

Solidarity

VOL 6 NO11

FOR WORKERS' POWER

4391
Soli

ucs and plessey
maoism in crisis
housing in ealing
reviews

5p



"BROTHERS ! IF THE BOSSES WONT EXPLOIT US WE'LL HAVE TO DO IT OURSELVES ."

UCS AND PLESSEY

The current struggles in west-central Scotland at the UCS yards on Clydeside and the Plessey factory at Alexandria in Dumbartonshire are not merely struggles to keep jobs, but for the survival of whole communities. In this article we wish to examine both of these situations to see how these two groups of workers are choosing to fight and, since the methods chosen are obviously different, to understand why they are different and why these differences are significant.

We felt that some of the reports in the capitalist (and even the Left) press were just not telling the whole story, particularly in the case of UCS, and so to find out what was happening we went to the west of Scotland ourselves. It was important to meet and talk to workers who were taking part in the struggles but who did not have any "vested" interest in the situation other than as working men, and so we took care to find workers who were neither shop stewards nor members of political parties trying to make political capital out of the situation. Consequently a large part of this article is re-telling what we have been told by workers who knew what they were talking about.

UCS : THE REAL SITUATION

The press has been full of coverage and comment about this "experiment in workers' democracy", and since the general background to the work-in has been extensively documented we don't propose to go over the same ground again.

One point which has not been given a great deal of coverage in the press, however, concerns the "Ridley letter". This was a memo written in December, 1969, by Nicholas Ridley (now an Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Trade and Industry) when the Tories were in opposition. In this letter he recommended that the Tories, on assuming power, should 'butcher' (his word) the UCS yards "irrespective of their financial position at that time". One motive for this he explicitly stated, was to reduce the shipbuilding industry's wage bill by making the lower rates in the Lower Clyde yards the norm. In other words, a clear-cut declaration of class warfare. These intentions are worth bearing in mind when considering the various "solutions" being proposed from all directions.

There has been much which has not been reported which shows that there is a great deal of insidious politicking going on, making expert use of the emotions of the workers for purposes which are not in their interests and which can only, in the long term, cause disunity.

When we considered the impressions we had gained from the media about the situation at UCS, all we saw was a fantastic show of solidarity behind the shop stewards committee in charge of this work-in. Yet, as we saw it, there was still the same managerial system carrying out the same managerial functions over the same (but officially shrinking) work force, all concerned with completing ships. Ships which will only put more money into the liquidator's pocket before the yards fold up. All, seemingly, with the approval of the workers!

Was there really no significant dissension among the rank-and-file? Did they really see this, out of all the options open to them, as the best way to fight?

The short answer is NO! But because the workers are continually being exhorted by appeals for UNITY behind the shop stewards, they are inhibited from carrying out any meaningful discussions, either among themselves or with "outsiders". It has been difficult until now, when discontent among the men has reached massive proportions, to piece some of the story together.

BEHIND THE SCENES

The second batch of redundant workers finished on Friday, 3rd September, and brought the total to nearly 800. Some of these workers reported to us that there was in fact massive discontent among the rank-and-file with opposition to the leaders growing. The best way to get some feel for what has been happening in the yards is to hear some of their stories. With additional information from other sources which we will refer to later, we can get some insight into what is really going on.

At a meeting prior to the third, the committee was almost defeated in a vote which included a large number of abstentions. The issue on which the vote was taken was one of those small administrative blunders which happened to find its way to the shop floor, but which angered many workers by its high-handedness. One of the redundant workers had asked for his cards so he could look for another job, simply because he couldn't manage to continue the work-in on the payment he was getting out of the fighting fund. (He had to put in a full day's work for a fraction of the pay of those not yet made redundant. The committee wanted to withhold two hours' pay (when he was absent enquiring about a job) out of the $1\frac{1}{2}$ days he had worked since being made redundant! This exemplified the bureaucratic pettiness to which many of the workers objected.

At the same meeting, the platform appealed for better work discipline as the management were complaining that the redundant workers were not pulling their weight on the job!

(One case which did not reach the floor at the mass meeting concerned a redundant worker who had been looking for another job and who was sacked for absenteeism. In fact, this decision was later reversed.)

It has become clear that many don't agree with the policy of paying redundant workers from the fighting fund to help complete ships for the liquidator; they realise that asking people to work for a means-tested payment will divide the redundant workers from the others and be a constant source of grievance. However, any expression of dissension is almost impossible. The meetings with the rank-and-file are taking place less frequently, sometimes less than once a week, and, consequently, most of the time is taken up with reports from the platform; in the short time left, it is impossible for anyone to be heard by more than a few people around him, especially against the stewards' PA system. If the platform recognises the would-be speaker as one of the "opposition", he is immediately denounced as a disruptive element trying to undermine the unity of the workers.

At one mass meeting, when someone attempted to raise a point from the floor, one of the stewards on the platform threw down a copy of an I.S. Clydebank Bulletin, shouting "These are the wreckers", and so implicating the speaker on the floor. (Is it only a coincidence that those redundancies mentioned happened to include several men who have voiced criticism of the stewards? One would suspect that the redundancies would occur first among workers in those sections of the production processes already completed, but this does not always seem to have happened.)

Why are the leadership behaving in this way? Well, probably because the interests of the leadership are not the same as those of the majority of the work-force. (They very rarely are, of course.) They know that, at the end of the day, if the government's policy of mass redundancies is successful, maybe 2,000 - 3,000 jobs will be left. Some may think that if they go along with the shop stewards' policy of working with management they will stand a better chance of not being among those to be made redundant later. And so these appeals for unity are in fact sewing the seeds of a terrible future disunity among the men by playing on their (quite understandable) fears.

However, the motives for all this go much deeper. Airlie and Reid, the two most powerful members of the committee, are well-known to be members of the Communist Party, although despite this they were making a lot of militant noises at the beginning of the work-in. A very reliable source has informed us that the C.P. leadership quickly told Airlie that he was not supposed to be leading a revolution! It soon became apparent that, as Airlie, Reid and Co. were entering into all kinds of negotiations with management, they were certainly NOT leading a revolution. In fact, it is becoming clear that the C.P., among others, would accept suggestions for

solving the UCS problem if the number of redundancies can be reduced from the original figure of 6,000 in order to claim a "partial victory". In this event, we are told that the C.P. see in Reid* a future head of the Scottish District of the Communist Party (a post he has held before) and possibly a communist M.P. in Clydeside. In Airlie's case, he could well become an important contender for Hugh Scanlon's job in the A.E.U. If this could be brought about, it could be a means of revitalising the flagging support in a declining Communist Party throughout Britain.

