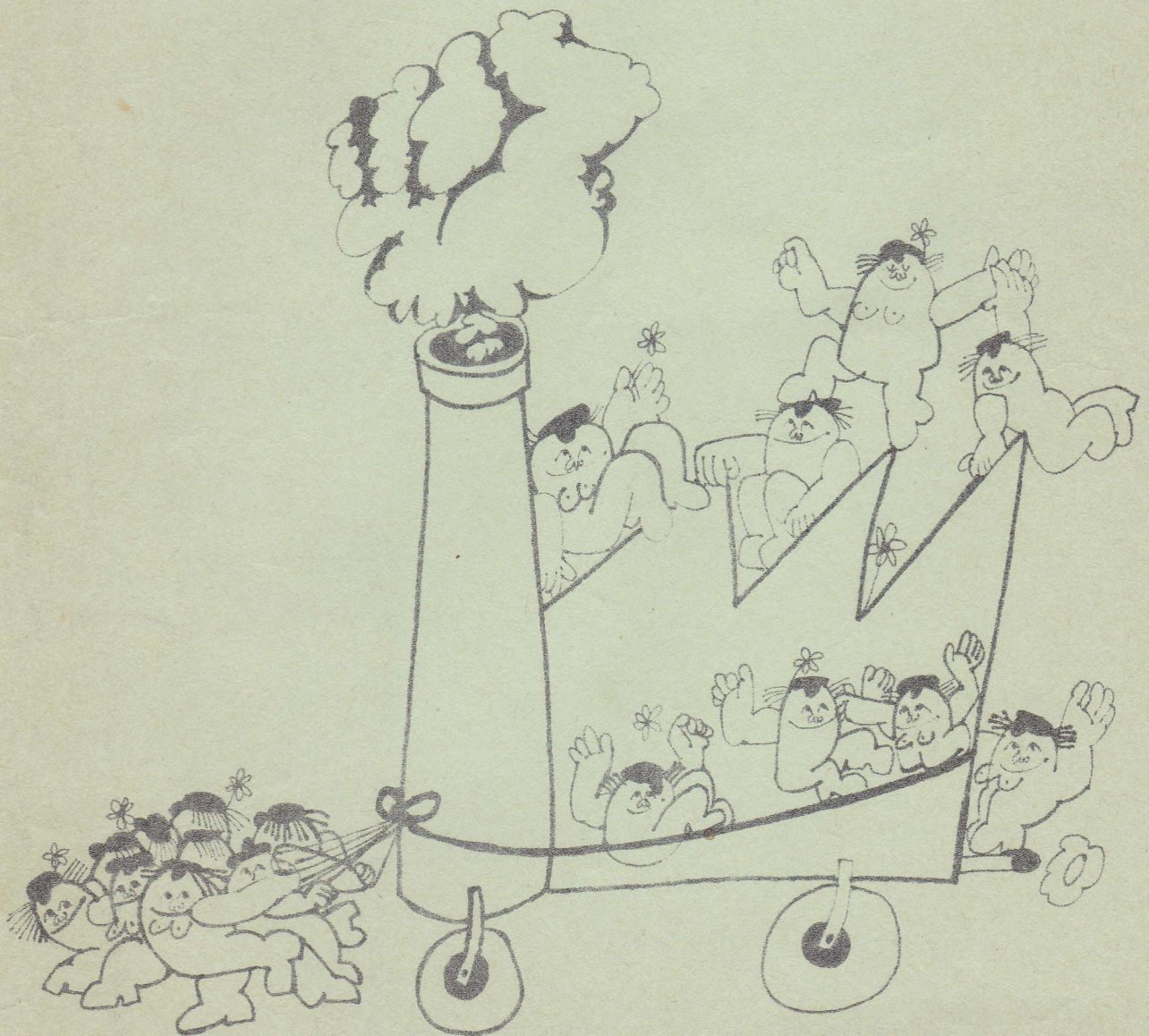


solidarity

for workers' power vol.8 no.1 5p

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- 1 -

WHAT HAPPENED AT COWLEY

THE INDUSTRIAL BANKRUPTCY OF THE W.R.P.

Recent events at the British Leyland assembly plant at Cowley must be seriously examined by revolutionaries. They raise very important problems, both in relation to the record of the W.R.P. there and concerning the industrial practice of the traditional left in general.

THE COWLEY BACKGROUND

The two main plants on the Cowley site are the Body Plant (which is the old Pressed Steel factory) and the Assembly Plant (which used to be the Morris Motors complex). In this article we will only be concerned with the Assembly Plant. The plant manufactures the 1300 range, the Maxi and the Marina.

The plant was relatively poorly organised until the late 1950s, when the shop floor struggle to gain control over piecework prices began to meet with some success. In the years up to 1955 the main Morris works at Cowley had only one reported strike.(1) It was not until 1959 that the number of reported strikes at Cowley exceeded two in any one year. But from 1960 on Cowley averaged more than a dozen reported strikes a year. By 1964 a quarter of all BMC (later British Leyland) stoppages were at Cowley.

The situation reached such a pass in 1964 that the Motor Industry Joint Study Group carried out an investigation at the plant. This group consisted of representatives of motor industry management and trade union officials. It found that from September 1963 to September 1964 there had been no less than 254 stoppages at the plant, most of them too short to be 'reported'. They also found that when the District Officials of the unions were called in, it was usually at the request of management. This at the very least indicates a healthy attitude on the part of the men. The Study Group made a number of suggestions for weakening job organisation and bringing the shop floor under the control of the officials (see

(1) By 'reported' we mean conforming to the Ministry of Labour's criteria. These are that more than 10 workers have to be involved, and that the stoppage has to last for more than one day, except where the aggregate number of man-days lost exceeds 100.

evidence presented by the Motor Industry Employers to the Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers Associations, HMSO 1966, pp.850-55).

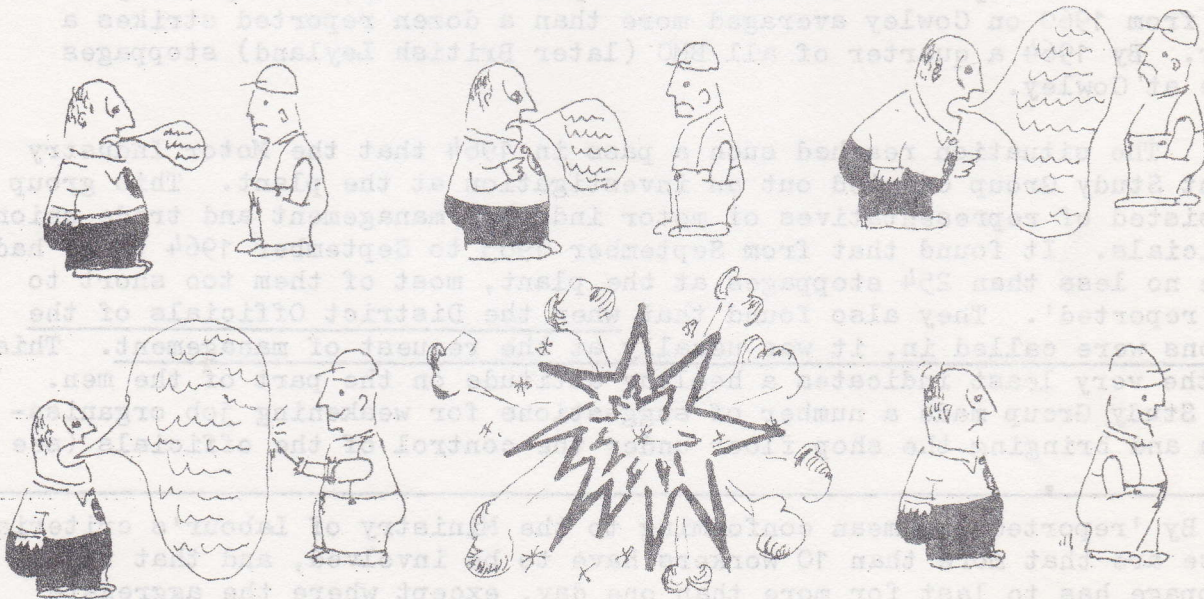
Collaboration between bosses and trade union officials fortunately had little effect, as is clearly shown by the Jack Scamp reports of November 1966 and December 1967:

'At Morris Motors Ltd., Cowley, for instance, the Council found that in 1965, 256 out of 297 stoppages of work had occurred before the senior shop steward had even had a chance to put the grievance into procedure. In the first half of 1966, again 128 stoppages out of 142 took place before the senior shop steward had had time to act on them, in spite of special efforts made by the company to provide facilities for the bringing in of senior shop stewards as soon as a problem was known to exist.'

(First Report, para. 24)

'During 1967 less than 2 per cent of disputes that led to stoppages had been taken right through procedure. 22 per cent were not dealt with in procedure at all, while 20 per cent went no further than the first stage ... before a stoppage occurred. Some 50 per cent went to the second stage ... but no further. Only one in a hundred stoppages was made official by endorsement by the union concerned.'

'Regard for the procedures tends to vary according to the question at issue. Not one of the disputes over discipline, trade union matters, manning scales, mobility of labour and transfers was taken to the final stage of procedure.'



Dismissals and other disciplinary matters tend of course to be associated with precipitate action and nearly 40 per cent of stoppages for such reasons took place without any regard for the procedure.'

(Second Report, paras. 18-19)

PIECEWORK AND M. D. W.

Until January 1971 piecework was the dominant system of payment at Cowley. The chief characteristic of piecework is shop floor bargaining, a process which leads to strong job organisation. Productivity was very low. In 1968 each worker at British Leyland produced 5.6 vehicles (worth £5180) compared with a Ford worker productivity of 11.7 vehicles per annum (worth £8000). To make matters worse (or better) Cowley would be at (or near) the bottom of British Leyland's own Productivity League Table. Side by side with this, wages at British Leyland were (and still are) much higher than at Ford's. For example:

FORD RATES FOR 1974

JOB	GRADE	BASIC RATE	RATE AFTER 4 YEARS
Skilled craftsmen	E	£39.80	£42.20
Domestic Skilled	D	£37.80	£40.20
Semi-skilled	C	£36.60	£39.00
	B	£35.60	£38.00
Unskilled	A	£33.00	£35.40

These rates apply from 1 March this year. They are for 40 hours on day-shift. It is still the case that you can't walk into Fords and earn £1 an hour without going on to night shift.

