

# **solidarity**

**FOR WORKERS' POWER**

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**6<sup>D</sup>**

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# THE A.S.S. STORY

dudley edwards

This article is about the long-drawn out struggle - in 1959, 1960 and 1961 - to destroy the shop organization at Aircraft Steel Structures Ltd., Acton. The author is well qualified to tell this story: he was convenor of shop stewards there during the whole period. The struggle was regarded by engineering workers generally as being of crucial importance because this small factory had acted in many ways as pacemaker on issues of job control. The struggle was important in another sense, too. It was a blueprint of the length to which employers are prepared to go to maintain absolute control within the factory.

## INTRODUCTION

During the fifties and early sixties I served for a period as convenor of shop stewards at 'Aircraft Steel Structures Ltd.', a small factory which functioned first in Kensington and later moved to Park Royal.

The history of workers' struggles in this factory is not very important in itself. However, when related to great industrial battles which have occurred before and since, the events I am about to describe do suggest useful conclusions for those who believe that the real struggle today is the fight for workers' control of workshop conditions, ultimately leading to complete workers' management of their own industries.

While this struggle is rarely waged consciously by factory workers, it constantly raises the question of who is to control the factories, of who is to set the norms of production and constantly challenges the 'sacred managerial rights' of the capitalist owners.

This is the story of a factory that was at the time a viable economic unit, producing to capacity, still taking on labour and where the workers were still being asked to do overtime, which was suddenly closed down and shut up by the directors for reasons of Company Policy.

Although those of us involved did not see it clearly at the time, intervening years of reflection bring me to the conclusion that this factory was closed down because the employers regarded it as being 'threatened' by workers' control. Being unable to defeat the tight and solid organization which the workers had built up over the years, the management decided to 'sink the ship' rather than allow their managerial rights to be infringed.

## CONDITIONS

Up to the middle fifties, Aircraft Steel Structures Ltd. was still employing about 150 workers, (equally divided between skilled and semi-skilled). By the fifties, the workers had obtained signed agreements from the employers which gave them considerable control of workshop conditions, well in advance of those obtaining in the majority of similar engineering factories.

Through these agreements complete control over overtime working was in the hands of the workers' representatives, who had to be approached by the management for PERMISSION, should very special conditions require overtime in excess of the strict limit laid down by the shop members. The shop organization also controlled the intake and outgoing of labour. If the management wished to

take on labour which could not be obtained through the union agency, the stewards again had to be approached for a special concession in this respect.

Included in these agreements was a consolidated rate well up to and above the composite rates which were paid in most other shops. Such rates are made up of fragmentary amounts, of bonus and piecework earnings, added on to a ridiculously low basic rate. As most industrial workers will know this of course means that in these establishments overtime rates and holiday pay are not based on the full rate per hour earned but only on that part of the rate which is ironically called 'basic' ( which even today is often less than 3/- per hour ). This consolidated rate, which was written into the shop's agreement with the employer, was probably one of the main reasons for the remarkable unity and solidarity of the shop revealed in the battle that developed at a latter date. The agreement also included an apprenticeship scheme, with a rate of payment well in advance of all other youth rates in the London area.

The workers had completely free facilities to use the canteen for meetings with loudspeaker apparatus and often held such meetings during working hours. During the whole period of my own stewardship at this factory (about 7 years ) and probably during the whole period of its existence (about 25 years ) not one man was sacked where the stewards opposed this. In two cases the stewards let men go because the men didn't wish to dispute their own dismissal. In two other cases inspectors went, who had sought top-rated employment when it was clear that they had never had the experience or qualifications they claimed, and consequently became responsible for a costly scrapping of completed work.

The Agreement included a 'closed shop'. While I recognize that there can be drawbacks to this method of organization - and that it is sometimes abused - in this case it was properly used by the workers to assess the degree of solidarity existing in the shop in the event of an emergency. Regular and thorough card inspections took place on the shop floor and the workers were always keen to check on their own stewards to see how far this had been properly carried out. The workers also completely controlled and administered their own sick benefit scheme, although part of the financial contributions to this were made by the employer.

The stewards were elected by the aggregate of the workers in the factory as a whole, not section by section - the more usual method. Incidentally, the usual method, unless watched, can become a 'hole in the corner' affair, in which no proper election takes place. It often means that existing stewards merely co-opt someone who is willing to

'stick his neck out'. By this aggregate method the proper preliminary submission of nominations was ensured and a contest encouraged for the stewards positions, each one then being chosen by a show of hands of the whole shop.

Regular monthly meetings with the management were then arranged. These were always followed by further shop meetings, at which the full minutes of discussions with management were read out and debated in public. Eventually a time, during working hours, was set aside for stewards to have their preliminary meeting before facing the management.

It is important to notice that at this stage the factory was an effective, economic unit, although it depended almost entirely on a sub-contract. This contract was provided by Doughty Engineering Ltd., a firm which is today the leading producer of a wide series of aircraft components and which controls many subsidiaries all over Britain.

During the middle 50's the small factory of which we are speaking produced, under licence from Doughty, probably more than half their total output of certain hydraulic pumps, used on almost all civil aircraft in the British Isles and Commonwealth. Probably 150 to 200 of these pumps, involving hundreds of components parts, were turned out each month by fewer than 150 workers, exclusive of staff. It is therefore clear that their productivity and efficiency was far from being below par despite the relaxation of the traditional, stern form of management-imposed labour discipline.

#### ON STEEL NATIONALIZATION

'Here the Labour Party's otherwise rather thin plan for nationalizing the ports could offer a lead. The proposed element of workers' participation in port management could well find a place in the new-look steel industry. After all, reducing over-manning - and persuading workers to accept redundancy - is going to be one of the main problems, whoever owns the steel mills.'

'Observer', July 3, 1966.

We call for workers' management of industry. Others call for nationalization, with various degrees of workers' control or participation. Above, in a nutshell, is the difference.

Although many of these concessions to the implicit idea of workers' control in the shop were won by the pressure of our own organization it must be admitted that in the early days progress was helped by the existence of a somewhat 'sympathetic' boss, who had what might be called a 'Swedish' approach to trade union organization. This doesn't mean that he was above trying to use the union in his own interest, seeing in it a useful recruiting sergeant for skilled labour and a means of obtaining cheaply the necessary labour discipline.

That he was to some extent successful in these aims is reflected in the relatively hefty financial reserve the Company had been able to accumulate by the middle fifties. It is at this point that the troubles of the Company ( and of course, to a greater extent, of the workers ) began.

In 1957-58, encouraged by success, the boss began to contemplate a move up among the really big boys. £100,000 or more was spent on branching out into an imposing new factory at Park Royal, complete with elaborate administrative offices, a traditional grandiose board-room, expensively styled furniture and carpets, and a wrought iron staircase leading up to what was to be the 'heart' of the new empire.

## THE TAKE OVER

Unfortunately for the workers, this break out of the 'back streets' coincided with the partial capitalist recession of 1958-59 as well as with the beginning of the showdown in the great civil and military aircraft racket, which had been going on merrily since the war, under Labour and Tory government alike, liberally subsidized by the tax payers.

As a consequence Doughty Engineering Ltd. withdrew the basic contract. This was partly because of falling demand and partly because they had found another cut-price contractor. In previous years the stewards had frequently pointed out that the Company should find its own marketable product against such an eventuality, but the contract had no doubt represented 'easy money' and the management had done nothing in this direction. It was therefore a desperate matter to obtain an alternative contract. The form that this would take soon became apparent.

In 1958 soon after moving into the new, well-appointed factory, the workers learned that Simms Motor Units, a large manufacturing combine producing all kinds of motor parts, had acquired 49% of the shares. From this point on the 'chips were down'. It was clear that the 'big boys' would obtain a majority holding, even though the 'old man' retained his independence for a while. Before long the new 'partner' was supplying the factory with short term, almost day to day contract work, farmed out from their headquarters factory. As this arrangement proceeded, complaints began to come in from the Simms costing 'experts'. Components being produced by their Park Royal 'associates' were costing more than were similar units at the Finchley factory, working under Federation piece-work agreements, or where a percentage of the labour force were women. This of course resulted in efforts at 'speed-up' by the company's underlings. An atmosphere of crisis developed. Meetings with management agents became stormy. The Managing Director ( the father of the family ) was by this time absenting himself altogether and became inaccessible to the stewards. No evidence satisfactory to the stewards was produced to prove the charge that costs per unit of production compared unfavourably with the same units coming off machines at other Simms factories. Nevertheless this continued to be asserted and pressed to the point where much of the work being done was again withdrawn from Park Royal and completed at the original factory.

