

Shop stewards history

**The Gospel According to the Rule** by E Morse  
 "Working to rule", reprinted from  
*Solidarity for workers power*, vol. 2, No. 1]

In the Beginning was the Rule  
 And the Rule was in the Book  
 And the Rule was Boss  
 And the Boss was God  
 So the Rule was God.  
 But woe unto them that worketh to Rule  
 For the Rule worketh not (Even as the Boss worketh not)  
 And upon them that abide by the Rule of the Boss  
 Shall great strictures and vengeance be visited  
 By the press of the Boss, thy God.  
 For the Rule worketh not  
 Even though It be written in the Book  
 By the Boss and His agents in the working class movement  
 Great therefore is the woe to the National Economy.  
 For the Boss thy God, who created the Rule,  
 Who created the Book, Is the Creator of great confusion.  
 And they that worketh to His Rule Shall post Epistles  
 that shall not arrive But be lost forever.  
 They shall sit all day in Great Confusion  
 In trains that runneth not  
 Even according to the Rule of the Boss, thy God  
 They shall assemble faulty components  
 Following blueprints that meaneth little.  
 For although He made Heaven and Earth  
 The Boss resideth outside of production  
 And knoweth not its ways and means  
 Therefore thou shalt do only the works of the Boss, thy God  
 And this sparingly -  
 Thou shalt heed not His Rules. Thou shalt use thy loaf  
 Thou shalt take over His factories and manage production  
 For the Boss is both alpha and omega  
 The Beginning and End of Great Confusion.

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A Libertarian Socialists publication



**The Deeper Meaning  
 of the Struggle -  
 an outline history of the international Shop  
 Stewards Movement and socialism**

by  
 Alan  
 Woodward



Shop stewards historyThe author

Alan Woodward was born in 1939 into a London working class family, failed the 11+ exam, had a successful secondary modern education nonetheless and did national service in RAF. After training and working for a while as a teacher, he began a heroic career as an agitator in North London factories. Victimised out 5 years later, he resumed education and then spent three decades in running and taking shop stewards courses. He worked in the Midlands, London, in colleges and universities and WEA, for several union organisations and rank and file bodies. He was always active in workplace and union.

Politically he was active in the Labour Party Young Socialists, against the bomb in CND, and then in the newly formed International Socialists. Events move on and after two decades battling against increasingly sectarian marxist organisation, he is now active in the libertarian movement. This is much pleasanter and more rewarding. He attends demos and marches - from the rather grand Aldermaston to the lowly patients pickets against insurance-run polyclinics. He was recently involved in the Ford Visteon occupation in Enfield and wrote up his experience in a booklet. Every participating worker got a copy. At 70, he has retired technically but still reads widely, thinks in a hurry and writes obsessively. A new career, encouraging girls football for grandchildren, takes much of his time, as does the Radical History Network. He hopes to live long enough to see the workers in the East and the South resuming successfully the struggle against capitalism.

Publications include *Ford Visteon Enfield Workers Occupation – an eyewitness account and first thoughts; Party Over Class - how Leninism subverted workers councils organisation; A Short Guide to Workers Council Socialists; Readers Guide to Workers Council Socialism; A Political Economy of Workers Socialism, A Guide to the Health, Safety and Welfare at Work; Going to Meetings; several booklets on strikes; also as editor Fragments – episodes in local workers history, vols 1,2 and 3, and The NHS is 60. Unpublished texts include Red Reading for socialists.*

p/p Gorter Press for Libertarian Socialists  
c/o PO Box 45155, London, N 15 4WR 2009

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Front Cover

Logo: *Politique* by Gerd Arntz (1900-1988) A council communist who specialised in graphical communication. See <http://www.gerdarntz.org/home>

Rear cover

Poem: "*Working to Rule*" by E Morse, in Ken Weller "*Strategy for Industrial Struggle*"



Shop stewards historyNote to Readers

The overall theme for this document is that the deeper meaning of the day to day events within the struggle in the workplaces and society can be found in the relationship to the continuous effort of the common people to control their own lives. I call this the conflict to overcome the prevailing ideas of the rulers to establish socialism ; and that means a collective and self governing society beginning at the workplace and moving to the social institutions from that struggle to society as a whole. The actual quotation of the title is from a booklet by William Morris in 1893 and I try to extend the case to references about the international movement , though much of the text relates to Britain

Although this text is sub-titled a "history" , anyone who has any experience of the workers movement knows that the great majority of individual contributions to workplace organisation, strikes, union branches and suchlike, is totally unrecorded. We are walking examples of "hidden history" - so much is lost, though some sees local publication. So the message is to get active in workers history groups to save the narratives as best you can.

Second of all , even with this limitation, there are huge reservoirs of accounts by writers of different beliefs. There are three main schools of thought in the political movement- labourists , marxists and libertarians – and this script is consciously and energetically located in the latter. Any text makes choices over priorities, over interpretations and over references. History is by definition partial and this selection is as well . Readers can make up their own mind.

A further note on content . My experience – extensive – and practical knowledge – wide and in places deep – has been acquired in the midlands and south east of England. And in certain industrial categories. Hence a good deal of the rest has been culled from documents of various kinds . Apologies for this and I would welcome more direct information from readers. Clearly this is no more than an outline and much further

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work remains to be done on the details of time and place , who and when, and suchlike. I urge others to fill the gaps so that the growing movement can be guided in its progress in future. Indeed, one aim of this document is to encourage more detailed study consequently. This is a huge subject but at least a start has been made.

Following my usual style , I have avoided foreign words and expressions , as well as academic conventions . Sorry, my computer does not appear to include accents . Writers are identified in [square brackets] and those wishing more information on a theme can refer for fuller details to the extensive reading list an the end. In selecting books for inclusion in this list, I have generally chosen one per subject. My priority has been biographical or auto biographical accounts by workers, then political accounts which I identified as general or by an interested party or group, and finally academic texts. Where ever possible , I have tried to refer to the more available and recent books , and avoid academic articles and journals. All the selections unless stated otherwise are my personal choice.

Having got your book, work with the contents list and index is then needed. Two examples : Reference is made below to the degeneration of the new bolshevik regime under Communist Party control and the source of the information is the Webbs , Beatrice and Sydney. Use of the Index of Subjects in their book will show several entries spanning more than one page under the heading 'factory committees' defined by the Webbs as shop stewards' committees. A further heading, 'Workers control and failure of ', is also fruitful. Though they were prolific and established academic authors , their books are now only available at Libraries. For USSR see below, or a recent publication, though not without limitations, is more accessible for most purposes. [Flewers].

Secondly, the source for information on the emergence of stewards pre 1900, and during WW1, was given as Edmund and Ruth Frow's volume "Engineering Struggles ". A look at the list of Contents shows the usual chronological approach, plus a unique collection of shopfloor biographies, a valuable selection of shop stewards papers or journals, and seven Appendixes, over thirty pages, of relevant information. The Index is also well constructed, and comprehensive. Despite Stalinist origins, the book is



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a goldmine . Generally books have a reading list or bibliography which can point people in their chosen direction

Getting books can be a problem : second hand bookshops are virtually non existent in London for example and rare elsewhere. However library copies can sometimes be obtained through the Inter Library Loan scheme , and judicious use of the photocopier can bring the required result. Second hand copies from bookshops around the world , through the internet by [abebooks.co.uk](http://abebooks.co.uk), or [bookfinder.com](http://bookfinder.com), etc, are sometimes amazingly cheap , but postage isn't. Be lucky anyway.

## Introductory Outline

Perhaps the primary source of the collective and co-operative society is that of age old, self organisation and land management, as practised by rural societies , and extensively in Russia for example. The struggle for land reform and collective practice can still be seen in huge tracts of the world such as Latin America and remains an integral part of the struggle .

When the values associated with this are transferred over to urban and industrial communities, we can see unionised workplace organisation, the election of representatives such as (work)shop stewards and the sequence of such activities as strikes , workplace occupations and self managed production. Discussion of demands for collective ownership , and even curiously, employer proposals of alleged steps towards this, are an indication of progress of the concept of "democratic" control. Here we are referring to "joint " or "co management", or "worker participation" and other such subversions of the grand idea. Our concern is with the workers' struggle , then but also now, and the links within them. An exciting recent book recounts selective episodes in this history and is probably the best single source for the comparison [Mason]

## 3 Origins

From the high period of the most vigorous private ownership of early capitalism comes the first identified demands for some form of collective control. These were usually linked to strikes, almost like insurrections, and were usually inadequately recorded and then often just lost. However, the

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early anarchist P J Proudhon adopted a perspective of workers control that was both and significant. This came from the various French workers after the 1840s insurrections. This and other ideas were discussed by the Proudhonists in the years around the First International, and were centred on an overall association of labour and aspects such as :

- every associated individual to have an indivisible share in the enterprise,
- each worker to take his share of heavy , dirty, or dangerous work, in the workplace and /or society,
- each to be trained for, and to do, all the operations of the workplace or industry,
- remuneration to be proportional to skill and responsibility of the job,
- profits to be shared in proportion
- each to be free to set his own hours, work as defined and leave the association at will,
- management and technicians to be elected, and work regulations to be subject to collective approval,
- office holders to be elected

[Notebooks (*Carnets* ), in Guerin] & [Mason]

Most of the ideas of industrial and political liberation of history can be implied from this list, though Proudhon's strong opposition to strikes – the most likely means of achieving the objectives – was just one of many contradictions in his theories. However it should be noted that these wide ranging discussions and formulations were before the followers of Marx and Engels realised the importance of the issues as a result of the Paris Commune of 1871.

## 4 Development

In Britain, the first organised workers movement , the Chartists, dominated the early period and its activists were influential for decades afterwards. As the century progressed so did the pressure grow for forms of workers control, as strikes among craft workers in unionised workplaces gradually replaced the customary insurrections, in some countries at least. In the UK for example shop stewards with a rudimentary workplace role began to appear in the engineering industry well before 1900, some say as earlier as the 1851 lockout. The movement was most advanced on Tyneside and



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Glasgow [Frow] . The emergence of stewards was itself manipulated by the emerging national union structure of full time officials to become a minor official within the union branch structure, that of routinely checking union membership cards and collecting money .

From local branches, the construction of the national TU organisation, within the appropriate craft or industry, however did itself evoke a response from below. The tendency of the full time officials, FTOs, to accept compromise deals on wages , hours and other conditions of work, opened up a gap between the ordinary members and the new "bureaucracy". The TU leadership was politically identified at first with the Liberals in the UK but then much more strongly with the Labour Party, and especially the parliamentary LP. This has always been a moderate and reformist body , despite the myths [Cliff and Gluckstein].

The TU leadership was acting with increasing autonomy and separation from the members - appointments rather than elections , job security and better pay than the workers, careers , and such like. Of course some were "left" and some were "right" but an old saying has it that what they have in common is much greater than what divides them.

The differentiation between shop stewards , SS, and full time officials was to become most clear in the new century when Jack Murphy spelt out the features at the start of his influential booklet on the *Workers Committees*. [Murphy] More of this later , but here we can only note that most FTOs would reject the idea of two separate movements . Some of the leadership would go on celebrate " honourable careers, [Roberts. E ] [ Goodman x 2 ] but no amount of good intentions can surmount the basic structural division inherent in the situation.

## 5 The alternative emerges

Opposition to the political road had been at the heart of the early divisions between marxists and libertarians in the First International of Workers Associations, and beyond, which is an argument about alternative philosophies that we look at briefly below. Here we are speaking about the labour movement at the workplace where there developed two approaches ;

- Acceptance of the political leadership of the TUs,

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- or self reliance , an insistence on the priority of militancy and organisation at that level.

This grew from opposition to the inevitable compromises with the existing authorities, and its advocates began to formulate their ideas. Their thinking is outlined above but were most coherently expressed within the French movement for syndicalism, with its overlaid elements of anarchism , or control from below. The French workers tradition of periodic insurrections has lasted through 1968 [ Cohn-Bendit], to the present .

Anarchism, surviving a period of destructive violence , created anarcho-syndicalism which believed that the interests of workers could be best pursued by organisation at a workplace and locality basis, This would be along trade and general structures, and upward federation. Hence the immediate material issues, like their defence or even the promotion of work issues , would benefit from the combination into collectivity. In the long term, when capitalism had been weakened by the general or mass strike, a new society would emerge from the insurrection and could use the exiting councils as a centres ; hence the workers councils were to be pre-figurative, using present structures for a socialist future. This remains a critical difference with marxist Party building organisations .