COWLEY RATES FOR 1974

GRADE	DAY-SHIFT RATE		NIGHT-SHIFT RATE	JOB DESCRIPTION
	FEMALE	MALE	MALE	
HDR*	£47.40	£49.40	£59.13	production
VI	—	£49.40	£59.13	craftsmen etc
V	—	£46.40	£55.53	quality control, die setters, etc
IV	—	£44.00	£52.67	storekeepers, slingers
III	—	£43.00	£51.57	drivers, checkers, etc.
II	£39.60	£42.20	£50.53	material handlers
I	£36.60	£39.20	£46.93	sweepers etc

These rates apply from 4 February 1974

* HDR means 'High Day Rate' — that is, all production workers who are now on flat rate. There are still some sections on piecework.

This was the background of the campaign by British Leyland and other motor industry management to end piecework and replace it by Measured Day Work (MDW). The core of what management was about was put very clearly in a pamphlet by G.H.B. Cattell (2) called 'Wage Drift, Work Measurement and Systems of Payment'. The pamphlet was published in June 1968 by the prestigious 'Coventry and District Engineering Employers Association'. In it Cattell stated that M.D.W. 'would remove from the stewards their present continuous function of being active negotiators on piecework price bargaining to which they owe much of their importance and influence. The substitution of a conversion figure negotiation on a factory basis would probably often involve full-time officials of the unions because of their importance, and this again could well be advantageous to the employers. ... The stewards will be the most concerned to retain their bargaining strength, but the Unions as responsible organisations will probably accept the change.'

During 1970-71 M.D.W. was gradually introduced at the piecework car plants in return for substantial increases in the basic hourly rate. It was introduced at Cowley in January 1971, after a 6-week strike which ended in victory for the company. Already there were clear signs of the isolation of the Shop Stewards apparatus from the men.(3)

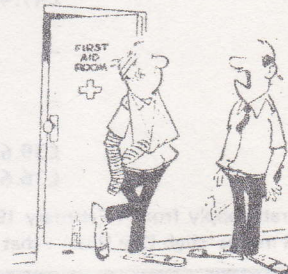
But in spite of all their efforts management were unable to get their way. In the first full year after the introduction of M.D.W. (1972) the number of vehicles produced per man at Leyland had only increased to 5.7 (or 0.1 more than the figure for 1968!). The mountain had laboured and given birth to an economic mouse. Leyland's problem still had to be solved.

On top of this situation came the Yom Kippur war, the oil crisis and the drastic drop in the demand for cars. Because of its non-competitive position, the effects were particularly severe at British Leyland. The estimated fall in sales was of the order of 25%.

(continued p.30)

(2) Cattell was a notorious Chrysler manager, who was later appointed to a key job at the Department of Employment and Productivity by Barbara Castle, under the Labour Government.

(3) In the Austin-Morris Division alone 750,000 man-hours were lost in 300 stoppages on the question of Measured Day Work. In total some 46,000 vehicles were lost.



"I suppose this means you'll want some time off."

women's liberation and male sycophancy

Our personal life is a political experience. Within our personal life we confront power relations, we live within a net of decisions in the making of which we had no part, we try to disentangle our real needs and desires from the deeply unsatisfying satisfactions we are offered. There is no discontinuity between personal life, everyday life and politics. Its instinctive grasp of this point was something that attracted me to Solidarity from the first, not least because the articles in the magazine actually described the world as I'd experienced it. They were disrespectful of ideological pretty pictures. When, for example, a union or the Labour Party committed some quite characteristic minor atrocity Solidarity pointed it out and sod the Trot verbiage about them being workers' organisations. As far as I and the mass of workers were concerned they did not feel like our organisations, they confronted us as something alien. Experienced reality came first and on this basis the theoretical implications were confronted.

In the case of this article I am prompted by a deep unease concerning certain formulations and attitudes of the Women's and Gay Liberation movements, and the straight male response to them. I am not qualified to talk about the internal life of these movements but I am concerned with the interface between these movements and us straights. My unease stems from my own experiences and that of some other men. It is informed by sections of the vast, if often repetitive, literature produced by these movements. I have read this in an, at times desperate, attempt to find out just what the hell was going on. I had not realised what a hard struggle this could be. I had not realised that the conventional wisdom and these new oppositions were such a mixture of true and false, hope and wishful thinking, real evidence and false conclusions. Separating the strands was a difficult enough process once some steady ideological form had been reached, or when degeneration had set in, as in the case of present-day marxist or social-democratic pictures of the world. But the most difficult trick of all was to separate the useful from the irrelevant and pernicious, as the ideologies developed. It was a situation without stable elements. It was not just the confusion of the incomplete one had to contend with - I was also a living part of the confusion. I do not claim to have worked it all out yet, by any means.

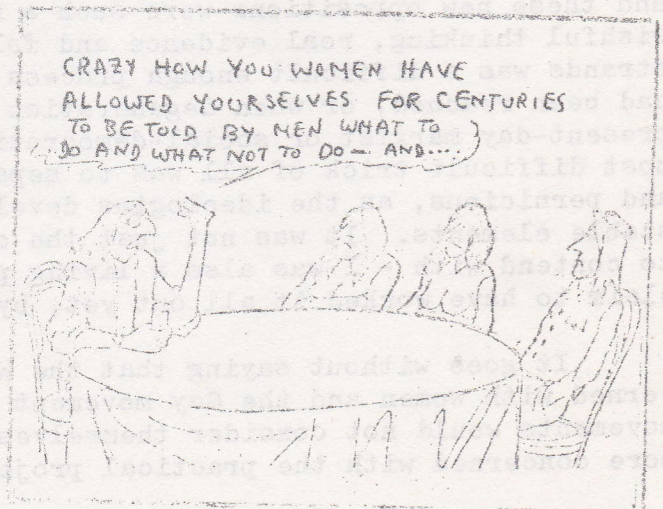
It goes without saying that the Women's movement is primarily concerned with women and the Gay movement with gays. Large numbers in these movements would not consider themselves to be theoreticians - they are more concerned with the practical project of understanding themselves and

their position, or with the practical activities connected with women's centres, refuges, gay switchboards, etc. The main intention of these groups is to break down the conditioning which inhibits them and to build an autonomous movement based on their specific oppressions and aspirations.

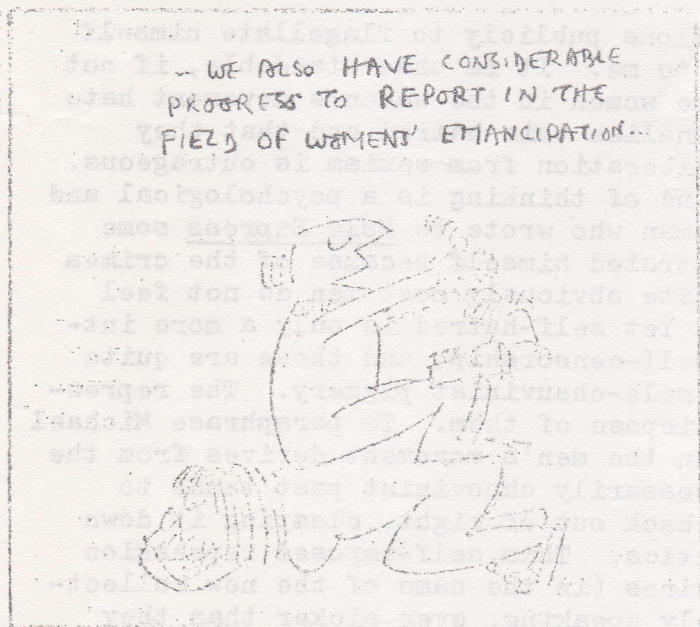
Yet half the world less 20% is outside the constituency of these movements. As far as the movements themselves are concerned, however, relationships with straight men (except in an individual capacity as 'The Problem') are not a major concern. Thus a certain absent-mindedness, even carelessness, typifies their formulations of the male role and their prescriptions for its change. It can be admitted quite openly that the absent-mindedness and the carelessness are no greater than in the male-centred socialist movement's treatment of women and gays. Yet men who have been convinced by women's liberation that they have been ignorant and unaware have still largely to relate to a mirror-image of themselves in their earlier state. There have been two negative consequences of this as far as men are concerned. One has been the attempt to win approval by an uncritical acceptance of vague prescriptions. The other has been an equally uncritical rejection of what is seen as a cynical attempt to manipulate. For all but the most devoted of feminist separatists, the logical consequences should prove worrying because they mean the steady isolation of the movement from the straight males, with the exception of sycophantic yes men.

It is surely more than a matter of private confusion that I perceive movements with 'liberation' in their title as directly repressive in effect. It seems clear that the mutual nature of liberation is being downgraded as a goal, and that a separatism is taking its place. Some individuals and groups connected with the women's and gay movements seem to have a psychological structure similar to that of the Trot groupings, down to the last drop of sneering dismissiveness over disagreements and the last ounce of a priori hostility. Now however it is based on the fact that one is a straight male rather than a libertarian. A catch-all solution for men's difficulties in the face of the women's movement - men's groups - is prescribed by some in a manner as bald and unthinking as any chauvinist's 'solution' to the problems of women.

Those strands of the theory formulating the role of the straight male largely stand opposed to any libertarian formulation. The argument seems to run as follows: men oppress women. This oppression is economic, emotional, and structural, i.e. our society could not survive without this



oppression. This oppression is either an outgrowth of capitalism or capitalism is an outgrowth of the oppression of women. In either case men, the male sex, are characterised as oppressors. Within this oppressor grouping there are overtly reactionary tendencies and more progressive elements (I have heard the term 'honorary women' used to describe the progressives). The progressives are of two kinds. First the gay men. Secondly those straight men 'who recognise their sexism and have taken steps to overcome it'. This is not however a task that can be finished in the present state of things. Whether it is a case of 'No women's liberation without socialist revolution and no socialist revolution without women's liberation' or whether, say, Shulamith Firestone is right to assert that the oppression of women is as old as human history and that all oppressions stem from it - either way men remain oppressors. Progressive men are doomed to struggle their oppressive roles and can only succeed with the success of the socialist revolution at the earliest. Women, at least, are struggling for liberation while men - and only a conscious minority of them - are struggling to cease to be oppressors. This is not a heroic position to be in...



