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SOLIDARITY

*for workers'
full control*

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Comprehensive Schools

Purges in Perivale

Letter to the IWC

Swedish Miners Strike



Metal Box (Acton)

[WEST LONDON] No.3

SOLOARTY

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THE INCREDIBLE TRUTH OF ACC

Alperton Carton Company, Alperton, Middx is controlled from Cadby Hall. As a satellite firm of Joe Lyons' catering and food empire it makes and supplies many of the containers, cartons and food boxes for Lyon's food products. In May '69 an unprecedented purge of shop floor activists took place here. It was instigated by the local SOGAT (1) Branch Secretary and it shook the membership to the core. Feeling his authority threatened by an increasingly well organised shop floor the petty officer in question took a conscious decision to collaborate with the management to regain control of the situation. Realising they had common objectives the management were only too pleased to use him. Together they proceeded to utterly destroy job organisation and chapel power.

The article below is the testimony of one of six men expelled from the Society and subsequently sacked from ACC.

KNOW YOUR ENEMY.

- Weintroub - General Manager, Promoted to director May 13th 1969 for services rendered to Cadby Hall.
- Keir - Weintroub's 'heavies'.....
- Morrisonfurther description not warranted.
- Moakes - Branch Secretary of SOGAT, Division one; RIRMA, since Oct., '67.
- Hutchinson- Assistant to the Branch Secretary since Oct., '67.

A NEW MOAKES SWEEPS CLEAN ?

Messrs. Moakes and Hutchinson became branch officials in late '67. At a meeting of Alperton Carton members the new branch secretary claimed that he would like to see ACC, a closed shop with the women organised as well. He offered every assistance and parted on a high note - "Buy some aspirin for Weintroub, he'll need them".

THE STRUGGLE FOR 100% ORGANISATION.

In May '68 I was elected onto the chapel committee (equivalent to the shop stewards committee - Eds.) The struggle to organise had already got under way. In the same month the whole factory (our chapel and the machine chapel) downed tools to pressurise two right wing student temporaries into joining SOGAT as the majority of student temporaries already had.

(1) SOGAT - Society of Graphical and Allied Trades - Britain's largest print union.

The message from the branch was "use your own initiative". We did. Representatives from both chapels demanded the sacking of the two scabs. The management capitulated to shop floor pressure within 90 minutes. We realised that the two chapels working together had the power to force management to negotiate directly with us rather than go over our heads. The Branch should have been pleased. It saved them a journey. In August '68 I was elected FOC. (Father of Chapel; equivalent of a convenor - Eds.)

TAKE YOUR HANDS OFF YOU NAUGHTY BOYS.

At this time attempts to help the women organise were paying off. The management reacted by threatening to sack any men caught fraternizing with the women about union affairs. Subsequently they accused two members of our chapel committee of intimidation. The branch investigated the allegations and found no evidence to substantiate them. Even the women denied it.

MANAGEMENT GET STUCK IN.

At the beginning of the new year the chapel committee were informed of a management decision to begin operating a glueing machine on the night shift. We reported that several porters were willing to work night shift, but none of the existing machine glueing operators were interested. Keir and Morrison reacted threatening all five operators and myself with the sack. We informed the Branch and suggested they carry out a review of labour relations as the management seemed to be bent on provoking myself and other members of the chapel committee. The branch secretary commented that.... "Anyone who refuses to do night shift is in the wrong industry".

WAY OVER OUR HEADS.

14th January: We waited several hours for the branch secretary to appear at the factory to talk with management. Eventually I phoned the Branch to be informed that Weintroub had just visited the branch secretary to discuss certain agreements. A complaint was sent to the Branch expressing the shop floor's anxiety over the deliberate exclusion of shop floor representatives from talks affecting the welfare of the members at ACC. A further complaint was sent about the increasing number of "brown coats", supervisors and non-organised workers operating machinery. There was no reaction from the Branch about either complaint.

WEINTROUB TAKES THE BRANCH LINE.

23rd January '68 : Management announced their intention of bringing in night shift workers on a Sunday. I informed them that it had always been customary for day shift workers to get preference. The day after I was called into Weintroub's office and handed the phone. Hutchinson, Moakes assistant, was on the line and told me not to take "unofficial" action. He further commented that Weintroub had drawn his attention to a note signed by a member of chapel alleging that I as FOC had threatened to branch and fine this particular member to the tune of £10 or £20 if he attempted to work overtime on a Sunday. I denied the allegation. The General Manager then took the phone and in front of my face asked the assistant Branch

Secretary of "my" union if there was any objection if he sacked me there and then. Hutchinson replied that it would be "inadvisable".

ENTER THE FINGERED MAN.

The chapel member concerned was brought into the office. He denied ever being threatened by me, but remembered signing a slip that Morrison had passed under his nose while he was working. He didn't even read it. (This statement was later repeated to both Branch and chapel.) Weintroub wasn't interested. He seemed to be going out of his way to sack me. He warned that he would if the matter wasn't cleared up

WALKOUT.

I reported back to the chapel committee stunned that the Branch had given me no support and upset at a second frame-up. Later the chapel chairman approached me and said that the committee had demanded a meeting with management. It had been refused and the whole chapel was about to walk out. Not wanting to be 'got' on the rule book I advised them to return to work and negotiate. They refused to listen to me and I was bloody glad. Chapel decided to stay out until a branch officer arrived, having no intention of waiting for Moakes to promise to come down and then not turn up at all. The men clocked out and returned the following morning with a partial victory under their belts. (Continued below)

Of crucial importance to the 'Worker Control' movement in Britain today.....

THE GREAT FLINT SIT DOWN STRIKE AGAINST

GENERAL MOTORS 1936-37.