Anarcho syndicalism placed great emphasis on the accountability of the union leaders , after all they were to be pioneers of the New Order. [Rocker] . A problem arose later for anarcho - syndicalists when it transpired that capitalism could live with the general strike, especially when called by a manipulative TU leadership. [Cliff]. For now the tactic remained central.

Anarcho-syndicalism world wide - From around 1900, syndicalism itself spread widely and quickly , especially in Southern Europe and both north and south America. In Russia, there was even a Syndicalist Party to contest the field with less dynamic formations Britain was not immune as the Miners' Reform Movement in South Wales grew in strength , and its publication "*The Miners' Next Step*" remains in print even today. [Holton]. As the decade of new unionism - the less skilled getting organised - passed into the great unrest period prior to WW1 in the UK, the movement grew



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The strength of this school of anarchism is today easily forgotten but prior to world war one, it was the chief protagonist to the suffocating reformism that was the official TU programme of labourism. The breakaway movement for independent working class education is a powerful reminder of its strength in this country.

Internationally the idea took hold in much of southern Europe and South America. Its call went wider. For example, anarcho syndicalism was a component in the very powerful libertarian movement in China, which at least one writer claims had Mao Tse Tung as a member.[Dirlik]. Either way, the Shanghai workers, 1919-27, have a high place in any role of honour [Mason]

Anarcho-syndicalism as a movement, partly avoided the process of pressure from above, by having an absolute minimum of full time staff, using workers' houses as centres, local rather than national locations and having rules about personal conduct. However this did not entirely eliminate the problem. Within the CGT in Spain, a tendency which displayed the same features as the Anglo-Saxon style full time officers, did emerge, and provoked a political response to balance it. The history of the CNT union and emerging, more political FAI in this period makes interesting reading [Christie]

Finally a note on the "big picture" of the theme. Our time span concerns the last two hundred years and constant reference will be made to the attempts to apply socialism, as defined, and change society through the process of "revolution", that is direct action, non parliamentary. This is because for most of the time and places, other roads to change are blocked off, For the poor, ragged and dispossessed, the only real road to change seems this option.

Though there are numerous texts on this subject, one stands out above all; this is the American anarchist Murray Bookchin's "*The Third Revolution*". In four volumes, he looks at several of the revolutions in Europe and one in USA. Though the overall quality is uneven, its gigantic scope and attention to detail recommends itself for the reader seeking more and wider information. It is generally committed to radical change and though not an

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easy project to follow, and understand, it must be mentioned, faults and all. [Bookchin]

6. (Work) Shop stewards in charge  
Back in the advanced industrial world of large scale factories, the shop stewards movement itself extended beyond its status as a collection of rank and file bodies as a result of world war one. Parliamentary Labour groups, as Social Democrats, dutifully swung behind the nationalism of each and every country in the hostilities. The official TU leaderships meekly followed them, accepting industrial truces of some kind [Brown, G]. They were thus unable to represent their millions of members, as the war profiteers made massive amounts while union members died by the million in the trenches, or starved at home on both sides.

In such an absurd position, shop stewards were thrust from being workshop officers into leading the opposition, if not at first to the war, then against extra levels of exploitation and in defence of hard won conditions. This was the prelude to the reluctant adoption of the second role of the SSs, as an alliterative political leadership in times of crisis, of which more below.

These years saw strong movements which collectively led strikes and co-ordinated organisation geographically. This sequence was unofficial, to the anger of Labour and TU leaders, and the rank and file bodies were strongest -

- in Germany, where the Berlin shop stewards played a key role in the workers councils and their politics, with Rosa Luxemburg [Carsten] [Bourrinet] [Cliff 58] They were termed Revolutionary Obleute [Appel]
- Britain with the Clyde Workers Committee in Glasgow and similar movements in Barrow, Birmingham, Coventry, Sheffield and London in the Shop Stewards and Working Class Movement [Frow] [Murphy];
- and Italy, especially in the of Turin where Antonio Gramsci's group *New Order*, copying Britain, played a model role of socialists influencing the workers commissions [Williams]

It was particularly important in the ensuing political crisis that followed, as the incompetence of the various ruling classes resulted in revolutionary



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situations in a dozen countries, most conspicuously in Russia.

## 7. The revolutionary dimension

The second and crucial aspect of workers councils now emerged. Nobody wants the economic or political crises and the poverty they cause in society but socialists have learnt that they are inevitable. In "normal times" the developments we are speaking of seem inconceivable, but history shows their persistent emergence at crucial times.

Within an emergency, extraordinary events occur. Capitalism is basically unstable and is marked by economic collapses in either individual countries or as a whole. In this century, the situation in Argentina in 2001 [Sitrin] and the global economy in 2007 are examples. [Elliot] The political causes can often be found from the rampant nationalism that industrial bosses use to camouflage their true greedy nature of profit at all costs. Nationalism leads to war, hence crisis. [Pannekoek]

Alternatively, falling profits and market catastrophe are generally followed by industrial and social disaster, sometimes for years, like those after 1929. In such crises, workers are wise to defend their own interests. After marches and demos, and strikes, occupation of the workplaces is common. The people who are called upon to respond to the growing degeneration are the workplace representatives [Guerin]

Factory committees - they go under a variety of names in different countries, mostly simply identified as workers councils - establish control over production inside then extend their sovereignty outside. Sub committees are established to deal with social aspects. Frequently retail prices are controlled by groups of consumers - and then enforced. Groups of young people are formed, and armed, to physically defend both the workplaces and neighbourhoods. Liaison committees link up with similar federated bodies in cities and regions to facilitate co-operation in production, armed defence, transport, controls and suchlike.

These structures can be listed formally as -

- firstly, the main Council -- workers extend their control of the workplace to amend working rules conditions, as in Turin, Italy in

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1921. Strike action can be extended and this can result in a take over of the site either in the form of co-operatives as in Argentina in 2001, or outright occupations in Argentina and elsewhere. Foreign employers premises especially those who flee, are more at risk, as in Algeria in 1962 [Clegg], but can sometimes be protected by less than revolutionary governments, as in Spain 1936-8.

- federations - non centralised structures, beyond the immediate area are constructed to extend workers control, in the form of federations. [Landauer] These can be for industrial estates in Valparaiso in Chile in 1972, cities or districts as in Petersburg and Moscow, etc in 1917, regionally as in Catalonia and Eastern Spain in 1936, or nationally. as in the Central Council for Factory and Shop Committees in Russia in 1917. [Brinton]
- sub committees for specific roles, either production related or for welfare, as in Russia in 1918. On occasions these sub committees grow into area bodies which monitor social conditions in the immediate neighborhood as in Portugal in 1975 and at the women's prices committee in Nantes in France in 1968. The neighbourhood committee itself tightly controlled transport and all drivers required a permit to travel. [Cohn Bendit]
- armed self defence. For security against counter measures, workers generally appoint militias. Most remarkably, the militia of the Red Army of the Ruhr fought off the German Regular Army for some weeks in 1919. [Appel] Alternatively a liberating army can result in workers democracy, as in the Northern Expedition in China in 1926/7, or Durruti's Column in Aragon, Spain in 1936 [Paz]
- auxiliary councils. Peasant and soldiers councils can emerge either as joint bodies with workers as in Russia in 1917 or in the movement of collectives in the Ukraine under Makhno 1918-20, or in Republican Spain from 1936-8. The earliest soldiers organisation was the Regimental Agitators in the Soldiers Council of the English Revolution in 1647?. More recently the Paratroopers in the Portuguese Army in 1975 rallied to the



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inspirational slogan, and chant , “The soldiers are the sons of the people [Mailer ]

Political structures beyond these rudimentary ones are dependent on specific circumstances. Though they are even more unusual than the immediate Councils , they have existed. But that’s another story, which would tell more explicitly of a new socialist society, a new world to replace capitalism [Morris ] .

The basic features were present in most of the insurrections following capitalist crises. It is worth outlining the major occurrences of insurrections and workers’ response, of the last 100 years , and a written source for information -

Algeria 1962 [Clegg] ; Argentina 2001 [Sitrin ] ; Austria in 1918 and later [Gedye] ; Bavaria 1919 [Carsten]; Chile 1973 [Zimbalist]; China 1927 [Dirlik] ; Czechoslovakia 1969 [ Fissera] ; France 1936 and 68 [Danos] & [Cohn-Bendit] ; Germany 1918 –1923 [Carsten] & [Harman] ; Hungary 1956 [Anderson ] ; Iran 1979 [Bayat ] ; Iraq 2003 ; Ireland 1921 [ Kostick] ; Italy 1920 and 69-77 [ Hoare] & [Barkan] ; Poland 1982 [Barker] ; Portugal 1975 [Mailer] ; Russia in 1915 and later, [Brinton] ; Spain 1936 to 39 [Dolgo] ; Ukraine under Makhno 1918–20 [Arshinov] ; Yugoslavia (?)1950 [Singleton] .

## Summary

The political dimension outlined above is the lesser known aspect of workplace organisation . It is in line with the pre figurative aspect of libertarian thinking, as opposed to the party control as advocated by marxists. Its regular appearance on the historical stage, at many points around the world, speaks for its applicability. Some use the presence of workers councils as an indicator , and their absence as a signal of weakness, for example in Venezuela. For now , we shall return to our chronological narrative

## 8. Disaster

In Russia , the brutal tsarist regime, allowing no opposition, had created a perfect situation for political revolution in 1917, which was in some ways a re-run of the 1905 events . There was a widespread and popular movement but control of the new government was effectively wrested out

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of popular hands by the Party dominated bolsheviks or communists.

Lenin, aided by Trotsky , was to eliminate the workers control element in the Russian revolution by :

- ❑ rejecting outright the national Central Council of Factory and Shop Committee’s plan for a new society, and an amended version.
- ❑ bringing in a very weak Decree on Workers Control despite stiff opposition, more a plan for consultation at the workplace .
- ❑ negating the workers own *Practical Manual For The Implementation Of Workers Control Of Industry* by instructions in a state sponsored *Counter Manual*,
- ❑ amalgamating the workers councils into party controlled trade unions and other State bodies
- ❑ by-passing the soviets - second layer of councils - with State institutions, up to the governmental Commissars at national level, and allowing the secret police to disregard even soviet concerns
- ❑ imposing one man management, and other techniques, in workplace,
- ❑ over riding various decisions by workers organisations. [Brinton]

This process took some years until the crushing of the 1921 strike wave [Aves], the Kronstadt revolt [Avrich] and the Ukrainian collectives [Arshinov]. Lenin had set the pattern with the politically forcible amalgamation of the workers councils with Party run unions [Brinton] . It’s not all down to Stalin. [Woodward , 2004].

The Russian story has two elements, the factory committees , FZK, or shop stewards committees in the workplaces, and the area councils. FZKs first – the political beheading did not dissolve the workplace committees. In fact they grew over the years – over 180,000 were claimed in the “official” figures in 1932 - but as part of the state institutions . A 1933 Party conference resolution , omnibus as usual , spelt out , over 11 pages, the extensive functions and role of the committees [Webbs] Useful, but not the independent structures we know as genuine workers committees. Nor of course as the legitimate voice of workers in an increasingly non-socialist society.



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Secondly, the second tier workers councils, or soviets, had in any case been partly subverted by having a political party Executive to oversee their activities. This example of Russian exceptionalism, supervision by a political party, has not been repeated in the many insurgencies since then, despite the pivotal role of Communists in the international labour movement for decades. The bolshevik regime – entitled Soviet Union – was identified alternatively as state capitalist soon after 1921 by libertarians [Maximoff], and some trotskyists. Rudolf Rocker confirmed the categorisation a decade later [Rocker].

## 9. Workers councils

The earlier 1905 revolution – a culmination of an Eastern Europe strike wave – was the first appearance of mass strike committees becoming workers councils [Luxemburg] [Pannekoek]. Before this, general strikes had been rare, though the general strike of the Chartists has been well catalogued by a writer whose manuscripts have generally not found publication. [Jenkins] The 1905 events were greeted by some marxist writers as the foundation of institutions for a new society, as opposed to more traditional concepts in the German marxist party for example. [Pannekoek, in Smart]

Later, by 1920, perhaps the most productive opposition to leninism was workers' council communism, WCC, which re-iterated its demand for workers' control, not Party control. It was effectively a libertarian amalgam of anarcho syndicalism, shop stewards structures and the "left marxism" of people like Rosa Luxemburg and her followers. [Gorter]

The centre was located in Germany where the Communist Workers Party, KAPD, was set up in opposition to the official CP. This was not a party in the traditional sense. Later in 1933, as Hitler began his suppression of socialists, unions and racial minorities, the organisation moved to Holland. German workers resisted for years but could not reverse the defeat made easier by sectarian attitudes of Communists and Labour Parties. [Trotsky]. WCC retained its ideas, Pannekoek lived on to 1960 and it remains the organisational and political form for many who have become disillusioned with other philosophies.

