

solidarity

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FORD: "OCCUPATION" AT
DAGENHAM

NEWS from SINGAPORE,
CZECHOSLOVAKIA, BRAZIL

LETTERS, REVIEWS

THE MEANING OF THE
YUGOSLAV REPRESSION



THE DAGENHAM 'OCCUPATION'

As forecast, the Ford management is using the present situation which is tactically favourable to them, to launch an offensive against the rank and file. We publish here three articles by Ford workers describing their reactions to the speed-up, intimidation and victimisation which are part of this campaign. The articles illustrate some of the lessons, both positive and negative, that are being drawn.

The short 'occupation' at Ford (Swansea) was significant in terms of methods of struggle but achieved nothing (all the myth-making of the trad left notwithstanding). The mighty outcome was... weekly meetings 'to improve labour relations' between management and shop stewards on a plant and shop basis. Big deal!

We do not agree with everything in these articles but they all have something to say that is relevant to the problems of motor workers. As always we would welcome reactions, criticisms and corrections as well as more substantial pieces from workers at Ford's, and elsewhere in the motor industry.

Although the situation looks pretty bleak at the moment - and although it is being exploited for all its worth by Government, trade union leaders and management (reinforced by the trad left and their perennial talk of the imminent final crisis of capitalism) - demand is going to pick up in the not too distant future (in fact the signs are already there). It is for that situation that workers should be preparing, now.

The occupation of the Dagenham Body Plant, in April 1975, stemmed from a whole series of anti-working class attacks which had started when the balance of power had shifted, in the autumn of 1974.

Before the October wage settlement the workers had management on the run. It was a situation where we had considerable control and power. There was a chronic shortage of labour and a really high turnover rate (take May 1974, when 70 men started at the Body Plant one week and 80 left the next). Ford could not get the labour, nor could they keep it. The Company was desperate for cars and the workers were unwilling to produce them. The last wage increase, in April, had been £2.60 - and the men wanted more. Various struggles were going on throughout the combine for more money, in one way or another. Some won money through getting wash-up time (an extra £3.50), others were trying to get it through changed 'shift premiums' (as in the Press Shop). All this was losing Ford cars: in 1974 Ford lost 60,000 cars through the 3-day-week, 53,000 through the Press Shop strike and 31,000 through Dagenham's other labour

problems. According to a Ford (Dagenham) manager they were witnessing 'a total disintegration of the Dagenham workforce'. When the Press Shop went on strike, in September, Ford realised that it had to do something in order to regain control and profitability.

To everyone's surprise, Ford suddenly came out with their own offer of a 'substantial' wage rise for all Ford workers. This amounted to 38% over two years. Of course they wanted a little something in return for them more than acceding to our demands. In particular a) an agreement to make all operations more efficient, with the unions cooperation; b) an agreement to allow the Company to use utility men (sometimes called chargehands, or scabs); and c) the end of the four-night week at Halewood. These were the main threats contained within the agreement. As P.T.A. convenor Elliot said, whilst recommending acceptance: 'This will be creating sweat shop conditions at Ford. They will be able to do what they like with you'.

On the return to work, late in 1974, there was a massive influx of new labour which more than filled the 3,000 vacancies and in fact created a situation where at times there were too many people for the jobs available. Men were put on to sweeping the floor, which really meant doing nothing. Through the use of this labour the plant was put on to full schedules - a theoretical production of about 96 cars per hour (Granadas, Consuls and Cortinas).

This full production had the twin effect of pissing off the workers and clearing the backlog of orders. It also cleared the way for the start of the Company's attacks.

FORD HITS BACK

Once Ford had overcome the main hindrances (the backlog of orders and the labour shortage) they commenced a series of assaults on working class organisation within the plant. These attacks bore a striking similarity to those made in other Ford plants, suggesting that this was a national policy. In particular they concentrated on:

- * a general tightening up on discipline. Getting 'clocked', absenteeism, abuse of superiors, 'noncooperation' were all answered with a warning letter or suspension.

- * mobility of labour was used to the full. Excess labour was used to maintain maximum production, but also to smash sectional organisation (new people do not know local agreements and are not prepared to fight in defence of them, or of someone they don't know).

- * procedure was stressed. There would be an end to recruiting and to overtime. Short time working would be started.

Short-time working meant a crucial change in the situation and atmosphere. From its start in March 1975 it heralded a shift in the attitude of a lot of workers. There aren't many people who like staying at Ford's and working there for only three days a week emphasised how good it was to be elsewhere. Absenteeism increased in my section during the 3-day week (we worked Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, with 80% pay for the other two days). There was less identification with work and more with leisure. Blokes just wanted to be out as quickly as possible. A high proportion said they would be leaving at the end of May (when the lay-off pay 'runs out'). 'When we go back, there will probably only be foremen, militants and '30-year men' left working there!'

THE BIG ONE

Ford unleashed their main attack on the workers on April 15. We had known it was coming, but couldn't give a fuck. They sent out a letter bristling with comments such as 'October agreement ... more efficient production ... one major area of inefficiency is the manning levels ... (there will be) manning at the appropriate levels for a line speed of 63 cars per hour from April 22 (B shift) and from April 29 (A shift)'. This meant that all the 'surplus fat' that had built up over the years would be cut away and put into a labour pool (notorious for smashing job organisation, through similar means to the 'mobility' tactic).

The Company had stated that 137 men would be taken out of the Body-in-White and another 27 from the Balcony (out of 200 workers on two shifts). Smaller sections were also hit. The Company had attacked the most militant sections first. As one manager put it 'We've got a few scores to settle up there (in Body-in-White). The cuts would represent eight out of 26 door hangers going into the labour pool, and 11 out of 30 welders from the Balcony. The door hangers had been the first to win the wash-up time the previous summer and the welders were in a similar position: they had to be broken.

The feeling in the plant was that although Ford would welcome the strike and confrontation (because 'they don't need more cars just now') they must not be allowed to get away with this one. People knew that one management got away with it in these sections, theirs would be next.

On Tuesday, April 22 the door hangers and welders refused to work in response to the cuts. Surprisingly, the Company did not create a confrontation by laying everyone off. Attempts at spreading the struggle via mass meetings and double-shift meetings of the door hangers were resisted by the shop stewards apparatus. The situation was more or less repeated the next day - still with no lay-offs. The door hangers went home, and the Company tried to put foremen and scabs in their place. Other sections refused to work with them.

There was a difference on the following day in that the news about Swansea had got around, and the Company upped their security precautions, speedily erecting heavy wooden doors between the offices and the shop floor. People were talking of occupation as a possibility. Wages were paid a day early - in case we were laid-off - as there's nowt so nasty as an unpaid Ford worker.

On the Thursday the door hangers voted to continue their strike. Ford promptly announced that all B shift lineworkers would be laid off till May 6 (12 days away!). A mass meeting was called at which a demand for an immediate occupation was suppressed. Instead the decision was taken that all B shift workers should attend a two-shift mass meeting at 8.00 am on Tuesday morning to decide on the action to be taken.

Most workers were, in fact, informed of the 'mass meeting' by supervisors. It eventually took place at 10.00 am. At the meeting, attended by only 500 or 600 workers (out of the 5000 in the Body Group), Dan Connor, Body Plant convenor, called for unity against the Company, support for the door hangers, and an occupation of the plant. This brought a loud cheer. The vote was taken (it was really an A shift vote - there were only 20 present from the B shift) and came out 50-50. Some said it was for, some against. Anyway, it was declared carried.

That having happened, we leapt off to barricade the gates. Or at least some did. The rest went home. Apart from an initial burst of elation, there was no real high feeling. There was nothing like what was there in the riots of 1973, no sense of power or of anger against the Company. Once we had closed the gates we settled down and began to look at what had happened. Within 2 hours the occupation simply became an inside picket. A hell of a lot of people went home, realising that it was not for them. The Press Shop and Wheel Plant were still working and management were still in the plant, all of which didn't help the mood at all. The PTA had been laid off, the convenor there telling workers that there was 'some dispute over manning'. There were only 50 of us left, 30 of whom were in or around some left organisation, the rest being 'unaligned' militants.

THE BARRICADES SPREAD

The only interesting event was the take-over of the Knock Down, a crucial place for Ford, which was barricaded at 3.30 am on Wednesday by the night shift (which also happened to be the day shift). A massive barricade was erected, much to the dismay of the men who worked there, who definitely were not shouting messages of support. The next day, people ended up just standing by the gate watching for anyone tampering with the barricades, and being ignored by everyone else. As one comrade very aptly put it 'basically, I feel like a fucking idiot!'. During the day the picket was reduced substantially. For 3 hours, there were at the very most 10 people 'occupying' the whole Body Plant.

On Thursday, April 24, the cavalry were supposed to arrive, in the shape of the 'poorly informed' workers coming in to get their wages. All 5000 of them would meet in the canteen at 10.30, hopefully to offer themselves for the picket and turn it into a 'real occupation'. In reality the meeting started at 12.00 ... and 100 turned up. 'Never mind' said the optimists 'this hundred could put real backbone into the picket'. In reality, half of those who came were against the occupation and wanted to go back to work! The vote was 37 for continuing the occupation... and 39 against. The convenor said 'never mind, we have shown the Company we are not willing to take these lay-offs lying down. We now have a well organised force together, ready to fight next time'. He was going off to a meeting with the union where he hoped that the strike would be made official. It turned out that the meeting had been called by the Engine Plant convenor to try to pressure us back to work, as our picket would have closed the Engine Plant within two days!

It all ended with a bunch of disheartened lefties leaving the plant, calling each other 'traitors', wailing about the 'lack of leadership' all the usual stuff. None had learnt anything from the experience. The best illustration of this was the leaflet put out by the I.M.G. the following week. You guessed it. They called for another occupation! They said that 'the workforce had not been prepared or understood the importance of the occupation'. They had been 'confused'.

THEY CALLED AN OCCUPATION... BUT NOBODY CAME

The failure of the occupation was due to a failure of the workers to recognise this as a tactic they could use at this stage. This may sound like a statement of the obvious, but its implications are immense. The majority of the workers intend to resist the speed-up. That is clear. What is less clear is the tactics they intend to use. With the knowledge of hindsight it seems that occupation was not one of them. In my opinion the reasons why the occupation failed were:

* That the men felt there was no tangible difference between an occupation and a strike picket. Even with a thousand people there, film shows, bands, dances and so on the occupation would only be barely tolerable. That sterile pile of dirty bricks and razor-sharp steel was not built to encourage enjoyment, but to destroy it. This, I feel, was the central reason.

