possibility of declaring solidarity with the miners, he left for the Continent, only returning to announce that support for the strike was up to the individual worker ('on their Jack Jones's', as it were!). This could have been as damaging to the miners as the failure of Post Office engineers to support the postal strike was last year. Fortunately, while unions failed to do anything, fellow-workers acted. Students also showed solidarity by providing pickets and accommodation, giving donations and offering many other facilities - in direct contrast to their 1926 predecessors.

But if those were different students and different workers, it was also a different public to that of 1926. 'Public opinion' is by definition an arbitrary and dangerous notion, usually being little more than what the 'Daily Express' or 'Daily Mail' believe that people ought to believe. However in this instance the government failed to whip up 'public opinion' against the miners, as it had done with the power workers. The standard argument that old ladies only die from hypothermia whilst strikes are in progress no longer worked. Even the most severe power cuts did not bring odium on the miners as the government had hoped. Since then, of course, the government has made it quite clear that, as the public had largely supported the miners, they would have to foot the bill. That'll teach us! Moreover, not all the chickens have yet come home to roost and the strike may provide the perfect opportunity for more redundancies in other industries which can be blamed on the miners.

WHO CONTROLS WHOM?

Why did the government engage in such a protracted struggle, losing much more in the end than it would have lost had it settled at the end of the second week? No doubt they were initially defending their Incomes Policy. But the price they were obviously willing to pay suggests that they felt that much more was at stake.

When it was over Heath spoke on T.V. of a double danger: inflation and the challenge to 'what most of us consider to be the right way of doing things'. It would be facile to dismiss this as just a reactionary response. It was certainly that, but it was much more. The government realised that the conduct of the strike (the picketing in particular) posed a powerful threat to the status quo itself.

The government's power to impose its will on a section of the population had all but disappeared. Its authority was being seriously undermined. The defence of the Incomes Policy became secondary to the defence of the basic authority relations. Editorials in 'The Times' spoke repeatedly of 'the crisis of authority'. Our masters showed their fear... made worse by the knowledge that the miners' leaders were not in full control either.

The government avoided direct confrontations. They back-pedalled whenever they could. They silenced their own hotheads who wanted to bring the troops in. When the Scottish miners threatened trouble because the Dunfermline Sheriff's Court had ruled that some pickets were to face riot charges, the government flew a legal expert up there to straighten things out - i.e. to release them. The government was attempting to repress by means of tolerance.

The miners' strike dealt a body blow to the Industrial Relations Act. No one even whispered about its existence. Heath's T.V. speech on the strike showed how scared they really were: '...in many ways the invisible danger is the more worrying because it concerns something it is hard to pin down and put a value to. It concerns the kind of country we want to live in and the kind of people we want to be. It concerns our traditional British way of doing things'. And so on. By this the Prime Minister presumably meant a society and government based on the principles of privilege, authority and deference.

The government was sufficiently aware of the threat not to provoke confrontations which it could not deal with. It was incapable of asserting its authority without using brute force. But it was anxious to avoid the consequences of this. In such an atmosphere of militancy, may be a million people could have been brought onto the streets (rather than thousands). And where would all that have ended? The government did not want to take any chances. In the end the struggle, successful as it was in some ways,* was completely contained within the system. But the Establishment clearly perceived a potential threat to its power. What saved them was the insufficient level of collective (although not necessarily individual) consciousness of the miners. If the miners' strike shows nothing else, it shows the fragile relationship between power and consciousness.

The power and authority of our masters is based on their ownership and control of the means of production. But this state of affairs can only last as long as people recognise it as 'natural' and give it the stamp of their consent. Our rulers retain power because they appear to have power (a self-fulfilling prophecy indeed). Deference perpetuates the illusion.

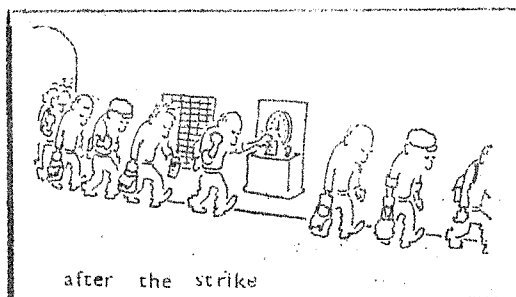
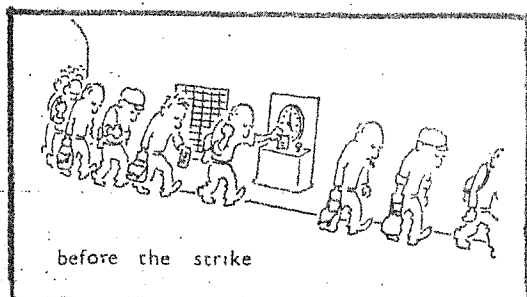
* The miners not only won a 20% wage increase, their self-respect and self-confidence were also given a big boost. Despite their militancy over the years, this was in fact their first 'victory' (in terms of wages and conditions) for a very long time. Previous 'victories' had all been linked to redundancies and productivity deals.

When they lose their 'credibility' as rulers, they are lost. On the other hand the working class collectively have real power. They run the system and only their daily intervention maintains it. But they are only partly conscious of this. If they were fully aware of this fact - and prepared to assert their power - the system would collapse. The miners' strike exemplified the assertion of real power without this collective consciousness.

There are many examples (especially in the U.S.A.) of militant and even violent struggles led by union bureaucrats, some of them very reactionary. Militancy does not necessarily mean rank-and-file control. This is a point to remember in the present wave of euphoria. The rank and file miners did organise, but there is no evidence that they created structures reflecting a deeper challenge to the union leadership, the boss or the whole rotten system in which we live. Again, the value system of this society prevailed. Few seriously challenged the 'right' of the NUM leadership (rather than the rank and file) to determine the way the struggle was conducted. There was no drive to extend the fight into spheres of their life other than the wage demand, or to link up with other sections of the community, despite the fact that large sections of the community came to the miners' support.

Although this militant strike was successful in achieving a wage demand, capitalism was successful too. The collective power of the miners was limited to a justified struggle for higher wages, but it did not fundamentally challenge the exploitative relationships at work. Had this happened, it would have provided an example to workers everywhere.

In the end, capitalists will pay up. But they can't agree to change the basic authority structure of their system. In the miners' strike, they were not asked to.



LETTERS

Supporters in various parts of the country sent us a number of letters during the miners' strike. The following extracts are of particular interest.

We found it unbelievable that coal stocks were allowed to build up in the way they did, although we think that the amount of fuel stocked was exaggerated. Living in this area, and also having been a miner for 16 years (I went down the pit on leaving school at 15 and left 4 years ago), I have every sympathy with the miners' cause, and will support them in every way possible.

I have been out today, seeing all the members of our TGWU branch who are concerned in hauling fuel. They have been asked to cooperate with the miners by not hauling coal or coke, and they have agreed to this. One firm employing around 30 drivers has laid them off for the duration of the strike. Many of the pits around here have been closed down over the past 10 years causing men to retire early, move to pits many miles away or leave the pits altogether. I believe that most miners have had the threat of the chopper hanging over their heads for so long that they have ceased to care whether their pits remain open or not. Most of them, though, are concerned solely with the money in the pay packet and have no thought of any change in the political system in this country. They would be content to help the system as it is, provided that they are getting what they consider to be a reasonable wage. This is true of most workpeople, I believe. I'm sure you must have found this. They seem very determined but, like you, we are dreading a repetition of the Post Office strike, which is what will happen if they fail to get the support they badly need. If the miners lose, we all lose.

W. H., Ossett, Yorkshire.

Last week in Birmingham, at Saltley Coke Depot, it was the Police versus the People. Last Thursday morning the People won a small victory through their solidarity. About 8,000 people gave their open support to the miners - women from the Valor factory, workers from G.E.C., Rover, S.U. car-burettors, building workers and Claimants' Unions, etc., plus hundreds of trade unionists and their wives turned up to stop the scab lorries from getting into the coke depot.