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Perhaps the most useful lessons of the whole epoch comes from a writer who was successively an anarchist, marxist, trotskyist and finally an independent socialist, Victor Serge, [Serge]. The underlying question of how workers power was to operate in practice was clarified by the Russian experience, amid the dispute over workers councils. [Gombin]

## 10. Retrenchment

Elsewhere, the international business and finance class just recovered their momentum and set about rebuilding their power. Tactics varied country by country – in Italy the fascists were let in to crush the workers, while in Britain unemployment taught the workers a severe lesson, with shop stewards the first to go on the dole queue. They often went straight to the Unemployed Workers Movement [Hannington] Rulers in Germany used a fundamentally flawed parliamentary regime under which the numerous workers councils here were transformed into works councils, an employer friendly amalgam of "co management" and "participation". When the American economic failure caused general collapse, the ruling class resorted to Hitler, with all its unseen consequences.

In the USA, while there was no structured SSM as such, working class activity did provide some relief from the pattern of repression. While the syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World faced extreme repression after 1918, being much weakened first, a strike wave occurred in the thirties and despite strenuous police violence and other pressures, did make some gains. In one instance, the leaders were trotskyists in the Socialist Workers Party of the USA. The strikers in Minneapolis set up their own hospital, daily newspaper and flying pickets, and their victory set off other energetic strikes [Dobbs, 4 titles].

## Nonetheless

The 1930s has been described as "*midnight in the century*", topped off by the defeat of the workers opposition to the semi fascist regime of General Franco in Spain. This was despite a lengthy period of workers' control in Barcelona and much of the country in the East [Dolgoeff]. Here there was extensive workers delegates, collectives and communes and whole industries formed into a socialised structure – a peak of self management as powerful as it has been neglected.



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The eventual defeat, after nearly 3 years was seen by many as the last throw of anarcho syndicalism, a tragedy hardly lessened in any way by the brief extension of workers council communism, through the Friends of (Buenaventura) Durruti, the legendary workers leader. [Guillamon].

## 11. Revival in, and after, World War Two

The re-run of previous international hostilities saw a resurgence of employment, and thus the shop stewards, this time unfortunately dominated by the politically corrupted communist parties, which we examine below. With the end of war in 1945 and the post war settlement, the ensuing economic prosperity presented new problem for capitalism. Deprived of the disciplinary role of unemployment, the controllers of society reverted to an old tactic – diversion.

Historically the potential of workers socialism from the introduction of capitalism, had generally remained a latent force but it was one characterised by participation in resistance through occasional and violent insurrections. Those who constitute the authorities had always sought to channel the insurrectional movement into acceptable forms, like trade unions in individual workplaces - and of course parliament. This can be seen for example briefly in Russia 1905, or Britain and Germany after 1919. Now this policy became a priority.

Unfortunately for them, the latent organisation still found expression in shop stewards organisations, frequently unofficial or outside approved and regulated TUs. In the western industrial societies generally, the subverted drives of the employed class materialised into ever stronger workplace organisation – a constant threat to their version of civilisation, at least until recently. In the stabilised capitalist world, workers beavered away and built their union castles within factory, mine, mill, dock, hospital, school, college and even offices [Kidron]. The issue of workers control always stood behind the stewards activities, as the ruling class fully understood.

It is worth repeating the basic division in what some people still refer to as a single entity “the trade unions“. The SSM and FTO structure had developed quite different philosophies on how to proceed. Many shop stewards become union officials and one, Moss Evans, explains the

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separation. Quoted in a book on the Ford Halewood, Liverpool, factory he says that on the shop floor “you initiate action but as an official you are bound by the Agreement and the Official Procedure“.[Beynon]

This is rigorously enforced by the employers, their Federation (where applicable), senior union officials, the union Executive and General Secretary. Any minor deviation from the official Rules, and union employed officials are bound to tell strikers to get back to work, regardless of personal feelings. Another official says he is so pressurised that he begins to think of ways to prevent strikes. Conversely a shop stewards complains that officials are too complacent, “no fire in their bellies”.

Of course, looked at theoretically, this dual approach could perhaps be explained as a matter of “power over“ as against “power for“, but members respond to their actual experience and speak of this. The political affiliation division referred to above is also a big point of difference. We can only note the difference and adjust our language and politics accordingly.

## 12. In a more stable economy – the US

One committed socialist describes the existence of a “counter culture“ in post war USA which is perhaps the least propitious of circumstances in the western world [James 1958] This major book is examined further below. Later another writer was to catalogue the little known US general strike wave of the late forties [Lipsitz]. This was against the TUs as much as the bosses, and we have recorded already the universal hostility of official full time officers, to both shop stewards and workers socialism.

In the USA, the pressure towards incorporation of the unions into capitalist ideas had proceeded most strongly. Post WW2, this subversion of union activity even extended to attempting to make shop stewards and shop committee members into “managers“, later seen elsewhere [Glaberman 2002]. TU appointed stewards did sometimes act as supervisors especially in the car factories, giving rise to the phenomena known as the unofficial, unofficial strikes.

A particular problem facing workers was the creation and promotion of



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racial division by employers, which held back workplace organisation for some decades [Glaberman 1980]. A valuable autobiography spells out the effects on a black worker, even in political groups like the SWP-USA. [Denby] An academic text book writes of its gradual negation, especially during WW2 [Foner] while a miniature masterpiece examines the later *Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement, DRUM*, in the car making capital of Detroit. [Georgakas and Surkin].

## Other contributions

An overall history of modern developments encompasses some of the main historical facts up to the 1970s [Aronowitz], and a theoretical framework can be found in a carefully entitled volume about things needing un-doing [Albert]. An academic account analyses modern workplace conditions especially for clerical staff [Braverman]. There is a useful collection of the histories of working class organisers relating their stories in jargon free, readable language [Lynd]. One remnant of better days is "*A Troublemaker's Handbook*" recently re-issued. [Slaughter]

A recent book, covering both USA and UK strikes over the last three decades, has come from a writer personally active in both fields. She is comprehensive about disputes and touches on many academic aspects. She argues passionately for "union renewal" but it is unclear exactly what for – more effective collective bargaining? fairer capitalism? some form of future socialism? if so which form? . Since over 90% of her references are marxist or academic, it seems unlikely that any new ground will be broken.

## 13. The UK

In Britain, the unofficial movement was probably at its strongest. Whole sections of industrial workplaces in engineering, printing, manufacturing and parts of transport were under stewards, not FTO, or management control. A series of accounts include:

- A union convener writes eloquently about his workplace and the metal workers' stewards in Coventry [Higgs, 1969].
- A London engineering works which had advanced organisation [Barker and Rosser 1966].
- Later, brief accounts describe North London printing fathers of

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the chapel and furniture workers firmly in charge of their respective workplaces [O'Connell] & [Moss].

- Glass workers in S Helens who went on strike, primarily against their union, the grossly undemocratic G&MWU, and headed a revolt led by the Rank and File Strike Committee. [Fore (Weller)] & [Lane and Roberts];
- Liverpool car workers expose the weakness of the full time officers and the Communist Party [Beynon].
- Building workers picket out working sites around the country [Warren] from an earlier London base [Tomlinson]

Returning to the major contribution above [James], his theme, originally penned in the aftermath of the revival of workers councils in Hungary in 1956, was that, all over the western world, in peace time and stability, a form socialism exists in the factories today. A revolutionary statement in itself. This was the unacceptable message for the owners, managers and their erstwhile agents in the state, including the ambiguous union leadership. Their reply was an accusation of "sectionalism", an undoubted element in the structure, but of course their real objection was the exercise of workers power. However exaggerated and ultimately misleading his book, James had grasped the crucial fact, and shouted it out loud for all to hear.

## Their problem

This was a the age of the unofficial strike, perhaps the most typical expression of workplace power. The "British problem" was never off the television screens of the more serious programmes. A government report records just 60 official strikes against a total of 2,000 unofficial ones in 1966, amid talk of "the two systems" at workplaces [Donovan Report, 68].

Of course, stewards did "lead" the actions but only in so far as they were elected to do so. Even the Donovan Report found that SSs were a "lubricant rather than an irritant". Though attempts were sometimes made to push a particular line, many workers were acutely aware of this and would collect near the platform of mass meetings for example for verbal intervention. Stewards are the nearest thing to complete social control, as Appendix two shows.



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With this unregulated industrial action came its visible expression : working to rule , the go slow, pickets , mass pickets , flying pickets, picketing out , supporting solidarity action ; banning non union shops, products and employees ; closed shops and 100% membership ; overtime bans ; collections with or without buckets ; work-ins, occupations and production without management; by-passing union full time officials ; support committees , and all that. The expression "direct action" can be applied to much of this especially those actions out of procedure and officialdom

Perhaps a special point should be made of occupations, which reverse the normal advantages the employing class enjoy. By taking possession of capitalist property, workers give a glimpse of the way a socialist society would be run . The authorities have to resort to brutal methods quite incompatible with the alleged "democracy" we live in, unless that is they can rely on their agents the union full time structure to bail them out – one more sign of the real relationships in capitalism.

A summary of international practice is perhaps the best guide and we quote below extracts from it on working to rule, good work strikes and occupations [Fore (Weller)]

Working to rule

*Antwerp Docks 1965. 'Every conceivable safety precaution is being applied, some of them dating back well into the last century and made obsolete by port improvements. 'Locks have never been filled so slowly. It is many years since the levels were so minutely checked with a plumb line, or swing bridges so carefully examined lest a belated reveller be sleeping off a hangover on the turntable beneath,' 'Lock-keepers too have unsuspected responsibilities when it comes to identifying ships and their masters or making sure that all the fire regulations are observed. Tugs are hedged in with speed and movement regulations.' 'Priority for entry is still being given to oil tankers despite the fact that the Antwerp refineries have adequate stocks of crude oil.'* (Daily Telegraph, January 8, 1965)

*French Railwaymen: when under nationalisation, French strikes were forbidden; their syndicalist fellow-workers were delighted to urge the railmen to carry out the strict letter of the law... One French law tells the engine driver to make sure of the safety of any bridge over which his train*

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*has to pass. If after personal examination, he is still doubtful, then he must consult the other members of the train crew. Of course trains run late. Another law for which French railwaymen developed a sudden passion related to the ticket collectors. All tickets had to be 'carefully examined on both sides'. The law said nothing of city rush hours!'. (What's Wrong with the Unions, by Tom Brown. A Syndicalist Workers Federation pamphlet, p.11)*

*There have been many successful work-to-rules in Britain too. Here is an account of a struggle by a group of toolmakers after their wage demand was turned down. It took place at Standard Telephones and Gables, in New Southgate, in 1962. 'The men immediately held a shop meeting and decided to "withdraw goodwill" and lock up their tools. We then witnessed the spectacle of . ' toolmakers queuing up to use the firm's limited stock of micrometers We saw jobs 5/16' in dimension being tested for square-ness with a 2 foot square, others a few inches long being checked with a 6 foot rule, job after job being impossible to assemble because the company's angle-plates were out of square. These and countless other happenings drastically curtailed the output of jigs and fixtures, which in turn meant huge pile-ups of work waiting for tools in the production shops, The men achieved their demands!'*

*The distinction between a 'work-to-rule' and a 'go slow' is an arbitrary and often mythical one. A work to- rule is usually highly selective in its application of rules and is rarely accompanied by normal working in areas where rules do not apply*

The 'good work' strike

*One of the serious problems facing militants in general and workers in the service industries in particular, is that of isolation from the general mass of the population. This enables the authorities to whip up 'public opinion against the strikers. This isolation may be so marked a feature of certain struggles that one gets the impression that some workers, on the buses for example, see their passengers as almost as much the enemy as the boss. One way round this problem is to consider techniques which selectively hurt the boss without affecting other workers or better still are to the advantage of 'the public'.*

*Lisbon Transport Workers 1968. 'Lisbon bus and train workers gave free rides to all passengers today. They were protesting because the British owned Lisbon Tramways Company had not raised their wages.*

*'Today conductors and tram drivers arrived at work as usual, but the conductors did not pick up their money satchels ! On the whole the public seems to be on the side of these take-no-fare strikers and schoolboys are*



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having the time of their lives. Holidays have begun, and they are hopping rides to pass the time.' (The Times, July 2, 1968)..

