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solidarity

FOR WORKERS' POWER

THE CONTINUING STRUGGLES AT

KINGSNORTH

& ABERDEEN

WORK **AN INDUSTRIAL**
MILITANT LOOKS AT HIS JOB

THE BRISTOL **OCCUPATION**

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6^D

KINGSNORTH: THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES

Since our last article on Kingsnorth the negotiations for the £46 million merger of International Combustion and Clark Chapman with John Thomson have broken down. The reasons given are that I.C.L. have incurred a £1 million loss on one of their major contracts in South East England. (Dungeoness Power Station)

Sir Humphrey Brown, chairman of the proposed new giant, made it quite clear that the first task of the reorganised management would be rationalization at site level, so that increased profits could be extracted out of the skins of workers.

Now that the negotiations have broken down temporarily it is even more vital to I.C.L. that rationalization takes place at site level in order that they may recover their declared loss. At the time of our last publication on Kingsnorth plans for the new discipline at site level were well under way.

JOB CONTROL

In modern industrial society the conflict of interests and attitudes between workers and management grows daily. The management on the one hand must continue to exercise its authority in an effort to control production, on the other hand it is dependant on the co-operation and creativity of the workers, who continue to resist authority in a variety of ways.

Because there is always this conflict of interests control in production often changes hands. A fact that is not always recognised. One of the methods used by management to extract the creativity from workers and still control production is to introduce Piece Work or Bonus Schemes. Although targets are usually negotiated jointly. It is management who determine the amount of work required to achieve the target. But usually after a period the control changes hands and its the workers who are controlling production.

Piece Work and Bonus Schemes have the effect of the carrot to the donkey. As soon as the workers are in a position to bite, the Piece Work or Bonus Scheme will be changed in order that the management may regain the initiative. Hence the increasing number of new working agreements and productivity deals, each one has its own built in discipline with which to subordinate the workers.

How then does control change hands? At Kingsnorth over the last 3 years, the workers have been promised a number of new bonus schemes. According to both management and unions each scheme was offered in the best interests of the workers. The workers are naturally suspicious of new bonus schemes and only accept them with reluctance. Within a short time their suspicions are proved correct. They have been conned.

Their reactions are slow at first, but there is a gradual decline of enthusiasm towards the work. Production is affected. This in turn produces frustration and hysteria amongst the management until an atmosphere of outright hostility exists." Then the initiative begins to change hands.

There have been many examples of this. For instance soon after Mr. Kempton came on the job as the new Resident Engineer, the Welders discovered two Foreman trying to weld a big butt and making a right old fuck up of it. If a welder had made such a mess he would have been sacked for incompetence. The Welders called a meeting immediately and it was decided to demand the removal of the two Foreman from the site, on the grounds that they were incompetant as Welders therefore incompetant to supervise, also that Engineers and Foreman must not work on the tools. Kempton, in pure desperation asked the Welders to be allowed to address the meeting (an unprecedented step). He made full apologies to the Welders and said that if they would agree to leave the question of what should be done about the two Foreman to him, he would promise to sack personally any Foreman caught in future working on the tools. The men reluctantly agreed.

But the feeling had caught on; soon after this there was another meeting with the gallery gangs; who, fed up with the incompetance of their Engineer, decided to do something about it. As a result of the meeting the Charge Hands met Kempton and demanded that their Engineer, Joe Asquith, or Holy Joe as he is better known, be removed from the job on the grounds that he was unable to read drawings or co-ordinate the work. Kempton was forced to give Holy Joe a bullocking, but of course he realized that if he gave into the workers demands by removing incompetant supervisors from the job it would only be a matter of time before the men put him under the same microscope and demanded his removal.

THE WITCH HUNT

At a mass meeting called to discuss the proposed Confederation Strike and the tactics to be adopted at Kingsnorth, for picketing and strike pay ect., Comrade Hughie Barr made a startling announcement as the meeting was drawing to a close. He offered his position as Shop Steward for election. He said that this was due to the constant criticism from people who wanted the site to go onto full overtime working and the criticism made of him in a journal called Solidarity, this tended to undermine his authority in the office. He went on to complain that had this article been published in the Chatham Standard he had no doubt that the workers would have stormed their offices. There were two other nominations for Shop Steward, but Hughie was elected unanimously. The Confed. Strike was later called off.

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- 1) Solidarity does not support the idea of people working overtime.
 - 2) If Comrade Hughie Barr's statement was meant to incite. We would point out that unlike the Communist Party we have no Giant Red Neon Lit offices. No expensive machinery and no underpaid staff. Noither do we have full time officials in the Union. We don't need them. We believe in Workers Control from the bottom up.

THE HYDRAULIC TEST

Every year on all Power Station and Gas Work contracts, there is a last minute rush to complete at least one Boiler or Unit. If the contractor can complete a Boiler and test it to the satisfaction of the G.E.C.B. in the September/October period he will get paid on the basis that the Boiler is ready for the winter load. If not he will have to wait until the following year. Some employers get a bit desperate at this time, even going so far as to create situations which will cause strikes on the basis that they can claim extra time through labour problems. Others conveniently forget all about lines of demarcation and put everything they have into trying to get a Boiler or Unit completed to meet the winter load and get paid.

I.C.L. adopted both of these tactics. Hydraulic tests were started on No.1 Boiler. The night shift Shop Steward left a note for the Day Shift Steward advising him that he believed that between the times the day shift left and the night shift came on the test pumps were being worked by electricians.

The day shift stewards went into the office to Kempton and pointed out that the Hydraulic Testing was work which is normally carried out by Pipe Fitters. Kempton stated that as far as he was concerned it was quite in order for Electricians to do this work and he did not wish to discuss the issue any further. Hughie Barr informed him that if this was his attitude he would advise the men on the job.

Hughie reported back and recommened that the men should stay in the Canteen and refuse to go out to work until the management was prepared to talk. At 11.30 that morning a mass meeting was called in the Car Park. The men were informed that the management had now agreed to stop the Electricians working the Pumps in future. Hughie also reported that he had demanded that all men should be paid the two hours lost through the Sit-in. But the management had refused.

It was decided that Hughie would go back to the management and inform them that unless the two hours was paid and a written guarantee was given that no Engineer or Foreman would be allowed to work on the tools or to carry out any work normally carried out by a worker they would have a token strike for the rest of the day.

The Shop Stewards came out of the office half an hour later and reported back that the management had completely capitulated and would pay the two hours lost and a written guarantee was read out. It was accepted and the men went back to the canteen for dinner.

Evidently all the workers had been informed of this guarantee but not the supervision. After dinner as the majority of the men walked over to the Boiler they had to pass the Pumps that had been in dispute. The Pumps were being manned by an Engineer and two Foreman and they had been operating them all morning. About 300 men began to gather round them jeering and booing. Two or three individuals informed them of Kemptons statement and guarantee which they ignored saying that they were carrying out orders.

The men began throwing belts, tin cans and lagging at them, others climbed up onto the steel work overhead and poured water and piss down onto them. This demonstration went on for about half an hour until the Engineer and Foremen eventually ran away still protesting their innocence, and finally we drifted back to our jobs.

