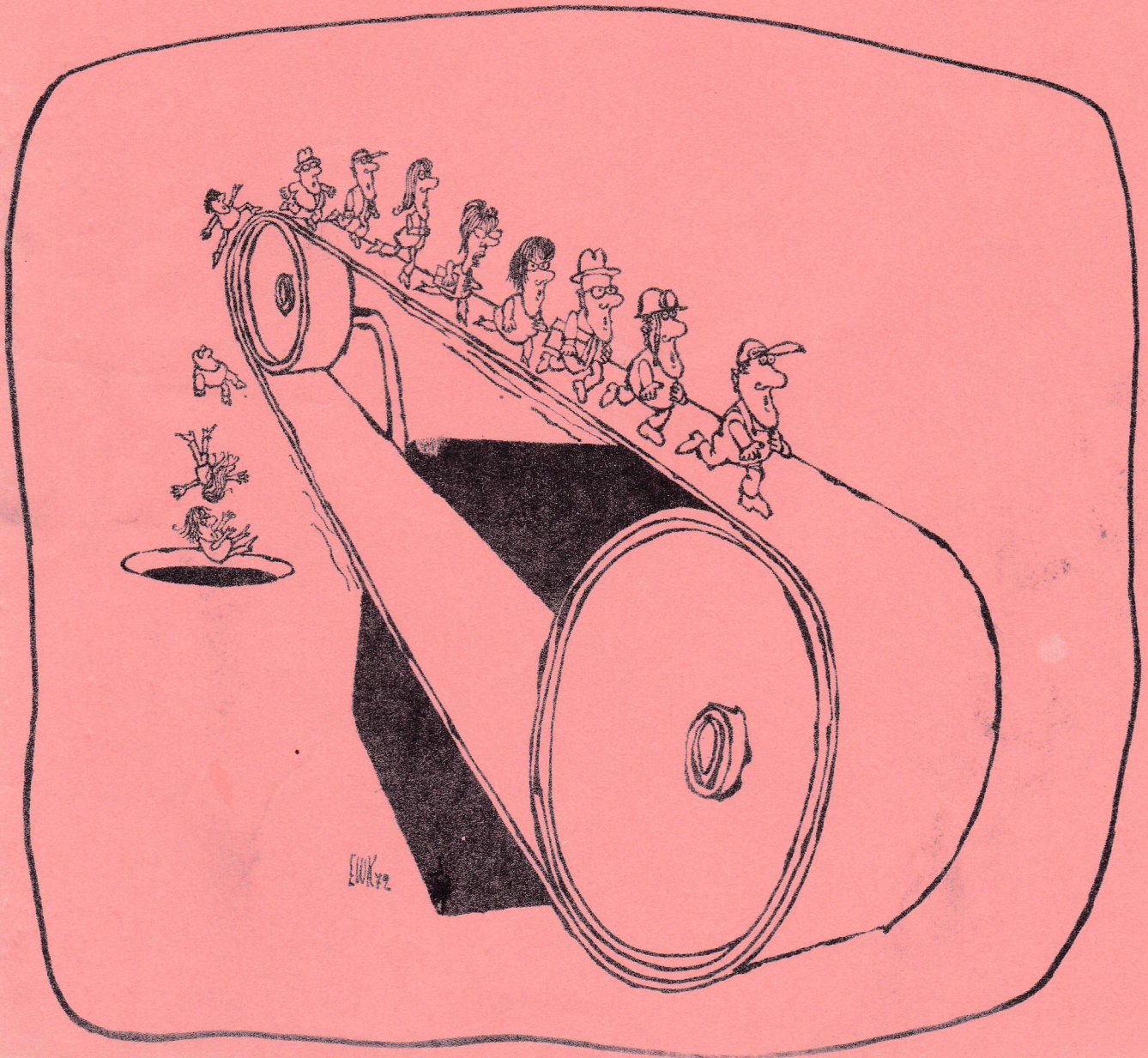


solidarity

for workers' power

- The Freeze
- Ford's
- Being & Consciousness
- Reviews
- The Docks

vol.7 no.6/5p



BUSINESS AS USUAL...

1972 proved an eventful year on the industrial front. Miners, railwaymen and dockers struggled with enormous success for limited demands. The miners gained support and mass sympathy all over the country, and won a pay increase of almost 30%. There were over 20 factory occupations and sit-ins, mostly over threatened closures or redundancies. The Industrial Relations Act was finally shown to be unworkable, when used against the dockers. During those 'July days' it looked for a moment as though an autonomous movement might be developing. But the Government, fearing the worst, retreated hastily, ensuring that things quickly returned to normal.

Despite the enthusiasm of many overseas comrades for the events of last year, and their excited reminiscences and anticipations of another 1926 General Strike, the real situation was somewhat different. All these actions were essentially defensive although they challenged for a moment the authority of bosses and Government. The Government sought these confrontations despite the wishes of its more astute allies, but then had to shelve the Industrial Relations Act. Claims were settled but little new consciousness among workers of their collective power emerged.

The Act had made it almost impossible for the trade unions to keep rank and file workers under control. The TUC and CBI made it clear that a new policy of conciliation was both necessary and possible. Heath told the Conservative Party Conference in October 1972 that the aim of his talks with the CBI and TUC was to bring the Government into 'partnership' with 'both sides of industry'. The Government put forward a package deal on wages and prices but the TUC asked for further concessions on food, rents, pensions and wages. Without these concessions the TUC would have lost all credibility among union members. The talks broke down when the Government refused to offer any more, despite Vic Feather's claim that 'We tried all ways to compromise'. (1) The result was the wages freeze which started in November.

This year the TUC and trade unions are again on top of the situation - business as usual. Phase 1 of the freeze has come and gone. Phase 2, which limits wage increases to £1 plus 4%, and which can make particular strikes seeking to exceed this norm illegal, has begun with little evidence of opposition. What then has happened to the developing struggles of the gasmen, hospital workers, locomen, civil servants, miners and Ford workers?

(1) Financial Times, November 4, 1972

The notoriously reactionary GMWU, the main gas workers' union, never had ambitions to defy the law. From the start it was after a speedy compromise with the Gas Corporation over the £3 wage claim. Instead of initiating action themselves gas workers pressured the union to take stronger action and 'give leadership'. The piecemeal disruption of gas supplies ended on March 24, after a union ballot. About 18,000 workers voted to return to work, accepting an average increase of £2.80. 11,000 rejected the offer. Almost 17,000 didn't vote at all.

The hospital workers' dispute is into its second month of sporadic, isolated strikes, overtime bans and working-to-rule. It is the only dispute where more than token picketing has taken place. The pay claim was originally for an extra £8. When the action became 'official' it was reduced to £4. The main hospital workers union, the NUPE is edging towards a compromise. There is talk of it taking its case before the Pay Board, set up under Phase 2 to regulate wage claims. As the general secretary of the NUPE said, 'We want to get our members back off the picket line and back into the hospitals but we simply cannot do it on the terms we have been offered already'. (2) Strikers have had difficulty in getting strike pay, and have been blackmailed back to work by claims that patients are dying as a result of their action. The unions have hindered the co-ordination of action between hospitals.

Locomen have been involved in a sectional claim for a bigger differential over other railway workers. Industrial action has been limited to working to rule, overtime bans and two one-day national stoppages, although ASLEF is still pushing for a one-day stoppage on May Day.

The leadership of the CPSA, the largest Civil Service union has finally managed to lock and bolt the door on the prospect of any 'unseemly' rank and file action. After organizing a worthless one-day national stoppage on February 27, the CPSA eventually called for official, week-long, selective strikes. As a result, in the whole of London some 21 members were called out! The production of Hansard was disrupted.