All week up till Wednesday we were giving out leaflets, telling the single strikers about Section 13 which entitles them to social security payments for urgent needs such as rent and food. We had a great response.

to this by the miners. About 2,000 leaflets were given out to the pickets who came from Wales, Barnsley, Doncaster, Durham, Stoke, Rugeley and Coventry.

On Monday the Police arrived in force to the Saltley Coke Depot. There were about 500 of them keeping the pickets back and letting the scabs in, but we all surged forward as soon as a lorry came and forced the lorry to stop. About 20 lorries got through. The police then started to show to everyone who and what they were protecting and exactly what their role is - the boots came in and they arrested 14 miners.

On Tuesday the Special Branch appeared, trying not to look obvious, but they managed to point out people whose faces they knew and who they thought were activists. This was the day a lorry forced its way through the picket lines and dragged a policeman under the wheels fracturing his leg and injuring other pickets. 20 pickets were arrested and there were 700 pigs.

On Wednesday about 800 pigs turned up - not counting plain clothes men in the crowd, who when they were discovered, were isolated and a cry went up not to mix with them! There were 800 pickets but more lorries were getting through, and the pickets started pushing to break the police cordons every time a lorry arrived. I had been speaking to some miners about their social security problems about 10.45 am, when a lorry arrived and they began surging forward. I was jumped on by two heavy sergeants and pulled out of the crowd by my hair and frogmarched to a police van with 6 other pickets. We were made to lay on the floor of the van, face downwards with our hands in our pockets. A lad from Rotherham who was in the van was attacked by 6 pigs. We were all charged with abusive words and behaviour, etc., a load of rubbish and trumped up charges as usual. There were 30 arrests.

Thursday. After a call for solidarity, between 8,000 and 10,000 people came to support the miners, and the Depot was closed. It was a victory for the first stage in the battle.

T. C., Handsworth, Birmingham.



OCCUPATIONS: A FOLLOW-UP

'Workers who have staged a 24 day sit-in at Fisher-Bendix radiator and heater factory at Kirkby, Liverpool, which was threatened with closure, have won a reprieve ... The men's victory comes only two days after another sit-in, at Plessey's factory in Alexandria, near Glasgow, ended with most jobs saved. Over the past six months there have been six threatened or actual occupations of factories in Britain and the latest score is: Workers 4, Employers 1.'

John Fryer, 'Sunday Times' Jan. 30, 1972.

WHO'S KEEPING SCORE?

'Solidarity' has paid attention to these developments because we think they can mark a new turn in the industrial struggle. We have therefore pulled out all the stops in trying to pass the facts on to other workers, as urgently as possible.

But to report the facts is not enough. We must seek to emphasize those aspects which reinforce the progressive tendencies revealed, and also say what we think about those tendencies which can be harmful.

Virtually all the recent work-ins/sit-ins/occupations have been against proposed total closures. But redundancies are nothing new. During the last 15 years there have been massive reductions of the work-force in Mining, Railways, Steel, etc. Most of these have been carried through with the agreement of the unions. Productivity deals have been accepted which have increased output at the expense of those remaining in the industry. There were no occupations in these cases.

The defeat of the postal strike was seen by the employers as a major breakthrough. They felt they had smashed the increasingly effective attempts by workers to meet the rising cost of living by winning wage claims. Again, there was no attempt to make the postal strike more effective by occupying the Telephone Exchanges. The miners' strike, on the other hand, showed that the classical strike could still be effective if there was active mass picketing by the rank and file, not only at their own place of work, but wherever it would be most effective. But while these methods

of struggle should not be ruled out, we hope that some of the lessons of alternative methods arising from the recent sit-ins and occupations will be learnt by workers when faced with issues other than sackings.

A full analysis of the struggles at U.C.S., Plessey, Allis-Chalmers and Fisher-Bendix is needed but it is not our intention to attempt this here. The results should be seen in a wider context. We must look beyond the immediate effects on those who fought, and see if their experience can be used, developed and improved upon by others.

Occupation presents workers with problems which go far beyond their immediate demands. A strike, in which workers leave the employers in possession of the means of production, corresponds to the 'normal' relationships in capitalist society (even if the workers are not producing at the time). Occupation gives the workers momentary control of the means of production. They can decide to use this control as a bargaining weapon. Or they could decide to use it for other purposes, like making things for themselves or others in the community. Occupation challenges the employers' 'right' to do as he wishes with machinery, premises, etc. It is because we seek to change society that we think the occupation of the factories by those who work in them so important.

U.C.S.

The 'work-in' at U.C.S. was important because it showed how NOT to conduct the struggle.

The slogan 'The Right to Work' is double-edged. It could mean the right of the employers to go on exploiting the workers. Moreover to go on working with a view to fulfilling management's needs challenges nothing. Employers can 'tolerate' this kind of behaviour.

At U.C.S., eight months of 'work-in' has resulted in large-scale de facto redundancy, and has led to a partial fulfilment of the employers' objectives. There has been increased production with a smaller work force. 'Redundant' workers have continued working and have been paid out of money collected from sympathetic fellow-workers. This is monstrous thing. Ships have been completed and delivered, which include in their cost of production money provided by workers for a very different purpose.

The leadership at U.C.S. has been in the hands of the Communist Party. The control of day-to-day events, the negotiations, the public appearances, everything they do, seeks to reinforce the idea that the workers need to be led by 'wise' and 'born' leaders.

At U.C.S. there has been no attempt to involve the rank and file in the real decision-making processes. On the contrary, every manipulative

device is used to get the workers to fall in line with what the leaders have decided, even when this is seen by the men to be against their best interests. Every attempt is made to boost the battered industrial prestige of the Communist Party. The whole thing is accompanied with unprovoked and vitriolic attacks on the 'ultra left' (that is anyone who dares criticise, in even the most moderate terms, the way the dispute is being handled) and with nebulous appeals to 'unity' and 'solidarity', which in plain English means 'keep quiet at any price'. What is happening at U.C.S. has many parallels with what the C.P.-dominated C.G.T. leadership have been doing for years at Renault in Paris.

If the workers themselves do not take matters into their own hands the result at U.C.S. will be a continuation of work on the employers' terms. The men will have to act through their own autonomous shop-floor organisations, which will first have to reject the kind of leadership they have followed so far.

At the time of writing the government has undertaken to provide £35m for the new Govan-Linthouse Company. They are considering a demand for a further £12m for Clydebank from an American company who would take over the yard if it could get a 4-year contract with the unions to guarantee 'no strikes'. This is actually being considered by the unions and presumably also by the leaders of the workers at U.C.S.

If the government is now prepared to provide a total of £47m to save U.C.S. (when it would not give £6m in the first place), it must have decided that Upper Clyde can carry on. The government itself must have learned something by seeing the building of ships being carried on by a reduced work force, praising the merits of productivity.

The U.C.S. 'work-in' started as a struggle to resist closure or massive redundancies. It looks like ending with massive redundancies and further demands on the workers to work harder and surrender the right to strike.

PLESSEY

The occupation started in September 1971 when 180 workers (all that remained of a much larger work force) were paid off, the Company having decided to close the factory.

This was a real occupation, in which the stewards and the workers participated in controlling the premises, thereby preventing the transfer of the valuable machinery. Some senior staff were allowed in, but only after agreeing that they would do nothing which might lead to the moving of the machinery or to its servicing by outside labour. For over 5 months the

workers had complete control of the plant, 24 hours a day. They established close contact with other Plessey factories, where workers agreed not to allow any transfer of machinery from Alexandria.

The Plessey men established close contact with other workers in their area. They also received a lot of help from the community generally, including some local shopkeepers who provided much material aid. Their efforts to link up with the U.C.S. workers, just a few miles away, never came to much. There was some financial help at the beginning, but the leadership at U.C.S. never sought to identify with the struggle at Alexandria. On the contrary, the U.C.S. leadership deliberately sabotaged any moves towards solidarity action or any attempts to link the two struggles.

The Plessey workers had received their redundancy payments before the sit-in started. They were getting unemployment and supplementary benefits, right from the start of the occupation, thus reducing hardship to their families and increasing their ability to sustain a prolonged struggle.

