

the population (about 23 million) is employed, and a small and declining fraction of these work full time in the traditional strongholds of militancy.

The question will be raised: why would anyone work for nothing? There are several answers. Most of us do an enormous amount of work for nothing already, mainly in the home, but also in the labour and union movements. In our paid work, it isn't usually the activity that we are reluctant to do (and therefore want to be paid for) but the conditions under which we have to do it, where we have little control or opportunity to have fun. It isn't the effort or energy expended that we want to be paid for: if that were so, why would people pay to expend vast amounts of energy on sports pitches, or queue to give blood for nothing? The same applies to non-manual work: in leisure time we exercise our minds with all kinds of games, hobbies or interests.



What distinguishes "work" from "play" is surely compulsion. We apply one label rather than the other according to whether we have chosen an activity or had it imposed on us.

We gain a positive reward when we know that what we are doing is useful to other people. By sharing

skills our contribution can be valued and recognised in a way that is impossible in the capitalist economy, with its distorted scale of values.

We can gain practical help when we need it, as well as learning new skills from others.

Finally, such a co-op being outside the money economy, the state cannot take its cut in taxes, NI contributions etc.

We cannot, obviously, bring about revolutionary change simply by such initiatives. However, we can provide a model of self-managed activity outside the formal economy, where money and the market are not the measure of everything and people are not graded valued and paid according to an occupational hierarchy which has nothing to do with the real worth to the community of the work done.

Jay Ginn

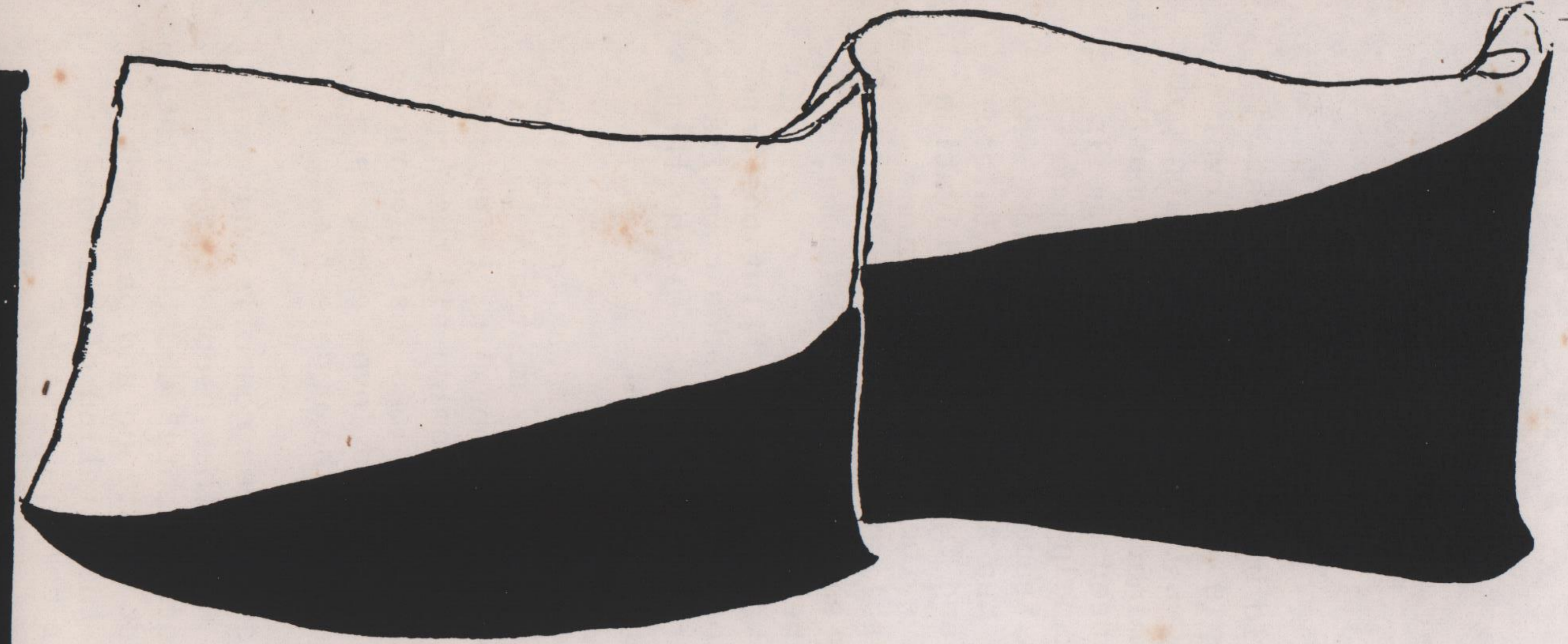
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We welcome articles for SB. Please send them to the above address, and write clearly, or better still, type them if possible.