THE GREAT CON GAME

Ten weeks ago the management accounced its intention of introducing a new bonus system. They complained that they were not getting enough production out of the old one, which was based on the individual Engineer's assessment.

The Stewards reported back that the new scheme would be accepted for a trial period of 10 weeks. When questioned about the details they stated that under the new scheme the workers would be targetted by One Bonus Engineer and that there would be a minimum fall-back rate of 13/10¹₂d per hour inclusive of hourly rate. They were questioned about other clauses in the new scheme which had leaked out, such as Clause 13, which said that in future any worker or gang who failed to achieve their target on the first day would be brought before the Bonus Engineer. If he could not be convinced that the failure to meet the target was beyond the control of the worker or gang, they would be given up to three warnings and then sacked for inefficiency. No Shop Stewards would be allowed to be present at any of these trials.

The Shop Stewards argued that as they had not signed the bonus scheme the men could ignore Clause 13. For good measure the management threw in another sprat, which was that under the new scheme everyone could work every other Sunday overtime. The new scheme was accepted for a ten-week trial period. Although the Bonus has remained pretty constant, we are paying a terrible price.

MANAGEMENT REGAINS CONTROL

Recently an Erection Charge Hand, Pat Hexton, was sacked without warning for what was described as lack of proficiency. His gang was split up and dispersed into other gangs and warned that in future they would be watched and if they didn't pull their socks up they would all be sacked. Pat Hexton was later re-employed but put to work out in the yard, on his own, as a handyman.

Two welders were sacked for bad time-keeping, but were later reinstated after three weeks' suspension. Both of these cases would have been completely unacceptable to the men in this industry in normal circumstances. How could a whole gang be accused of lack of proficiency? How can an employer demand good time-keeping on a site that is as isolated as Kingsnorth, where there is no public transport.

The management has a professional watcher or peeping tom, Homden, or Satchel race as he is better known. He seems to have one purpose in life and that is to catch someone who is not working hard enough or who is breaking the rules (their Rules). As soon as he does, the victim is sent to the

office where he is put on trial. He acts as both prosecution and executioner. Other Engineers and Foreman compete in this practise each trying to outdo the others in a bid to inflict the new discipline.

THE RETURN OF RICKY

An example of one of these trials is the case of Ricky Massam. On the 17th December D. Hunt, Engineer in charge of the Pressure Parts Section, made a number of allegations against a Fitter, Ricky Massam. The Shop Steward, Simon Julian, advised Massam of these allegations but said that they did not constitute a warning. Massam however insisted on a meeting with the Engineer. A meeting was called at 10.30 a.m. on 18th Dec. Those present were the Labour Relations Officer, the Engineer and Foreman and the AEF and H & D. Shop Stewards and the prisoner Ricky Massam.

The Engineer opened the meeting and listed the allegations as follows:-

(1) That Massam was not on his job on a number of occasions that the Engineer had visited the job. Ricky replied that as he did not have a Fitters Mate he had to fetch and carry for himself. So they could expect the best part of his day to be spent in transit between stores and other such places. He said that if the Engineer wanted to see him fitting all he had to do was supply a Fitters Mate. The Engineer mumbled that the firm was not obliged to supply mates.

(2) That Massam walked round the Power Station in the words of his Foreman "As though he owned the place". Ricky replied that this was technically true. The people of Britain do own the power stations so why shouldn't he.

(3) That Massam had sold on various occasions a journal called Solidarity on the job. Ricky replied, yes thats right, I sold you one (to the Foreman). The Foreman a little bit flustered said I don't know if it was you I brought it from it might have been. Ricky said yes I sold you a copy during my dinner break and as I don't get paid for my dinner breaks I feel at liberty to sell to anyone who wishes to buy.

(4) That not Fitters Mates would work with him. Ricky replied that he had had one mate in the 15 months he had been on the job, had he complained? No replied the Engineer, but two other mates who had never worked with him were reluctant to do so when asked.

(5) That Ricky Massam was not pulling his weight in the gang. The other Fitter who was paired with Rickey assured the Shop Stewards that Ricky did as much work as he did. The Engineer refused to accept the word of the Fitter and insisted on believing the word of the two un-named Fitters Mates. The meeting was adjourned for the bonus sheets to be sorted out.

In the afternoon the meeting was resumed, the line up was just the same except for the Erection Foreman who was an additional witness for the prosecution. The Engineer produced the Bonus Sheets, upon seeing them both Stewards challenged them on the grounds that they were not filled in correctly. So that charge was dropped.

There followed a general discussion on Ricky's work performance. The Engineer said that he had been satisfied with the prisoners work performance until recently. Since he had returned to work after an accident his performance had fallen off. The Engineer then invited the Erector Foreman to give evidence. The Foreman, Ron Scott, said that there was nucleus of men who were always late getting out of the canteen after breaks, the prisoner Ricky Massam was one of these men. The prisoner blushed and admitted that this was true, he was duly warned and left the Dock no doubt wishing everyone a Merry Syphillis and a Happy Gonhorria.

CONCLUSIONS

Since the new bonus scheme has been introduced there has been little or no increase in production, but what has happened is that the management has definately regained control of the site and is inflicting its own harsh discipline. The workers are being forced to fight a defensive battle.

The workers must remember in future that clauses in new agreements are important. It's not just the money it's the whole question of job control. When management gets control we are treated like slaves and criminals.

Whether we get paid in the form of bonus payments or flat wages is unimportant. What is important is that we maintain our normal wage expectations and at the same time maintain and extend our job control.

We in the CEU were recently taken through an abortive election where we were led to believe that all we had to do to get to the promised land was to elect another left wing leader to the office of General Secretary. Comrade Eddie Marsden said in his election address that if he was elected to office, before any new agreements were signed he would insure that there was more consultation with the rank and file. Comrade Eddie Marsden was elected. The Shell Star agreement was signed without consultation. The CEU men made history at Kelogs when acting on instructions of the Union Officials they remained at work and scabbed on the other trades on the site. What has he done or is he doing about Kingsnorth. The answer is just the same as Ernie Patterson.

As workers we can rely on ourselves, its better to have no agreements and make the rules as we go along, than to accept bad agreements which have been signed on our behalf.

It is not enough for workers to maintain good organisation at site level. What is required now is that the workers must establish real links on other sites and in other industries only in this way can struggles be co-ordinated and victories be consolidated and Workers Control become a reality.

Ernie Stanton

ABERDEEN SHIPYARD

Hall Russel's Shipyard in Aberdeen is the biggest yard on the Scottish East Coast, employing 1,000 workers. The yard builds tankers, sugar boats and trawlers, and has a full order book until at least the end of 1970.

It is also the scene of the most militant industrial action in Aberdeen, with frequent strikes winning for the workers the highest rates in the town (turners at Russel's get £18 a week compared with the £12 weekly wage for the rest of the town). The Communist Party is fairly strong, with 15 members at the yard, and has some influence on the shop stewards' committee. There are also two young anarchists, who are active on an apprentices' committee.

A full account of conditions at the yard appeared in Solidarity Scotland, Vol. 2, No. 5.*

THE RECENT STRUGGLES

At the moment, an unusual form of struggle is taking place with the management trying to get the yard out on strike. The workers are naturally resisting this provocation.