These considerations should be borne in mind by others faced with similar situations. It is worth noting that even the N.U.M. decided not to pay a strike allowance during the recent miners' strike, so that dependants could claim higher supplementary benefits.

While the unions at Alexandria made sympathetic noises, they never recognised the Plessey occupation as official. There is a lesson to be learned here. Workers can fight effectively even when the unions do not give them the kind of support some of them still expect to receive from this quarter.

The struggle ended at the end of January, when the parent company announced they were setting up a new company to reopen the factory and to develop the site as an Industrial Estate. The compromise settlement included the immediate employment of about half the workers who had taken part in the occupation, and promises that there would be prospects for many more workers living at Alexandria, where there is high unemployment.

The occupation was a partial victory. The factory would certainly have been closed and the machinery sold or transferred if the workers had not acted themselves and kept substantial control of the struggle in their own hands.

At no time did the company seek to bring in the police to evict the workers. They obviously did not consider it to their advantage to hot up the fight, which could well have rebounded against them, making them lose more than they would gain. Did they fear the reaction of the workers in their other factories - as well as that of the workers and people of Alexandria?

It can't be assumed that the employers will always behave with such caution. The workers at Plessey's were right to pay particular attention

to securing control of occupied territory. They kept in mind the fact that the employers have resorted to force in the past, and will doubtless do so again in the future.

A detailed story of the events at Plessey's would reveal much more which might help others. We hope this story will be written, by those who took part. Only they could do it full justice.

MOLD

120 workers at Allis-Chalmers, Mold, Flintshire, occupied the factory for three weeks, starting on New Year's Eve 1971. The employers had decided to close it, dismiss all the workers, and transfer the machinery to another company. Allis-Chalmers was part of a large multi-national company, based in the U.S.A., which had taken over the Mold factory from Jones Balers, a locally developed company, famous for its farm machinery.

The employers began to run the factory down after operating it for some ten years. There had been a number of redundancies over a considerable period. Mold is not an industrial area and the closure would have left the workers with little alternative employment.

The occupation began with the workers occupying part of the lodge. The company security guard was able, however, to function throughout the occupation. Moreover, the staff continued attending for work. They took no part in the struggle. The gate and some parts of the factory were manned 24 hours a day. The workers effectively saw to it that no machinery would be moved.

During the occupation the convenor (who was also the local Branch Secretary of the A.U.E.W.) exercised considerable personal control. He did not really involve all the workers in what was going on. The negotiations took place in Manchester, many miles away. The convenor participated in them - along with full-time union officials - but there were no direct representatives from the factory. When the convenor returned to Mold, the following day, things were very much cut and dried.

The agreement stated that a new firm (Bamfords of Uttoxeter) who had bought the franchise would reopen the factory. They would provide jobs for 75 of the 120 men. The remainder would receive redundancy payments, plus 25% extra severance pay. The agreement was endorsed by the workers who saw it as a partial victory. The factory would continue to exist in the area.

The Mold occupation was not a good example of this tactic. It did, however, challenge the right of employers to dispose of the factory as they wished. Some workers gained a respite which would certainly not have been the case had the factory not been occupied. In this particular case, a strike would almost certainly have been useless.

There was no attempt to use the police to evict the workers. After returning to work, it was not long before the workers were involved in a sit-in over new wage rates and bonuses. The occupation, despite a questionable compromise settlement, had developed the workers' confidence to act for themselves. They will have to learn to control and determine the outcome of such struggles, in the future, through their own autonomous shop-floor organisation.

FISHER - BENDIX

The Fisher-Bendix occupation at Kirkby, near Liverpool, highlighted some important aspects of this type of tactic. Many of the details have been given in our special pamphlet* produced at the height of the struggle. We would here only like to emphasise a few points. The notice 'Under New Management' which appeared in large letters attached to the railings surrounding the plant was itself an important expression of awareness of what the workers were doing. Taking over. Trying to manage for themselves. And this, even if they did not succeed in implementing all their declared intentions.

Let us discuss the negative aspects first. There were resorts to the Labour Party and to political leaders such as Harold Wilson to intervene on behalf of the workers. Illusions were thereby fostered that these people could get results which the workers by their own efforts could not have achieved. As it turned out the results obtained were a mixed bag. On the one hand the agreement cancelled the 60 sackings and guaranteed that the factory would be kept open until the end of 1973. On the other hand it was agreed that a joint management-union working party would be set up to examine how productivity could be increased. There are many dangers for the men in this proposal.

The occupation could have continued longer - with growing embarrassment and heavy financial loss for the bosses (and possibly better terms for resuming production at Kirkby) - if the workers themselves had decided both the terms and form of the eventual settlement. On the other hand we cannot be callous about the sufferings of workers and their families in a long drawn out struggle. At this stage in the development of the class struggle workers will accept compromise settlements. Growing consciousness will teach us how to win all our demands while inflicting the minimum suffering on ourselves. Suffering often results from half-hearted methods of struggle - such as failure to spread disputes by securing the support of other firms in the same combine.

That this happened may be a reflection of an inadequate participation of the rank and file in the taking of the essential decisions. This in turn could represent one of two things: either tendencies on the part of the stewards to keep the control in their own hands, or an acceptance of this

* Under New Management - The Fisher Bendix Occupation. 'Solidarity' (London) pamphlet No. 39.

state of affairs by the rank and file. Or both. The problem of rank and file consciousness is not automatically helped forward by always postulating it as being of a very high order, and merely impeded from expressing itself by various leaders. There is a genuine problem of consciousness, quite apart from the problem of how particular leaders distort that consciousness.

The Fisher-Bendix occupation was carefully planned and the plans subsequently implemented. ('Spontaneous' actions on the part of some workers during the early stages of the occupation may have influenced the situation. They did not continue to express themselves as the struggle proceeded.)

Representatives of the workers consulted workers and stewards at U.C.S., Plessey's and Mold before formulating their plans. These included selecting the best time to carry out the occupation, i.e. while the 'negotiations' with the employers were actually proceeding. There was also consultation with the staff of the Admin Block, to coordinate the occupation of the Admin Block by the staff workers themselves.

The march from the factory floor to the Boardroom (where the negotiations were going on) proceeded via the place where the master keys were kept. A mass meeting was called as soon as the employers had been forced to leave. Plans to secure control over entry into the plant were immediately put into effect. Security measures were organised. The press and T.V. had been alerted (before the occupation took place) to obtain maximum publicity. Contact with other factories belonging to the Thorn combine, of which Fisher-Bendix was a part, was ensured.

Many committees were created to deal with various aspects of the occupation (amenities, attendance rotas for security duties, etc.). Some may have been excessively controlled by the leading stewards, but if this was the case we have no information concerning resistance to this state of affairs. The canteen was taken over and run by the workers.

Let us now deal with some of the positive aspects. At the earliest opportunity the workers and stewards organised a raid on premises at Moor-gate Road, some distance from the factory, to take over stores which might otherwise have been used to the employers' advantage. This was an 'illegal' act, which was not shirked for that reason. Another decision of importance was that mass meetings of those occupying the plant would be open to wives, husbands, children and other relatives not working at Fisher-Bendix. In the words of an informant: 'aren't they all in the struggle?'.