SYNDICALIST BULLETIN

series 3
Number 5



Welcome to this month's edition of SB which is concentrating on the trades councils; their nature, their role for us as syndicalists and their future.

For syndicalists, the trades councils may constitute the area of the labour movement which offers the most potential for useful activity. For trades councils, the syndicalist approach, stressing direct action, solidarity, political independence, internationalism and direct democracy, offers a vision of their possible future as a key part of a strong combative labour movement, not only functioning effectively in defence of workers in the face of repression, but as organisations capable of taking the offensive, and ultimately of helping to build and run a new form of society. Syndicalists stand out in clear contrast to almost every group left of the Labour Party in having developed a coherent policy with regard to trades councils.

Many of our readers will know that the TUC has launched an attack on trades councils. It has attempted the abolition of County Associations of Trades Councils (CATCs), and the abolition of the trades councils' Annual Conference. Evidently the men in grey suits and red ties share SB's analysis of trades councils as the authentic voice of shop-floor activists in their own locality and beyond!

Perhaps it is not perverse to say that this attack is just what we all needed. Never before has there been such a flurry of communication between trades councils, whether in the same CATC or not. It is our hope that this year's conference will see the foundation of an efficient co-ordination of trades councils, with an effective and rapid means of communication.

Inside we print articles on trades councils by Pete Turner (President of Hammersmith Trades Council), a Cambridge Trades Council delegate, and Jay Ginn, active on Caterham Trades Council. All write in a personal capacity. We would be pleased to receive further material on this topic.

The period of adversity is also one of opportunity. Let's go to it!

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BEYOND NARROW CONFINES

Syndicalists have always stressed the importance of links between the trades and occupations within the same industry and have therefore favoured industrial unions as a means of organising workers against the employers and the state. It could be said that trades councils are an extension of this principle -- not surprisingly, as workers needed an organisation that went beyond the narrow confines of craft unionism in the last century. In one locality, trades councils bring together workers of different trade unions, and different public sector workers.

A good practical example of this was the 1926 General Strike. Trades Councils readily responded to the situation, much to the annoyance of the General Council of the TUC. As John Brown wrote in *The Social General Strike*, "The [1926] strike failed because it was called off by the trade union leaders and the workers had not learned to distrust those leaders sufficiently." And again, "The trade union leaders never believed in the strike and only led it in order to prevent it being controlled by the workers; they led it in order to ensure its failure."