This prospect, we have been told, is closely linked to the C.P.'s change of policy in connection with the future development of the Morning Star, which is required to widen its base of support as the voice of the Labour Left in keeping with the policy of "The Parliamentary Road to Socialism".

PLESSEY

The struggle at Alexandria has not received as much coverage as UCS, so we'll describe the background in more detail. We include stories workers told us to describe the situation.

The Alexandria factory, formerly the Argyle Motor Factory, then the Navy Torpedo Factory, was to be used to produce the Mk. 24 torpedo, the main armament for £300m. worth of hunter-killer submarines. In December, 1969, despite reassurances a year earlier that the plant would be producing until 1972, the government decided that the Mk. 24 was too complicated to produce, so G.E.C. was brought in to redesign the torpedo. The Alexandria, factory, employing 1,300 workers, was to close. In March, 1970, it was announced that Plessey were to take over the factory which was then to become one of the main centres of its electronics group; 500 people were to be employed by the end of that year, and some staff were even to be transferred there from Dalkeith. About the same time, the IRC gave nearly £3m. to Plessey to invest in numerical controlled machine tools. (Significantly, perhaps, the most important of the machinery in the plant is of this type.) At the end of July the Mk. 24 was announced to be the best in the world; everything was improving and the jobs were secure. Plessey were getting quite a bargain, what with the IRC money as well as the plant (a 23-acre site with a 400,000 sq. ft. factory) and machinery worth several £m. for the (estimated) rock-bottom price of £640,000. In addition, about the time that Plessey took control of the plant (in January of this year) it was announced that Plessey had been given the contract to manufacture the Mk. 24 torpedo.

* Reid is already a C.P. city councillor, and the Clydebank area is the Communist Party's greatest hope for electoral success.

Under the surface, however, things weren't quite all that they appeared to be. Office staff found it difficult to get any new equipment, even to replace ancient typewriters. After a while, machinery started to be moved out to other Plessey factories, mainly in the south of England. Soon the workers' suspicions were aroused and proved to be well-founded when, in the middle of May this year, Plessey announced that the machine shop was to be closed down (making 440 redundant). The numerical controls section was to be kept open, employing 250. Early in July it was announced that the whole factory was to close, and on Friday, 3rd September, the management paid off the remainder of the work force. Plessey's say that they had decided to manufacture the torpedo at Ilford, and because of lack of work it was necessary to shut the Alexandria factory. The shop stewards say they have irrefutable proof that Plessey have enough work subcontracted which could keep the plant going for an indefinite period. The Alexandria workers reckon that Plessey had never intended to keep the plant going for long, and that the main reason for buying it was for the obvious profit they would get from the deal.

OCCUPATION

Long before they got their cards, the Plessey workers had been moving; they had been making representations to the Plessey management and the Ministry of Defense. They had also been in touch with workers in other Plessey plants; Poole and Ilford shop stewards had agreed to black machinery taken out of Alexandria. Immediately they were given their books, the workers held a mass meeting, and decided not to leave their factory. They went to the main gate, giving the departing management the sort of farewell to which they were entitled under the circumstances, locked themselves in, and have remained in control ever since.

Immediately support poured in from the townspeople, passers-by, and other workers. This included food, money and moral support. Shifts for the gate picket were organised, in addition to feeding and sleeping arrangements. That Sunday morning a mass meeting was held and it was decided to continue the occupation and control the movement of men and machinery in and out of the factory. The main objective was to ensure that the machinery which Plessey needed to manufacture the torpedo in Ilford was not to be moved from Alexandria.

When the district secretary of the AEF, McKee, was asked what the official union line was, he stated that the Union was right behind the men but nothing could be done over the weekend to confirm that there would be official union support until the offices opened on the Monday morning. (We wonder if the management were sitting on their arses and waiting for Monday morning before considering their position.) McKee said that the UCS shop stewards committee were 100% behind the Plessey workers.

On the Monday morning there was a really good turnout - almost the whole of the Plessey work-force were inside the gate. Outside, over 50 workers from local factories had turned up and everyone waited to greet the

management. First, the few workers who were still employed by Plessey to help run down the plant turned up. They were told at the gate that they would not be denied access and would not be interfered with, as long as they did not try to touch any machinery - in which case there would be trouble. They left, and were cheered away by the pickets. When the management turned up in cars, they were told the same thing. There were several amusing incidents. At one point, a car with four people in it stopped outside the gate; the driver got out, agreed not to touch the machinery and went back to his car. The gates remained shut. He got out again, went to the gate and said "Well". Back came the answer, "You agreed, but the others didn't". So everyone in the car trooped out to personally agree to the terms, return to the car, and then enter the factory amid shouts of "Say please" from those with cameras, slow hand-claps and some drumming on the car roof. In all, between 12 and 15 of the management eventually went in. Later the tea ladies came along - to make tea for the pickets - a good sign of support. Everyone then settled down to wait, knowing it could be some time before any meaningful moves might be made.

A few days later, after a conference with the police, management informed the workers they intended bring in outside labour to maintain the equipment - the workers offered to do this, but were turned down. There was also a conference between the police and the workers. Although there is no law of trespass in Scotland, the workers were told that it was illegal to hinder free access to anyone entitled to it, and that they (the police) would have to provide protection for management, staff or outside workers if necessary. Continual discussions are being held by the workers to decide how to meet these threats.

Recently there was a demonstration in Alexandria in support of the Plessey workers at which 7,000 people took part. Among the demonstrators was a delegation from the Ilford plant. Their management had told them that the machinery at Alexandria was only old junk but a tour round the factory soon put the lie to that story. After demanding and getting a meeting with the Alexandria management, the Ilford men told them that they were going to report the facts to their own workers and their shop stewards' committee.

UCS WORKERS! JOIN THE ARMY!

Is it coincidence that a mobile army recruiting office has appeared just up the road from the Clydebank gates?

USE COMMON SENSE

On Monday, 6th September, we distributed a leaflet (reproduced here) to both Plessey and U.C.S. workers.

Consider the four comparisons made in the leaflet.

1. Where the workers stand in relation to their work-place is a very important factor. The Plessey workers see that their best course of action is to occupy the work-place and exert direct control over it - a clear-cut attack on the property rights of the bosses. They are thus held together and can discuss their situation, the methods they should continue to use and can know and feel each other's attitudes and arguments continuously. There is no possibility here of men being unaware of how their mates are feeling.

The U.C.S. workers are not at the moment threatening the property rights of their bosses over the yards in which they work - they come in the morning and leave in the afternoon; at weekends the yards are deserted, the gatehouse door is open and it is possible to walk in and out freely. There is no need for a show of presence by the workers because they are not in control of their workplace.