Miners have now voted solidly against strike action over their pay claim and are accepting the £2-3 per week offered. Only one-third of the total work force voted for strike action. The miners have recognised that they would have had to fight alone. Their own union bosses have been trying for months to get the TUC to hold the baby. Gormley, the NUM president, made it clear that unless possible action was fully backed by the TUC there would be none.

The debacle at Fords is dealt with elsewhere in this issue.

(2) The Guardian, April 3, 1973

It is evident from this year's balance sheet that British capitalism has had some success in convincing ordinary people that its economic problems are theirs, and that workers have to make sacrifices on the altar of profit. Workers are pocketing whatever rises they can get, rather than taking on fights they have little confidence in winning at present. In this sense Phase 2 of the freeze has been 'successful'. This year's events have re-emphasized the continued reliance of workers on 'their' trade union 'leaders' to 'give direction' and lead the struggle on their behalf. Yet these 'leaders' continually show that they will only fight in their own interest.

The TUC has been dragged into a 'one day national protest and stoppage' on May 1 in fulfillment of the rhetoric of 'fighting the Government' over Phase 2. If nothing else, all this has given the trad. left a new lease on life. Their fetish of 'throw the Tories out' (and put a Labour government in) fills the front pages of their papers for the umpteenth time. As if replacing one bunch of louts and scoundrels with another would prove anything to anyone.

There are no new lessons to be learnt, only the old ones once again. If the freeze goes on, and prices, rents and interest rates continue to rocket out of proportion to wage increases, a confrontation is on the cards despite the unions.

The success of even limited confrontation depends on ordinary people taking affairs into their own hands. It is not until men and women refuse political parties, trade unions and bosses the right to formulate the questions, act in their place, take the decisions, and provide the answers, that wage freezes, the trade union hierarchy and the system itself will effectively be challenged.

B.C.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

We hereby notify all friends, sympathisers, bookshops, subscribers and correspondents - and all those who send us complimentary copies of their papers, or with whom we exchange publications - that our new address is now:

SOLIDARITY (London)
c/o 123 Lathom Road,
London E.6. (Correspondence only)

Material sent to our old addresses (53A Westmoreland Rd., Bromley, Kent, or 27 Sandringham Rd., London N.W.11.) will take a long time to reach us. After a while it will no longer reach us at all. We therefore urge all those who read these lines to note our change of address now.

THE FORD FIASCO

On March 1, the majority of Ford workers refused to support the unlimited strike proposed by the National Ford Convenors Committee, a proposal that had been endorsed virtually unanimously by the national shop stewards meeting at Coventry. This raises important questions. The lack of confidence - even distrust - shown by Ford workers for the Ford shop stewards apparatus must be examined seriously by socialist industrial militants.

All this is not new - something similar happened at Dagenham in 1968, 1970 and 1971. Neither is it unique to Ford. Yet the issues have repeatedly been evaded or swept under the carpet. The Joint Shop Stewards Committee appears to have learnt little from these reverses. Its circulars issued on March 19 and April 5 are both full of the usual guff tail-ending the trade union leaders. Most workers and stewards at Dagenham are - and have been for years - completely pissed off with the way shop stewards committees operate. It is time to do something about it.

The problem will not be solved by simply replacing the dominant junta of the Joint Shop Stewards Committee, or by the more sophisticated methods of manipulating workers proposed by the trad left. For far too long, militants have concentrated on techniques of bringing workers out on strike instead of contributing toward rank and file understanding of what is going on. Militants have made no efforts to help ordinary workers dominate and direct their own struggles. In the long term, this is the only way that socialist struggle in industry can develop.

The attitude of the trad left has deep political roots, both in the ideology of Leninism and in the dominant values of the rotten system we live under. The Communist Party is the main, but by no means the only,



culprit. The role of the SLL at the British Leyland Austin Morris plant at Cowley near Oxford (one of the few factories where they have any strength) closely parallels the situation at Dagenham.

The problem is not whether these people are militant. We don't doubt their opposition to the Company. The problem is that they don't see the mass of workers as active participants in struggle, either in the day-to-day conflict or in the fight for an alternative society. For them it is all a question of 'leadership'. In practice this means that their particular tendency should take over and dominate the existing apparatus, within which the fundamental relations remain unchanged.

The Shop Stewards organisation at Ford is much more institutionalised than at most other car firms, or in general engineering for that matter. The form of election is laid down by an agreement between management and unions. There is a fixed period of office of one year, no right of recall, and fixed numbers of stewards with predetermined constituencies. The Company has also, on its own initiative, provided convenors with offices within the plants.*

The commanding heights of the works committees are dominated by a small number of people, many of whom have not touched the tools for ten years or more. (This problem is by no means limited to Dagenham, or even to Ford.) These people seem more interested in remaining in control than in helping a real movement develop. They are primarily oriented towards the union hierarchies rather than towards strong and independent plant organisation, responsible directly to the needs of Ford workers. In fact, their relationship to the workers they 'represent' resembles that of trade union officialdom, whose techniques and attitudes they share. Mass meetings have been infrequent, dominated by full-timers and manipulated. Attempts by workers to organise on more functional lines, for example through the formation of some sort of production workers committee, have been smothered. (We will certainly hear more about such committees in the future.)

There has been no proper discussion of techniques of struggle, of demands which challenge the prerogatives of management, or of the development of plant organisation. The information on which such a discussion must be based has been suppressed. The unwieldy and creaking constitution of the Dagenham Joint Shop Stewards Committee is a barrier rather than an

*

A note on the organisation of shop stewards at Ford. Each constituency in a plant elects a panel of stewards, who collectively constitute the shop stewards committee. They in turn elect a convenor, secretary and works committee, who handle plant-wide negotiations with management. Stewards from various plants at a location have a joint shop stewards committee. They are also national meetings of shop stewards, and a convenors' committee, consisting of convenors from the various plants.

aid to effective coordination of activity. It mainly serves the interests of the Communist Party and the 'left wing' trade union officials which the Party supports and whose interests seem more important to the Party than those of Ford workers. It is worth recalling, in passing, just how bad the record of the Communist Party and 'left' officials at Ford has been. Every single agreement to weaken job organisation at Ford - in the fifties and sixties - was signed by such officials as Frank Haxell, Claude Berridge, Ted Hill, and much later even Reg Birch. We don't have to go through the experience again.* Ironically, on March 25 it was announced** that the state-owned Moscow Narodny Bank was underwriting a \$75 million issue for the Ford Motor Company. So it looks as if a good whack of the surplus value produced by Ford workers will go straight into the coffers of the Soviet bureaucracy, in the form of dividends, perhaps to help finance the suppression of Skoda workers?

The flow of information to, and communication between, rank and file Ford workers whether on a shift, shop, plant or location level - let alone nationally - is appalling. This is not simply due to mistakes. It is essential for bureaucratic control. Apart from spasms of activity, just before every national wage claim, virtually nothing positive has been done. When ordinary workers have attempted to create their own direct links with others, their efforts have been obstructed.

The face presented to the media is completely unrepresentative of the attitudes of workers at Ford. Speakers show a totally uncritical attitude towards union officials, seeking to project a 'respectable' image. This would normally be a rather superficial criticism. However, the malfunctioning of the shop stewards apparatus means that TV, and to a lesser extent the local and national press, are the main source of information to Ford workers. This is true whether they are at work or in dispute. It is deplorable that workers should thus have to depend on the hostile media rather than on anything produced by the Joint Shop Stewards Committee at Dagenham. Other workers are thereby given a completely distorted view of what Ford workers are up to.

* Four members of the six-man Works Committee in the key Body Group at Dagenham are members of the Communist Party. Two of them are complete dummies whose only credential seems to be that they are members of the Party.