A little known workplace occupation

An interesting occupation took place in July 1956 when some 200 clothing workers at the M. & L. Goldstein factory at Warren Street (in the West End of London) were locked out one week before their annual holiday. The factory had been the scene of a long struggle with the management, with the workers actually running the factory for two weeks and proving that the company's problems were due to defects of the management. The following account was given to the author by one of the participants. [Joe Jacobs an experienced activist who was in the Communist Party pre-war but later became a libertarian]

" 'We decided to oppose the lock-out by staging a 'stay-in', an occupation of the factory. We had to answer all the objections to this course. We were told that we would antagonise the leadership of the Tailors and Garment Workers' Union, who had been negotiating for some time', and that they would "never give us recognition". We were informed that the police would be called. Another problem was that the labour force consisted of about two-thirds women and girls. When it got to the vote almost everybody was in favour of the "stay-in". We knew that two factories in East London employing about 150 workers would strike in sympathy and that about 70 workers in the remaining unorganised factory, with about 200 employees, would also support us.

'It was decided that about half the workers would barricade themselves in the factory on the top floor. The rest including women with young children would operate from the street. This meant organising food and other supplies - which would be hoisted up in buckets.

'About 100 workers proceeded to make themselves secure on the top floor. The lift was put out of action. The one door leading from the stairs was well secured. The only way in was over the roof by way of the fire escape which, in our own interests, we could not risk closing. We knew that the police would be called in and would try to get in from the roof.

'Sure enough the police arrived and surrounded the building. In the meantime we had been busy putting up banners and posters on the outside of the windows. People gathered outside and supplies began to arrive. We felt able to continue for a long time provided the police did not intervene. But at a meeting to discuss what to do if they did, it was decided that we did not stand much chance of resisting physically as the support on the ground was not big enough.

'Several hours later the attack came. A large force of police came over the

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roof-tops and into the top floor. We had to agree to leave or face a violent struggle with very limited forces. 'Had this been a large factory with widespread external support, the police would have had great difficulty in removing us. And possibly would not even have attempted to'.

Lastly

On the subject of how-to-do-it manuals, two booklets offer practical guidance, one earlier and the other much later. [Montague ] & [ Hill]. A volume promoting the occupations of hospitals was published in the 1980s [London Health Emergency] and republished on the internet by the libertarian group, [Libcom.org](http://Libcom.org). Extracts are in the recent booklet on the NHS is 60. [Radical History Network , NE London]

The employers solution . . .

- ❑ Employers and government have of course their own ideas on what to do, and their tactics here were long term. ;
- ❑ Change the basis of the SS power by introducing more plant negotiation rather than sectional settlement - whole site Agreements replaced sectional ones ;
- ❑ Fixed pay norms, not piecework - Measured Day Work ;
- ❑ Fewer SS but more full time ones, such as senior stewards and convenors ;
- ❑ institutionalise the SS more into the official TUs as union officers,
- ❑ better internal workplace Procedures,
- ❑ minor legislative changes.
- ❑ Union education courses , paid for by government grants and left in the hands of the trusty TUC (the Russell Street branch of the employers federation), would ease the process. The training element was a process the writer was involved in for many years, subverting the integratory intention , to general approval.

In practice, Managers could often rely on the traditional methods of neutralising the SSs. These included the internal transfer, that is to a section where there was an established but moderate steward, or more drastically to an "exile " department, comprising other victims . This was a favourite with large engineering companies , Fords , Fiat, etc , where the dissidents could only influence each other. [Barkan] Neutralisation in fact.



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A second tactic was promotion. There was a time when most workplaces had an ex shop steward as a manager, and some were in charge. Senior stewards becoming Personnel Officers was common - with the expressions of "I've packed in the job but not my principles". Perhaps indeed some did help the astonishing growth of white collar unionism in the 1960s, who knows. There was always a small minority of stewards who sought self advancement - legitimate in itself but not at the expense of the workers - and hence the old refrain -

"The working class can kiss my arse ♪  
I've got the foreman's job at last ♪"

This tactic needed to be used with care, less the problem was multiplied.

A third option was the sack. Victimisation is as old as capitalism and paid labour, but does risk a collective response like that which followed the dismissal of Derek Robinson at Longbridge. The introduction of a legal right against unfair dismissal has always been more illusion than reality, as hard experience shows. Readers may also have had a similar experience, as has the writer on several occasions. There is a chapter in the Frow book on this subject and Ernie Roberts' experiences in Coventry may well be typical [Frow] & [Roberts].

Many stewards would be forced, because of private employers' black lists, to seek work in the public sector - the Post Office, or hospitals being the favourites. One other consequence of this was an enforced role as a union branch officer, then perhaps a new role as a delegate to the local Trades Union Council. The local TUCs had a long role - like setting up the national TUC - in change but their radicalism had quickly been sussed out and the TUC had banished them to the periphery of the official movement [Clinton]. This overt discrimination has only very recently been marginally reversed, 2008, with the right to send one motion to Congress.

In the event, on the larger scale, the Labour government tried out a legal manoeuvre, *In Place of Strife*, which was cosmetic and destined to fail anyway. The ensuing Tory government was more serious with its Industrial Relations Act, but this too did not succeed and the solution for them awaited the return of the free enterprise market with Margaret Thatcher. Of which, more later.

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Selected highlights of the UK SSM would include:

- ❑ An account of the unofficial struggles and leadership of the dockers 1945-89 against the Transport and General Workers Union [Hunter] and the much weaker autobiography from London [Dash];
- ❑ A relatively accurate account of the Grunwick strike by Asian women workers in London, a doubly neglected section of workers. The union leaders surrendered at the end. [Dromey and Taylor];
- ❑ Fine Tubes, the longest strike of 3 years, in provincial Plymouth where engineering shop stewards held on despite official disinterest [Beck];
- ❑ The story of the Upper Clyde shipyard worker in [Buchan] or a partisan version [Johns]. This came from the Socialist Labour League, or its successor WRP, organisations which disrupted genuine rank and filers over some decades
- ❑ The crisis year of 1972, with the Tory anti workers legislation, a high point of multiple strikes and occupations - over 30 in an incredible three months [Darlington and Lyddon];
- ❑ A striking miner writes about the crucial point in the NUM miners strike, the picket at Orgreave coking plant, the illegal police action and violence, and the eventual trial [Jackson];
- ❑ Women's memories of the 1984/85 miners strike, a modest account of the essential support work by wives, partners and campaigners [Salt and Layzell];
- ❑ The handbook of the shop stewards or union health and safety representatives as part of the expansion into occupational health in the 70s and 80s. [Kinnersley]

## 14. Women's liberation - an additional element

The discrimination against the female gender, doubling their problems, has been traditionally dealt with as part of the overall circumstances. Rejecting political solutions and their illusions, progress has been on the established practice of building in the workplace primarily, and working class social movements. The organisation then can act, and seek solidarity or support, until the immediate situation and its wider implications are resolved.



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Hence the heroines here are women who have acted to establish, or extend, workplace conditions, from cleaners [Hobbs] to factory workers at Fords [Blackman] The latter are widely credited for the Labour government's Equal Pay Act of 1970, which has bought little of the benefits promised to the sowing machinists and women workers generally.

Others within the political movement include historical figures like Sylvia Pankhurst and Alexandra Kollontai. The women in East London, and Sylvia, steered their organisation from one that demanded the right to vote to an anti-war body in WW1. She went onto associate with Antonia Gramsci, Anton Pannekoek, Herman Gorter and the first council communists. [Pankhurst] The Russian Communist party member, Alexandra, believed the battle for workers councils was lost by 1921 and fought a rearguard action in the Bolshevik party in the Workers Opposition [Kollontai]. Predictably even here the battle was defeated as Lenin manipulated the proceedings [Brinton].

Unknown champions can be identified as the women in republican Spain who carried through the socialisation of health services in and around Barcelona. This, despite wartime conditions and an international boycott imposed by Britain others, serves as an inspiration to later campaigners [Dolgoff]. An account of unskilled women in post war German factories also deserves mention [Herzog]

Finally a note on the women's support groups in the UK miners strike 1984-5. Reference is made above in their role [Salt] and elsewhere - this practical demonstration of woman's liberation is still celebrated today, especially their theme song "Here We Go ♪".

## 15. France and Italy

This section can be concluded by brief examinations of the movement in two other European countries. The early French experience was referred to at the beginning and here we can note that the Paris Commune of 1871 did show examples of workers control in a small number of workplaces. The main gains however were substantial improvements in work conditions. In 1936, in a massive strike in which the leadership was cleverly manipulated by the French Communist Party, there was a good deal of workplace activity and big gains made regarding wages and

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suchlike. These were removed in the following years by the so called Popular Front government before it too fell from office.

In 1968, insurrections threatened the existence of the state and one writer describes a workers council ready for operation while De Gaulle hovered on the brink of resignation [Cohn-Bendit]. Predictably the Communist Party of France backed the capitalist regimes against the protesters, seen as "ultra lefts" and the story of this cynical betrayal is well known.

The Italian crisis rumbled on for a decade or so from 1969 [Barkan]. Curiously, Italian workers had suffered from a domination by TUs and Communist Party of Italy from soon after the cold war hostilities were adopted in the 1945-48 period. It was more than a decade later that some workplace bodies began to emerge and not until after '68 that the pattern identified by James, was established. The three separate TU federations crumbled as the advanced workers in the industrial triangle - Turin, Milan to Genoa - exercised the militancy and aggression that amazed both the Italian Christian Democrat government and their attendant US financial backers. It was primarily among car and metal working factories that the changes were strongest.

The new Workers Movement broke the management dictatorship of the shop floor, reminiscent of Mussolini's pre war political regime. In the "hot autumn of 1969", the rank and file won a whole series of concession for 1.2m workers from the employers federation - hours reduced to 40 a week over 3 years, overtime limits and a recognition that it was exceptional not planned, scheduled accommodations for workers attending school, an extra days holiday, equal sick pay, and so on.

In addition, the right to have regular workplace assemblies in paid company time, and extra meetings before and after work, notice board rights, and to give out union literature at work in non-work hours, union subs deducted from pay with permission time off for union work and general education (150 hours); statement of personal work conditions and a fairer discipline procedure. Most importantly, the rank and file in the workplace to ratify provisional Agreements. For eleven years, strikes disrupted production. An imaginative programme of strike action - unofficial, short, rolling,



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chessboard, sabotage , all carefully planned and relentless activated - spread the gains around in Agreement after Agreement..

From our viewpoint, the system of workers factory councils comprising elected workplace reps taking priority over national union decision making, quickly became dominant in a period that exemplifies all the main themes of this document . This was a revolution in miniature.

However since all good things must come to an end, readers will not be surprised to learn that management constructed a decisive strike in Fiat in 1980 lasting 35 days that curtailed the celebrations . This had much the same effect as the year long miners strike in the UK in 1984-5 in its impact nationally. Fascist terrorism, and its pale Left version from the Red Brigades, also weakened the movement . In the following years employers re-couped some of the lost ground. For example , the cost of living sliding scale indexing of wages supplements was severely restricted in 1983, and again later. Other actions re-inforced this.

Unemployment was also used and after wards, predictably , the TUs regained their status, but many gains were not easily removed . In this brief period , the whole experience of generations were experienced and celebrated . Since we are concerned with the role of the CPI , we should note its consistently reactionary approach at a national level , but residual support among the members in the rank and file, even so .

## 16. Workplace Organisation

Finally a thumbnail note on the specific functions of the shop steward and SSM structures in the UK. The SS has classically been concerned with pay, either directly negotiating money for a sectional work group, correcting bonus errors or getting piecework rates from a rate fixer , work study "expert" or supervisor ; where overtime was worked , its distribution should be fair not subject to favouritism and sometimes according to a displayed rota ; staffing levels should be equitable, and defined by workers .

Apart from this collective function, membership representation in cases of grievance or discipline, as part of an agreed Procedure engaged many reps

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and their time, extensive note taking being often the key, as management broke agreements ; also discrimination needed to be squashed completely. In the early years, stewards would be responsible for maintaining membership, recruiting , inspecting cards and promoting shop funds.