It is important to notice that the workers' reaction to this situation was not all negative. At one stage it was suggested that if the management would make a gesture, either in the form of a shop bonus or of a straight rate increase, the stewards ( if given a free hand to approach the shop ) would assume the responsibility of getting an extra productivity effort from the workers which could get the management out of its difficulties. However by this time it was only the underlings of the administration with whom the stewards could deal. They not only looked askance at the idea of the workers' representatives assuming responsibility for raising productivity, but were already worrying about their own positions under possible new masters. Further the stewards' proposals were once again infringing upon those 'sacred' managerial rights. The proposals were therefore ignored.

As might be expected the boardroom arguments culminated in an ultimatum. The 49% holders insisted on full control or the old owners would be left high and dry on the rocks! By this time the 51% of the shares held by the old private company were not really saleable. The Big Boys moved in without paying a cent. The old Managing Director developed a diplomatic illness and the new management took over.

# THE STRIKE

The take over agreement was signed on the 13th March 1959. On Monday 16th March the representatives of the men were summoned to the grandiose boardroom by the new Managing Director, seconded from the Simms organization. After introducing himself he informed the stewards in so many words that he had come to save a sinking ship. All the agreements entered into by the previous management would have to be abrogated. They would be null and void. He had to have 'a free hand'. The potent phrase used was that the new management would have to use 'the surgeon's knife'. The whole character of the factory would have to change, would have to 'come more in line with modern mass production methods'.

At a continuation of this meeting on the 23rd of March the stewards were informed that the first application of the surgeon's knife would result in 30 men being declared redundant. A list of these, already prepared, was handed to the stewards. The most significant part of this 'new broom' approach, however, was that the consolidated rate would have to be abolished. A Federation system of piece-rate working would be introduced in its place, which would include an influx of semi-skilled labour including women operators.

On being informed of these managerial decisions the whole shop assembled in the canteen. On the recommendation of the stewards and with the agree-

ment of the North London District Committee, a resolution to take strike action as from 8 am on the 26th of March was carried by an overwhelming majority, with only one or two abstentions. A strike committee was immediately set up. Its first act, after picketing arrangements had been settled, was to appeal to all local factories calling for financial and moral support. In this statement the workers declared that the strike had been caused by the management's proposed 'abrogation of all previous agreements and the issuing of redundancy list for 30 of their workmates'. The statement went on to say that 'our 100% T.U. shop intends to defend wholeheartedly this attack on trade union principles and organization'. The shop stewards had simultaneously issued a statement giving a more detailed outline of the reasons for the strike.

To provide some thin legal cover for their demand that the old agreement should be scrapped, the management placed great emphasis on the 'closed shop' sections of this agreement, which they declared to be contrary to the principles and policy of the Employers Federation, as well as contrary to procedural agreement between them and the Federation of Engineering and Allied Trades Unions. It is interesting to note here that the newly appointed Managing Director ( Mr. J. Ayres ) was at the time an Executive Committee member of the Engineering Employers Federation. In their own statement the stewards pointed out that the agreement they proposed to defend was not merely a closed shop agreement - as the Managing Director had proclaimed - but an agreement protecting wages and conditions, shop custom and practice, as well as the maintenance of 100% trade unionism.

## WORK

Most socialists think or talk about work solely in terms of wages and hours... not in terms of what it does to those who endure it. We wish to stress this latter aspect, for we see one of the central tasks of socialism as changing both the relations between people in the process of labour - and the relation between man and his work.

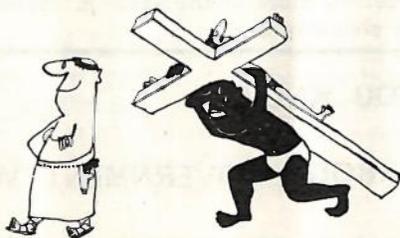
Betty Reid's article in this issue continues our account of work as seen from the receiving end. In previous issues of 'Solidarity' the people concerned have discussed the problems of Engineering workers ( I, 3; II, 3; II, 5; II, 6; III, 6; IV, 2 ) \* Busmen ( II, 5; III, 2; 'Busmen What Next' ) \* Seamen ( II, 4 ) \* Printworkers ( I, 4 ) \* Postmen ( II, 1 ) \* Typists ( III, 6 ) \* Telephonists ( II, 5 ) \* Milkmen ( III, 10 ) \* White collar workers ( I, 2; II, 5 ) \* Dockers ( II, 2; III, 1; III, 6 ) \* Railwaymen ( IV, 2 ) \* Scientists ( II, 12 ) \* Building workers ( III, 12 ) \* Power workers ( II, 8 ) \* Schoolboys ( II, 7 ) \* Borstal boys ( IV, 1 ).

In a further press statement the workers' representatives declared that for many of them this was 'the first major strike in over 20 years of industrial life and that it brought into focus all the more the need now to fight for the right to organize themselves, and for the right to work and to resist redundancy'.

The strike continued for 5 weeks during which the workers maintained complete solidarity and unity and participated daily in the most varied and imaginative activities. Every important factory in the area was covered with factory gate meetings, leaflets and collecting sheets. Speakers were sent to scores of other shop stewards' committees. These included the Ford Shop Stewards Committee, which was beginning its long and tragic battle against management's intimidation at the time. A march was organized, which was attended by the entire labour force. The marchers proceeded to the parent Simms Motors factory at Finchley, where a colourful mass meeting took place outside the gates. Over £2,000 in donations from workers' organizations as far apart as Cornwall and Scotland were received, together with rousing letters of support. At the beginning of the strike the workers had already voted the whole of their sick fund reserve into the strike fund. The result was that together with the donations received, an average of £2 per week per head was paid, over and above the strike benefit of £2.15.0. which was eventually agreed by the union.

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After 5 weeks the management capitulated. They offered a return to work on the basis of the status quo. The redundancy notices were withdrawn. There was no further talk about introduction of piece rates. And the old agreements continued. The workers then marched back to work as a body, singing their theme song 'Keep Right on to the End of the Road'.

The stewards agreed to a face-saving formula for the management: in the event of there being insufficient work to occupy the shop, the workers would agree to some short time working provided this was fairly spread over all, and carried through only after consultation with the workers' representatives.

## THE MANAGEMENT PREPARES

In the event, as the strike committee had anticipated, no short time was ever proposed by the management. On the contrary, after a week or so, the management was proposing to work a certain small section excessive overtime. When the stewards replied that no one would work overtime while the possibility of short time working was held over their heads, the management withdrew this proposition altogether. Within a few weeks the management were not only asking for the introduction of general overtime, but were even proposing to take on more labour.

The factory appeared to be swinging into rhythm again. Nothing more was heard about the bailiffs coming in if the management did not get its way. Of course hindsight now shows that the management was already preparing its dramatic counter blow.

The old machinery brought in from other factories was for the purpose of running off the backlog of work that existed in the other enterprises. This most probably was the remains of orders undertaken by Simms on the 'penalty clause' system, which means in effect that a contractor is fined if he does not complete the order by the required date. There is a reduced profit margin on units still undelivered after the deadline. Nevertheless the full number of units must still be delivered.

Working in the shop, we noticed that the management now seemed much less concerned with the time taken over a given job, but very much concerned to get off large quantities of components by means of as much overtime as possible. They actually took on new labour, which they could have done without, had there been more efficient organization.

On the initiative of the stewards the management actually agreed to a points system of bonus payments, on top of the consolidated rate. The workers were prepared to give this scheme a fair trial, but although they demonstrated that it would be possible to get an increase of productivity of real financial benefit to both sides, the management strangely enough gradually seemed to lose interest. They neither provided adequate personnel, nor ever got all the jobs properly timed as had been agreed. After some time they lapsed once again into the expedient of excessive overtime, which had to be seriously resisted by the stewards.

In this post-strike period various guerilla actions continued. For instance the management's refusal to pay an increase for apprentices which had recently been agreed upon nationally. They claimed that as the apprentice rate already paid was way above the national rate, they were not obliged to pay the increase. This attitude of course resulted in an overtime ban, after which the management paid the national increase without further argument.

On another occasion the stewards had verbally arranged for one of the union officials to interview the manager. When the official arrived the manager said he was too busy to see him. The workers took this to be an insult and the whole shop walked out to hold a meeting of protest.

In this way the factory continued functioning for the next eighteen months. The atmosphere of returning to normality was accentuated by the taking on of labour and this continued right up to a week or two before the management's plans were ready.

## CLOSING DOWN THE FACTORY

Finally, nearly two years after the strike, a brief notice went up on the notice board, to the effect that at a recent directors' meeting of the Simms combine it had been decided that it was necessary to 'reorganize and re-deploy the industrial forces of the firm'. It had therefore been decided to close down the Aircraft Steel Structures works at Park Royal and to transfer the machinery and that part of the labour force which was willing to go to subsidiary factories controlled by the Simms combine (none of which were nearer than 16 miles away). The method of closure and transfer would later be discussed with the shop stewards.