For some time, due to a bonus dispute, there has been an overtime ban at the yard, one-day token strikes every week were also proposed. As a direct result of the overtime ban, a big trawler for Hull, carrying a very heavy penalty clause, is now almost three weeks behind schedule. However, another clause in the agreement states that, if there is a strike, an extra $2\frac{1}{2}$ days - without penalty - will be given for the completion of the ship for every day lost in the strike. The employers are calculating that if they can get the yard out on strike for a week, they will automatically be given $2\frac{1}{2}$ weeks more and so get back on schedule for the completion of the ship.

The management have another reason for wanting the men out on strike. The yard has been simmering with little disputes for months now, and the shop stewards' committee was told in so many words that a strike at the yard would be welcomed by the management as it would 'take the steam out of the men'. Of course, the men can only lose in such a management-provoked strike.

But this is not all. The provocation goes on all the time. During the last weeks of December, the generators were kept running during the dinner breaks without any workers present (at least two men should be present at any time that the generators are running). One of the managers readily admitted this when questioned. Also, the apprentices are constantly being provoked by being shifted from job to job, and then always pulled up for not finishing the jobs. Garfers are using tradesmen's tools, and keep on ordering workers to infringe demarcation procedures.

*Copies are obtainable from I. Mitchell, 3 Sinclair Road, Aberdeen.
(10d a copy post free.)

A NEW TACTIC

Any of these provocations would usually cause an immediate walk-out of the men, but the workers are aware of what's on and are keeping control of the situation. They have given the gaffers the bollocking they deserve. More important, they have dropped the proposed plans for a one-day strike a week, and have adopted an ingenious substitute, which creates the same disrupted production without giving the bosses the $2\frac{1}{2}$ days per day lost that they would get in the more traditional strike. What happens is that twice a week mass 'strike' meetings are held, lasting all afternoon, at which the decision to come out on strike is never taken. In this way, production time is lost every week without an actual strike taking place, and the boat gets further behind schedule. . . .

The struggle now going on is doubly significant. Firstly, it shows the resourcefulness of the working class in defending itself and its class interests; secondly, it pinpoints the basic contradiction facing management in production. On the one hand, the bosses relegate the workers to the position of passive ordertakers, and on the other, they need constantly to solicit the workers' active participation, without which efficient production - and profit - is impossible.

Shipworker.

SOLIDARITY AND THE ABERDEEN PAPER MILLS

The last issue of Solidarity (Vol. 5, No. 6, available from H. Russell, 53A Westmoreland Road, Bromley, Kent) with an article on the Paper Mills in Aberdeen, sold well in Aberdeen itself, and one or two contacts have been made. About 45 copies were sold at each of the mills at Culter, Donside, and Mugiemoss, while over 180 copies were bought at Stoneywood, representing 10% of the workers at that mill. We got advance publicity and good will at Stoneywood through a leaflet we distributed the previous week attacking a new wages structure at the mill. While we were harrassed by security men, photographed and had our car numbers taken at Stoneywood, an encouraging feature of the struggle is the help we received in selling the issue from comrades in International Socialism, Syndicalist Workers' Federation, and the Revolutionary Socialist Students' Federation.

Solidarity (Aberdeen).

London Squatters announce : A PUBLIC MEETING to install homeless families in empty properties. Sunday 9th February, at 2 pm. Manor Park British Rail Station, Station Road, London E.12.
By train: To Manor Park by Liverpool Street-Gidea Park line.
By bus: To Manor Park by Nos 101, 25, 86 and 721 (Green Line).
By tube: To Stratford (Central Line), then BR to Manor Park.
All enquiries to R. Bailey, 128 Hainault Road, London E.11

WORK — AT WHOSE EXPENSE?

WORK — TO WHAT END?

WORK — DOES LIFE BEGIN AT 8 A.M.
OR END?

The prison I'm confined to has no walls, I am a prisoner of work (absolutely inhuman), consumption (completely irrational) and society (in which I cannot have real expression). The warders are the managers, and a horde of so called "experts", who are aided and abetted by their own bureaucracy and, of course, the trade union officials, now "safely integrated and infected with the ideas of the boss". The sentence (for millions of workers) can be for a lifetime, some of us never quite make it, we die off - the law being the survival of the fittest. I serve two masters, the employers through their "Kapos" (chargehands and foremen), and the cold mechanical track - subject to the control of slide rules and computers.

This is an account of one of the most inhuman forms of exploitation and some of its effects.

I work in a large car plant employing thousands of people. Some 75% are engaged in the actual production of vehicles: the best-selling product of the affluent consumer society. Here, they mass-produce by the most efficient methods - a series of tracks linked together under the control of computers. This is a description of just one part of the complex, the paint shop in the massive assembly building.

Conditions

Where I work the vehicles are sprayed with underseal in a special booth. Here the body shells are suspended just above the heads of the blokes who stand on platforms. My own particular job (which I had no choice but to accept) is to pull off the masking tape from underneath the body shells as they come overhead. Five of us perform this job, with one man removing the heavy masks (metal) and depositing these into a hand cart. We work immediately next to the sprayers.

The main thing about my job (one of the worst on the line) is the shit and dirt from the overspray of the sprayers' guns. Although this envelopes the whole booth in a fine spray the extractor fans do little to improve or remove the effects. The sprayers, who operate a special rota

(40 minutes on - 20 minutes off), have to be swathed like bleeding mummies, and they emerge from the booth looking like monsters from outer space. As we are adjacent to two boilers that feed the drying ovens elsewhere, the heat builds up to an unbearable extent. I've seen it averaging in the nineties in midsummer; even in winter we wear nothing bar the overalls and the muslin round our necks. Unlike the sprayers we cannot double man or operate a special rota; the management thought fit to cover our job with only normal reliefs (22½ minutes in 8 hours).

If you think the heat and shit sum up the generally miserable conditions, we have other, perhaps equally unpleasant aspects to overcome. Normal shoes in this job of course would be ruined so mostly we wear rubber boots or old shoes. As we pull off the slimy tapes covered with underseal, inevitably a certain amount finds its way onto the floor or platform instead of the sacks hung up on the wall. This accumulates on the floor with the overspray into a thick tacky mass. At the end of the shift the scene reminds us of the thick mud in a marsh. As for the bloke himself, he has to carry a scraper permanently in his pocket, which he uses to scrape off the rapidly hardening bitumen rubber from the sole of his boot. If he left it on he would be clomping about with twice the weight on his feet and the annoyance of literally having to pull the damn stuff off. As the underseal is still wet and tacky, nylon gloves have to be worn and are issued every day, but of course even they become congealed, hampering the free movement of the fingers. The above is not really helped by the fact that the body shells come straight from the last red primer drying tunnel like some continuous inferno or heater passing over you all the time.

The demand for an improvement to these physical conditions, if such improvement is possible, is only an economic demand, which would cost the guvnor money. On its own this is not really a socialist demand; it would not change the nature of work or the relations of people at work.

Effects

I have purposely left out of the description other more important points with regard to my job conditions: its effect on the individual and its effect in destroying the expression of people, i.e. the class struggle.