It is a position some men seem prepared to adopt. Groups of men have been set up to discuss sexual politics largely as a result of the salutary shocks resulting from the women's liberation movement. There is nothing wrong with that and some of the men involved have the wholly reasonable intention of sorting out some of the crazy things that they've suddenly found in their heads. Yet the motivations are mixed. For some men the struggle for understanding is linked to the struggle for autonomy, for others it is an exercise in the repression of undesirable traits of behaviour: the 'not farting in church' tendency.

This latter object is reflected in the names of some of these groups e.g. 'Men Against Sexism'. This orientation towards eliminating the negative rather than accentuating the positive is an indication of a self-imposed limit to the possibilities for personal liberation. This limit corresponds to the limit laid down in the strand of women's liberation theory placing man as oppressor. It also corresponds to the role of the male as eternal loser.

A Wicked Messenger told me about some of the men at the Men's Conference recently held at Coventry: 'they'd turned themselves in, man, they were coming out with their hands up!'. For what crime? For oppressing women and gays. An example is the Wildcat correspondent who took his part in the collective responsibility for '...all the hang-ups and oppressiveness we "straights" push onto gays in general ... the people we actually oppress in daily life...' There are similar breast-beatings elsewhere about the collective male responsibility for the oppression of women. Now if someone says to me 'What do you mean by those actions or those words? They are offensive to me as a woman (or a black, or a gay)', then I have to face that accusation and justify myself, or change. I also have to consider my own and the accuser's motivations in the encounter between us. What I do not have to do is accept responsibility for every atrocity every man has committed on every woman. That would be the mirror-image of asking the women's liberation movement to take responsibility, as individuals, for Lucretia Borgia. For the Wildcat correspondent to write as he does implies that the Men's Conference was full of queer-bashers or wife-beaters who were doing penance. This, I assert, was not what it was about. The motivations that would take a man to such a conference are deep worries about the sexually-specific roles and expectations that affect so much of his life, and an equally deep need to find a way out.

For someone with these motivations publicly to flagellate himself as a sexual monster seems ludicrous to me. It is understandable, if not liberatory in the long run, that some women in the women's movement hate men. But that some men should internalise this hatred and that they should present this self-hatred as liberation from sexism is outrageous. The logical extrapolation of this kind of thinking is a psychological and physical self-mutilation - like the man who wrote to Mole Express some three years ago saying that he'd castrated himself because of the crimes men had committed against women. Quite obviously most men do not feel such extreme steps to be necessary. Yet self-hatred is only a more intense version of guilt or obsessive self-censorship, and these are quite general responses to accusations of male-chauvinist piggery. The repression of chauvinist traits does not dispose of them. To paraphrase Michael Schneider*: 'The mental suffering in the men's movement derives from the fact that whenever our comrades' necessarily chauvinist past tends to reappear, they relentlessly push it back out of sight, clamping it down under the lid of the new sexual politics. This self-imposed repression of their chauvinist feelings and desires (in the name of the new collective Superego) makes them, subjectively speaking, even sicker than they would ordinarily be as a result of their original bourgeois, fascist socialisation'. The resocialisation of men, absent-mindedly aimed at by some sections of the women's movement and the men's movement, is repressive. It has nothing to do with liberation and for those who embrace

* Michael Schneider made a critique of the maoid leninism so prevalent in the West German student movement. In 1971 he wrote 'Vanguard, Vanguard, who's got the vanguard?'. A translation recently published by Leeds Libertarians is obtainable (10p + postage) from Rising Free, 197 Kings Cross Road, London WC1.

this guilt-riddled resocialisation it represents a nose-dive back into voluntary servitude. One of the lessons we can learn from the women's movement is that because other people want or expect you to do something, this does not necessarily constitute a good reason for doing it.

The importance for women and gays of the insights of the 'new' sexual politics has been in the sphere of self-awareness and in the sphere of organisation. For men the importance - mainly potential rather than actual - has been in the area of self-awareness. Contrary to current conventional wisdom I think that the main liberatory potential for men of this self-awareness lies not so much in the discovery of male chauvinist attitudes to women but in new possibilities for loosening male heads. The male psyche is riddled with insecurity, self-doubt and sexual fears, not to mention several other nasties. In this it differs little from the female psyche. What is different in men is, I think, the way these generally manifest themselves as a result of male conditioning. Essentially they encourage over-compensation in the form of the obsessive and aggressively expressed need to be right, to be obeyed, to be taken notice of - all the forms of authoritarianism - when dealing with those defined as social inferiors. The roots of this behaviour - in the fear of weakness and vulnerability - have been opened up by some of the new sex-political writing, as well as by people like Reich. What is important is that a way of talking about these problems has entered the language from the women's and gay movements. It is available for men to define their subjective problems rather than using it to define themselves

IRRATIONALITY SPREADING

Our pamphlet The Irrational in Politics has, in the course of the last couple of years, been reprinted several times. Over 6000 copies have been sold to date. Among editions published abroad, and to which we have not yet drawn our readers' attention, we would like to mention:

- a) L'Irrationnel en Politique. This is very amusingly illustrated, and was produced by the now defunct ICO group. Copies still available from H. Simon, 34 rue St.Sébastien, Paris 11ème.
- b) Die sexuelle Konterrevolution: Russland, published in Schwarze Protokolle No.5. This consists of the second part of the pamphlet dealing with the Russian experience. Some very funny drawings. (From Peter Ober, 1 Berlin 30, Welserstrasse 3)
- c) To paralogo stin politiki, produced by comrades in Greece, since the collapse of the Junta. This little book also contains an article by Klaus Horn on the Mass Psychology of Fascism. (Obtainable from Diethnis Bibliothiki, Akadimias 63, Athens).

Editions of The Irrational in Politics will very shortly also be published in the USA (by Black and Red, Box 9546, Detroit, Michigan 48202, USA), in Canada (by Black Rose Books, 3934 rue St.Urbain, Montréal 131, Québec, Canada), and in Australia by the Self-Management Group of Western Australia, P.O. Box 61, Inglewood, Western Australia 6052.

as the objective problem. Here lies the truly libertarian role for straight males as self-managers of their own sexual liberation. What is thus offered to men as a way out of their sex-political misery is not a repressive and guilt-based resocialisation but a way of facing and defeating what is felt to be oppressive in the male role... oppressive, that is, to men.

But this is only the beginning. I remain convinced of the need for forms of struggle which not only enhance the autonomy of individuals and groups but which also link the various constituencies and activities. At present, in the various grass roots groups, there is a potential dynamism which is not to be found in the musty, dusty General Theory which the Left trundles out to Procrusteanise* with. The reason is straightforward. The General Theory is neither the result of general practice or the result of generalising from practice. It's just there, like God or dog shit on your shoe. The fragmentation of experience and activity which this indicates is quite consistent with the preservation of our bureaucratic corporatist society. The social forces that oppose this fragmentation are based on self-management and generalised autonomy. The process of the social revolution is a process of generalisation. The process involves not only ferreting away on your own patch but a continuous stitching and unstitching to see how the various patches go together. The isolation of any movement - whether it be for workers' control or for sexual liberation - is the extent to which it is cut off from natural allies. Isolation is weakness and, ultimately, defeat. We really do need one another. As far as sexual politics is concerned the forms of mutual liberation have hardly developed. The process is complicated by the acute fragmentation among the sexual politicians themselves. Yet develop they must, if our mass psychology is to remake itself. And without that massive changing of heads, nothing changes.

J. Q.



* Procrustean : which has violently been made to conform to a standard. From Procrustes, a mythical Greek robber, who stretched or cut off his captives' legs to make them fit a bed.

AGAINST ALL NATIONALISM

After all the hysteria and slogan-shouting about Ireland it is perhaps time to look at the question from a socialist point of view. As socialists we cannot give 'unconditional', or even 'critical' support to any of the protagonists in Northern Ireland. We do not support the IRA (either wing), the UDA or UVF, or the British Army. Our concern is with the workers, all of whom have been exploited and exploded by all sides. We have nothing in common with narrow sectarian groups who are dedicated to the cause of moral repression - for example the successful Paisleyite campaign to ban 'Last Tango in Paris' from Belfast cinemas, the Provisional IRA's opposition to birth control and abortion. Victory for any of these groups would hardly seem to be a step on the way to a free and libertarian socialist society.

An obvious consequence of sectarian division is the economic one. It is no accident that the divided workers of Northern Ireland, both Catholic and Protestant, are among the lowest paid in Britain and that, despite the bombings and the chaos, profitability in the province continues to rise.

The ideology of Republicanism in itself accepts the protestant/catholic divide which was established by the protestant supremacy, and poses not a socialist perspective but one of narrow nationalism.

In the past SOLIDARITY has opposed giving support to nationalist movements in the Third World. The fact that we were opposed to British Imperialism did not lead us into the absurd position of supporting various national liberation struggles which have invariably led to the institution of equally repressive regimes (e.g. Nkrumah, Kenyatta, Eric Williams). - the enemies of our enemies are not necessarily our friends. Many of these struggles were hailed by the trad left as 'revolutionary' as is the present republican struggle in Northern Ireland. We are not interested in just any revolution - we are interested in the socialist revolution.