This difference is reflected in the relationships with the police. At U.C.S. the police can drive a conspicuous landrover freely in and out of the yards and can openly show their presence. The work-in does not constitute any threat to 'law and order' (in other words to the bosses, liquidator or the government). At Plessey's the police are keeping out of sight and are playing it cool. They have given advice to both management and workers, but although some of the 'advice' for the workers has really been 'warnings' they know that immediately they throw their weight around it means a direct confrontation.

2. Plessey workers are holding onto machinery which the company needs; the very equipment that it wanted when it bought the factory. The bosses need the machines but the workers are determined that they will only be used where and how they want. They have said that they don't want their livelihoods based on building weapons of war, but society being how it is, the torpedo will be built anyway and there is no reason why it cannot be built at Alexandria and at the same time give them work.

At U.C.S. the workers are continuing to build ships, and subsidising them out of the pockets of other workers, only to put more money into the liquidator's kitty. This form of action leaves the ships still in the bosses' hands - their property is still being recognised as such - and it won't even be to the financial advantage of the workers. On top of this, the more ships that are completed, the less there will be for the men to use as a lever to fight the government, should they wish to do so.

3. The Plessey workers are making policy and taking decisions themselves - democratically. They stand or fall by these decisions with everyone having the same available information and the same interest in the outcome.

USE COMMON SENSE

UCS-PLESSEY A STEP FORWARD?

PLESSEY - SIT-IN
U.C.S. - WORK-IN

PLESSEY - TAKING MACHINES FROM THE BOSSES
U.C.S. - MAKING MACHINES FOR THE BOSSES

PLESSEY - WORKERS' DEMOCRACY
U.C.S. - SHOP-STEWARDS' BUREAUCRACY

PLESSEY CONTROLS - WORKERS' CONTROL
U.C.S. - DON'T ROCK THE BOAT

Is a Labour Government or Nationalisation the solution? - Ask the miners, the railwaymen, the steelworkers.

Can an official Trade Union leadership lead a militant struggle? - Ask the Postal Workers, the Power Workers, the Pilkingtons Workers, the Dustmen.

HOURLY NOT AIRLIE

Is a weekly mass meeting enough, or should there be constant consultation?

Are only the leaders capable of expressing ideas and deciding policy and tactics?

Is the leadership beyond question?

The rank-and-file can do without the leadership.

The leadership can't do without the rank-and-file.

PEOPLE BEFORE PROFITS

Is co-operation with the management putting people before profits?

Is co-operation with the liquidator putting people before profits?

Does finishing the ships with the help of the fighting fund put people before profits?

ITS THE PROFIT MOTIVE WHICH HAS CREATED THIS SITUATION.

ITS THE PEOPLE WHO CAN SAVE IT.

This is in marked contrast to U.C.S. where, as we have pointed out earlier, the very structure of the mass meetings is such as to inhibit formulation of policy by the men who have been regarded more as rubber-stamps to pass the shop stewards' decisions. However, the U.C.S. workers are realising more and more what their role has been in this affair and may yet be able to put pressure on their leaders to bring control into their own hands.

4. During their struggle the Plessey workers are changing the normal methods of making decisions which determine the way their work lives are organised, in order to be able to face their present predicament. Here there is no distinction between who makes the decisions and who follows them. At U.C.S. the same old management structure prevails to control their daily work-in with the bonus of a shop steward management added to back it up - attempting to push the men yet further away from the decision-making process. Consequently, there is no change in the authority relationships which they have been used to for so long.

Perhaps we shall see the boat rocking in future. It would appear that pressure from the rank-and-file could democratize the U.C.S. fight and let's hope so. However, the Plessey workers have nothing to be complacent about - they will have to take very great care to ensure that their decision-making will not become bureaucratic; and they will have to watch the way that the unions choose to play their game - it is unlikely that they will readily back a group of potential law-breakers right up to the hilt. Their local branch official, McKee, has given them his full support, but at the time of writing we have not heard of any positive action from the union.

UCS - PLESSEY SOLIDARITY?

It is interesting to look at the UCS shop stewards' attitudes towards the Plessey struggle. Here, some incidents which were brought to our notice are quite revealing.

For example, at the massive UCS demonstration in Glasgow on Wednesday, 18th September, in which 70,000 people took part, along with many from other industries the Plessey workers joined in. At one point the Plessey workers sat down and blocked the road. Immediately the march stewards moved in to guide the rest of the demonstrators round those who had sat down saying, "Avoid these trouble-makers, this is a disciplined march". The police moved in and seeing that the other demonstrators weren't going to support them, the sitters had to get up and carry on.

When the march reached the meeting place, some Plessey workers went to the rostrum and tried to set their banner up beside those of UCS to get some much-needed publicity on the television cameras. 'Twas not to be; Airlie leaned over and told them to move it, and when the Plessey workers tried to insist all they got was the treat of calling the police.

At a meeting in Chatham on Monday, 13th September, Ross, the UCS Boilermakers' shop steward convener, said that despite the better case the Plessey workers had, they were unlikely to win (as the UCS workers would) since 'they did not have a leadership with the correct political perspective'. He also announced that UCS were donating £250 out of the fighting fund to the Plessey men as well as sending the redundant UCS men to Alexandria to demonstrate their support. The Plessey workers have been asking for these men to come and picket the gate when the need arises. We shall see. Judging by previous indications, it is more likely that these gifts and gestures from the UCS shop stewards have come either as a result of pressure from the rank-and-file or from an idea that such a gesture would go down well with their own men rather than an action of solidarity. Those stewards are unlikely to give much more than qualified support to a group of men who have shown that democratic discussion and argument need not be equated with squabbling, disunity or weakness.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

How should we regard the economic arguments going on about the possible viability of the UCS yards in the light of the Ridley report of almost two years' ago? Have the yards been deliberately run down in the period between December 1969 and the collapse of UCS in July 1971? (Eg. We hear that orders for more ships have been deliberately refused in the last nine months.)

At the time of writing there are many proposals for "solving" the UCS problem and it is difficult to visualize what the outcome will be. What is clear is that the rank-and-file have been unable to make their own proposals, they have only been asked to endorse the shop stewards' committee's recommendations.

The government has set up a company to run the Govan-Linthouse yards. The directors have now met the representatives of the unions and shop stewards, resulting in what appears to be a basis for discussion on a compromise solution.