** Sunday Times, March 25, 1973.

On an international level many opportunities for joint action have been missed. The Committee emphasises official, semi-official, and C.P. links (these overlap) rather than seeking to establish genuine connections between actual Ford workers. The Committee, itself bureaucratic, shows an unwillingness to tread on bureaucratic corns. Examples are the series of struggles at Ford Cologne late last year (see letter in this issue) and the important strike and occupation at Ford, Genk, in Belgium, which ended on March 19. (see next article). Both were bitterly opposed by the unions. Neither struggle was mentioned in material produced by the Joint Shop Stewards Committee. Yet either could have been a potent starting point for coordinated action. The international perspectives of the shop stewards - if you can call them that - seem to be a) refusal to criticise the union, and b) reluctance to see any independent role for themselves, for Ford workers, or for workers generally. Their international record is in fact an exact parallel of their policy in Britain, and just as bankrupt.

Side by side with all this the dominating junta of the shop stewards organisation has accepted, without audible protest, the purely economic demands put forward by the union bosses. Year after year, demands such as mutuality and status quo (that is no change of working condition or work load without the agreement of workers) put forward as a gesture, under pressure from the shopfloor, have gone straight into the wastepaper basket. Yet it is obvious that only if Ford workers have genuine power within the plant are they going to make any real change in their situation.

Far from being a period of 'economic crisis' this is a boom time for Ford. Production has risen from 677,000 vehicles in 1970 to 750,000 in 1972.* There has been an even greater rate of growth in production of knocked-down (K.D.) components and engines, and an overall productivity rise of the order of 15%.** Production figures will rise even higher in 1973. Estimates of the increase over 1972 vary from 10% (The Ford Claim, 1973, produced by the Ford NJNC) to about 20% overall (The Society of Motor Manufacturers, reported in The Times, March 15, 1973).***

* The Times, December 28, 1972.

** The fast line in the Body Group is now running at over 70 cars per hour compared with 60 in 1970, which must make it the highest speed in Britain.

*** Ford is expanding in other ways too. On July 28 it will be absorbing the ceramic interests of Smiths Industries at Treforest, South Wales, and in Warwickshire, employing altogether nearly 500 workers. In this context of expansion, Ford workers have an opportunity to put the screws on the Company. But to do this they have to take control of their own struggle. They have to create structures which are capable of effectively coordinating action and mobilising workers. This does not yet exist.

Although Ford workers vetoed unlimited strike action, this seems to have been more a vote of no confidence in the trade unions and in the present shop stewards set-up than a generalised unwillingness to take on the Company. There have been continued and even growing struggles, with guerilla, 24-hour or longer strikes, overtime bans, work-to-rules and even one or two short-term sit-ins.* These piecemeal actions, usually on a departmental or smaller basis, have affected virtually every part of the Ford empire. Yet, at the same time, massive overtime is still being worked.

The Company has claimed that the first 10 days of the conflict cost them £6 million in lost production. It would be a mistake to underestimate the cumulative effect of the campaign, in a period when the Company needs all the production it can get. An example of this took place in the Press Shop at Halewood on March 28, when 3 shift workers refused to load panels on to lorries. The convenor was called in by the Company. He persuaded the men to load the panels, which were then rushed to Manchester Airport and flown to the Saarlouis plant. So far the struggle has been completely uncoordinated and limited in character, although there are strong signs of a welcome growth of informal links between militants, bypassing the normal channels. To put it no higher, there is a possibility that the conflict could develop further. But for this to happen a network capable of mobilising workers and coordinating the struggle will have to emerge.

At all stages in this article I wish to emphasise that when I refer to the shop stewards apparatus, I am referring to the institutions, not to individual stewards. Generally stewards are representative of the workers who elect them, are good militants and are the salt of the earth. Many of them are at least as critical of the present state of the shop stewards organisation as is the author of this article.

We hope this article provokes a response. We hope it initiates a serious discussion by militants at Ford and elsewhere on the problems raised. It is time we began to do something.

M. F.



"We Conservatives have always believed in home ownership — I personally own over a hundred and fifty!"

LETTERS FROM - 9 - The Genk struggle

The Ford plant at Genk, in Belgium, is part of Ford (Germany) Co. It employs 10,000 workers, 20% of them immigrants, and produces 1,400 vehicles per day. It has its own parity problems and the differential between wages at Genk and the Ford plant in Antwerp has been reduced over the last few years from 20 to about 5 francs per hour. (The Belgian franc is worth about 1p.)

The old contract ended on December 31, 1972, but negotiations were dragged out till March 8, 1973, when a conciliation commission proposed a 14 francs per hour wage increase, in stages, spread out to October 1974. This recommendation was endorsed by the unions and, in a ballot, accepted by 50.37% of the workers. But on March 11 a strike started despite this. According to the local press 'teams of propagandists' spread the strike throughout the plant. There was a partial occupation of the Assembly Shop and some damage to material there.

Management sent letters to all employees, reminding them that the agreement which the unions had signed meant 'wage increases higher than in any other sector of the engineering industry'.

The unions admitted that 50% of workers were on strike, but militants claimed that the vast majority were not working. On March 14 there was a mass meeting which elected a strike committee, and put forward the following demands: 1) Regrading of jobs; 2) Slower production speeds; 3) Payment for days on strike; 4) No transfers, sackings or other victimisations. The strike committee also called for a boycott of a postal referendum being organised by the unions. On March 14, police attacked and dispersed several hundred workers in front of the factory.

The ballot went ahead with the following results: 7,648 workers voted; 4,625 (60.47%) voted to continue the strike; 2,977 (39.9%) voted for return to work. There were 47 invalid votes.

The unions, CSC (Catholic) and FGTB ('Socialist'), ignored the fact that many militants had boycotted the ballot, declared that as the required 66% of workers had not voted for the strike it must be called off, and that work should be resumed on March 19. And so it was.

LETTERS FROM

March 12, 1973.

'What is happening now at Ford Cologne? The strike situation we have had since the end of last year has ended. The union (IG Metall) has just signed a contract with Ford which gives us an 8.5% wage increase. Prices are rising rapidly in Germany - the Government hopes that the cost of living will "only" rise by 7.8% this year. In fact our real wages will be less than before, because of our increased taxes.

In Cologne we produce a lot for the USA, especially engines. Production for America is being increased. When we get the new machines working properly we will make diesel engines for Transits. At the same time the work study men are retiming our jobs. Where before I had to make 480 parts a day I now have to produce 600. We often can't even stop for a cup of coffee, or go to the toilet. Our agreement says we should have 20 minutes relief time. But in fact we have to use this time for small repairs which are not provided for - because, of course, there cannot be mistakes by the Company.'

Ford worker, Cologne.

March 18, 1973.

'At the moment in Holland, a national action has been launched by the Metal-unions for a renewal of contracts. The main issue is the levelling of incomes, whereby wage

increases for the better paid are limited, and increases in general are given in cents instead of percents. This might look like a progressive standpoint for the unions to adopt, but it is not.

The unions sold themselves to the bosses and Government last November, when they agreed to a ceiling. With their programme of levelling incomes, which they present as revolutionary, they are in fact implementing a policy of wage restraint to cope with inflation. To this end they play the two income groups against each other.

As part of this national action in the engineering industry, several shipyards went on strike last week in Amsterdam. The unions did not call for action at the Ford factory at Amsterdam. They said that action in the English factories would have sufficient effect on production here. Probably a more important reason is that union membership is low here.

Last week we noticed that instead of 54 containers with parts only 39 arrived from England, and seats have already been brought in from Cologne. In the last half year 90% of our Cortina production has been with right-hand drive. Before it was about 50%. We think this is to build up a stockpile for the English market in case of a strike. A manager of the Sales Department said there was a stock of Cortinas in England that could not be sold. The transport of assembled cars from Amsterdam to England is not done by Ford, but by a Dutch firm called Brockman.'