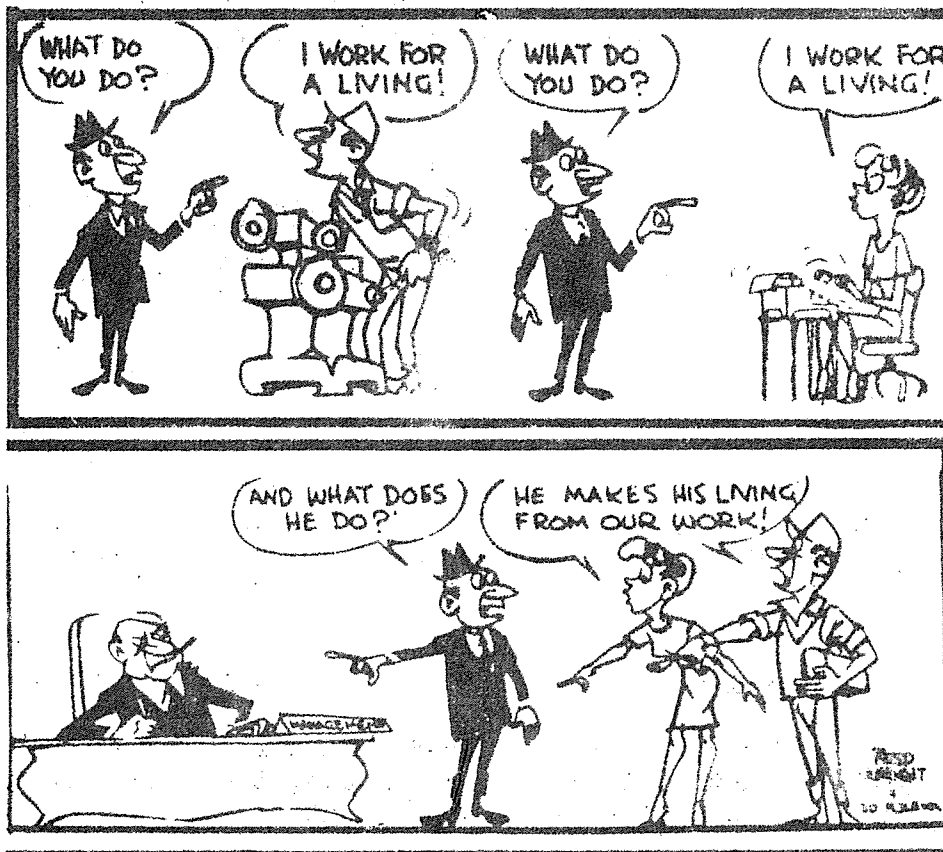
Even if the mass meetings did not come up to expectations, it was nonetheless an important initiative, to be considered in all future struggles.

If at the end of the day the Fisher-Bendix workers returned to work on conditions which did not meet all their demands, they did succeed in gaining a respite on the question of closure. But there were strings to

this particular package. One of the main questions raised by the terms of the return to work was the question of the politics of the shop stewards committee. There can be no vacuum at this level.

J. J.

Postscript. Since this article was written there have been further developments, most of them bad. The ownership of the firm has been transferred to a new holding company 'International Property Development'. In exchange for transfer fees (of up to £300, tax free, for a worker employed at Fisher-Bendix for 8 years or more) a mass meeting on Monday, March 20 unanimously endorsed a new agreement which included a 'no strike' clause and no resistance to reorganisation. The present work force would be kept on (on a week-off, week-on basis). The firm promised to 'do its best' to obtain full-time work for 750 workers by September.



WHOSE RIGHT TO SELF DETERMINATION?

Most contemporary revolutionaries take it for granted that the 'right to national self-determination' is a progressive demand. We see them waving Viet Cong flags or proclaiming their 'full solidarity with the I.R.A.'. They seem to believe that 'the enemies of my enemies must necessarily be my friends', forgetting in the process the fundamentals of class politics.

This article urges a return to a principled internationalism. It will doubtless annoy those who believe 'activity' can proceed without previous thought as to where one wants to go. As for us, 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.

Why further discussion on the national problem? Anyone familiar with the voluminous literature on this issue over the last century ought to ask himself this question. First there was the Marx-Proudhon controversy over the national struggle of the Poles. Then came Marx's conflicting views on the Irish question. At the turn of the century we have the Lenin-Luxemburg controversy on the question of self-determination for the Poles in particular, and for oppressed national minorities in general.

These are merely the better known writings on the subject. Hundreds of lesser known pamphlets and articles have circulated in every revolutionary organisation throughout the world. And if despite all this there is still a sufficient readership in the movement to justify the publication of another text on this subject, it can only mean that what has been said in the past failed to provide a satisfying answer.

The reason for the uneasiness felt by many revolutionary socialists concerning the national question is not hard to discern. Every revolutionary socialist, including those who uphold the right to self-determination on a national basis, agreed that nationalism was a bourgeois ideology. Its modern form, which has been an active political force over the last 150 years, was born with the bourgeoisie and serves its political, economic and social interests. It is also agreed in the revolutionary left that the struggle against national discrimination, oppression and persecution is an integral part of the struggle for socialism. The differences were over the principle of the right of the persecuted minority to establish an independent nation-state.

The demand to establish an independent nation-state was a banner under which masses of people were mobilised to struggle against oppression. Anyone who remained silent on this issue, or opposed this demand (for whatever reason) antagonised broad masses of people, mostly workers and peasants, who were sincerely struggling against oppression. These struggles however were never struggles for abolishing national discrimination as such.

Most of them were motivated by the belief that 'minority persecution is inherent in human nature'. They aimed at creating separate nation-states in which the persecuted minority would become the majority. They did not aim to oppress other minorities, they merely aimed at establishing their own nationality as the dominant one. That is why all national liberation movements always demanded separation (to separate them from the national group which constituted the majority) and political independence (to enable them to establish a political, economic and legal system that would safeguard their national majority and their privileges).

No struggle waged under the banner of national liberation ever created a regime which abolished national discrimination. All these struggles merely transformed a discriminated minority into a discriminating majority. To be sure, these struggles also had broader repercussions. They weakened the particular imperialist power against which they were directed, whether it was the Poles struggling against Tsarism, the Greeks against the Ottoman Empire, the Irish against British imperialism, or the Indonesians against Dutch rule. But this weakening of the political grip of an imperial power was made under the banner of the bourgeois ideology of nationalism, which explicitly demands the subordination of class interests to national (i.e. bourgeois) interest.

This has contributed to the entrenchment of regimes deeply permeated by nationalistic ideology. In the last 25 years millions of people in Asia and Africa waged struggles against imperialism and for self-determination, yet wherever the demand for self-determination was dominated by nationalist ideology the struggle produced regimes opposed to social revolution. To argue that this is a 'necessary phase' in the development towards social revolution is to seek cover behind a grand scheme of 'historical necessity'.

What is necessary and what is not necessary in history? Was the emergence of Pilsudski's Poland and of Mannerheim's Finland a 'historical necessity'? Was de Valeira's Ireland a 'historical necessity'? Is an independent state of Black Americans, inside or outside the USA, a 'historical necessity'? Is a Jewish state in the Middle East a 'historical necessity'? Was Castro's victory in Cuba a 'historical necessity'? Was Mao's victory over Chiang-Kai-Chek a 'historical necessity'? Is the role of revolutionaries merely to hasten the realisation of what is anyway a 'historical necessity'? Was May 1968 in France - and its political aftermath - a 'historical necessity'? And if so why did those who think so not foresee this historical necessity, say, in April 1968? Let those who mobilise the argument of 'historical necessity' in defence of their policies go on acting as a passive midwife to an active historical process. We prefer to play the role of begetter. To each his rationalisation and to each his reward.

It has been argued - defensively - by Lenin and his followers, that 'recognition of the right of nations to separation does not contradict

propaganda against separation by marxists of the oppressed nation, just as the recognition of the right to divorce does not contradict propaganda, in this or that case, against divorce'. 'To accuse the supporters of the right to self-determination (i.e. the right to separation) of advocating separation is the same stupidity and hypocrisy as to accuse the supporters of the right to divorce of the destruction of family relations...' (Lenin, 'On the right of nations to self-determination')

This analogy between the right to divorce and the right to self-determination on a national basis, which is brought up repeatedly by Leninists, is misleading and obscures the issue. The right to divorce is a right to dissolve a relationship. It makes no reference to the situation of the divorcee after the divorce. The right of self-determination based on nationality emphasizes precisely the acceptance of a particular mode of political existence after the separation.