Sometimes, before the days of the check-off, actual cash subscriptions would be collected and carried heavily home more until permanent arrangements were made . Access to large amounts of cash sometimes proved irresistible to hard up workers , and both man and money vanished. The result in some strange forms of representation – members were out of compliance and sometime therefore membership -- but the writer knows of no cases where the police prosecution followed .

## The gang system

Perhaps the apex of shop floor power was reached in Coventry factories after the first flush in WW1 but before the 1940 resuscitation. Workers combined to take responsibility for a complete stage in production, sharing work, and payment among themselves without management supervision. These gangs , with deputies and stewards could reach as many as 1,000 workers but were usually around 50. Car production flourished and in wartime so did that of aircraft. The system lasted right up to the management offensive of the 1980s. A brief but quite explicit description was spelt out by a founder ["Wright" / Rayton 1961 & 1972].

## And more

In addition , with the growing realisation that ill health and accidents were becoming a serious problem, many stewards took over a role in occupational health. Legislation , the H&SAaW Act, allowed this. Sometimes a separate union Health and Safety Representative was needed to deal with the hidden hazards of chemicals and substances used in workplaces, and the consequences of technological change. Management manipulation into a divide-and-rule tactic, involving two people, had to be resisted. Union courses to familiarise reps on H&S were far superior to management training , and some managers would actually attend these.

Lastly the union rep would often become a general adviser to the members on a whole range of topics , both from work and outside it. This informal



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function was frequently very important in keeping SS in touch with members, but was unrecognised in the handbooks. There is no single source for the paragraphs above but a volume guiding adult union students, but from a communist viewpoint, is readable and still available as second hand copies. [Lane].

One innovation is worth noting. A practice grew up of experienced shop stewards encouraging younger workers to takeover as representatives – a good steward has a good deputy -- on the condition that the older man would always be there. This seemed to reduce the average age considerably. And may have radicalised the committee!

The structures

Individual sectional reps would meet in union groups, then, frequently led by Amalgamated Engineering Union stewards, would form Joint SS Committees. [Parkside Rolls Royce, Coventry; Joint Shop Stewards Committee Standing Orders] The committees would elect their own secretary or Convenor, plus officers if this constituted a workplace union branch, and sometimes a Negotiations Committee. At RR, the Nego, a sort of EC, comprised around 10 workers who sat in the union room with the full time convenor for a half day a week. Senior stewards, or Chief Stewards in white collar unions, became an intermediary position

JSSC meetings were usually held monthly or weekly, at a fixed time and place, and attendance records scrupulously kept for publication during the next elections. The main item on the agenda would be the Convenor's report, after the Minutes of the last meeting and any sub committee issues. Combine reports could be taken if necessary, see below.

Funds; unions subscriptions were separate but sometime the deductible collectors commission were used by branch secretaries as a supplementary income in unions like the G&MWU. In contrast to this somewhat dubious practice, shop funds, complete with a neat shop card in furniture factories, would be paid into by all members - a collective account. This could become a whole site fund and some JSSCs funds were very large. The money could be used for SS's incidental expenses or attendance fees, for literature like the Labour Research journal, or as donations to strikers.

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Much was paid out to miners. In the smaller ambulance workers dispute in 1989, a SS committee at a BT factory in Enfield, who had converted their fund into a weekly "lottery", donated the profits from this – a considerable sum – to the NHS workers for the duration of the industrial action. Such funds had no official role in the union and were thus immune to the governmental seizure actions, as the movement wound down.

Report backs arrangements to the members vary but often a brief shop meeting during a meal break would suffice. In some workplaces, JSSC meetings were subsequently attended by staff union reps, as at ENV [Barker and Rosser]. Outside the workplaces, many reps went to AEU District Shop Stewards Quarterlies or T&GWU District meetings where the political issues were sometimes hotly debated. [Watts]. Elsewhere, regional and district meetings did the same role.

Workplace news sheets or shop stewards bulletins kept most members aware of the issues. Communist Party members, in the period before the deadening reformism took over in 1935, [Dewar], frequently produced their own factory and pit papers [Frow] and later the International Socialists followed the example. Journals like the *New Propeller*, later *Metal Worker*, were pivotal to the growth of one key body from WW2. [Zinkin], the Engineering and Allied Trades Shop Stewards National Council - based on the Amalgamated Engineeringworkers Union (1922 onwards). Today there are practically no organised groups in unions or industries and consequently few newsletters. Tube workers – "underground but not ground under" – produce some but perhaps the largest systematic publications are newsletter from the branches of the UNISON union, mainly in local government.

Facilities were often double edged. At first say, a union room as a permanent basis and meeting room was a considerable advantage. Sometimes members got the idea that their reps were becoming a bit too like managers in offices and some would even reject the idea of time off for union work. As usual, the knack was to be aware of the dangers and take action to pre-empt them. Hence report backs, H&S tours and so on.

Combines committees, inter workplace bodies



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As ownership became concentrated and smaller companies taken over, the need emerged for combine bodies across separate plants, to be set up. These were SS CCs, as charted by the Joint Forum of Combine Committees [JFCC]. Examples were car factories, GEC, miners panels, dockers' liaison committees., London bus drivers, etc. Perhaps the most visible was the Leyland Combine Trade Union Committee, whose response to the Edwardes Plan for British Leyland Cars rationalisation, resulted in the sacking of the Chair of the Committee, Derek Robinson, or "Red Robbo". Protest strikes achieved little. Industry combines sometimes, in the earlier decades, had political advisers, from the CP, which would turn out to be a double edged mechanism, as we shall see..

Much of this was in stewards own time, not paid time, though as the movement was institutionalised, official TU bodies were set up, and paid time off with full time convenors introduced. After the *Donovan Report*, concerted attempts were made to pull stewards into the TU structure, make them full time and to set up training courses, some useless, other constructive. See also the general point above.

Socialist or Labour?

Of course the political affiliation, or not, of shop stewards, was not universally that of socialists. Most of the time, in most of the places, the movement was quite diverse and socialists were clearly in a minority. However as in Glasgow, Berlin and Turin for example, there may well have been a majority of a sort during certain times, though the extent cannot easily be quantified.

Sections of the movement were, and are, in support of Social Democracy or Labour, and a small number were actively conservative. A very small number sought to advance themselves and their career through their role, as examined above, though probably for most stewards the initial motive was to represent work mates. We can say that many SSs, and especially those in the local leadership, were part of that conscious minority who were the engine for change – for reform in stable times and revolution in a crisis. These would have been in the vanguard section of the working class, before that title was dragged into disgrace by the political parties.

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Back to the main theme - Going up  
Industrially, the politics of rank and file socialism in the UK began to infiltrate into the higher reaches of the official TU movement, and new "left wing" TU leaders came to power. Even revolutionary political leaders had agitated on aspects of the struggle, though again avoiding, either completely or virtually, the issue of revolutionary politics [Cliff, 1966-75] Academics wrote volumes on the subject, without mentioning the revolutionary political dimensions, including those with the best left wing credentials. [Hyman].

Lastly

One final twist came near the end of the era. Joint and Combine SSCs met the threat of redundancy with imaginative plans for alternative production, using largely existing resources. Sometimes workplace occupations accompanied these. Extracts from individual accounts from this country and around the world have been collected in one volume on socially useful production [Collective Design/Projects] - a practical but visionary volume.

The TUs remained intransigent, mainly concerned with the Institute of Workers Control, but the IWC was firmly located, even by its own definition, within the TU camp of "encroaching" piecemeal on management prerogatives while ultimately defending the system. [Hyman, 1974]

## 17. The leadership of the movement

We return to the crucial issue of the political ideas of those leading the post 1940 revival [Frow]. In the UK, essentially these were those of the Communist Party of Great Britain, a strange blend of pretending to be one thing while actually being something quite different. This comprised offering an apparent lead for militancy in workplaces but moderating the overall approach regarding the political FTOs and their reforming perspectives.

The contradiction was demonstrated by the communists primary commitment to the foreign policy of Russia, as their industrial policy of "no strikes" during world war two, illustrates [Glberman 1980]. The old pre war rank and file Minority Movement had been replaced by new



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attendance at the National Rank and File Organisation conferences in 1974, and two more up to 1977. Sadly, the IS was soon to move from its libertarianism into a leninist style Socialist Workers Party, thus becoming ultimately part of the problem rather than the solution. [Steel]. The decision to disband industrial groups, rank and file journals, etc, just months before the great miners strike in 1984 has come to symbolise this transition.

## 18. Insurrections in the East

In the eastern bloc, so called "communism", or state capitalism, the actual work conditions were revealed as primitive in some places [Haraszi]. The whole edifice was shaken when workers, as alienated as any, and deprived of political expression by Stalinism, rose up in revolt. After East Berlin 1953, the best example was in Hungary in 1956 where the workers, in their councils at the workplace, displayed astonishing political and tactical acumen against armed force [Anderson]. This was after the heroic defeat in the streets. The events were to be played out repeatedly over the next three decades, in Czechoslovakia and Poland dramatically. The repression did enormous damage to world wide communism, inspired further revolts in east Europe and marked more progress potentially for workers' socialism. The political collapse came in 1989 with consequences.

## 19. The general situation outside Europe.

In Africa and Asia, labour movements became linked with struggles against the dominant powers of economic imperialism – Britain, Holland, France and most significantly the USA. Subordinate within the national liberation movements, the labour groups tended to adopt the majority Europe position of TUs, and association with parliament of course. This was both before and after the violent wars of liberation. Others were just absorbed in to the new communist societies. Either way progress of independent workers movements and organisation was slow, sporadic and uneven. There are few documents from Africa but two are outstanding - an account of a rail workers strike in west Africa in 1947, and autobiography of a militant women worker and shop steward in South Africa. [Ousmane] & [Mashinini] Our core book also has a chapter, outlining episodes of resistance [Mason].

Perhaps the last arena of struggle against open international imperialism

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has been Latin America. Here US business interests, using the willing weapons of international finance such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, still resorted to occasional ruthless military repression, committing acts that would today merit a reference to the War Crimes Tribunal, in Nicaragua, Grenada, etc. [Gonzales 1990]

A few areas of resistance can be mentioned:

- Bolivia with its strikes, councils and militias of the 1950s, and neighbourhood councils which inspired the powerful movements from 1993 [Crabtree]; [Mason]
- Argentina's explosive revolt in 2001, building on the Peronista gains of fifty years previous [Sitrin]
- Those curious south American specialities, in the form of an idiosyncratic military leaders whose reforms actually benefited the working class. Colonel Peron in Argentina has already been mentioned and the career of Colonel Hugo Chavez in Venezuela shows amazing parallels with this [McCaughan];
- The disastrous Allende experiment in Chile where he tried to outmanoeuvre capitalism [Gonzales 1999]

Note that we are excluding the state capitalist regime of Cuba whose gains were bought at harsh expense and with widespread repression, and attracts few followers.

It is important to note that the Chavez example has promoted numerous copy-cat insurrections in other countries. [Chomsky] The heavy period of overt US political dominance is now concluding and the re-structuring of capitalism will reflect a different balance of forces, though still likely to be dominated by US financial interests. Still, the day of the Bully seem numbered.. Workplace organisation has been slow to develop and has been partly state sponsored in Venezuela, raising the issue of the workers councils in Yugoslav, which came from a similar origin.

Currently the latin american struggle has resurrected the old debate among active socialists as to the nature of nationalism, liberation and the prospects for socialism. The issue of nationalism has never been resolved, beyond noting the repeated defections of national liberation leaders to orthodox theories and practice. Ortega in Nicaragua is perhaps the current example. A recent book on latin America, sub titled "Utopia Reborn",



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probably represents the apex of nationalist expectations.

Hence the questions remain unanswered - Should the nationalist leaderships of the liberation conflict always be opposed? Do the situations present a narrow window in which socialists can operate, with care? How much of the political dimension of anti capitalism should be submerged into long and short term gains? [Solidarity, 1971] When will workers again re-assert their interests? A thousand different replies can be expected.