Prior to the formation of this company, the stewards said that there would be no negotiations based on splitting the four yards or on issues which did not include the employment of the whole work force. Reid and Airlie then shifted their position by introducing a new term, "cumulative proposals". According to John Kerr (Guardian, 25.9.71) when questioned Reid agreed that these could be interpreted "as a combined operation involving separate solutions for different yards". This now appears to be the policy upon which future negotiations with the new company will proceed. Will the stewards now shift **their** position regarding "no redundancies" to a more flexible attitude leading to some unavoidable redundancies", i.e. something less than the original 6,000 proposed? A compromise solution could enable Reid and Airlie to claim a partial victory and the government could attain its main objective at the same time.

However, if things get too hot for Reid and Airlie due to rank-and-file pressure, we can expect to hear more from the T.U. leaders as negotiations get under way.

Is there no alternative to this kind of negotiation over the heads of the rank-and-file? The rank-and-file workers at UCS are not stupid - many see through what's going on. Can they withstand pressure from leaders like Reid and Airlie and those at the top of the Trade Unions, in addition to pressure from Press, T.V., Radio and the government? Individual workers have different individual problems, i.e. family circumstances, age, and future prospects for employment, etc., which may affect their actions.

Whatever the UCS workers decide to do, it should be with full cognisance of all the information available. The government is not going to hand out concessions which are not forced from them. The workers must surely use methods which will kick harder at the people who are destroying their communities.

Regarding the merits of the "work-in", the liquidator summed it up himself. When told of the work-in decision, he said, "Well, if all they're doing is working-in for the right to work, I've no quarrel with that". Of course he hasn't! He knows that in this society 'the right to work' really means 'the right to be exploited', and he certainly has no quarrel with that! One cynical newspaper reporter has commented "Concentrating all their frustrations and anger on a work-in will effectively take away their energy from other, more dangerous activities".

The situation at Plessey's is different. Here the workers are still in control and they can stay in control so long as they don't remain isolated. They need the support of people from other Plessey factories and from their communities. They need the support of all workers.

The Plessey bosses are playing it cool. They seem to be hoping that the workers can be starved into submission. If they are obliged to carry on without adequate support, it will not be long before they are under severe pressure through their unemployment and very low incomes with families to support.

The struggle can be extended to other Plessey plants to bring maximum pressure on the employers.

There is a danger that if they do not lead to victories the kind of struggles now going on at UCS and Plessey's will discredit the "Stay in", "Occupation", "Work to rule" type of tactic. This must not be allowed to happen. Whatever the outcome of these particular struggles, these tactics are needed now more than ever. The Industrial Relations Act may make traditional forms of strike action less effective in many situations.* In these two cases the workers are faced with situations in which the factories are being closed down. The tactics referred to above are even more valid in disputes in factories which are not closing down.

* For several examples where tactics other than just strike action have been used successfully, see Solidarity Pamphlet No. 37, Strategy for Industrial Struggle, by Mark Fore.

- 12 -

At a meeting in Chatham in support of UCS, representatives of UCS shop stewards and Communist Party spokesmen said, "no 'sit-in' had ever succeeded". We can tell them of many cases where they have. The Flint auto workers in U.S.A.*, Renault workers in France, and Fiat workers in Italy** can teach us a great deal about these tactics.

We in "Solidarity" think that workers can voice opinions, make proposals and criticisms, if they don't rely on leaders, whoever they are, to manipulate meetings and arrange things so that the rank-and-file are prevented from being. This means taking matters into their own hands, by forming their own organisations at shop-floor level and meeting as often as necessary, even every few hours when engaged in direct struggle.

We say that the workers themselves should decide on the objectives of their struggle and that control and organisation of these struggles should remain firmly in their own hands. The forms which this self-activity of the working class may take will vary considerably from country to country, and from industry to industry. Its basic content will not.

Meaningful action - for revolutionaries is whatever increases the confidence, the autonomy, the initiative, the participation, the solidarity, the egalitarian tendencies and self-activity of the masses, and whatever assists in their de-mystification.

Sterile and harmful action - is whatever reinforces the passivity of the masses, their apathy, their cynicism, their differentiation through hierarchy, their alienation, their reliance on others to do things for them, and the degree to which they can therefore be manipulated by others - even by those allegedly acting on their behalf.

People everywhere can act now without leaving it to leaders who, in the name of UNITY, make decisions over their heads. At the end of the day it will be useless to cry "We have been sold out".

* See Solidarity Pamphlet No. 31, The Great Flint Sit-Down Strike against G.M., 1936-67.

** See Italy 1969, a pamphlet published by Big Flame.

Anyone in the West of Scotland wishing to contact us should write to:
Solidarity, c/o Dan Kane, 43 Valeview
Terrace, Dumbarton.

A WAR-TIME RECIPE

Take some venom ripe and mellow
From the cobra-di-capello,
The rattlesnake, the fer-de-lance, the scorpion as well;
Add the courage of a rat,
With the slyness of a cat,
And the perfume of the martens, skunks, and other beasts that smell;

Take the vigour from a mouse
And the brain waves of a louse;
Add the mercy of a tiger and the pity of a shark,
With the justice of a hawk,
The parrot's gift of talk,
And the wisdom of the troglodytes who lived in Noah's Ark.

Let it simmer in a pot
Till it settles down to rot,
Add the smile of a hyena and the belly of a cow,
With the grimace of a seal,
The wriggles of an eel,
And the gourmand satisfaction of a marketable sow.

Boil it slowly on the fire,
Get it stirred by every liar
That your mother ingenuity can gather on the spot;
Then add the wolfish wile
Off the armoured crocodile,
And the hide of any pachyderm that's safe to stop a shot.

Place the mixture on a tray,
Cart it on a brewer's dray
To the oven of a brickyard, with instructions to the baker
To mould it to the shape
Of an anthropoidal ape,
And you'll have a perfect specimen of a Union Labour Fakir.

John S. Clarke

in 'Satires, Lyrics and Poems',

S.L. Press, 1919.

U.P.W. : THE PARTY IS OVER

The honeymoon in the U.P.W. between the 'left' and the leadership of the union is now over. The trad 'left', having fulfilled its role as a cover for the union's reactionary leadership during the recent struggle,* is now being thrown on the scrap heap.

A number of rank and file papers for postal workers have recently been circulating among the union's members. In the August 6 issue of the U.P.W.'s Branch Officials Bulletin the union leadership attacks some of its erstwhile 'allies' associated with these journals (such as the Communist Party, I.S., I.M.G. and S.L.L.). The Bulletin calls on its Branch Officials to report any radical activities to the General Secretary of the union.