We do not argue that Lenin and his supporters accepted nationalism. We are fully aware that their insistence on supporting the principle of the right of nations to self-determination was motivated by their belief that this policy would help overcome the nationalism of the oppressed people and help win them over to internationalism and revolutionary socialism. The question is (judging today and with the wisdom of hindsight), was this policy right or wrong? What did it in fact help to bring about? Were its expectations justified? Or were they refuted? And concerning the recent past and the emergence of independent nation-states in Asia and Africa, from Pakistan to Nigeria and from Cyprus to Ceylon, does the support which the revolutionary left gave to the right of nations to self-determination not imply a certain responsibility for what these states turned out to be, when they finally won the struggle? Not only in terms of their internal policies but also in terms of their role in international politics.

Let us clarify our criticism to forestall easy misinterpretations. We distinguish between the struggle against national discrimination and the struggle for political independence based on nationality. The first is part of the struggle for a new society which has abolished all discrimination. The second is part of the struggle to change roles within the framework of existing society. It is often said that such abstract arguments are meaningless unless they are applied to an actual, concrete case. We accept that. And yet there are issues like racial or religious discrimination where no concrete struggle will ever make a revolutionary socialist uphold the principle of right to self-determination based on religion or race. Under what concrete circumstances would a revolutionary uphold the demand of a religious or racial persecuted minority to establish an independent state based on its religion or race?

It goes without saying that every revolutionary must struggle against religious and racial discrimination. But here the struggle against does not imply upholding the right for the establishing of a political system based on the race or religion of the persecuted.

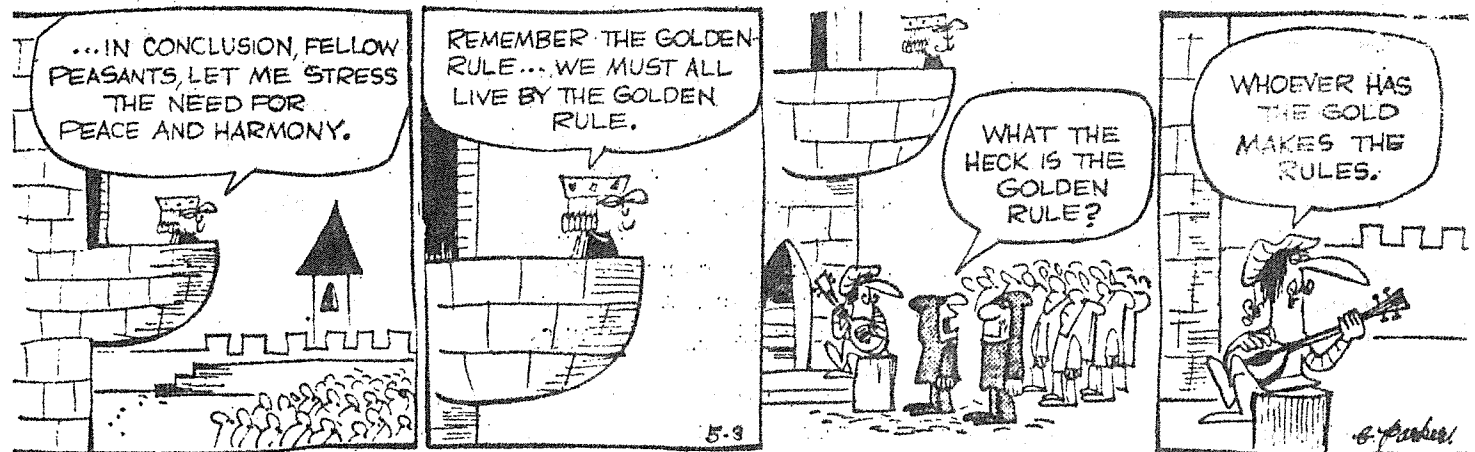
Revolutionary socialists accept the policy of 'separation of religion from the state' and 'separation of race from the state'. Why then do many of them refuse to accept the formula of 'separation of nationality from the state'? This last formula, by the way, is effective against both the nationalism of the oppressor and against the (understandable) nationalism of the oppressed.

We do not consider these two to be symmetrical political forces. But while struggling against the oppressing nationalism, we must not advocate the right of self-determination based on nationality. To uphold this as an inalienable 'right' is to make a major concession to the dominant ideology, to accept its legitimacy.

Revolutionaries might decide, as a matter of political tactics, to support a struggle for self-determination waged by a persecuted national minority. But when it comes to advocating a right they ought to advocate one right only: the right of workers councils to self-determination. In the 1970's any deviation from this principle, any acceptance of 'rights of nations', 'national interest', etc. by revolutionaries is tantamount to capitulating to the national bourgeoisie or to the political bureaucracy. This is the lesson we can learn from what upholding the principle of the right of nations to self-determination has meant over the last 70 years.

A. Orr.

Postscript. The above article is based on one which appeared in the May-August 1971 issue of the French journal 'Partisans'. We are pleased to reprint it as a contribution to a wider discussion on the nature of nationalism in the modern world.



THESES ON NORTHERN IRELAND

Over the last 2 years we have published a series of short pieces on Ireland (see 'Solidarity' V,11; VI,1,9,11,12). These have aired various viewpoints but have not attempted any deeper analysis. The following article by two Aberdeen comrades seeks to get to grips with some fundamentals. It was written before the recent suspension of Stormont. 'Solidarity' (London) endorses their main conclusions.

'The main enemy is always in your own country' (Karl Liebknecht). The Irish events have unmasked our own ruling class more thoroughly than would have been thought possible 2 years ago. Tear gas has been used against civilians, despite the Home Secretary's reassurances of July 1968. Thousands have been arrested and detained without trial (so much for their 'Habeas Corpus'). Torture has been sanctioned by the highest authorities in the land. Troops have shot down and killed civilians. And the Special Branch has raided homes in the U.K. in the early hours of the morning in search of background political information. The myth that we live in a liberal democracy has taken some hard knocks. All the more reason why we shouldn't succumb to other myths - or line up behind other rulers.

The latest tragedy in Londonderry, when 13 people were shot dead by the Army, makes it even more difficult than before to discuss the Northern Ireland situation in rational terms. Of course, it is a clear demonstration and a warning to us all of how brutal the forces of the British State are prepared to be. The Government, which maintains the Army, is directly responsible for these 13 deaths.

At the same time they are not the only murderers. Just before Xmas a bomb exploding in a Belfast furniture shop killed four people, including a few-months old baby and a 2-year old child. We do not propose to get hysterical over this and similar I.R.A. 'outrages'. But it has to be recognised that BOTH sides seek a military solution: both seek to impose their will on a minority. (They draw their own boundaries to ensure that their opponents are the minority.) The violence of each side encourages the violence of the other and increases the hysterical commitment to 'one's own' solution.

All those - including recruit-hungry Bolsheviks - who encourage the Nationalist backwardness of both sides are partly to blame for the mounting death toll.

NATIONALISM AND INDEPENDENCE

1. During the rise first of commercial, then of industrial capitalism in Britain all the peripheral areas suffered relative social and economic stagnation. The two most peripheral areas - the Highlands of Scotland and the south and west of Ireland (the 26 counties) - suffered most from being 'left behind'. Each experienced alternations of mass starvation and ferocious repression.

In the case of the 26 counties, a QUALITATIVE difference existed. Over 90% of the population was Roman Catholic. The Church, rich, hierarchically structured, and very self-righteous had a firm hold over the minds of most of the people and could thus compete for political power with the British ruling class.

2. The 19th century saw the development of active nationalism. The Victorian ruling class developed its own brand: 'jingoism'. They succeeded in convincing a major part of the working class that they too were the beneficiaries of Imperialism.

In the 26 counties, where few 'benefits' were obvious, the rulers were less successful in imposing their brand of nationalism. Here, Catholic politicians, clerical and secular, succeeded in implanting their specifically Irish form of nationalism. In Ulster, there was a reaction to the reaction. The Orange bourgeoisie developed a brand of anti-republican jingoism, which outdid the 'imperial' brand in loyalty to King and Country. From the start, the rival nationalisms fostered each other and excluded the growth of any real alternative.