That was virtually the end of 25 years of productive activity in this factory. Not a few of the workers had been employed in this factory for most of this time. A large chunk of their lives had been given to it. It is true that in the conditions of relative full employment most of them would find alternative employment. But had they had the power of genuine choice most would have chosen to stay where they were. The factory was not obsolete and useless. The labour 'know-how' was there, as well as the machinery and tools. There was no reason why the factory should not have remained an effective productive unit. It was closed down because of the whim of a small group of directors who realized they could not manipulate the workers in precisely the way they saw fit. The whole operation illustrates the complete lack of democracy in industry and the complete dictatorship of capital over labour, still underlying the facade of political democracy in Western Europe.

A rear guard action took place around the issue of compensation or, as it is now called, severance pay. Already before the closure an effective Combine Committee of representatives from all subsidiary firms was being built. Through this body, we were able to get some strong intervention from the stewards in other factories, especially from the main parent factory where the workers at one stage were prepared to refuse to operate machinery being transferred from our factory or to complete work being sent to them for completion.

As a result a 'severance pay' agreement was reached. In relation to the rarity of such concessions at that time, it could be considered 'liberal'. It is interesting to note that when one whole section, including men and machinery, was transferred to another factory on the far outskirts of London they took with them their own organization, their steward and their consolidated rate, which they even succeeded in increasing on arrival. They remained the only shop in the Combine paid on this basis. About 12 months later Simms Motors sold this particular section to Ford Motors, after a tough struggle had been conducted by the transferred workers to maintain the same control over workshop conditions which had existed at the old factory. They received more of the same medicine. They too were shut down.

**YOU KNOW**

**LABOUR GOVERNMENT WORKS**

**... JUST LIKE THE TORIES**

# SOME CONCLUSIONS

What conclusions are to be drawn from this slice of working class life?

The events here described were in themselves only small skirmishes in relation to the great struggles that go on in industry all the time. To me however they throw a spotlight on the incurable illness of modern Big Business directed industry. Modern industry is completely unable to do the one thing which could achieve that panacea, rising productivity, which is constantly urged upon the workers as their patriotic duty. That one thing is to allow the workers to take important decisions concerning their place of work. This, Big Business CANNOT DO, because to do so is to recognize that modern workers themselves are capable of completely managing all the processes of production and distribution. Workers' management would put an end to the vast bureaucratic caste that now is supposed to keep the workers in order. It is against this system that the real ceaseless struggle of the working class is carried on. This struggle is unaffected by the complete nationalization of the means of production and takes place in the countries described as 'Communist' as well as in the capitalist West.

At the time of the events described I cannot say that I held the views I am now expressing. At that time, I accepted the vanguard theory which was the lynchpin of official Communist Party teachings. I probably still held this view after leaving the Party.

This idea of the absolute necessity of creating an elite which must constitute the 'General Staff' of the working class is indeed woven into the fabric of the Labour movement since the formation in 1881 of the first marxist body in Britain, the Social Democratic Federation. It is implicit in all those organizations that have since claimed either that they alone embody the essence of working class consciousness, or that they alone have the 'correct' theory of social advance which will bring the workers behind their banner. This doesn't mean I accept the opposite idea of a 'spontaneous revolution', welling up from the depth of the people, which some on the left seem to expect. Of course a degree of working class leadership is necessary and the workers themselves do produce it, at the appropriate moments.

What seems clear to me is that this intense striving for a 'steeled and tempered' vanguard - for what Stalin called 'people of a special mould'

(surely, he really meant people who would mould other people in a special way) - is in fact both unnecessary and harmful. The workers themselves, admittedly not always conscious of ultimate aims - do conduct a struggle to wrest control of industry from the ruling bureaucracy, whether their bosses call themselves capitalists or 'socialists', whether they operate in Britain, the USA, the USSR or in Hungary. In this struggle the working class throws up its own leadership, a leadership which, though not sophisticated and professionally trained, is often more effective and more durable than the wise bodies of marxists who claim that they must always be there to provide the 'correct leadership'.

If a genuine change in human society is ever to be achieved it must be through this unsophisticated type of working class leadership. It will, no doubt, take the form of Workers' Councils, which for brief periods proved their effectiveness: in Russia in 1917, briefly in Spain in 1936, and in Hungary in 1956.

To avoid being submerged by the backwash of bureaucracy which swept them away in these three historic periods, such workers' councils must develop on a more universal scale and in one at least of the main advanced capitalist countries of the West. I don't believe any pattern can be laid down in advance as to how this will be achieved. I don't believe that all the old traditional labour organizations should henceforward be attacked as a solid block of reactionary obstruction. It may be that these organizations can yet be won over to the idea of genuine industrial democracy.

One thing is certain. Irrespective of various 'laws of history' which the self-styled vanguards proclaim, I believe the workers will find their way to industrial democracy and that Workers' Councils will initiate a new and peaceful world-society for all humanity. Indeed unless they do so society may well be destroyed in a nuclear holocaust, organized by the very bureaucracies who, East and West, rule industry today.

## POSTSCRIPT

After standing empty for a few months the factory described was re-opened by an electronics firm, with much the same conditions of labour, piecework, etc, as the Simms Combine had wished to impose. Such evidence as I have is not conclusive, but I believe a little research would almost certainly confirm that this concern was indirectly controlled by the same board that decided to close the original factory down.

# REVIEW

ken weller

Incomes Policy, Legislation and Shop Stewards. by T. Cliff and C. Barker, with an introduction by Reg Birch. 136 pp. 2/6 (3/- post free). Published by the London Industrial Shop Stewards Defence Committee, 117 Carmelite Rd., Harrow Weald, Mdx.

This paperback is an excellent piece of work, badly needed for a long time. It is well written and amply documented, an unusual combination in material published by the left. It is no surprise that the first edition of 5,000 copies was quickly sold out, almost entirely to industrial workers. Both the book and the response to it reflect the growing disgust of militants with negotiating procedures that prove to be straightjackets and a growing awareness of the impossibility of getting the hierarchies of the unions to defend real working class interests.

The first few chapters are rather innocuous. They deal with the economic background to the incomes policy. Whilst more readable than most critiques of this type, most of this could have been written (less well) by almost any 'marxist', at almost any time during the last few decades. It is complete, with predictable references to the 'falling rate of profit' and the 'permanent war economy'. Within these terms, there is a thorough demolition of George Brown's claims for his Incomes Policy.

The second half of the book is much more valuable. Significantly, it is with this part that Reg Birch (1) states he disagrees with, in his introduction. This section deals with the degeneration of the trade unions and with the developing role of the shop stewards, and is a real contribution to the self-awareness of militants. It points out how completely different the interests of the rank and file are from those of the union bureaucracies. It describes and documents the increasingly important part the shop stewards play in wage determination and the inability of the employers to settle with them. It describes both the weaknesses, fragmentation and backwardness in job organization, and its strengths, and suggests some solutions. It refers to the fact that most industrial struggles today are on issues other than straightforward wage claims, that many are over the question of control, and that this tendency is becoming increasingly important.

I have a few comments which relate to what is not in the book. The book claims, amongst other things, to be about the problems facing shop stewards. Today no discussion of the shop stewards is complete without an analysis of all the sources from where attacks on them are coming. The book recognizes that the trade union officials are now a major base for assault on shop organization. This is a step forward. What is needed, though, is some discussion as to how this assault can be met and overcome. At what level, in other words, should the main struggle be fought?

The meetings and campaign waged by those who have produced and distributed the book have been centred so far almost entirely against the Incomes Policy and the proposed Trade Union Legislation. This defensive resistance to governmental action has meant that many of the central dangers, problems and opportunities facing job organization are ignored or played down. A campaign on this basis is necessarily based on the concept of 'pressure on the government'. The campaign so far, and this is not the fault of the publishers or authors of the book, has consisted almost entirely of lobbies and meetings. It seems to me that a much better insurance against all attacks on job organization (not just those emanating from the Labour Government, but also those emanating from within the trade unions themselves) would be to place the whole emphasis on building up the autonomy (both organizational and political) of job organization. This would require profound clarification of ideas as to what are the real aims of the movement, and as to who are its real enemies. It would require the discarding of many traditional left ideas. In this respect it is significant that there is very little in the book about life, work and struggle inside the factory. There is next to nothing about methods of struggle or about 'unofficial' forms of job organization. There is even less about the new methods of exploitation and manipulation within the modern factory. It is here that the failings of the economic analysis show up. Just as the book's analysis of modern capitalism is rather traditional, so are its conceptions of the points of growth for struggle within industry itself.

Nevertheless the book is useful and important. It marks a distinct change of emphasis on the part of a whole layer of socialists and industrial militants and a turn away from reliance on resolution-mongering and fighting for positions within the union. In this respect, and on its own many merits, the book deserves the widest possible circulation and can do nothing but good.