Meanwhile there is every sign that grass roots opposition to the leadership remains. It is probably this which is the major factor in causing the current witch-hunt.

Dastardly acts have apparently been committed by subversive elements. We read for instance that some groups 'are circulating leaflets with no printing or publishing address, some of which have been placed in mail bags, thus finding their way to various offices throughout the country'.

Perhaps it is significant that the Postal Workers Alliance was singled out for attack in the Bulletin. This group continues to operate and has issued a leaflet on Merseyside calling on postmen to continue the struggle. The leaflet reads:

WHAT - NO 5%, TOM!

7 weeks strike for sod all.

Loads of talk about 5% and still sod all.

What happens now? Nowt, mate, bloody nowt ... if we leave it to Tom.

WAKE UP, COLLEAGUES!

The only way for us to win anything is for us to fight for it ourselves. Why not start a rank and file group in your office?

It's your office, you're a taxpayer, you work in it ... and die.

If we want our 5% we must show that we are not sheep but human beings.

BLACK BUSINESS MAIL

BAN OVERTIME

LIGHTNING STRIKES

WORK TO RULE

-

TRY IT !

* See SOLIDARITY, vol.VI, nos. 9 and 10, and our 'Postal Strike' pamphlet by Joe Jacobs.

REVIEWS/1

Work-Counterplanning on the Shop Floor, Bill Watson, Libertarian Bookshop, 95 West Green Road, London, N.15. 5P.

This excellent little pamphlet is a reprint of an article which appeared in Radical American, Vol. V, No. 3. It is based on the author's experiences in an un-named car engine plant in Detroit in the late 60's.

The pamphlet describes the resistance to the introduction of new types of engines, and how this resistance on a plant-wide scale, on both formal and informal level was planned and carried out. In one case there was systematic collaboration between production workers and inspectors to discover or manufacture faults in the new models. As a result:

"... Stacks upon stacks of motors awaiting repair, piled up and down the aisles of the plant. This continued at an accelerating pace up to a night when the plant was forced to shut down, losing more than ten hours production time. At that point there were so many defective motors around the plant that it was almost impossible to move from one area to another."

The pamphlet brings out clearly the spirit of enjoyment with which the struggle was waged and the spirit of healthy competition which developed. Another quote:

"The inspectors organised a rod blowing contest which required the posting of lookouts at the entrances to the shop area and the making of deals with assembly, for example, to neglect the torquing of bolts on rods for a random number of motors so that there would be loose rods. When an inspector stepped up to a motor and felt the telltale knock on the water pump wheel, he would scream out to clear the shop, the men abandoning their work and running behind boxes and benches. Then he would arc himself away from the stand and ram the throttle up to first 4,000 and then 5,000 r.p.m. The motor would knock, clunk, and finally blow to a crunching halt with the rod blowing through the sink of the oil pan and across the shop. The men would then rise up from their cover, exploding with cheers and another point would be chalked up on the wall for that inspector. This particular contest went on for several weeks resulting in more than 150 blown motors. No small amount of money was exchanged in bets over the contest."

The pamphlet describes events in an American factory, but the phenomenon of workers not only resisting but imposing their own patterns on

production is a very widespread, if poorly documented, one* (this is one of the main values of Watson's article). From the setting of piecework ceilings, to the 'carrying' of older workers in a shop, to the not collecting of fares from mothers with children, to not cutting off families' electricity for non-payment, the system in which we live is constantly being modified by workers doing things their way and operating their values instead of those of the system.

It would be a big mistake to go overboard in this area, but is as well to remember that production is often a very different thing from what our masters, and many socialists think it is, and it is an area which needs a much more serious examination than it has received so far. This pamphlet is a valuable beginning.

M.F.

* Solidarity pamphlet No. 38, Strategy for Industrial Struggle, by Mark Fore, IOP, discusses this resistance and puts it into context in a general socialist strategy.

SOLIDARITY AUTONOMOUS GROUPS

ABERDEEN : c/o Ian Mitchell, 3 Sinclair Rd., Aberdeen.

CLYDESIDE : c/o Dan Kane, 43 Valeview Terrace, Dumbarton.

DUNDEE : c/o F. Browne, 1st Floor, 42 Baldovan Terrace,
Dundee.

LONDON : c/o 53A Westmoreland Rd., Bromley, Kent.

NORTH WEST: c/o R. Sumner, 23 Sewerby St., Manchester 16.

SWANSEA : c/o D. Lamb, 66 Terrace Road, Swansea.

REVIEWS/2

ITALY 1969-70: New Tactics and Organisation.

Obtainable from 122 Offord Road, London N 1, or Big Flame, 78 Clarendon Road, Wallasey, Cheshire. 25P.

Here is how the class struggle goes on in Italy today:

"In FIAT the managers took a long time to learn obedience, and were several times forced to run the gauntlet between two lines of furious workers. Onto their bald heads, beaded with sweat and spattered with gobs of spit, the workers showered five-lire coins, which sparkled like confetti in the sun."*

The bitter struggle that takes place daily the world over between workers and management, is at present at a peak in the Italian motor and allied industries. This sixty-page pamphlet is a number of articles from the Italian revolutionary papers La Classe and Lotta Continua strung together for English readers with a preface and various introductory notes, maps, etc. No contribution is signed, but there are some variations in the viewpoints expressed.

The first article, a long one, started life as a speech by a delegate to a rank-and-file workers' conference in July, 1969. He describes how he and his workmates at FIAT's Mirafiore factory, Turin, began to take the initiative for struggles away from the union officials, onto the shop floor. They did this by a variety of tactics, based on the watchword "FIGHT WITHIN THE FACTORY". The unions sought to pervert and frustrate this move by imposing line delegates - individual union activists on the shop floor with whom the management could negotiate rather than face the united body of workers. The workers replied: "We are all delegates". The article includes some recurrent demands at FIAT that could unite workers throughout Italy: equal rises all round (and no strings), less hours, no compulsory overtime, abolition of gradings, parity with office staff. "The workers have virtually expelled the union from the factory, and have begun to formulate their own demands, and carry them forward in a fight that is led entirely by themselves."**

The next piece is on a Turin street battle in July, 1969, when workers and students fought the police for 24 hours: barricades, tear-gas, rifle butts, house-to-house "searches".

* Italy 1969-70, page 38.

** Ibid.

Next comes a lengthy discussion of the line delegate system. This shows how workers see through the way the unions try to penetrate autonomous shop-floor organisations and networks of contacts.