Ford workers, Amsterdam.

FORD WORKERS

'In your review Focus on Ford (vol.VII, no.3) you mention lack of confidence of the workers in the shop stewards committees, the acceptance of £4 in January 1970, and the strike which ended in April 1971. As a former shop steward I always understood that a shop steward consulted his members, and received a mandate to vote in a certain way. If the majority of the men took a course against the recommendation of the shop stewards committee, surely this shows that the shop stewards voted for that recommendation

against their members' wishes. I myself at shop stewards' meetings have seen stewards voting for action which I knew their department would not support. When I reproached them, I was told: "You don't think I'll admit my men won't come out and get abused by everybody?". Can you wonder why men on the shop floor lack confidence in shop stewards committees, when many have not the courage to express their members' feelings?'

H. F., Ford Dagenham.

now available...

THE KRONSTADT COMMUNE by Ida Mett. (25p plus postage). This pamphlet, which has been out of print for well over a year, is now available again in a new edition (new cover, map of Kronstadt, and some further bibliographical references).

REVOLUTIONARY ORGANISATION (5p plus postage). This new pamphlet comprises the articles on this subject published in vol.I of Solidarity (in 1961) and the Open Letter to I.S. (the struggle for self-management) which deals with the organisational question and was produced in September 1968.

L.S.E. : A QUESTION OF DEGREE (5p plus postage). This pamphlet, produced by Solidarity (London) on behalf of Bob Dent is an account by a student of his expectations, experiences and activities at the London School of Economics between 1969 and 1972.

AS WE DON'T SEE IT (5p plus postage). This pamphlet was specially written to eliminate certain ambiguities in previous statements of our views. It tries to answer questions put to us concerning our analysis of various types of contemporary societies; our concept of socialism; our view of the trade union and political bureaucracies; and our attitude to other political tendencies on the 'left'.

THE DISCREET STINK

On January 19, 1973 the New Statesman published a 1400 word review article by Neil McInnes of The Fellow Travellers by David Caute. The article was entitled (significantly) 'Fraud Squad'. It mentioned by name the following people as having been C.P. fellow-travellers in the between-the-wars period: André Gide, Shaw, the Webbs, Sartre, Roman Rolland, Andre Malraux, Feuchtwanger, Dreiser, Sean O'Casey, Heinrich Mann, Julian Huxley, Laski, Edgar Young, Hewlett Johnson, Pearl Binder and Lincoln Steffens.

SOLIDARITY received a letter from Don Bateman, Treasurer of the Independent Labour Party, in February, pointing out that the review article did not mention the New Statesman or Kingsley Martin. Don therefore sent off the letter published below to the Editor of New Statesman. He subsequently received a postcard stating that it is not intended to use his letter. Don Bateman's letter is published here in the interests of illuminating the activities of yet another Stalinist fellow-traveller.

The Editor,
"New Statesman",
Great Turnstile,
London WC1V 7HJ

26 Burghley Rd.,
Bristol 6.
Jan. 26. 1973.

Dear Sir,

I read with interest your lengthy review by Neil McInnes of "The Fellow Travellers" by David Caute. The importance of the book in your estimation, may be judged by the space you have devoted to it and your reviewer reels off the long list of intellectuals who loom large in this sorry chronicle.

There is one notable omission from the list. I refer to Kingsley Martin and the "New Statesman". For years Kingsley Martin was the front man in an attempt by this journal to whitewash the crimes of Stalinism at a time when few progressive journals were available for telling the truth about Spain, the Trotsky Trial frame-ups and the Stalinist murders of other left-wing militants. May I remind you that Martin refused to print George Orwell's articles which formed the basis for "Homage To Catalonia" and also refused to print reviews written by Orwell of Franz Borkenau's "Spanish Cockpit" on the grounds that it "controverted editorial policy". That editorial policy was not to print material which criticised Russian policy in Spain, and the Spanish Communist Party's slaughter of the POUM leaders and other working class militants of the Left.

OF THE FELLOW-TRAVELLER

When Orwell wrote an article in 1938 protesting about the imprisonment under disgraceful conditions of over 3,000 left-wing prisoners by the communist-dominated police service of the Republican government, Kingsley Martin refused to print the article. He did however print one by H.N.Brailsford in which he trotted out a C.P. lie about the POUM having attacked the government with stolen batteries of guns, tanks etc. Orwell wrote to the "New Statesman" refuting this and pointing out that he was an eye-witness to the events. Kingsley Martin refused to print the letter. Brailsford had the honesty to admit in a private letter to Orwell that he had no evidence for the story (it was of course being trotted-out by Stalinist agencies at the time) but your paper did not print the retraction. Maxton, Felicien Challaye and others were protesting about these crimes to the Republican Government, who said they wished to release these people but were unable to do so because of Russian pressure. Some publicity at this vital period would have saved the lives of hundreds of anti-fascists, including those of Andres Nin and his friends who were then murdered by GPU agents in Spain.

Evidence for these facts may be found in the first volume of the collected essays and letters of George Orwell (pp 333-337). This brainwashing operation upon left-wing intellectuals has been thoroughly chronicled by Arthur Koestler in "The Invisible Writing" and one can accept his evidence, for he took part in the operation.

Kingsley Martin of course had his own personal reasons for fellow-travelling when he occupied the influential editorial chair of the "New Statesman". It is surely significant that the success which the manoeuvres had with middle-class intellectuals was not repeated in working-class circles, for to its everlasting credit, this Stalinist falsification of history had little impact upon the British labour and trade union movement.

Yours faithfully,

Donald Bateman. Treasurer. Independent Labour Party.

SUBSCRIBE TO SOLIDARITY

A paper for militants - in industry and elsewhere. Attempts a total critique of modern society, and a systematic 'demystification' of its values, ideas, and forms of organisation. Discusses what libertarian revolution is all about.

Send £1 to SOLIDARITY (London), c/o 123 Lathom Road, E.6., to receive forthcoming issues of the paper and pamphlets to that value.

POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF A PHILOSOPHICAL ILLUSION

(MARX'S THEORY OF 'BEING AND CONSCIOUSNESS')

One of Marx's most complete and definitive statements concerning his philosophical assumptions and their application to the problem of social change (both evolution and revolution) appears in the famous preface to his 'Contribution to the critique of Political Economy'. Owing to its importance and clarity, we shall quote it here at some length:

'The general result at which I arrived, and which, once won, served as a guiding thread for my studies, can be briefly formulated as follows:

In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production, or - what is but a legal expression for the same thing - with the property relations within which they have been at work hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. In considering such transformations a distinction should be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic - in short, ideological - forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. Just as our opinion of an individual is not based on what he thinks of himself, so can we not judge of such a period of transformation by its own consciousness; on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained rather from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social productive forces and the relations of production.*

* Marx-Engels, Selected Works, Moscow 1955, vol.I, p.362.

This definitive and self-contained statement was written by Marx in 1859, eleven years after he wrote the 'Communist Manifesto' and eight years before the publication of Volume I of 'Capital'. In other words, it is well embedded in Marx's mature and creative period, and forms a logical link between the 'Manifesto' and 'Capital'. It explains why Marx considered it necessary to proceed from a political analysis (like the Manifesto) to an economic analysis (like Capital). Moreover, this preface is not some marginal idea of Marx, which can be discarded as 'insignificant'. It is the philosophical core of his ideas. It is, in fact, his philosophical system.