The most formidable and disturbing factors about my job are basically two things: the boredom of repetitive functions and the discipline - the very nature of track work itself. Ask anyone in my factory whether they really think this is the best method and whether they like doing it, the same bloody thing thirty-five times an hour, eight hours a day, five days a week, fifty weeks of the year. They'll soon vehemently give you their answer. They will even agree that you can't alter this within present concepts of production. Present reformist T U organisations of course cannot and will not answer why or what socialist alternatives there are to the lads' predicament. The following is, I hope, the articulation of millions of people, who do it through unofficial means. What's it like, and how do I feel or even react to it?

An 'Action Council Bookstall' is now operating in Rupert St., Soho (off Shaftesbury Ave.). 'Solidarity' can be obtained at the stall, which opens from 9am. onwards.

Under the first heading - the effect on the individual - we will consider mental well-being in relation to the boredom. Repetitive functions become simple to do after a very short while (they give you two hours to "work into" a job). Your sequence of movements becomes purely automatic or "mechanical", your mind slips into a void. Much as the foreman would wish it, it is impossible on a track not to "have accidents" like leaving items off or even forgetting to complete jobs. It's true when workers tell you that you can do the job "sleeping", there's nothing worse than coming out of a trance to find that you have fallen behind, or that some fucking foreman is yelling into your ear that you've left this or that job a hundred body shells back. They generously give three warnings, rather like the army. Or alternatively you could have the other extreme, that of stress due to the concentration of battling not to slip into a trance, or even to try and think of something else. Every little diversion, people passing through, crumpet, (though not surprisingly they do not let visitors round the booths), and stoppage acts like a fix to ease the torment in a bloke's mind. You pray for the relief man.

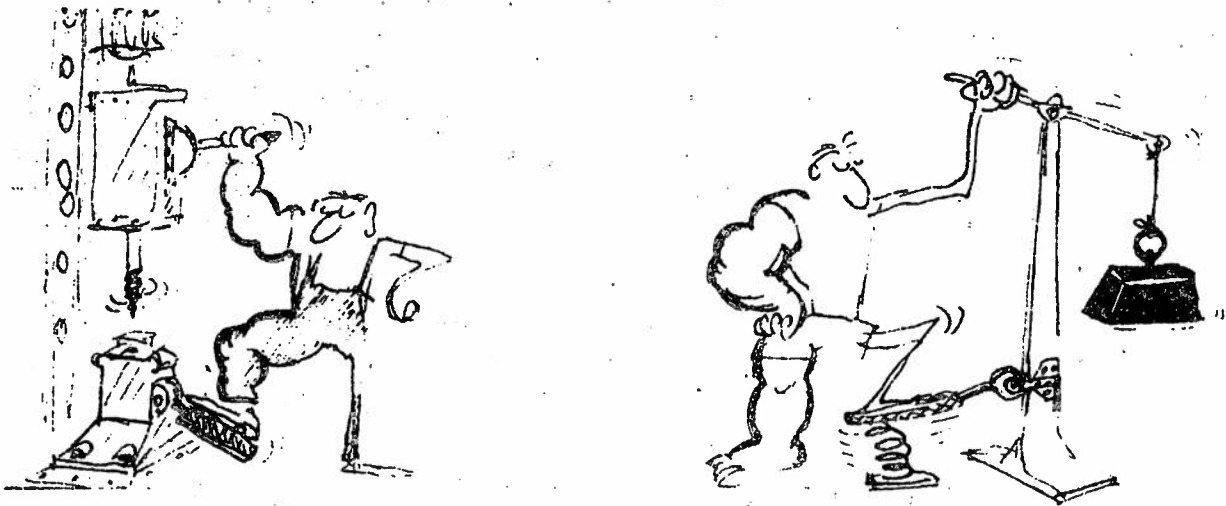
Reliefs (22 $\frac{1}{2}$ minutes a day) are like the very job itself, evaluated by the standards department. Yes, next to control, time is sacred to these bastards. When the relief man comes round, usually with a curt remark about being bloody well back on time (his time off is measured on how quickly he finishes all his reliefs), you become a human being again, thinking, talking, and moving naturally. When I hear another wretched human tell of his experience, this is the class struggle, the expression of which is constant - but at its most articulate during relief time when you're all together.

The second point is the discipline and nature of track work, and here one cannot ignore the authoritarian apparatus that maintains this through the foremen and their erstwhile functionaries. The ratio of purely supervisory staff in a car factory of this size is fantastic - they perform no useful role, but we'll discuss that later. For a start, the operation that you're given to do, and the method you will use to do it, are decided for you, but you resist this instinctively and change it to your own convenience when possible. For instance, in the underseal, we are a gang of five and we "unofficially" reallocate the component parts of jobs to spread the load. This is the consistent expression of all people in struggle. To counteract this the standards department try to break the operations down so that they can time them more easily and thus speed up the process. My own efforts, and those of my mates, to disrupt and confuse these "experts" when they time us, watch us, prod us, or survey us, etc., are sometimes exceedingly successful - one of them even gave up and went away from my station. We believe he was transferred.

If most people in industry, and outside of it, experience the fact that they have little control in decision making, they do not all experience the reality of having the tempo and quantity of work forced on them with little prospect of actually altering it except by direct action. We have been able consistently to contest track cycles, and on one occasion managed to control this through our own pressure at work and outside official channels.

Most track workers know and will verify the fact that the human body is the most unpredictable thing. In my own view it's not designed for contin-

uous slog on a barbaric or inhuman production line. Wolinski's cartoon, reproduced below, illustrates this graphically.



Tracks are no exception to the rule in the appearance of abnormalities or occupational defects. I could show you sprayers with rashes, or other people with swollen calloused hands as a result of handling masking tape for years, or those people, with arthritic-type complaints, who work on the wet rub deck in continuous contact with freezing cold or warm water. We all sustain these, no matter how slow the track runs, in spite of the constant struggle waged every day at work by millions.

It is made known to all of us on the track that we are the obedient (although at times a little unwilling) slaves of the production process. Our bodies and minds are their property, the "green-jackets" make it very plain, as does the nature of track work itself. Working on the track means carrying out fully predetermined functions with both body and mind.

My job is a typical example of how the meaning of work is completely destroyed. I don't ever see the finished product which I help to produce. I do nothing which is creative in any way, certainly the type of work surroundings give little opportunity for me to be particularly creative. Most important of all, I have no say in the general conduct of production: what should be made, what quantity, and to what use it should be put.

We are told quite openly that we are an expendable, replaceable and removable commodity. A track worker is explicitly asked, or rather told, that he is required to move his arms and legs to perform some quite ridiculous gesture. You are told that if you hasten your own self-destruction as a human being, by working harder, by cooperating, improving quality, allowing the industrial engineers to carry out job evaluation, by participating on their terms in all sorts of joint "T U/management" training projects, you can earn more money. If you're a specialist in arse-hole crawling you can join other "specialists". It is said that in every shop stewards' organisation, there are 25% of these potential foremen.

The guvnor can only think in terms of two types of reward, monetary, so as to secure the participation of us, the "proles", in production and in consumption, and the use of promotion or heirarchy to continue the utterly wasteful process. The track or conveyor line shows one thing vividly, that power is in the hands of a very small minority.