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(1) Reg Birch, who has written the foreword to this pamphlet, is AEU Divisional Organizer for North London. He is a dissident member of the Communist Party and was 'dropped' some time ago from the Party Executive. He had a good record as a militant when he was in industry.

# POLES APART

In 'Solidarity' vol.IV, No.2 we described how a number of Polish Communists had been imprisoned by the 'liberal' Gomulka regime for publishing a text critical of various aspects of the Polish economy. Since then we have found more background information about the whole affair.

Modzelewski and Kuron were the authors and publishers of the document (1). All five of the 'culprits' were imprisoned for 'the hoarding and distribution of literature criticising the government' (2). Modzelewski had spent a year in Italy with the Italian Communist Party (1). When he returned home he contrasted the developments in that Party (in particular its relative freedom of discussion) with the atmosphere and ethos he saw around him in Poland and more especially with the lack of egalitarian inspiration in the Polish Party. Modzelewski came to the notice of the Polish apparatchniks in the Spring of 1964, when he organized a meeting in support of the 'letter of the 34 intellectuals', who had protested against the censorship and lack of freedom in Poland (3). In the general tightening up after this episode, Modzelewski had been warned by the Party.

The group of Communists with whom Modzelewski and Kuron associated consisted of young lecturers and post-graduate students at Warsaw University. It included the historian Ludwig Hass, who had been a pre-war Trotskyist associated with the group around Isaac Deutscher (4). Hass had been arrested by the Russians in 1939, in Lemberg (2) after the Nazi-Soviet partition of Poland and deported, eventually ending up in a concentration camp at Vorkuta in Siberia. Even there he maintained his

ideological stance. Poles imprisoned with him talked of his passion and sincerity in these terrible circumstances (5). He was not allowed out when vast numbers of Poles were freed to form the Polish Army in Britain, which fought in Italy. He was only released when Gomulka negotiated an amnesty in 1957 (5). He emerged from Vorkuta an anti-Soviet Communist, not denying his Trotskyist past or views (5). He involved in politics immediately, participating in demonstrations which protested against the suppression of Po Prostu, the paper which, during the 'thaw' of 1956, had discussed the issues of workers' control (6). He spoke publicly and took part in several demonstrations. Later, during the early sixties, he formed a discussion group with a number of intellectuals who had been involved with Po Prostu. This discussion group was eventually disbanded by the police (6).

Less is known about the other arrested men. Kazimierz Badowski is described as a '58 year old, nationally-known economist' by the Neue Zurcher Zeitung (2), but as a 'young scientist' by Robotnik Polski (3). Roald Smiech is a young history lecturer at Warsaw University.

The shooting of James Meredith has once more drawn attention to the plight of Negroes in the South of America.

The article "NEGRO LIFE IN THE AMERICAN SOUTH" in 'CONTEMPORARY ISSUES' No. 50 (June, 1966) gives an arresting picture of what Negroes have daily to endure.

3/6 post free from 'CONTEMPORARY PRESS', 78, Summerlee Avenue, London N. 2.

The group's main document, which runs to some 128 pages, is an analysis and criticism of the regime. According to Robotnik Polski (3) it was submitted to the Central Committee of the Polish Party. According to New Politics (6) the pamphlet 'analyzed the structure of Communist society. The substance of its analysis was that the Communist State does not represent the workers but a new ruling class. It characterized the regime as a bureaucratic dictatorship which had usurped the workers' property and called for a struggle for workers' democracy based on workers' councils. The authors of the pamphlet differentiated themselves from the Titoists in their rejection of the workers' councils of Yugoslavia as genuinely democratic or representing the rule of the Yugoslavian workers'.

Robotnik Polski (3) says 'they criticized the socialist economy in Poland for being based on unreal plans and mistaken economic concepts. The Central Committee was wrong in following the Soviet economic model. The policy of Comicon limited the development of Polish industry. They noticed that the wages of workers were kept low, which they claimed only results in low output and high cost of production.'

The workers were thereby forced to look for an additional income, often from illegal sources. 'You cannot - they claimed - call it a socialist system in which allowance is made in State plans for stealing. Sometimes this stealing amounts to half the production'(3). Central Committee man Jedrychowski is reported to have said that stealing by the workers is more economic than the raising of wages (3).

The group, though not itself involved in industry, saw industry as realistically as it could be seen, under the circumstances. They said that the economic ills of Poland were directly connected with the workers' low wages.

'You are destroying Communists just like Stalin did, and you are 20 years too late!'

Ludwig Hass, addressing the Public Prosecutor in the first trial, July 1965. (Kultura, No. 4, April 1966).

The authors of the pamphlet discussed Poland's heavy financial burden. Defence spending amounted to half the national budget. They wrote that this was unnecessary, since Poland was protected by the Russian Army. Then, with a breath of revolutionary socialism, they declared that 'the best way to protect the country would be to distribute arms to the whole population' (3).

The pamphlet also spoke of the 'reactionary role of the Polish clergy' and asked for 'a return to proletarian internationalism' (6).

The group was taken into custody and repeatedly questioned. This in no way stopped them. A number of people were then expelled from the Party. This included those later sentenced. Their jobs were threatened (1). They continued nevertheless to organize, seeking a wider approach to more people. Some verbal reports speak of factory leafleting. The group prepared a declaration and a programme, which they printed and published privately. At this stage the whole Warsaw group was arrested. The Neue Zurcher Zeitung (2) talks of an agent provocateur giving the group's activities away.

Modzelewski and Kuron were tried in July 1965. There were demonstrations outside the court, to which, according to most papers, the public was not admitted (2, 3, 5). According to a note from the Second Secretary of the Polish Embassy in London the trial was 'not in secret'. Modzelewski and Kuron were manacled (4) and escorted into court by 20 militiamen (3). The defence lawyer - Madame Aniella Steinsberg - protested against this treatment of the prisoners, saying that they were being treated worse than Communist prisoners had been in the pre-war authoritarian state (3). The trial lasted 3 days. Ludwig Hass was called as a witness and is said to have spoken very vigorously (5).

When the result was announced, and those in the corridor outside heard it, they sang the Internationale (4), again a pre-war occurrence at the trial of Communists. In ensuing scuffles with the militiamen, Kuron's sister was hurt (3). Modzelewski was sentenced to three and a half years and Kuron to three years imprisonment. Kuron then asked for an equal sentence.

During the trial the Party authorities had constantly asked Modzelewski to remember 'his father's party and its discipline'. His father had been a Minister of Foreign affairs between 1947 and 1951 (7). After the trial Modzelewski's mother said 'she was not shocked at the sentence since she was quite used to such things, having lived in the Soviet Union before coming to Poland' (3).

The second trial in which the accused were Hass, Smiech and Badowski was again a foregone conclusion. They got 3 years. Some other supporters of the group were expelled from the University (7).

There have been many instances of intellectuals being subject to pressure and imprisonment since 1956, but one is left with the severity of these sentences. The difference between the academics, like Adam Schaff, who are given rave notices by the kremlinologists as the 'great new influence', and the group we have just discussed is the latter's willingness to go beyond a philosophical criticism and to carry on, in an organized way, even after expulsion from the Party.

Huw Price.

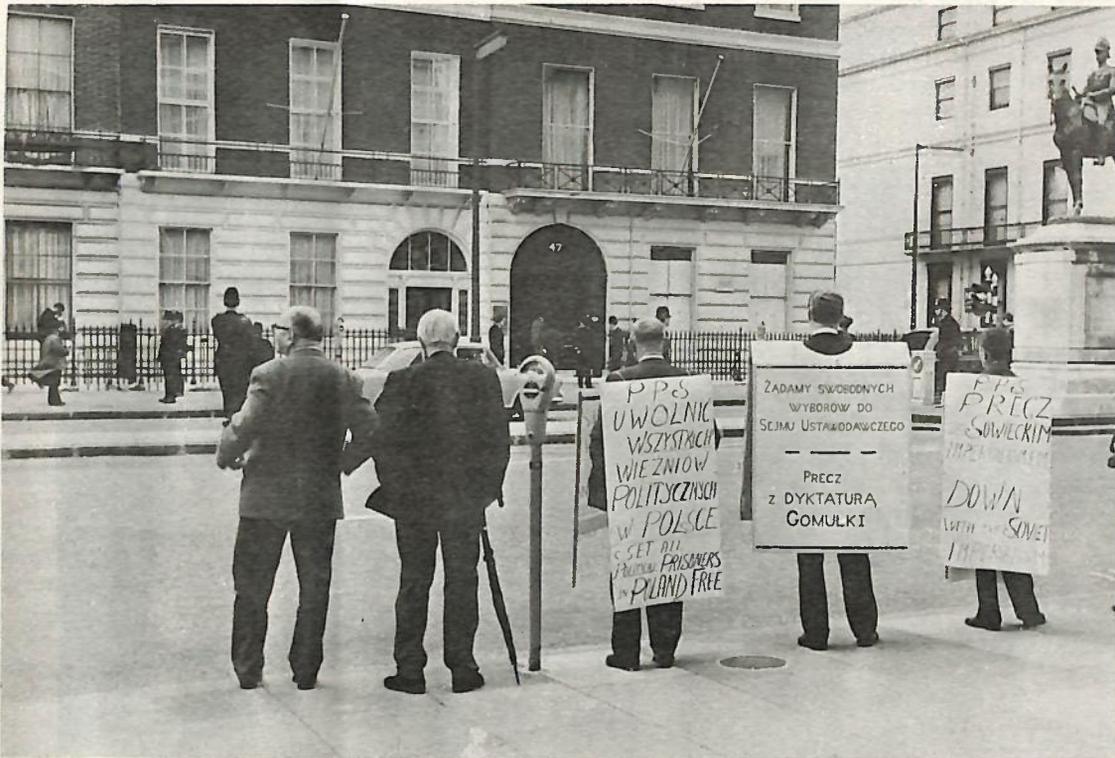
On May 15, 1966 a demonstration and march to the Polish Embassy were organized by the United Libertarian and Socialist Defence Committee. This was to protest at the arrest of the Polish Communists. The march was attended by some 300 revolutionaries.