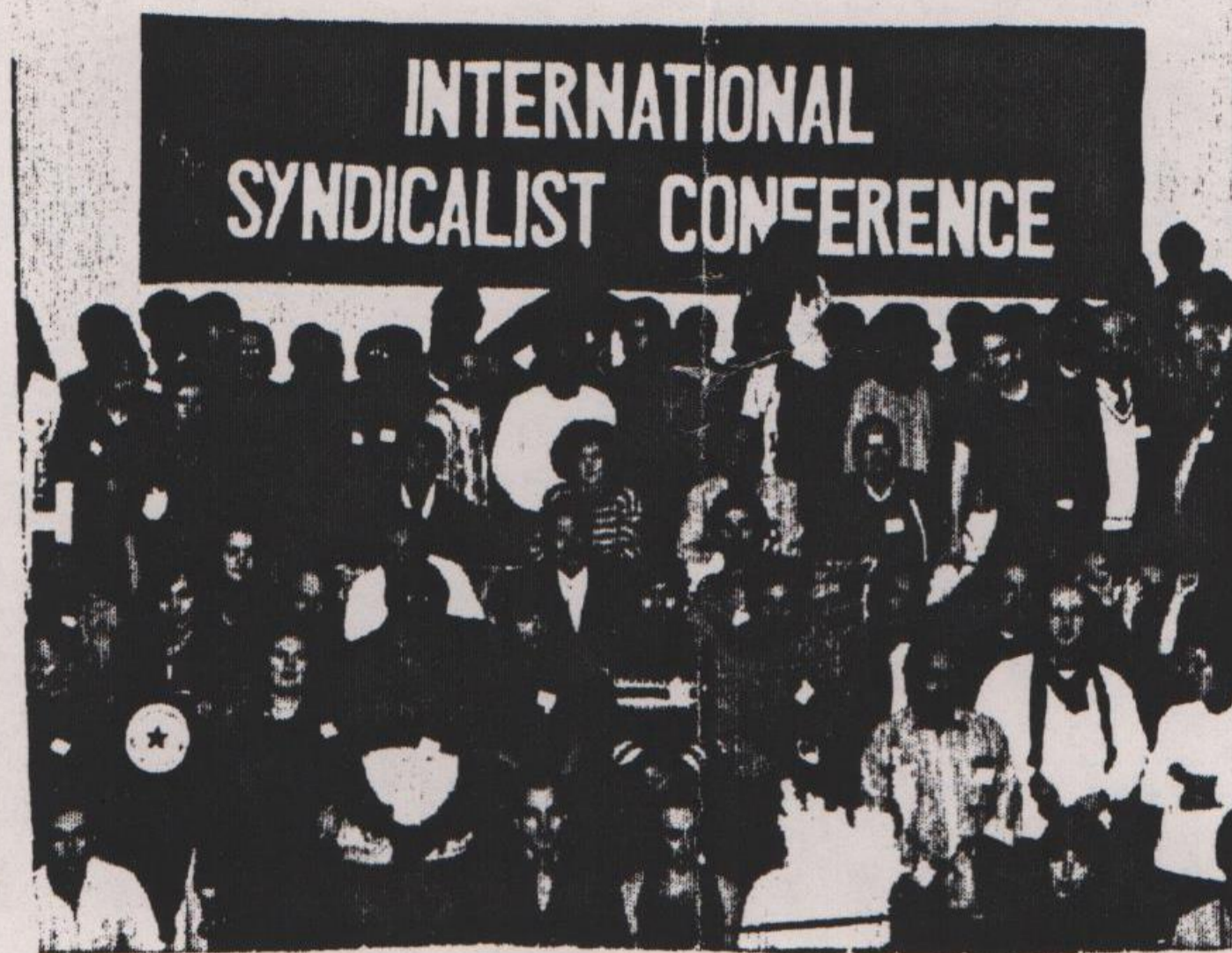
Although trades councils are the local organisations of the TUC they nevertheless have a record of opposing or outflanking the dictates of Congress House. The TUC recognise this and that is why the General Council is at present trying to curtail the activities of trades councils under their so-called "review".

Most political groupings and parties of the "left" fail to see the importance and relevance of trades councils. As they jump from one campaigning issue to the next, they haven't the staying power and political insight to acknowledge that trades councils can transform trade union organisation in a locality. Nor do they recognise the wider implications of organising within the local community. Workers are naturally suspicious of these "left" groupings but recognise that trades councils have no political axe to grind (or shouldn't have).



Trades councils are usually in the forefront when it comes to major industrial disputes. The miners' strike of 1984/5 is an example of the work trades councils can do: miners were accommodated for long periods and by twinning with specific pits trades councils organised effective solidarity. In localised disputes they easily spring into action, but even on an international scale their wider contacts mean they offer support that really counts. This happened during the Hangers artificial limb makers' dispute in London. Hangers were owned by the infamous multinational, the British Tyre and Rubber Company. Local trades councils became involved and then supported

workers sacked in South Africa, by the same company, which in turn led to nationwide support groups for our comrades in South Africa.