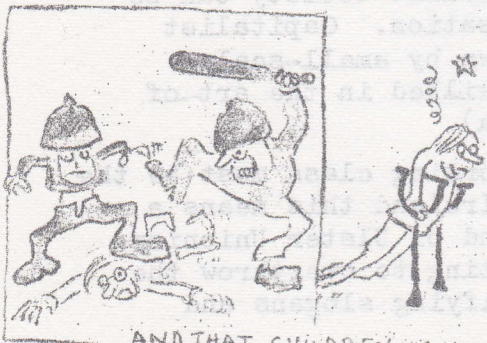
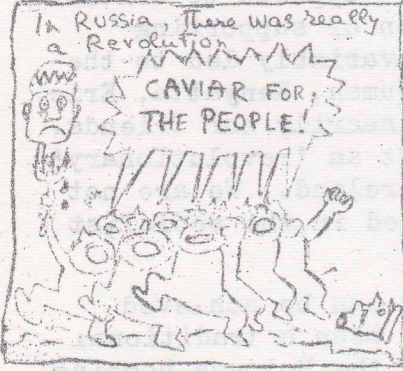
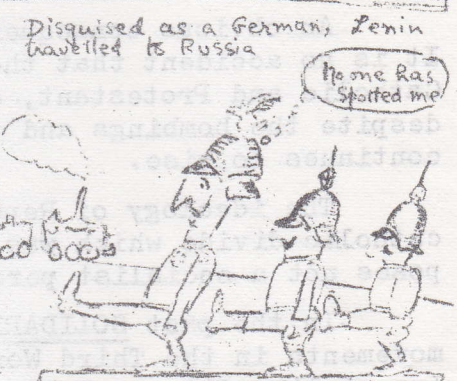
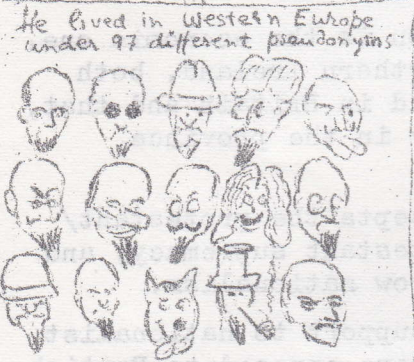
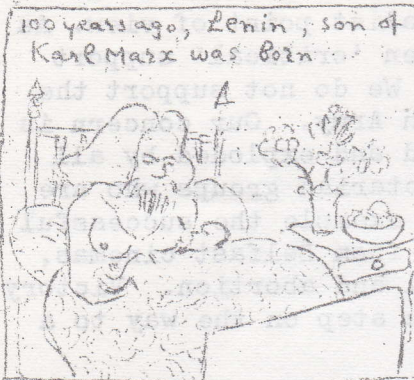
We do not believe that a socialist revolution can be achieved through terror tactics. Indiscriminate bombing has been a traditional tactic of the fascists and the extreme right - i.e. the Bologna bombing earlier this year. Nor do we believe that a socialist society can be achieved by an authoritarian militaristic organisation. Capitalist society, anyway, is hardly likely to be overthrown by small-scale bombings when its military apparatus is highly skilled in the art of large-scale bombing (Dresden, Coventry, Hiroshima).

We believe that 'the emancipation of the working class must be the task of the working class itself'. In Northern Ireland this means a break with both the vision of a United Ireland and of Ulster Unionism. We see the most effective way of helping as fighting to overthrow the capitalist system here, and not by chanting mystifying slogans and jumping on second-hand bandwagons.

* * * *

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AGAINST ALL NATIONALISM



AND THAT, CHILDREN, IS HOW THE LENIN MAUSOLEUM BECAME THE LOURDES OF ALL THE LITTLE LENINISTS IN THE WORLD...

HAPPY NEW YEAR... or

ANYTHING YOU CAN DO, I CAN DO BETTER

Over the last year it has become obvious that Western capitalism has encountered serious economic problems. Whether or not this is the long-awaited (and even longer delayed) final crisis, and what the fundamental causes of the problems are, is quite another question. What has not been so apparent is that the East European state capitalist regimes are also in serious difficulties.

In this article I would like briefly to compare the difficulties faced by Czechoslovakia with those faced by Britain. Czechoslovakia is the East European state most comparable to Britain. It is an industrially advanced country, dependent on the export of manufactured goods for survival. It has few natural resources and suffers from an ailing industrial technology. Given these circumstances, if any of the advantages claimed by the Communist Parties for their own particular form of exploitative society are justified, they should be very apparent.

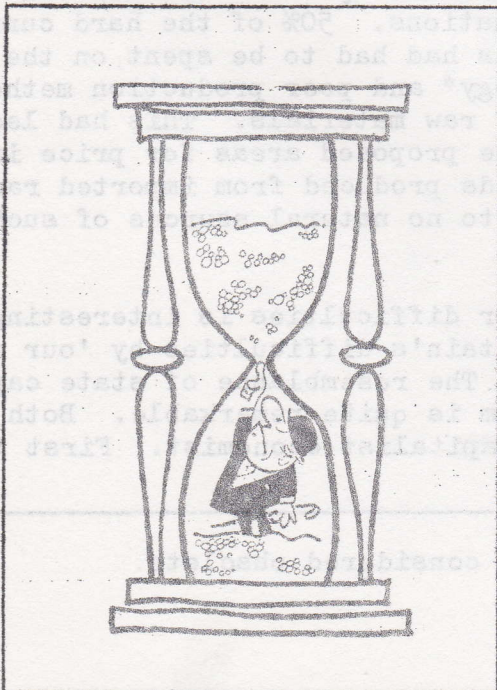
A central feature of any crisis is the feeling that those who have been in control of the situation are losing that control. Let's look at Czechoslovakia in that light. In 1974 an economic report was issued in Czechoslovakia giving a black picture of the country's position. It reported a steady decrease in the growth of the G.N.P. and proposed price increases for electricity, gas, water, transportation and rents. It was admitted that price freezing had failed to contain inflation and that there was an increasing balance of payments difficulty. How had all this come about? First came the technical explanations. 50% of the hard currency earned from the export of consumer goods had had to be spent on the import of raw materials. An obsolete technology* and poor production methods had resulted in wasteful consumption of raw materials. This had led to a high import to export ratio. One of the proposed areas for price increases was in relation to manufactured goods produced from imported raw materials (this in a country with next to no natural sources of such materials!).

The Czechs' own analysis of their difficulties is interesting to compare with the analysis given for Britain's difficulties by 'our own' capitalist economists and politicians. The resemblance of state capitalist solutions to those of private capitalism is quite remarkable. Both fall back on the standard solutions of the capitalist economist. First there

* 30% of all Czech industrial plant was considered obsolete.

must be technical innovation. Where will the money come from? Why, from increased productivity, of course! But here they come up against the fundamental bureaucratic contradiction. For increased productivity there must be a greater motivation in the labour force. The Czech document states explicitly that labour productivity has a social function in addition to an economic one. (We are not so very far from the social contract here.) But how do you get greater motivation out of a labour force that is so completely alienated? By the tried and trusted method of bribery (more consumer goods, higher wages, increased standard of living), through which it is hoped to transform a public alienation into a private one. But now we have come full circle, because this is just what the Husak regime attempted to do in 1971. By so doing they spent all their reserves of foreign currency on consumer goods instead of re-investing in industry. Hence the obsolete state of Czech industry. In other words, their attempts to provide incentives and to privatise alienation has added to the economic difficulties by contributing to the obsolescence of industry. Stated in general terms the basic contradiction in the Czech economy is between the need to provide material incentives (so that the population will work, so utilising resources) and the need to utilise resources (so that industry can be modernised and become more efficient in capitalist terms). This is an interesting East European variation of the 'law of increasing prosperity'.

If we compare the situation with that of Britain some interesting differences come to light.* Here the law of 'increasing prosperity' works as follows: the trade unions have become fashioned into tools to ensure that the living standards of the working class are not reduced. So we see firms collapsing (such as Aston Martin) whilst in other sectors of the economy workers strike so that real wages can keep pace with inflation, or even overtake it. The need to provide material incentives



so that alienation can be bought off with consumer goods is so intense that even the gravest economic crisis cannot affect it. Put in these terms the function of the trade unions in Britain is to improve the terms of buying off the working class. But in carrying out this essential (for the capitalist economy) function of privatising alienation, they help to produce the economic conditions where the continuation of this function becomes increasingly difficult.

* Solidarity's analysis of the economic situation here has been given elsewhere (see the introduction to the second edition of Modern Capitalism and Revolution)

This has immediate political consequences. We see confused politicians seeking ways of getting the trade unions to participate in the reduction of working class living standards, the trade unions agreeing, and then shop floor agitation and militancy preventing the implementation of this unsocial contract. So we stagger from one general election to the next, with the politicians dazedly following, unable to understand that all their solutions are unworkable. Either they must buy off the working class (at the expense of 'The Economy') or they must salvage 'The Economy' (at the expense of the working class). But the working class won't allow them to do this. The British economy is a good indicator of just how much control our own variety of order-givers have lost.

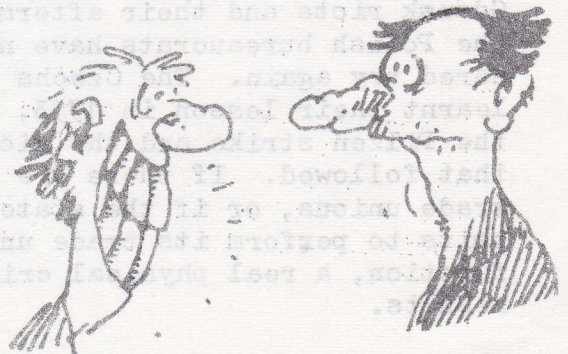
This brief analysis illustrates a fundamental difference between the working of Western capitalism and that of Stalinist state capitalism in Czechoslovakia: there is no force corresponding to that of the trade unions. Yet if we assume that the trade unions are an essential part of the structure of a capitalist society, their function must be carried out by other means. In Czechoslovakia it is the state itself that has to ensure the continued rise in working class living standards. The state has to undertake the role of the trade unions in the West. At the same time it has to undertake the historic role of Capital (investment and the maintenance and development of the productive process). This internal contradiction is producing an incredible tension in the working of the Party and the state machinery. The essential function of the trade unions is shown by the fact that where the state has attempted to resolve the tension by 'abolishing' its trade union role (that is by carrying out attacks on working class living standards) explosions have inevitably followed. The state attempted to produce a healthy economy in Poland by such attacks in 1970. We are all familiar with the Gdansk riots and their aftermath. The Polish bureaucrats have not dared try again. The Czechs learnt their lesson in 1953, with the Pilzen strike and the riots that followed. If there are no trade unions, or if the state omits to perform its trade union function, a real physical crisis results.



How do the authorities expect to extricate themselves from their appalling predicament? In Britain there is, in my opinion, a greater chance for the system to recover its economic position. The Czechs had all hope of salvaging a workable state capitalist economy destroyed in 1968. Our leaders are just perceiving that economics is not only about figures, percentage profit, trade deficits, etc, but that it is also the end product of a complex web of human relationships. Our rulers could attempt, at some time or other, to provide motivations for work by some form of capitalist self-management. This is their only hope. Whether they succeed or not is another question.

We can see that similar contradictions exist when the means of production are nationalised. In 1968 some Czech economists were aware of the contradictions inherent in a centralised command economy. Their proposed solutions offer an interesting development of the concept of capitalist self-management and how self-management could be recuperated in a state capitalist framework. For a lucid exposition of this line of thinking, see Critique no.3, where the Czech economist Selucky has outlined his ideas in an article with the misleading title 'Marxism and Self-management'. The basis of his thinking is in the idea of decentralised firms under workers' control (not self-managed - he gets the two terms quite confused), with the trading between the firms regulated by the market (a socialist market economy is the term used), the overall priorities being set by the state. In the conditions of Czechoslovakia in 1968 ideas along these lines might just have recuperated the growing demands of the working class. It would be politically impossible for the present regime even to consider anything like this at the present time.