This pamphlet deals in depth with how the American auto workers planned, executed and internally organised their occupation of the Flint plants. The part played by the 'red' women's brigade; the tactics of management, police and state officials; and the role of the AFL bureaucracy are all gone into. Available from Solidarity (North London), c/o H. Russell, 53A Westmoreland Rd., Bromley, Kent.

VIOLENCE IN COURT.

In the face of extreme provocation I had tried to act within the rule book so I was flabbergasted to receive a summons to a Branch investigation.

February 12th. Moakes was hostile throughout. They charged me under Rule 20; Clause 9, (2) of "conduct, act, or acts, directly or indirectly detrimental to the interests, welfare, or reputation of the Society." I was severely reprimanded, fined £5 and banned from holding union office.

(2) The old umbrella clause - a device used by all the larger unions to squash critical voices among the membership.

COUNTER-ATTACK/SOGAT HOUSE TAKES EVASIVE ACTION.

With the help of two socialist law students and the support of chapel I lodged an appeal with the Executive Council. They claimed that it was't in on time, but this was dropped when I produced a dated certificate. The appeal procedure was fantastic and seemed designed to give the average member no chance at all. The Appeals Committee met on 25th of March to consider the long written statement submitted by myself. They decided that I had been wrongly convicted and my appeal was upheld. The five lads convicted with me did'nt think it worth appealing so their fines had to be paid.

A MOAKES NEVER FORGETS.

In mid April I attempted to stand for election to FOC again. Moakes claimed that this was impossible as he was appealing against the EC's decision in my case. This move was smashed when Briginshaw the General Secretary ruled that I was eligible to run for office. Meanwhile chapel organisation was becoming increasingly efficient. The management were visibly worried.

GUESS WHO GOT A WHITE COAT FOR CHRISTMAS.

On April 29th Weintroub sacked a Ceylonese bloke for swearing at a woman worker. Management refused to listen to anybody and insisted on sacking him. At lunch break the following day I bumped into a number of men on their way to pressurize the FOC into convening a meeting as they were'nt satisfied with Bill's claim that the matter was out of the chapel's hands. Towards the end of the break Weintroub and Keir approached and asked if we were withdrawing our labour. Of the men present, all but three were there in their own break time, and that gathering did not constitute a formal meeting. Told to return to work the men did so.

PUPPET ON A STRING.

Smarting under his recent defeat Moakes was only too pleased to dance to the management's tune. Twelve chapel members including myself were summonsed yet again to a branch investigation to answer management allegations of "unofficial action". This charge was dropped when Moakes realised that it was going too far to allege "withdrawal of labour" during a lunch-hour. Instead Rule 20; Clause 9 ("conduct detrimental") was dragged out of the union cupboard again and unbelievably levelled at the twelve of us. The twelve included the chapel chairman, and two men that had been disciplined earlier, Chris Bennet and Ned Darbey. Quite obviously a full scale purge was in the wind.

THE MAY PURGE / A SHOWPIECE OF UNION DEMOCRACY.

The hearings began in May and were like something out of Alice in Wonderland. The Branch Secretary doubled as the Queen of Hearts shouting "Off with their heads !") He and Hutchinson as chief prosecutors cooked up procedure to suit themselves. Statements prepared by us with the help of law students were disallowed while previous irrelevant incidents were dragged in to blacken our case.

(Continued page 19.)

WHAT IS WORKERS' CONTROL?

In the first issue of Solidarity (West London) we carried a five and a half page article on the failure of the September '69 occupation attempt at Liverpool's G.E.C, - E.E.* plants, Netherton, East Lancs., and Napiers. Feedback from the men up there indicates they appreciated our account of the September events.

In contrast we recently received a confused and hysterical letter from Tony Topham**, on behalf of the I.W.C. complaining about our article's coverage of the Institutes activities in Liverpool.

We print below the complete letter. Our reply follows it.

Dear Editor,

Your unsigned article "GEC Liverpool, The Occupation that Failed" contains a section on "The Role of the Institute for Worker's Control" which is inaccurate, scurrilous, and gratuitously hostile. I must request space to reply to your attack in detail.

You allege that our "strange sense of priorities" led to the question of affiliation fees to the IWC being considered as the first item on the agenda at our Initial meeting with the Action Committee. This is untrue. Representatives of the IWC attended two meetings of the committee. On the first occasion, IWC affiliation was not discussed; we offered certain services - the drafting and circulation of an appeal to the labour movement, the preparation of a printed pamphlet on the GEC and the redundancies, research into the question of world markets for GEC products, and into the legal issues raised by the proposed occupation of the factories. We set this work in process and completed it without any exchanges between the Institute and the Action Committee concerning affiliation. At our second meeting with the committee, the question of affiliation was raised, (not as a "first item" or with any sense of priority) because we wished to be placed even more fully and clearly, for the outside world, in a position of servicing the committee. Those who followed the events and publicity closely will recall that the usual accusations were made in the press, that "outside" bodies were directing the occupation plan. We felt that, had the committee taken out a formal (and in financial terms, merely token) affiliation, it would have been even better placed to refute these suggestions, and to give us directions as to the services required of us.

*GEC - EE: General Electric Co./ English Electric.

**A lecturer in industrial relations

In the event, we accepted fully the Committee's wish to defer consideration of the affiliation, and we proceeded with our programme of assistance and research without giving the matter a second thought.