Trades councils are mostly made up of rank-and-file delegates representing rank-and-file workers. Not very many full-time officials are delegates. They are usually concerned with trade union issues and are run and controlled by the delegates. As such they are ideal vehicles for syndicalists to play an active part in.

Pete Turner.

FORGING THE LINKS

It is vital not to underestimate the usefulness of trades councils. They are often a major focus for activity in a particular locality, whether in terms of issues on which they directly take the initiative, or into which they have a significant input (particularly if this input is measured in the contribution of resources such as facilities, network of contacts and, most importantly, people). It is sometimes easy for trades councils, in spite of their status as established organisations with a solid structure and presence in a community, to be overlooked. This may have something to do with negative attitudes to trade unions (some of which are well-deserved) -- not those projected by the right-wing tabloid press, but the perception of unions as non-achieving talking-shops, run by the labour movement's equivalents of the Tory "men in grey suits" picking up inflated salaries for defusing and dissipating militancy and lurching with the bosses.

Over the last decade or so, there has grown up a whole generation of people who have no positive experience of union activity -- either because they have spent long periods out of work, or because they have been in jobs where they have been unable or simply disinclined to get involved. Due to the same social, economic and political conditions, many peoples' experience of constructive political activity is through community-based or single issue groups. Unions and trades councils have, especially in the case of the former, often been backwards in forging links with these. It is only comparatively recently that some unions have begun to abandon their reluctance to recognise the significance of what can no longer be regarded as "marginal groupings" -- most particularly the unemployed. The cost of this mixture of slow-wittedness and blinkered arrogance, in terms of wasted human resources, can only be guessed at.

I would be willing to bet that, for many people who are currently involved with trades councils, the turning point was the miners' strike, when support groups based around trades councils welcomed help from people with no previous trade union experience, who suddenly had a popular cause to get behind, and felt enormous motivation to involve themselves. Relations were established between trades councils and other organisations, giving them to involve themselves. Relations were established between trades councils and other organisations, giving them something to build on.

So, what should trades councils be doing? Firstly, they must aim to increase union membership; this is far from simple. Overcoming all the problems associated with unions that discourage people from active involvement is a challenge not to be underestimated.

Secondly, trades councils must work on links with other groups campaigning at the "grass roots" and these relationships must be strong and permanent, not just for the duration of a single strike or campaign issue.

A MODEL FOR THE FUTURE?

Trades Councils are uniquely placed to demonstrate how workers with a wide range of skills can co-operate for the common good, without the need for a state and its apparatus of legal or economic coercion. This potential has been realised in revolutionary situations, like Spain 1936 or Hungary 1956, when people organised locally to produce the goods and services everyone needs.

But why wait for a revolution if we can put a simple and sensible idea into practice now



What I am suggesting is the setting-up of a Skills Co-op in which we all contribute our particular expertise (yes, we do all have something to offer, even if it isn't always recognised as such) where it's needed. It is important to include people who are unemployed, pensioners, children and houseworkers as well as those who are employed: remember, only about 40% of

REVIEW

"Winning the Class War -- an Anarcho-Syndicalist Strategy"

Published by the Direct Action Movement, price £1



The DAM have brought out a smart eye-catching pamphlet as an introduction to anarcho-syndicalist strategy. It should attract a large readership, and could well bring a number of new people to syndicalism. It rightly explains that the reformist policies of the unions were inadequate for resisting the Thatcherite onslaught on the workers, and that such reformism was built-in to a movement which only seeks to gain better conditions under capitalism. It sketches -- though inadequately -- the revolutionary industrial unionist alternative, and stresses, cogently, the need for work canny, stay in and other imaginative forms of struggle, to be decided on at the workplace; the need for the greater democracy that syndicalism should provide; and the fact that militancy, class solidarity and vital democracy are essential to each other, dismissing the militant pretensions of those who try to impose their will -- in the name of a spurious militancy -- on the rank and file.