So at the start of 1975 we have a situation where, both East and West, the leaders are following events, and losing ground all the time. Far from controlling the situation they are being driven by each new, and for them unexpected, twist taken by events. Let us be romantic and wish a very happy new year to the people of both East and West who hope that, for the first time, they will be able to take their destiny into their own hands and say 'bollocks' to exploiters of every kind.



THE MAN QUESTION

During the middle of last summer I went somewhat timidly to an initial meeting of one of the men's groups in the East End of London. It was a unique experience: 14 men sitting in one small room, all a bit self-conscious and shy, trying, without aggression or the desire to put anyone down, to discuss our 'maleness' that had led us to coming to the meeting.

From its start in this country - approximately two years ago - I was suspicious of the men's movement, wondering what the motivation of such a movement was, and dubious of what they were trying to do. My suspicion, unconsciously, had a lot to do I think with an underlying resistance to the idea that I had any problems. It was reinforced (due to that resistance) by articles that I read in the Men Against Sexism magazines. What was reinforced was the feeling that there were groups of men saying to each other 'What a load of sods we are towards women!' and then complacently congratulating each other for saying it, and/or manifesting a guilt-ridden masochism, akin to the reaction of the white liberal to the black nationalist. Both attitudes, if true or widely representative, seemed to me unlikely to produce anything of value.

A number of circumstances - like it getting increasingly difficult to live with what I felt were my inadequacies; a developing theory (born of personal experience) of what seemed more positive ways of relating to other people of either sex; and discovering that a bloke I knew and respected in Coventry was in a men's group - contributed to me finding the courage to get off my pedestal and go to the first meeting of a new group.

I continue to go to that group because (surprise, surprise) I have problems. Some of these I believe to be specific to being a male. Others I suspect may be common to both sexes, whether one is homo- or hetero-sexual. Problems which I wish to discuss and share, and are shared with other men. To give an example. I'm interested in overcoming barriers that exist between men when it comes to discussing certain deeply personal things. Being a male means (theoretically) that one doesn't admit to being intimidated, frightened or insecure to other men. Men - if they are having a relationship with the opposite sex - tend to use women as they would their mothers - or at least as they wish their mothers might have been. A woman is expected to console the male, to comfort. I believe there's a lot of truth in those two old cliches that a) men are little boys at heart, and b) that behind every great (or not so great) man, there is a woman.

But as Frank Norman wrote a decade ago Fings Aint What They Used T'be. In many households men are no longer solely the breadwinners.

This has had an effect on their ability to wield power and control (not only on their wives, but also on their children who are earning). This must be coupled with the fact that the ideas of the women's movement have now gone beyond the bra-burning image in the public debate (i.e. in the mass media). Men, or rather quite a few, have been forced into a defensive situation, particularly but not exclusively those men who have had (or continue to have) relationships with women in the women's movement. This in turn has led them into the men's movement.

It's disconcerting to find oneself attacked because of one's sex. But, provided it doesn't produce excessive guilt, it can be a healthy thing to be forced to rethink ideas that are so much tied up with one's self-identity - that self-identity itself being very much tied up with one's sexuality.

The resistance to the politics of sexuality is very deep seated. In libertarian circles, for instance, I have heard it said when a man has changed his opinions that he has been 'got at' and 'influenced' by the woman he lives with. Apart from being grossly insulting - implying that a woman's ideas are invalid - it assumes (though, at a theoretical level, the utterers would rightfully reject this) that we (men) pluck ideas out of the sky, or the nearest person, rather than evolve and develop them within a personal social milieu. The feeling one gets is that if one is going to be influenced then, for God's sake, let it be by a fellow male - preferably one with the right line!

The above attitude - which could be called the male club syndrome - is one of many examples that demonstrate how deeply and on the whole unconsciously our conditioning affects us. Another example is the resentment expressed in the post-school situation when one of your mates gets married, and the group of male friends loses yet another member. This conditioning, whether in men or in women, is essential for the smooth functioning of this society. It cripples us, makes us cower when faced with authority, turns us against each other, whether amongst our own sex or the opposite sex. It is guaranteed to maintain feelings of insecurity and anxiety, which are necessary for an authoritarian society to function. To break down this conditioning and the roles we play (which are usually at variance with our best interests) we first have to realise - often painfully - that we are in fact role-playing. We must attempt to understand why, and from where it comes. Questions that, frankly, I have problems answering neatly.

The greatest contribution the women's movement has made - or rather forced onto the political scene (a scene historically dominated by men and their ideas) is the politics of sexuality. This is not to say that this area has not been touched on before, and by some men (Reich, for instance). But the depth and breadth of the theory being developed by the women's movement, and to a lesser extent by the male gay movement, surpasses anything historically preceding it. With a prevailing libertarian climate it has a chance to take root.

With the success of the Bolshevik revolution many, if not most, of these ideas were dismissed and suppressed as irrelevant or bourgeois. Only with the manifest failure - in terms of socialist realisation - of the Russian revolution, and of successive 'Workers' or 'Peoples' regimes (which for the most part mesmerised revolutionaries the world over) have these ideas and others been rediscovered and developed, and have totally new ones arisen. (It goes without saying that it was no accident that these ideas were dismissed by the Bolsheviks and their various successors)

* * * * *

Half a century and more after the Bolsheviks took power found me walking down the Seven Sisters Road in North London one bright October morning, in search of the Coop Hall where the third men's conference was being held. I wandered in to find smoke haze and around 200 men, some chatting to each other, others in groups of various sizes.

It was a loosely structured affair. Written on large sheets of paper attached to the wall were various topics that individuals wished to discuss: health and self-examination, male conditioning and authoritarianism, monogamy, and so on. The thinking behind the loose structure was that individuals turning up and not knowing anyone would find it easier to participate. This was not necessarily the case. I immediately cast my eyes around, to latch on to anyone I knew. Others pointed out during the post-mortem that followed on the Sunday morning that they had found it just as difficult to get to know anyone and participate. The different workshops were held on the Saturday, with a general session in the evening. This was followed by a further general session on Sunday.

As a newcomer to the men's movement, the general sessions held the greatest interest for me. They gave a reasonable cross-section of the ideas of the men attending and were, one assumed, representative of the movement. The sessions were enlivened by the presence of two angry and articulate gay men. In fact they were pivotal in the discussions, because they were attacking the whole concept of the men's movement. They compared it to a group of capitalists getting uneasy about their restless workers. They claimed that the basis of the movement was recuperation of the women's movement: we talked of sexism and overcoming it, but only in relation to women. They instanced that they had experienced more sexism coming from the 'straight' men over the weekend than for a long while. We were 'liberal shit' who found it easy to talk about non-competitiveness and non-aggression because we were the masters. Women and gay men were angry and gave expression to their anger because they were the oppressed. When asked to give token to our honest intentions, they suggested that all we could be was an ancillary of the women's and gay male movements. We should be 'out on the streets' with them and so on, if we were sincere, which they doubted.

The above criticisms and thoughts have been experienced by many men in the men's movement, either externally (articles, for instance, in

Men Against Sexism) or internally, springing from situations in personal relationships, mine included. The response to their accusations was interesting. A small minority accepted it all carte-blanche, one saying he was leaving his group and the movement. Others criticised aspects of the gays' position, but accepted that the men's movement was inevitably only an ancillary to the women's and male gay movements. Others rejected part or much of the criticism, including two other gays. Some I felt, must have felt they were Uncle Toming in supporting the concept of a men's movement and remained silent.

The rejection of the overall criticism was on many levels. The two predominant ones were a) that once one got into the 'who-is-the-most-oppressed' syndrome one would end up with an eight year old black lesbian road-digging Irishwoman who, by the logic of the argument, all other 'oppressed' people would have to support in an ancillary way; and b) that the male gays themselves had been rejected by the women's movement, and in particular by gay women, first and foremost because of their male sexism. As men we shared the same sexism, irrespective of whether we were straight, gay or in-between.

However, irrespective of the invalidity of the arguments or otherwise, the sheer force of the attack had, for me and other men, the beneficial effect of making one re-examine one's ideas and emotions and think hard about the role of the men's movement. As a result of these shock waves some men in the London area circulated, in the New Year, a letter inviting others to a meeting to examine the ripples.

This proved to be an interesting meeting, in that it showed clear differences of opinion emerging between the thirty or so 'straight' men present. These boiled down to whether the movement should be seen as Men Against Sexism or as Men's Liberation. For those who formulate the concept of the movement in 'against sexism' terms, the motivation of those who call it 'liberation' is merely liberation from the difficulties of relating to women and male gays. In short it is simply one step from recuperation. If the movement is posed in terms of 'against sexism' there is no side-stepping the issue.

The men from Stoke Newington who had circulated the letter to the other London groups were for 'Men Against Sexism'. They were deeply pessimistic about the men's movement and the problems of fighting sexism as straight men. This was reflected in the questions they posed in their letter. They felt, near the end of the meeting, that like at the conference the issue of sexism had been side-stepped. We had spent too much time discussing whether or not to have a men's centre. We had significantly failed to discuss such questions as 'Is Men Against Sexism merely a movement of unsuccessful sexists?' (this had been one of the questions asked in the circulated letter). It was simply another meeting where we had been self-congratulatory, and had not fundamentally examined ourselves as a movement.

Opinion split fifty-fifty. I personally am opposed to the concept and ideology of Men Against Sexism. There's a strong whiff of sack-cloth and ashes about it. In the end, it seems to me, it can only be a sycophantic movement that will destroy itself with disillusionment, and possible hatred of women and male gays (how can you progress, and change, and love if you hate yourself?). Or it could re-emerge with often the same individuals but a different name, such as 'Men Against Ageism' - answering the same guilt-ridden needs as those who mindlessly and uncritically support the black movement, the Arab movement, the IRA, Women's Liberation or white industrial workers.

However, it is true that the seeds of an attempted recuperation may well be within the men's movement, and that the movement may be too complacent. The real problem is to find a critical balance between the two. Whether the balance will be found, or whether the differences will grow wider at the next men's conference in Brighton, in March, remains to be seen.