You then make certain allegations about the content of our pamphlet Worker's Takeover, which show that you either have not read it, or have read it with closed minds, determined to discover within its pages the appropriate sins according to the gospel of Solidarity, West London revised version. You say that the term 'worker's control' is never allowed to stand on its own, but always occurs in the phrases "public ownership and workers' control" or "social ownership and workers' control" in our pamphlet. Even if we take this "criticism" at its own puerile level of infantile semantics, we do not find it difficult to refute. If readers will refer to our pamphlet, page 3 line 10, page 6 line 28, page 7 line 6 page 10 lines 24 - 25, they will find 'workers' control' used without reference to public or social ownership. It is the Solidarity version of workers' control that is misleading, and not that of the IWC or the GEC workers. For your writer, workers' control is a great abstraction, pie-in-the-sky, to be deferred until the second coming, when "the workers' themselves run society". Our pamphlet, on the contrary, is based on the belief that the GEC occupation plan was the concrete expression of the aspiration towards such a society, and that the practice of workers' control (the affirmation and imposition of the workers will over and against that of the employer) constitutes a valid school and strategy to be applied here and now. Our pamphlets concluding words are: "The lessons of direct democracy of the school for self-management which will open on the Mersey, must therefore be carefully marked" Oddly enough, and despite his inability to understand our thoughts on this question, your own writer's conclusion ("The seed has been planted: don't just watch it grow, help it") is not all that different. But his confusions on the way don't help at all. For instance, having accused us of always linking workers' control with public ownership, he then asks almost in the same breath: "what is the pamphlet referring to when it talks of 'public' and 'social' ownership as something entirely separate from workers' control?"

The real doctrinal base of your writers hostility however, emerges in his attitude to the trade unions, and our advocacy of a TU programme against the redundancies. If the article represents Solidarity (West London) approach, we are bound to conclude that your organisation is anti-union. We are rebuked for advancing a programme of demands to be taken up by the unions, instead of by "the workers themselves". The approach of the whole pamphlet assumes of course that it is the workers themselves who are acting in Liverpool, and who are involved through their unions in the evolution of strategies and policies. We specifically call for workers' control to be carried into the heart of the unions themselves. But Solidarity (W.L.) would have the GEC workers turn their backs on their own organisations and in consequence ensure their isolation, at a time when every effort should be bent to guarantee that in our words "a vast political and trade union solidarity movement arises" (incidentally, even your reporter has to record that the proposals to occupy the factories came from a union bureaucrat).

Your writer's next step however, must take first prize for distortion and lack of logic. Having found us guilty of advocating a militant trade union programme, he concludes "that the future society according to the IWC would not be run by workers but by self-styled representatives

from either the so-called Worker's Parties (as in Soviet Russia) or the Trade Union bureaucracy." Your writer at this point reaches a level which can only honestly be described as drivel. We invite you to give any reference, either in the GEC pamphlet or elsewhere in IWC's literature, which substantiate the assertion that our movement advocates management along Russian lines, or through a Trade Union bureaucracy.

It would indeed be meaningless as your writer suggests, to advocate further nationalisation without demanding workers' control. Which is precisely why the workers who meet in the working conferences organised by IWC - dockers, miners, steelworkers, public service workers, etc., - have prepared programmes for the advancement of workers' control in their industries. But perhaps your writer has been too busy contemplating Judgement Day to notice this upsurge in workers' control activities.

In a final spasm of ill-will and malevolence, your writer accuses IWC of profiteering by charging 2/- for the pamphlet. He judges of course that your readers have not seen the document, which is a 24 page printed booklet, with a stiff card cover done in two colours. We have probably incurred a loss on its production, in addition to the considerable postage and telephone bill we incurred during our numerous activities on behalf of the GEC struggle. For this last sneer, if for no other part of your tirade, we can do no more than demand an apology.

Yours sincerely,

Tony Topham.

OUR REPLY

Dear Tony Topham,

To deal with your first and last points:- The information on affiliation fees to the IWC was given us, unasked, by a member of the Liverpool Action Committee the day before the scheduled take-over of the three GEC-EE plants. If you still wish to pursue that argument, we suggest you look towards Liverpool rather than London.

With regard to the cost of your publication "GEC-EE Workers' Takeover," we felt then (and still do) that 2/- is an exorbitant price for a small half-quarto leaf pamphlet, which could have been produced for 6d (say 1/- with labour costs) and might then have reached the people we assume it was originally intended for. The fact that it was printed with a two-colour cover (and no doubt could have been bound in white leather and gold-edged) is beside the point.

As we have neither the time, paper or ink to waste on the kind of professional idiocy practised in your third paragraph, we'll get down to the real differences between us straight away.

All IWC literature is based on the assumption that 'workers control' in Britain can best be brought about by strengthening the Trade Union movement.

E.g. "As we have repeatedly argued all those demands which strengthen trade union powers (our emphasis) and self-confidence have a control element within them."* This in turn is based on the assumption that

* Ken Coates and Tony Topham, Participation and Control, p. 8.

the membership in some way exercise control in 'their' unions. When we questioned both these assumptions in our Liverpool article you accused us of being "anti-union" and of wanting the GEC workers to "turn their backs on their own organisations".

This accusation evades the point. No one in their right mind would surrender the rights and benefits that the trade union movement has gained through struggle over the last century. However, the question we are asking is not generally, whether unions have been a good thing, but quite specifically, whether the majority of them could possibly be the vehicles for an emerging workers control movement in this country, as the IWC suggests.

Of course it all depends on what you mean by 'workers control', and this is something the IWC refuses to come clean on. As far as Solidarity is concerned a valid workers control movement requires that power be effectively held by the mass of people making up that movement; that the rank and file membership be self-organised and self-reliant. Let's take a look at the larger unions. None of them fulfills these requirements.

For a start it's worth reminding ourselves that over 90% of all strikes in this country are 'unofficial' (not recognised by the union executive). While the men are often back inside before the executive has met to consider recognition, this still leaves an alarmingly high number of cases where executive councils ignore democratic decisions to strike taken at membership level (emphasising incidentally the lack of control members have over funds which they swell by weekly subscription), usually because the union top brass has already implicated itself in agreements with management over the heads, and often without the knowledge, of the members involved.