An article translated from Lotta Continua, the worker-student revolutionary paper, November 1970, is a very clear, convincing piece of analysis that also reaffirms the basic libertarian and humanist nature of the struggle against wage slavery. It shows, in effect, how once workers begin to shed their burden of fear and servility they see "society" merely as social conditions - not forever fixed or uncontrollable, but the product of human activity, to be changed, abolished, or rebuilt according to human needs - and begin to organise and act accordingly for themselves (but with whatever allies are sincerely willing to throw in their lot with the workers). The author lists several different sides to this process in present-day Italy that would repay careful consideration by all libertarians. (Read this article, "Cultural Revolution", if you read nothing else.

The last major piece is an interview with three FIAT workers that explains how the current industrial struggles link with the unrest in the south of Italy where so many younger FIAT workers come from.

There are many interesting things in this pamphlet, including some good cartoons (and lousy photographs). Unfortunately, some subjects are just skated over (eg. "The workers have attacked the school system directly, as the root of the divisions that weaken the working class . . ."), but the publishers do hope to bring out a bigger work on Italy later this year.

And in one or two places some residual Stone Age attitudes peep through: ". . . the political and mass organisation of the workers, guided by a revolutionary vanguard . . .", or "FIAT = VIETNAM = FIAT", but these are rare. The English editors have added rather a lot of fairly inept comments on how they see the Italian struggle affecting Britain, without really analysing the different set-up over here. They are also a bit obsessed with economics, and come close to attributing the course of the Italian events simply to full order books. Judging, though, by the new-found mutual assistance and joint actions of students and young workers, the world youth rebellion is a mighty big element. But you can make up your own mind: it is well worth reading this pamphlet just for the facts.

M.H.

SUBSCRIBE TO SOLIDARITY

A paper for militants - in industry and elsewhere. Attempts a total critique of modern society, and a systematic 'demystification' of its values, ideas, and forms of organisation. Discusses what libertarian revolution is all about. Send £1 to SOLIDARITY, c/o 53A Westmoreland Road, Bromley, Kent, to receive forthcoming issues of the paper and pamphlets to that value.

EALING COUNCIL AND THE HOUSING CRISIS

In the official view, as set out in the Greve Report, homelessness can be ended if immigration is curtailed, if cheaper mortgage and house modernisation programmes are speeded up, and if social work agencies concentrate on the various family problems - marital breakdown, too many children, rent arrears, unemployment, etc. - which are seen as the underlying causes. The overwhelming bias in favour of short-term welfare provisions greatly distorts the problem. Only the symptoms are treated.

The root cause of homelessness is of course the chronic shortage of adequate low-cost housing, in London especially and in Britain as a whole. Working class families and minority groups are the victims of the multi-million-pound property rackets. Public housing cannot compete with the building of offices and luxury flats.

Concentration on immediate family welfare not only ignores the cause and camouflages the inadequacy of present "solutions". It also involves vast expenditure in terms of money and other resources.

A good illustration is the way Welfare and Children's Departments in the London Boroughs spend huge amounts to keep homeless families in supervised hostel accommodation or take children into care. But even the deterrent threat of these policies cannot prevent people from becoming homeless. The Departments of Social Services have to resort to more elaborate piecemeal schemes.

In the Borough of Ealing (including Ealing, Acton, Southall), as in some other boroughs, a procedure has developed almost of its own accord. Families with absolutely nowhere to go, i.e. a small proportion of those in serious housing need, are temporarily accommodated in Bed and Breakfast establishments throughout the West London area*.

Under this scheme, families are provided with only basic sleeping accommodation in single or double rooms, with or without access to kitchen or cooking facilities. After breakfast, depending on the rules and regulations in particular guest houses, they are expected to go out for the rest of the day or to stay quiet and bored in their rooms. Obviously life in such circumstances becomes extremely difficult and uncomfortable, especially where boisterous young children are involved.

* Under Section 1 of the Children's and Young Persons' Act, 1963, Children's Departments are authorised to give whatever help, advice and guidance is necessary to prevent children being placed in care.

Families are scheduled to go through the system from bed-and-breakfast to hostel to intermediate council housing. But with the shortage of council housing and the stop on new building, they may have to stay in Bed-and-Breakfast for a year or 18 months until something is found for them or they make their own arrangements (back to overcrowded Southall or Acton).

Families are usually glad to have anywhere at all to stay together, and social workers are relieved of having to "persuade" people into allowing their children to go into care. However, in terms of a long-term plan to solve these families' housing problem the scheme is disastrous.

The cost of keeping them in this unsatisfactory situation is, unbelievably, at least £1.50 per person per night. Thus families with 3 or 4 children will take £52.50 to £60 per week to maintain. Even infants of a few months or weeks are charged at the full rate by landladies. At present Ealing Council has approximately 30 families in Bed-and-Breakfast accommodation at an annual cost of about £35,000 in payment to 15 or so guest houses.

Ealing's Conservative Council (recently deposed) tried to solve the housing problem by cutting the waiting lists for council houses. This was done not by building and allocations, but by throwing hundreds of families off the waiting list because they earn too much (over £30 per week) or because they lack the five-year-residence-in-the-London-area qualification. The net result is that the Social Services Dept. has to maintain in Bed-and-Breakfast several families refused rehousing by the Housing Dept. because of "high" earnings and refused council mortgages because income is "too low".

At the end of May the Labour Party swept into power in Ealing after promising far-reaching changes, particularly in relation to the housing situation. Since then the families in Bed-and-Breakfast have been documented and analysed to find out what proportions are immigrants, unsupported mothers, and unemployed. The Council, perhaps genuinely shocked at the scale of the mismanagement of the housing problem, promised to rehouse all suitable families in temporary accommodation. There were plans for reopening older houses which had been empty and boarded up for years in several streets near the centre of the borough.

However, just as the feasibility schemes were grinding through the bureaucracy, three families took direct action and squatted in houses in Western Road. Each of these families had been pushed around for months by the various Council departments. The squatters, helped by supporters from Lewisham Squatters and people from Shelter, held meetings in the Town Hall and demanded speedy action from the Council.

This really stampeded the Council into action. Top-level meetings directed the recently appointed Director of Social Services, whiz-kid Nick Stacey (ex Dartmouth College, Oxford, Olympics, Panorama, Woolwich, Oxfam, etc., etc.) to supervise the immediate opening up of 16 houses in Western Road, and the eventual reopening of some 40 more properties in the Borough. Within 10 days or so sixteen families had been moved into Western Road.

Far from forestalling any community action, this led to the squatters (having welcomed these families and helped with furniture and decoration) apparently recruiting most of them into their network. The Council is now being forced to hold joint meetings with the squatters and plans are well advanced for the Council to hand over 10-12 houses to the newly formed Squatters' Association for them to re-equip and allocate.

