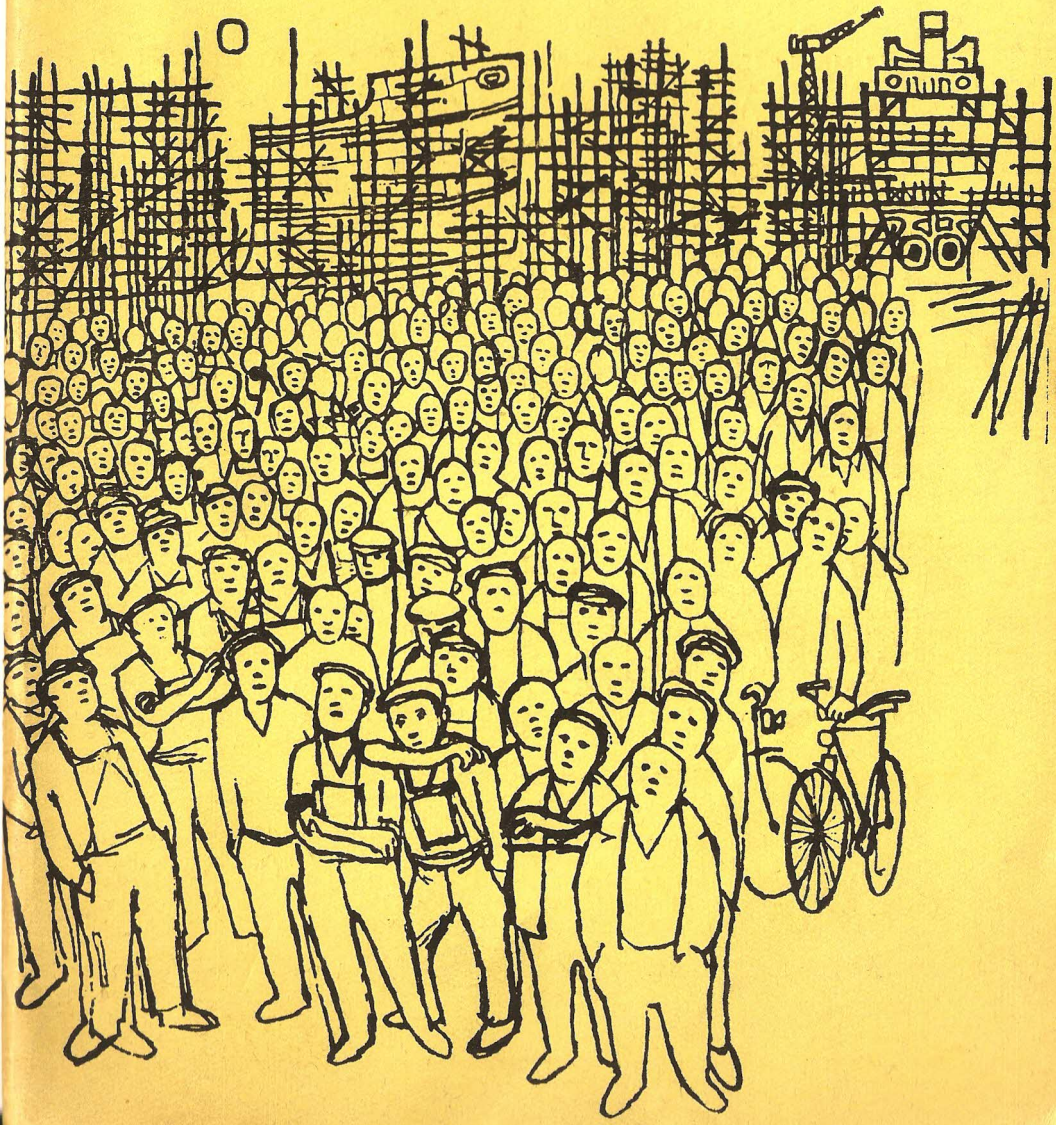
ANARCHY 40

TWO SHILLINGS or THIRTY CENTS

The Unions & Workers Control



Contents of No. 40 — June 1964

History and role of the Trade Union movement

PETER TURNER

IT IS VERY NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE TO TRACE the exact beginnings of the trade unions. It was in the early 18th century that they really started to make themselves felt, and although they were in existence previous to this, there had been up until this time no continuous association of workmen.

The unions often came about by the men in one particular trade meeting together in the evenings at the local public house. They discussed the situation in their own trade and how it affected them. Later on, these meetings were of a more organised nature and enabled the men to find out what vacancies were available in their trade. As they grew, contributions were collected which were used to pay sick and funeral benefits to members and their families. These types of associations or Friendly Societies, as they were called, were very widespread during the 18th century. In Nottingham, for example in 1794, there were 56 of them and every year they combined for a procession through the town.

With the increasing economic revolution of this period, more and more of the members of these societies, who had at first been independent, became wage earners employed by someone else. Due to the very low rates of pay, men and their families suffered great hardship, and with the frequent fluctuations in trade, wages were often cut, or the men found themselves without work.

As a result, the Friendly Societies developed to combat these changes. They became trade unions which aimed at defending and improving existing wages and conditions and were called "Combinations". The employers made ever increasing complaints about these combinations to the House of Commons, to which the workers' associations replied with petitions for wage increases and better conditions of employment. It seems that these early unions were effective to the extent that their activities caused Parliament to pass Acts against the formation of combinations in certain trades, this being extended to cover all trades in the Combination Acts of 1799.

PETER TURNER, born 1935 *at Battersea, is a carpenter, an ASW steward, and a member of the Committee of* 100.

Even before this Act was passed there had been successful prosecutions such as in the previous year, when printers in London were sentenced to two years imprisonment for conspiracy. Their conspiracy amounted to their meeting to discuss wages and conditions on the invitation of their employers. After the passing of the Act, the open bargaining nature of the trade unions ceased and they often disguised their activities as those of the Friendly Societies in order to escape prosecution. Due to this secrecy, the risk of informers was great.

On paper, the Combination Acts could be used against the employers, but of course, this was never put into practice and they only served as a weapon to break working class movements. For sometime the authorities succeeded and, although these were small local disputes, there was no large scale agitation for the improvement of the workers' lot.

There were, at this time, certain acts in force such as the Elizabethan Statute of Artificers, which laid down conditions of employment and gave magistrates the power to decide what wages were to be paid. Workers, dissatisfied with conditions, sometimes made use of these old Acts, applying to the magistrates to look into their case. It was really up to the State to decide on wages and conditions, but in practice these old Acts were not used very much.

The Combination Acts, however, never really broke the growing trade union movement. The weavers, in 1805, formed a combine for the purpose of pressing Parliament, by the means of petitions, to pass the Minimum Wage Act. Some of the employers gave their support, but in 1808 the Bill was heavily defeated in the House of Commons, to be followed by the repeal of the Elizabethan Statute and similar Acts for the regulation of wages.

With this came the realisation that no help could be expected from the State and that it was up to the workers themselves to challenge the boss directly. The weavers did take action, striking and bringing the woollen and cotton industry throughout Lancashire to a standstill. They won their demands, but these were shortlived for wages were soon cut.

AFTER REPEAL

In 1824 the Combination Acts were repealed, but not before they had been used to break several strikes. One example was that of the Scottish weavers, who having had their claims rejected by the employers, applied, with great cost, to the magistrates to fix a wage scale. This was ignored by the employers and the magistrates chose not to enforce it. Consequently, the weavers withdrew their labour and at the end of three weeks, just as the employers were about to capitulate, the State stepped in and arrested all of the strike committee, giving them prison sentences ranging from four to eighteen months.

A number of strikes occurred after the repeal of the acts and the employers put pressure on the government to make amends. This resulted in the introduction of new Acts which allowed the formation of trade unions, but contained clauses about " conspiracy, intimidation, molestation or obstruction to coerce either employers or workmen ".

Although prosecutions continued after 1825, it was at least legal to form trade unions and, from then on, their growth was very rapid. Those disguised as Friendly Societies now came out into the open. In 1829 the first national trade union was formed under the leadership of John Doherty and had the long title of the Grand General Union of All the Operative Spinners of the United Kingdom. Later Doherty formed the National Association for the Protection of Labour, to which a substantial number of unions either joined or affiliated.

With the introduction in 1832 of the Reform Bill, which gave franchise to the middle class but left the working class still without the vote, workers turned their attention to the formation of larger unions based on industrial lines. These and other unions were federated in 1833 to form Robert Owen's Grand National Consolidated Trades Union, whose programme contained not only higher wages and better conditions, but also Owen's revolutionary ideas of Socialism. Each industry in the G.N.C.T.U. was to form its own co-operative with the purpose of negotiating contracts and eventually taking over the ownership of the means of production.

However, its strength was merely a paper one, for the individual unions clung to their authority and did not send in any funds. There was no united policy, making it easy for the government to destroy it. This was achieved in March 1834, when the six Tolpuddle labourers were arrested, prosecuted under an Act of 1797 for administering " unlawful oaths " and sentenced to seven years transportation. At this time, workers were being forced by their employers to sign the " Document ", a paper promising not to belong to any union, and refusal to do this resulted in their being locked out. The introduction of the " Document, together with the lack of funds and loss of several strikes was the end of Owen's union and it finally disappeared in the winter of 1834.

Other unions carried on, some only as Friendly Societies, others as bargaining unions. Some of them played a prominent part in the Chartist movement and in fact, a general strike took place in the North to back up a resolution to " recommend the people of all trades and callings forthwith to cease work until the Charter becomes the law of the land ". The military was called out and several men were killed. It was not long before the strikers returned to work, due partly to starvation and partly to the divisions that arose within the Chartist movement.