Even district committees and officers with a fine record of rank and file contact perpetually face this same problem finding themselves hamstrung time and again by their own executive councils. In these cases the IWC usually makes 'no comment' for the 'unofficial' strike shows the members actually exerting their power over and against both employers and their own union hierarchy, raising the crucial and embarrassing question (for the IWC) of whether the members' objectives are at all similar to those of their executive officers.

Indeed while the president of the AEF, 'leftie' Hugh Scanlon, churns out The Way Forward for Workers Control (IWC pamphlet series, No. 1), the AEU's executive council (now amalgamated into the AEF) is devising ways to prevent power moving out of its own fists towards the membership -- "The Executive Council shall have the power to call, and terminate, a strike of members, other than provided for in Rule 14, Clause 15, when in their opinion it is in the best interests of the members concerned."* (Our emphasis.)

This lack of membership control is the rule rather than the exception in each of the larger unions -- "Of the 128 largest unions, no less than 86 appoint their major officials permanently. Of those which do hold elections, it's almost unheard of for a sitting tenant to be evicted. Among the 24 largest unions which have elections, there have been since the formation of the unions 134 general secretaries.

* One of a list of rules to be submitted by the Executive Council AEU to the 1970 rules revision meeting.

Of these only one - Jenkins Jones of the A.S.E. - was ever defeated while in office."*

Your letter, like the pamphlet 'GEC-EE Workers' Takeover' consistently strains to create the impression that the Liverpool men were "involved through their unions (our emphasis) in the evolution of strategies and policies". This is quite misleading as our Liverpool article made very clear in the section entitled "The Unions" The men were involved "in the evolution of strategies and policies" by being employees Weinstock intended to axe. Union membership is beside the point here. Why not talk to the lads at Netherton, as we did, about the usefulness of 'their' unions in a mass redundancy situation? May we draw the IWC's attention to the two-day national conference of GEC-EE shop stewards held twelve weeks after the failed occupation. This 'unofficial' shop stewards committee commented that union officers on the N.J.N.C. had done little more than rubber stamp the managements redundancy proposals. It seems to be a case of the organisation turning its back on the membership rather than, as you suggest, us turning our backs on 'our' organisations.

CONTINUED OVERLEAF.

*Quoted from the recently published pamphlet 'G.M.W.U.-Scab Union' Solidarity (North London). Original information from V.L.Allens Power in the Trade Unions (Longmans'54) The facts have changed slightly since this book was written, but the move has been towards even more permanent officials.

SOLIDARITY GROUPS

London (South) c/o 44 Sturgeon Rd., London, S.E.17.
 London (North) c/o H.Russell, 53A Westmoreland Rd., Bromley, Kent.
 London (West) c/o M.Duncan, 15 Taylors Green, East Acton, W.3.
 Romford c/o T.Reed, 26 Seamore Gardens, Ilford, Essex.
 Hull c/o E.Strauss, 32 Pearson Park, Hull.
 North West c/o J.Harris, 96 Doveleys Rd., Salford, M68QW.
 Aberdeen c/o N.Roy, 138 Walker Rd., Aberdeen.
 Clydeside c/o D.Kane, 43 Valeview Terrace, Bellsmyre, Dumbarton.
 Dundee c/o F.Brown, 444 Perth Rd., Dundee.
 Edinburgh c/o T.Wooley, 14 West Preston St., Edinburgh, EH89PU

The three London Groups, Aberdeen and North West all produce regular journals. Copies available from above addresses 10d Post paid.

Solidarity (Melbourne) For information and first issue write:-

Lou Costelloe, 55 Union St., Brighton, 3187, Australia.

In view of what little control the membership have over the executive, the IWC's choice of the unions as a vehicle for a growing 'worker control' movement is an altogether questionable one. But then, the Institutes own operational methods are hardly calculated to increase the self activity and self confidence of the men on the shop floor. For like the national press the IWC tends to think in terms of 'leaders' and 'led', placing more emphasis on whether the leadership of a given union is 'left' or 'right' than whether the rank and file hold the power (to us the essential prerequisite of any worker control movement). This produces interesting results. The pamphlet 'GEC-EE Workers Takeover' knocks Les Cannon the right wing president of the E.T.U. ("Cannon's position is as far removed as possible from the demand that officials should be held accountable for their conduct and their activities to their members"-page 19) yet uses a different set of criteria when the left-led T and G and AEF unions are involved. The role their officers played in the March '69 Ford* 'sell-out' settlement is lovingly white-washed (pages 19-20) and excused elsewhere as "mistakes in leadership"**. IWC conference procedure reflects the same preoccupation. At most conferences men that work on the shop floor have the pleasure of listening to second generation John Cousins' and Stan Newins' complete in work clothes and boots, telling them all about the virtues of 'workers control'.

This misplaced emphasis on 'leadership' indicates a hopeless confusion within the IWC ranks as to what 'workers control' is all about. While the institute continues to act as though conflicting interests between membership and national officers are figments of the imagination, it's not surprising that your call for 'workers control' to be carried into the heart of the unions themselves is treated with some scepticism. For such a call, if acted on, would threaten the careerist TU officials and Labour MPs now decorating the IWC conference platform, as much as the employing class and the government.

Yet the alternative is neither to wait for the "second coming" or contemplate "Judgement Day". The fight continues outside the conference hall and increasingly outside the Branch, on the factory floor. In the past members allowed national officers to clinch dubious productivity deals with management on their behalf. While union machinery can still be used to a limited extent the issue is increasingly one of job organisation and job control fought for at plant level by the men themselves.

Perhaps you have been too busy lecturing in industrial relations to notice the gradual spreading of 'unofficial' communications networks and organisational structures within the major sections of British industry to meet the new challenge of the corporate company and 'merger' trend - we mean the combine shop stewards committees.

In the past union executives, recognising a threat to their power, fought tooth and nail to smash the combine committees, 'banning' them and even expelling members for participation in their activities. Today the balance of forces is changing and nowhere better demonstrated than in the present confrontation⁺ between the leaders of the motor unions and the British Leyland joint shop stewards committee as to who really speaks for the groups 150,000 workers.