Ealing's housing situation is still appalling; there are still 25-30 families in guest houses in costly overcrowded unsuitable accommodation. The report in the Guardian, August 23, about the Atlantic Guest House in Kilburn, where 15 homeless families are maintained in unsanitary overcrowded conditions by Brent Borough Council at a cost of £250 per week, is an illustration of how the fragmented attempts by the various welfare and housing departments in each of the London Boroughs are failing even to sweep the problem under the carpet tidily.

In Ealing the direct action Squatters' Association is beginning to have concrete results beneficial in the long term - i.e. achieving re-housing.

If such associations can demolish the notion that homelessness is a network of immediate welfare crises to be dealt with by social workers, probation officers, marriage guidance counsellors, race relations officers, etc., then perhaps in the near future the real problem, the shortage of housing, will be recognised and dealt with.

S.W.

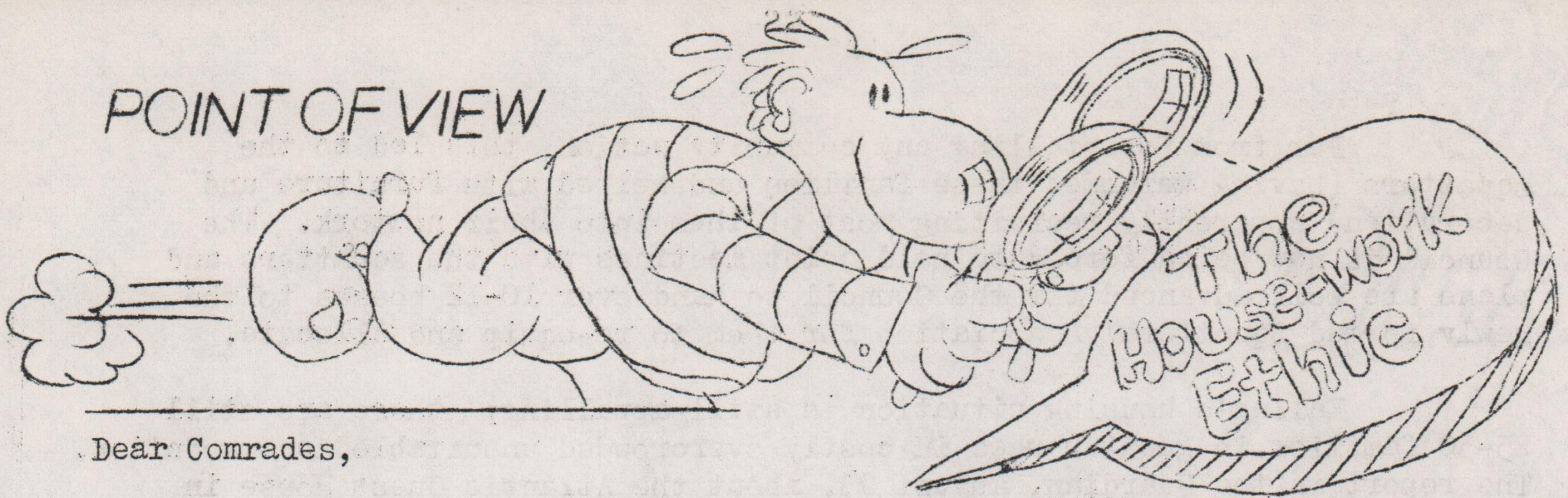
A NEW SOLIDARITY (LONDON) PAMPHLET :

HISTORY and REVOLUTION (a revolutionary critique of historical materialism) by Paul Cardan.

Discusses the socio-centric and ethno-centric foundations of marxism. Shows how today's dominant 'revolutionary' system of ideas was itself a product of historical development, reflecting a typically capitalist vision of man. Suggests that, at a certain stage, historical materialism becomes an obstacle to the further development of critical thought about both history and revolution.

15p (plus 3p postage) from H. Russell, 53A Westmoreland Road, Bromley, Kent.

POINT OF VIEW



Dear Comrades,

The article "Wife and Mother" in Solidarity, VI, 10, gave a good account of the type of alienation particularly affecting women in contemporary society - alienation which pervades not only our work, but our leisure activities, our closest relationships, our own bodies. It must have been quite mind-expanding, if they bothered to read it, for all those men who imagine it's a great life being a modern housewife, that motherhood is the ultimate fulfilment for a woman, and so on.

For too many males, revolutionary perspectives stop short at the threshold of their own homes. They ignore what is happening to the women they live with. They go on being looked after by a tame female as they have been all their lives, and they even have the nerve to criticise her methods if standards fall below the style to which they're accustomed! One wonders whether their attitude is due to a failure of consciousness, or to deliberate cynical exploitation of the conventions.

No one with any claim to be liberal or progressive would condone a social system in which domestic service is performed for one class by members of another or for one race by members of another. So why should one sex be served by the other? The daily household tasks forming the background to people's lives should not have to dominate anyone's existence.

Women's-liberation literature gives a great deal of attention to housework, its nature and effects. This is necessary at present, in the process of raising consciousness, exposing myths and working for change. But in the long term, the significance accorded to this area of activity must be drastically reduced. The domestic treadmill will cease to exist when it's accepted that everyone not physically or mentally incapacitated can "do for himself", either as an individual or on a co-operative basis.

Of course, change here must be linked with change in the relations of production, the function of production in society - in fact with our total perspective for general liberation.

Our perspective will not be total if it fails to consider the whole question of personal relationships, life outside production. This concerns everyone's life in its privatised sector; for a majority of women it is dominant over everything else, sometimes to the exclusion of everything else. The women's liberation movement has presented a conscious and in some ways effective challenge to existing norms, but a lot of its work has been internal, hardly known outside the groups directly involved. I hope Solidarity will continue to contribute, not only by reproducing articles like "Wife and Mother" but by developing its own critique.

Fraternally, E.A.S.

IRELAND

ANOTHER VIEWPOINT

The comments below are taken from a letter written by a reader in Northern Ireland to the author of "Occupied Ireland" (in Solidarity, VI, 9).

... To refuse to recognise the right to self-determination of the Northern Protestant nationality is in fact, in the real situation which exists in Ireland, to align oneself with Catholic Nationalism, Anti-Partitionism, under whatever new label and packaging it may come today. You would agree that there can never be socialism in Ireland (of a genuine kind, I mean, not just nationalised industry, etc.) without the creative, conscious action of ordinary workers, Protestant as well as R.C. Then you must recognise that, even after half a century, the Protestant community here still feels that it would be nationally oppressed within a 32-County state.