However, actions taken by the larger, amalgamated industrial unions often had the authorities worried. At certain periods there seems to have been genuine discontent, not only with wages and conditions, but also with the social status of the workmen. William Godwin's book, " Political Justice ", was a great influence at this time, and although published at 3 gns., more than any worker could afford, copies were bought by making collections. G. D. Cole and Raymond Postgate, in their book " The Common People ", write of Godwin, " Among evil institutions, Godwin included not only government, but above all else, inequality. He believed profoundly that man's productive powers were enough to provide a frugal sufficiency for all." It was from Godwin that Owen later derived the major part of his ideas. There were also

the writings of Tom Paine and the example of the French Revolution which must have inspired many with the desire for social change.

Here I think lie the vast differences between these and the later types of unions. The old type, although often badly organised and with very little money, did challenge authority. Most of them did not have any concrete idea of what they hoped to achieve, but there was a basic desire for a social change. The control rested in the hands of the membership and the executives were not the powerful bodies which are characteristic of our present day unions. Most of the funds were held by the branches with only a small proportion being sent to the central committees, which were often no more than clearing houses with the General Secretaries acting only in a corresponding capacity.

NEW UNIONS

This form of organisation was charged with the advent of the new unions which came into being in the middle of the 19th century. R. Postgate's " Pocket History of the British Workers ", gives an outline of their principles.

"1. Unions should be amalgamated into one financial unit. All power should be concentrated in the Executive, controlled by regular conferences. Lodges should never retain any but the smallest sums.
2. Agreement should at all times be sought with employers and strikes, as far as possible, ruled out.
3. High subscriptions and high " friendly " benefits (sickness, death, unemployment, etc.) should be the rule.
4. Members should improve themselves as craftsmen, and non-craftsmen should be kept out of the trade."

The first of these new unions was the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, which was a combination of a number of the engineering craft unions. Another was the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners, whose Secretary was Robert Applegarth, the philosophical leader of this new form of unionism. Other trades that formed unions on this pattern were the bricklayers, shoemakers and ironmakers.

In 1852 the A.S.E. was involved in a ban on overtime, in reply to which, the employers locked them out. After three months they returned, defeated, to work, without gaining either a ban on overtime or piecework. This seemed to be the end of the A.S.E., but it survived and at the end of the year its funds had reached the very large sum of £5,000.

These new unions went from strength to strength, helped by the Reform Act of 1867, which gave the vote to town workers, and the flourishing trade of the period. Other unions followed this model and the Trades Union Congress started meeting regularly from 1868 onwards. The growth of these new unions did not mean an end to bitter industrial conflict.

There were still many sections of labour who were without trade

union organisation, especially the non-craft workers, but later an Agricultural Labours' Union was formed by Joseph Arch and within a very short time had 100,000 members. Robert Owen's ideas were still being propagated and Lloyd Janes, an Owenite, used to tour the country urging trade unions to " commence production " for themselves. This was actually done by some unions, the Yorkshire and Durham miners having their own mines. These Socialist ideas spread, for many workers were fed-up with the " peace at any price " policy of the leaders of the new unions.

1888 saw an upsurge of industrial action. With the help of Annie Besant, the girls at Bryant & Mays match factory won increased wages and better conditions. The eight hour day was gained by London gas-workers without even striking, and workers in the docks, led by Tom Mann, Ben Tillett and John Burns, who later became a M.P., struck for 6d per hour increase and other improvements. They won their demands after a strike lasting a month, during which time £50,000 was collected for strike funds. Up until this time, the dockers had had very little union organisation.

In the early years of the 20th century, there had been a steady decline in the value of wages. Although the Labour Party had been formed and had members in Parliament, conditions for the workers steadily worsened and a fresh impetus was needed to prevent a further decline. This impetus came from the ideas of the French Syndicalists and the Industrial Workers of the World, a nation-wide industrial union in America.

A NEW REVOLUTIONARY SPIRIT

Syndicalism is based on industries instead of the narrow craft basis and in France, it had succeeded by a long series of strikes, which became a " guerilla " war between the unions and employers. Sympathy action was taken by workers in other industries to support those in dispute. This resulted in great advances in pay and conditions and by continuing in this manner, the unions hoped to finally overthrow capitalism and take over the running of industry themselves.

A loose Federation of Transport workers, which had been formed in 1885, was joined by the water transport workers in 1910. At this time, it was led by Mann, Tillett and Havelock Wilson. In the following year the water transport workmen called a national strike of Sailors and Firemen for a wage increase. It was strongly supported and was later joined by the dockers in some ports, who came out in sympathy. They won their demands, but prior to the settlement, the railway workers, who for a long time had received low wages, also came out on strike. They, too, won their demands and forced the employers to recognise their union. There were many disputes at this time, not only for better economic conditions, but also for the recognition of the workers' status.

In 1914, the Triple Alliance was formed. This linked together the National Union of Railwaymen, the Transport Workers' Federation and the Miners' Federation of Great Britain. Under this alliance concerted

action was to be taken, but before this happened, war was declared. The Labour Party was, at first, opposed to war, but once it had been declared, they tamely supported the government, and the T.U.C. signed agreements not to strike.

The war did not mean the end of strikes, for unofficial ones often occured and the position of shop steward gained much in importance. G. D. Cole and R. Postgate in their book "The Common People" write as follows:—

"But now, under the peculiar war-time conditions, the shop stewards acquired a new importance. Chosen by the men in the shops, and untrammelled by the agreements made by the Trade Union leaders, they could do things which were now outside the leaders' power. Moreover, as the question of dilution* began to assume importance, new issues kept on cropping up almost daily, needing to be argued out and if possible settled on the spot, and in any event far too numerous for the small number of full-time Trade Union officials to attend to. In these circumstances, the shop stewards found themselves compelled, as the men's representatives in the shops, to assume negotiating functions; and although at the outset each steward represented only his own union, it was inevitable that the stewards from different unions should take to acting together on matters of common concern."

This pattern of organising still takes place in industry and in fact it is the life blood of the present-day trade union movement. The "new model" unions which were formed in the mid 19th century still exist today, under different names, but with the same policies. The A.S.E. is now the Amalgamated Engineering Union, whose president, Sir William Carron, is a member of the National Economic Development Council and on the board of the Bank of England.

The primary object of the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers, whose forerunner was formed in 1860, is according to the T.U.C. Dictionary of Abbreviations, "the raising of the status of the artisans engaged in these trades and generally to improve the social conditions under which they shall labour." Improving pay and conditions under capitalism!

The old transport unions, which blazed such a militant trail before the First World War, now follow the same policies as the older craft unions. The old Federation, with other unions, was absorbed into the Transport & General Workers Union, which was founded in 1921. Its policy is "to assist members in cases of sickness, accident, disablement, unemployment, old age, trade disputes, and to give legal advice and assistance. To further political objects, and to promote the extension of co-operative production and distribution." The last section refers of course to the return of a Labour government and nationalisation.

* The introduction and training by the Government of unskilled men and women, often not trade unionists, for jobs which until this time had been exclusive to the craft trade unionists. This occurred particularly in the Engineering trade.

UNIONS TODAY AND THEIR FUTURE

This is what the unions stand for today. True they do, at times, offer protection against the employers and do gain improvements, but they can only work within the framework of capitalism. They have no policy of revolutionary change in society. Revolutionary change will not come from men who sit on Neddy or accept positions on Boards of Directors, neither will it come from the craft unions for their policies have never been revolutionary.

The narrow basis of organisation, with workers in one industry belonging to many different unions, makes it practically impossible to have a uniform policy of action against the employers. Each union bureaucracy is jealous of the others and there is often bitter competition for members. All this only serves to divide workers and drive a wedge between not only the different trades in an industry, but also between skilled, semi-skilled and non-skilled labour.

Industrial unions could be the answer to this problem, but only if they were run and controlled by the members themselves, could any real advance be made. It is no advancement to the rank and file to have the structure and control of the present unions transferred to industrial unions. The answer lies in the organisation of the shop stewards at the place of work. These are the real representatives of the rank and file, and, elected by the different union members, they get together to form joint shop stewards committees. These in their turn can link up with others in their industry, common problems and programmes of action can be discussed and finally these links spread to other industries until there would be a National Federation of Industries, an unofficial organisation of the rank and file.

The industrial unions, though someway off yet, will slowly emerge, and with their appearance this type of unofficial organisation might be possible. However, with the help of government legislation, the executive of these industrial unions might have the power to prevent the formation of a national rank and file movement.

If social change is not going to come about through the established unions, then new ways must be sought. The bases of the shop stewards committees offer a possibility, for they are not closed to ideas as the leaders of the trade unions are. All kinds of ideas and problems such as housing and workers' control of industry could be discussed. In this way a real challenge could be made to the State, possibly leading on to a social revolution.

Anarchism and Trade Unionism

GASTON GERARD

THE QUESTION OF THE POSITION anarchists should take in relation to Trade Unions has been the subject of perennial debate within the anarchist movement. It is not, however, a question which admits of a permanent or definitive answer. Because of differing circumstances and changing conditions, each generation of anarchists must think out its position afresh in the light of existing tendencies within its own national trade union movement. The present time seems an opportune one for a re-assessment of the anarchist position in relation to the British trade union movement and what follows is to be taken as a tentative contribution towards this end.