* That the men had a healthy distrust of anything coming from the convenor and the shop stewards apparatus.

* That since the shop stewards apparatus (in the shape of the convenor) dominated the struggle the ordinary worker felt isolated and unable to control or influence what was going on, or even to participate in any meaningful way.

* That other tactics existed that had not been tried yet on a factory-wide basis: the go-slow and general non-cooperation of last year, for instance. These tactics do not hit the pocket so much, and a lot of workers still have faith in them.

If cynicism shows through in this article it is because it is present in my view of past events. It should not, however, be mistaken for defeatism or pessimism. Recent events have made some people realise that they have become detached from reality and the prevailing mood of the workers, and tend to twist facts to fit their theories.

This can be a period when working class organisation at Dagenham can tighten up. The sectional, loose rank and file organisations that existed before the summer were useful. But they have not yet been put to trial in this new situation. Whether they will stand the test is doubtful. The Motor Industry has entered a whole new period, and now is the time to work out new ways to struggle and new forms of organisation to fight the Company, which are being thrown up out of the present struggle. In that sense the present 'defeats' (being defeats for the 'Left' and not for the Ford workers) are on the whole positive ones. The present situation in the motor industry has meant the workers are thinking of struggle on a broader plane. Seeing attacks on the working class across the whole system has meant they are considering political/revolutionary answers to their problems. This must be confronted by militants and positive tactics used to enhance and develop that shift of thinking.

ED. ZELL
(Body Group, Dagenham)

TALKING THEM TO DEATH

(THE CONVENORS' PROGRAMME FOR DEFEAT AT FORD'S)

A document was recently circulated by W. Cleary, Secretary of the Ford National Convenors' Committee. Their proposals for dealing with the current situation were:

- a) That the Joint Works Committees should meet every six months, as per agreement.
- b) The N.J.N.C. Trade Union side should arrange a meeting of all Ford Shop Stewards on an annual basis.
- c) Give support to the panel of six M.P.s and six Trade Union side in calling for a full-scale Government enquiry into Ford of Great Britain.

MORE ABOUT DAGENHAM

The foundry (which seldom suffers from short time) is quiet and seeing the shop stewards one get the impression of bewildered mice, scurrying they know not where. The short time in other plants has left the foundry cold and the attitude is 'don't worry about the others, lads, we're alright'. A few stewards have shown flashes of militancy about reductions of overtime, but this is the only subject they are militant about. There were several occasions in the past when stewards complained about poor working conditions and the Company, rather than spend thousands on giving good conditions, offered extra overtime for cleaning up. The men were prepared to accept bad conditions for more overtime. Now, when the Company are ready for a confrontation, the men are losing their overtime without any improvement in conditions. This happened on no.3 moulding line. In the crack-off department it was successfully resisted.

What goes on in the foundry is exemplified by the situation on the Hutchinson core machines, which has drifted on for four years. The Hutchinson makes cores for crankshafts. Four years ago there was an outbreak of dermatitis caused by a quick-drying glue. After many representations this was withdrawn, and there were no new cases. In the last six months there have been several fresh cases of dermatitis and they are still occurring. The Medical Department and its doctor are supposedly 'baffled'. The fact is that the new Health and Safety Act brought in this year which makes it law that an employer must give full information about all noxious substances used has not been put into effect. The Joint Works Committee are still talking about it, the Branch is still corresponding with the Executive about it, men are still going down with dermatitis, and Ford's are still getting their crankcase cores.

H. F., Dagenham

NOW OUT

SOLIDARITY MOTOR BULLETIN No.4 : WILDCAT AT DODGE TRUCK

(Detroit, June 1974). How the struggle against work itself is playing an increasingly important role in modern industrial disputes. Also deals with the problem of 'radical bureaucracies' and of their relation to the rank-and-file movement in industry. 5p (plus postage)

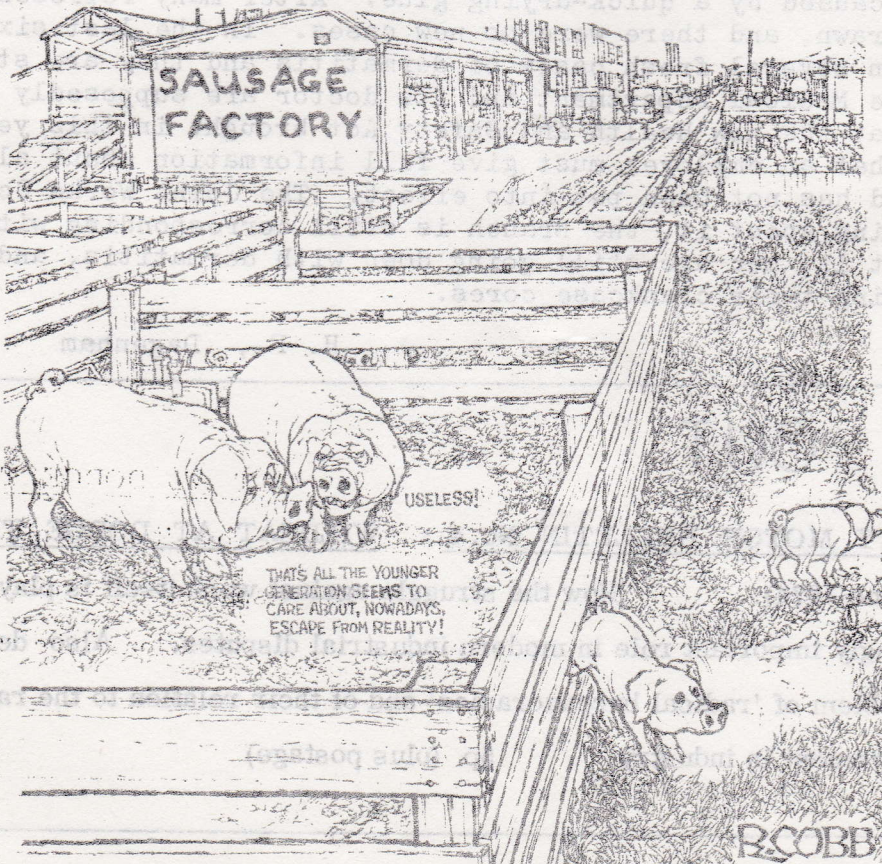
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THE WORKERS OPPOSITION by Alexandra Kollontai. A fully annotated account of the anti-bureaucratic struggle of 1920-21 within the Russian Bolshevik Party. 35p (plus postage)

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capitalism and to bureaucratic state capitalism. From workers' management of the factory to workers' management of society.

This re-edition of our previous pamphlet was produced by the Philadelphia Solidarity Group (hedgehogs still there). 40p + postage



MARKING TIME AT HALEWOOD

The situation basically is bad. The Company have succeeded in establishing lay-off as the order of the day. The odious 'lay-off payment' has made that possible. It is really amazing how, in these circumstances, the supposed concession of 80% pay when laid off has acted against the interest of the lads. By making this payment for a limited time the Company achieved an acceptance by the unions and the members of the three- and four-day-week. By the time this arrangement runs out (any day now) it will be too late to start resistance.

In fact the F.N.J.N.C.,* through pressure from the Convenors, have negotiated an extension of lay-off pay without cost to the Company. They have agreed to use all the entitlements to lay-off payment up to March 1977 and pay it out now. This is a poor substitute for a claim for full pay when laid off.

Quite naturally, the Company are using the situation to tighten up on Works Standards. Whilst there is some resistance to this, there are many more instances of success for them. One wonders how long it will take for the existing resistance to be overcome, if there is no organised campaign against speed-up that recognises all the implications behind it. The recent Swansea action was great but the final result was disappointing. A committee meeting weekly to discuss works standards problems. Ugh!

Last Thursday there was a meeting of Convenors, J.W.C. members and the N.J.N.C. Suggestions for debate included 3 items calling for more and bigger meetings, one for cooperation with M.P.s for an 'enquiry', and a few pious comments about public ownership. Nothing about action for defence of jobs. Nothing about tactics against speed-up. They even defeated a resolution calling for action in defence of the Shrewsbury 2.

There is very little activity in general. No pressure is being put on the Company in areas where it is vulnerable. There is no coordination of work-sharing. Some plants are on 3 days whilst others are working 7. I don't expect the position, as far as work is concerned, to get any better. By mid-summer there could be an increase in lay-offs, culminating in redundancies, unless of course there is some unforeseen change in car buying.

* Ford National Joint Negotiating Committee.

Halewood seems to be in a better position than most Ford factories at the moment. The small new Escort has helped. We are building cars for the European market as well because the German plants, it seems, cannot cope with the demand. We make identical Escorts to the Saarlouis plant and there is no doubt that this is the reason for our escape from lay-offs. How long can that go on for?

The Company have been conducting a campaign up here through top level meetings with stewards, letters to all employees, and with Press and T.V. help. Their aim is to increase the output at Halewood. They claim that we have the capacity to produce 1100 vehicles a day and that we are only making about 600. They say that if we pull the schedules we will be O.K. - if not they foresee short time and redundancies.

We are indeed well down on plant capacity. One of the reasons is resistance from the lads. They have taken the view that the more cars they make, the sooner they'll be laid-off. There is a great deal of pressure on them now, from all sides, to increase output. It is a good sign however that even with organisation at a low ebb there can develop an activity from the lads themselves. But to sustain an effective line of action requires leadership and organisation, if only to harness the natural militancy that will come from the shop floor.

You may not agree but I see bad union organisation as the fifth column in the battle against the system. It undermines the activity that is undertaken. If things come to a real showdown however there is a chance that the lead will come from the lads on the floor.

I am sorry to sound so pessimistic about things in Fords, but I have always believed that a sound shop stewards movement is essential to organise workers against the bosses. I see as tragic the development of a shop stewards bureaucracy in Fords. The major concern of Ford convenors seems to be to replace the trade union officials on the Negotiating Committee in order to improve their own position in the bureaucracy. It frightens me when this line is taken in the name of workers' control. To take this sort of negative control lower down the scale is worse, in my opinion, than leaving the positions in the hands of union officials. It's like putting officials in the factories: they would stifle organisation. At least now the militants can control the shop floor without too much interference.

