

dismissed into obscurity as a result.

Cadres involved in relief work after the Tangchai earthquake this autumn were being urged to "deepen the criticism of Teng Hsiao Ping and strive for new successes in the anti-quake and relief work".

The fact that mass struggles in China have intimate connections with the bureaucratic faction fight does not indicate, in the final analysis, that they are not without autonomous subversive content.

In both Hengchow and the April 5 demonstrations, popular dissent rapidly escaped the control of the bureaucrats and culminated in clashes with the state apparatus as a whole.

On the other hand, a declining in confidence in the Maoists — whose campaigns regularly dashed more hopes than they fulfilled and who may suffer from the loss of Mao himself — would have important consequences for those sections of the proletariat which retain an anti-bureaucratic combativity.

The potential is there for a political consciousness to develop which more radically approaches the whole question of the bureaucracy and the factions within it.

Signs of this happening are naturally few and far between, but not totally non-existent.

70's Front

One window onto such developments is the socialist movement in Hong Kong.

There, former Red Guards of the cultural revolution and other libertarian communists have teamed up with local comrades to form the 70's Front.

A document of theirs has been published in the English language in called 'Our Position' in *Libero International*, available in Britain from Social Revolution, Box 217, 144 Drummond Street, London NW1.

The Libertarian Communist Group, of which the 70's Front is the Hong Kong part, has members in

AUEW: a Case for Workers' Control

THE AMALGAMATED union of engineering workers has a reputation as one of the more left-wing unions in this country. To some extent, this is true: the engineers came out in support of picketing miners, to close Saltley Coke Depot in 1972, and the AUEW waged the most bitter fight against the Industrial Relations Act—although they did it through the courts rather than through industrial action.

Again, AUEW conference decisions and public statements from their leadership—which includes Maoist leader, Reg Birch—tend to be rather more progressive than most unions.

But if you look at the rule-book, you will find that much of this 'leftiness' disappears—especially when it comes to letting the rank-and-file have a say.

The President is elected for a three year period, and then for a subsequent five year period, which is more democratic than many unions.

The salary for that job is £6,000 a year, and other officials get £5,000: this, of course, is way beyond what any of the members get.

On top of the basic, there are the perks: the car, the posts on various governmental bodies.

Hugh Scanlon can collect £3,300 a year as chairman of the Engineering Industry Training Board, and more from other bodies.

There are also lesser pickings for lesser executive members. No ordinary engineer has these opportunities.

It's no wonder the executive supports the social contract; they don't know what it's like for the ordinary members, and they're well protected against inflation themselves.

Postal Votes

The method of election for these posts is the postal ballot, recently introduced after a famous court-battle. The postal ballot means that union

candidates at branch meetings.

And of course, the field is left wide open for the capitalist press to do some free publicity for their favourite candidates—usually called the moderates.

Thus we have the Sunday Mirror of 12 9 '76 saying about a recent AUEW election: "Here are the men the Communists and their extremist allies do not want to win", and then giving a list of right-wing flunkies.

The union is based on association of branches, but this is by no means a free association. The autonomy of branches is severely hampered.

A minute proportion of branch subscriptions are returned to the branch to use in support of whatever they choose.

However, this money may not be used to affiliate to overtly political causes—except the Labour Party.

Thus, union members have no autonomous political power.

Rule 13

Perhaps more important however is the role played by the District Committee.

In particular, this bureaucratic body has immense power over shop-floor activity.

Rule 13 states "District Committees . . . shall have power . . . to deal with and regulate rates of wages, hours of labour, terms of overtime, piecework and general conditions affecting the interests of the trades in their

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worse: "In the case of a shop dispute the members shall not leave their employment without the approval of the District Committee."

Of course, all these above infringements of workers rights are frequently ignored, and the bureaucracy, afeared of losing all those lovely subscriptions, turns a blind eye.

But these rules can and have been used against left-wing activity; they would certainly be used against anyone who tried to break the social contract.

So just belt up and pay the subscriptions! . . . and the shop steward has to be accredited by the District Committee, which also defines a shop steward's powers.

So the message to would-be rank and file militants is: Watch out! There's a District Committee about!

Demands

Because Unions are only reformist bodies anyway, confined to narrow boundaries of economic struggle, even the most 'left-wing' unions can be pretty right wing when it comes down to it.

This gives the bureaucracy the powers it needs to hold back the rank and file in the interests of the ruling class—also in the interests of maintaining the bureaucrats' perks.

The AUEW has to be brought more under the control of its membership.

Here are some possible demands

above the bureaucrats' 'overtime' involved to be shared amongst branches:

- * Postal ballots to be replaced by workplace ballots, after extensive election campaigning;
- * Full political autonomy for union branches, with funds made available on a larger scale;
- * Automatic union recognition of elected shop stewards: their powers to be defined by the people who elected them;
- * The right to strike and regulation of the conditions of labour to be in the hands of the workers in question.

The best way to achieve this is to form a rank and file group in your area, to jointly press these demands at branch level.

There are already two such bodies; the Broad Left, and the Engineers Charter.

The Broad Left is dominated by the Communist Party, and is under its thumb.

Engineers Charter is dominated and controlled by the International Socialists.

Neither is a rank and file group in any real sense—they are party machines.

One paper which may be useful however, is *Engineering Voice*, a left wing engineering paper produced by libertarian socialists in the industry.

Proof of how good it is can be seen from the fact that the Communist Party tried to smash its circulation a while back—it was a bit too independant for their liking!