*If the term "sell-out" offends, we recommend as essential reading Ford-The Settlement by an AEU steward at Dagenham. Solidarity (North London), vol. 5, n. 9.

**Ken Coates answer to Raymond Challinor, IS, No. 40.

+Reported in Times Business News, Friday, March 6th.

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The once sacred area of 'policy making' is being attacked all along the line by the shop stewards movement. Given this situation, we suggest that the combine committees, with all their shortcomings (there are still too many stewards that feel themselves answerable to the shop committee rather than the shop floor) might be much more appropriate vehicles for an emerging 'worker control' movement in this country than the unions themselves.

The question of just how 'policy' would be decided in any future socialist society leads to the final major reservation we have about the IWCs operational methods.

All IWC literature (GEC-EE Workers Takeover is no exception) throws terms around such as 'public ownership' and 'social ownership', usually in formulae like 'public ownership and workers control' or 'social ownership under workers control'. Yet not one pamphlet indicates just what is meant by 'public' or 'social' ownership.

Even the pamphlets produced under IWC patronage by workers in mines, steel and the docks, suggesting programmes for the eventual establishment of 'workers councils' in industry, hesitate to step outside the industrial front and begin thinking in terms of how they would like to see politics and society as a whole organised. Ken Coates views this hesitancy in a commendable light claiming that . . . 'it (the IWC) carries a minimum of pre conceived ideas and relies on the creative drive of the workers themselves '*

Yet this stance is evasive, and in being so, dangerous. Evasive, since all IWC assumptions are based on one fundamental 'preconceived idea' - that workers control will be brought about through the strengthening of the T.U. movement; and dangerous to the extent that workers accepting this philosophy will be tempted to hand over the organisation of society and politics to T.U. leaders, rather than extending their ideas on collectively controlled Workers Councils to embrace politics and society as a whole in a system of collectively controlled People's Councils (the real meaning of 'Soviets').

The 'worker control' movement in Britain today could probably learn a lot from the way the Worker's Council movement in Russia was broken by the Bolsheviks after the 1917 revolution.

"The forces fighting for the rule of the Workers Councils did not produce (not even for themselves) a total scheme, or vision, of the organisational structure of the whole society, derived from their views on the management of production. They left a vacuum in the realm of ideas concerning the social and political structure of the rest of society.

Lenin stepped into this vacuum with the scheme of the political party managing production, society, and the state. This contributed massively to the defeat of the soviet (in the real sense of the word) tendencies in the Russian revolution.

Unless the movement for self-management puts forward its ideas for the organisational structure of the whole society, the political bureaucracy (however well meaning it may be) will go on managing not only production, but also politics and society as a whole." ++

By limiting Workers Councils to the industrial front, neglecting the state and society, by suggesting that 'workers control' can best be

*Ken Coates reply to Raymond Challinor .I.S.no 40

++ The whole of this quotation is taken from A.O.s article

'Lenin and the Workers Councils'; Solidarity (North London) vol.15 no.9

achieved through a strengthened and democratised T.U. movement while simultaneously over exposing "left" T.U. leaders and overestimating their importance, the IWC is paving the way for a society controlled by a new political bureaucracy (that, is a society where organisation is imposed from above). Such a development would be the complete and utter negation of what most workers envisage when they talk of 'workers control'-a society organised from below by the mass of people. We suggest that those attracted to the I.W.C. take a long hard look at this institution and then ask themselves whether its methods of operation are calculated to encourage rank and file initiative or squash it.

Yours sincerely,
Eds.

Readers will be pleased to learn that the complete text of our article "G.E.C., the occupation that failed" has appeared in translation in the February 1970 issue of I.C.O. (Informations et Correspondence Ouvrier) the French workers bulletin. Write P. Blachier, 13 bis rue Labois-Rouillon Paris 9e.

DAVALLS STRIKE.

After the recent success of strike action at Metal Box Co. (Perivale) and of the threat of such action at Glasco's, the workers at S. Davalls and Sons Ltd., Wadsworth Rd., Perivale, have united to begin what may be a long fight against a management who are as thick and pigheaded as they come. The men on strike are mostly engineers and produce flight and crash recorders, and engine starting equipment vital to British aircraft. If the strike goes on much longer some planes may have to be grounded. Most other firm's workers, including airport and British Road Services employees are refusing to touch anything from Davalls. So even the inevitable 4 or 5 scabs still inside will soon be laid off. The strike is mainly about victimisation of shop-stewards and recognition of the A.E.U. They have been out for 3 weeks and need your support. So why not pop down to the picket-line during your lunch-break to express solidarity. The factory is at the bottom of Wadsworth Rd. They will be glad to see you.

Donations to be sent to:-

Bro. A. Flynn,

51, Ridley Avenue,

Baling, W.13.

METAL BOX ACTON

THE MOVING FINGER WRITES.

Metal Box Company Limited, Headquarters in Baker St with tentacles all over the world, from Mozambique to Malaysia, from Israel to India. The company is divided into five main groups, Open Top (cans), Paper Group (from cartons to cheques), Plastics Group, General Line and Machinery Building. They made almost nine million pounds profit (after tax) last year which is hardly surprising since they have a virtual monopoly in the UK. The factory we are concerned with at the moment is Open Top Group Headquarters, Kendal Avenue, Acton. Most of the workers are members of the TGWU but there is a small AEF organised machine building dept. The TGWU section seems to be emerging from a long period of inactivity and on Friday the 20th of March, in company with the AEF members, had a one hour sympathy strike because of a lockout of the workers in a Metal Box factory in Neath, Glamorganshire. The article below is a reprint of a notice put on the notice board by some anonymous person in answer to two management notices condemning the one hour stoppage. For the moment we will content ourselves with this but we intend to do a lot more about Metal Box in the future.