I

A useful starting point for discussion is provided in the two articles by Errico Malatesta on the subject published in 1907 and 1925 respectively.* The first was written at a time when the movement of revolutionary syndicalism was making great strides on the Continent. In France, where the classic revolutionary syndicalist movement found its most complete expression in the days before the first world war, this movement was very much a product of anarchist activity. Largely in reaction against the notorious policy of "propaganda by deed", many of the younger anarchists, led by the redoubtable Fernand Pelloutier, joined the syndicates with the object of developing their revolutionary potentialities. Such work seemed to them to offer a constructive alternative to a policy of negation and destruction which, however, justifiable it might be in theory, had done much to discredit the anarchist movement in the sight of the world at large. In their enthusiasm for the new policy, however, many of the anarchists abandoned any purely anarchist activity on the ground that the syndicate in its various forms was not only the most effective means of overthrowing capitalism but also contained in itself all the essentials of a free society.

Such an attitude amounted in effect to an identification of anarchism and syndicalism and its was against this attitude that Malatesta directed his attack. He was not opposed, it should be noted, to

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GASTON GERARD is a lecturer in political science whose valuable discussion of an anarchist approach to trade unionism first appeared in the University Libertarian *in* 1957.

anarchists participating as individuals in labour organisations. On the contrary, he thought that such participation was necessary; but he insisted that it should be participation and not identification. This position, which he reiterated in his second article, he supported on two main grounds. First, that anarchism was not equivalent to syndicalism. If it were, he argued, then syndicalism was merely a new and confusing term. In fact, however, it was not; only certain syndicalist ideas were genuinely anarchistic; others were only authoritarian ideas under a new guise. Experience had shown, he argued, that labour oragnisations, however, revolutionary they might be in their initial phases, had a twin tendency to degenerate into reformist and bureaucratic bodies. And this tendency was owing, not so much to *personal* factors, such as the corrupting influence of power, as to certain *institutional* factors.

It was, and is, a fundamental article of syndicalist theory that syndicates or unions perform a dual role; a negative role of defending the workers' interests under capitalism and a positive role of acting as the nuclei of the future society. Malatesta's point, as I interpret it, was that the first role—the defensive role, and in the short run from the ordinary worker's point of view, the most important role—inevitably dominates the second role, and in so doing paves the way for reformism. To fulfil their defensive role, the unions have, for example, to submit to an element of legal control. In audition, they are compelled to widen their membership as far as possible with the object of achieving a 100% organisation in their trade or industry. In doing this, however, the conscious militant minority becomes swamped by the non-militant majority, with the result that, even if the leadership remains in the hands of the militants, the revolutionary ideas one started with have to be toned down. The revolutionary programme becomes nothing but an empty formula.

Malatesta's conclusion, therefore, was that whilst anarchists should remain in the unions, combating as fiercely as possible these degenerative tendencies, they should not identify themselves too closely with syndicalism. "Let us beware of ourselves," he said. "The error of having abandoned the Labour movement has done an immense injury to anarchism, but at least it leaves unaltered the distinctive character. The error of confounding the anarchist movement with Trade Unionism would be still more grave. That will happen to us which happened to the Social Democrats as soon as they went into the Parliamentary struggle. They gained in numerical force, but by becoming each day less Socialistic. We also would become more numerous, but we should cease to be anarchist."

II

How far Malatesta's arguments applicable to the British trade union movement and how valid is his conclusion today?

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* "Anarchism and the Labour Movement," originally published in FREEDOM, Nov. 1907 and republished in the same journal 23.2.1946; "Syndicalism and Anarchism," published in *Pensiero e Volonta*, April-May, 1925 and republished in FREEDOM, 11.10.1952.

A review of the history of British trade unionism shows that there is ample evidence to support the view that labour organisations tend to degenerate into reformist bodies. Contrary to popular belief, trade unionism in this country has not always been reformist; it has in fact passed through several revolutionary, or potentially revolutionary, phases. It was in the early days of the movement that syndicalist ideas first saw the light of day. The Grand National of 1834 was the first expression of the One Big Union idea, and it was William Benbow who first elaborated the theory of the general strike—or grand national holiday, as he called it. In its beginnings at least British trade unionism was as revolutionary as one might wish. After the collapse of the first revolutionary movement, the trade unions settled down to win reforms within the existing system—reforms which in the hey-day of its 19th century prosperity British capitalism could well afford. Then in the 1880s with the onset of the Great Depression and the rise of competitors like Germany who challenged British capitalism's industrial supremacy, revolutionary ideas once again came to the fore in trade union circles. These ideas were asociated particularly with the rise of what was called the new Unionism—the attempt to organise the unskilled workers. Many British anarchists of the day considered that this New Unionism offered great scope for anarchist influence. William Morris' Socialist League, for example, addressed one of its first manifestos to the trade unions urging them " to direct all their energies towards confederating and federating with the distinct end of constituting themselves the nucleus of the socialist commonwealth " and making clear that the aim of socialism was the abolition of " that great bogey," the State. Similarly a writer in *Freedom* in 1892 urged that " Unions are free spontaneous associations of working men waiting to do anarchistic work." In point of fact, however, the New Unionists, despite their more militant policy, their vague talk of workers' control and a general strike, and their disavowal of the friendly society functions of the old union of skilled workers, proved to be less not more anarchistic than the old unions. It was the New Unions which were, the first to become infected with Fabian State Socialism and it was the New Unions which forced the pace in the movement towards the creation of a political Labour Party.

The reason for this apparent paradox is illuminating. *Just because* the workers they enlisted in their ranks could not afford to finance " coffin club " activities, and did not possess a monopoly of any particular skill, the New Unions were predisposed towards political action. Too weak to secure their defensive objects themselves, they turned to the State to do the job for them—to introduce a legislative 8-hour day, old age pensions, unemployment benefits and the like. At its birth the Labour Party was largely a means of achieving the defensive objects of the trade unions—and this, despite its " Socialist " programme, remains its primary function today. To tell trade unionists therefore to renounce political action is to ask them to renounce what they have found to be a powerful defensive weapon and to rely on their own unaided efforts—and to risk the possible loss of reforms that have already been won.

The third and to date last revolutionary phase of British trade unionism was the period roughly 1910-1926 when syndicalist ideas were again in the ascendant. British syndicalism was born partly of disillusionment with Labour Party policies and was partly the result of Continental and American influence. The movement achieved some success in spreading the idea of workers' control among the rank-and-file trade unionists and, in fact, to the extent that this idea is alive today in the British working-class movement, it is largely owing to the syndicalists of this period and their middle-class counterparts, the guild socialists. But the syndicalist movement proper collapsed partly through internal dissensions consequent on the creation of the Communist Party and partly through lack of success. The savage counter-attack of the British ruling class during the General Strike of 1962 dealt a body blow to British trade unionism. Syndicalist ideas were discredited—most unjustly since the General Strike was certainly not syndicalist-inspired—and after 1926 the policy of political action once again began to dominate trade union thought. Nothing that has happened since has seemed to justify to the majority of trade unions a return to the policy of relying on direct action in the industrial sphere. In terms of their own practical objects, trade union leaders have no incentive to revert to direct action mehods. The political ruling class is now agreed on the maintenance of the Welfare State which represents the limit of the utopian aspirations of the average trade unionist. As a guarantee of its maintenance the official trade union movement has been granted a secure niche in the organisation of the State and in return for this concession it throws its weight against " irresponsible " and unofficial strikes.

It is possible that if the Welfare State were threatened either by a reactionary government or by a new slump, this might provide the necessary stimulus for a new revolutionary phase in the history of British trade unionism. But there are no signs that a real slump is likely to occur in the foreseeable future or that our ruling class is so inept as to allow a repetition of mass unemployment on the scale experienced in the 1930s. And what is more important, there is no reason to believe that, if trade unionism did take a revolutionary turn, this would be anything more than a passing phase. There is nothing in the history of British trade unionism to suggest that in the long run it is ever likely to be more than a reformist institution. Looked at historically, revolutionary methods and policies on the part of British trade unionism have been no more than one way of winning reformist concessions from the ruling class. Trade unionists have, in effect, been saying to their masters: " If you don't grant us our modest demands, just look what we'll do! "

III

The other tendency—the tendency towards bureaucratisation—which Malatesta discerned is also amply illustrated in British trade unionism. " Every institution," he wrote, " has a tendency to extend its

functions, to perpetuate itself, and to become an end in itself." When this tendency becomes dominant, bureaucracy, the *de facto* rule of officials, is the result. This stage in the life of an organisation is marked by the emergence of a new type of leader—the organiser, who replaces the more demagogic type: the Morrisons replace the Keir Hardies, the Bevins and Deakins replace the Ben Tilletts and the Tom Manns. In theory the officials remain responsible to their members but in practice it is the officials who run the show.

This tendency which Malatesta noted has since been elaborated into a sociological hypothesis, known as the law of oligarchy. First formulated by Robert Michels in his exhaustive study of "Political Parties" (1915), it has a general application. Put in its most general form, the hypothesis states that in any organisation, however democratic it may be, once it has reached a certain size and degree of complexity, there is an invariable tendency for the officials to gain effective control. The ostensibly democratic constitution thus merely serves to mask what is in fact the rule of a narrow oligarchy. It needs no great knowledge of British trade unionism to appreciate the fact that the movement has reached the oligarchical stage. The facts published in Dr. Goldstein's book on the T.G.W.U. confirm the view that Michels' "iron law of oligarchy," as he called it, holds within the trade union world that we know today.