On May 21, to demonstrate its concern for 'unity' the Socialist Labour League organized its own demonstration outside the Polish Embassy.

This was attended by under 50 people. At this demonstration G. Healy is alleged by the Newsletter (May 28, 1966) to have said 'that the youth and trade unionists on the demonstration disagreed with the sentiments of another march on the Embassy held the previous Sunday, in which the anti-communist, pro-capitalist Polish Socialist Party had participated.'

Solidarity is pleased to document and ruthlessly to expose the participation of these 'anti-communist, pro-capitalist' Polish Socialists in the following photographs.

- (1) New York Times, June 29, 1965.
- (2) Neue Zurcher Zeitung, January 15, 1966.
- (3) Robotnik Polski, No. 3, September 1965.
- (4) Isaac Deutscher in Newsletter, May 7, 1966.
- (5) Janusz Kowalewski in Wiadomosci, April 1966
- (6) New Politics, vol. IV, No. 4
- (7) New York Times, November 5, 1965.



Three Polish Socialists parading subversive, pro-capitalist slogans.



United Libertarian and Socialist Defence Committee confusing the masses with reactionary anti-communist slogan.



Unprincipled assortment of revolutionary socialists, anarchists, syndicalists, solidarists and libertarians pretending to protest against arrest of Polish Communists.

# THE FATE OF MARXISM

This article is the first chapter of a text by Paul Cardan ( 'Marxisme et Theorie Revolutionaire' ) which has been appearing in issues 36-40 of the French review 'Socialisme ou Barbarie'. The series starts by clearing the decks of the accumulated theoretical debris of a generation and then gets down to a serious attempt to rethink revolutionary theory from rock bottom up.

Cardan's text is bound to infuriate those who have never had a new idea of their own. In a world where everything is changing more rapidly than at any other period of history some still seem to feel that revolutionary theory alone should remain immune from the process. For us, the development of revolutionary theory is the condition for the development of revolutionary action. We can therefore only welcome a serious discussion of new ideas.

## Which marxism?

For anyone seriously concerned with the social question, an encounter with marxism is both immediate and inevitable. It is probably even wrong to use the word 'encounter', in that such a term conveys both something external to the observer and something that may or may not happen. Marxism today has ceased to be some particular theory or some particular political programme advocated by this or that group. It has deeply permeated our language, our ideas and the very reality around us. It has become part of the air we breathe in coming into the social world. It is part of the historical landscape in the backgrounds of our comings and goings.

For this very reason to speak of marxism has become one of the most difficult tasks imaginable. We are involved in the subject matter in a hundred different ways. Moreover this marxism, in realizing itself, has become impossible to pin down. For with which marxism should we deal? With the marxism of Khrushchev or with the marxism of Mao Tse Tung? With the marxism of Togliatti or with that of Thorez? With the marxism of Castro, of the Yugoslavs, or of the Polish revisionists? Or should one perhaps deal with the marxism of the Trotskyists (although here too the claims of geography reassert themselves: British and French trotskysts, trotskysts in the United States and trotskysts in Latin America tear one another to

pieces, mutually denouncing one another as non-marxist). Or should one deal with the marxism of the Bordighists or of the SPGB, of Raya Dunayevskaya or of CLR James, or of this or that other still smaller group of the extreme 'left'? As is well known each of these groups denounces all others as betraying the spirit of 'true marxism', which it alone apparently embodies. A survey of the whole field will immediately show that there is not only the abyss separating 'official' from 'oppositional' marxisms. There is also the vast multiplicity of both 'official' and 'oppositional' variants, each seeing itself as excluding all others.

There is no simple yardstick by which this complex situation could be simplified. There is no 'test of events which speaks for itself'. Both the marxist politician enjoying the fruits of office and the marxist political prisoner find themselves in specific social circumstances, and in themselves these circumstances confer no particular validity to the particular views of those who expound them. On the contrary, particular circumstances make it essential carefully to interpret what various spokesmen for marxism say. Consecration in power gives no more validity to what a man says than does the halo of the martyr or irreconcilable opponent. For does not marxism itself teach us to view with suspicion both what emanates from institutionalized authority and what emanates from oppositions that perpetually fail to get even a toe hold in historical reality?

## a return to the sources.

The solution to this dilemma cannot be purely and simply a 'return to Marx'. What would such a return imply? Firstly it would see no more, in the development of ideas and actions in the last eighty years, and in particular in the development of social democracy, leninism, stalinism, trotskyism, etc, than layer upon layer of disfiguring scabs covering a healthy body of intact doctrine. This would be most unhistorical.

It is not only that Marx's doctrine is far from having the systematic simplicity and logical consistency that certain people would like to attribute to it. Nor is it that such a 'return to the sources' would necessarily have something academic about it (at best it could only correctly re-establish the theoretical content of a doctrine belonging to the past - as one might attempt to do, say, for the writings of Descartes or St. Thomas Aquinas). Such an endeavour could leave the main problem unsolved, namely that of discovering the significance of marxism for contemporary history and for those of us who live in the world of today.

The main reason why a 'return to Marx' is impossible is that under the pretext of faithfulness to Marx - and in order to achieve this faithfulness - such a 'return' would have to start by violating one of the essential principles enunciated by Marx himself. Marx was, in fact, the first to stress that the significance of a theory cannot be grasped independently of the historical and social practice which it inspires and initiates, to which it gives rise, in which it prolongs itself and under cover of which a given practice seeks to justify itself.

Who, today, would dare proclaim that the only significance of Christianity for history is to be found in reading unaltered versions of the Gospels or that the historical practice of various Churches over a period of some 2,000 years can teach us nothing fundamental about the significance of this religious movement? A 'faithfulness to Marx' which would see the historical fate of marxism as something unimportant would be just as laughable. It would in fact be quite ridiculous. Whereas for the Christian the revelations of the Gospels have a transcendental kernel and an intemporal validity, no theory could ever have such qualities in the eyes of a marxist. To seek to discover the meaning of marxism only in what Marx wrote (while keeping quiet about what the doctrine has become in history) is to pretend - in flagrant contradiction with the central ideas of that doctrine - that real history doesn't count and that the truth of a theory is always and exclusively to be found 'further on'. It finally comes to replacing revolution by revelation and the understanding of events by the exegesis of texts.

All this would be bad enough. But there is worse. The insistence that a revolutionary theory be confronted, at all stages, by historical reality (1) is explicitly proclaimed in Marx's writings. It is in fact part of the deepest meaning of Marxism. Marx's marxism did not seek to be - and could not be - just one theory among others. It did not seek to hide its historical roots or to dissociate itself from its historical repercussions. Marxism was to provide the weapons not only for interpreting the world but for changing it. (2) The fullest meaning of the theory was, according to the theory itself, that it gave rise to and inspired a revolutionary practice. Those who, seeking to exculpate marxist theory, proclaim that none of the historical practices which for 100 years have claimed to base themselves on marxism are 'really' based on marxism, are in fact reducing marxism to the status of a mere theory, to the status of a theory just like any other. They are submitting marxism to an irrevocable judgment. They are in fact submitting it, quite literally, to a 'Last Judgment'. For did not Marx thoroughly accept Hegel's great idea: 'Weltgeschichte ist Weltgericht'. (3)

## marxism as ideology

Let us look at what happened in real life. In certain stages of modern history a practice inspired by marxism has been genuinely revolutionary. But in more recent phases of history it has been quite the opposite. And while these two phenomena need interpreting (and we will return to them) they undoubtedly point to the fundamental ambivalence of marxism. It is important to realise that in history, as in politics, the present weighs far more than the past. And for us, the present can be summed up in the statement that for the last 40 years marxism has become an ideology in the full meaning that Marx himself attributed to this word. It has become a system of ideas which relate to reality not in order to clarify it and to transform it, but on the contrary in order to mask it and to justify it in the abstract.