P. G.

WELL, FANCY THAT!

"As our relationships become unstable, people - particularly the petty bourgeoisie which has more leisure time - scramble about in a desperate attempt to find some meaning in their lives. Today people are grasping at all kinds of straws, at exotic religious sects, mysticism, drugs, pornography, promiscuity, sex orgies, trotskylism, etc.

"The fundamental contradiction in capitalist society is that between the petty bourgeoisie and the working class...."

"Gay liberation is anti-working class and counter-revolutionary."

From the "Statement on Homosexuality"

issued by the Revolutionary Union (an American Stalino-Maoist group).

BOUQUETS AND BRICKBATS....

We receive, each week, letters on a wide variety of topics. Some tell us off for what we have said, others suggest what we ought to be saying. Some (and we dread them) ask for information on highly technical historical or bibliographical points. Others (and we welcome them) describe situations or struggles readers have been involved in. Here are a few of them.

We had a number of communications about the article 'The Malaise on the Left' published in our last issue. We hope to publish them together in due course as a Discussion Bulletin.

Glasgow, October 23, 1975

Dear Solidarity,

Glasgow's Labour administration have continued to illustrate Wilson's claim that Britain would 'win with Labour' because 'Labour cared'. So sensitive and extensive is this care that, for several weeks now, a million gallons of untreated sewage have poured into the Clyde each day. The Clyde is possibly the least suited river in Britain for this type of treatment.

During this period Glasgow's dustmen-drivers have been on strike and the streets display the refuse that would normally have been removed. The town's bus and underground workers are also on strike. Daily, our Health Authorities assure us that no hazards are involved. So cheerful are those assurances that I wonder why those who care so much persist in employing municipal workers, only to demonstrate how unnecessary they really are.

Last Saturday evening I was discussing with a friend how Glasgow's population had apparently accepted, without protest, the withdrawal of these social amenities. I suggested - taking my cue from Solidarity's Strategy for Industrial Struggle - that workers, instead of going on strike, should continue to work but should limit their efforts to what they decided coincided with the wages being paid. I cited the striking dustmen-drivers as an example. They claimed their wages amounted to £25 and they were demanding an increase of £10. The logical inference of this is that as the strikers believed they were only being paid 60% of the value of their work, they should only work for 60% of the allotted time.

Before replying, my friend took the precaution of filling our glasses. His verdict: workers would never accept what you say. Perhaps not, I said, but this is the explanation of their strike. If workers didn't believe they were being underpaid, then why the hell were they striking?

Meanwhile madness reigns supreme. The river Clyde has become an immeasurable dry lavatory. Stacks of refuse add a new dimension to Glasgow's landscape. On radio and television every type of con-man tells us just exactly why insanity must be honoured. Medical experts and health environment geniuses pooh-poo the fears of those foolish enough to be worried about the consequences of what is going on. The response of Glasgow's population shows considerably less animation than can be found in any graveyard. Proletariat and bourgeoisie - lower, middle and upper - leave their respective compounds each morning, walk to their workplaces and after completing their stints (or is it norms?) walk back to their democratic citadels, secure in the knowledge that their television screens will continue to dispense intellectual banality of the highest order and most certainly give the lie to such people as Solidarity members who, in their willfulness, persist in claiming that the national interest is a myth.

Best wishes,

Stuart H.



Swansea, December 8, 1974.

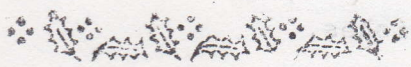
I must apologise for not writing for so long but I have for once a legitimate excuse as I have spent the last month in an occupation and haven't had time for much else. Like almost all student actions these days the occupation was a spectator sport for the vast majority of the students here. Despite having meetings of up to 2000 students (out of 3000 on campus) voting for the action, there were never more than 200 carrying out the action. Naturally we eventually lost. The trouble with being centrally involved in a struggle is that it is very difficult to see the weaknesses of the actions you are taking until after the event.

The faults with this one were quite straightforward but I must confess I failed to see them in time. The various left groups were more concerned to win union meetings than to involve people. They were also quite satisfied for the most conscious elements (the occupiers) to lead 'the masses' and take action on their behalf. The eventual result of this was that a split developed between the mass of students and the occupiers. The occupiers despised the mass for its lack of activity and the mass mistrusted the occupiers as 'mad lefties'. The net result of this was the College were able to play upon the split between these groups and we were beaten by a backlash amongst our own ranks and not by the power of our authorities.

The Left, now mainly signed up by the IMG leaders, now despise the mass of students even more. The IMG in particular seem to be satisfied to create a situation and take a small group of students through the experience of struggle. Contact with a wider group of students was only on the basis of them being an audience for our speeches. Both the tactic of occupation and the traditional method of applying it were shown to be totally outmoded methods of struggle in this particular environment and I would suspect in colleges generally.

... I was quite impressed with the latest issue of the paper (vol.VII, no.12) in terms of each individual article but I'm never quite sure what audience we're aiming at. It seems to be a combination of industrial labourer, academic revolutionary and yippie youth. Still I enjoy the articles and I usually find that whoever reads the paper finds at least one article to enjoy, so it can't be too bad. I never hear anyone say anything about enjoyment when they've been pushed into buying Red Weekly, Socialist Worker, etc.

Andy B.



Kennington (London SE11), December 3, 1974.

Did I hear you say 'Solidarity'?

'In the dairy where I work most of us spend a lot of time trying to screw things up for the bosses. For example, many of us piss in the milk before we take it out on our rounds.

'When we're out we have this game where, especially with families who've got a lot of kids, we just don't deliver the milk.

'Another great laugh is to drop the milk bottles outside the customer's door so they break and the milk runs everywhere. Someone else has to clear it up but we don't worry because - after all - we are wasting our lives.'

* * * * *

None of that is true, but it sounds the kind of thing D. Tate would enjoy judging by what he wrote about his days at the Gas Board (Solidarity vol.VII, no.12).

'We call, if possible, at the AM jobs in the PM, or vice versa, hoping the customer will be out.'

Ha-ha. That teaches all those housewives not to complain about their ovens not working. They're all related to the Chairman of the Gas Board or the foreman, so no dinners for them, middle class bastards.

'Secondly, we claim we cannot find addresses or even "lose" the job voucher with the addresses on it.'

Ho-ho. Anyone who wants their gas fire fixed must be the enemy. Doesn't matter that they do shitty jobs and have pointless lives like us, let's try to make things a little bit worse.

'If all else fails, gas men can be seen creeping down garden paths with a "not in" card written out, trying to appear as unobtrusive as postmen, and thus avoiding entry and work.'

Hee-hee. Just imagine those stupid sods sitting round wasting their time hoping we'll call to fix their water heater, and there we are pissing ourselves...

Of course, in this round of merry pranks a note of seriousness must sound. 'Where people are in real need the lads will leave their beds in the middle of the night to help.' Perhaps they wouldn't have to disturb their sleep so often if they helped in the day.

Obviously, D. Tate is an amateur when it comes to siding with us in the struggle against the bosses. I want to read in 'Solidarity' about hospital porters who fight by letting oxygen cylinders leak so that - ho-fucking-ho - there's no oxygen left when someone is gasping for breath.

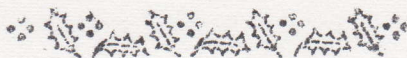
And can't we hear about ambulance drivers who always take the longest way to a road accident so the victim can bleed a little longer? And - you'll love this - how about the Social Security clerk who always makes sure that supplementary benefits Giro's get sent out late, if at all.

Can't D. Tate stop pissing himself for a minute and learn to differentiate between kinds of sabotage? Anyone with a bit of common sense can look at the job he or she does and see ways of fucking up the system up by hurting the bosses as much as possible and the rest of us as little as possible.

If you hate your job - and who in their right mind doesn't? - is the way out to blame people who depend on your help and punish them day in and day out? Anyone who thinks that is little better than a scab as far as I am concerned.

It won't come as any surprise to me to see D. Tate's piece quoted in the 'Daily Telegraph' as an example of what solidarity really boils down to.

Harry Harmer.



Wanstead, London E.7., January 15, 1975.

One year ago I re-read the 'Irrational in Politics' because Solidarity thought of reprinting it with some cartoons. While I made some sketches Wilhelm Reich crept through my mind and with him the idea of staying in London.

One year ago something started that had begun already before. I came for a winterweek to get to know the group better. A group is a sum of people. I asked, how can we change in a political struggle. I wondered whether our personal needs lead to freedom (whatever that means). I dreamt of Free Schools and villages full of friends, of creating (as M.B. puts it in 'The Malaise on the Left') 'in the "here and now" microcosms of the alternative society'.

One year ago I got a lot of new hope. We talked about fascism and emotions, Jerry Rubin and emotions, rationalism and emotions. Outside it became dark and chilly, inside emotional and hot.

We dived into a big argument about 'spreading ideas is more important than showing alternative lifestyles' and 'emotions are dangerous' (perhaps no one ever formulated those sentences, but I remember it like this). Together we were shivering in a tiny cold room in Coventry when I tried to explain that only discussing, reading and writing is as 'dangerous' as only dancing, singing and lovemaking. On the one end it develops intelligent monks, on the other uncritical freaks. Both are quite close to characters who support any authoritarian system.

Reading the last issue of Solidarity reminded me of all that. Very old worries and uncertainties piled up again. Specially because of the text and cartoon on pages 8/9: the police fucks an idealist with a flower shirt and long hair. See where you get with all this love-rubbish. And personal politics is change in 'purely individual terms', so that it turns immediately into fashion.

Last year I had hoped to connect in this group Politics with politics, the big P with the little me. Since then - as so often in his/her story - things changed. I left Germany for good and bumped into a new kind of capitalism. To explain my escape intellectually would take a double issue. The emotional basis was: I liked the new people, in general and specifically. Now I ask myself how important political groups are at all, and where does this famous new life come from?

Beside forcing the roses (and weeds) under microscopes, we should see and smell and taste them; beside analysing this bloody planet from tip to toe, we should try to get in touch with our own feelings. Expressing and exploring emotions doesn't mean throwing cups at each others' head. Just the other way round: by admitting our needs and showing our desires we can prevent a lot of tension from piling up. So being emotional helps being rational.