IV

Increasing awareness of the twin tendency in trade unionism towards reformism and bureaucracy has suggested to many contemporary anarchists that participation in trade unions is value-less and that instead attention should be concentrated in building up a new trade union movement on avowedly syndicalist lines. This, as I understand it, is the policy of those who call themselves anarcho-syndicalists. Such anarchists propose that the new movement should adopt principles of organisation which would ensure that it would not develop in the way the "official" trade union movement has developed. The new unions or syndicates are to be based on industries rather than on crafts, thus avoiding sectional conflicts between the workers themselves. There is to be no political action; instead, reliance is to be placed exclusively on direct action. By this means it is hoped to avoid mere reformisms and the danger of unions being used for the ulterior ends of political opporuntists and careerists. Special measures are to be taken to avoid the danger of bureaucratisation. There will be a minimum of organisers; no organiser will be regarded as permanent; and no organiser will be paid more than a rank-and-file worker. By these means, it is hoped that control will remain with the rank-and-file: the danger of control falling into the hand of a hierarchy of officials will be avoided because there will be no officials in the sense understood by ordinary trade unionists today.

In theory all this is perfectly correct but nevertheless the policy of seeking to create anarchist organisations—for this is what it amounts to—is, I believe, mistaken. In the first place, the time is not propitious.

Such a policy is likely to bear fruit only in a period of revolutionary crisis and after the ground has been well fertilized by years of propaganda in favour of such general objects as workers' control. In this respect, it will take years of intensive effort before the climate in the world of labour is as favourable towards revolutionary activity as it was in, say, the early 1920s. In the second place, the theory of anarcho-syndicalist organisation fails to show how it can counteract the institutional factor noted by Malatesta. The means proposed for ensuring rank-and-file control can only be successful if membership is confined to workers who are more or less conscious anarchists. But if this was done, the numbers at the present time and in the foreseeable future would necessarily be small and the unions so organised would find themselves unable to fulfil satisfactorily their first role—that of defending the interests of their members under the existing régime. If, on the other hand, membership was not limited—the unions would soon become swamped by reformists and the anarcho-syndicalist principles of organisation would cease to operate. The reformists might allow the organisation to keep its revolutionary programme but it would be more than a paper programme. In this connection it should be noted that many existing unions still have the revolutionary object of workers' control written into their constitutions. In short, the anarcho-syndicalist is faced with an inescapable dilemma at the present time: he cane either choose to keep his organisation revolutionary, in which case it will be small and ineffective in defence; or he can choose to make it large and effective for defensive purposes at the sacrifice of its revolutionary potentialities. In addition, a policy of creating separate organisations would divide and confuse the workers even more than they are divided and confused at the present time and this in itself would be used as a strong propaganda point by the existing union hierarchy. And, finally, there is the undeniable fact that the efforts expended by anarcho-syndicalists in propagandising their policy has had little effect. The hopes placed by the anarcho-syndicalists in the unofficial workers' committees that have sprung up since the war have not been fulfilled.

V

In the present circumstances, therefore, it seems to me that Malatesta's main contentions still hold good that those anarchists who are prepared to act in the industrial sphere should work within the existing unions rather than propagate the idea of a new union movement. This is not to say that the time will never come when the workers should be encouraged to form new and revolutionary unions but that time will be in the future *after* the ground has been well prepared in the present unions. In short, the position anarchists should take in relation to trade unionism today is to participate in them as rank-and-file members with the two-fold object of (i) making anarchists by spreading anarchist ideas and explaining to their fellow-workers the root causes of their disillusionment with the trade union leadership and policies and (ii) acting as a prophylactic against reformist and bureaucratic tendencies.

The first object is fundamental in the sense that it is now clearer than ever than an anarchist society can be brought about, not by mass movements, however "revolutionary," but only by individuals who have consciously adopted an anarchist philosophy and faith. As William Morris was never tired of asserting in the days when "socialism" was still an honourable word, the only way to make socialism is to make socialists—a truth which his Fabian opponents never began to understand.

The second object, if less fundamental, is of the utmost importance in the immediate future. The unions began as free associations of workers to promote their economic interests. Increasingly since the war, however, they are being incorporated in the mechanism of the State. Such incorporation means in practice that instead of defending their members' interests they are tending more and more to act as disciplinary bodies and as agencies for restraining the workers. The insistence on greater productivity at all costs—with no questioning of what is produced and to what end—and the present talk of regulating strikes are significant pointers to the fact that British trade unionism is treading the same road as its Soviet counterpart. Unless the present tendency is halted soon, the much vaunted independence of trade unionism will be no more; and one further step will be taken towards the totalitarian state. In a situation such as this and granted that the most desirable course of action is not practicable—in this case, the speedy building up of genuinely anarchist unions—there is only one sensible alternative for the revolutionary: to do his utmost to reverse the present tendency. For it is obvious that independence of the State is a prior condition for any further development of labour organisations along anarchist lines. By opposing the reformism and bureaucratic control of the existing trade union leadership and asserting the independence of the unions, anarchists could play their part in stopping the drift towards totalitarianism. Such a role is less heroic than attempting to foster anarcho-syndicalist unions, but in the long run is likely to be more fruitful.

In an age like our own when all the major currents are running towards "the closed society," the revolutionary might well be satisfied if he can achieve the limited object of keeping open the door to freedom.

Trade Unions v. the Law

BILL CHRISTOPHER

IS THE ROOKES V. BARNARD CASE a storm in a tea cup? Sir George Pollock, Q.C., Director of the British Employers Confederation says "Not to worry, it is not expected that the 'closed shop judgment' will encourage employers to take legal action". He then quietly points out that in law there is no "right" to strike in breach of contract. The strike in breach of contract is not a right, but a legal wrong.

The Rookes case itself appears to be a very smelly affair; according to Rookes' statement in the *Sunday Telegraph* he was the paragon of virtue; according to D.A.T.A., he was a militant who because his union was not taking a strong enough line, resigned, thus provoking a "closed shop" dispute. Rookes was one of the members who met the Corporation officials to register the fact that 100 per cent. membership had been established. B.O.A.C. in reply, said they would take no action to prejudice this position.

The "closed shop" policy is always presented as a controversial issue: the freedom of the individual to join a union or not. To a trade unionist the issue is not controversial, to fight and win needs unity, so the "closer the shop" the better. Who are these bods who claim to cherish personal freedom so highly? In the majority of cases they are people who believe that because *they* are getting the recognised TU rate or over, trade unionism is not necessary. They believe in the jungle technique of survival of the fittest, the strongest go up the ladder, and the weaker are used as the rungs. In other cases, to join a union means the sack. This still happens in the Britain of 1964.

In the *J. T. Stratford & Son Ltd. v. Lindley* case, the Watermen, Lightermen, Tugmen and Bargemen's Union wanted recognition for their members by J. T. Stratford who claimed that the T & GWU had the majority of members and therefore they were the negotiating body. J. T. Stratford's barges were declared "black" by the WLT & BU, and they were thus immobilised: The Watermens' union was ordered to desist from continuing their embargo by the court, but this ruling was reversed at a later stage and so the union won its case.

Where do the unions stand now in the light of these two judgments? To quote Barnard's counsel in the Court of Appeal, the judgment of Mr. Justice Sachs drove a "coach and four" through the 1906 Trades Disputes Act which gave protection from the law for acts which may have been actionable in other circumstances, but which were taken in pursuance of a trade dispute.

The Rookes v. Barnard decision means in effect that a third party other than the union and the employer can be involved and can sue, not only shop stewards but the fulltime officials of the union involved. As Aidan Crawley MP stated in his articles in the *Sunday Times* (1/3/64), "The right to call an official strike is untouched, but if the

courts continue to interpret the law in the light of the recent decision, men who strike suddenly without giving due notice, may find themselves being sued for damages not by their employers (who have always had the right but seldom used it) but by anyone who has suffered loss as a result of their action. It is also possible that anyone who threatens to strike without notice might be guilty of intimidation and lay himself open to criminal prosecution". He then poses the question "Is this fair"? Aidan Crawley by the way is in favour of a Royal Commission on the unions.

Just what are these self-professed patriots after? Frankly they want trade unions to act like a "fan club", with the same degree of militancy. The Swedish set-up is looked upon as a rough blue print, employer and employee working hand in hand for the common good: master and man, and all that jazz. Strikes in Sweden are virtually impossible by the time all the necessary rigmarole is gone through. The advantage of the strike weapon is lost, which of course is the sole purpose of the rigmarole. As Mr. G. H. Doughty, General Secretary of the Draughtsmen's and Allied Technicians Association (DATA) stated in a speech printed as a pamphlet called *Keep the Unions Free.** "What will happen in federated firms where spontaneous action takes place against victimisation and provocation by employers, only time will show. Spontaneous actions often take place when an active trade unionist is discharged. If you have to wait three months you may as well forget it."

The Rookes v. Barnard case in conjunction with that of Stratford & Son Ltd. v. Lindley, has given the would-be union reformers a taste of blood, a Royal Commission on the Unions is now their battle cry. The National press in their editorials all supported an investigation, although in some, such an investigation was couched in the vaguest of terms.

In the *Financial Times* (24/3/64) it was said that, "Until recently the unions had for a long time seemed to be getting the best of both worlds in their legal status—enjoying a substantial degree of legal protection with very little legal responsibilty. Consequently there was no incentive for them to co-operate in steps to regularise and tighten up trade union law." The editorial concludes that "A great deal of clarification is needed. Conflicts of interests can never be eliminated, but conflicts over rights, and over the interpretation of agreements, can and should be." *The Times* and *The Guardian* both called for a new look at trade union legislation. *The Daily Mail* in its 'Comment' (24/2/64) calls for a Royal Commission and states that present industrial relations are "anarchy".