Another tragedy is that the motor industry, whilst going through its roughest period for many years, has not been able to coordinate the various companies and plants with a view to a common objective. It seems that in spite of real efforts by some to arrange meetings of the various shop stewards committees we have not made any real progress. Perhaps there are too many like the Ford convenors who believe (as their resolution last week implies) that 'if we don't call the meeting, we're not going'.

A. B., Halewood.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

We are pleased to publish the following three texts, recently received from Singapore, Brazil and Czechoslovakia. It would be easy enough to write articles about what revolutionaries elsewhere ought to be thinking or doing. We prefer to bring information to our readers about what their thoughts and actions really are. If the gap between the two is considerable, that's life! 'Triumphalism' never helped anybody. 'Only the truth is revolutionary'.

This does not absolve us, however, from making our own assessment of these accounts. The article on Singapore shows how far the techniques of 'paternalistic' management and domination have developed in a 'Third World' country. The article on Brazil is over-concerned, in our opinion, with the manoeuvres of established politicians rather than with the forces below, that are provoking them. The article about Czechoslovakia was first published in Czech in Nos. 13 and 15 of Informacni Materialy by the Czech Revolutionary Socialist Group, in West Berlin. As far as we know, we are the first to publish the complete text in English. It is a strange admixture of positive concepts (building from below, the abolition of any specific 'leadership' role for self-proclaimed revolutionaries, the need to break completely with the traditional political structures) with reformist illusions (belief in the significance of the Declaration of Human Rights, ambiguous attitudes to the question of 'participation' in management, concern with the financial solvency of individual enterprises, etc.).

eastern promises

(SOME PROBLEMS OF SINGAPORE LABOUR)

Election promises made by the Lee Kuan Yew Government some years ago are about due to be fulfilled. Instead the people of Singapore are being told to tighten their belts as prices of essential goods go up and as lay-offs increase, especially in textiles. In Singapore the trade union leadership is itself part of the Establishment.* Indeed, the National Trade Union Congress (NTUC) recently demanded that hotels pay workers the wage increases recommended by the National Wages Council, even if they had to retrench workers to do so. The Mandarin Hotel obliged. It paid the increase and sacked 74 workers. Unemployment has now reached 4.5% of a workforce of 858,000; between June and September last year 7000 workers were retrenched.

* In his 'Sell Singapore' stunt the Prime Minister declared to investors that Singapore had the cheapest labour in the industrial world and the most responsible trade unions in the region.

In the delicate labour situation facing Singapore, what with the British withdrawal from their base there, the Government is taking no chances with possible student agitation. Nearly 9000 armed police, backed by troops with fixed bayonets, recently completed a 'security exercise' during which CISCO (Commercial and Industrial Security Corporation) guards moved into the Singapore University campus. In the background to this heavy-handed show of force was the trial of Tan Wah Piow, President of the University of Singapore Students' Union (USSU), charged along with two industrial workers with rioting and criminal trespass at the office of Pioneer Industries Employees' Union (PIEU) in Jurong,* on October 30. Devan Nair, Secretary General of the NTUC, has referred to the students as 'crackpots', 'out to undermine Singapore's social and political stability'. Moreover, the trade unions are supplying most of the prosecution witnesses in the case, sending trusted members daily to the court to keep an eye on the protesters and earn some spare cash at the same time.

FRAME-UP BY THE UNION

Tan Wah Piow himself claims that the charges are fabricated: stories that he had caused the riot were concocted by the union officials. The students had planned to set up a Retrenchment Research Centre (to support workers who had lost their jobs through the recession) and to protest against increased bus fares and arbitrary detention. It later transpired that the arrest and detention order came from Lee Kuan Yew himself. The principal motive was to keep the activists out of the way until unrest among laid-off workers cooled down.

The unrest which resulted in this particular case began in June 1974 when American Marine (an American concern manufacturing luxury yachts) retrenched some 100 workers, blaming poor markets - not that the falling demand for luxury yachts affected these workers unduly. On October 18, more workers were told, minutes before being dismissed, that they would be laid off for two weeks, during which no compensation would be granted. The lay-off was especially harsh since most of the workers were Malaysians, with work permits sponsored by the factory, unable to change their place of work or to seek employment during a laid-off period. Those caught doing so can be fined, jailed and deported. For the Singapore workers, seeking new employment would amount to resigning voluntarily from American Marine. Since 60% of American Marine workers were members of PIEU, they naturally sought help from their union. Unaccountably, it proved impossible to make contact. When contact was finally made, union officials allowed only one representative into the union building. They further insisted that all present should produce their membership cards 'for the

* Jurong is the largest area mapped out for industrial development in Singapore. It will cover 14,000 acres with 700 factories when completed. 506 factories are already in production, employing about 120,000 workers, most of them very young (16-23 years).

files'. After the workers had staged an 8½ hour sit-in, the general secretary at last arrived, accompanied by more than a dozen policemen. He refused to speak to the men until they had left the building. Meanwhile a union official was busily taking photographs.

The workers demands were (1) that the union negotiate with American Marine for compensation during the two-week lay-off period; and (2) that the PIEU use its funds to maintain the workers until they were re-employed. The union's reply was to suggest that they seek alternative employment (thus sacrificing what few benefits were paid to victims of retrenchment), ignoring the plight of the Malaysian workers. In face of new criticism the bureaucrat was finally forced to admit that he had no power to negotiate with the Company where retrenchment problems were concerned. When new grievances were poured out, he simply turned his back and disappeared, leaving behind the police.

On October 30 the workers re-gathered outside the PIEU offices. Plainclothesmen were already lingering outside. A notice read that negotiations with American Marine would not begin until November 6, the day the lay-off period expired. As the 150-odd workers grew angry, sounds of commotion came from inside the building where, according to workers not connected with the demonstration who had been inside, the deputy-secretary general of the union had ransacked the offices after receiving a phone call. So obvious was the frame-up attempt that the workers contacted reporters present to stand as witnesses that they had had no part in the smashing of the union offices.* At the time, neither Tan Wah Piow nor the two workers later arrested were on the premises.

The functions of the Retrenchment Research Centre (RRC) are (1) to provide information on retrenchment and related matters; (2) to give advice to the relevant authorities and workers; (3) to organise immediate relief for affected workers; and (4) to recommend further action to the Students' Union. Soon after it was set up the Lee Kuan Yew government dissolved all effective trade unions and created the NTUC (to which the PIEU is affiliated) to orchestrate its relations with the multinational companies which practically run Singapore's economy. In short, the NTUC was nothing but an extension of managerial control.

All three of the arrested are involved with the RRC : Tan Wah Piow is Chairman. The Centre's investigations brought forth some facts which were laid at the Government's door. From February to October 1974, over 14,000 workers were retrenched. Others were on the verge of being laid off, still others were restricted to working a three-day week. Many factories were retrenching the older and better-paid workers; others used the threat of retrenchment to offset the government's proposed wage increases.

* The Straits Times, Singapore's English-language daily, reported the incident but made no mention of rioting. (AMPO, Japan-Asia Quarterly Review, Winter 1974)

The arrests were made on November 1st. At the time of writing Tan Wah Piow is still conducting his own defence. While it would be nominally simple for the defence to prove their innocence, the Singapore judicial system is part and parcel of the state set-up; the judge can simply dismiss the defence arguments at will. He has a special reason to do so. An acquittal would imply that PIEU - a government-sponsored trade union - had fabricated the case. Where would its standing with the workers be then? Since the government has spent ten years nurturing its facade of industrial democracy, it cannot afford to lose this case, which is therefore a political test-case. Tan Wah Piow is resigned to a three-year sentence and a possible caning. He has already taped a 'farewell message'.

Singapore has nothing to live on but its labour force and commercial skills. The government's consequent paranoia regarding social unrest, scaring off the foreign investors,* has become acute under the double influence of inflation and recession, making it difficult to stretch incomes to meet rising prices. Industrial peace is an essential factor in Lee Kuan Yew's strategy of attracting foreign businessmen, looking for experienced technological talent but seeking to escape restless European and American labour, pressing for higher wages and a say in the running of the factories. Hence Devan Nair has openly backed the government's appeals to the people to endure hardship and make sacrifices.** Trade unionists, he advises, should not 'ask for more'.*** Instead, they should work hard - 'that is what they are paid for'!

BACKGROUND TO POLITICAL REPRESSION IN SINGAPORE

Lee Kuan Yew's People's Action Party (PAP) came into office in 1959, with strong support from workers and in an atmosphere of opposition to colonialism. Many of the original founders are now in jail, for immediately

* For example Japan, whose business involvement in Singapore is heavy and increasing: currently in third place (with \$235 million) Japanese investment is expected to exceed the British one and take second place in no time.

** Among the hardships already endured by Singapore workers are the low wages with tiny increments, long hours, meagre and restricted entitlement to annual leave and sick leave, and hassles over actual payment of wages (including the use of coupons exchangeable only at PIEU supermarkets).

*** The Employment Act, 1968, outlaws strikes, and for the past 7 to 8 years there has been a general wage freeze. With recent inflation a National Wage Council was set up to make recommendations about wage increases, as guide-lines to management. Workers were warned by Lee Kuan Yew that '... it is not realistic to expect an increase in real wages as high as those enjoyed in the last few years because the oil prices quadrupled... In other words, there will be a lower rate of increase in real wages.'

after coming to power Lee conducted a systematic campaign to eliminate leftists from the PAP. Just before the general election of 1963, 100-odd opposition leaders and personalities were arrested under the Internal Security Act, some of whom remain behind bars. The poet Said Zahari is one. Under this act, anyone can be convicted and detained indefinitely for criticising government policy. There is also a 'Suitability Certificate', obligatory for all higher education students, and issued only after clearance by the Internal Security Department. Activists' studies can be terminated at any moment, Singaporeans jailed, and non-citizens deported. It is illegal for citizens to gather in groups of more than five: all such gatherings must apply for a police permit. These are issued, except for funerals, only to PAP supporters. Distributing leaflets is also illegal, all printed matter requiring a permit from the Ministry of Culture.