3. After the First World War many ordinary Irish people made great sacrifices - often of their lives - to win 'independence'. The power of nationalist ideology was so strong that most of them saw the establishment of any kind of Dublin-based regime as an advance. In the event, the only beneficiaries of all the effort and sacrifice were the local Catholic hierarchy and bourgeoisie, who had played little part in the struggle. None of the real needs of the people on housing, jobs, etc, were met. Indeed, the new republic soon established itself as one of the most reactionary states of Europe, legislating all the facets of Catholic bigotry on education, divorce, contraception and censorship.

4. In predominantly (65%) Protestant Ulster, the threat of military force by the Orange bourgeoisie, backed enthusiastically by the working class, forced the retention of this area in Britain. This development was useful to both sides. In the North, the ruling class could keep the workers in check by holding out the prospect of a 'Fenian' invasion. The new rulers in the South could blame all the ills of their republic on the retention of the 6 counties by Britain. These essential aspects of the situation remain with us today.

THE SOCIALISTS YESTERDAY AND TODAY

5. Throughout, most of the socialists supported nationalism and many were among the most active fighters for independence. This was very significant as the prestige of the socialists around Connolly and Larkin, leaders of the Irish T.G.W.U., was high among the working class. The union had done good work among both Protestant and Catholic workers. But the nationalist leanings of the socialists reinforced their enemies. The socialist ideas and demands were completely smothered. To the Catholic worker, the nationalist commitment of the socialists put them in the consensus of opinion with the local employer and priest. To the Protestant, it made credible the Orange leaders' dismissal of socialism as a Papist plot. Thus the socialists lost all influence over the situation in both parts of Ireland. The importance of the industrial struggle was entirely lost. Significantly, the socialists, who had played an important role in the General Strike in Dublin in 1917, had become so immersed in the struggle for independence that they played no role in the (largely Protestant) General Strike in Belfast in 1919.
 6. Whatever excuses there may have been for Connolly's generation of socialists, these do not exist today. An independent Irish republic, which falls ever further behind the rest of Europe, is there as an object lesson. Yet today we find people calling themselves socialists who advocate as loudly as ever the nationalist nostrums on the problems of Ireland. For this there are two main reasons - one opportunistic, the other founded on confusion.
 7. For the more opportunistic groups, the real aim is recruitment. They pose as defenders of the Catholics in Northern Ireland and impress the more simple-minded in Britain with the level of their revolutionary rhetoric. By pandering to nationalism and blind militancy it may be possible to recruit enough members (who can then be 'politicised') to justify the exercise. This attitude is exemplified by 'International Socialism'.
- The more naive groups, of which the International Marxist Group is possibly an exemplar, are sincere in their reactionary stance. They believe in nationalist solutions for Ireland - but not for Scotland, or even for Formosa, with 14 million people! For them the struggle is for 'national liberation', nationalism representing a 'progressive force'. By a sleight-of-hand identification, a small, ineffective revolutionary group is made to feel part of a large, effective, progressive force. Historically, the practice of supporting 'progressive' forces has led to socialists being implicated in the establishment of the most ferociously reactionary

regimes. Hoping to seize the reins of power, they are often pushed from the vehicle and crushed under its wheels.*

To the utterly mindless, the appeal of violence is paramount. The spectacle of disorder presented by the media looks like the REAL THING. The facile equation 'Bogside - Clydeside' springs from their 'angry' mind.

NORTHERN IRELAND TODAY

8. In Northern Ireland the working class is bitterly divided by the events of the past 3 years, whose outline is well known. There has been a massive regression to active nationalist hysteria on both sides. The nationalist forces, such as the I.R.A. and the U.V.F., have emerged from the limbo of folklore to positions of real power in the respective communities in the slums of Belfast and Londonderry.

In the present military situation, we accept the right of the Catholic ghettos to defend themselves against the Army or any other outside force. This does not imply any support for the provisional I.R.A., with their hierarchy of officers, their courts and savage 'sentences'. Likewise we accept the right of the Protestants to defend themselves against bombing by Republicans; a subject on which the traditional Left are conspicuously silent. The fact that socialists haven't defended the rights of working class Protestants against the I.R.A. has enhanced the influence of McKeague and the U.V.F.

9. The above position outlines and underlines the tragedy of Northern Ireland, where the backwardness of both sides reinforces itself in a downward spiral. Far from being, as has been claimed, a great threat to the British state, Ulster is, in the present political climate, about the least hopeful place for any socialist advance in Western Europe, perhaps in all of Europe.

Of course, there are a few hopeful signs.** The main one of these is the rents strike in the Catholic housing schemes. In a situation where the state may deduct payment from social security benefits, there is the possibility of a discussion developing about the lack of housing in Ulster (while high unemployment persists), and about rents and property rights,

* For a fuller discussion of this point see 'Third Worldism or Socialism' in 'Theses on the Chinese Revolution' (Solidarity Aberdeen Pamphlet No.2)

** A discussion of the 'Crisis of Modern Society' in Ulster starts in Solidarity (London), vol.VI, no.9 with 'Occupied Ireland'.

etc. Similarly, the fact that Protestant workers have been involved in campaigns on unemployment and against the Industrial Relations Act (the Tory I.R.A.?) shows that their 'Britishness' does not exclude class consciousness.

10. However there is no place for euphoria. For some time the 90% Protestant workforce of Harland and Wolff remained physically non-involved in the sectarianism, following in this the policy advocated by their shop stewards. With the Provisionals' policy of bombing pubs and shops in Protestant areas, this changed. Recently, the Islandmen held a token strike and marched to hear Paisley calling for a 'third force' - i.e. a revival of the B-specials.

To see this strike as any more reactionary than than which followed the shooting of Civil Rights demonstrators in Londonderry, where Catholic workers were involved, is not valid. Outrage against Unionist 'extremism' is, in the last analysis, motivated by a nationalism as virulent as that of the Orangemen.

11. Much is made of the reactionary nature of the Orange culture, with its devotion to the Monarchy, the Flag, etc. Are we seriously to prefer the 'alternative'? Is the man kneeling at the confessional more 'progressive' than the man saluting the Union Jack? If a choice is to be made, surely there is more excuse for the Orangeman, since according to the traditional criteria the British state is more 'progressive' - freer, gives more to both its workers and its claimants - than the Republic? But the choice between false alternatives is not one which is forced upon us. We utterly reject it.

12. Most pathetic of all are the twin beliefs of the Left that the ruling classes cannot extricate themselves from the situation, and that only the working class can achieve Irish unity. Memories are short, or perhaps selective. No less a man than Connolly said the same of Independence, but nothing has been learned from the appalling results of this.

In fact, the British bourgeoisie is quite prepared to abandon anyone so long as its investments are safe, as they are today in Eire, where British investment now exceeds that in Ulster. This could be confirmed by first the White, then the Asian 'British' citizens of Kenya. Already some sections of the ruling class would like to leave someone else to clear up the political mess in Ulster.

This sort of 'Irish unity' would be to everyone's benefit, except that of the working class. Even the Trad Revs would have a new minority (the Prods) to defend. Will we yet see the Orange Lily fly beside the red clenched fist on Derry's walls?

PERSPECTIVES

13. People in Ulster face real problems: unemployment nearing 10%, the chronic housing situation and the general low pay and lack of opportunity which characterises the more backward areas of capitalism. From the beginning, socialists should have been involved mainly in these areas, where lie the real and obvious needs of the working class, Orange and Green. The orientation of activity towards 'civil rights' was a tragic mistake, which has had consequences predictable in form but hardly in ferocity. Three years of activity have seen no gains - even the spurious reforms have not been operated. Even if we count recruitment to the Trad Revs as a 'gain', this is more than cancelled out by the disastrous results discussed above.
14. In this situation the spreading of consciousness and the development of ideas about workers' power are much more difficult than in 1968 - difficult though it was then. But socialists must now re-direct themselves to these key areas of work, advocating the ideas of autonomous struggle and self-management and making no concessions to false consciousness. The basis is there, in the struggles taking place in industry and over housing and in the new industrial tactics starting to be used in Britain and elsewhere.
- Even the negative aspects of the prevailing nationalism could be turned to some good account if each section of the exploited were encouraged to broaden its rejection of the 'enemy' regime, republican or Unionist, into total opposition to class society as such.
15. A political programme such as this need only be stated to be seen as having little chance of acceptance by even small numbers of people in Northern Ireland - or Eire for that matter. But to present any other, to try to ingratiate oneself with one section or another by supporting their illusions, can only lead to tacit acceptance and repetition of the tragedies of the past 50 years. We do not expect Bolsheviks to learn anything from such mundanities as historical evidence, but for Libertarians the application of the lessons of history, however unpalatable, is an absolute obligation.