In the shop where I have been subjected to all this, people began to ask, what the hell is all this in aid of? Small informal groups began to spring up (though in a random way). An instinctive awareness and solidarity built up to such an extent that we challenged on manning, track speeds, scheduling, movement of the men and so on. We made it clear to the union officials that they could be dispensed with. We suddenly realised that life "doesn't begin when we drop in front of the telly at six p.m."

As a direct result of this challenge being consistently posed, the boss has to maintain an enormous heirarchy of order givers to maintain the discipline. Also they resort to the engagement of "special grade men or trustees" whose job is "to set an example" to the new blokes on the lines. Besides the normal run of foremen, chargehands, and other arsehole creepers, the guvnor relies on various "experts" (with all sorts of imposing titles) to brain-wash the worker to work harder and to fit him more easily into his work. Some of these study us rather like specimens in a laboratory, all in the "interests of research".

All this I've seen being put into effect, even on my own station, by the "experts", the arm of the management who serve the other arm - "order givers" - by rationalizing this society and the output in the interests of the present economic set up. We receive this through the ideas they hold on heirarchy, adaptation to their needs, ritual, social function and control. The effect comes through speed-up, more intense exploitation of the bloke on a particular job, quite arbitrary planning without the consultation of the persons concerned, the adding of certain functions or even the abolition of certain jobs, etc.

Why, in spite of the increase of "experts", and their importance in the role of "management", must they have a large section of order-givers who play no other role whatsoever? The answer is simple, it is because we as workers resist consistently every moment we can on the track, thus they have to have a large disciplinarian force to keep us (the producers) in line - this has not decreased at all. Yes, this is the big contradiction - they want us to work, but, of course, won't let us have too much say. We've got about one "green-jacket" to every fifteen production workers. These are the N.C.O's or Kapos who are recruited from the floor; they work up to production manager level and higher.

WHAT IS THE SOCIALIST ANSWER?

Some people have often said that work can never be abolished, some have even said that it is not possible to change the mode of producing things, e.g. doing away with tracks or conveyor belts. They support their argument by saying that methods of production will always be governed by the need of

society to consume. They say that this would be the same even in a Socialist Society (and I don't mean Russia or even Yugoslavia). However, there is no doubt that this society creates many artificial needs. Or you could go to the other extreme and say, as some people do, that work with its attendant consumption of goods must be abolished thus "breaking the market". Some sectors of opinion have said that if you destroy the consumer market and society, or rather the need for luxury goods as we know them, you can get rid of work (as we know it) and replace it with what they describe as "free activity". My answer is that if this is the case, then we've got to get down to discussing what is "free activity" or what we mean by doing away with work. In my opinion the "free activity" includes the production of essential goods needed in any socialist society, working for socialist objectives. It does not mean the continuation of the ridiculous consumer society, i.e. cars, radios, T.V.s as status symbols. There are some other important aspects that I want to see discussed. One is that work means me becoming creative again - this is what has been destroyed for millions. It means that I must dominate whatever method I use to produce things. Goods for use, not goods for profit that people have to slave half their lives to buy.

But perhaps the biggest question that faces us is "who manages?". Many people, even in my factory (Labour "lefts" or Stalinists - now indistinguishable), have said that all that is needed is the expropriation of wealth and the placing of production in the hands of the State to be run on behalf of the people. No one needs to look very far to know that if anything, the struggle at work is even more intensified in a nationalised concern, and it would not alter the conditions or nature of your work, least of all in a car factory.

At all levels people are concerned about whether they can have expression in determining how, what, and when work is to be carried on, i.e. whether the majority's right to make decisions can be implemented.

If you see the revolution (or transformation of society) on the purely reformist lines I have mentioned, then all that remains is for a leadership to take power "on behalf" of the masses. The only change would be that you would have replaced one ruling class with another, with the same collection of "experts with their slide rules" performing the same role as before.

As revolutionary socialists we are more concerned with creating the kind of society where a collective assembly of people make the decisions, not one which leaves this to specific groups or a "leadership". We are concerned with the creation of completely new relationships at work, that is the producers actually deciding how they will produce, e.g. why not abolish the track and put something in its place? In the field of consumption the community at large could decide what they want. E.g. instead of clogging the motorways up with more useless cars, we could discuss the development of a rapid transit system locally. It is interesting to consider the possibility of wiping out the advertising business, who at present decide and create these "needs" for us.

But the main problem will be to discuss how we can apply specifically socialist priorities or arguments at the place of work.

Before we can discuss this in a meaningful way, we have to examine one more feature which I have experienced in my job, and which all revolutionary militants undoubtedly go through. Besides physical and mental suffering at work, there is the damming of people's self-expression, i.e. political isolation and alienation.

The working of today's society is governed to a large extent by the class struggle. Management rationalizes either by trying to integrate workers and their forms of expression or by the isolation of the worker and finally by alienating him. Integration can take all sorts of forms: promotion, sending people on various courses, giving an illusion of "participation" through various joint committees. Isolation can be seen by those on the shop floor as victimisation, sudden transfers, dismissals, and the general run of divide-and-rule such as non-parity of rates.

It must be understood that these techniques of rationalization, as well as the technical development of society, were created by the bosses to counter the struggle of people at their place of work. Also, it must be remembered that the unions are essential to this control of working class expression at work.

If we are to face the main crisis at work - that is people's inability to express themselves or to consciously dominate their work - we've got to bear in mind the following.

- (a) The worker today has a very clear insight into his condition (not only the economic one). This awareness increases as the pursuit of consumer goods becomes more absurd. Already he sees the problems revolving round that of control. Workers are full of ideas, they have the deepest and most profound experience of work.
- (b) In order for workers to think in terms of the previous points I've mentioned, they must be aware that because they have relied for so long on others speaking for them (who invariably act against their interests) they no longer have any say in their organisations of resistance.
- (c) Once people at work see that a given activity or demand enhances their confidence in their ability to manage things for themselves, they must carry their struggle to the society around them, i.e. industry is but one place of conflict - the question of leisure and consumption are also important.

The struggle is also expressed in economic forms, but in spite of the fact that these are important and relevant in this society, they are not paramount over the qualitative criteria. I ought also to mention that an acceptance of the bosses' conception of hierarchy is implicit in the struggle to maintain wage differentials. People at work can really challenge this concept by pursuing demands for equal increments for all, or even the idea of greater increases for the lower grades and smaller ones for the more highly paid. In this way we can begin to effectively attack capitalist thinking.

It would be as well to state here and now that demands concerning conditions, e.g. more light in the toilet, free milk for welders, etc., are economic demands. If you suddenly decided to take two hours for your tea break,

banned overtime, or worked to rule, then these begin to emerge in the form of qualitative demands in the political sense, precisely because they pose an element of control. We have to discuss what is meaningful, and what is harmful, what increases working class expression, and what kills it, according to the particular circumstances of each demand. In this context you could say that most economic demands are conceded by the system, but overemphasis on these will prevent people from progressing to socialist demands.