A PERSONAL OPINION.

The management show a remarkable fondness for sticking up notices explaining their point of view about all and sundry. Fair enough. But of course they don't grant the same facilities to the workers. In fact every union notice has to be vetted by the management before they allow it to be pinned up. So it should be born in mind that it's not always possible for the Shop Stewards to put a notice up. This one will be ripped down as soon as they see it. So much for free speech! I won't bother with the one they put up last Friday. That's the one where they said they couldn't condone our action in stopping for an hour. After all I don't think anyone expected them to come out in sympathy with us!

As for the other one where they said we had no right stopping for an hour because the people on strike at Neath are in the AEF and we are in the TGWU that's a very crude way to try and split us up. What they want us to forget is that the main thing we have in common is that we all work for Metal Box. People here gave many reasons for supporting Neath. For example,

"If we support them they'll support us".

"It will show the management here that things have changed".

"We'll be laid off soon anyway if the strike doesn't get settled".

But underneath all that was the knowledge that one factory cannot stand alone against such a big firm as Metal Box but between us we will bring it to its knees and it was a splendid opportunity to show our management where to get off. What everybody here should remember is that when we walked out the gate the machines stopped. All the notices in the world won't change that. Metal Box laid off all TGWU workers at Neath yesterday. They made nine million last year and could well afford to keep them on but of course it's more pressure on the AEF people to go back. See how they use us as weapons against each other.

HE WHO WORKS AND DOES HIS BEST, GETS THE SACK LIKE ALL THE REST.

COMPREHENSIVES.

Some part of the "Educational System" always seems to be in uproar. Comprehensive schemes, political files on University students, oversize classes, teachers pay, are only some of the areas where a struggle is taking place. This article is concerned with the State Education System.

Does the child from a working class home have a fair chance of getting the best from the present education system?, and are comprehensives the answer to middle class privilege?

To answer this question we have to go back and look at the system as it was 10 or 15 years ago.

11+ AND ALL THAT.

There were basically 2 types of school: the Grammar and the Secondary Modern. If you were one of the lucky 20% who got through the 11+ examination, then you went on to the Grammar School and the chance of University and/or a better paid job when you left. If, on the other hand, you were not one of the elite, then you went on to the Secondary Mod. where the buildings and equipment were much worse and the teachers not so well qualified. (The average pay in Grammar Schools is higher than in Comprehensives or Secondary Mods.)

Selection at 11 had an effect on the Junior Schools (7-11 years) which were usually judged by how many children they got to Grammar Schools. The Junior Schools all streamed their classes, usually at the entry age of seven, so that all the bright ones were in the A stream and all the dull ones in the C stream. The A stream were expected to get into Grammar School, the C stream weren't and perhaps 2 or 3 kids from the B stream would hit the jackpot. This all sounds reasonable enough until you ask yourself, "how do they judge which child is suitable for the A stream?" It is worth pointing out that working class kids are at a disadvantage in school for the following reasons:

(a) Their parents have usually not had much opportunity for education themselves and therefore don't help or encourage their children as much as middle class parents do.

(b) In school, learning is usually by words, words and yet more words. The working class child will usually have a smaller vocabulary and not be so used to abstract ideas. They will usually have fewer books and magazines at home.

Which stream the child goes into is not decided solely on their ability as measured by intelligence tests but also take the teacher's prejudices on behaviour, dress, accent etc into account.

An example from my own experience: A young Asian boy from East Africa entered the school in the middle of the year and was immediately placed in the 'G' stream, (H was the bottom) which is quite normal procedure for immigrant children. In his case, he was so obviously bright that before a month had gone by he was moved right up to the 'C' stream. But what would have happened if the mistake had not been so obvious? He would almost certainly have stayed in a stream which underestimated his

ability.

An exactly similar situation exists for working class kids. A recent report on streaming* showed that teachers, even those who weren't actively hostile to working class children, tended to overestimate the abilities of middle class children and underestimate worker's children.

The stream that they were placed in when entering the school would not matter too much if there was plenty of movement between streams but this movement hardly happens. Only about 5% of children change stream at the end of each year (i.e. 2 children out of a class of 40).

So the system in junior schools that was universal 10 years ago and is still strong today, meant that working class kids tended to get themselves stuck in lower streams than their ability would lead you to expect, and because these lower streams were given work which was thought suitable for the slower kids i.e. handicrafts, looking after pets etc, their chances of getting to grammar school were much smaller than those of a middle class child of equal ability** (Streaming is not the only cause of this difference but it does have an effect.)

What about the 11⁺ exam itself? There is general agreement that it was the most accurate means of selection available yet a survey in 1957 *** came to the conclusion that for the 120,000 places available each year in Grammar Schools, 40,000 were wrongly allocated. In other words, the most accurate means of selection available was still so inaccurate that 40,000 kids who should have gone to Grammar School didn't, and 40,000 who should not have gone, did.

A CHANGING SOCIETY.

A modern capitalist society such as ours can no longer use a labour force which has been fobbed off with a poor basic education, (especially in science subjects). American experience is :-

"Those young people who left school at the age of 16 (minimum leaving age in America) were now regarded as virtually unemployable for life." **** (My emphasis). What is needed now is a more highly trained labour force and the comprehensive school seemed the best possible answer to raising educational standards. As a Comprehensive School is intended to provide courses for all levels of ability in a system where selection has been abolished, streaming is no longer required to get the brightest section through the 11⁺. So streaming in primary schools had to be justified on educational grounds.

* Streaming in the Primary School.--Joan Barker Lunn (1970)

** In "The Home and the School", J.W.B. Douglas estimated that more than $\frac{1}{2}$ as many extra Grammar School places would be needed if an 8 year old working class child had the same chance of later passing the 11⁺ as an upper middle class child of equal ability.