It is not the development of the man Marx that we wish to discuss but the idea that 'it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness'. This formulation of a fundamental problem, that many great minds had grappled with in various historical periods, stunned many with its clarity. To many, it appeared as if Marx had done more than just formulate the problem with unprecedented brilliance, but that he had actually solved it. Here, at long last, was the discovery of the Objective Dynamic of History. This was what had made all societies evolve, develop, undergo revolutionary crises, surmount them, and proceed on a new path. Of course, this whole process had to be carried out by the acts of millions of people, each with his own consciousness, but this social awareness was itself merely part of the 'ideological forms in which men become conscious of the conflict between the material productive forces of society and the existing relations of production'. In other words, the consciousness motivating those who fought out the conflict was itself a product of the material productive forces.

To realise that Marx did not solve the problem at all, but merely created the illusion of a solution, one need only rephrase his formulation with a minor modification. We need only introduce the term 'change' into it. Consider the following:

It is not the change in the consciousness of men that determines the change in their being but, on the contrary, the change in their social being that determines the change in their consciousness.

Question: Where does the change in social being originate?

Answer: From changes in the material productive forces.

Further question: Where do these changes in the material productive forces originate?

To this question Marx has no answer. Or if he has one, he never states it explicitly. Marx is, of course, aware that changes occur in the material productive forces themselves, because these changes are, in his view, the source of all other changes in social life. But he never

attributes significance to the source of changes in the material productive forces. In the quoted Preface he mentions the 'development of the material productive forces', the 'change of the economic foundation of society', the 'material transformation of the economic conditions of production'. But nowhere in the preface or in any of his other writings does he answer the question: what generates this development/change/transformation of the material productive forces? And what is the social significance of the factors which generate this change?

To some people this may appear as a pseudo-problem. They would argue that all one has to do is to observe what is actually taking place in real life. A change in the material forces of production is brought about by the implementation of some technological invention. This requires a) a new invention; b) an investment to transform the invention into an economic reality. Does this not resolve the problem?

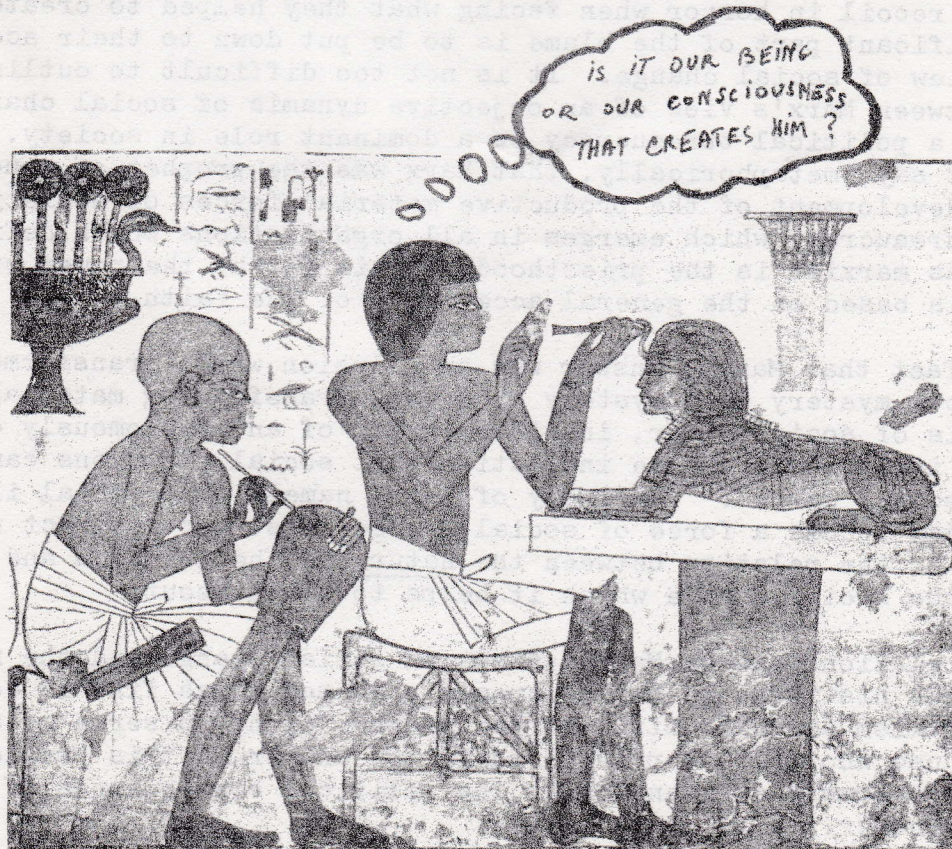
Not at all. It merely raises a lot of further questions. What, throughout history, has motivated inventors to invent new technologies? And what has motivated those who had means to select and choose a particular invention and incur the risk of investing in its practical implementation?

To argue that many inventions are accidental is not good enough, unless one accepts that accidents are the generators of social change. To say that, although individual inventions may be accidental yet on a statistical scale they exhibit an overall, non-accidental pattern, is little more than rephrasing the problem. For what then is this pattern? We know, for example, that the ancient Greeks had sufficient scientific and technological know-how to improve their agricultural production significantly. Instead, all this know-how was applied to warfare and temple building.

To say that throughout history most inventors and investors, whether as individuals or as social groups (the investors - even as a class), were impelled by the 'profit motive' is to retroject onto the whole history of all known societies typically capitalist motives and a specifically capitalist ethos. Moreover, what is this 'profit motive'? Is it simply greed or the need to accumulate? To assume this is to accept the naive (bourgeois) assumption that human beings are inherently competitive and that this inexplicable characteristic of the individual is the generator of social change. This type of explanation, which embeds the problem in 'human nature', is more than just a logical trick, which transforms a problem which cannot be answered into an assumption which requires no explanation. It is an acceptance of the capitalist ethic. To accept this ethic is to accept the most fundamental assumption of capitalism about human beings, and thus to be trapped ideologically within the bourgeois system. A more sophisticated analysis of the 'profit motive' would interpret it as a class mentality, and as the urge of members of a given class to sustain their decision-making role in society. However, if one

accepts this interpretation, one is forced to conclude that it is class consciousness (or a class subconsciousness) which brings about changes in the material productive forces in society. In other words, Marx's view that 'social being determines social consciousness' is stood on its head. (Class) consciousness would here clearly be determining (social) being.

Some marxists try to evade the whole problem by arguing that the whole process of social change must be grasped as an evolving totality, where 'social being' influences 'social consciousness' while being itself influenced by it. In other words, they will claim that society is a totality in which every element is both influencing and influenced by every other. They argue that 'being' and 'consciousness' are abstractions, describing partial aspects of a total social organism which can be grasped 'correctly' only when considered as a whole, and that these abstractions themselves only obscure the dynamic of change. We can only reply that it was Marx, not us, who posed the problem in these terms. Moreover, with all his firm grasp of Hegel's dialectics, Marx still found it relevant to cast the problem in terms of 'Being' and 'Consciousness', and to attribute to 'Being' a dominant role. Marx was, of course, fully aware that class consciousness plays a role both in invention and implementation of new technologies. Yet he found it necessary to emphasise that it was the change in the material forces of production which dominated the change in social consciousness. In other words, the mutual relation between the two was not symmetric: one aspect was dominant, the other subordinate.



THE ENIGMA OF THE SPHINX

In short, viewing the social organism as an evolving totality fails to resolve the problem in the terms that Marx himself posed it. Even if one manages to extricate one's own version of 'marxism' from being cracked by Marx's formulation of the relation between 'Being' and 'Consciousness', one is still left with the basic problem itself: what generates social change?

Perhaps there is no particular segment of social life (i.e. either 'consciousness' or 'being'...or anything else) that plays a dominant role in generating social change? Perhaps the whole problem is just a lot of hot air? To say so is more than to reject Marx's view on the matter. It is to accept a passive role in effecting social change. If one has no answer to the problem of social change, one is unable to contribute consciously towards it. How can one act to bring about desirable social transformations (including revolution) without some answer to the question of the dynamics of social change?