The chief advocate of smashing the unions in their present form is Edward Martell, Chairman of the "Freedom Group" and editor of the *New Daily*, whose editorial on 23/1/64 says, "There have been various interpretations of the House of Lords decision in the Rookes case on Tuesday. It is agreed, however, that this decision curtails the almost unlimited freedom formerly enjoyed by the trade unions under

* *Keep the Unions Free*, published by DATA, Onslow Hall, Richmond, Surrey.

the Trade Disputes Act 1906. Officials will no longer be able to victimise individual workers in the certainty that they cannot fight back. Unofficial strikes outside the context of union-negotiated agreements may now be ground for damages and moves to start "sympathy strikes" and "black" products in places not directly connected with a dispute may have to stop."

Over the past six months Martell has been actively campaigning for a Royal Commission on the unions and has gathered support in one way or another from half the back benchers of the Conservative Party.

We can rest assured that the first opportunity that Martell gets for testing the Rookes v. Barnard judgment, he will take. During the power workers' discussion with the Electricity Board, Martell took counsel's opinion, after which he stated that a legal clash would take place if, for a few minutes, work had to stop at the Saphire Press (*New Daily*) or if the life of anybody relying upon electricity in an iron lung had been endangered. (Power workers would never have allowed that situation to arise.)

In Yorkshire a dispute has been in progress for very many weeks over the "closed shop" issue, and the local branch of the NUR agreed to try and black the firm's products. "Brutus" in the *New Daily* (4/3/64) says, "Offhand, I cannot recall a previous instance of this. I would very much doubt whether such action in a nationalised industry would be legal."

This is the exact position that the trade unions fear; striking in breach of contract has gone by the board (legally) in the past, because employers are more interested in getting production restarted than going through the rigmarole of the courts. They realise that if they started to sue shop stewards or full-time union officials, production would never be restarted and also there would be a strong possibility of the strike spreading. For example whilst Bill Lindley of the Watermen's union was in court on a contempt of court charge, 3,000 lightermen of the Port of London stopped work.

Having said that, where lies the danger? The danger lies in Martell or someone like him who is prepared to "take the unions on". Once a *clear breach* has been made, the rest of the industrial toads will climb on the band waggon.

As I see it, the job of trade unions is not to help perpetuate the present system of society but to help get shot of it, although I must confess that the modern trend is "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em". All our would-be reformers and some trade union leaders want to get in and help run this murky society of ours, sit on the board of directors and kid themselves it's Workers' Control. If this train of thought takes serious hold, trade unions will be reduced to the position of benevolent societies and sports clubs.

Let's be frank: 99 per cent. of the time it's the rank and file members who force strike action, and rank and file militants have never had any illusions as to whose side the law will take in any strike action. Getting down to rock bottom, what's really new? In any case successful militant action does not necessarily mean traditional strike action:

just conform to the rules and regulations made by the employers themselves, and things would be chaotic.

The Rookes v. Barnard judgment presents the challenge. Some one will take it up, this intensifying the fight between labour and employers, and exposing the co-partnership, "fair day's work for a fair day's pay" baloney for what it is really worth.

Unions and workers' control

THE STUDY GROUP ON INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY held at Nottingham in April (and convened by the journal *Voice of the Unions*), concerned itself largely with the policy and demands to be adopted by the unions if and when a Labour government is returned in the autumn. Ernie Roberts of the AEU pointed out that there were many Labour Party resolutions on the subject which had never been implemented. "Cripps said that the workers were neither fit nor ready to control industry. Morrison not only said it, but made certain that it would be so". Ken Coates reminded the participants that their discussions were taking place in the context of a capitalist system which is moving closer and closer to state capitalism: the direct opposite of workers' control; and several other speakers pointed out that unless the Left built up now a movement for workers' control, the initiative would certainly be taken by the right-wing of the Labour Party, to divert left-wing militancy, whether in the nationalised or "co determination", under the banner of "orderly industrial relations", productivity, and so on.

Participants differed in their assessment of the extent to which a demand for workers' control can be said to exist. Peter Jackson pointed to a recent survey in the steel industry, showing a desire for workers control of 15 per cent. (But think: if only 15 per cent of workers *were* actually and actively demanding workers' control!) Other speakers were sure that a revival of the idea within the trade union movement was imminent, if not already in evidence: Tony Topham for instance, drew this conclusion from the sharp growth in the number of shop stewards in the engineering industry, and the simultaneous increase in the number of strikes over "non-economic" issues in the industry. "The number of disputes concerned with management prerogatives", he declared, "is growing all the time". There is evidence that the employers realise this, and much of the discussion following the Rookes v. Barnard case has been aimed at disciplining the shop stewards, as have the proposals to run "educational" courses aimed at indoctrinating them.

Topham have developed this theme in a subsequent article, citing Prof. H. A. Turner's study of the increase in stoppages in the mining industry, which Turner interprets as showing "an implicit pressure for more democracy and individual rights in industry" since "it seems clear that . . . one is dealing with a strong contemporary current of feeling which has not so far been satisfied by the limited development of joint consultation."

Richard Fletcher, a London Co-operative Society committee member, who led the discussion on the role of workers' control in the Co-op movement, pointed out one curious aspect of that movement's current malaise. In the recent London Co-operative Society elections, under 2 per cent: of the members voted. It was estimated, he said, that 80 per cent. of the people who actually voted were co-op employees, ex-employees or relatives of employees, with the result that a kind of accidental *de facto* workers' control exists. How paradoxical then, was the situation in the Works Department of the London Co-op, where the left-wing militant members of the committee have, at short notice, declared 200 of their staff redundant. Here surely, was a field for experiments in workers' control under a collective contract or self-management system: to operate the Works Department as a syndicate or workers' co-partnership, building for example, houses for co-op members.

This led to some pessimistic observations from Peter Elderfield, based on his experience of trying to organise and to keep solvent, co-operative co-partnership building firms. And yet, as he pointed out, co-operatives have built 750,000 houses in Germany since the war, the French producer co-ops have built 400,000 houses, and in Sweden 40 per cent. of all housing was built by co-operatives. (Might not the basis of his unhappy experience be not so much the inability of workers to organise on their own, as the difficulty of operating, with insufficient capital, within the framework of a capitalist economy?

Everyone seemed agreed that if we are going to develop a movement and a demand for workers' control, it must be within the trade unions, and at the same time it was recognised that the unions were not the appropriate vehicle for workers' control. As Tom Bottomore put it in his address on the second day, two separate systems of organisation are needed, since the trade unions could not manage the plants and represent the workers' interests defensively at the same time.

And Michael Barratt-Brown, who led the discussion on the possibilities for action in the publicly-controlled industries, suggesting that the first step for "encroaching control" in the mining industry, was on three kinds of policy decision—safety, hire-and-fire, and manning of the coal-face, remarked that while the NUM should be the channel for workers' intervention in decision-making, "the delegates should not be the little demi-gods who run some of the union lodges."

Indeed, once we can get this issue of workers' control back on the agenda, the question of the role of the unions and of the shop stewards' movement to the two opposing functions of workers' management and workers' defence, is one of the two basic theoretical issues to be argued about. The other is that of the relationship of the idea of economic planning to that of workers' control, which was the subject of a stimulating paper presented to the study group by Walter Kendall of USDAW. Basing himself on the experience of the East European countries he concluded (among other things) that "Total planning and workers' control are incompatible. The precondition for workers' control at the point of production is a form of planning which is both flexible, general and democratic. Democratic workers' control of production is uncompatible with undemocratic control of planning."

Workers' control and the collective contract

COLIN WARD

IN EVERY INDUSTRIAL COUNTRY, and probably in every agricultural country, the idea of workers' control has manifested itself at one time or another—as a demand, an aspiration, a programme or a dream. To confine ourselves to this country and this century, it was the basis of two parallel movements in the period around the First World War—Syndicalism and Guild Socialism. These two movements dwindled away in the early nineteen-twenties, and ever since then there have been sporadic and periodic attempts to re-create a movement for workers' control of industry. In the late 'thirties, following the constructive achievements of the Spanish anarcho-syndicalists in the revolution of 1936, there was an attempt to build a new syndicalist movement here; in the late forties a number of left-wing groups formed a London League for Workers' Control, and at the beginning of 1961 a National Rank and File Movement with similar objectives was constituted. But from the point of view of sparking off a large-scale working-class demand for workers' control, these attempts have been completely ineffectual.

The advocates of workers' control had much more reason for optimism in 1920 than in the 1960's. In that years the Sankey Report (a majority report of a Royal Commission) advocating "joint control" and public ownership of the mining industry, was turned down by the Government for being too radical, and by the shop stewards for not being radical enough. When the mines actually were nationalised after almost thirty years, nothing even as mild as joint control was either proposed or demanded. In 1920 too, the Building Guilds began their brief but successful existence. In our own day it is inconceivable that large local authorities would let big building contracts to guilds of building workers, or that the co-operative movement would finance them. The idea that workers should have *some* say in the running of their industries was generally accepted then in a way that it has never been since.

And yet the trade union movement today is immeasurably stronger than it was in the days when workers' control was a widespread demand. What has happened is that the labour movement as a whole has accepted the notion that you gain more by settling for less. In most western countries, as Anthony Crosland has pointed out, the unions "grealy aided by propitious changes in the political and economic background, have achieved a more effective control through the

This is the text of a paper given to the Study Group on Industrial Democracy at Nottingham on April 25th.

independent exercise of their collective bargaining strength than they would ever have achieved by following the path (beset as it is by practical difficulties on which all past experiments have foundered) of direct workers' management. Indeed we may risk the generalisation that the greater the power of the Unions the less the interest in workers' management."