Printers' permits also expire each year, and printers are generally submitted to all sorts of pressures by the government for printing anti-government material. Under the Press Act, all newspapers are controlled by management shareholders, approved by the government. Under the Employment Acts, strikes are forbidden. Strikers are dispersed by the police; Malaysians, constituting 60-70% of the workforce in Jurong, are deported, while Singaporeans are threatened with indefinite detention without trial.

After de-registering all the left-wing unions the government set up the Pioneer Industries Employees' Union, affiliated to the NTUC. Workers in Pioneer Industries (i.e. all those in the first five years of existence) are forbidden to join or form other unions than the PIEU. Many of the top men of the NTUC and PIEU are MPs: Devan Nair was once a Malaysian Assemblyman. Committee members at factory branch level who act independently of the union are sacked by the Company with the recommendation of the union: the effect is to reduce all Branch Committee members to the role of stooges. Negotiations concerning workers' benefits are conducted between management and the union's Industrial Relations Officer - no workers are allowed to be present. IROs who have attempted to champion the workers have been sacked. The workers themselves cannot approach the management, who insists on working through the union officials, the IROs. When the union is approached, however, the invariable reply is that the case has been referred to the Ministry of Labour. Finally, the Ministry, if queried, maintains that workers should refer their grievances to their union. The worker thus has no one to support his case.

The Housing Programme plays a major role in Singapore's repressive state machinery. In the last decade or two large areas of the old town have been pulled down and rebuilt. In the first place, the areas where the new Housing Estates have been built were formerly strongholds of the left-wing opposition, which have thus been dispersed to reduce their effectiveness. By the 1980's Nineteen Eighty Four is scheduled to be achieved in every respect: 80% of the population will be residing in Singapore's version of Victory Flats, while private housing will be within reach only of the very rich and politically screened. Already the government is

pressuring people who speak out against it by threatening to evict them from their flats. Although a flat may be purchased, a clause maintains the government's right to evict those it deems undesirable.

The Lee Kuan Yew Government's internal policies are based on the principle of divide and rule, and depend on its being able to discredit all individuals and groups which oppose it. If you are a leftist, Lee will brand you a Red. If you are a liberal, he will call you a proxy for external forces. When the students opposed a bus fare increase, for example, the government accused them of being manipulated by external elements. It did the same to the American Marine workers. Its latest ploy is a novel one: all the communists being in prison or thoroughly discredited, it has now invented a new threat - non-communist opposition, credited with more subtlety than 'the Reds', and with being therefore more effective in its subversion. This line is now being directed against the Students' Union.

Lee Kuan Yew's favourite line is to ask the hypothetical question: what would happen if 300 top government leaders were put in an aeroplane which then crashed into the sea? He might well ask.

ABOUT OURSELVES

The Solidarity National Organisation consists of individuals and autonomous groups (of which Solidarity-London is but one) subscribing to the views outlined in AS WE DON'T SEE IT.

The National Organisation holds regular Conferences in various parts of the country at intervals of about two months. The purpose of these meetings, which are organised and convened by the National Working Group, is to discuss our ideas collectively, and plan common action.

The National Organisation has already produced one pamphlet ('The Lump': an heretical analysis by Dave Lamb) and several more are in the pipe-line.

We intend steadily to develop our joint work on a national scale. Any readers who are interested in what we are doing and want to help should write to the National Working Group, c/o Grass roots, 109 Oxford Road, Manchester 13.

THERE'S AN AWFUL LOT OF COPPERS IN BRAZIL

The success of the opposition party in the elections in Brazil in November 1974 ushered in a new stage in the development of the military dictatorship which has run the country since 1964. Reports in the British press, then and since, have suggested that the election results were part of a process of liberalisation which, before too long, would lead to a return to 'democracy' and to 'civilian politics'. A deeper look at the situation in Brazil suggests that this prediction is mistaken.

THE BACKGROUND

After coming to power, the military set up two parties to give a facade of democracy to their dictatorship. One is called Arena (Alliance for National Renewal). This is the government party. The other is MDB (the Brazilian Democratic Movement) which is the opposition party. Elections are held to the Senate and Chamber of Deputies on the national level, and to state assemblies.

Up to now these bodies, whose powers have been severely restricted by the Institutional Acts passed by various military presidents, have been controlled by Arena and have merely rubber-stamped government decrees. The actual running of the country is in the hands of the President and of a cabinet picked by him.

The elections have nothing to do with choosing the government, but can provide some indication of how the population is feeling towards it. In the past Arena have always won, but before concluding that this indicates large-scale popular support for the government account must be taken of the control of the press and television, of the absence of any genuine political discussion in them, of the continuous government propaganda, of the buying of votes, of the straight intimidation of peasants by Arena landowners in rural areas, of the general atmosphere of repression that has been built up since 1964, and of any number of corrupt practices that are quite normal in Brazilian public life. Given all this, and the low level of political consciousness among most people anyway, it is not very surprising that Arena in the past has always been victorious.

This is not to say that there is no opposition. Electorally it has shown itself by the large number of blank and spoiled votes. There are a handful of MDB members who are generally prepared to fight the government, one of whom is at present in prison. Industrially the number of illegal strikes has been increasing in recent years. Urban guerilla groups, though viciously repressed at the end of the 1960's, are still ticking over, and a small but growing guerilla war is at present being fought in the Amazon

region in the north of the country where attempts by large capitalist farming and cattle-raising concerns to occupy the land and drive off the peasants who settled there first have been provoking violent resistance.

On the economic level the years of military rule have been used to give capitalism a boost through such measures as the massive influx of foreign capital and the intensified exploitation and repression of the working class. This, taken as a whole, is referred to as the 'Brazilian Model of Development'. It has on the whole been 'successful': there has been a polarisation of wealth, and while the poor are poorer the capitalist class is certainly better off. But during 1974 the storm clouds began to gather. Inflation, which had been contained within about 20% (or 13% according to misleading official methods of calculation) started heading for about 50% for the year (or 34% officially). Net foreign debt nearly doubled, rising from US \$6.5 billion in 1973 to \$11.1 billion in 1974.

Meanwhile, it was becoming apparent that the new president, General Geisel, who took office in March 1974, was hoping to liberalise the regime and prepare the way for an eventual return to civilian rule, in which policy he was supported by a considerable number of army officers.

THE ELECTIONS

Shortly before the elections the discontent of both the business community and the workers surfaced. It became clear that MDB were going to benefit enormously from a massive vote against the government from all sections of the population. Hard-liners, who constitute an important section of the military, wanted the elections cancelled. Armando Falcao, the (civilian) Minister of Justice, decided to ally himself with them, as became clear when he took to Geisel a decree cancelling the election which only required the President's signature. But Geisel refused to sign it: he knew that he still had enough support within the army to carry on with his liberalisation programme.

So the elections went ahead, and MDB duly made quite unprecedented gains. They won 16 of the 22 seats contested in the Senate (though two-thirds of the Senate seats were not up for election this time), 162 out of 364 seats in the Chamber of Deputies, and majorities in five of the most important state assemblies. The MDB still do not have a majority in either the Senate or the Chamber of Deputies, but the important thing is that they do now have a certain position of power.

Reactions to the results were varied. Most MDB deputies and senators, who were not seriously opposed to the military and anyway didn't want to risk having their seats revoked, were apologetic and at pains to proclaim their loyalty to the 1964 'Revolution'. Military hard-liners again pressed for the elections to be cancelled. Falcao again turned up in Geisel's office, this time with a list of the more 'dangerous' MDB deputies whose

seats he wanted revoked. Again Geisel refused to sign, and instead claimed MDB's victory, and its acceptance by the government, as a victory for his policy of liberalisation. And this was also the line adopted by most reports of the elections in the British press. They predicted that repression would ease up and that the military would start preparing for a return to the barracks.

WISH-FULFILMENT OR REALISTIC REPORTING?

The pre-condition for bourgeois civilian rule to work in Brazil at present is the participation of such liberal sectors as the Church, the Order of Brazilian Lawyers, and so on. And they will only participate if political repression (that is the arbitrary arrest, torture and murder of people considered to be opponents of the regime) is brought to an end. And Geisel accepts this. But although it's a nice idea to think that this is about to happen, has recent reporting been based on a realistic appraisal by journalists* of the current situation or more on wish-fulfilment?

GEISEL AND THE MILITARY SECURITY FORCES

Geisel's main problem, in his attempts to return to 'political normality', lies in his relationship with the powerful internal security forces of the various sections of the Armed Forces. The most notorious of these are: OBAN, recently renamed DOI, the Department of Internal Order (part of the 2nd Army based in Sao Paulo); CODI, the Centre for Defense Operations (part of the 1st Army based in Rio de Janeiro); and CENIMAR, the Navy Information Centre, also based in Rio. Of these, only CENIMAR exists officially.

These forces are theoretically under the control of the government but in practice they enjoy a considerable autonomy. Whenever there is conflict between the President, who doesn't directly control any of the

* We know very well that journalists have their own political positions and that it is impossible to write 'value-free' reports. Nevertheless it is by no means impossible for journalists, even while they are making their own appraisal of an overall situation, to present at least all the aspects, and not give a misleading selection. Information, after all, is an important matter, and its possession bestows power: this is especially true in the case of foreign correspondents in countries like Brazil, where the national media are censored. From the point of view of the class struggle what we need are not ready-formed opinions, based on what the journalist in question would like to see happening, but a presentation of the facts to allow us to see what is the range of possibilities. As we might say, by their reports shall ye know them.

armed forces, and the heads of the various armies, security organs are even freer to act as they wish. In the period around April 1974 no less than 22 people 'disappeared', that is were arrested by security organs acting on their own initiative and not on government's orders. Because Geisel has eased up censorship somewhat, this has now come out into the open (previous 'disappearances' were never reported). This means that the 'disappearances' can be mentioned, but not the fact that the people concerned have been unofficially arrested.

Because the matter became public Falcao, as Minister of Justice, was forced to 'investigate' and admit at a press conference that the government did not know the whereabouts of any of the 22 people. This may or may not be true - the point is that, even if the government do know the various places where people are being held, they apparently are not in a position to have them released. (The latest information is that 5 of the 22 have been murdered and 2 are still alive; the fate of the other 17 is not known.)

Further information on Geisel's relationship with the security forces came in the aftermath of the discovery in January of this year of two printing presses belonging to the Moscow-oriented PCB (Brazilian Communist Party). Some 30 members of the PCB were arrested by forces under the control of the government (this is not to say that these people are not undergoing torture). All this has been reported in the press. What has not been reported is that the security organs, again acting on their own initiative, also arrested some 500 other people belonging to a number of diverse underground groups unconnected with the PCB.