Ian Mitchell.
Norman Miller.

ORGANISING BURTONS

This article is about the struggle at a small isolated depot - the sort of place which is often ignored, although hundreds of thousands of workers work in them.

One of the underlying themes of the article is the fragmentation of the working class: in this case the divisions between drivers and warehousemen, and between men at Wakefield and those at Blackpool, employed by the same firm. Not only are workers employed by Burtons not yet united, but Burtons is only part of the giant Associated British Foods, the Garfield Weston Group, which includes Allied Bakeries, Sunblest and Finefare to name but a few subsidiaries. ABF employs 77,000 workers in Britain alone (107,000 in the world) and has annual sales of £407 million. Their profits in 1971 were £26 million. Anyone interested in contributing towards the development of job organisation and rank-and-file links in this huge combine should write to us: c/o 27 Sandringham Road, London N W 11.

I have been a member of the TGWU since I joined the firm of Burtons Biscuits as a delivery driver in January, 1969. The shop steward we had was a dead loss. He saw his position as an opportunity to boost his status by hob-nobbing with the depot manager. The men soon became disenchanted with him. He then left the job, and as there was no one else to fill his place, I said that I would give it a try. After about three months I was elected as official Shop Steward.

The Company have a number of factories and depots around the country. The distribution depot at Wakefield, where I work, employs about 22 drivers, and 28 warehouse, office and garage workers. The drivers and warehouse workers are all T & G W U members and the office staff are in GCTS (a section of the T&GWU). Some of these are reluctant members, others are merely apathetic. The drivers stand solidly behind one another in times of trouble, but the rest are more or less afraid to do anything of which the management disapproves. This situation can be difficult when we have to abide by a majority decision since the warehousemen can out-vote the drivers, although we have usually found some way around this.

The Company has always pursued a policy of 'divide and conquer', and I quickly learnt that when it came to wage negotiations there were none. Each depot or factory is separately told what they are going to get. Each one is offered just as much as the Company think is necessary to get

the men there to continue working without giving any trouble. The result is that the rates vary widely from one depot to another.

The Wakefield Depot found out that it was closely linked with Blackpool, where the Head offices are. Blackpool had received a pay award in 1970 which was not offered to Wakefield. I found this out from the long distance trunker drivers who make daily deliveries to our depot. We held a stoppage until the Managing Director promised that, in future, Wakefield could join Blackpool in negotiating wages and conditions. We thought that this was the end of our troubles.

I tried to get in touch with the Blackpool shop stewards with the idea of forming a Joint Committee but they were not interested. Two other depots that I contacted made no reply. Over the months we became accustomed to working things out alone, I found that I was at least gaining some experience in the day-to-day work of a shop steward.

When it became necessary to hold a heavy goods vehicle licence in order to drive our vans, we decided to follow the example of more militant drivers in the Midlands, and demanded a rise of £2.50 per week for holding such a licence. We then learned that the Brierley Hill Depot of Burtons Biscuits had already won the rise, after some trouble. This strengthened our claim and we again approached Blackpool with a view to putting on a bit of joint pressure.

We then informed the company of our decision. They called a meeting at Blackpool with representatives from Wakefield and Blackpool. The management offered £2.00 and although we opposed it, Blackpool voted to accept and we were out-voted. However, we did persuade the firm to pay £2.50 and knock the extra 50P off the attendance allowance which is paid on a daily basis. When we asked that this be written into our agreement the management refused, murmuring about trust, etc. Blackpool once again out-voted us so we had to be satisfied with that for the time being.

I was becoming increasingly aware that if we were to get anywhere in improving our lot, we would have to negotiate in our own right. I also felt that it would be beneficial to all concerned if we could have a national agreement on basic rates, and local agreements for special circumstances. The Company did not take kindly to this line of reasoning. We were kept waiting until September, 1971, when the next pay rise was due.

On September 22, 1971, Mr Cairns who had been appointed 'official negotiator' arrived at our depot. He offered a rise of 50P which we turned down. He had no power to negotiate anything and was merely the errand boy carrying the management's ultimatum. It transpired that Blackpool had accepted the offer after being told the firm would close down, and open up elsewhere, throwing them and all the rest of the bakery workers out of work. Blackpool swallowed this, hook, line and sinker. They even got in touch with us saying that we should also accept the 50P as things were in such a bad way, that all the lot would close down if we refused. We did not believe this bluff and turned the offer down.

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At this point I began to see that we could use this situation to our advantage. Realising that Cairns would not be able to negotiate with me I said we would call in an official Union negotiator. As the firm officially recognises the Union, Cairns could not refuse this and it would establish that we at Wakefield could negotiate for ourselves.

On Tuesday, September 30, there was a meeting between Davey (from the Union office), Cairns (from the management) and myself. We made some counter-proposals and made it clear that we would want negotiating rights in the future. Cairns was still unable to say 'yes' or 'no' and had to take the proposals back to his Board of Directors.

On Wednesday, October 20, Cairns arrived with an offer for the warehouse. Here I should explain that the Blackpool warehouse and bakery workers are members of the Bakers Union, and that our warehouse (while being T&GWU members) have agreed to accept the same pay increases as the Blackpool workers. Once again the Blackpool men accepted the management's offer.

That evening one or two of our more naive brother drivers went out with Cairns for a drink. Cairns deviously suggested that if our drivers did not also accept the Company's offer the depot would be closed down, as the Board was not prepared to consider any further increases. These drivers reported this to me the next day. After a meeting it was decided that we should stop the job until the matter was cleared up.

Cairns was obviously trying to blackmail us and he should have told the official negotiators about the Board plan to close the depot before discussing it openly in a public place. The manager immediately informed Blackpool, who despatched yet another "diplomat". We contacted the Union office and passed on the news. After much argument it was decided that we should resume work provided that our negotiations could continue the following week.

We banned all overtime and said we had no confidence in Cairns and demanded another negotiator. The company were not happy about this but we arranged a meeting for Tuesday, October 26, with the new negotiator, a Mr Guy, (the Managing Director of Burtons, Edinburgh) which was no more successful than the others. He threatened us with closure if we did not accept the offer. When we decided to strike from the following Monday, he pinned up a notice stating that the drivers were the cause of the other workers receiving seven days notice. There followed a battle of words. Guy left taking our rejection back to the management.

All hell broke loose the following day. The warehouse workers, frightened of losing their jobs, turned on the drivers for 'selling their workmates down the river'. Several times they almost came to blows. The garage and office staff were just as bitter. The rows lasted all day. Then I heard that the biscuits were to be shipped out, and sure enough trunckers began to move the goods. I went to see the night shift workers and asked them not to load the trunckers but they refused, saying that the drivers were greedy swine and that I was a Communist. The day shift and the garage and office workers also refused to help us.

I contacted Northcliffe who contacted the Brierley Hill depot, and they promised that nothing would move in the Midlands. I then contacted Davey of the T&GWU who told workers at Transhield (a transport company) that non-union drivers from Edinburgh would be delivering biscuits (for Marks and Spencers) which usually come through the Wakefield Depot. Transhield workers said they would black all Burtons Biscuits.

We were trying to get in touch with the other Burton depots, when the management backed down, and a Mr Beckett arrived to say that the depot would remain open. When we took the vote to start the strike there were 12 for and 6 against, one was absent and the other 3 were away on the job. The tension eased and the anger and bitterness in the warehouse was abated, once the men knew their jobs were safe. During this time only one driver wavered in his determination to see it through. Friday brought a suggestion from the management that we take the dispute to the Department of Employment. We refused, so they suggested an independent chairman of our choice. We agreed and suggested two names. It was decided to have a meeting at Leeds, on Wednesday, November 3.