His observation is true, even if it is unpalatable for those who would like to see the unions, or some more militant syndicalist kind of industrial union, as the vehicle of workers' control. Many advocates of workers' control have seen the unions as the organs through which it is to be exercised, assuming presumably that the attainment of workers' control would bring complete community of interest in industry and that the defensive role of the unions would become obsolete. I think this view is a gross over-simplification. Before the First World War, the Webbs pointed out that "the decisions of the most democratically elected executive committees with regard to wages, hours and conditions of employment of particular sections of their fellow workers, do not always satisfy the latter, or even seem to them to be just." And the Jugoslav scholar, Branko Pribicevic, in his history of the shop stewards' movement in this country, emphasises this point in criticising the reliance on the idea of control by industrial unions:

> "Control of industry is largely incompatible with a union's character as a voluntary association of the workers, formed primarily to protect and represent their interests. Even in the most democratic industrial system, i.e. a system in which the workers would have a share in control, there would still be a need for unions. . . . Now if we assume that managers would be responsible to the body of workers, we cannot exclude the possibility of individual injustices and mistakes. Such cases must be taken up by the union. . . . It seems most improbable that a union could fulfil any of these tasks successfully if it were also the organ of industrial administration or, in other words, if it had ceased to be a voluntary association. . . .
>
> "It was unfortunate that the idea of workers' control was almost completely identified with the concept of union control. . . . It was obvious throughout that the unions would oppose any doctrine aiming at creating a representative structure in industry parallel with their own."

In fact, in the only instances in this country which we know of, of either complete or partial workers' control, the trade union structure is completely separate from the administration, and there has never been any suggestion that it should be otherwise. What are these examples? There are the co-operative co-partnerships which make, for example, some of the footware which is sold in retail co-operative societies. These are, so far as they go, genuine examples of workers' control (needless to say I am *not* speaking of the factories run by the CWS on completely orthodox lines), but they do not seem to have any capacity for expansion, or to exercise any influence on industry in general. Then there are those firms where some form of control by the employees has been sought by enlightened or idealistic employers. (I am thinking of firms like Scott Bader Ltd., and Farmer & Co., not of those heavily paternalistic chocolate manufacturers or of spurious co-partnerships). There are also odd small workshops like the new "factory for peace" (Rowan Engineering Co. Ltd) which is now in operation in Glasgow.

The Labour correspondent of *The Times* remarked of ventures of this kind that, while they provide "a means of harmonious self-govern-

ment in a small concern", there is no evidence that they provide "any solution to the problem of establishing democracy in large-scale modern industry". And a great many people share this view, that workers' control is a nice idea, but one incapable of realisation (and consequently not worth agitating for) because of the scale and complexity of modern industry. On the face of it we could counter these arguments by pointing out how changes in sources of motive power make the geographical concentration of industry obsolete, and how changing methods of production (automation for instance) make the concentration of vast numbers of people obsolete. *Decentralisation* is perfectly feasible, and probably economically advantageous within the structure of industry as it is today. But probably the arguments based on the complexity of modern industry actually mean something quite different.

What they really mean is that while they can imagine the isolated case of a small firm in which the shares are held by the employees, but which is run on ordinary business lines—like Scott Bader Ltd., or while they can imagine the isolated case of a firm in which a management committee is elected by the workers—like the co-operative co-partnerships; they cannot imagine those who manipulate the commanding heights of the economy being either disturbed by, or least of all, influenced by, these admirable precedents. And they are right of course: there is not on the political or on the industrial horizon, the slightest sign of any widespread desire for, or capacity for, a revolutionary change in the structure and control of industry.

The tiny minority who would like to see revolutionary changes—and presumably this means us—should not cherish any illusions about this. Neither in the political parties of the left nor in the trade union movement will they find anything more than a similar tiny minority in agreement. Nor does the history of syndicalist movements in any country except Spain give them any cause for optimism. Geoffrey Ostergaard puts their dilemma in these terms: "To be effective as defensive organisations, the unions needed to embrace as many workers as possible and this inevitably led to a dilution of their revolutionary objectives. In practice, the syndicalists were faced with the choice of unions which were *either* reformist and purely defensive *or* revolutionary and largely ineffective."

Is there a way out of this dilemma: an approach which combines the ordinary day to day struggle in industry with a more radical attempt to shift the balance of power in the factory? I believe that there is, in what the syndicalists and guild socialists used to describe as "encroaching control" by means of the "collective contract". The syndicalists saw this as "a system by which the workers within a factory or shop would undertake a specific amount of work in return for a lump sum to be allocated by the work-group as it saw fit, on condition that the employers abdicated their control of the productive process itself."

The late G. D. H. Cole, who returned to the advocacy of the collective contract system towards the end of his life, claimed that "the effect would be to link the members of the working group together in a common enterprise under their joint auspices and control, and to

emancipate them from an externally imposed discipline in respect of their method of getting the work done". But has it really any relevance to present day industrial conditions? I believe that it has, and my evidence for his belief comes from the example of the gang system worked in some Coventry factories which has some aspects in common with the collective contract idea, and the "Composite work" system worked in some Durham coal mines, which has everything in common with it.

The first of these, the gang system, was described by an American professor of industrial and management engineering, Seymour Melman, in his book *Decision-Making and Productivity*, where he sought, by a detailed comparison of the manufacture of a similar product under dissimilar conditions: the example he found was the Ferguson tractor, made under license in both Detroit and Coventry "to demonstrate that there are realistic alternatives to managerial rule over production". His account of the operation of the gang system in Coventry was confirmed by a Coventry engineering worker, Reg Wright, in two articles in ANARCHY (Nos. 2 and 8).

Of Standard's tractor factory (he is speaking of the period before Standard sold the plant in 1956, and before Leylands took over Standard), Melman declares, "In this firm we will show that at the same time: thousands of workers operated virtually without supervision as conventionally understood, and at high productivity; the highest wage in British industry was paid; high quality products were produced at acceptable prices in extensively mechanised plants; the management conducted its affairs at unusually low costs; also, organised workers had a substantial role in production decision-making". The production policy of the firm at that time was most unorthodox for the motor industry and was the result of two inter-related decision-making systems, those of the workers and of management: "In production, the management has been prepared to pay a high wage and to organise production via the gang system which requires management to deal with a grouped work force, rather than with single workers, or with small groups . . . the foreman are concerned with the detailed surveillance of things rather than with the detailed control over people. . . . The operation of integrated plants employing 10,000 production workers did not require the elaborate and costly hallmark of business management."

In the motor-car factory fifteen gangs ranged in size from 50 to 500 people and the tractor factory was organised as one huge gang. From the standpoint of the production workers "the gang system leads to keeping track of goods instead of keeping track of people". For payment purposes the output that was measured was the output of the whole group. In relation to management, Melman points out, "The grouped voice of a work force had greater impact than the pressure of single workers. This effect of the gang system coupled with trade unionism, is well understood among many British managements. As a result, many managements have opposed the use of the gang system and have argued the value of single worker incentive payments."

He contrasts the "predatory competition" which characterises the managerial decision-making system with the workers' decision-making

system in which " The most characteristic feature of the decision-formulating process is that of *mutuality* in decision-making with final authority residing in the hands of the grouped workers themselves ".

My second example is again derived from a comparative study of different methods of work organisation, this one made by the Tavistock Institute in the late 1950s and reported in two books published last year. Its importance can be seen from the opening words of one of these reports (*Autonomous Group Functioning* by P. G. Herbst):

> " This study concerns a group of miners who came together to evolve a new way of working together, planning the type of change they wanted to put through, and testing it in practice. The new type of work organisation which has come to be known in the industry as composite working, has in recent years emerged spontaneously in a number of different pits in the north-west Durham coalfield. Its roots go back to an earlier tradition which has been almost completely displaced in the course of the last century by the introduction of work techniques based on task segmentation. differential status and payment, and extrinsic hierarchical control."

The other report (*Organisational Choice* by Trist, Higgin, Murray and Pollock), notes how the study shows " the ability of quite large primary work groups of 40-50 members to act as self-regulating, self-developing social organisms able to maintain themselves in a steady state of high productivity. . . ." The system of composite working is described by Herbst in a way which shows its clear relationship to the collective contract system:

> " The composite work organisation may be described as one in which the group takes over complete responsibility for the total cycle of operations involved in mining the coal face. No member of the group has a fixed work-role. Instead, the men deploy themselves, depending on the requirements of the ongoing group task. Within the limits of technological and safety requirements they are free to evolve their own way of organising and carrying out their task. They are not subject to any external authority in this respect, nor is there within the group itself any member who takes over a formal directive leadership function. Whereas in conventional long-wall working the goal-getting task is split into four to eight separate work roles, carried out by different teams, each paid at a different rate, in the composite group members are no longer paid directly for any of the tasks carried out. The all-in wage agreement is, instead, based on the negotiated price per ton of coal produced by the team. The income obtained is divided equally among team members."

Both the Tavistock books and Melman's book are highly technical studies written for specialists, but their lessons are clear for people who are interested in propagating the idea of workers' control. These experiments do not entail submission to paternalistic schemes of management—in fact they tend to demolish the myth of management and managerial expertise. They are a force for solidarity rather than for divisions between workers on the basis of pay and status. They help bring decision-making back to the factory floor and the face to face group. They increase the pleasure and self-respect of work, and they even satisfy—though this is not my criterion for recommending them—the capitalist test of productivity. The collective contract idea also has the great merit of combining long-term and short-term aims. And if our long-term aim is workers' control of industry, the collective contract provides a realistic starting point. We cannot hope at this stage to build a movement from nothing. But we *can* hope to enlarge the aspects of work which workers *do* control.