*** Yates A. and Pidgeon D.A. "Admission to Grammar Schools".

**** R.G.Cave "All Their Future".

Does it help the slower kids if they are taught separately from the rest? Does it hold back the bright ones if they are taught together with the slow? What effect does streaming or non-streaming have on childrens' self-confidence and involvement in other school activities like sport, music and drama? The Barker Lunn report already referred to found that streaming or non-streaming made no difference to academic standards (reading, writing and arithmetic) but that in the non-streamed school the kids who would have been in the C stream were much more interested in what went on and more involved in other school activities.

The battle for non-streaming in primary schools seems to be just about won and the same movement towards a non-streamed school is beginning in the comprehensive schools.

MIDDLE CLASS GET OUTS.

The comprehensive re-organisation brought in by the Labour Government has its opponents who have been fighting a fairly successful rearguard action to preserve their privileges. There are numerous variations on the theme of re-organising a school system so that it looks 'comprehensive' but still keeps the working class kids at the bottom and allows the middle class child to increase the lead that his home back-ground gives him.

Two of the more popular variations are given below.

Scheme A

Abolish selection at 11, provide large new buildings that will replace several of the former schools. You then 'stream' the pupils until they have test-papers coming out of their ears.

Result: You end up with the top streams taking academic subjects, the middle streams taking technical subjects and the bottom streams being bored to tears. Simple really and everyone is conned into thinking that privilege in education is a thing of the past.

Scheme B. (Ealing type)

Abolish selection and reorganise the schools so that you have a 'middle school' from 8 or 9 up to 12 or 13 years old. A transfer is then made to a High School.

This is the system proposed for Ealing and the game is given away by one paragraph in their document. "Admission to Middle and High Schools would not depend upon aptitude or attainment, and parental choice would be taken fully into account when pupils were being allocated. While all schools would offer a full range of subjects and courses, it may be anticipated that certain strengths, interests or biases would develop in particular schools: such special characteristics of schools would be of significance when transfers of pupils between schools were being arranged."

(My emphasis).

This sort of arrangement leaves the way wide open for inequalities and biases to develop. Those schools which had good reputations for 'O' and 'A' level results would attract more applications than there were places available. As the "certain strength, interest or bias" of this school would be towards the academic subjects, the Headmaster would be allowed to pick and choose the most able children. It will always happen that schools with a high reputation will attract more applications but

if it is to be a true comprehensive, the school should try to have a balanced intake. In other words if it takes three very bright children, it should also choose three very slow children and so on. It should not "cream off" all the bright kids. This is something that the Ealing scheme appears to accept. "Such special characteristics of schools would be of significance when transfer of pupils between schools were being arranged". Over a period of a few years we can see these schools developing to the equivalent of grammar schools with the rest descending in both reputation and quality until you have few places at the bottom which have all the problems of the roughest and toughest secondary modern. How would a Headmaster, who has decided to take only the cream, make a decision on whether a particular child should be accepted or not? The exact details for the Ealing scheme are not given but it will probably be very similar to the methods used in Bolton and Haringey.

In both places, the Junior or Middle School headmaster's report is the vital thing. In Bolton he is asked to assess "character" traits - Ambition, Alertness, Industry, Co-operation, Perseverance, Emotional stability and Retentiveness. He must further make "relevant comments" on such items as appearance, home environment and speech. Standards of work in English and Mathematics would also be included in the report but why have the sections "home environment", speech etc., be included if not to pick out the working class kids. It seems that we are moving from an 11 plus system which, was inaccurate and biased against working class kids, to the Headmaster report system, which is also inaccurate and biased against working class kids. There is no reason why we should put up with 'comprehensive' schemes which preserve all the old inequalities and injustices of the grammar school/secondary modern setup. A comprehensive scheme which has abolished streaming and which makes sure that each and every school receives a balanced intake of children would go some way to giving working class children a fair chance.

Nevertheless, one thing is certain: - You can think up scheme after scheme for education but as long as class society exists, the dominant class will find some way of twisting the scheme so that its privileges are preserved. In a society like ours where the ordinary worker has little or no control over the decisions that affect his own life, then his kids will always get the rough end of the stick when it comes to education.

The only complete solution is to overthrow the old society and move to a new one based on workers control.

D.K.



INDUSTRIAL NEWS FROM ABROAD

SWEDEN - DEC '69 - 5,000 IRON-ORE MINERS ON STRIKE.

In Sweden, labour relations have been until last year held up as an example of perfect cooperation between an enlightened management and strong but reasonable trade unions. This myth was broken in December. An agreement signed by management and unions together, imposing cuts of forty cents (8d an hour) on men transferred from the pit to the surface provoked a violent reaction. 35 cradle operators from three ultra modern nationalized mines walked out immediately. Hours later other miners came out, to be followed the next day by men from the Kiruna and Malmberget works—a total of 4,800 on strike. Rapid negotiations between management and unions to get the men back to work produced an offer of 2/6d per hour rise and the promise of warmer work clothes (Laponie is the coldest part of Sweden).

To the surprise of both, the men turned the offer down.

As the Laponie miners are among the highest paid workers in Sweden there appears to be more to the walkout than the wage cut that originally provoked it. The 21 man strike committee put forward its own list of demands and gained its biggest victory by forcing the Director of the industry (a Swedish Lord Robens) to come to Laponie and negotiate directly with them at rank and file level. The demands included a minimum wage of 34/- per hour for pit workers, 24/- per hour for surface workers (an increase of 40%), compensation for workers transferred to lighter (and lower paid) jobs because of old age, higher overtime rates, free transport to work, retirement at 60 instead of 65, bigger retirement pensions, reduction in the rents of company houses and improved ventilation systems for the diesel engines in the work areas.