Most of these people have now been released. But the inability of the government to prevent their being arrested in the first place or to do anything concrete about the 'disappearances' suggests that Geisel has so far failed in his attempts to subordinate the organs of repression to his control. Indeed, Falcao brought further pressure on him to revoke the seats of some MDB deputies by publicly disclosing that MDB election leaflets had been found (?planted) alongside the PCB printing presses. It is so obvious that MDB would never run the risk of being associated with the (illegal) PCB that this could only be a political manoeuvre. But Falcao's move suggests that Geisel's position may well be weakening, for otherwise he would surely do himself a favour and get rid of Falcao.

What will mainly decide the President's fate will be the amount of support he continues to receive from within the Army. At the moment his supporters appear to be mainly the more nationalistically-minded junior officers. Whether this will prove to be enough remains to be seen - but with the present state of affairs it is as likely that he will have to give ground and revoke the seats of some MDB deputies as that he will be able to proceed with his 'political opening'. And if he does manage to proceed with the latter, it will only be against the bitterest opposition from the hard-liners.

MANIFESTO OF THE CZECH WORKERS COUNCILS PARTY

Being aware of the coming economic and political crisis we would like to present our Party's programme. Because of the difficulties in communicating we will have to restrict ourselves to a few sentences. Our aim is the exclusion from Czechoslovakia of the Soviet intruders' power and influence, and the overthrow of our own bureaucratic power apparatus.

The basic points of our programme are: to inform the workers of all Warsaw Pact countries of the WCP's programme, and to cooperate in action with all Parties having a similar programme. We are aware of our being in Eastern Europe, and of the similarity of the problems faced by East European workers.

We disagree with, and will take action against, the power politics of the USA and the USSR, particularly the so-called Brezhnev doctrine. We propose to regain all rights for all citizens and to extend individual freedom. We want to bring about the self-government of the people.

Just as the Soviet tanks in Budapest, and the Soviet troops in East Germany, Poland and Czechoslovakia were not selective in their means, nor will we be. We shall not claim any power position after the limitation of the supreme power of the Communist Parties and the implementation of democratic principles. At the present time, our Party is an underground organisation.

Before the invasion it was possible to believe that a limitation of personal freedom could be compensated for by economic gain. Today we know that any loss of freedom is a definite set-back. According to the declaration of human rights, the international agreement on economic freedom, and the international agreement on economic, social and cultural rights, we have the right as Czechoslovak workers to form workers' organisations. However, we must remember the fate of those who tried to assert these rights under our dictatorial regime. But no one can deny us the right to organise ourselves outside the framework of the TUC and the National Front.*

This is why we will start our work at production meetings. These meetings were initially established to further delude the workers. We shall concentrate on revealing the truth at these meetings. We will be interested in the economic conduct of the enterprises. We will discuss with our colleagues unsuitable managers selected on account of their political connections, and all matters that deserve criticism. We shall prepare ourselves for the foundation of the WORKERS COUNCILS. After the taking of

* The official Czechoslovak T.U. organisation is known as the ROH, equivalent to, but of course not analogous with, the British TUC. The National Front is a coalition of 'political parties' and interest groups organised under the 'leading role of the Communist Party'.

power in the enterprises by the workers, we shall not wait for the WORKERS COUNCILS to be approved by the Ministry of the Interior, or any other body of the occupiers' regime.

We know that, by themselves, workers' councils are not capable of solving all the acute problems of the present time. It will be necessary to divorce the enterprises from all parasitic organisations such as the vast administrative bodies, ministries, committees, etc. Our aim is Councils built up from below, such as were started in 1968.

There will be similar structural changes in all organisations now falling in the National Front. There will be other far-reaching changes in legal rights and individual freedoms.

We do not want to give the factories back to the entrepreneurs, or to return to capitalist production relations.

In this Manifesto we do not intend to give a precise account of the future arrangement of society, but to inform people of our principles and the main direction of our activities.

That is why we invite economists, lawyers and soldiers to join us and to make any constructive suggestions for the future arrangement of society, and their comments on our Manifesto. We shall try to publish the next declaration (programmatic, we hope) as soon as possible.

PROGRAMMATIC DECLARATION OF THE WORKERS COUNCILS PARTY

From passive resistance to active struggle!

Under the heading of 'rationalisation and a new system of rewards' the ruling bureaucracy is trying to limit workers' wages. This is producing a growing dissatisfaction which will logically result in the union of all workers in all professions and lead to a mounting strike movement.

Because of the lack of publicity expressions of dissatisfaction are still very isolated, and are often not even known in the immediate neighbourhood. To illustrate this point, we will give a few examples.* The workers from the Skoda factory, the drivers and co-drivers from the CSAP, the employees from the engineering and industrial plants in Vrsovice,** the drivers helping to build the railways, and the workers in the East Slovakian steel industry.

As a part of economic control a new wage regulation has been put into practice. It is an attempt to prevent those who work effectively from earning the wage that they deserve. This provision also hides production

* The examples do not say how the 'dissatisfaction' showed itself: wildcat strikes, go-slows, sabotage, etc. We can only give the list as presented in the declaration.

** An industrial district of Prague.

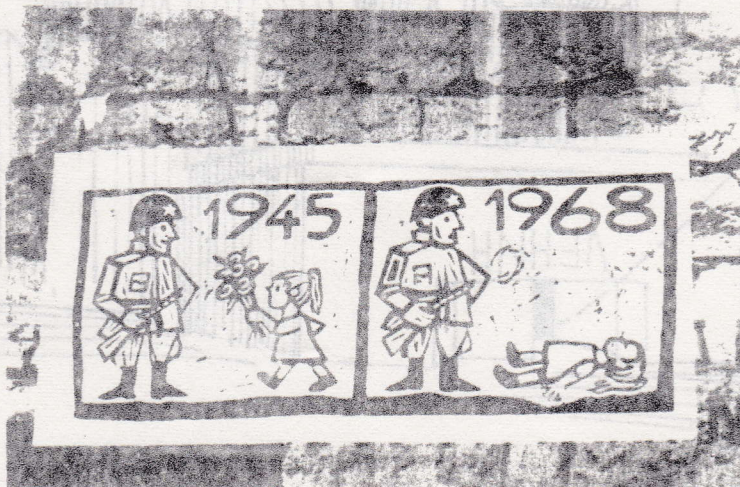
that runs at an economic loss. This policy is contrary to workers' participation in the management and prosperity of the enterprise, and tends to illustrate the truth of the saying 'everyone who doesn't piss around at work supports Husak'.* At the same time the various obligations and pressures on the workers will increase with this tendency of not giving them their promised rewards, benefits, etc.

It is shocking to say but very often the unions are far harder and more against the workers than is the management of the enterprise. This is because to some extent the directors of the enterprise are dependent on the work of their subordinates, whilst the TUC officials are not. Very often it appears as if the aim of the TUC is to make working conditions worse.

In fighting against the increasing pressure on our wages, and against demands for increased productivity without automation or mechanisation, we will not use half-hearted labour, produce shoddy goods or resort to schweikism,** but will rely on exposing the incapability of the bosses, their schemes towards their own personal advancement, etc.

We shall create workers' collectives which are not afraid to come out with the demands of their members, closely linked with the demands of other collectives. This is how we see the working class uniting, and the leading role of the Workers Councils.

The first phase will be to unite the strike movement. This period will culminate in THE GENERAL STRIKE as a protest against the politics of the ruling bureaucracy.



* It sounds much better in Czech, where it is a rhyme in working class dialect: 'Kdo se v práci neflaka, podporuje Husaka.'

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A reference to 'The Good Soldier Schweik', a classic of Czech satirical literature.

that runs at an economic loss. This policy is contrary to workers' party-
elation in the management and property of the enterprise, and tends to
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In fighting against the existing pressure
demands for faster production, but without automatic
will not use the same methods. It is necessary to
socialism, but will rely on extraordinary inequality of the houses,
their claims towards their own personal advancement, etc.

We will create workers' collectives which are not afraid to come
out with the demands which are linked with the demands of
other collectives. This is the role of the workers' collectives,
leading role of the workers' collectives.
The first phase of the process of socialization
will consist in the formation of workers' collectives
the ruling bourgeoisie.



Kandler

It sounds much better in Czech, when it is a rhyme in working class
dialect: 'Kdo se + praci rekne, potvrdi Huska.'
A reference to 'The Good Soldier Schweik', a classic of Czech satirical
literature.

REVIEWS

MEET YOUR FRIENDLY SOCIAL SYSTEM by Peter Laurie. Arrow Books. £1.25.

Since its publication a few months ago this interesting book seems to have been ignored by both the established and the radical press. Its aim is to analyse the operations of what Laurie calls 'the machinery of social control' and to examine how this affects people's lives and ideas.

The field covered is a wide one, taking in education, work, sexual relations, the media and several other topics. Although the author's treatment is necessarily somewhat superficial, what he has to say is often much more interesting (and relevant to people's everyday experience) than anything to be found in most left-wing papers (journals like Socialist Worker and Workers Press rarely if ever discuss the organisation of society as a whole, preferring to issue opportunist slogans about specific grievances).

Laurie's book is marred by the fact that the author is so overawed by the control mechanisms he describes that he sees them as totally monolithic and unbeatable. True, there is a paragraph calling for radical social change, but there is no discussion of how this is to be accomplished or about the failure of past attempts to achieve it. Nor is there any analysis of how the present social system pursues contradictory aims, thereby generating its own crises (for instance of how appeals for wage restraint now mingle with advertisements suggesting that the sole end of life is the accumulation of material possessions). Instead we are given a picture of class society as totally omnipotent and unchanging. (In a discussion on Radio London, Laurie actually described the structure of society as 'basically unchanged since the Roman Empire'.)

As a result Laurie nowhere describes the resistance which the social system encounters or the potential ability of this resistance fundamentally to change society. By far the worst example of this is the way the author can write a chapter on sexual relationships that would certainly not have been written without the work of the women's liberation movement, and then (a few chapters later) dismiss this movement as 'a timely move to disengage men and women from the control of the family, to leave them to cope individually with a system far more powerful than before'.