This meeting took place with several union and management representatives and myself in attendance. The Board were unhappy about the choice of Chairman so we contacted the Department of Employment Conciliation Officer who said the Department of Employment were reluctant to handle it. They said they would have to get permission elsewhere and would let us know. The meeting continued and it was agreed that any increase would be back-dated to November 11. The Department of Employment refused to handle the claim. This time the Company accepted the Chairman we had first proposed.

A further meeting was held at Leeds on Tuesday, November 9. Arrangements were made for the procedural agreement, etc., to be drawn up. After expending a lot of hot air we reached a compromise on the pay rise, which I considered to be the best we could achieve. The company's proposals were put to the drivers who accepted them.

The bad feelings engendered by our actions over the past period will, no doubt, last for some time to come. Some of the drivers would not be sorry about this, but in my opinion we should all try to convert the dissenters to our way of thinking, so that if the time comes for another confrontation, the whole depot will stand solidly together, and support each other. If we cannot achieve this solidarity, we will again be placed in the same position. Fragmentation of the workers is the best thing possible - from the management's point of view. It is the worst thing possible from the workers' angle. I do not believe that either a strike, or any other real action can be sustained when there is such fragmentation.

It is up to all of us, who believe in the right of workers to wring every possible advantage out of management, in whatever way possible, to convince our fellow workers that we must unite, and bring our collective strength to bear.

W. Hodgson.

Since writing this we have been in touch with shop stewards at Slough who are trying to organise Burton depots at Bishops Stortford and Colnbrook. We are also trying to establish contact with a depot at Llantarnum, Wales. The link with Slough is one step in the right direction. They have now also been successful in winning £2.50 H.G.V. money.

BURTON'S GOLD MEDAL BISCUITS (WAKEFIELD DEPOT)

DRIVERS

WAREHOUSE MEN

(40 hours basic)

Prior to last rise

40 hours basic	£20.00	Loader	£17.75
2½ hours guaranteed overtime	£1.88	Forklift	£18.75
Attendance bonus	£1.25	Checker	£19.25
Total	£23.13		

Current wages (January 1972)

40 hours basic	£22.20	Loader	£19.75
2½ hours guaranteed overtime	£2.08	Forklift	£20.95
H.G.V.	£2.50	Checker	£21.55
Total	£26.78		

Our latest pamphlet WORKERS COUNCILS and the ECONOMICS of SELF-MANAGEMENT is now out. It costs 25 pence (+ 6p. postage), and deals with the question we are all often confronted with, namely 'what kind of alternative society do you envisage? Here, at the level of the economy, some suggestions are put forward.

The pamphlet has been sent to a number of subscribers (being counted as the equivalent of 6 issues of the paper). If you are a subscriber and have not received it, this means your subscription would not have run to another 6 issues. If you still want the pamphlet, please either top up your sub. or order the pamphlet directly from us.

BSSRS Conference

On March 11 and 12 a most interesting Conference, sponsored by the British Society for Social Responsibility in Science (BSSRS), was held in the Holborn Assembly Hall, London. Its theme was 'Workers' self-management in science'. Over 100 people participated, from universities, research institutes, hospitals, and a few workers from science-based industry.

The aims of the conference were to analyse the role of science and technology in reinforcing the values, priorities and structure of the existing society, to discuss control of science by the people, and to explore the possibilities of scientists acting together, and with others, at their place of work, to change the structure of scientific work as part of a broader objective of changing society.

Subjects such as 'alienated work and alienated life', 'mental and manual labour', 'deference and expertise', and 'science as the ideology of power' were discussed, which made an interesting difference from the usual 'scientific' gathering.

There was controversy as to the viability of islands of self-management embedded in the general economic structure and value system of the class societies of East and West. Participants pointed to the negative experiences of isolated 'self-managed' enterprises in the West, or of allegedly self-managed countries, such as Yugoslavia.

There was a growing awareness among those present that for too long scientists had considered their politics as something separate from their lives. In the past 'committed' scientists had considered politics as something that took place outside of their work. They would belong to some vanguard party which believed it embodied 'scientific' socialism. Some saw themselves as the 'vehicles of science' bringing 'socialist consciousness' to the masses in the best Lenin-Kautsky manner.

The conference epitomised the transcending of these conceptions. Scientists are becoming aware of the role of science in underpinning the dominant ideology and of the need of a critique at this level, as well as at all others. They are also realising the need to challenge the hierarchical structures and relationships in those very institutions in which they spend the major part of their working lives.

The sense of isolation - from which many scientists suffer - was partly overcome, as they discovered the existence of like-thinking comrades in other scientific institutions. Many useful contacts were made. All those interested in this work should contact B.S.S.R.S., 70 Great Russell Street, London WC1. (01-242-8535).

about ourselves

We have produced 2 new pamphlets since our last issue. The first ('UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT - The Fisher-Bendix Occupation' by Joe Jacobs, price 5p.) deals with the important factory occupation at Kirkby, near Liverpool. It has sold widely to industrial militants and we hope that this experience will be digested and built upon in the struggles to come.

Our second pamphlet 'WORKERS COUNCILS and the Economics of a Self-Managed Society' by P. Chaulieu (25p + postage) is a translation from a 1957 text, first published in 'Socialisme ou Barbarie'. The pamphlet is without doubt one of our most important publications to date. It deals with basic problems of the organisation of a socialist society, an area largely (and ominously) ignored by the traditional left. Although written earlier than 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution', the newly-published text in a sense complements the ideas in that book. The critique of capitalism is incomplete without the positing of an alternative.

We have also produced the first of what we hope will be a series of Discussion Bulletins. In it will be found a critique (and reply) of the ideas outlined in our Pamphlet No.38 'History and Revolution'. Copies of the Bulletin are available (5p + postage) to all those interested. We hope this discussion will continue and develop.

We have also continued the killing job of keeping stocks of our material in print. The most important single recent task has been the reprinting and collating of 2000 further copies of 'The Irrational in Politics'. The first 4000 copies had gone within 18 months of production and the demand continues. People are obviously worried...

We have discussed (and before the end of the year hope to produce) three further pamphlets. These deal with the recent uprising in Ceylon and the role of the traditional left in suppressing it; with the media; and with 'Third Worldism'

SOLIDARITY (London) speakers have also addressed a number of meetings - both in London and in other parts of the country.

The London group is currently engaged in a campaign at the E.M.I. factory at Hillingdon. Substantial information about the Company's secret plans to redevelop the site and sack many workers has fallen into our possession. The response to our first two leaflets has been most warming. There is a rumpus in the local Council about meetings between the Town Clerk and E.M.I. officials to discuss the project. The Company is issuing ambiguous statements to its workers to the effect that its plans aren't quite as bad as all that.

The long delay in the production of this issue has been aggravated by a chronic technical problem: our severe shortage of skilled, committed, London-based typists. We would greatly welcome volunteers with experience of typing stencils. The elimination of this bottleneck would enable us radically to increase the tempo of production of the magazine. It would also help us in the process of gradually shifting production over to offset litho. The new pamphlet gives some idea of what could be done in this direction.

Last but not least the huge expansion of our publishing work has placed an enormous financial strain on us. Substantial amounts of our limited capital are tied up in stocks. The time is not far distant when our work will be severely hampered if we don't get a substantial injection of cash. We are therefore appealing to those in political sympathy with us to reach deep into their pockets and send us a few quid. Every penny will be acknowledged and judiciously (and gratefully) spent.

SOLIDARITY AUTONOMOUS GROUPS

CLYDESIDE : c/o Dan Kane, 43 Valeview Terrace, Dumbarton.

DUNDEE : c/o F.Browne, 1st Floor, 42 Baldovan Terrace, Dundee.

LONDON : c/o 27 Sandringham Road, London N.W.11.

NORTH WEST : c/o C.Clark, 23 Tame Walk, Colshaw Drive, Wilmslow, Cheshire

OXFORD : c/o 4 St.Barnabas Street, Oxford.

SWANSEA : c/o 16 Heatherslade Close, Oystermouth, Swansea.