The answer (or absence of answer) which people give (consciously or unconsciously) to this question shapes the outcome of their activity (or inactivity) in the struggles to effect such change. For example we know that many ex-members of the Communist Parties in Russia, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, etc. who sacrificed a lot in order to establish these regimes now recoil in horror when facing what they helped to create. However a significant part of the blame is to be put down to their acceptance of Marx's view of social change. It is not too difficult to outline the relation between Marx's view of an objective dynamic of social change and the rise of a political bureaucracy to a dominant role in society. One could almost say, metaphorically, that Marx was the prophet of a new deity, namely the development of the productive material forces of society. The political bureaucracy which emerges in all organisations which define themselves as marxist is the priesthood of this faith; the power of any priesthood is based on the general acceptance of the faith.

The fact that Marx's answer was an illusion which transformed the problem into a mystery (the mystery of a self-transforming material productive basis of society - or, in other words, of an autonomously developing technology) is another example indicating that social illusions can become tremendous social forces. The irony of this, namely that social illusions themselves can become a force of social change, must not distract us from the problem of the relation between the nature of the illusion and the quality of the social change which it helps to bring about.

The relation between Marx's views on social change and the nature of the regimes his ideas helped to create, regimes which find it essential to uphold marxism as their official philosophy, ought to serve as a warning: those who fail to provide their own answer to this problem will one day find themselves entangled in the political consequences of somebody else's answer.

NATIONAL SOLIDARITY MEETING

A national meeting of SOLIDARITY members and supporters was held in London on March 17 and 18. The Manchester, Oxford and Swansea groups were represented. Individual comrades from Edinburgh, Bristol, Southampton, Cardiff, Brighton, Nottingham and Leeds also attended. There were observers from the French group 'Informations, Correspondence Ouvrières', the Belgian group 'Liaisons' and the Dutch group 'Daad en Gedacht' (Thought and Action).

The meeting was called to clarify the political basis for a regroupment of SOLIDARITY members and supporters. The text 'As We Don't See It' had been produced by the London group in response to the wide and often self-contradictory interpretations of our earlier statement 'As We See It'. The London group felt that 'As We Don't See It' might be the basis for the proposed regroupment.

The meeting started with a discussion on classes and class struggle in modern society, and went on to discuss, in this light, the difference between meaningful and sterile activity. In the middle of this discussion three members of London SOLIDARITY and one member of the Oxford group jointly left the meeting in a demonstrative manner, having made statements and distributed a pile of voluminous documents dealing with their political disagreements. These members had constituted themselves as a marxist faction and had acted as a group within the group for some months. Their main differences concerned our critique of Marx's views on history, economics, and social struggles, and our attitude to such matters as the 'objective basis' for and meaning of revolution and of socialism.

Those who left expressed strong disagreement with two pamphlets yet to be published (Paul Cardan's 'Revolution Re-affirmed', and our new pamphlet on Vietnam) and with 2 older texts (namely 'History and Revolution' and 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution'). As the latter had been published and widely distri-



buted long before they had joined the group, one might conclude that they had perhaps discovered these critiques after joining the group: they had gone to the wrong shop, and bought the wrong goods - although the goods had been clearly labelled. Alternatively, they had entered a group with whose politics they disagreed, hoping to win over some of its members. The contribution of these comrades proved very different from what they intended. The whole period of discussing marxism with them in fact deepened and strengthened our critique of marxism. One could almost say that the chapter of struggling to liberate oneself from the grip of Marx's views on philosophy, history, society, economics and politics is, for the time being, over for SOLIDARITY (London). The marxist faction, while rejecting our critique of Marx and our positive ideas which flowed from it, had never clarified its own politics in positive terms (for instance in relation to 'war' or to 'the slump'). It seems as if this brand of marxism is still (desperately?) holding on to the idea of an 'objective basis' for revolution, but that it has partly replaced the idea of the inevitability of the economic crisis with that of the inevitability of a Third World War* - if capitalism is not overthrown by a social revolution beforehand.

continued p.30

* One of our marxists (J.M.) recently advocated the publication in Solidarity of a leaflet (with which he said he agreed) produced by the French group Révolution Internationale. This stated that 'the India-Pakistan war demonstrates the gravity of the crisis of the capitalist world - a crisis which tends to push it towards a new generalised war. As the Spanish war in 1936 in relation to the Second World War, the India-Pakistan war can be today a rehearsal for a new world-wide massacre.'



REVIEWS

WOMEN, RESISTANCE AND REVOLUTION by Sheila Rowbotham. Allen Lane, 1972.
£2.95.

The history of the working class has only comparatively recently begun to be studied seriously; that of women, within the class or in any collective sense, remains largely unwritten. When historians mention 'people', 'workers', etc., it can hardly ever be assumed that they mean women to anything like the same extent as men, while women as a category may be allocated a page or two in the social background. A valid undertaking for the women's liberation movement could be, then, to restore to women their history of struggle, intellectual and physical, against the social structure of their times and the continuing reality of male domination.

Sheila Rowbotham's book is rooted in the contemporary women's liberation scene. She calls it 'a tentative first step towards correcting the masculine bias in the story we have inherited of our revolutionary past'. Of course there are dangers in this sort of approach, which could degenerate into a catalogue of supposedly good things women have done. Instead Sheila tries, as she says, 'to trace the fortunes of an idea... that the liberation of women necessitates the liberation of all human beings'. That this idea, and its converse, are not simply tautological is perhaps justification enough for the attempt.

There is a lot of interesting material on the development of feminist ideas as expressed by women and men, and on the actions of women in radical movements and revolutionary outbreaks. Coverage is fairly broad, from the 17th century English Revolution through to revolutionary theorists of the early 20th century. The last three chapters, though, are more selective, dealing respectively with the Russian Revolution; the Chinese Revolution; and Vietnam, Cuba and Algeria. This selection - omitting Spain '36, Hungary '56 and Paris '68 - must give pause to libertarians. It is in line with a particular marxist view of revolutions which have been at least partially or temporarily successful and give certain pointers for the future.

The book ends with a semi-personal statement on the problems of being simultaneously Marxist and feminist. To my mind, the author keeps her feminism reasonably in check, while her marxism has serious consequences which need to be pointed out.

Already in her discussion of the Russian Revolution and its outcome, criticism and analytical inquiry is applied much more to the situation of women in society as it developed than to the class realities of that society. The judgement (p.166) that 'the Soviet Union is not a society based on equality, that it is probably not any longer a society struggling to become more equal' appears rather muted. In the case of China the nature of the post-revolutionary regime is glossed over (p.198): 'It is not clear... whether self-activity at the base can be reconciled with the magnified figure of Chairman Mao directing from the top.' In Cuba the revolution is seen as having been made though not completed; in Algeria it is said to have failed (p.244) - 'the old colonizers are simply replaced by new ones' (p.243) - but this does not lead to questioning of the F.L.N. and its supporters. In dealing with Vietnam the critical faculty is virtually suspended in favour of romantic identification based on mystical unity of suffering, evoked by the harrowing details of oppression (on one side).

All this points up the way in which reactive feminism at the level of 'Stop thinking - start feeling' can play into the hands of the hard-headed politicians it claims to reject. I wouldn't accuse Sheila of being either a dupe or a knave, but some of her sources epitomise the sort of attitude I mean, such as the approving quote on p.220 about struggle on any level being good. When the line of 'supporting our sisters in struggle' leads to the passing of resolutions in favour of N.L.F.s and I.R.A.s, the women's movement aligns itself with certain political programmes which have about as little to contribute to women's liberation as to socialism. Sheila does good work in showing the deficiencies of her chosen subjects in the former respect, but leaves plenty of room for illusion about the latter.