In spite of its many shortcomings this book should be read and criticised by anybody who wishes to develop a critique of the society of today, rather than of 1848 or 1917.

Roger S.

EAST END JEWISH RADICALS 1875-1914 by W.J. Fishman. Duckworth/Acton Society Trust. £6.50.

This is a well researched book. I don't like reading a book with a lot of footnotes. If you are similarly affected, try not to be put off. Fishman is not only a good writer, he is also very close to the subject matter of his book, not an outsider. He is passionately concerned for the preservation and illumination of the history of Jews and Radicals from the East End. His book does much to serve this end.

The description of Jewish emigration from Russia and Eastern Europe is necessary in order to understand how these people behaved after arrival in East London. It must be seen in relation to the specific conditions they encountered. The coming together of many different people from many different places to a land which was so different from the 'heim' (the old country) produced something quite new. Fishman deals with this in some detail and it makes good sense.

I am personally acquainted with this history, being a first generation product of a Russian father and Polish mother who arrived in the East End during the period covered by this book. I spent most of my childhood and much of my adult life in Stepney. I can testify to the accuracy of Fishman's description of conditions and events. I learned all about what happened as part of my growing up process.

Many stories of Anarchist activity became folklore within a very short period. Sidney Street was just round the corner from where I lived and we never regarded 'Peter the Painter' as a criminal. The undoubted influence of the anarchists will live and continue to serve all who wish to know more about the dynamism of social change.

The book ends in 1914 and Fishman gives his reason for wanting to write it, apart from his personal interest in and love for the people he describes. He finishes with a quote from Rudolf Rocker: 'Social ideas are not something only to dream about for the future. If they are to mean anything at all they must be translated into our daily life, here and now; they must shape our relations with our fellowman. It was this kind of human relationship that placed its seal on all the strivings and aspirations of the libertarian movement of the Jewish workers in Britain'.

What became of this movement (and what it might have become) was made clearer by events and by what people tried to do after 1914. The period between the wars 1918-1939 should be related to the background as dealt with by Fishman in a similar or, if possible, even better way.

The history of the East End was not, and is not, just the history of the Jewish immigrants, however important a component part the latter

may be. The struggles of the dockers, the unemployed, Jew and Gentile, the history of the Labour and trade union movement, the huge melting pot of political activity of the 1920s-30s, must be written anew.

In the meantime, Fishman's book is an important contribution to that history. No libertarian in particular, and others in general, can fail to benefit from reading this informative and enjoyable book. The issues dealt with are as relevant as ever.

Joe Jacobs.

TAKE A SUB. 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 £2 to SOLIDARITY (London), c/o 123 Lathom Rd., London E.6., to receive forthcoming issues of the paper and pamphlets to that value.

One of the effects of the 19th century Stamp Taxes was to weed out the small/radical publications from the Free Press. Recent massive increases in postal charges here could have a similar effect. It now costs us substantially more to send you a copy of Solidarity than the nominal value of the paper itself. Real costs of production (ink and paper) are also escalating. We will very shortly be obliged to review our whole pricing structure.

For the time being we would just ask all subscribers who feel their subs must be about to run out to 'top them up' by sending us another pound or two. If possible before we start nagging for it.

ON THE SOLIDARITY WAVELENGTH

In previous issues we have referred to the responses abroad to various of our pamphlets (Sweden: vol.VII, no.4; Japan: vol.VII, no.5; France: vol.VII, no.7). This is what has happened in Germany.

The appearance of Solidarity texts in German was delayed for a considerable period, the left movement being dominated by maoists (all calling themselves 'marxist-leninists') and very orthodox anarchists. This is strange because both libertarian marxism (from Rosa Luxemburg to Otto Ruhle and Karl Korsch) and the politics of sexual revolution (Reich and the post-Reichians) have had a considerable audience. Perhaps through fear of patricide few German texts have dared criticise marxism from a modern revolutionary viewpoint.

In April 1971 the now defunct Verlag Roter Oktober published an incomplete version of The Bolsheviks and Workers Control: 1917-1921 under the title of 'Räte in Russland'. Our introduction and conclusions (in which most of our political points were made) had been cold-bloodedly omitted...because the publishers disagreed with them! They were subsequently to be published in issues 6, 7, and 8 of Revolte (current address: 205 Hamburg 80, Hassestrasse 22). The comrades who produce this interesting and lively paper broke from orthodox anarchism a few years ago and have been strongly influenced by the Situationists. They have translated and published a number of Solidarity texts, including Ceylon: the JVP Uprising of April 1971 ('Aufstand auf Ceylon') and Redefining Revolution ('Postskript zur Neu-Definition der Revolution'). These have appeared as MaD (Materialien, Analysen, Dokumente) pamphlets Nos. 3 and 6. These comrades were also the first to publish in German a text on the Saigon Commune (first published in Informations, Correspondance Ouvrières and later in Solidarity, vol.V, no.5). Our pamphlets Paris, May 1968 and Vietnam: Whose Victory? will be published later this year by the same group.

Our basic statement AS WE SEE IT was first published in German in November 1971 in issue no.2 of 'Die Soziale Revolution ist Keine Partei-sache' (the Social Revolution is no Party Matter), the journal of the now defunct 'Soziale Revolution' group in Berlin.

Schwarze Protokolle (c/o P. Ober, 1 Berlin 30, Welserstrasse 3), an anarcho-marxist paper published the second half of The Irrational in Politics in its issue no.5 (July 1973). In its issue no.6 (October 1973) it published AS WE DON'T SEE IT in full. In a later issue (no.124 (sic!), January 1974) it reproduced the article Third Worldism or Socialism (which had also appeared as an Appendix to the Revolte edition of the pamphlet on Ceylon). Finally the text on Workers Councils and the Economics of a Self-managed Society was published by Verlag Neue Kritik (Frankfurt) under the title 'Arbeiterräte und selbst-verwaltete Gesellschaft' - but, we regret to say, minus the hedgehogs!

GASSING ON...

May I join in the heated and hilarious dialogue on the Gas Board started in your last two issues and point out how easy it would be to transform the present work organisation in the gas industry into a worker-managed one. But first, to cover myself, a couple of retractions. The 'transformation' suggested is an ideal one and it's always best to deal with reality. Moreover I recognise a bit of blueprintism in what I suggest, though the blueprint comes from 'Workers Councils'* if anywhere.

The present situation is as follows: there are, roughly, two departments in the Gas Industry. Distribution deals with the supply of gas from the North Sea up to the household meter; and Customer Service, which deals with household appliances. I work on the Distribution side. Here there is the usual hierarchy with supposedly smooth graduation from rank to rank. In reality, of course, there is a break at the foreman level between management and those who do the work. The management are not ordinary workers promoted 'on merit'. Few are 'qualified'. They just happened to slot in obscurely when the industry went over to North Sea Gas. None of them has any more idea about the work than us who actually do it.

As far as the work is concerned we're as near to being free agents as a capitalist work organisation will allow. We work from vans and spend a lot of time travelling. There is rarely anyone breathing down our necks. To some extent we can choose when or whether to work. It's possible to do shopping, fetching and carrying for ourselves and others, or other jobs we want to get done (including sleeping). Obviously this situation suits us. It's not, of course, a hand-out by an enlightened management but is determined by the conditions of work, the circumstances of distributing gas.

What would change if management were rubbed out? Very little. The only function out of our hands at the moment is planning. In 'Worker-Managed British Gas', planning decisions would be taken at weekly meetings of the workers involved. This would present no practical problem of numbers, since never more than twenty would be involved in the most common type of decision. Wider issues would be put to the whole work force, on the same lines as ideas outlined in 'Workers Councils'.

All this revolves around access to information. The capacity to conceal information is the key to power. At present management hoards it and it has to be squeezed out, or else it creeps out in the form of orders.

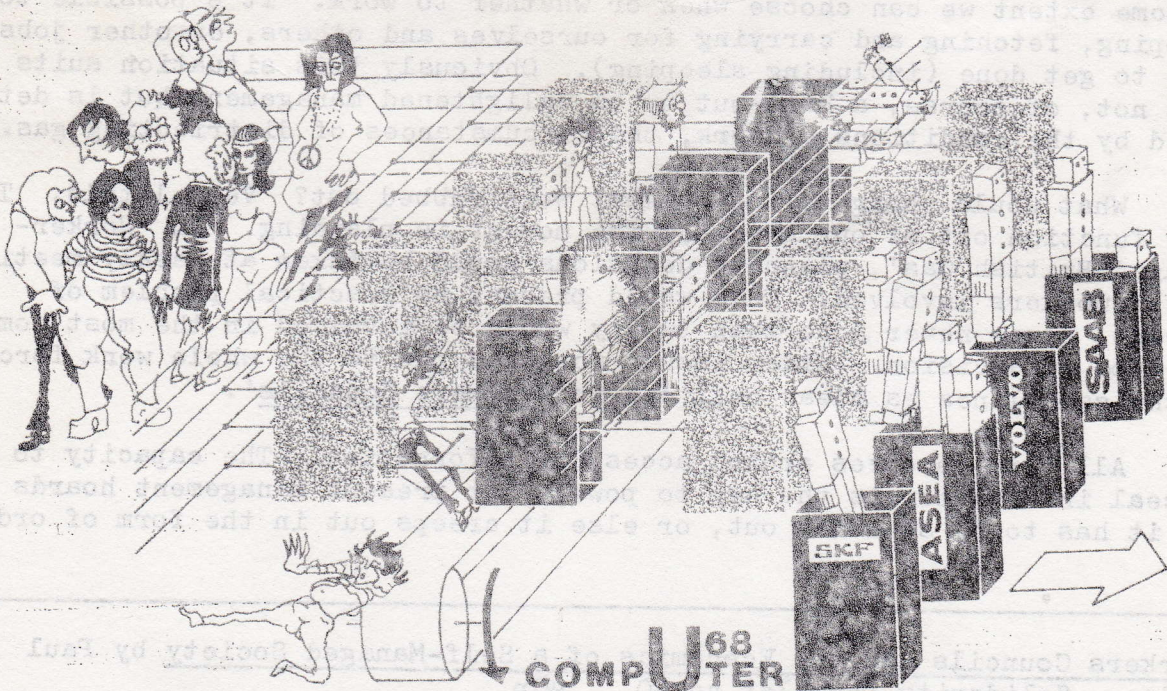
* Workers Councils and the Economics of a Self-Managed Society by Paul Cardan. Solidarity Pamphlet no.40. 40p.