Lastly, I would like to examine the differences between what work does represent in our lives and what I feel it ought to represent. Although International Situationists accuse Pouvoir Ouvrier and Socialisme ou Barbarie groupings of "a reformism of labour couched in demands for its humanisation"* I do not think it is just a question of humanisation. Let me say - "Yes, I do call work itself into question"!

I question the conception that we can only have a full social life "outside the gate", that when the hooter sounds at 8.00 a.m. we must all become obedient morons. I question the idea of forcing a person to work at a pre-determined pace, of being confined to a track without being able to go for a shit when I want to, of enduring barbaric and humiliating conditions.. Even if the argument that methods of production would still be dictated by "the needs of society" was valid, it would be possible, with all the technical knowledge at our disposal, to use electronic devices to take the unnecessary drudgery out of work.

How then, do I define work in a Socialist society, compared with what millions now go through every day, e.g. in a car factory. First of all, work will not be something that it is necessary for one to do in order to buy luxuries, or take two ridiculous weeks' holiday. It will be the way in which I can exploit my creative abilities to the full, for the benefit of all, not to be sold or measured in "skill", but available to anyone. It will be part of life, not separated from it. But above all, the process will be under my control and therefore mine to adjust if I cannot keep the pace.

But the socialist and objective meaning of production will only be created when both producers and users (let's drop the word consumer) meet to discuss collectively what, and how many of the particular item, is needed. "Needs" of our choosing, not needs created by others who say that "this brand is better than the other".

The producer will find expression through self-management at work; his political expression will be his collective will.

The new role for the technicians will be to fit the machine or the jobs to man, not to try and adapt the human being.

A worker at a car plant in Dagenham is quoted as saying "God gave us tools to use, but at the end of the day I've got fuck-all energy to use mine"!

* Strasbourg pamphlet, p. 22, English version.

If the traditional T.U. organisations ignore the questions discussed here, it is because they have become instruments of the State, and are permeated with the ideology of the ruling class. It follows that they are incapable of a revolutionary perspective. Some people are already thinking in terms of wresting themselves from the unions completely. But thousands of workers are forced to remain inside them, not because there is a possibility of reforming them, but because, in some jobs, it is now obligatory to be in a union. In fact, the established order increasingly approves this. To many people the unions are only a means of keeping links with different sections; workers are increasingly aware of this, and know the unions' limitations.

It is vitally important to emphasise that current T U policy is to blur or obscure the class struggle at the work place, whether this concerns physical conditions, heirarchies (wages or rank), political expression (for autonomy) or the battle for the mind (ideological). Why are managers always so fucking proud to boast that "I'm an ex-shop steward" whenever we go into the office? You cannot be an order-giver and still purport to hold socialist ideas. However "socialist" the manager may claim to be, he has, in fact, adopted the ideas of the system, and has become part and parcel of it, and he plays a role in the gradual destruction of working class expression.

When we have finally won the class struggle, we will have made managers and their ridiculous experts unnecessary. There is no question of reducing the gulf between order-givers and order-takers. Let's abolish these two divisions. If you see a headline "strike cripples motor giant" - lend a hand, every minute of industrial struggle helps to undermine the small minority who rule over us.

George Shaw.

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the bristol sit-in

In the good old days (and even now at Oxbridge) students could smash up property and people to celebrate some pathetic occasion. The only reaction from the staff was to say, "How amusing". During our sit-in there was hardly any damage done, and a large number of porters, cleaners, and typists got ten days' holiday, and yet the reaction was much stronger. The Vice-Chancellor said there was a "breakdown in orderly life" and a local newspaper suggested, "Flush them out with tear gas". Obviously the situation has changed and the students are different. At the beginning of the century there were 25,000 students, now there are about 300,000. They saw themselves as a small elite, but now some of us realise that we are just being used as grease to keep the capitalist machine running. Of course, as students we are still in a relatively privileged position, but like almost everyone else in our present society we have very little say in how we are used. The so-called democratic processes we are allowed to play with are useless so we are learning how to do without these games.

Background

A few years ago the University of Bristol was given three-quarters of a million pounds from public money to build a new Students' Union. The building includes rooms for meetings and dances, canteens, two bars, a library and a swimming pool. In comparison, the student facilities at the other institutions of higher and further education in Bristol are disgusting. For example, Bristol Technical College has a few dingy rooms and no bar at all.

There is obvious discrimination in higher education; seven times as much money is given to universities as to other colleges. This is no accident; it is part of a deliberate policy. It is an attempt to carry on the split between grammar and secondary modern schools. All the way through education people are graded into stupid categories (like eggs: standard, medium and slightly cracked) and then given opportunities according to them. The college students are treated like second class citizens and given third class facilities.

Students at the university, like those at the colleges, objected to this unfair treatment. In May, 1967, at an Annual General Meeting of their Union, they decided that students from all the colleges in the area should be able to use the new University Union building freely. This would have been very easy to put into practice, but eighteen months later it was still being blocked. It was seen as an attack on privilege.

In those eighteen months up to December, 1968, there was militant student action both internationally and in Britain (e.g. Essex* and Leeds**).

* Solidarity, Vol. 5, No. 4.

** The June Sit In, Leeds R.S.S.F.

At the end of last summer term Bristol saw a short sit-in set off by the Free University.

During the summer, Vice-Chancellors of all universities met to co-ordinate action against student unrest. They also produced a joint statement with N.U.S. covering topics like union autonomy, examinations and discipline. On student participation they said that student committee members should serve "like representatives, not as delegates specifically mandated". This makes sure participation has no real meaning.

The Slow Move to Action

Unfortunately the majority of students thought there would be a change in the university authorities' attitude because of this joint statement, so when we came back to Bristol we had to start again from scratch. At the beginning of term Union General Meetings were crowded with liberal enthusiasts who believed that we could change things from below using the normal bureaucratic machinery. Together we passed motion after motion about changes in the union structure and about reciprocal membership with other student unions in the area (which would give college students the right to use our union building). Of course, it was no good because we do not control our own union, and the first line of defence against change was our own Union Council.

Too many students get elected onto Union Councils because they want some practice in the arts of bureaucracy before going on to jobs in management or politics. They start in their local unions, then progressively arselick their way into positions where their own arses are licked. In almost any student struggle the first fight will be with the union officials at a local and a national level.

Finally we forced Union Council to accept our motions, but they did not have any real power. Any important changes had to be ratified by Union Finance Committee which was chaired by the Vice-Chancellor (so much for union autonomy). Before the next meeting of this committee support was gained in the other colleges by circulating a petition. As the majority of students were still thinking in parliamentary terms, we also decided on a lobby.

Unite and Lobby

At four-thirty on Thursday, 5th December, students from seven colleges in the Bristol area, plus the University, met outside the Union and marched with banners and placards to Senate House. The placards said "End Privilege in Education", "Down with the Binary System"*, "Unite and Lobby", and "No Victimisation". The University was expecting trouble. If a few people had not arrived early, we would have found ourselves locked out. The petitions,

* Higher Education is divided into the semi-autonomous, high-status universities, and the techs and polytechnics. These latter are under much greater local and government control, and are viewed as essentially functional vis-a-vis the needs of capitalism.

signed by over 2,000 students, were handed to the Vice-Chancellor before the committee meeting began. Even though there was a small student majority on the committee, we could not be sure that staff members would not use unfair personal pressure on them, so we asked for observers to be sent in. This was refused.