## 20. Modern society - the decline of a movement

One event symbolised the weakening of the British SSM, though in fact anti-union laws and unemployment were contributory factors – the great miners strike of 1984/5, *Coal not Dole*. Fighting the inertia and deliberate inaction of the TU /LP leadership, the rank and file miners, plus Arthur Scargill, battled on for a year. There was an unprecedented support from other union members with workplace collections and levies, many ethnic workers with their own grievances, students, gay communities and most critically from the women's support groups. Thatcher and her allies, armed with free market dogmas, and aided by state police structures and popular press, won out in the end. There have been dozens of publications, many inspiring, but a Guardian journalist drew the most perceptive political lessons for the so-called UK "democracy". [Milne]

Other heroic struggles including the lengthy Wapping strike and siege against printworkers redundancy [Bain], and the earlier Messenger dispute in Warrington in the same cause, 1982. [Dickinson]

## 21. Future Perspectives

When Russian state capitalism collapsed in 1989, so also did the vast majority of national parties, many of which had been racked by internal dissent for years. Individuals were strongly affected. In Britain, the shop stewards movement was already under attack from unemployment and Thatcher's aggressive expression of the re-birth of new capitalism. Miners, printers, engineering workers, and dockers, etc, reeled under monetarism, neo liberalism, the free market or whatever it is called. Decades under the reformist communists was no preparation but, to be fair,

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these periodic repressions have also been successful in the past centuries as well.

Consensus, Free market, or New "Regulated" Capitalism?

Recent events have opened up the overall prospects. After all, capitalism has tried successively the modest state intervention that Keynes advised, and then the option of much reduced levels of State activity within a blind faith in market dominance [Elliot]. Total State control, as practised by Russia, has collapsed, though the performance of China is impressive, as was that of the Soviet regime between the Wars, before stagnation. The case for collective society has never been stronger but the old ownership interests are likely to resist moves in that direction. "Global regulation" whatever that will turn out to be, it seems, for a while at least, is our immediate future.

Today

The present shop stewards movement, though small, shows a more diverse leadership, with libertarianism now firmly back in the startling line. Political and economic instability, and free market uncertainties, are widening the perspectives. Most strikes are in the public sector and have a strong political dimension [Neale]. More often than not, they are of what was previously called the uniformed working class – postworkers [Clinton] [Woodward], bus workers [Fuller], fire fighters [Seifert]- and of white collar or professional workers. Strikes in manufacturing are few. [Pritchard]. The very recent outbreak of workplace occupations promise a different perspective from 2009 onwards

The working class, defined as people who depend on employment, is certainly not dead. As the statistics continue to rise, an interesting future seems on the agenda. We are now re-building with a definite purpose, and avoiding the errors of the past has a place in the strategy. The rest, as they say, is history, and we are living it now.

## 22. Conclusions

Currently workers socialism has made small advances in the post Hungary period. The moribund Movement for Workers Councils exemplified the situation – useful literature but no political or industrial strength was



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realised . The dream remains – a collective society, run by councils from workplaces and neighbourhoods , federated upwards ; production for social use , not profit ; a sustainable world ; no more nationalist ambitions or war and an all out onslaught on hunger , poverty and ill health ; no capitalism, and no State. The reality – everyday struggles for piecemeal gains and small scale rewards - until revolutionary change comes - and a belief in the future for all. [Appendix three,]. The deeper meaning of the struggle still prevails as an underlying theme [Morris].

**Appendix One - Workplace and parliamentary procedures compared**

The two systems of representation at work and in parliament are often examined together and we examine this here. For our special purposes, we would also add the structures within the national trade union system.

Firstly the period of election. In the absence of the Chartist demand for annual elections , the present arrangements are a maximum of 5 years for the House of Commons, averaging four in practice. Union fulltime officials are generally appointed for life, some for three or five years then a system of re-election by members, but some elected like this from the start . Shop stewards, for generations outside union rulebooks, are today elected for one or two years.

Next, right of recall in face of defection. MPs cannot be recalled even if they change their affiliation to that of an opposition party . This applies where Labour representatives have become Tories. FTOs can theoretically

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be held to account by members but much more frequently are subject to the wishes of the General Secretary . Shop stewards can be criticised at a shop meeting, in practice called by dissatisfied members , at any time, and removed from office on the spot. If they are recalled, FTOs frequently have difficulty getting employment , SS merely loses time off and negotiatory functions - MPs, if removed for any reason, get extremely generous pension rewards and are able to retire.

Eligibility to stand for office. MPs are selected by meetings of the local party, having been vetted by Party HQ ; FTOs are often chosen from experienced members but some are selected from elsewhere, like TU colleges ; unskilled manual workers unions would often appoint “friends” from outside where the members were not thought up to the job ; union histories speak of journalists being general secretaries in earlier periods. SS are often subject to employment qualifications and are also technically union officers with a union credential to show it.

Payment while in office ; MPs get salaries and very generous expenses, and this was a Chartist demand to ensure working people got elected. If they are ministers , extra salary follows and consultancy work , with fees, for companies or suchlike is also not unknown , even for Labour MPs. FTOs get salaries , often a car and adequate expenses. SS are usually paid by their employers only for the work they were engaged to perform but sometimes an average wage by members , and occasionally overtime pay for special work, say no more ! It is said that SS wear three hats - members rep. , union officer and as an employee - but none brings extra financial rewards.

Status MPs are regarded as parliamentary representatives, FTOs as union reps and SS's as directly elected members delegates, a slightly tighter position as the title indicates.

The final points on this topic are to note that sometimes, in political crisis in some countries , a type of industrial parliament has been set up, comprising shop stewards . These have not generally proved successful, being overshadowed by the constituent assembly of parliament.

Secondly , the pre revolutionary Bolshevik Party in Russia did appoint members to stand as Deputies in the Duma or parliament. They instituted special controls to prevent defection but the experiment again had limited success. Parliament is a law in itself it seems .



Shop stewards historyAppendix two – Contrasting approaches to social opposition, and to future perspectives

Capitalism and the associated private ownership of the means of production of goods and services, creates its own labour force of people who have no other means of existence but paid labour employment, both manual and non-manual. The polarisation of these groups, or classes, occurs as their interests are generally seen as being in opposition – money can either be used as dividends for consumption and profit for further investment, or alternatively as wages to create a better life for employees. Company Taxation, for the creation of a welfare services by the State, is generally regarded as being in the second category by capitalists, financiers, bankers, etc. Of course, the capitalist mode of production, which has increasingly dominated the world, proceeds by the irrational method of crisis-innovation- new phase – another crisis, further innovation, etc.

However absurd this system is, as very recent events show. no more sensible arrangement appears to have widespread support as yet see below.

Politics arising

The economic struggle between the two competing classes gives rise to equalling competing political forces. Capitalism has individualism, nationalism, fascism where needed, and more recently global concerns, while the labour movement has labourism, marxism or libertarianism, as outlined above. The labour view accepts capitalist categories of economic affairs, basically wages, and political advance through parliament. The catch was that parliamentary rules for a century excluded fair and equal participation by the non property owning class, It took over a century of agitation, often violent, before the comprehensive right to vote within a representative system, was achieved. Now, with the final take over of the Labour Party by capitalist ideas, this hard won right appears terminally ill. [Foot] Parliamentary apathy has now reached a point where direct action is seen as more effective.

Marxism sees clearly the inequality of capitalism. It poses the solution as the coming to power of a political party which will create a State for the new society – many equated that as Soviet Russia for decades despite the evidence to the contrary. Communism, based loosely on marxism, has for

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generations provided the staff to drive the labour movement onwards but the contradictions severely impeded their progress, as outline above. Communist shop stewards, veterans and long serving, regularly re-elected in the workplace as they were, when standing in parliamentary elections received negligible votes. And the figures got worse. In the end, so-called communism which in fact was a new formation of State run Capitalism became part of the problem, not the solution, despite their good intentions.

Libertarianism, wider than its political form of anarchism, makes a similar analysis as marxism but rejects the proposed State as the answer. This would all too soon turn into another authoritarian institution, it is argued, and the evidence of the Soviet Union under Stalin is seen as proof. The long serving USSR leader certainly deviated clearly from Marx and even slightly from Lenin, but libertarians also cite the degeneration of communist parties elsewhere in their case.

As stated above, anarcho-syndicalism sees workers councils as both the centres of resistance under present arrangements, and centres of organisation in a replacement society. Libertarian ideas on organisation do place emphasis on workers councils, and communes in living areas, federated upwards, as opposed to central bodies, as the basis of individual freedom. The main theoretician is Rudolf Rocker, a scholarly writer and effective labour organiser. Recent contributions would include a clever plan for eliminating political parties [Orr], and a survey of present groups {Franks}, as well as those mentioned above.



Shop stewards history**Appendix three****Libertarian Socialists : As We See It Now**

This is an updated version of the old Solidarity booklet.

***Our capitalist society***

*Our basic society changes little. Economic compulsion still forces most of us to work for a living, parliament mainly defends the property rights of the rich and pays a minimum regard to our threadbare legal rights and living standards. Business interests use their control of the state bodies to protect themselves while those of us who must work for a living suffer war, welfare cuts, poverty and ill health. For the retired, existence on pensions adds to the poverty and social isolation for the majority.*

*In our "democracy", we do not elect any of the tin pot tyrants or bureaucrats who run our lives at work, home and else-where. We do not live in a "democracy", just the shadow of a dream. The farce of "parliamentary representation" is increasingly ignored by voters as the private financial market intervenes more and more in our lives, employment, public health services, bookshops and even our football teams.*

***Exploitation***

*Despite the raised living standards of working people and more consumer goods, the status of the worker in the production of the world's wealth remains basically the same. Workplaces are models of tyranny. Nor has progress given the bulk of mankind much freedom in other social institutions.*

*East and West, North and South, across the globe, capitalism remains an authoritarian type of society where the vast majority are bossed at work and manipulated in consumption and leisure. The conflict between labour and capital goes on, albeit carefully camouflaged.*

*Propaganda and policemen, prisons and schools, traditional values and traditional morality all serve to reinforce the power of the few and to convince or coerce the many into acceptance of a brutal, degrading and irrational system. The "Free" world is not free. All religions still repress rather than liberate. Remaining "Communist" states are not communist and the Third World features more military despots every year.*

Shop stewards history***Resistance***

*The fantasy that workers and their families can be bought off with material goods from an ever expanding "market", and that people can only challenge on piecemeal issues anyway, ignores the long term economic instability within the system. Politicians and bosses also mistake acquiescence with acceptance.*

*Capitalism always suffers financial crises, and slumps and depressions that sometimes follow, despite periods of expansion or stability. The recent failure in 2008 exemplifies this.*

*So we believe that conditions of life and experiences in the workplace and in neighbourhoods, constantly drive the people -*

- to adopt and adapt priorities and tactics,*
- to dispute the established patterns of thought,*
- and to find methods of organisation which challenge the established social order.*

*These responses are implicitly socialist and collective. One immediate job is to overcome the fragmentation of the working class movement which is dispossessed of the means of communication, and its various sections are at fractured levels of awareness.*

***Sustainable world***

*Unplanned and excessive use of modern technology, in the name of profit, has endangered the planet and its inhabitants. Such dangers grow yearly in the globe. Climate change is the consequence of this mis-management. Only action by those determined to protect both people and nature, can achieve a sustainable society. Real Green society and the capitalist market are not compatible, despite the international Environmentalist industry and its cosmetic programme of minor reforms.*

***The alternative***

*Our alternative is a new order of libertarian socialism - the common ownership and control of the means of production and distribution. It means practical equality, real freedom, the end of oppression based on discrimination, and a radical transformation in all human relationships. Libertarian socialism is people's understanding of their environment and of themselves, their control over their work and over such social institutions as they may need to create. In any replacement society, these changes must be worked for, as the only guarantee that a genuine social transformation*



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*has taken place and no backward subversion is allowed*

**Councils**

*A new society can therefore only be built from below, and that for us means councils. Regarding the production of society's resources, decisions concerning the workplace will be taken by workers' councils composed of elected and recallable delegates from mass members meetings. Above the base level, federated liaison committees will ensure people's control, through computer aided collective planning, not centralised bodies.*

*Similar council organisation will be applied as communes to all social services, bodies and enterprises thus ensuring popular control from assemblies upwards in both production and substitute "state" institutions. All councils or communes should comprise delegates from the body concerned, plus those representing social interests. This democratisation of society down to its very roots is what we mean by 'workers' power' or "popular power", and we support effective action to promote this.*

**Action**

*Effective action, for revolutionaries, is whatever increases the confidence, autonomy, initiative, participation, solidarity, equalitarian tendencies and the self-activity of people. Sterile and harmful action is whatever reinforces passivity, apathy, cynicism, differentiation through hierarchy, alienation, reliance on representatives to do things for them and the degree to which they can therefore be manipulated by others - even by those allegedly acting on their behalf. This applies before, and after, any "change over" in the way our society, and planet, is run.*