But in a pamphlet that has this there are notable omissions:

--while the pamphlet is clear that we need both a more militant and democratic unionism, without craft divisions and organised at the point of production, and a vision of revolution and a future society which can only be built when workers have taken over the ownership and control of industry, there is no suggestion as to how this will be done;

-- while the pamphlet makes clear the distinction between a rank-and-file movement that is only committed to militant "business unionism" and one with a revolutionary objective, and while it talks of creating industrial networks as a first step; there is no clear description of what it means by the latter, and no suggestion as to how "syndicates" (revolutionary industrial unions) can come into existence, whether this be from the networks or in some other way.

The basis of syndicalism has always been that workers should occupy and take over factories, locking the bosses out; and that revolutionary industrial unionism is the ideal organisation for such "taking and holding", and for running industry while the libertarian socialist re-organisation of society takes place. The omission of this seems curious, especially as the only hints as to the means of social change, and these only in illustrations suggest insurrection, a means for which an industrial union organisation would be less useful than a party.

The pamphlet refers to Britain's syndicalist past, but gives no details of this; the reference is presumably to the fact -- of which syndicalists are with good reason proud -- that from about 1908 until 1919 there was a workers' upsurge, initially inspired by the ideas of continental syndicalists and the American IWW. This created the shop stewards' movement, the first Trades Councils, the South Wales Miners' Combine, the Engineering Union, the Clyde Workers' Committees and the Irish T&GWU. Again the omission is curious, until one notes that it might be thought to clash with an "all or nothing" attitude to rank-and-file movements. These are dismissed as either (NALGO action group) militant trade unionism, or as Marxist plots to manipulate workers. The crucial point which is to be seen by any study of the "syndicalist upsurge" in Britain -- as indeed by studying the foundation of the French CGT or the American IWW -- is that workers in a period of militancy burst the limits that their own organisations impose, and transform these into organisations of a new type.

There had been organisations existing before this upsurge dedicated to copying the IWW or CGT; few workers were attracted, and since then most British syndicalists have agreed that the creation of rank-and-file movements within TUC unions, rather than the attempt to create separate unions was the authentic British expression of syndicalism. Consequently traditionally British syndicalists have -- while insisting that a syndicalist movement is essentially one which workers will shape to their own use, and therefore it cannot be confined to any pre-defined limits -- assumed that the most likely way such a movement will come into existence is by a revival of rank-and-file organisation, of shop stewards' committees, trades councils and so forth.

The DAM's alternative strategy for building an industrial union movement lies through the creation of industrial networks; but other than to say that these would have the aim of creating an anarcho-syndicalist union, that they would not be merely a network of contacts and that the combined economic/political outlook of such networks would be new, no clear idea is given as to what such industrial networks would be. The description, such as it is (pages 18 & 19), except for occasional lip service to federalist decentralism, could have been written about their proposed industrial activity, by any serious Leninist group.

One wonders why these omissions. Obviously the DAM rejects the traditional concepts of how to achieve a syndicalist movement; and they might well argue that however good Tom Brown's pamphlets, those of us who worked with him in the 1950s did not achieve a new upsurge, and that therefore they are well justified in turning away from his strategy. But the pamphlet gives no hint of looking at real live workers and their organisation. Of course it is right to say that a revolutionary is in orthodox trade unions but not of them. But it is quite a different matter when it comes to existing shop-floor organisations, which for all their faults do organise workers at the point of production, do depend on face-to-face democracy and are centres of spontaneous working-class activity. The pamphlet treats workers as entirely passive: if that were fair, syndicalism would be impossible.



A Bit Rich

A GOVERNMENT that eighteen times changed the means of calculating official statistics in order to make the unemployment figures more palatable;--that constantly claims the recession is bottoming out, when all the evidence suggests the opposite;--that steadfastly refuses to allow full open investigation of the Wright allegations, the Belgrano sinking, the Donnington fires, the Larsen impersonations, and attacks on the anti-apartheid offices the Stalker frame-up, the Gibraltar shootings or the Murrell murder; although it states that the redundancies in Trust-managed hospitals are not government affairs, yet has the impertinence to accuse the Labour candidate in Monmouth of lying, when he calls their scheme for changing the management of hospitals "opting out of the health service".