Anarchy and Culture: Fernand Pelloutier and the dilemma of revolutionary syndicalism

ALAN SPITZER

ADVANCING UNDER SOCIALIST BANNERS, the labour movement in Western Europe won such success by the end of the nineteenth century as to produce a deep moral and intellectual crisis in European socialism. Internecine quarrels over revisionism, participationism, and anti-political syndicalism reflected the malaise of a " revolutionary " movement that each year bound itself more closely to the system it had vowed to destroy. For socialist theoreticians, the crisis was cognitive or " scientific "—it had to do with issues of adequate historical analysis and prediction—but for the theorists of French revolutionary syndicalism it was essentially a moral crisis. In their eyes the socialist parties had already failed because they were the instruments for manipulation and betrayal of the workers by leaders whose ambitions could be gratified through the capitalist establishment. They identified a practical and moral alternative to political socialism in the revolutionary general strike prepared and carried out by autonomous proletarian organisations. Such organisations were necessary to the idealists of the general strike if their programmes were not to degenerate into a strictly verbal revolutionary Couéism and they therefore put great stock in the development of militant working-class associations. Among these, the Bourses du Travail, which flourished from 1895 to 1901 under the dedicated direction of the anarchist intellectual, Fernand Pelloutier, seemed the most promising.

Fernand Pelloutier came to revolutionary syndicalism out of a background of provincial republican politics. As a youthful journalist at Nantes he moved left from the radical republicans into the camp of the orthodox Marxists, and then, with his close friend Aristide Briand, broke with the Guesdists over the issue of the general strike and turned toward the commitment to anarcho-syndicalism that was to define the rest of his short career. During the 1890s he played a leading part in the growth and consolidation of the French trade union movement; and in the successful struggle to separate it from political socialism. He was one of those middle class martyrs to the ideal of

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ALAN SPITZER is Professor of History at the University of Iowa. *We are grateful to him and to the editor of the* International Review of Social History *for permission to reproduce his essay. Passages quoted in French has been translated for* ANARCHY.

proletarian freedom and self-respect, dying of a tubercular condition in his early thirties, after some ten years of tremendous labours in agitation, pamphleteering, journalism and most of all in consolidating the Bourses du Travail into an effective national movement. When Pelloutier became secretary of the national Federation of the Bourses du Travail in 1895 there were 34 Bourses made up of 606 syndicates, five years later shortly before his death there were 57 Bourses with 1065 syndicates.

During Pelloutier's tenure the Bourses expanded their range of action far beyond that of the labour exchange which was their original function. Each Bourse was a federation of all the trade unions in a locality willing to co-operate across craft or industrial lines. The heart of each Bourse was, wherever possible, some permanent location—a union hall which was to be the centre of working class existence, and to provide a great variety of services including a mutual benefit society, a job information and placement bureau, a system of financial assistance for travelling workers, a strike chest, a programme of propaganda for organising the unorganised, a sort of bureau of labour statistics, and education courses, periodic conferences, and a library.

The growth and vitality of the Bourses du Travail aroused the enthusiasm of the various theorists of revolutionary syndicalism not only because they were self-directed working class organisations more or less uncorrupted by socialist factions and ambitions, but because they seemed to provide the institutional nucleus for the construction of a new order out of the ruins of the old. Georges Sorel thought that Pelloutier, recognising that socialism could only be based on " an absolute separation of classes and on the abandonment of all hope for political reconstruction of the old order," had helped to establish the means for the final break " with the imitations of the bourgeois tradition " through the organisation of autonomous proletarian institutions: the Bourses du Travail.

Pelloutier's place in the history of the French labour movement is secured by his practical contributions to the development of the Bourses rather than by the enthusiasm he aroused in the armchair ideologists of the general strike or by his own contributions to anarcho-syndicalist doctrine. However an examination of the doctrinal foundations of his brand of syndicalism helps to situate it in French social history and illuminates the ambiguities of his commitment to the self-emancipation of the workers. Pelloutier was a middle class intellectual who believed that for the workers to shatter, and transcend, the capitalist order they had to liberate themselves from the iron vice of bourgeois culture. His radical critique of this culture owed a great deal to its nineteenth-century French critics including the tendency to draw upon the intellectual stock of the culture for the rationale that condemned it.

Pelloutier, of course, was not interested in formulating some completely new revolutionary ideology and explicitly placed himself in the cranky and paradoxical tradition of moralistic radicalism, articulated in the writings of Proudhon and carried on, with reference to the practical example of Pelloutier himself, by the school of Sorel. He once described Proudhon as the least utopian of all the socialists

precisely because he established morality as the criterion, not only for social action, but for any science or metaphysics, whereas " so-called scientific socialism " had to contrive sophistic arguments that would permit it to arrive at its utopian ideals by induction.

Pelloutier's own refusal to separate theoretical from moral considerations was at the base of his repudiation of socialist political alternatives. He perceived parliamentary socialism as an ignoble avenue of social mobility, and revolutionary socialism as either a rhetorical facade for unrevolutionary ambitions or an academy for future authoritarians. The answer to these corrupting alternatives lay nowhere but in the working class itself—in its solidarity and its revolutionary will. He left Proudhonian channels, at the point where he accepted for the working class the moral obligation to be revolutionary in a literal as well as a metaphysical sense—where he asserted the liberating role of " that violence which in the end, alone, can curb violence, and which is the natural weapon of every proud and dignified creature."

The voluntarism of the idea of progress as moral change is obvious, particularly when the regeneration is not to be confined to the hearts of individual men but realised through the very process of collective revolutionary action. However, Pelloutier did not conceive of the liberation of humanity as completely contingent upon the revolutionary will of the oppressed. Like most contemporary revolutionaries he mingled exhortations to bring down the capitalist system with predictions of its inevitable demise. Notwithstanding occasional expressions of contempt for " economic laws " so often wrong in the event, he was convinced that the inner contradictions of capitalism inexorably pointed to its extinction.

The economic theories which provided Pelloutier with this conviction were out of the common stock of a century of French radicalism. Although he occasionally borrowed the Marxian terminology of contemporary socialism, his essential conception of the nature and direction of capitalist development was that of the perversion of the exchange function through the illegitimate transformation of money from neutral standard of value to a valued commodity: " The standard of exchange gives scope for monopoly and to capitalisation because instead of remaining a standard, i.e. the fiduciary and exact equivalent of products, it becomes at the same time a value, i.e. a commodity, an object of commerce, and an indispensable instrument of labour."

The subordination of production to the accumulation of the perverted value represented by money enables those who possess it to exchange it for a " greater quantity of labour (hence surplus value, surplus labour, usury in all its forms.) " So the surplus value of labour is conceived as that portion of created wealth siphoned off by the possessors and manipulators of the medium of exchange whose successful machinations have guaranteed " The inversely proportionate and over-growing increase in wealth and poverty, and in their consequences: authority and servitude."

This venerable notion of the illegitimate use of money as the original economic sin was the commonplace of nineteenth-century French anti-capitalist polemic. It reflected lower-class preoccupations

in a pre-industrial society where not only the peasants and petty proprietors but the town workers longed for easy credit as the crucial economic reform and where the usurer remained the popular personification of capitalist rapacity. Although social and economic changes during Pelloutier's lifetime made these doctrines increasingly archaic they continued to serve him as the theoretical foundation for his polemic against all economic reforms within the framework of the capitalist state. He argued that all apparent benefits granted to the workers by opportunistic governments or wrested from the capitalist by direct action were wiped out by prices that inevitably rose to compensate for any diminution of profits. Indeed whatever augments, " for whatever cause, purchasing power, immediately augments, in the same proportion, the value of the products bought." Since money is the counter in the endless competitive bidding for the fruits of labour, those who have more of it will always be able to bid up the price of goods for their advantage. And this is the way that " Money permits those who possess it to pass on to others the burden of unpleasant reforms," and that is why genuine social equality waits upon the liquidation of the money economy and why " . . . instead of attempting to modify existing society . . . the only thing to do is to destroy it."

Thus his analysis of the economic proces reinforces his voluntarist political ethic: " exploitation . . . will continue to dominate as long as we do not strike at its heart, and consequently it is not enough to aim at restraining its evil instincts; they will only be suppressed by supressing capitalism itself."

The demand for the root and branch destruction of the source of evil was of course a common plank in the orthodox platforms of Pelloutier's peaceable socialist contemporaries. The logic of capitalist economic development could only be confuted by the elimination of capitalism. Yet even such an activist as Pelloutier realised that the immediate regeneration of the victims of capitalism would not be guaranteed by its destruction. He once remarked that he was not so foolish as to believe that a " moral transformation would proceed at the same pace as the social transformation,"—evil would not disappear overnight but better institutions would provide the conditions for its disappearance. The unarticulated but truly painful question for Pelloutier was not so much will the proletarian revolution guarantee the moral transformation of the workers, as, can they sufficiently transform themselves in the debasing present to will the regenerating future?

This was a question of more than tactical significance. Pelloutier was well aware of the practical difficulties in organising the workers against the system that devoted huge resources to deluding them as to their true interests and their real enemies. Nor were all radical solutions accptable to an anarchist deeply committed to the self-emancipation of the proletariat. Even if the working class found the resolution to rise out of slavery this was no guarantee that it would rise to freedom. Pelloutier is often praised for recognising that revolution was not enough —that the promise of the new order would depend upon the quality of the men who constructed it. In the very speech in which he admitted

that institutional change might proceed more swiftly than moral change, he also said: " And as long as there remains in the spirit of men the shadow of prejudice, we can make insurrections, modify the useless machinery of politics, change the course of empires even; but the hour of the social revolution will not have struck! "

One might argue that " prejudice " could only be eliminated after a political revolution had destroyed its institutional context, but for Pelloutier the moral and intellectual preparation for the genuine social revolution could not be postponed until the present iniquitous political order had been destroyed. The working class has to begin in the present to make itself worthy of the future despite the efforts of its exploiters to deepen the ignorance and reinforce the prejudices which were the condition of their survival. The answer to this dilemma lay at hand in the French antecedents of Pelloutier's social thought and was in essence, the self-education of the working class outside of, and against, the deadening and manipulating culture of capitalist society.