*The primary role of all who want to promote libertarian socialism is to work for the formation, development, unity, and co-ordination of resistance to capitalism on a day to day basis. Socialists are most able to promote their aims by being active and unionised members of a workplace, and standing as delegates in that capacity. This is a primary agitational function, even for those who chose to become politically active, and one that cannot be neglected.*

*Also depending on circumstances, libertarian socialists may be active in -*

- *organisations fighting racism and discrimination against asylum*

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*seekers;*

- *the defence of the welfare state against privatisation, closure and cuts.*
- *anti war campaigns, and other fields including, in specific circumstances, possible electoral work at this stage*
- *bodies agitating for a sustainable "green" society and planet.*

*Activity in such bodies assumes the positive acceptance of organisational responsibility rather than the blatant use of "interventions" in public meetings to recruit membership. People will become politically active on the basis of the performance, humanity and example of existing socialists, rather than lectures and rehearsed speeches*

**Part of the problem not solutions**

*The trade unions and their Labour Parties started life with many supporters wanting to change society radically. But these bodies have come to terms with the existing patterns of exploitation. In fact they are now essential for exploiting society we live in to continue working smoothly. The unions act as middlemen in the labour market. The political parties use the struggles and hopes of the ordinary people for their own ends. The degeneration of working class organisations, itself the result of the failure of the "revolutionary" movement, has been a major factor in creating working class apathy, which in turn has led to the further degeneration of both parties and unions. Racism, or even fascism, in society is a frequent secondary consequence.*

*Meanwhile, the trade unions and political parties cannot be reformed, 'captured', or converted into instruments of liberation. We don't call however for the proclamation of new unions or parties, which, in the conditions of today, would suffer a similar fate to the old ones. Nor do we call for militants to tear up their union cards, but to work with the rank and file in workplaces, unions and action alliances*

**The marxist diversion**

*By their convoluted ideas, rigid hierarchical structure, and destructive activities, bolshevik and similar types of leninist political Parties have discouraged this kind of socialist understanding and prevented mass participation. The idea that socialism can somehow be achieved by an elite*



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party (however apparently 'revolutionary') acting "on behalf of " the population, is both absurd and reactionary. "Party" led action has been shown repeatedly to end in defeat, isolation or political corruption.

**Anarchism**

After the decline of more prescriptive sets of ideas, many believe that in modern society, libertarian organisation is the remaining hope. Those active as a result of, or a belief in, anarchist ideas have had a powerful, if hidden, influence in such resistance over a historical perspective. Anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism, though excluded from academic and orthodox theories, can point to a much less disastrous history than those more favoured institutions. Consequently it is increasingly widely thought that a new society of libertarianism is the hope of a disillusioned world.

**Direct action not parliament**

No ruling class in history has ever relinquished its power without a struggle and our present rulers are unlikely to be an exception. In any move to a fairer society, power will only be taken from them through the conscious, autonomous action of the vast majority of the people themselves. Building up for this, Libertarian Socialism advocates forceful direct action. This method has repeatedly shown itself as the one that gets results. It bypasses the parliamentary road block by using mass action.

We see the right to vote as one weapon in the overall strategy and do not propose abstention as others do. However it is largely a negative power to prevent the worst option, as parliamentary majorities will achieve very little within that framework. Instead we propose the popular form of society outlined above. In the meanwhile we could accept the idea of voting for issues, rather than political parties. Subsequently "voting" may have a consultative role.

**The political core**

It is clear from the experience that political parties cannot organise the social transformation that is the libertarian revolution. There needs to be a general plan. To achieve the new order, we propose a co-ordinating political organisation to oversee activity: to respond, think, discuss, plan, liaise, propagate, suggest tactics, guide, prepare, communicate, administrate but not centralise, within the overall strategy outlined above.

Shop stewards history**26. Reading references –****by surname, alphabetically with very short notes.**

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- Joanne Barkan,: *Visions of Emancipation – the Italian workers movement since 1945* [1984 USA, 266 pp] a conventional academic text, but notable for its scope and direct sources ;
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before the main author became a conventional green Party politician in Germany;

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Hugo Dewar,: *Communist Politics in Britain – the CPGB from its origins to the second world war* [1976,159 pp] ; useful, if not faultless, story of the whole decline ; from trotskyist perspective ;

Mark Dickinson , : *To Break a Union - the Messenger, the State and the NGA* . [1984, 209 pp], very detailed account of employers use of anti union laws to defeat workers resistance ;

Arif Dirlik, : *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution* [1991 USA, 326 pp], tells of events in China before 1930, now largely forgotten , but still instructive ;

Farrell Dobbs, : *Teamster Rebellion* , [1972 , USA, 185 pp], *Teamster Power* [1973, USA, 255 pp] *Teamster Politics* [1975, USA, 257 pp] *Teamster Bureaucracy* [1977, USA, 304 pp] comprehensive account of three teamster [drivers] strikes in 1934 ;

Sam Dolgoff, editor : *The Spanish Collectives - workers management in*

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*the Spanish Revolution 1936-39* [1990 Canada , 194 pp]; American anarchist summarises some of the life transforming social experiments during Spanish revolution ;

Lord Donovan . : Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers Associations [1968, 352 pp]; exhaustive government report outlining the nature of their problem :

Jack Dromey, & Graham Taylor : *Grunwicks - the workers story* [1978 , 207 pp] ; unorganised Asian women workers take on bosses, union leaders and labour government ;

Larry Elliot, and Dan Atkinson : *The Gods That Failed – how blind faith in markets has cost us our future* [ 2008, 327 pp] journalists tell an inside story ; economics made readable ; already out of date .

Vladimir Fisera, , editor : *Workers Councils in Czechoslovakia: documents and essays*. [1978, 199 pp] ;standard account but ambiguous ref origins ;

Paul Flewers ,: *A New Civilisation ? understanding the Soviet Union 1929-41* [2008, 299 pp] examines the nature of USSR and its impact on UK , somewhat traditional ;

Paul Foot,: *The Vote – how it was won and how it was undermined* [2006, 506 pp] ; perhaps the best book by the ace investigative journalist and writer ;

Philip S Foner,: *Organised Labor & the Black Worker, 1619- 1981* [1974, USA, 492 pp] ; classic text on a much neglected aspect of black liberation ;

Mark Fore, (Ken Weller) *Strategy the Industrial Struggle* [1972, 24 pp] Solidarity best single source on workshop practice. Should be reprinted complete, not just core text, as currently on line;

Benjamin Franks: *Rebel Alliances – the ends and means of contemporary British anarchisms* [2006, 473 pp] , comprehensive and thorough survey, unusual in this movement ;

Eddie and Ruth Frow, : *Engineering Struggles - episodes in the story of the shop stewards movement* [1982, 496 pp], probably the most essential volume on our subject, by lifelong engineering worker and his partner, both CP , who jointly left an extensive library on working class history ;

Ken Fuller, : *Radical Aristocrats - London bus workers from the 1880s to the 1980s* [1985, 256 pp] ; FTO tells neglected story of T&GWU members on the buses , often dissident ;

G E R Gedye,: *Fallen Bastions* [1939, 519 pp] ; old Left Book Club, old



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pre war book but still the main source ;  
 Dan Georgakas, and Marvin Surkin : *Detroit , I Do Mind Dying – a study in urban revolution* [1975, 1998 USA, 276 pp] ; outstanding analysis of black car workers of Detroit and their attempts at rudimentary organisation  
 Martin Glaberman,: *Punching Out and Other Writings* [2002 USA, 220 pp] ; comprehensive collection of US factory literature and attempted political organisation , over the years  
 Martin Glaberman : *Wartime Strikes - the struggle against the no strike pledge in the UAW during world war 2* [1980, 158 pp] ; informative volume , shows how racism was broken by unity ;  
 Richard Gombin,: *The Radical Tradition – a study in modern revolutionary thought* [1978, 153 pp]; popular, if incomplete, exposition of workers council communism/socialism ;  
 Mike Gonzales, : *Nicaragua - what went wrong ?* [1990, 141 pp] ; summary of his previous writings on US repression of a national liberation movement in latin America,  
 Mike Gonzales, : *Revolution and Counter Revolution in Chile* [1999, 32 pp] reprint from article in International Socialism series 2 /60, and title commandeered as well ; little detail of workers action ;  
 Geoffrey Goodman : *Brother Frank - the man and the union* [1969, 128 pp] popular illustrated biography of the veteran union leader and peace campaigner ;  
 Geoffrey Goodman ; *The Awkward Warrior – Frank Cousins , his life and times* [1979, 616 pp] standard biography, detailed and comprehensive ;  
 David, Goodway editor : *For Workers' Power – the selected writings of Maurice Brinton* [2004, 379 pp] which includes useful accounts of debate over original publications, plus reprints of his three main works ; preliminary history of *Solidarity for workers power* in effect ;  
 Herman Gorter, : *An Open Letter to Comrade Lenin* [1921, 1995, 41 pp] fundamental statement of council communism where Lenin is out argued ; still in print ;  
 Herman Gorter, : *The Organisation of the Proletariat's Class Struggle*, [24 pp] reprinted in Smart  
 Daniel Guerin,: *Anarchism - from theory to practice* [1970, USA, 166 pp] ; an ex marxist attempts to relate the two big ideas , perhaps required reading for the comrades ;

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Agustin Guillamon, ; *The Friends of Durruti Group 1937-1939* [ 1996, 114 pp] concise story of breakaway group from anarchism in Spanish revolution , belatedly confirming workers council communism/socialism ;  
 Wal Hannington, : *Never on Our Knees* [1967, 368 pp], autobiography of AEU shop steward turned unemployed workers leader, then FTO, who never quite surrendered his soul to CPGB ;  
 Miklos Haraszti, : *A Worker in a Worker's State - piece rates in Hungary* [1977, 175 pp] ; one of the few volumes on conditions in workplaces ;  
 Chris Harman, : *The Lost Revolution - Germany 1918 - 23* [1982, 330p] ; political account largely but some info on the main struggle ;  
 Marianne Herzog, ; *From hand to Mouth – women and piecework*, [1980, 155 pp] post war Germany , somewhat marred by the substitution of authors self introduction by a Party political one ;  
 Philip Higgs, : *An Account of Work - the convener* [25 pp] in *Work 2*, edited by Ronald Fraser, [1969, 365 pp] ; very capable shop steward summarises the situation in midlands car factories and union structure , from CP origins.  
 “Joe Hill, “ ; *The Activist's Guide to Industrial Action* [1998, 36 pp] Reading Unison, includes advice ref anti union legislation ;  
 Quentin Hoare, , ed. : *Antonio Gramsci - Selections from Political Writings 1910-1920*, [1977, 393 pp] essential volume , self explanatory, regarding an attempt to apply socialist ideas to Italian SSM ;  
 May Hobbs, ; *Born to struggle* [1973, 174 pp], east London autobiography of cleaner, unfinished .  
 Bob Holton, : *British Syndicalism 1900-1914 – myths and realities* [1976, 232 pp] informative volume about the ideas behind the “great unrest “ before WW1, assess British syndicalism as more powerful than commonly thought;  
 Branko Horvat, , Mihailo Markovic and Rudi Suprek : *Self-governing Socialism, ; a reader , vol 1 historical development social and political philosophy* [1975, 491 pp] ; three Yugoslav academics predictably defend state participation in workers councils ;  
 Bill Hunter, : *They Knew Why They Fought - unofficial struggles and leadership on the docks 1945-89* [1994, 140 pp], useful look at rank and file organisation and workers in Transport and General Workers Union; trotskyist origins ;  
 Richard Hyman ,: *Strikes* [1972, 184 pp] ; popular, if flawed, academic