Every human being comes into the world with a big empty head (which will surely be filled and labelled by society later) and some bodily needs: breathing, sleeping, eating, drinking, shitting, moving and loving (in the sense of having warm contact with other persons). Over the years, we go through the hurtful process of being moulded to fit in: if we eat our porridge, we see smiling adults; if we caress our genitals, we see a grumpy face. Aggression, hate and destruction is the reaction to disappointment. First we try to get the sweetie, or toy, or kiss, or job. If the effort fails, we get angry. That's 'socialisation'.

Now the swallowing begins. After a while we don't dare to show what we want, if it is not in the limited wish-allowance. We learn to go the narrow track of the least frustration. We censor ourselves before the others can do so and put on the faces they like to consume. It provides us with chocolate at home, good marks at school, and later friends, careers and power.

Anyway, now we are older (or not), we live quite comfortably, provided we each still play the roles which together make up the pieces for the big society-puzzle (or our little group-puzzle). But that is only the glossy surface. We haven't buried our needs in the nearby graveyard, we are hiding them in ourselves. They are still there. That is bad and good. Bad: it can itch and hurt, it can even make us ill. Good: it can still come up, be looked at and talked about. Where? Obviously not in every bus or office or supermarket. But in the secure situation with people you trust you may have the courage. And suddenly we recognise that the others swallowed a lot of similar troubles. Being honest about it releases tension in all of us.

So what? Yes, there are already groups which do a lot in that direction: women's and men's meetings and some therapy circles. People there are more interested in the personal aspects of emancipation, we in Solidarity more in the politics? In those groups 'The Irrational in Politics' is still read and used. Did we only print it? Who caused the split in the movement, or is it nothing but energy-economy? How can we reach the vast regions of 'freedom', 'socialism', 'paradise', etc, when we lose ourselves right from the start in struggles for others - or in one's own navel?

I am more and more suspicious about the unconscious structures in left groups. I am confused about hierarchy and aggression in libertarian and other circles. Perhaps we could put a lot more light on our own reasons for being 'political' and bridge the gap between rationality and emotions (sometimes even with a biscuit). We still have the possibility of destroying in us the germs of a new authoritarian system.

Julia H.

THE LUMP PAMPHLET - SOME REACTIONS

In April 1974 Solidarity's new National Coordinating Committee published its first pamphlet 'The Lump: an heretical analysis' by Dave Lamb. (1) The text, written by an ex-building worker, challenged many of the left's fetishes concerning industrial organisation and the 'need' to sell one's labour power through trade unions. Some of the reactions to the pamphlet are worth recording.

Dave Lamb's ideas on the Lump were originally put forward in Solidarity (Swansea) vol.3 no.1 in the late summer of 1973. First reactions appeared in the Industrial Network Bulletin. Issue no.1 of the Bulletin (2) contained a critical review by W. Allin. The Lump worker was described as a 'bloody-minded fly-by-night' who produced shoddy work, took no notice of safety 'or any other regulations' and accepted 'shitty conditions without complaint'. UCATT (3) was seen as becoming an industrial union. The author even claimed that it was 'the industrial unions which protect their militants best'. Issue no.2 contained a detailed reply by Dave Lamb - stressing that a way of selling one's labour power that involved about half the workers in the building industry (and resulted in very substantially higher rates than those negotiated by union officials) needed looking at in a cool and dispassionate way. He sought to refute, one by one, the main arguments (shoddy work, disregard for safety, strike-breaking, etc.) adduced against the Lump. The next issue of the Bulletin contained a sober discussion of the whole issue by Albert Meltzer - although his article contained strange statements, such as that 'those working the Lump cease to take part in the economic struggle (a claim not substantiated by the role of Lump workers during the 1972 building dispute), and an even more strange defence of the work ethic (in terms of CNT practice in Spain: 'their idea of unionism was that their craftsmen should be the best'). In the same issue Roy Emery took strong objection to Dave Lamb's lumping the traditional left and anarchists together, as having 'a common inability to conceive of workers deciding for themselves exactly how they will sell their labour power'.

(1) Copies (15p + postage) still available from 4 The Grove, Lancaster or from us. 'The Lump' is the term employed in the construction industries for the system by which gangs of self-employed men hire themselves out to building contractors for a lump sum.

(2) Obtainable from W. Allin, 9 Wood Road, Manchester 16.

(3) Union of Construction and Allied Trades and Technicians.

The correspondence was then taken up in the columns of Freedom. Dave Lamb's views were criticised both by implication (October 3, 1973) and more directly by one of the paper's editors (November 24, 1973). To be fair, Dave had been granted a full page of the paper to outline his argument.

Once the pamphlet itself had been produced, strange developments took place in the direction of International Socialism. Their bookshop, which regularly accepts Solidarity publications on a trade basis, took a bulk order of the pamphlet, only to phone us a few days later asking us to 'remove them as soon as possible'. They had expected a 'serious discussion of the problem' which the pamphlet, in their view, did not provide. Their main reason, in our view, was not so much their concern with 'serious analysis' as their embarrassment at the sustained criticism of I.S.'s industrial policy contained in the heretical pamphlet - and the risk of the critique proving contagious.

International repercussions were interesting. Many readers were quite unfamiliar with such strange British practices as the Lump and wanted further information. A favourable review appeared in Compass (organ of the Revolutionary Committee of the Communist Party of New Zealand - expelled).(4) Nearer home a friendly review appeared in 'Lower Down' no.5,(5) and a somewhat non-plussed one in Building Design (May 17, 1974), one of the trade journals for the Building Industry.

Sales over the last 12 months have been steady and, as the problems raised are very general ones, have not been confined to the building industry. The Manchester comrades produced a leaflet (describing the pamphlet) for distribution on building sites and followed this up, in a number of places, by direct sales of the pamphlet itself. Several dozen copies were sold on building sites in London by a building worker comrade who is not even a member of Solidarity. We have had very little hostility to the pamphlet by building workers themselves. Most of the heat has come from the traditional left.

(4) c/o J. Dickson, 15 Louvain Avenue, Mt.Roskill, New Zealand.

(5) The Wandsworth People's Magazine, 45 Salcott Road, London S.W.11.

HUNGARY '56

We would like to draw readers' attention to the recent production of a French edition of Andy Anderson's Hungary '56. This has been produced jointly by Henri Simon (34 rue St.Sebastien, Paris 11) and by Liaisons (B.P.208, 4000 Liège 1, Belgium). The text contains a new preface and certain additional footnotes, both contributed by a Hungarian comrade who was in Budapest at the time. These correct minor factual errors in our original text.

There is also an expanded bibliography, dealing mainly with new material published in French since the Hungarian events.

A Dutch edition of this text will appear very shortly.

THE SITUATION AT COWLEY

The Cowley Assembly Plant has one of the most militant records in the motor industry. In 1973 about three quarters of all the strikes at British Leyland (and about 20% of all the stoppages in the whole motor industry) took place there. Yet during the recent motor mechanics ('Engine Tuners') dispute the vast majority of workers were prepared to go on working (and even to blackleg) to keep the Cowley assembly lines going. What had created this position?

This situation is by no means as unusual as revolutionary mythology would have us believe. There have been a number of major disasters to job organisation where a similar situation has occurred (for example Pressed Steel at Swindon in 1962 and Fords Dagenham, to name only a couple). In these situations militants under threat have found the workers they 'represented' unwilling to support them. The Cowley events give us an opportunity to look at how such a position is reached.

In April 1974 management reading the signs (the successful imposition of M.D.W., a couple of abortive occupations and a number of other defeats of the shop stewards apparatus) judged the time ripe for a showdown on the productivity question. But first they had to exploit the division between the men and the shop stewards apparatus.

THE S.L.L./W.R.P.

This apparatus was firmly controlled by the S.L.L./W.R.P. and had been for about 5 years. The leading figure of the W.R.P. working at Cowley was Alan Thornett.(4) About 50% of the Committee of the 5/55 Branch were also W.R.P. members.

While the W.R.P. (ex-S.L.L.) is an extreme and ludicrous case, it nevertheless shares its fundamental industrial attitudes with the whole of the traditional movement. The Communist Party and the Maoists, the various Trotskyists sects and the Social-Democrats, all share a somewhat similar view of their relationship to the working class. All see the problem as the 'crisis of leadership'. What matters to them, first and foremost, is that they should be in the saddle, not that there should be changes in the structures and relationships within the class. They do not see the vast mass of workers as capable of actually dominating their own struggles here and now. This view of the limited potentiality of the working class and of the vast role of the 'leadership' is directly related to their view of socialism (both how it will be achieved and what it will be like). But here lie the roots of Thermidor.

(4) Alan Thornett had been a steward of the transport drivers for about 13 years, but also held a number of other positions. He was Chairman of the Shop Stewards Committee, Deputy Convenor, Chairman of the crucial 5/55 Branch of the TGWU, automotive delegate on the no.5 Regional Committee of the TGWU, delegate to the TGWU Biennial Delegate Conference for the last 4 years and a member both of the TGWU District Committee and of the Automotive Group Committee.

Stalinist and Trotskyist organisations seek to bring about situations where the decisions of shop stewards committees - or of other bodies they may control - are subordinated to the political line of their Party. The interests of the workers involved take second place. This sort of thing is the root of many industrial defeats. This is bound to happen when tactical and strategic decisions relating to a strike are made in King Street - or in Clapham High Street - and not by the workers themselves.

What do we propose instead? We are not political simpletons. We do not believe that all the problems facing workers can be solved within the factory, far from it. The major problems of society cannot be solved at factory level alone. But even less do we believe that these problems will be solved by resolutions, or by placing the future control of job organisation (in the motor industry or elsewhere) in the hands of political organisations who have their own axes to grind.

Our fundamental disagreement with such organisations is not over whether a political solution to industrial problems is necessary. It is. Our disagreement is rather on how such a solution will be achieved. For us the essential prerequisite for a strong, revolutionary, libertarian socialist movement is a powerful, independent and conscious rank and file movement in industry.

The problem facing industrial workers is not one of leadership. It is one of developing a mass consciousness among ordinary workers. There is a surplus of self-styled leaders already. Fortunately the proportion of the working class which is willing to be led by them is minute. The problem facing socialist militants is to contribute towards getting people to act and to understand why they are acting. This is a far more difficult task than replacing one lot of leaders with another. But it is also a far more relevant task to the building of a genuinely free society. There is an enormous amount to do. And the only way to do it is to start at rock bottom.