We Occupy

Almost 600 of us waited cramped together in the foyer of Senate House. At 9 o'clock the Vice-Chancellor himself stepped out to tell us a joke; Union Finance offered us another working party on "reciprocal membership" and the final decision would have to wait until they reported back. The comedian returned to juggling the rest of the committee's agenda. After a short discussion we decided almost unanimously to occupy the building until the authorities reconsidered the issue. At eleven o'clock the committee broke up and the Vice-Chancellor and Registrar tried to intimidate people by pointing out the so-called ring leaders. They soon saw they could do nothing and left us in possession of the building. We needed more room, so we removed a glass panel from the door leading to the main staircase. We made our way to the fourth floor and held a meeting to decide on immediate issues. An Action Committee was elected with representatives from all the colleges present. Around one-thirty at night we adjourned the General Assembly until 6 o'clock in the morning. About 300 people remained in the building; the majority went to sleep wherever they could, but a few stayed up to prepare leaflets to go out the following day to staff and students.

From that night on, we guarded the main doors continuously, to keep out the staff. If the university insisted on messing up the running of our union, obviously we had to do something to stop the administration of the university. Until Monday, 16th December, we occupied the Senate House and ran our own community inside. Rather than describe the sit-in day by day, I would prefer to make a few general comments.

Unity in Action

The most important single factor about the sit-in was that the split between university and college students was overcome in action. Students came from Bristol Technical College, The College of Commerce, West of England College of Art, various teacher training colleges, South Bristol College of Further Education, Filton Technical College, as well as Bath and Bristol Universities. For far too long most college students have passively accepted their situation, but once they begin to act, they often become more radical than university students. Technical colleges are particularly important because they have very close links with industry. Unfortunately, most apprentices study at a college only one day a week, so they are not allowed to become members of the student union. This is one thing that must be changed if the student movement is to have any real strength.

During the sit-in people who had never seen each other before worked together in a meaningful way. The decision-making body was the General

Assembly, which met at least once a day. Anyone, including outsiders, could speak at these meetings and no decision was made until a definite majority thought the issue was clear enough to take a vote. The main function of the Action Committee was to co-ordinate activities. Food was brought in and sold at cost price. Cleaning was done regularly by volunteers. A poster workshop was set up and propaganda leaflets were produced. On this level everything was fine, but the more theoretical discussions and seminars that we held were weak and repetitive. Most of the outside speakers were far too liberal; they stuck to education and refused to generalise their criticism to society.

Liberalism

The worst thing about the sit-in altogether was the liberalism of most people there. They saw the occupation as an individual moral protest only; this stopped us from making full use of the situation. As we had occupied the Senate House we should have run the building as our own, using the offices and the equipment. Our exaggerated respect for property was almost certainly due to the middle-class background of most students. Again we ran the whole sit-in with one eye on the university authorities.

The University had worked out certain tactics even before the sit-in began. The first step was to ask the police to clear us out, but the police refused; no property was being damaged, we were policing ourselves, and if they went in it might have set off a serious situation. Then they tried to use other students against us by saying that we were stopping exams. They told the newspapers that we were preventing wages from being paid to the staff. They cut off the heating and lighting. Many of these cheap tricks rebounded back on them, but their nastiest move was to issue writs on eight of us for trespass and damages. We stayed in to make sure the cases went to court, and costs amounting to £200 were awarded against four students. This victimisation helped to rally support for us, but it also forced us to continue the sit-in for too long. It is not good tactics to remain in occupation once the numbers start to drop; it is better to come back again when support grows stronger once more.

The Future

We still don't know the long-term effects on the university authorities, the staff, and the other students. But no concessions have been made so far, and more victimisation will probably follow, so the struggle must go on. The sit-in united the students of Bristol and we cannot go back. The socialists must work hard to generalise the criticism from education to the whole of our society.

Rod Choler.

BREAD OR FREEDOM? (A comment on the article "Capitalism and Socialism" in Solidarity, Vol. 5, No. 6.

Why does Solidarity print "theoretical" articles like "Capitalism and Socialism"? It seems as if Solidarity has to prove that we are not simply mindless militants, but socialists who have a coherent view of what we are trying to do. In other words, that Solidarity has a theory which is a generalisation from our practice.

But "Capitalism and Socialism" is not a generalisation from Solidarity's practice. It is in complete contradiction with it. Solidarity has stated that it is a socialist organisation - i.e. one dedicated to the overthrow of the capitalist system. M.B.'s article insinuates that society's ills are not due to the existence of the capitalist system, that is, to a particular pattern of ownership of the means of production.

I disagree with M.B. on two points. One, that the misery and deprivation which most people suffer from is due to the existence of capitalism in both its private and state form. Second, M.B.'s method of argument. In essence this method is extremely simple and not even original.

The Method

M.B.'s basic weapon is the amalgam. You take groups of people of different opinions; demonstrate that one group has advocated some kind of action; and then condemn the other groups for the same action. Thus, Stalin could show that fascists, Trotskyists, and Anarchists were opposed to his regime. Fascists planned to invade the Soviet Union. Therefore, Trotskyists were part of a Fascist-Trotskyists' conspiracy to carry out this invasion. One also remembers the difficulty many Americans had in refuting Senator McCarthy's charge that they were crypto-Communists.

M.B.'s amalgam is called the "Trad-Left". By refusing to specify the characteristics of this Trad-Left M.B. is able to use the word as an indiscriminate term of abuse. If a category is to be useful it must be capable of identifying and describing specific traits.

Who are M.B.'s Trad-Socialists?

They include: Those who wish to establish a society modelled on Soviet Russia, and those who believe Russian Society is capitalist; bureaucrats like Kosygin and Gomulka, and revolutionary socialists like Kuron and Modzelevsky who are in Gomulka's prisons. Our present government and those socialists who are trying to fight back against its anti-working class policies.

M.B. constructs a further amalgam from progressive capitalists, Liberals, Labour reformists, Communists, Trotskyists, etc., and damns them all for seeing society's ills as flowing primarily from "a particular pattern of

ownership of the means of production". By implication he includes others who hold this belief in the same Trad category.

Let us examine the constituent parts of M.B.'s amalgam.

- (a) Progressive capitalists and liberals do not see the problems of society as flowing from the ownership of the means of production. Writers like Shonfield or Galbraith who represent progressive capitalism clearly state that ownership is no longer crucial. This is indeed the cornerstone of their theory.
- (b) Social Democracy - in common with all other varieties of socialism - originally saw the relations of production as the crucial question. The evolution of social democratic parties towards an acceptance of the existing system has been marked precisely by the abandonment of this concept. (See any of the works of the main British theorist, A.Crosland.)
- (c) Stalinist theory substitutes a legalistic definition of what constitutes the ownership of property for an economically and politically meaningful one. (i.e. Russia is supposed to be socialist because the bureaucrats do not individually formally own the means of production.
- (d) The fundamental flaw in the Trotskyist theory has been precisely its ambivalence on this matter. This is the issue which time and again splits the Trotskyist groups. This theoretical confusion means that their theory is incoherent, therefore its contradictions perplex them at each new turn of the political situation.