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text on workplaces in action and related issues ;  
 Richard Hyman, : *Workers Control and Revolutionary theory – an appraisal of the publications of the Institute of Workers Control* [27 pp] in  
 Ralph Miliband, and John Saville : *The Socialist Register* [1974, 372 pp]  
 ; a thorough analysis of the apparently radical IoWC ;  
 Bernard Jackson, with Tony Wardle : *The Battle for Orgreave* [1986, 120 pp] ; rank and file striking miner presents the case against police repression, typical of the dispute. This crucial picket was the subject of tv manipulation, never corrected ;  
 T A Jackson,, *Solo Trumpet – some memoirs of socialist agitation and propaganda* [1953, 166 pages ] reflections of an intellectual ;  
 CLR James, as J R Johnson, Grace C Lee and Pierre Chaulieu ( Cornelius Castoriadis) : *Facing Reality : the new society, where to look for it , how to bring it closer* [1958, USA (listed under Lee ?), 174 pp]. extremely relevant political and industrial critique on the practice of workers socialism, subsequently neglected by James despite evidence. ; first account in English of the re-birth of the movement after Hungary ;  
 Mick Jenkins,: *The General Strike of 1842* [1980, 300 pp] ; details the first general strike ;  
 Stephen Johns, ; *Reformism on the Clyde – the story of UCS* [1973, 128 pp] trotskyst - SLL – collection of articles, which does provide a form of critical account of a sort ;  
Joint Forum of Combine Committees, *The Combine Organisation Handbook*, [1984, 58 pp] a practical manual on rank and file SSSC organisation, hopefully of more than historical importance ;  
 Michael Kidron,; *Western Capitalism Since the War* [1968 , 196 pp] ; pleasantly straight forward explanation of factual post war political situation by founder member of International Socialists , later SWP dissident ;  
 Pat Kinnersley, : *The Hazards of Work – and how to fight them* [ 1974 , 394 pp] the union safety reps “bible” but a lot more useful than that. Workplace awareness of atmospheric contamination proceeded those of society as a whole by some decades ;  
 Alexandra Kollontai, : *The Workers Opposition* [1921 & 1961, 70 pp] well publicised account of the last stand of the resistance to bolshevism and state capitalism ;  
 Conor Kostick, : *Revolution in Ireland – popular militancy 1917 to 1923*

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[1996, 239 pp] ; excellent comparison of workers and military power in particular ] ;  
 Gustav Landauer, : *For Socialism* [ 1911 Germany & 1978 USA , 150 pp], main volume of life long socialist and martyr of the Bavarian revolutionary government ;  
 Tony Lane, : *The Union Makes Us Strong* [1974, 320 pp] well written attempt to explain contradictions in CP industrial policy, caused political row, curiously titled ;  
 Tony Lane, and Kenneth Roberts : *Strike at Pilkingtons* [1971, 266 pp] detailed account of the dispute against union leadership from the viewpoint of the R&FSC ;  
Leyland Combine Trade Union Committee : *The Edwardes Plan and your job – a trade union response to the Edwardes Plan* [1979- 16 pp] published by the LCTUC, not TUs ;  
Libcom.org ; internet site with comprehensive but compact factual information on history and politics ;  
 George Lipsitz,: *Rainbow at Midnight* [1994, USA, 359 pp] ; revealing story of US wave of unofficial general strikes post WW2 but politically inconsequential ;  
London Health Emergency ; *Health Workers : Occupy and Win* ; [1984, 50? pp] practical guidance on occupying for health workers , still a useful guide . See the internet update at Libcom.org  
 Rosa Luxembourg,: *Mass Strike - the political party and the trade unions* [1907 & 1986, 90 pp] ; marxist writer comes to terms with mass general strikes, attempting to challenge orthodox marxist German Party politics ; foundation document for WCC ;  
 Alice and Staughton Lynd, , ed : *Rank and File - personal histories by working class organisers* [1973, 297] ; includes those of black and women workers , basis of union films ; unique volume on setting up workplace organisation. ;  
 Phil Mailer, , : *Portugal, the impossible revolution*, [1977, 399 pp] ; model account of revolutionary events and their curious ending ;  
 Emma Mashinini, : *Strikes Have Followed Me All My Life* [1989, 142 pages ] a unique insight into the life a South African worker , shop steward and FTO. ;  
 Paul Mason,; *Live working or Die Fighting – how the working class went global* [2008, 304 pp] exciting and exuberant selection of episodes in



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history, and twinned with events today. Journalist style but readable introduction and good single source for our concerns ;

Gregory Petrovich Maximoff,: *Bolshevism, promises and reality* [ 1935 and 1990 ?, 35 pp ?] early text with critique of state capitalism ;

Gregory Petrovich Maximoff,: *Constructive Anarchism [ 1927 & 1950, USA, 152 pp]* ; *basic statement of its relevance*

Gregory Petrovich Maximoff,: *The Guillotine At Work*, 2 volumes, [1940 & 1975 USA, 555 pages ] one of the first descriptions of leninism and stalinism's elimination of opposition ;

Michael McCaughan, : *The Battle of Venezuela* [2004, ] ; journalistic account of Chavez challenge to old elite and their US backers, very readable and jargon free ;

Seumas Milne, : *The Enemy Within – the secret war against the miners*, [1995, 511 pp] ; perceptive analysis of the aftermath of the miners strike and exposes the real workings of our so called “ democratic” state ;

Ken Montague, ; *Going on strike – rank and file handbook no 1* [1979, 24 pp] useful practical guide.

Jack Moss,; *The London Furniture Workers Shop Stewards Council* [10 pp] in Alan Woodward, editor, : *Fragments - episodes in local labour history*, [1998, 120 pp :] informative and unique ;

JT Murphy, : *Preparing for Power - a critical study of the history of the British working class movement* [1972, 296 pp], written with much hindsight after his communist period ;

JT Murphy, : *The Workers' Committee - an outline of its principles and structure* [1972, 26 pp] original booklet dealing with the Sheffield WC, and the role of the SS&WCM in Britain.

Jonathan Neale, : *Memoirs of a Callous Picket* [1983, 107 pp], informed, humorous and political account by NHS shop steward during early strikes.

Mac O'Connell, : *The Chapel and the Rank and File in the North London print*, in vol 1, Alan Woodward, editor, : *Fragments - episodes in local labour history*, [1998, 120 pp ] inside story ;

Akiva Orr, : *Politics Without Politicians* [2004, 36 pp], veteran Israeli writer advocates computer based proposals ;

Sembene Ousmane,: *God's Bits of Wood* [1960, 245 pp] significant novel about 1947 rail workers strike in West Africa, in unusual format ; the author was an experienced union activist, film maker and writer ;

Sylvia Pankhurst, ; *The Suffragette Movement* [1977, 631 pp] the author was prime mover in development of the women's group to a

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workers' one, and also a leading council communist in opposition to the Russian Communists ;

Anton Pannekoek, ; *Marxist Theory and Revolutionary Tactics* [22 pp] reprinted in D Smart, ],. Slightly more perceptive document than Luxemburg's after mass strike wave ending in 1905 revolution ; the Dutch core of council communism were prominent at the time ;

Anton Pannekoek, : *Workers Councils* [1947 & 2002, 219 pp] fundamental text on workers councils and their German Workers Communist Party, KAPD ;

Parkside (Rolls Royce) Joint Shop Stewards Committee, Standing Orders, the writers copy

Will Podmore, : *Reg Birch ; engineer, trade unionist, communist* [2004, 308 pp] ; recent narrative about UK metal workers leader, of maoist outlook, and of surprising depth ;

Trystan Pritchard, and Ian Edwards : *On the line - the story of the 'Friction Dynamics' workers* [2005, 159 pp] full account of long running strike in North Wales ; lists all strikers and pictures their families ;

Pierre Joseph Proudhon: *The General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century* [1989 301 pp] ; mixture of ideas from contradictory anarchist exponent ;

Radical History Network, NE London ; *The NHS is 60* [ 2008, 64 pp] selection of articles on libertarian analysis of health services ;

Dwight Rayton, ; *Shop Floor Democracy in Action* [1972, 31 pp] longer version of Wright – also probably a pen name, of Coventry shop stewards in control of car and engineering factories ;

Ernie Roberts, : *Strike back* [1994, 300 pp] autobiography of life long union leader and anti racist, companion volume to the earlier book on *Workers Control* [1973, 308 pp] ;

Rudolf Rocker, : *Anarcho - syndicalism* [ 1938 & 1989, 166 pp] ; probable the most comprehensive single volume on labour history and political theory ;

Chrys Salt, and Jim Layzell : *Here We Go ! : women's' memories of the 1984/85 miners strike*, [1985, 88 pp] ; illustrated, eye witnesses, brilliant exposition of women's liberation in practice ;

Roger Seifert, and Tom Sibley : *United They Stood – the story of the UK fire-fighters dispute 2002-2004* [2005, 304 pp ] comprehensive account but



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the book has been overtaken by post strike union changes ;  
 Victor Serge, ( Victor Kibalchich) ed Peter Sedgwick : *Memoirs of a Revolutionary, 1901-1941* [ 1967, 401 pp] ; perhaps the best publication by the best writer of his age ;  
 Marina Sitrin,: *Horizontalism – voices of popular power in Argentina* [2006, 255] ; includes a movement index, and many personal contributions, essential reading ;  
 Fred Singleton,: *Workers self management and the role of trade unions in Yugoslavia, [1970, 36 pp]* in Coates, ;  
 Jane Slaughter, ed : *A Troublemakers Handbook - how to fight back where you work and win* [ first edition -1991 & second 2005, USA, 372 pp] ; readable, illustrated, funny, only mildly academic , politically reasonable ;  
 D A Smart, : *Pannekoek and Gorter's Marxism* [1978, 176 pp] coherent paperback edition of basic writings on the two theoretical founders of council communism or socialism  
Solidarity ; *Third Worldism or Socialism ? in Ceylon : the JVP Uprising of April 1971* [1971, 6 pp] ; re-statement of socialist case against nationalism and national liberation movements, now a little dated ; the issue remains ;  
 Mark Steel,: *What's going on ?* [2008, 252 pp] amid family breakdown and anti war campaigns, a political disillusionment emerges with the true revolutionary Party ;  
 Bob Stewart : *Breaking the Fetters ; the memoirs* [ 1967 , 166 pp] perhaps the model autobiography;  
 Ricky Tomlinson, : *Ricky* [2003, 370 pp] ; popular life story of a Shrewsbury picket ;  
 Edward Upward ,; *The Spiral Ascent trilogy. In the Thirties* [1969, 236 pp], *The Rotten Elements* [ 1979, 224 pp] and *No Home but the Struggle* [1979, 293 pp] truthful account of a CPGB members problems;  
 Hilary Wainwright, and Dave Elliot : *The Lucas Plan - a new trade unionism in the making* [1982, 280 pp] ; perceptive investigation of workers plan to revolutionise production in favour of socially useful machines ;  
 Des Warren ,; *The Key to My Cell – by Shrewsbury picket* [1982, 319 pp ] account by victim of bosses, TUC, Tory and (Old) Labour governments, a story typical of many untold ones ;  
 Alan Watts , : *An Agitator and an Engineer* [25 pp] in Alan Woodward,

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editor, : *Fragments - episodes in local labour history* , vol 1, [1998, 120 pp  
 Sydney Webbs , and Beatrice : *Soviet Communism : a new civilisation ?* [1935, 1174 pp] . uncritical view of Russian state capitalism by UK right wing labourists and Fabians ;  
 Ken Weller : *Don't be a Soldier - the radical anti war movement in North London 1914-1918* [1985, 96 pp],  
 Ken Weller : *Strategy for Industrial Struggle* , Solidarity pamphlet 37 [1972 ? , 28 pp];  
 Gwyne A Williams,: *Proletarian Order - Antonio Gramsci, factory councils and the origins of Italian communism 1911-21* [1975, 370 pp] model history of socialist influence on workplace committees, despite later deviation ; a strong syndicalist input ;  
 Alan Woodward, : *Party Over Class ; how Leninism has subverted workers council organisation* [2002 - second revised edition, 77 pp] re statement of the case for workers council communism or socialism, using both marxist and libertarian texts ;  
 Alan Woodward, ; *Ford Visteon Enfield Workers Occupation – an eyewitness account and first thoughts* [2009, 60 pp] ,  
 Alan Woodward, ; *The NHS is 60 – understaffed , under funded and undermined* [2008, 64 pp] .  
Workers Council Socialism , *As We See It Now* , [2008, 8 pp] re-statement of the old Solidarity fwp document in council communism formation , by a movement with few supporters as yet ;  
 Reg Wright, : *The Gang System in Coventry* [ 7 pp] in *Anarchy 2* , 1961, reprinted in Colin Ward , ed , : *A decade of Anarchy 1961-70* [1987 , 283 pp] short but crucial description of lost traditions of workplace organisation in engineering and car factories ; see also Rayton .  
 Peter Zinkin, : *A Man to be Watched Carefully* [1985, 168 pp] ; detailed account by CP political journalist covering early developments in aircraft workers SSM in 1930s.