(1) By 'historical reality' we obviously don't mean particular events, separated from all others. We mean the dominant tendencies of social evolution, after all the necessary interpretations have been made.

(2) K. Marx. Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach.

(3) 'Universal History is the Last Judgment'. Despite its theological form, this statement expresses one of Hegel's most radically atheistic ideas. It means that there is nothing transcendental; that there is no appeal against what happens here and now. We are, definitively, what we are in the process of becoming, what we shall have become.

It has become a means of allowing people to say one thing and to do another, to appear other than they are.

In this sense marxism first became ideology when it became Establishment dogma in countries paradoxically called 'socialist'. In these countries 'marxism' is invoked by governments which quite obviously do not incarnate working class power and which are no more controlled by the working class than is any bourgeois government. In these countries 'marxism' is represented by 'leaders of genius' - whom their successors call 'criminal lunatics' without more ado. 'Marxism' is proclaimed the ideological basis of Tito's policies and of those of the Albanians, of Russian policies and of those of the Chinese. In these countries marxism has become what Marx called the 'solemn complement of justification'. It permits the compulsory teaching of 'State and Revolution' to students, while maintaining the most oppressive and rigid state structures known to history. It enables a self-perpetuating and privileged bureaucracy to take refuge behind talk of the 'collective ownership of the means of production' and of 'abolition of the profit motive'.

But marxism has also become ideology in so far as it represents the doctrine of the numerous sects, proliferating on the decomposing body of the 'official' marxist movement. For us the word sect is not a term of abuse. It has a precise sociological and historical meaning. A small group is not necessarily a sect. Marx and Engels did not constitute a sect, even when they were most isolated. A sect is a group which blows up into an absolute a single side, aspect or phase of the movement from which it developed, makes of this the touchstone of the truth of its doctrine (or of the truth, full stop), subordinates everything else to this 'truth' and in order to remain 'faithful' to it is quite prepared totally to separate itself from the real world and henceforth to live in a world of its own. The invocation of marxism by the sects allows them to think of themselves and to present themselves as something other than what they are, namely as the future revolutionary party of that very proletariat in which they never succeed in implanting themselves.

Finally marxism has become ideology in yet another sense. For several decades now it has ceased to be a living theory. One could search the political literature of the last 30 years in vain even to discover fruitful applications of the theory, let alone attempts to extend it or to deepen it.

We don't doubt that what we are now saying will provoke indignant protests among those who, while professing to 'defend Marx', daily bury his corpse a little deeper under the thick layers of their distortions

and stupidities. We don't care. This is no personal quarrel. In analysing the historical fate of marxism we are not implying that Marx had any kind of moral responsibility for what happened. It is marxism itself, in what was best and most revolutionary in it, namely its pityless denunciation of hollow phrases and ideologies and its insistence on permanent self-criticism, which compels us to take stock of what marxism has become in real life.

It is no longer possible to maintain or to rediscover some kind of 'marxist orthodoxy'. It can't be done in the ludicrous (and ludicrously linked) way in which the task is attempted by the high priests of stalinism and by the sectarian hermits, who see a marxist doctrine which they presume intact, but 'amend', 'improve' or 'bring up to date' on this or that specific point, at their convenience. Nor can it be done in the dramatic and ultimatic way suggested by Trotsky in 1940 (4) who said, more or less: 'We know that marxism is an imperfect theory linked to a given period of history. We know that theoretical elaboration should continue. But today, the revolution being on the agenda, this task will have to wait'. This argument is conceivable - although superfluous - on the eve of an armed insurrection. Uttered a quarter of a century later it can only serve to mask the inertia and sterility of the trotskyist movement, since the death of its founder.

## a marxist 'method'?

Some will agree with us so far, but will seek final refuge in the defence of a 'marxist method', allegedly unaffected by what we have just discussed. It is not possible, however, to maintain 'orthodoxy' as Lukacs attempted long before them (in 1919 to be precise), by limiting it to a marxist method, which could somehow be separated from its content and which could somehow be neutral in relation to this content. (5)

Although a step forward in relation to various kinds of 'orthodox' cretinism, Lukacs' position is basically untenable. It is untenable for a reason which Lukacs forgets, despite his familiarity with dialectical thinking, namely that it is impossible,

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(4) In his 'In Defence of Marxism'.

(5) See the essay 'What Is Orthodox Marxism?' in Lukacs' book 'History and Class Consciousness'. An English translation of this essay was recently published by 'International Socialism', Nos. 24 and 25 (obtainable from 36 Gilden Rd., London NW6). C. Wright Mills adopts a rather similar viewpoint in his book 'The Marxists'.

except if one takes the term 'method' at its most superficial level, to separate a method from its content, particularly when one is dealing with historical and social theory.

A method, in the philosophical sense, is defined by the sum total of the categories it uses. A rigid distinction between method and content only belongs to the more naive forms of transcendental idealism (or 'criticism'). In its early stages this method of thought sought to separate and to oppose matter or content (which were infinite and undefined) to certain finite operative categories. According to this view the permanent flux of the subject matter could not alter the basic categories which were seen as the form without which the subject matter could not be grasped or comprehended.

But this rigid distinction between material and category is already transcended in the more advanced stages of 'criticist' thought, when it comes under the influence of dialectical thought. For immediately the problem arises: how do we determine which is the appropriate analytical category for this or that type of raw material? If the raw material carries within itself the appropriate 'hallmark' allowing it to be placed in this or that category, it is not just 'amorphous'; and if it is genuinely amorphous then it could indifferently be placed in one category or in another and the distinction between true and false breaks down. It is precisely this contradiction which, at several times in the history of philosophy, has led from a criticist type of thinking to thinking of a dialectical type. (6)

This is how the question is posed at the level of logic. When one considers the growth of knowledge as history, one sees that it was often the 'development of the subject matter' that led to a revision of the previously accepted categories or even to their being exploded and superseded. The 'philosophical' revolutions produced in modern physics by relativity theory or by quantum theory are just two examples among many. (7)

The impossibility of establishing a rigid separation between method and content, between categories and raw material becomes even more obvious when one passes from knowledge of the physical world to the understanding of history. A deeper enquiry into already available material - or the discovery of new material - may lead to a modification of the categories and therefore of the method. But there is, in addition, something much more fundamental, something highlighted precisely by Marx and by Lukacs themselves. (8) This is the fact that the categories through which we approach and apprehend history are themselves real products of historical development. These categories can only become clear and

effective methods of historical knowledge when they have to some extent become incarnated or fulfilled in real forms of social life.

Let us give a simple example. In the thinking of the ancient Greeks the dominant categories defining social relations and history were essentially political (the power of the city, relations between cities, relations between 'might' and 'right', etc.). The economy only received marginal attention. This was not because the intelligence or insight of the Greeks were less 'developed' than those of modern man. Nor was it because there were no economic facts, or because economic facts were totally ignored. It was because in the social reality of that particular epoch the economy had not yet become a separate, autonomous factor (a factor 'for itself' as Marx would say) in human development. A significant analysis of the economy and of its importance for society could only take place in the 17th century and more particularly in the 18th century. It could only take place in parallel with the real development of capitalism which made of the economy the dominant element in social life. The central importance attributed by Marx and the marxists to economic factors is but an aspect of the unfolding of this historical reality.

It is therefore clear that there cannot exist a 'method' of approaching history, which could remain immune from the actual development of history. This is due to reasons far more profound

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(6) The classical example of such a transition is the passage from Kant to Hegel, via Fichte and Schelling. But the basic pattern can be discerned in the later works of Plato, or among the neo-Kantians, from Rickert to Last.

(7) It is obviously not just a question of turning things upside down. Neither logically nor historically have the categories of physics been 'simply a result' (and even less 'simply a reflection') of the subject matter. A revolution in the realm of categories may allow one to grasp raw material which hitherto defied definition (as happened with Galileo). Moreover advances in experimental technique may at times 'compel' new material to appear. There is therefore a two-way relationship - but certainly no independence - between categories and subject matter.