We gave up being surprised at the blunders of management ages ago. The present struggle is in part a psychological war to let them know what we think of them. It shows up their irrelevance. At worst we get resigned to this situation - it's frustrating when our ideas and suggestions are ignored, yet later appear as management directives hot from the planning offices.

More positively: often the weekly work tickets just don't arrive. And so we do the work we consider needs doing. We ignore pointless instructions, of which there are many. I'm sure they must get the message - they are by-passed daily. For instance, if someone reports a gas leak the radio operator can either pass it on to a foreman or straight to one of us who (she, in our case) assesses who can take the job. In our bit of the gas industry there's a lot of scope for by-passing our 'superiors'. I'm not saying it's the same everywhere. And we may ignore them, but they're still there. But that's another problem.

I hope this goes some way towards satisfying Harry Harmer who (rightly) wants the form of struggle to hit (or embarrass) the bosses, rather than the customer.

Nick V.H.



DISSENT IN YUGOSLAVIA

'FROM AFFLUENCE TO PRAXIS'. Mihailo Markovic. Ann Arbor 1974. £2

'BETWEEN IDEALS AND REALITY'. Svetozar Stojanovic. Oxford University Press, New York 1973. £1.40

Recently, severe repression against 'dissidents in Yugoslavia has recommenced on a large scale. In early March the author Mihajlo Mihajlov was sentenced to 7 years imprisonment for 'anti-state propaganda'. More significantly there has been the recent round of state action taken against students and lecturers in universities throughout Yugoslavia. News of the draft resolution of students in three Philosophy departments (complaining that they had been prevented from studying marxism) was suppressed by the state authorities. The internationally renowned journal 'Praxis' has been closed down. A long campaign against 8 lecturers in the Belgrade Philosophy Faculty has culminated in their suspension (on full pay) from teaching. In the statement 'On the ideological and moral fitness of Professors at Belgrade University' and in Tito's recent speech, the lecturers were treated as enemies of the state and as 'people who tried to block us'.

Only a small section of the work of the Belgrade lecturers has appeared in English. It is therefore of great significance that these two books have been published.

Markovic introduces 'From Affluence to Praxis' with a critique of positivism and the related attempt either to replace formal logic with 'dialectical logic' or, inversely, with a total refutation of the logic of dialectical analysis. Instead, he bases himself on critical consciousness and on a clear differentiation between social and natural processes. Social institutions are created by human agencies. They are 'thus potentially free'. In Markovic's words, 'In the legitimate effort to establish certain social laws, there has always been a tendency to reify these laws, to construe them as if they were independent of human action, and to forget that they are only the expression of certain regularities of human behaviour'.

This is the real break that distinguishes Markovic from the mechanical marxism of the Second International, including leninism, and also from Western bourgeois science. 'Both past and future are living in the present' he adds, in order to show that there is no possibility of returning to the safe dogmas of historical fatalism. Positively, Markovic asserts that from affluence to praxis there are many changes. Although he is not unique in this, his views are refreshing.



His premises stated Markovic continues (in his first chapter on 'Critical social theory in Marx') by outlining his general thesis. Freedom is the recognition of concrete forms of oppression, criticism of them, and eventually their overthrow. In the cases of history and of nature 'overthrow' is impossible - but increased control is not. Markovic develops a well-rounded and coherent categorisation of Marx to accomplished the required criticism. There are both concrete and abstract phenomena (e.g. wealth and surplus value respectively). Concepts are either negative (alienated labour), neutral (work) or projective (praxis/ideal human activity). According to Markovic, several conditions have to be met before one can use Marx's model of the economy, as outlined in Capital. Many of these preconditions have long since disappeared, but what remain are the conceptual categories outlined above.

Perhaps the most impressive chapter of the book is that entitled 'Economism or the humanisation of the economy'. Here Markovic makes numerous points of great significance to radical political economy, based on the Hegel-Marx idea of alienated labour. As the State expresses purely private (class) goals, it cannot be the repository of some public good, potentially or actually. It can only be the rationalisation (in both practice and ideology) of class society.

Markovic takes a rather narrow view of the State when applying himself to Yugoslavia. The three alternatives to the State that he presents are all managerial and not social-economic models. He attacks the ideologists of the meaning of commodity production. Those, like Stalin, who advertise a

'socialist commodity production' are shown to be self-contradictory. Either there is commodity production or there is socialist production and distribution. There can be no transitional state for commodity production because it is the heart of bourgeois economy. But socialism is not just the suppression of commodity production. Already the bourgeois states have partially modified the nature of this production through public works and nationalisations. These have varied from stalinist or social-democrat set-ups to fascist ones: in none has there been anything other than the reinforcement of the class goal of production. The thesis that capitalism is the generalisation of commodity production is dismissed by Markovic in his model of Capital (pp.67-68).

'CRITICAL THEORY' AND REVOLUTION

Markovic then turns his attention to Easter-style exploitation in his chapter on 'The concept of revolution'. Since revolution is a question of possibility (and not just necessity) and of understanding (and not just knowledge), formal changes in the State, in the economy and in society are all essentially non-revolutionary. This has been the reality of Eastern Europe. Exploitation survives in a wider sense than outlined by Marx.

Markovic delineates two stages of communist revolution:

- 1) the establishment of a classless society and the abolition of the State.
- 2) the abolition of commodity-production.

But he sees complications. Peaceful change is and can be possible. He gives the examples of Marx's hopes for England and Holland but adds the rather sad examples of Chile and Sweden. He further states that in the East 'bureaucracy cannot be abolished by force ... what is needed ... is a critical science, a new revolutionary culture' and a creeping expropriation of the economy.

All this is reformism, but it is a reformism that is fundamentally different from social-democratic or leninist reformism. It is based on the false concept of communist revolution in two phases. As the State is nothing other than the rationalisation of the extremes of commodity production, its fall has to be simultaneous with the expropriation of the economy. Markovic's dual thesis is one in which one moves from formal to substantial changes. This is false: nearly all revolutionary movements have had a content before they ever developed a form. The power of workers councils is not some formal or managerial abolition of the State: it is the expression of the communist revolution itself.

Markovic's views are obviously deeply influenced by Yugoslavia. But his analysis of self-management is threadbare and his belief that the self-management system can become something new and revolutionary is confusing. To demonstrate that the Yugoslav system could itself be revolu-

tionised, one would have to show:

1) that the future could develop out of the institutions of the present;

2) that the necessary qualitative changes could be produced by the quantitative changes of extending self-management.

This all hinges on the old belief of changes in quantity causing changes in quality. Markovic gives an example when he says that the bureaucracy is slowing down the transformation of social relationships and not really changing them. The mechanistic association of quantity with quality does not have very much bearing on these situations.

The author concludes with a chapter on 'The new human society and its organisation'. He categorises three types of project - positivist, utopian and critical. The first is dismissed as allowing only for quantitative development, and the second for making the future absolute without criticism of the present. It is the third, critical project that shows that the fettered social relationships can be broken by social revolution, by the absorption of the individual being (abstract being) into social being. Markovic compares this with the Yugoslav system of self-management. He carefully describes the manipulation of the councils, the total fragmentation of self-management which allows exploitation and alienated labour. In some cases workers are so placed as to give them a strong role in the exploitation of others, through a favourable contract with other works. Such a system identifies itself with the past, not the future.

THE CRITIQUE OF YUGOSLAVIA

Stojanovic's main theme is the gap between ideals and reality. But there is no gap at all. The 'ideals' of the Yugoslav state are as real as the stones on the beach. They are not virtuous abstractions that float about, destined eventually to be consummated with history. They are the outcome of their historical setting.

It is said that every State gets the government it deserves. Perhaps this is also true of ideology. The lack of workers' autonomy in Yugoslavia is not the outcome of the under-fulfilment of some plan. It is due to the very opposite, to the over-fulfilment of the ideas of the Yugoslav ruling class. Self-management has not meant the expropriation of the power of the State, but the decanting of the problems of the rulers ... onto the workplace. One can overstress the undoubted differences between Yugoslavia and other states in Eastern Europe. On closer examination, when the illusions have been seen through, a capitalist economy, relentless repression of internal dissent, and eternal diplomacy with every bourgeois emissary or tin-pot despot from the Third World are common to all these states. For Stojanovic the question is to re-situate the ideals outside the ideology of contemporary Yugoslav society.

At present an extension of self-management in Yugoslavia would mean an increase in self-alienation. The alternatives are not statism or self-management, just as for Marx the problem was not the alienated thinking of Hegel or that of Feuerbach, but a break with pre-existing systems of philosophy. The real alternative, in both cases, is alienated versus non-alienated production. The alternatives as expressed in Yugoslavia today reflect the split in the ruling class. This is very much a split between local managers and the central bureaucracy. Stojanovic takes the two sides together. He is severely critical both of the Proudhonian-based economics of the decentralising 'anarcho-liberals' and of the statist myth of socialism. But here we find the roots of some confusion. A certain form of collectivism is confused with communism. Thus a managerial form is taken as representative of a social movement.

Returning to the critique of alienation, Stojanovic displays in a well-rounded way the multi-dimensional form of capitalist society, and the absurdity of presenting one axis as crucial. But then he turns on the old self-management /statism axis, slipping into the false orbit of the 'epochal dilemma' of socialism. The ghosts of past critics (Ciliga, Rizzi, Burnham, Machajski) are called upon to enter an old debate. (The first three were oppositional elements to trotskyism and incorporated many of its assumptions.)

The revolutionary critiques of Russia made by Ruhle, Pannekoek, Bordiga and many others are not mentioned. The terms of 'degeneration' and 'statism' are therefore used to describe the East European states. Old ideas are used to fill in certain gaps. We are told that the restoration of a multi-party system would 'spell catastrophe for (Yugoslavia's) revolution'. What revolution, one might ask? When was there communisation of

IF I'D KNOWN WHAT A GHASTLY REGIME I'D BE CREATING IN RUSSIA I WOULD HAVE RETURNED THAT RAILWAY TICKET TO THE GERMANS AND FINISHED THE SEASON SKIING IN SWITZERLAND...



production in Yugoslavia, and when was money abolished? The 'revolution' was a capitalist and not a communist one. Trade with the West, the massive aid given by the USA to support Tito's defiance of Stalin's wagging finger, and the export of labour to Germany can hardly be the outcome of a communist society.