Her closing statement (pp.244-247) admits 'the tension between solidarity and honesty', given that 'so far all revolutionary movements have had to settle for something less' and 'the experience of the Soviet Union provides no clear alternative'. But it is not said clearly enough that nowhere at present provides an alternative; in fact there is a reference to 'existing socialist societies' on p.98. For us, it is not only 'the revolution within the revolution' which remains unresolved, but the revolution itself. It is not only in the countries of advanced capitalism that socialist revolution has not occurred, and it is in precisely these countries that we must hope and work for it. We reject the third-worldist confusion which seeks revelation via 'the emergence of women's consciousness very recently, for example, in such diverse colonial situations as Mozambique, Palestine and Northern Ireland' (p.245).

There is no section of conclusions as such, perhaps in accordance with the self-conscious tentative approach now conventional among women's liberation theorists. Of course it's good to beware of

dogmatism, to acknowledge that ideas derive from a broad collective base, to say one's work must be 'repeatedly dismantled and reconstructed as part of a continuing effort to connect feminism to socialist revolution' (Introduction). But I don't think an attempt to draw some threads together and make a few more general statements would have been out of place. As it is, many interesting and important points are buried within the text. You have to read it all to be sure of not missing anything, ideas not being subject to indexing.

On page 98, for example, a number of basic questions are posed: 'From what basis and in what manner can women act together as a group which can be the agency of revolutionary change? Where is there a necessity to act from the logic of women's own socio-historical situation? In what sense can women be regarded as a group with interests in common?' etc. The list ends: 'And ultimately can the essentially personal and emotional understanding of pain be translated into political action, or is the tragic vision the only consolation for the daughters of the dream?' Sheila alludes to this 'most disturbing dialectic, our praxis of pain' - the necessity, in terms of individual human dignity, for women to 'demand now the preconditions of what is impossible at the moment'. Later (pp.156-7) she rejects 'that self-denying strain which simply cut itself off from awkward emotion', the tendency towards 'dismissal of the personal and sexual dimensions in relationships', as well as the simple faith that comradeship and solidarity would make everything all right. These psycho-sexual aspects of liberation will have to be explored further, as long as we try to avoid the snares of introversion and mysticism.

The view of women as a group, and what sort of group they can be said to constitute, is also taken up at different stages: historically, pointing out the separation between 'the feminist aspirations of the privileged and the traditions of collective action of the unprivileged women' (p.37); in socialist theory, citing Engels on women as a class - 'within the family he (the husband) is the bourgeois and the wife represents the proletariat'; the concept of 'social relations of reproduction' recurs. There is analogy with imperialism - 'colony within the colony' - but it does not go unqualified. Feminist isolationism is rejected (pp.108-9) in favour of extending partial consciousness and connecting to the experience of other oppressed groups - without a suggestion that there may be significant differences between the struggles of women, blacks and workers as such.

Naturally much will remain to be done in confronting and trying to resolve the problems touched on here. This wide-ranging study, written intelligently and deploying a variety of sources including literature and folklore as well as historical records is a considerable contribution, and well worth reading. To withhold our serious criticisms, though, would be to adopt the kind of patronising attitude its author rightly condemns.

L.W.



REVIEW

DOCKERS, THE IMPACT OF INDUSTRIAL CHANGE

by David F. Wilson. Fontana. 60p.

An industrial militant reading this book will see the absurdity of the author's premise in the introduction where he quotes approvingly a statement made in 1970 by Peter Shea, the London Docks secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union: 'We are all in this together. If we are not careful there will be more employers than men at the labour exchange'. (Dockers, The Impact of Industrial Change, p.15)

Since the Devlin Scheme over 25,000 redundant dockers have found it necessary to visit the labour exchange, and there has been no evidence of any port employers registering for the dole-queue!

The implication that the Labour Government and the port employers had altruistic motives in setting up the Devlin Inquiry to improve the dockers' lot occurs throughout the book. The Devlin Inquiry, like all other docks inquiries was set up to increase profitability, and any improvements for dockers which resulted were incidental.

Wilson devotes a third of the book to an examination of the social background to dockworkers' problems. He quotes 19th century sources such as Tom Mann, John Burns, Ben Tillett and Charles Booth. Very interesting for the student of social or trade union history, but it provides no explanation of how the traditional militancy of the dockworkers was softened for the Devlin 'kill'.

Anyone outside the industry reading Wilson's book will find it difficult to understand how the dockers, with a record of militancy second to none, allowed the national dock labour force to be reduced from 66,000 in 1964 (pre-Devlin) to the present 38,000.*

To understand the dockers' fairly passive acceptance of the first phase of Devlin, it is necessary to examine the day-to-day life and insecurity under the 1947 Dockworker Regulation of Employment Scheme (now known as the 'Old Scheme').

An example of what occurred throughout the country is Sector 5, the West India and Millwall docks in London, which employed some 2000 men, of which 1200 were permanently employed by the Port of London Authority. The remaining 800 were employed by the National Dock Labour Board, on the 'pool'.



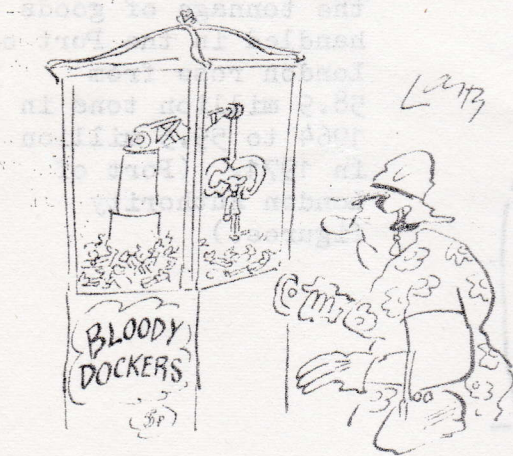
* As the number of London dockers fell, the tonnage of goods handled in the Port of London rose from 58.9 million tons in 1964 to 59.5 million in 1971. (Port of London Authority figures.)

The Pool men attended the employers' call-stand each morning at 7.45. In a busy period most of them would find work at wages at least as good as the national average. In slack periods, 800 men would line up in front of the call-stand, pushing and shoving each other, jockeying for position to attract the attention of the caller-man, and gain the coveted work-ticket.

Slack periods could last up to eight weeks with the unemployed men competing more and more fiercely, to the point of physical violence. On a number of occasions the scuffles resulted in the iron barriers being broken down. It was not unknown for the struggle for work to end in men sustaining injuries such as broken arms and legs.

If the employers needed only 300 of the 800 men, the remaining 500 would then report to the National Docks Labour Board for allocation to work in other sectors - if work was available there. If not, they would be credited with 9/- (45p) a turn, or 18/- (90p) a day unemployment pay. When they had been unemployed for a full week, they would enjoy the princely sum of £9, less deductions for normal unemployment and tax.

Anyone might think from reading Wilson's book that this took place in the 19th century, but these animal-like scenes took place on most call-stands every day of the week as recently as 1966. The Royal Group in London (Sector 4) had a number of call-stands for the 8000 (mainly pool) labour force, so these scenes were multiplied many times over.



The unemployment pay which the men received from the National Docks Labour Board was deducted from their wages when they were at work as well as their normal unemployment contributions. Even though the National Docks Labour Board acted as a private labour exchange, these men paid twice for that unemployment pay and yet received several pounds less than if they had drawn State benefits.

These conditions were excellent for the employers. They had at their disposal a highly skilled labour force readily transferable on a short-term basis between sectors. For this privilege they paid less in terms of unemployment pay than employers in other industries.