At Cowley as elsewhere positions and committees were captured, the 'rotting corpses' and 'empty shells' fought over. Everything was justified in order to hang on to office. Mass or shop meetings were called (or not called) on the basis of whether the resolutions of the apparatus would or would not be passed. There was very dubious vote counting at mass meetings. Information was given or withheld according to the tactical needs of the dominating political group. Lies

and character assassination were commonplace and opponents were suppressed. (5) In May 1974 a Cowley worker wrote to Solidarity. He described the situation as follows:

'Over the last 4 years one British Leyland factory out of the 6 has suffered dozens of major defeats. The other five factories have resisted successfully all the employers' attacks. The one factory that continually gets defeated is Morris Motors (The Cowley Assembly Plant Ltd.) where the leadership is in the W.R.P.

'To demonstrate how bad the situation is, Thornett is Chairman of the Joint Shop Stewards Committee and also of the 5/55 Branch. Yet when the Company reopened the factory, every shop steward (there are about 300 of them) and every member of the 5/55 Branch (6000 members) went to work, including the Branch Committee which has 6 WRP members out of 12.

'The membership at Morris Motors has suffered from undemocratic manipulation, squalid manoeuvrings from the WRP over the last 5 years and are totally sick of them. There was a

(5) We hold no brief for the I.M.G. but the systematic accusations directed at them by the WRP (for collaborating with the British Leyland management) are ludicrous. A good example of the WRP style of fantasy took place at a London Aggregate meeting of the WRP on April 23, 1974, right in the middle of the Thornett dispute. A leading member of the WRP at Cowley characterised the situation at the plant as one where 'the question of power was posed'. A 'revolutionary situation' was in the offing. The Cowley workers were said to have 'lined up on class lines' (i.e. with the WRP). Other organisations (the trade unions, the Communist Party, I.S. and I.M.G. were said to have lined up with the employers. 'Only the Party (the WRP) lined up with the working class'.

Another Cowley WRP member embroidered the theme that other political groups at the plant were colluding with management. I.M.G. workers were said to have been given jobs by management to attack Thornett. He also alleged that 'I.S., I.M.G. and the Special Branch were trying to set up Thornett (see 'Cowley Special', produced by 'Bulletin', 29 East Street, Osney, Oxford. May 1974, p.17). This pamphlet written by a leading ex-WRP industrial militant, was produced by a group which had split from the WRP in the early part of 1974. A similar line of 'argument' is pursued in the WRP's version of the Cowley events (see 'Victimisation at Cowley' by Stephen Johns, WRP Pocket Book no.11. This contains a whole chapter entitled 'The I.M.G. and the right-wing'. Obtainable -

- from 186a Clapham High Street, London SW4).

concerted trade union campaign, some time ago, to change the leadership. But this was baulked by methods such as calling extraordinary Branch meetings when the factory was closed down, and also confining decisions to the Branch Committee rather than the full Branch.'

What happened at Cowley is an only too familiar story. Time after time, and after years of such behaviour, militants have found themselves completely isolated from the rank and file. Dagenham in 1962 was one sad example - but there have been many others.(6)

MANAGEMENT MOVES IN

This was the moment British Leyland chose to act. Late in March 1974 they provoked strike action by attempting to introduce a speed-up on the track. On April 4 a resolution to continue the strike, put by the Shop Stewards' leadership, was defeated. But a further resolution to return on the Company's terms was declared defeated by the platform, with very dubious justification (there was no vote count). Yet another proposal, namely to continue the stoppage until April 8, was declared carried by the Chairman (Alan Thornett), again without a count. These 'votes' were challenged by many of those present, even by some of those who voted for strike action.

The next day (April 5, 1974) Cowley workers received a threatening letter from management. It contained the following passage:

'I understand you will be meeting again on Monday at 10.30. Please turn up and vote for an immediate resumption of work.

When you report for work, tell your foreman you will give your assignment a fair effort, at a line speed of 30 per hour. To those who refuse, I must ask the question: do you wish to remain in our employment? If you won't work, we must assume you wish to leave us and we will respond accordingly. The choice lies with you.' (7)

With its back to the wall the Branch Committee of the 5/55 branch put forward a completely defensive line. Their statement of April 18, 1974 ran as follows:

'Transport department is a section on which strike action is extremely rare. The total amount of days lost through

(6) The WRP has had more than its share of these disasters. Their whole industrial policy is in ruins. Their work within the ACTT is in a shambles (see our article 'Monkey Business' in Solidarity, vol.VII, no.11). and their work has collapsed in several other industrial areas.

(7) From 'Leyland in Crisis'. Produced by Cowley I.M.G., 59 Southfield Road, Oxford. Price 20p. (Page 38)

strikes within the department amounts to considerably less than one day per year for the entire period Brother Thornett has been a steward. But involved here is the fundamental issue of whether the Company has the right to interfere in the rights of Trade Union members to elect the representatives of their choice. The Company of course would not allow the Trade Unions to encroach one inch on the appointment of their foremen and superintendents.'

The same statement went on to prove that the 'illegal' meetings for which Thornett had been sacked had been authorised by the supervision, and then goes on to make a call for the personal intervention of Jack Jones!

This was just what the TGWU leadership wanted. It is no secret that certain 'left wing' officials at Transport House could hardly contain themselves with glee at the opportunity which had been handed to them on a plate by the WRP. It was enough to make a cat laugh: militants realising their complete and afraid to call a mass meeting, inviting in the trade union officials who, of course, used the opportunity to attack and weaken job organisation. It is alright to attack these officials, but who opened the door to them? The irony of 'moderates' calling for the introduction of democracy into a plant dominated by a left group is compounded by the even greater irony of what happened during the recent motor mechanics dispute, when on February 3, 1975 the Maoist A.E.F. Executive Councilman Reg Birch instructed the 'moderate' shop steward of the department (a leading member of the Organisation to Represent Moderate Opinion in Trade Union Matters - ORMO-TU) to return to work!

THE TGWU GETS TO WORK

Sure enough, the TGWU set up its own enquiry. This 'cleared' Alan Thornett, while Bobby Fryer (the senior steward, and not a member of the WRP) was found 'guilty' of 'undemocratic practices' at mass meetings. They also decided to divide the 5/55 Branch into two, and to hold direct elections for the Senior Stewards positions on June 3. The Company then agreed to re-recognise Alan Thornett as the steward in the Transport Department. The trap was sprung.

The June 3 election for Senior Stewards was an absolute disaster for the WRP. There were 3 candidates: Reg Parsons (the Regional Office's blue-eyed boy and ex-leading member of the WRP), Bob Fryer (the sitting senior steward) and Alan Thornett. At the election the usual games were played. Rumours about 'deals with the right-wing' were floated by the WRP about Bobby Fryer. The result was clear-cut. Reg Parsons got 1800 votes, Fryer 1200, and Thornett a pathetic 400. The WRP screamed 'ballot-rigging' (they are the experts) but there was little doubt about the general nature of the result.

The 6000-strong 5/55 branch was then carved up. The TGWU bureaucrats, with the aid of management, moved 5000 assembly workers into the new 5/293 branch. But all this did not take place in a vacuum. While it was

going on, management was putting on the screws: manning was reduced and work loads increased. A major defeat for job organisation had taken place. Management and Trade Union officialdom had, as usual, collaborated. And the activities of the WRP had made the offensive possible. (8)

RADICAL BUREAUCRACIES

For far too long bureaucracy has been seen as a purely right-wing phenomenon. This is far from being the case. Alan Thornett and his comrades wanted to fight the boss. But they did not see the workers they 'represented' as being active and conscious participants in that struggle. They and many other militants in industry see the role of active minorities as being to capture positions, manipulate meetings, distort information. What workers actually want and need is considered irrelevant by them. Cowley and many other examples show that this kind of politics leads to defeat and disaster.

Our statement of aims 'AS WE SEE IT' provides a fitting postscript to the Cowley struggle. 'Meaningful action, for revolutionaries, is whatever increases the confidence, the autonomy, the initiative, the participation, the solidarity, the equalitarian tendencies and the self-activity of the masses and whatever assists in their demystification. Sterile and harmful action is whatever reinforces the passivity of the masses, their apathy, their cynicism, their differentiation through hierarchy, their alienation, their reliance on others to do things for them and the degree to which they can therefore be manipulated by others - even by those allegedly acting on their behalf.

Ken Weller

There is already a quite substantial bibliography on Cowley. The sources mentioned below were used in this article:

British Leyland: The Beginning of the End'. Counter-Information Services
52 Shaftesbury Avenue, London W.1. 60p

Cowley Special 'The Bulletin', 29 East St., Osney, Oxford, May 1974.
No price. Very useful source of information on internal WRP politics.

(8) One of the by-products of the Cowley events was a major split in the WRP. Over 200 members have already been expelled or excluded by branch reorganisation. They have formed yet another Trotskyist group, called the Workers Socialist League (Weasel). Their politics show minor signs of greater contact with the real world, but no fundamental differences so far from the politics of the WRP. All members of the WRP at Cowley, with one exception, have now left, including Alan Thornett. So have substantial numbers of industrial cadres in other areas. (For the politics of this group, see A. Thornett's internal WRP document dated 1/11/74: 'Correct the wrong positions of the Party - Return to the transitional programme'. Obtainable from W.S.L., 6 Ferry Hinksey Road, Oxford.)

Cowley. Women and the Unions, by Jeff King. From I.M.G., 97 Caledonian Rd., London N.1. 10p This rather insipid pamphlet is not very useful. In any case, for some reason, it was recalled by the IMG and is not on sale.

Crisis in British Leyland: Our Answer. Socialist Worker. 10p. From 8 Cotton Gardens, London E.2. A mediocre general run-down on British Leyland. Nothing on Cowley. Good cartoons.

Leyland in Crisis: Cowley under Fire by Cowley I.M.G. (20p) From 59, Southfield Rd., Oxford. Very useful source of facts. Best of bunch, but exaggerates the role of the I.M.G. at the Cowley works.

Victimisation at Cowley by Stephen Johns. 35p. From W.R.P., 186a Clapham High Street, London SW4. This is a truly appalling booklet. Its style and accuracy are reminiscent of the worst periods of Stalinism. Worth getting for some documentation and by those interested in paranoia.

We would welcome further contributions or comments from Cowley workers, and others employed in the motor industry, as we plan to make the Cowley events the subject of one of our future Motor Bulletins. (Motor Bulletins still available: No.1 'Ford Struggle 73. No.2 U.A.W. Scab Union. No.3 Datsun: Hell's Battlefield.)

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