Stojanovic is, however, clear and ruthless in his critique of what he recognises as Stalinism: 'Some critics of Stalinism are not able to see through the statist mystification of state property. They adhere to the practice of connecting the concept of ruling class ownership with private ownership of the means of production. But according to this logic, the Church hierarchy was not a part of the feudal ruling class since its members did not privately own the means of production, nor did their children (sic!) inherit any property'.(p.47)

He is also clear on the nature of Stalinism itself: 'In no way can thought inspired by Marx find the basic indicator of socialist progress in material construction alone ... As usual, this mystification makes use of an element of reality: the dependence of all social life on the

**'HERETICS ARE ALWAYS MORE DANGEROUS
THAN ENEMIES.'**

**Svetozar Stojanovic in 'Student' (April 1968,
p.7), speaking of the student riots in Warsaw and other
Polish cities.**

development of the forces of production. But for Marx this dependence was not of an evaluative nature, as it seems to be for the Stalinists. An analogy: man is also dependent on his biological constitution, but it does not follow that it is to be more highly valued than his humaneness. In both cases there is a dependence of qualitatively higher levels of reality on qualitatively lower levels of reality'.(p.11)

As with Markovic, Stojanovic's position has both its internal and its external limits. The first have already been reviewed. The latter are perhaps largely the outcome of the position of the two authors as ardent Titoists, only later driven into opposition and criticism. For them the student revolt of 1968 in Poland and Belgrade* was the speck of 'foreign matter' on which these criticisms could crystallise. This particular revolt was mainly centered geographically on Belgrade University. Pro-

* See F. Perlman 'Revolt in Socialist Yugoslavia' (Black and Red, Detroit 1969) for an excellent account of the latter revolt.

grammatically it was centered on the demand for real self-management in industry and in academic life. There were strong tinges of leninism (i.e. elitist versions of state capitalism) and of Third Worldism. Inevitably, these are carried over into the books of Stojanovic and Markovic. So the critical sections developed by these authors are supplemented with hasty and half-finished immediate programmes of action. One of the casualties of this situation is the difficulty in describing communism. The two authors take the dogmatic view of communism as a stage of revolution, instead of seeing it as the real social movement of communising production and revolutionising the economy and society. The confusion arises by seeing no divide (other than one of time) between the present stage of the struggle and its outcome.

Undoubtedly these elements will resolve themselves as the Yugoslav State (now both financially and ideologically bankrupt) is forced to react against internal opposition from whatever quarter. Whether such a reaction hastens the fruition of the revolutionary contradictions in Yugoslavia (as the pre-1956 events did in Hungary and the pre-1970 events did in Poland) or not is where human action comes in.

D. B.

CAPITALISME ET LUTTE DE CLASSES EN

POLOGNE 1970 - 1971

WRITTEN BY I.C.O. COLLECTIVE

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EDITORIAL COMMENT

ONCE MORE, FOR THE RECORD:

A REPLY TO CRITICISM

Systematic misrepresentation of others' positions is a technique of political sectarianism with an unfortunately long history. We have come to expect that fights will be picked with us on the basis of things we haven't said, and arguments will be adduced to refute points we never made; but when this sort of 'criticism' is disseminated to people who may not know much about Solidarity's politics, we have to try to set the record straight.

Misrepresentation is currently focused on the question of self-management. 'Workers' Voice' no.13 (c/o Box W.V.4., 48 Manchester St., Liverpool L1 6ER, price 5p.) contains the following statement, in a footnote to an article by Revolutionary Perspectives of Glasgow:

'The historical bankruptcy of organisations which see the revolution only in terms of forms is illustrated by the group SOLIDARITY for whom Communism has no content, only the forms of workers' councils and self-management. Thus they were able to write enthusiastic article (sic) on the Ulster Workers Council, which was an expression of deep divisions in the proletariat, and also wax enthusiastically (sic) about the Lump in the building industry, as a bit of self-managed workers' capitalism. Here as elsewhere communism as formal recipes can only serve the bourgeoisie.' (pp. 14-15, note 2).

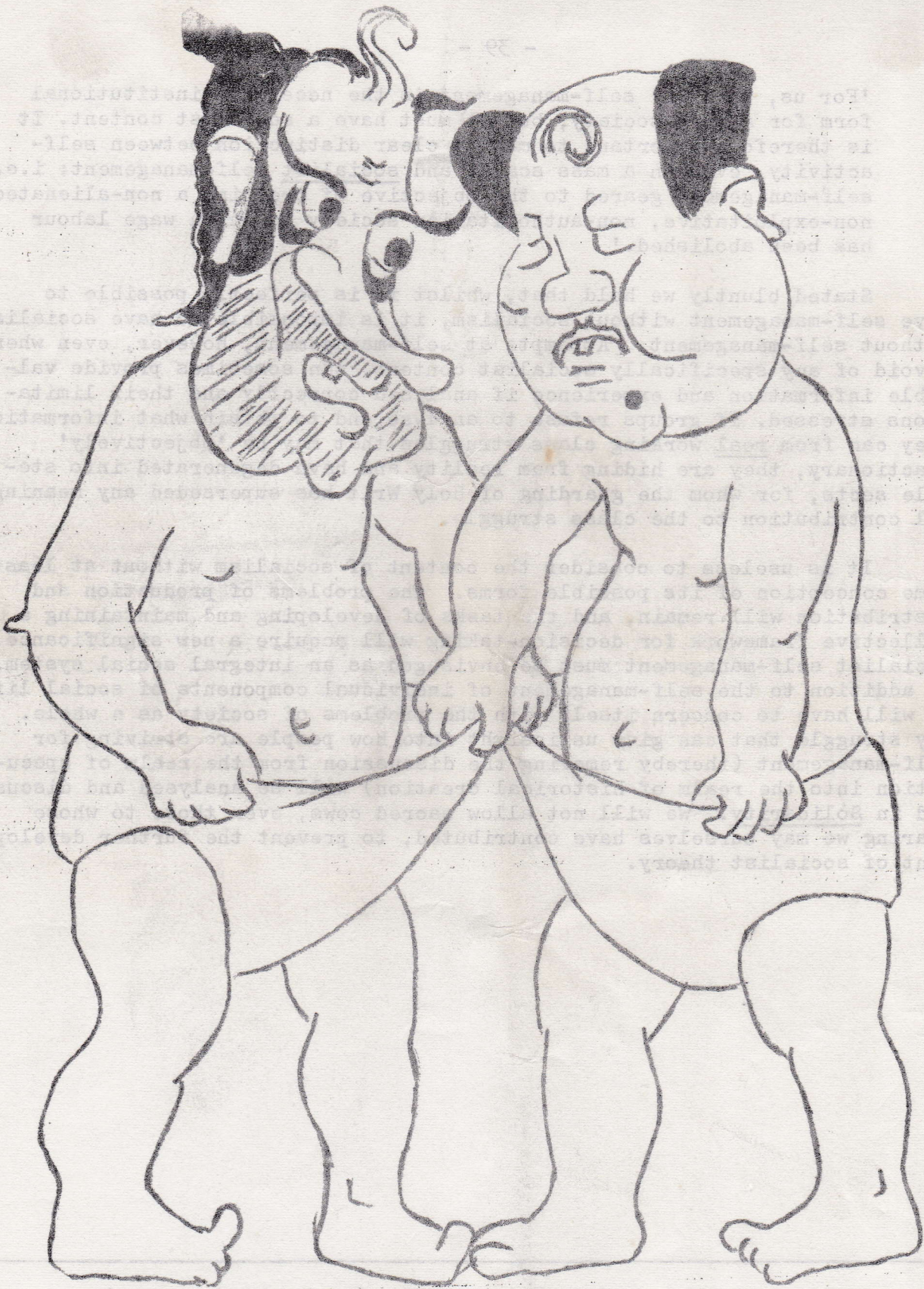
The only documentation given for these slanders takes the form: 'Solidarity's gems can be found in their magazine of the same name, and in their pamphlet "The Lump".' No address. No page references or issue number. Those who would like to form their own judgment can obtain the Lump pamphlet from us, or from the National Working Group (price 15p), and can find out whether it is a mindless celebration of the phenomenon, or an attempt to analyse a feature of contemporary society instead of reacting with intellectual labour-saving labels.

Similarly, the controversial editorial on the Ulster Workers Council General Strike ('Solidarity', vol.VII, no.11) brought a predictable response from Republican sympathisers for whom any attempt to look rationally at Protestant workers' action must be by definition a capitulation to bigotry (see letter from M. Comack, vol.VII, no.12, p.17). Far from being uncritical or waxing enthusiastic, however, the editorial tried to analyse the components of the strike and its implications in all their complexity, going a little deeper than the obvious remarks about deep divisions in the proletariat. The last paragraph reads:

'For us, workers' self-management is the necessary institutional form for a free society, but it must have a socialist content. It is therefore important to make a clear distinction between self-activity, even on a mass scale, and socialist self-management: i.e. self-management geared to the objective of creating a non-alienated, non-exploitative, non-authoritarian society in which wage labour has been abolished.'

Stated bluntly we hold that, whilst it is perfectly possible to have self-management without socialism, it is impossible to have socialism without self-management. Attempts at self-management, however, even when devoid of any specifically socialist content, can sometimes provide valuable information and experience if analysed correctly and their limitations stressed. If groups refuse to analyse and to obtain what information they can from real working class struggles that may be 'objectively' reactionary, they are hiding from reality and have degenerated into sterile sects, for whom the guarding of Holy Writ has superseded any meaningful contribution to the class struggle.

It is useless to consider the content of socialism without at least some conception of its possible forms. The problems of production and distribution will remain, and the tasks of developing and maintaining a collective framework for decision-taking will acquire a new significance. Socialist self-management must be envisaged as an integral social system. In addition to the self-management of individual components of social life, it will have to concern itself with the problems of society as a whole. Any struggle that can give us insight into how people are striving for self-management (thereby removing the discussion from the realm of speculation into the realm of historical creation) will be analysed and discussed in Solidarity. We will not allow sacred cows, even those to whose rearing we may ourselves have contributed, to prevent the further development of socialist theory.



Best caption for the above gets free sub. to SOLIDARITY

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