However, the most significant demand of all was for an end to a negotiations procedure involving 'summit' meetings between management and union 'bosses'. While discontent had been growing among the members, the union 'bosses' were preoccupied with internal bickering between social democrats and communists. The men demanded instead that all negotiations be held at works level—so restoring power to its rightful place on the shop floor away from union offices and government departments. To this extent the strike was directed equally against employers and union.

Management comment after strike:- "In the courses we organised (to adapt the men to the new techniques demanded by increased mechanisation) workers' participation and industrial democracy were discussed. Perhaps we raised the workers hopes too high!"

BELGIUM

JAN. '70. 23,000 COAL MINERS ON STRIKE.

1,500 miners attack union head quarters smashing windows and furniture. At Limbourg workers attack the mine buildings. The police use teargas, fire hoses and truncheons on the men. Again a strike with more to it than a wage increase. Miners distributed leaflets saying "Our demands won't stop at a 15% pay rise - we want to bring the government to its knees."

Behind most strikes on pay and conditions there is an important political demand, for control by the worker over what he does. In the highly industrialised countries of N.W. Europe the issue of power has degenerated into a mock battle between managements and full time trade union officials since both have a similar basic interest and that is to maintain control over their employees/members. In this power play the worker is left out in the cold and comes to the conclusion that full time union officials have more in common with government and employers than with their own membership. Knowingly or unwittingly they help maintain a political and social system whose power is shared out at the expense of working people.

In this country Productivity agreements between management and unions have for a few pennies more, hung chains round workers and boosted company profits. Here as in Belgium and Sweden the 'wildcat' and 'unofficial' strike is a sign that workers realise they can only prevent themselves being speeded up and turned into machines, and begin the movement to smash this big business society, by taking power out of union offices, govt. departments etc. and restoring it to its rightful place on the factory floor... EDS.

ALPERTON CARTON CONTINUED.

On the day of the second batch of hearings a shop floor exchange between Weintroub-Andy Middleton confirmed what we had long suspected.

Weintroub; "You understand that you have to go before the Branch tonight....
...What happened last week was that all the men were lying to cover up for each other. I hope you're not going to do the same tonight."

Andy; "I've made my statement and intend to stick to it."

Weintroub; "You realise that by lying to cover up there'll be quite a few who'll get their cards torn up.....They'll be sacked!"

EXPULSION.

That evening I went before the Branch and was expelled from the Society. Chris Bennet and Ned Darbey got the same treatment. Three temporary members were also expelled, Hughes, Podronow and Kotsofatos. The remaining six were keavily fined. Of the twelve offenders, ten were completely innocent while two who had been away from their places of work had only been away for 3-4 minutes each. We had all witnessed as vicious an attack as you could possibly imagine by a man supposed to be representing us. Every time we went before a Branch committee it was a farce. They refused to listen and used procedure to suit themselves. Six men lost their jobs because of a bastard of a union bureaucrat.

UNION OFFICIALS CLOSE RANKS.

All twelve of us appealed. SOGAT executive council turned down nine and refused to consider the appeals lodged by the temporary members. Ned Darbey appealing to the Governing Council was still found guilty although reinstated in the Society.

A QUESTION OF CONTROL.

At each appeal the Branch Secretary's evidence was lodged in general terms and never specifically related to the alleged incidents. We were "troublemakers" disrupting the "smooth running of the factory". As long as the people at ACC behaved like zombies accepting without question, the orders of both Branch and management, Moakes and Weintraub were happy. When we realised we were people and not Weintraub's property, and began fighting for our say in the factory we were kicked in the guts from two sides. The interests of branch and management were identical in that both attempted to control working men. The Branch was feeling so concerned about the "smooth running" of Joe Lyon's factory that it smashed chapel power to that end. I'm told that there is now 30% annual labour turnover at ACC, and that Chapel members of ten years standing are now leaving to find new jobs. Since last summer industrial peace might have come to Alperton Carbons, but as always, it's a peace that is skin deep and paid for time and time again by the people working inside.

D.

OUR COMMENTS.

D's testimony tells the story of one of the most incredible instances of management and union collaboration we have ever come across. At the same time it's typical. People organising at factory level are repeatedly being smashed by their own representatives. When it happens for the first time we are usually shocked and amazed, and while Moakes is certainly an atrocious branch secretary any explanation dealing in personalities alone doesn't help us fully understand why we were smashed. To do this we have to look at the part he and unions play in the industrial setup. Once this is realised we can draw lessons from defeat that might prevent it next time. To this extent defeats are as important as victories. Workers began organising in unions as a defence against the employers. Since then management have realised that unions are often prepared to act as industrial policemen for them, ensuring the "smooth running" of the factory in exchange for certain rights, like recognition and recruitment—both of which increase union power and funds. Today few unions are interested in questioning management's 'right' to manage or in challenging a system where people are exploited the length of their working lives and then thrown out on the human rubbish dump when too old to serve the boss at 65. They are too much part of the same system.

When an increasingly well organised chapel at ACC began to question just these "rights" the Branch Secretary saw it as a threat to his authority as much as the management's. The bogey term "unofficial" was brought into play, as it always is, to regain control of the membership and smash their initiative. Understandably the lads fell for it and stuck to "official" channels relying on the good offices of their union officials.

The result is described in D's testimony. The May '69 purge and the incredible SOGAT Appeals procedure ought to convince even the most constitutionally-minded union member of the limits of official channels. Ultimately power rests on the initiative of the chapel membership and requires their 100% involvement even when this means being accused of unofficial action.

Complete dependence on union officials or even our own shop stewards to do our thinking and acting for us is a recipe for disaster. Moakes was able to remove six, but SOGAT could'nt expel the whole chapel.--Eds.
ADDITION: The final sentence page 1⁹ should read as follows- "Ned Darbey appealing to the Governing Council was still found guilty, and squeezed for £20 although reinstated in the Society."

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