When Pelloutier identified the sources of Proudhon's socialism in the " revolutionary metaphysic of 1789 ", he was referring to the tradition that supplied the premises for his own brand of anarcho-syndicalism. Like so many French ostensible materialists or even " orthodox " Marxists he did not really believe that ideas were epiphenomenal but that they were the motors of social progress. He confidently asserted " mankind's inevitable tendency towards innovation in ideas and in opinions, the source of all progress." Therefore the education of the masses as the very condition of their revolutionary consciousness was always his central concern. Even the meagre education doled out to the workers to date had produced that fund of aspirations labelled socialism. However, public education under the aegis of the State could only become another method of conditioning the masses to their servitude because the State in all of its manifestations was the classic instrument of social and ecenomic exploitations.

To some extent Pelloutier would perceive the revolutionary education of the proletariat in the very conditions of its existence. With the Marxists, he was confident that the logic of capitalist development would reveal to the workers the outlines of their plight and their genuine interests: " Unfortunately for the capitalists, the proletariat opens its eyes sooner than might have been expected. Through the force of disastrous experience, it discovered one day that the remedy for social ills is neither born out of political revolution nor in the necessary but incoherent struggle against day-to-day injustices . . . it begins to perceive the necessity of a social revolution, that is to say, a complete economic and social transformation."

However Pelloutier did not believe that the working class would attain the appropriate knowledge and resolution to undertake the necessary revolution merely through a passive assimilation of the objective facts of life under moribund capitalism. Because the system which degrades and brutalises the worker will never afford him the institutional means of a genuine education he must himself construct organisations through which " he can reflect on his condition, disentangle the elements of the economic problem, fortify himself in knowledge and

in energy, to make himself capable of the self-liberation to which he has a right." Such institutions would not only help the worker to understand what sort of future he should desire but could help him to " elaborate, here in the present, the elements of a new society,"—they would not only show him how to shape his destinies but train him to be worthy of them. And these institutions already existed—as the Bourses du Travail, for Pelloutier the chosen instrument for the work " of moral, administrative and technical education, necessary to make a society of free men viable."

Under Pelloutier's aegis, the educational possibilities of the Bourses were given an emphasis never repeated by his successors. The various technical and educational courses, the periodic conferences, the statistical services, the libraries, the never to be realised projects of labour museums were not for Pelloutier peripheral, but essential functions of the Bourses. Libraries he felt were particularly promising agencies for introducing the workers to the discoveries of the human spirit so long denied them. He proudly described the intelligent eclecticism of the *bibliothèques* of the Bourses where volumes by Marx, Saint-Simon, Darwin and Kropotkin were found side by side in a fraternity of genius with those of Chateaubriand, de Maistre, and Lammenais. Not all of the militants were ready for this rich diet but even those whose literary interests had to be " artificially aroused " could benefit from the novelists closest to them in age and social orientation.

Pelloutier, who was the product of a classical French education, conceived of a cultural heritage that transcended class boundaries as well as the narrow limits of propaganda and indoctrination. The aesthetic quality of the worker's existence had both moral and practical relevance. His present cultural possibilities were crucial conditions of his political and social future: " Just as bourgeois art does more to maintain the capitalist regime than all the other social forces—government, army, police and judges—together; so a social and revolutionary art would do more to advance the coming of free communism than all those agents of revolution to which man has been led by his sufferings."

The ruling groups bitterly resist any measure to enlighten or purify the tastes of the masses because they know that the appetite for liberty, and the development of the intellect, proceed togther, and that resignation is bred from ignorance. Not only have they enlisted priests, mystics and obscurantists to persuade the worker that his salvation is not to be found on this earth, but they have bribed venal artists and writers to supply him with debased and salacious entertainment that inspires rut instead of reflection. And how much more dangerous than capitalist exploitation itself is the work of its cultural accomplices: " Deprived in the daytime by his work, brutalised at night by impure alcohol, by ribald shows, the masses have neither the time nor the freedom of spirit necessary to reflect on their lot, and from this arises the indifference, the cowardice with which the people, the same people who revolted in 1848 and 1871, undergo worse outrages today. The insults they receive are washed away by absinthe; the uncertainty of their future is forgotten in the music hall; their revolutionary virility is dissipated in the brothel."

In this very depressing picture one can discern Pelloutier's concern, not merely to enlighten the masses, but also to combat the debasing and cheapening of the very fabric of working-class through the effects of a pervasive commercialised culture. Of course I may be guilty of projecting backward present concerns. We are still far, in turn of the century France, from the erosion of working class culture " in favour of the mass opinion, the mass recreational product and the generalised emotional response." But the contemporary French worker's consumption of recreation, entertainment and culture in general was scarcely calculated to provide him with those nobler perceptions which were the conditions for a truly free society.

The reluctance of the masses to absorb the culture appropriate to their historical destinies posed not only a practical problem for a revolutionary moralist such as Pelloutier but also a profound dilemma. As what the French call a libertarian, devoted to the emancipation of the workers by themselves, he could not conjure away unfortunate proletarian dispositions with reference to inadequate class consciousnes in a given historical situation. As George Orwell once observed, the desire to " level up " the culture of the working class often includes an element of snobbish presumption as to what it should, but doesn't want. Pelloutier's efforts to level up the French working man certainly did not stem from some genteel condescension. Nothing would have been more repugnant to him than what Raymond Williams calls the " Fabian tone in culture . . . leading the unenlightened to the particular kind of light which the leaders find satisfactory for themselves," yet his assumption of a cultural " general will," not necessarily equivalent to the sum of proletarian tastes, reflects the deeper dilemma of his anarchist political morality. That is to say—either the products of collective freedom of choice are not necessarily the True, the Beautiful and the Good, or, the worker was not actually free to make the correct moral decisions under capitalism. But if these decisions were the prerequisites for some genuine future freedom, was it necessary for some one, if not to impose, at least to urge them on the workers? Pelloutier hoped that the answer lay in a gradual voluntary assimilation of the cultural and educational possibilities of the Bourses du Travail, yet the affirmation of these possibilities had somehow to precede the workers' recognition of them.

None of these remarks are meant to denigrate the purity of Pelloutier's motives or the remarkable self-effacement of his devotion to the workers cause. But there is a final irony in the very dimensions of his contribution to the development of autonomous proletarian institutions. With his passing the Bourse movement seemed to lose its momentum and there were many who testified to the words of the militant syndicalist Pierre Monatte: " After the death of Pelloutier in 1901, the Fédération des Bourses du Travail was nothing more than a great wounded tree, from which every year a withered branch fell to the ground."

OBSERVATIONS ON ANARCHY 37: WHY I WON'T VOTE

Although I enjoyed ANARCHY 37, I was somewhat disappointed that no one discussed the ethical (or rather unethical) aspects of voting. Presumably anarchists consider it morally wrong to dominate or coerce a fellow human being. Therefore it is equally wrong for one to designate an agent to dominate or coerce another; regardless of whether one individually selects him, or combines with others to vote for him. Authority, *per se*, is vicious—no one has a right to tell another creature what to do. Consequently an anarchist can hardly sneak into a secret polling booth to join with other underhanded anonymities in choosing a slimey politician to do the dirty work.

H. W. MORTON

New York

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I shall not vote in the General Election because I do not wish to consent in being governed. I have no desire to associate myself with the workings of the State in any way that could be considered as laudatory.

In the same way I would not sign a death warrant or praise the actions of a maniac. I would seek to end the insanity of the madman and refuse to give my assent to the death warrant.

I want to withdraw myself from the process of government and seek to spend my time and energy in building a society based on mutual co-operation, not one based on organised violence. I will not kiss the hand that hits me and my fellow beings; I will not embrace a person who would stick a knife in my back; I will not shake the hand of a person who would twist my wrist and break it. In a similar fashion I will not vote for politicians who work for the State.

I have no part in the State, nor do I want any. I have nothing to thank it for, indeed my aim is to destroy it. It is therefore not my intention to support it. There is no political party that the State fears, the politicians are neither capable nor willing to help mankind. Quite certainly the State only fears those who would do without it. I want to frighten the State by our inaction as well as by our action. I want our silence to scare them as well as our words.

I want to take away the power of the State, I do not want to contribute to it. I want to end privilege, injustice, inequality, war, poverty, misery, unhappiness and capitalism. I have no desire to help them on their way by means of a cross on a ballot paper.

The world will disarm when the people disarm the State, the capitalist system will be destroyed when the workers take control of the factories and the fields, the unnatural order will be ended with the spread of the lively anarchist contagion throughout the world. Authority will be overthrown when the well of its strength —obedience, nationalism, hatred, violence—dries up, and when the clear spring of spontaneity washes away the stench of cruelty and crime with compassion, fraternity, love and creation.

I cannot see that the opportunism of etiolated politicians has anything to do with this. I cannot see that the cause of anarchy is furthered one jot by voting in a General Election. I cannot see why it is thought that elections matter very much. They are small events, they interest only seekers after power. I cannot be responsible in any way for the perpetration of such a thing.

JEREMY WESTALL

Salisbury