(8) See Lukacs 'The Changing Function of Historical Materialism' (loc. cit.).

than the 'progress of knowledge' or than 'new discoveries' etc. It is due to reasons pertaining directly to the very structure of historical knowledge, and first of all to the structure of its object: the mode of being of history. What is the object we are trying to know when we study history? What is history? History is inseparable from meaning. Historical facts are historical (and not natural, or biological) inasmuch as they are interwoven with meaning (or sense). The development of the historical world is, ipso facto, the development of a universe of meaning. Therefore, it is impossible radically to separate fact from meaning (or sense), or to draw a sharp logical distinction between the categories we use to understand the historical material, and the material itself. And, as this universe of meaning provides the environment in which the 'subject' of the historical knowledge (i. e. the student of history) lives, it is also necessarily the means by which he grasps, in the first instance, the whole historical material. No epoch can grasp history except through its own ideas about history; but these ideas are themselves a product of history and part and parcel of the historical material (which will be studied as such by the next epoch). Plainly speaking the method of the biologist is not a biological phenomenon; but the method of the historian is a historical phenomenon (9).

Even these comments have however to be seen in proper perspective. They don't imply that at every moment, every category and every method are thrown into question. Every method is not transcended or ruined by the development of real history at the very instant it is being utilized. At any given moment, it is always a practical question of knowing if historical change has reached a point where the old categories and the old method have to be reassessed. But this judgment cannot be made independently of a discussion of the content. In fact such an assessment is nothing other than a discussion on content which, starting with the old categories, comes to show, through its dealings with the raw material of history, that one needs to go beyond a particular set of categories.

Many will say: 'to be marxist is to remain faithful to Marx's method, which remains valid'. This is tantamount to saying that nothing has happened in the history of the last 100 years which either permits one or challenges one to question Marx's categories. It is tantamount to implying that everything will for ever be understood by these categories. It is to take up a position in relation to content and categories, to have a static, non-dialectical theory concerning this relationship, while at the same time refusing openly to admit it.

## conclusions

In fact, it is precisely the detailed study of the content of recent history which compelled us to reconsider the categories - and therefore the method of marxism. We have questioned these categories not only (or not so much) because this or that particular theory of Marx - or of traditional marxism - had been proved 'wrong' in real life, but because we felt that history as we were living it could no longer be grasped through these traditional categories, either in their original form (10) or as 'amended' or 'enlarged' by post-marxian marxists. The course of history, we felt, could neither be grasped, nor changed, by these methods.

Our reexamination of marxism does not take place in a vacuum. We don't speak from just anywhere or from nowhere at all. We started from revolutionary marxism. But we have now reached the stage where a choice confronts us: to remain marxists or to remain revolutionaries. We have to choose between faithfulness to a doctrine which, for a considerable period now, has no longer been animated by any new thought or any meaningful action, and faithfulness to our basic purpose as revolutionaries, which is a radical and total transformation of society.

Such a radical objective requires first of all that one should understand that which one seeks to transform. It requires that one identifies what elements, in contemporary society, genuinely challenge its fundamental assumptions and are in basic (and not merely superficial) conflict with its present structure. But one must go further. Method is not separable from content. Their unity, namely theory, is in its turn not separable from the requirements of revolutionary action. And anyone looking at the real world, must conclude that meaningful revolutionary action can no longer be guided by traditional theory. This has been amply demonstrated for several decades now both by the experience of the mass parties of the 'left', and by the experience of the sects.

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(9) These considerations are developed more fully on p. 20 et seq. of the French text.

(10) In the present article we cannot enter into a detailed discussion as to which of the concepts of classical marxism have today to be discarded for a real grasp of the nature of the modern world and of the means of changing it. The subject is discussed in detail in an article 'Recommander la Revolution' (published in January 1964 in issue No. 35 of 'Socialisme ou Barbarie') of which we hope to publish extracts in forthcoming issues.

## TOO OLD AT FIFTY

In our last issue we printed an article 'AFTER THE FORD DEFEAT', written by an ex-Ford worker. It described conditions in the plant after the defeat of 1963 and drew particular attention to the policy of the Ford Motor Company towards its older workers.

The following article emphasizes some of the same points. The author, who has written for 'Solidarity' on a number of occasions in the past, has had recent bitter experience of the attitude of Ford toward their older employees. Recently his wife died suddenly. He was left alone, to bring up his three young children. He applied to the Company to be taken off shift work, so that he could look after them in the evening. The response of the Company was a bald negative: he has had to leave Fords after working there for many years. This is what the 1963 defeat at Dagenham really means!

The 1963 struggle was not only against the victimization of Bill Francis ( see 'Solidarity' vol.III, No. 11). What was at stake was the whole balance of power within the factory. Once defeated, workers at Dagenham were no longer able to resist the speed-up. They were no longer able to protect their militants, or the older men from the worst excesses of the management. This article spells out the results of such a defeat, as it affected one man's life.

Let us hope that future struggles will take more effective forms. In the past the workers have been too gentlemanly. The firm acts, the men retire from the factory, and then everything stops, until one side or the other gives way. Since the firm's resources are always immeasurably larger, they generally win. Strikes have to be made more expensive and unpleasant for the management. Picketing has to be more rigorous. The full potentiality of the stay-in strike and the work-to-rule have to be realized. Only by these methods can the right to a human existence at work be protected.

### MANUAL WORKERS AND 'STAFF'

The series on Fords is most interesting. Of course the Ford Motor Company is not equally brutal to all workers. Those on the 'staff' ( that is the clerical workers ) have a separate Welfare Department for their benefit. This distinction is clear to all who work at Fords. Thus if a clerk is ill, the Welfare Department sends someone round to visit him in hospital. It also sends someone to his home to enquire if they can help in any way. Some men with twenty years or more service to the Company are still regarded as obscure peasants, while their daughters, who have only 2 or 3 months service, are already on the staff.

As far as the manual workers are concerned the firm's 'Welfare Department' is a front organization. Its purpose is to cover up the brutality of modern production and to improve the firm's image with the general public and the boss gobbler press. The 'Welfare Department' has no real power. It can only make recommendations to the supervisor of a particular employee. Thus if for reasons of ill health a worker needs a light job, or if for domestic reasons a worker wants to be taken off night work, it still depends on his foreman's favour if he gets the desired change. As one of my mates said to me: 'You can have a medical certificate recommending light duties, you can have it signed by your own doctor, by the medical department's doctor, by the welfare officer, and for that matter by Henry Ford himself, but if your face doesn't fit with the foreman it's "Goodnight, George!".'

## STARTING AT FORDS

The new production worker at Dagenham is soon given a taste of Company policy. Job selection is almost totally arbitrary. It seems to be at the whim of some junior clerk, without any consideration of previous experience or of the individual wishes of the new worker. When their great day dawns, the new victims turn up and wait outside the 'personnel' office. A clerk emerges and instructs them all to follow him up to the canteen or into some other large room. There he will give the recruits a lecture on the virtues of Ford. I think the clerk who lectured me must have been a 'company man': his talk to us was about the immaculate conception of Henry Ford and his Foremen.

The lecture over, you troop downstairs and outside the office again. Some time later, another clerk emerges, who then segregates the men out. 'You lot here, follow me' he says, as he points to a group of 4 or 5 potential assembly workers. He will then lead them ( some protesting that they were taken on as toolroom or inspectors ) to the assembly line, to be 'broken in'. Those remaining will be sent to 'machining' or 'janitoring' or some other job they know nothing about.

Some of the new men are put on inspection or quality control jobs. They don't know what faults to watch out for and quite a lot of old junk is passed as O.K. Cars like all products under capitalism are made to be sold at a profit. Cars are a consumer product and they must be consumed. As long as they stand a chance of lasting out the warranty period they are alright. If an inspector goes mad and starts 'knocking some of the jobs down for repair', he is threatened with an assembly job. If an assembly operator starts querying the use of faulty parts he is reported to the foreman as a 'communist' or 'trouble maker'. If he persists in his illusions that the Company puts quality before all else, he is listed for special treatment. He may be transferred to another job on the same line and be expected to work slightly faster than the previous operator on that job. Or he may be kept on his own set of operations ... with an additional little operation added.

THIS WAS A BLANK SPACE . . .

## CONDITIONS IN THE FACTORY

To the average production worker Ford means filth. The stench of the place is sickening. The fumes from the foundry intermingle with the breeze from the river sewer. The resulting smell is overpowering. Many refer to it humourously as the stench of company men.

One has to work at the speed of the line. After morning tea break the line is speeded up. After dinner likewise. If a man happens to do his job without sign of strain he gets lumbered with another operation.

On nearly all assembly lines the power tools are hung either head high, so that one is always cracking one's head against the bloody things, or hung so high that you have to reach on tiptoe to pull the thing down to the job. The tension on this type is so strong that when you let go, the thing shoots up like a rocket and then bounces up and down like a half hundredweight yo-yo. When anyone points out to the foreman how dangerous this arrangement is, the only reply they make is 'They're quite safe! Everyone ducks, don't they? There aren't many accidents except on night shift, when the fools are half-asleep anyway'. The complainant is immediately pigeon-holed as a trouble maker.