However, the scheme also had disadvantages for the employers. The Pool system produced solidarity. Those left unemployed in the 'pen'

would often discuss their common plight. The pool men going from employer to employer were never taken in by the myth of loyalty to a company, all too common in many industries. Another disadvantage was that although the employer in a slack period would tell his caller-man not to hire a 'difficult' man, in a busy period where the employer had to indent to the local board, he could not refuse the man allocated even if he was a militant. Under the present social system the boss has a range of arbitrary powers, he has the 'right' of hiring workers when they are profitable and firing them when they are no longer useful.

David Wilson uses masses of trade union and employer references in his book, but never once does he quote a rank and file docker. He makes slanderous attacks on members of the Portworkers' unofficial liaison committees, but does not even bother to explain the origin of the unofficial workers representation.

He glosses over the fact that the major docks union, the Transport and General Workers Union, selects all its paid officials for life. Equally unimportant to him is the little matter of the absence of an official shop steward set-up in the industry prior to 1967! The unofficials arose from a serious lack of shop floor representation. They were elected democratically at mass dock-gate meetings and were always subject to instant recall.

On p.202 he states: "Few officials had the charisma of rank and file leaders and they could not match them in the techniques of handling a mass meeting. This was fatal. The information put out frequently bore little relation to what the union was negotiating". This downright lie can only be attributed to the fact that he only took his information from government, trade union or employers' sources. The liaison committees could not have received the massive support necessary to organise large-scale strikes unless they had put out accurate information. Very often the unofficials issued information the unions wanted to keep confidential, pursuing the policy that nothing which affected the dockers' working lives should be kept secret.

The rank and file relied on the liaison committees for details of what the trade unions were cooking up with the employers. The Transport and General Workers Union in collusion with the National Association of Stevedores and Dockers tried to discipline Terry Barrett, leader of the West India Dock, for publishing details of a trade union - employer plan to bring back excessive overtime and Sunday working. At the T.G.W.U. trial, Barrett said that whatever the consequences he would continue to issue details of underhand trade union deals which came into his possession. Harry Hussey of the West India Dock liaison committee gave details of the intended sacking of 88 staff employed by the National Dock Labour Board. Wilson writes: "the unofficials

were fully informed and widely spread masses of information, they even published a rank and file newspaper, the Dockworker."

In his book Wilson always seems to support the official trade union-employer line. He refers to Harry Battie, Tilburys' Docks Group delegate as an "ebullient man hall-marked by his warm grin". Perhaps Batties' grin was in amusement at the filthy tricks he used while attempting to break the container ban and establish manning scales determined by the employers. Maybe he was grinning at his and fellow delegates record of organisation of large-scale scabbing on the Liverpool and London six week strikes of November 1967. Harry Battie and his partner George Hughes (known as Stanley Unwin because of his total inability to articulate) arranged with the employers that all cargoes diverted from strike-bound Liverpool or London would be handled at Tilbury. Yes he was an ebullient scab bastard!!

Wilson is guilty of many omissions, in a book which purports to be about dockers attitudes to change. For example, he completely ignores the Honeyman Enquiry.

In April 1966 the threat of unofficial militant action forced Mr Gunter* (then Minister of Labour) to set up yet another enquiry into all clauses of Devlin. Trade union officials had for a year been touring the branches trying to sell Devlin and countering objections by saying that negotiations had gone too far to change the course of events. They and the Government found that one of these events was the resistance to the rank and file.

In May 1966 one of the propagators of productivity and rationalisation bargaining, the much beloved Tim O' Leary** was put in the invidious position of voicing the objections to the scheme!

Since there have been more High Court Judges employed on docks enquiries than there are dockers employed during slack periods, very few dockers had illusions about the new enquiry. However, many militants used the enquiry to voice their grievances.

* The record of Mr Ray Gunter is interesting. President of the Transport Salaried Staffs Association, Chairman of the Labour Party, Minister of Labour he then became a Director of Securicor and Industrial Research and Information Services (IRIS), the American financed set-up for witch-hunting militants. Gunter's life embodies the role of the Labour bureaucracies today.

** O'Leary is a Papal Knight and C.B.E. - presumably for services to dockers!

Wilson does not define the role and purpose of Government enquiries. When trade union officials can no longer hold back the rank and file with delaying tactics, vague promises and constitutional buck-passing, then the employers ask the State to intervene. In a capitalist economy the State inevitably takes sides with the employers. In the atmosphere created by the State's intervention other agents of the bosses - the monopoly press - embark on a programme of discrediting the militants and distorting the root causes of the dispute. (David Wilson fits nicely into this category).

On examination of government enquiries, one finds that the same pattern emerges. The Devlin Enquiry saw the militants as Luddite-type wreckers, while also saying, tongue in cheek, that the employers had some responsibility. The Cameron Enquiry into the Barbican Building strike took exactly the same stance. The pattern continues with Geddes on shipbuilding, Pearson on seamen, Devlin on printers, Roberts on the Port Talbot steelworkers and so on.

The role of the enquiry is to appear neutral, an unbiased referee. The result is always the same. A return to work is required. Production must not be held up further, in the name of the 'national interest'. The most powerful right of workers, their collective refusal to work, is itself threatened nowadays, again in the 'national interest'. Militants reject this as a part of the smoke-screen that surrounds every dispute and every enquiry.

Many politicians have bemoaned the fact that workers seldom consciously relate their industrial actions with political questions. During the Honeyman Enquiry, the whole theme of rank and file objections focussed on the issue of control. Every rank and file spokesman who addressed dock-gate meetings in London, Liverpool, Hull and Manchester was emphatically against any extension of the power of the employers. Furthermore, any extension of the employers' powers would be to accept the major restrictive practice in the docks, i.e. the very existence of those employers. The 1947 scheme and even Devlin despite its conclusions are indictments of the employers on moral, economic and humane grounds.

Without being politically conscious, the dockers saw what infringements of their hard won limited freedom total employers' control would mean. The issue of control is highly political. Dockers must become aware of the political nature of their actions. Pointing this out is central to the role of the revolutionary agitator.

The society we live in is split into those who have only their labour to sell for wages or salaries and those who own property in the form of firms, stocks and shares, land, housing etc., from which they get profits, rents, dividends and interest. The minority in the second group are unnecessary in the process of production, being parasitical on the labour of the great majority of society. Through their economic

power (Inland Revenue figures for 1970 show that 10% of the population owns 75% of the total wealth leaving over 50 million to share the remaining 25%), this class rules politically. Between the forces of labour and capital there is no community of interests: in a class divided society, appeals to anything 'national' obscures these divisions, thereby aiding the rich and powerful to become richer and more powerful.

I would suggest to David Wilson a sequel to this book, outlining the real rank and file history of the 'Docks Industry'.

Jack Cade - with acknowledgements to Terry Barrett for quotes from his essay The Docks Before Devlin, published in 1971.

NATIONAL SOLIDARITY MEETING (continued from page 20)

Both these views are alien to us and we are glad that those who uphold them will no longer disseminate them in the name of SOLIDARITY, but under a name of their own. In its hectoring style, nit-picking content and systematic misrepresentation, their document epitomises everything in the trad left that SOLIDARITY was formed to reject and transcend.

To get back to the meeting. It was agreed that the first 9 points of 'As We Don't See It' were a suitable basis for the proposed national regroupment. The tenth point (on the structure, function and coordination of autonomous SOLIDARITY groups) is to be the theme of a further national gathering, shortly after Easter.

The Manchester group announced that it had decided to dissolve and to apply for membership of the London group. The whole question of national membership, dual membership of both 'national' and autonomous groups, etc, is to be discussed at the forthcoming meeting, to be organised by a Committee of 4 comrades from Swansea, Manchester, Leeds and London. It was also decided (without prejudice to future pamphlets produced by individual groups) that a number of future pamphlets might be produced on a national basis, which would involve 'national' financing and a 'national' editorial group. This problem too will be looked into at the next national meeting.