All of these groups should be attacked, but for what they say, not for being Trads. A critique of any of these groups should centre precisely on their attitude towards the relations of production.

Psychologists state that one of the characteristics of a prejudiced person is that he cannot discriminate between different ideas which he dislikes. Thus an irrational conservative will be unable to distinguish between Stalinists, Trotskyists, Labour Reformists and Anarchists. From his point of view the differences between these viewpoints are trivial or non-existent and can only be accounted for as a rationalisation of personal quarrels.

Amalgam Two

M.B.'s accusations against the Trads fall into three categories: two concerning their beliefs and one concerning their background.

- One They see the conflicts and evils of society as flowing "from a particular pattern of ownership of the means of production". This charge is true. And those who hold this view are correct in doing so. Some people whose other ideas we do not like much may hold it too, but that should not worry us.
- Two The second charge or group of charges groups together a number of beliefs, some of which will be held by some of the Trads and not by others, some by none at all.
- Three The older Trads can reasonably be suspected of having read John

Strachey's "Why you should be a Socialist" in their youth. M.B. seems to take literally Lenin's remark that the greatest sin for a revolutionary was to be more than 50 years old.

So, the only valid charge against the Trads is that they define capitalism and socialism as particular patterns of ownership of the means of production.

Capitalism

"Conflicts in class society do not simply result from inequalities of distribution or flow from a given division of the surplus value, itself the result of a particular pattern of the ownership of the means of production." In other words, M.B. rejects the socialist claim that the conflicts in society, and the deprivations people suffer, flow from the particular pattern of ownership of the means of production. The socialist case does not depend on the mechanisms of exploitation being simple. They may well be extremely complex. It is sheer demagoguery to suggest otherwise.

To substantiate the claim that the question of the relations of production is the crucial one we must, as socialists, answer M.B.'s opening question: What is basically wrong with capitalism?

Capitalism is a system where the mass of the people do not own or control the means of production. They must, therefore, work for wages. They are dispossessed from the product of their labour and from control over their own lives. They do not receive the full amount of their produce in wages, nor do they have any say in the organisation of production or in the running of the wider society.

A socialist analysis starts from the relations of production. But society includes more than production. The factory is all-important in the modern world, because all other areas of life are influenced by it and subordinated to its needs. Capitalism, like any other dominant economic system largely determines the conditions of life of even those people who are outside the capitalist production process. This is why it is so ludicrous for bourgeois sociologists who investigate the life conditions of students, housewives, or peasants in underdeveloped societies, without reference to the existence of the capitalist system. M.B. is doing the same at a more naive level when he talks of separate "fields" presumable of equal importance and neatly fenced off from each other.

Capitalism is a System

The hardships most people experience are not attributable to the malevolence or lust for power of the people at the top. Within the limits of the system the rulers have no real alternatives. The individual members of the present government would no doubt like to expand welfare and education. But the experience since 1964 has shown that the pressures generated by the demands of the system are stronger than people's good intentions.

What is wrong with this system? The mass of people in it are subjected to various forms of deprivation ranging from, at the extreme, lack of the means to sustain an adequate diet, to bad housing, inadequate education, insecurity, war, and subjection to power structures over which they have no control.*

No socialist could deny that class domination manifests itself in all aspects of life. The question at issue is which aspect is predominant. The "Trad" socialist answer to this is that ultimately the relations of production determine the other social relationships.

If we abandon this concept we are left with a number of struggles, or problems which have no essential unity. M.B. correctly points out the increasingly bureaucratic nature of modern society, but he is unable to explain why it should be so. The only plausible explanation, once we abandon the concept of a capitalist system, would be in terms of the psychological motivation of those in authority. But the personal authoritarianism of those in authority only makes sense in terms of the social structure.

How would socialism differ from capitalism?

In a socialist system the means of production would be democratically owned and controlled by the whole of the population. They would not be subject to the vagaries of the market, as in private capitalism, nor to the absurdities of a plan imposed from above by a bureaucratic elite, as in state capitalist systems.

A socialist society would be egalitarian

M.B. sneers at the "Trad" socialists for their emphasis on "the division of the cake", i.e. the unequal distribution of wealth. Why is revolutionary socialism necessarily egalitarian? Is it because of some fixation on consumption? No, it is because an unequal society will perpetuate its inequalities, often in very brutal ways, in every aspect of social life. M.B. counterposes a concern with the division of the cake to one with the relations between man and man. But what produces the monstrous human relations which prevail today, if not the existence of inequality?

This is now being realised by those reformists who have genuinely tried to create equality of opportunity by abolishing formal inequalities in the educational system. They have found that it just does not work. An unequal system will perpetuate its inequalities. Being deprived of culture is undoubtedly linked with economic oppression.**

* See Poverty, Socialism and Labour in Power, Fabian Tract No. 371.

** See Education and the Working Class, Marsden and Jackson.

Consumption

M.B. draws a sharp distinction between man as a consumer and man's urge to fulfil himself. This division is basic to bourgeois thought. It expresses itself in the dichotomy material/spiritual or sacred/profane.

Socialists have always rejected this absolute division. Man fulfils himself by appropriating the products of the external world. The extent of his freedom is limited by his lack of material resources. Socialists have always recognised that the objective was bread and freedom. It is true that in practice there is a division (although not an absolute one) between economic and non-economic struggles.

This is not to say that the relationship between those struggles is simple or the connection easy to make. But the denial of the possibility of making these connections is the denial of the possibility of revolution. One has a revolutionary situation precisely when the most advanced thought and the most daring vision of a better society fuse with the wishes and needs of masses of ordinary people.

Conclusion

I believe it is a pity that this article of M.B.'s was printed without any kind of editorial disclaimer. Not because of the banality of its arguments against socialism. Even if these are not new there is no reason why they should not be aired. But for other reasons:

1. The dishonest method of argument. The amalgam should be left to the Stalinists.
2. The mystifying jargon. Any political group tends to develop its own special jargon. This may begin as a harmless practice, but it ends by stultifying thought.
3. The frantic search for novelty. The debate within the socialist movement is largely about the evaluation and interpretation of a tradition. One of the hallmarks of conservative thought is its claim to represent the only valid tradition. M.B.'s approach lets this claim go uncontested.
4. If M.B. is correct there are a number of different struggles, each equally important and not organically connected. Why do we need a socialist organisation? Surely the Liberals would then be right in seeing the need to work for various reforms, but denying that these are in any way determined by the relations of production. Yet Solidarity has announced its intention to build a socialist organisation. Why does Solidarity devote so much of its space to the struggle in production? Why do we have an article on the economic crisis? The total effect of the last issue is of something produced by schizophrenics.

M.B. says that he wishes to stress "a facet of socialist thought that is in danger of being forgotten". If it is being forgotten, then it is deservedly so. For this "facet" could also be described as a tradition. It is a warmed-up version of the soggy humanitarianism of the Christian Socialists, Ramsay MacDonald, and the right wing of the ILP. This rancid puritanism has more in common with monasticism than socialism.