Many of the older men, some of whom have been at Ford for 20 years or more, are generally bitter about the Company's policy of giving the easier jobs (like stock, time clerking, quality control, inspection, etc.) to new men, who have just started, and who know nothing about the job they are supposed to do, whilst the old hands still have to sweat it out on production jobs. The older men get, the faster they are made to work. When the older men complain the supervisor usually replies: "If you don't like your job, you can collect your cards". We all know it is Company policy to encourage the older men to get other employment, to save the company paying out pensions or severance pay. If an 'old boy' dies or moves out elsewhere, his job on the line is given to another old man from janitoring or such like, who will be transferred as a 'casualty replacement'. These men are nearly always over 50. The Company knows it is difficult for a man of that age to get employment elsewhere, but the Company gives them every encouragement! The only reason that many older men like myself stay on is the hope that things will improve. If ever the powder keg explodes again I would like to be there to enjoy it.

## THEN AND NOW

Looking back over the years I have been at Fords I despair at the weak-spined attitude of most of the men. At one time we all looked forward to the annual strike. These usually only lasted a week or so but we felt they had a purpose. They kept us in training. Generally only a few thousand men were out. Those unaffected 'chipped in' to support the men who were out. They also took careful note of the scabs. Job organization was kept in trim. Each department knew exactly where to go for part time work. The 'social clubs' and 'sick clubs' of each department paid out their accumulated cash and generally acted as subsidiary strike committees.

Everything is different now. Many departments don't have 'social clubs' any more. Many that do exist seem to think that they have to provide a free beer-up for the foreman occasionally. Many shop stewards now see their sole role as being collectors of union dues. As a result, the men tend to be cynical about both the unions and the shop stewards.

When there are walk-outs, shops are often split down the middle. Shop organization was much stronger before the unions became 'official' at Fords. If the men wanted something they just struck for a few days or so and they usually got what they were after.

Now, after months of negotiation, all we get is an insult. While negotiations are in progress the phrase commonly heard from Ford workers is: 'what will the union bastards give the Company this time?'

We still have our morning tea-break because we refused to listen to the union big brothers. And we sit down for ten minutes or so in the afternoon because we refused to submit to the union officials and the Company interfering with what we regarded as our religious freedom. (1)

Today, the atmosphere in the factory is strained. Few men trust their colleagues. 'Is he a company man or a nark?' is a question always uppermost in our minds. The Company welcomes this mutual suspicion, and actually helps it by handing out overtime on a selective basis to the good boys, while the baddies are left out in the cold. This is the situation at Fords today.

Brian Jeffreys, TGWU

(1) For more information on the struggle to retain the tea-breaks, see 'Solidarity' vol.II, No.3.



## ABOUT OURSELVES

'Solidarity' Pamphlet No. 23, 'THE CRISIS OF MODERN SOCIETY' by Paul Cardan, is now out. It is based on a talk given by the author at Tunbridge Wells, in May 1965. In this pamphlet, Cardan deals with a number of subjects not often dealt with in the context of 'revolutionary' politics. It discusses the profound crisis in the values of our society and the interlocking crises in science, in education and in the meaning and organization of work. He makes some interesting observations on the crisis in interpersonal relationships (relations between the sexes and between parents and children) and on how people react to these problems. He examines the revolt of young people against the institutionalized nightmare around them and the significance of their refusal to be fitted into the little compartments of the great bureaucratic pyramid, allocated to them by their 'elders and betters'.

We recommend this pamphlet to all our readers. It covers ground which we have not touched before. It costs 6d. (10d. post free). Send for some copies now.

Our other pamphlets continue to go like a bomb. Recently 110 copies - all we had available - of 'The Labour Government versus the Dockers 1945-1951' (Solidarity Pamphlet No. 19) were sold by one seller in a single morning at the West India dock in London. We will be reprinting this pamphlet shortly, with an up-to-date introduction dealing with the activities of the current Labour Government during the Seamen strike. The pamphlet will still cost 6d. (10d. post free).

'Vietnam' by Bob Potter (Solidarity Pamphlet No. 20) is also going well. In a recent Vietnam Week in Aberdeen several hundred copies were sold. We have just heard that 100 copies of this pamphlet, on their way to a friend in Chicago, have been confiscated and burnt by the US Customs Department as 'subversive propaganda'. Perhaps we should say our stuff has been going like an incendiary bomb!

The Mount Isa pamphlet by Bretta Carthey and Bob Potter (Solidarity Pamphlet No. 22) costs 1 shilling (1/5 post free). It is selling fairly well, but not as well as we would like. In particular not enough copies have yet gone to workers in similar sorts of situations, who could use the information it contains in a useful way. We are not interested in documenting struggles in an abstract way, but in providing factual information so that lessons can be learnt and the struggle taken a stage further. Any of our readers in the Antipodes, or any who have contacts with metal miners anywhere in the world, can help the workers in these industries by getting this pamphlet to them. Workers should not be defeated because they lack basic information about other sections.

We have been active in a number of other fields too. We have begun a series of trips into the darkest provinces to put over our point of view. We are interested in hearing from individuals and groups up and down the country who would like to meet us. We have recently been to Brighton, Manchester and Birmingham. A number of other trips are planned. Please get in touch.

### SOLIDARITY ( SCOTLAND )

Solidarity Scotland Pamphlet No. 1 ('A WAY AHEAD : FOR A NEW PEACE MOVEMENT') is now out. The pamphlet is endorsed by 18 individuals from 6 different towns in Scotland, all active in the Scottish anti-war movement. It aims to provide a basis for the creation of a new, radical, direct action peace movement in Scotland.

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In our last 2 issues - and in the present one - we have reproduced drawings by the French cartoonist 'Sine'. Sine's political drawings, many of them rejected by various 'progressive' French journals of the traditional left, were recently gathered together and published in Utrecht, Holland. They are guaranteed to annoy and antagonise a really wide public, the best reason, in our opinion, for disseminating them as widely as possible.

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The pamphlet is written in a very outspoken and witty style. For instance it notes that the first British Polaris submarine ( HMS 'Resolution' ) was named after the Labour and Communist party revolutionaries who had taken over the anti-bomb campaign in Scotland. We hear that the initial response to the pamphlet has been most encouraging. The response includes an all-out attack by Peter Cadogan, National Secretary of the Committee of 100. In a privately circulated sheet, marked 'not for publication' this great advocate of openness attacks Solidarity Scotland in a manner guaranteed to insure maximum sales for their first pamphlet.

Volume II, No.2 of Solidarity Scotland will be out shortly. A sub. costs 10/- for 12 issues. All orders should be sent to : N. McLeod, 20 Elderspark Street, Glasgow, SW1.

## SOLIDARITY NORTH - WEST

On June 11-12th, a meeting was held in Manchester with a view to producing a paper in the North West. About 20 people were present from Manchester, Burnley, Bolton and Altrincham. Groups and individuals in Liverpool and a number of other centres have also shown an interest in the project and a further meeting has been held. It is hoped to start producing the new paper in the autumn. The main aim of the paper will be to report and analyze industrial struggles in the North West, but space will also be devoted to other subjects. Anyone interested in helping the project in a practical way - as distinct from just academically discussing it - should write to Ian Smith, 20 Nora Street, Salford 7, Lancs.

# S.C.R.A.M.

Dear Comrades,

I would like, through your columns, to inform fellow anarchists throughout the U.K. of a demonstration in Scotland on September 24/25 organized by the Scottish Campaign for Resistance Against Militarism ( SCRAM ).

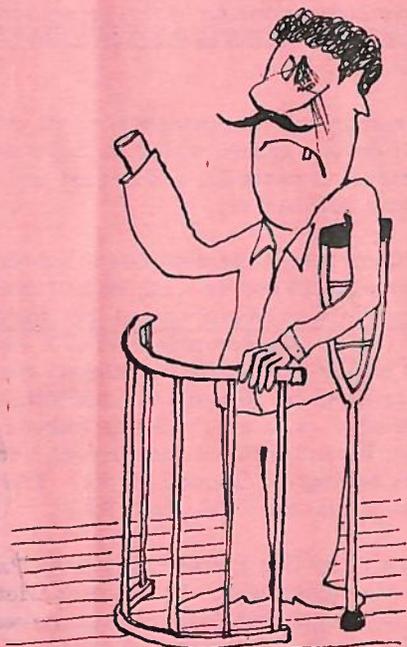
We have contacted and hope to have support from all the major peace movements in Britain. We are going to make this a really forceful demonstration at the Faslane Polaris Base, the Missile Store at Coulport, and the Weapons and Bomb Store at Glen Douglas.

Would any groups or individuals who require further details about the demonstration or SCRAM please contact the field organizer Bob Johnstone, c/o 13 Rodwin St., London N4.

Yours fraternally,

Jim Livingstone (Jnr.)

RAISE YOUR RIGHT  
HAND



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