The I.C.O.* Statement puts it very well: "The breaking down of the national barriers between the Catholic and Protestant communities would be of advantage to the socialist movement, provided that it happened by the mutual consent of the two communities. But an attempt to break down national barriers by the bigger nation over-coming the smaller would not be of advantage to the socialist movement. It would only foster national divisions in the working class."

Unfortunately, the Catholic working class in the North has been and still is under the domination of bourgeois nationalist political and religious organisations, whose function has been to act as the Northern wing of Southern Catholic nationalism. Partition was never imposed by England, but by a politico-military national movement in the North.

It is precisely because you don't accept this analysis, and thus don't recognise the rights of the Northern Protestant community, that you see the British troops through the tinted spectacles of traditional Catholic nationalism/republicanism - as the "army of occupation". The very phrase, of course, shows the contradiction in what you say - showing that the concept of nationality is by no means absent from your analysis, but that only one "Irish nation" is recognised.

* Irish Communist Organisation.

To talk of occupation is to talk of one nation invading another, occupying its territory with its armed forces, etc. This is precisely the standpoint of the Provisional/Official Republican/Blaneyite F. Fail, etc. ideologies. But if the Northern Protestants form a national community, then there can be no talk of "Occupation", since the majority want the link with the U.K. maintained: the Six Counties are not retained within the U.K. against the will of their inhabitants by British troops, as the rhetoric about "occupation" seems to imply.

It is just this sort of logic about the nature of the State and the wrole of the Army which leads the P.D. into Houdini-like postures and frequent disappearances up its own arse. Thus Free Citizen (Vol. I, No. 27) condemns sectarian attacks by one group of workers on another (in this case, R.C.'s from Ballymurphy attacking Prods in New Barnsley estate), but says it does not condemn clashes with the Army - which in this case was standing between the two sets of workers to prevent sectarian conflict!

The same with the attacks by Shankill workers on Unity Flats - compounded by the fact in this case that these people are sometimes labelled "fascists" by the P.D. but Free Citizen could still say: "We do not rejoice when any section of the working class is beaten off the streets by the army" (no doubt including the Unionist mobs dispersed by the troops in August, 1969!).

To explain the presence of the army here (as I would explain it) by saying that it came to protect the interests of British (including 6-county) capitalism does not preclude one from saying that its role is to prevent sectarian conflict - for British Imperialism and the Ulster ruling class no longer have an interest in provoking sectarian conflict - for reasons given in the I.C.O. Economics of Partition pamphlet.

And I think you would seriously misjudge the situation here if you imagine that withdrawal of troops would not leave the working class areas open to grave danger. After all, August 1969 was not "inevitable" or "probable" either - it took most of us by surprise. Moreover, in the new situation today, with terrorism being widely employed by the Provisionals, and the sectarian gulf in the working class deepened by such means, the aggressive I.R.A. strategy in fact exposes the R.C. ghettos to real danger of retaliation by embittered Protestants . . . especially after bomb blasts when Protestant women and kids are injured (maybe soon fatalities will occur - and remember that the number of guns in Protestant hands, i.e. the potential strength of a U.V.F.-type force which would inevitably spring up if the Army pulled out and the B-men were not reconstituted officially, runs into tens of thousands.

Even at present, the R.C.'s are suffering principally because of the so-called "defence" strategy - in fact a very aggressive strategy - of the I.R.A. Thus in July 1970, a minor arms search by the Army ended in the deaths of several civilians, because the I.R.A. escalated a minor stone-throwing incident into a major gun battle.

The P.D., as usual, carries the logic of its position from elbow to arse by its absurd demand, occasionally trumpeted in Free Citizen, that

the 'Peace Line' be dismantled, as it prevents working class unity between the R.C.'s and Prods - presumably the sort of unity which Shankill Prods keep wanting to have with their R.C. brothers in Unity Flats, but which the nasty soldiers keep preventing!

I do not believe, myself, that R.C. working class areas are 'harassed' and 'attacked' by the troops. How would that serve any bourgeois or imperialist interest, unless one assumes (as, for instance, Lysaght did in the debate with Conor Cruise O'Brien in Red Mole some time ago) that a revolutionary situation was developing in Ireland in August, 1969? And that the role of the army in intervening was (and is) to prevent social revolution, which seems to me to be patently absurd. Nor do I believe that 'resistance' in the R.C. ghettos, motivated as it is by the bourgeois nationalist illusions of a single Irish nation part of which is occupied by a 'foreign' force, is properly classifiable as 'defence'. (Remember, too, that it is one thing to throw bombs and bricks at soldiers to harass them, and quite another to fight off armed civilians intent on burning your home down.)

Of course, there are cases of army brutality, arrogant treatment of civilians, damage to people's property, looting, etc., by soldiers (in Prod and Mick areas), but this is the pattern of 'normal' undisciplined behaviour which one can expect from a bourgeois military force, because of its very nature and structure. To oppose such behaviour (as when a number of Scottish soldiers clearly ran amok recently on the New Lodge Road) is distinct from supporting demands for withdrawal...

In my view, it is nothing short of criminal for the I.R.A. to construe arms searches (and it is obvious that no ruling class is going to stand by while its opponents stockpile arms for use against it - any serious working class defence movement would be prepared for this and would not lay the whole community open to danger by adventurist Chicago-style shoot-outs in the streets) as general attacks on the R.C. ghettos by order of Stormont and Westminster (as R.C. politicians alleged in July, 1970) and so deflect blame from themselves when ordinary working class people get gassed or killed for fuck all.

It looks as if we must be prepared for a new I.R.A. 'campaign' here, starting soon. The Provos learned nothing from the 1956-62 debacle, and it looks like the chance of any meaningful class politics is out for about 10 years after they have played their physical force card. It's very disheartening to see English left-wing papers like Red Mole giving such uncritical support to the I.R.A., even the Provos. All the English groups seem to be united in calling for troops to be withdrawn (L.P.Y.S., C.P., S.L.L., I.S., I.M.G., Solidarity) and I don't know of any who show sympathy for, or recognition of the democratic rights of the Protestant community here.

Against the current stream of opinion on the Left, I would strongly maintain that recognition of these rights is a precondition for working class unity, and thus for Socialism, in Ireland. While the 6-county state is under continual threat from R.C. nationalism, especially its internal 'Fifth Column', Protestant workers will defend it. Only when this

threat has been removed, will it be at all possible to win large sections of the Protestant working class to opposition to the 6-county state on a class basis - on the basis of their own interests as workers, not the interests of the Southern middle class (whose interests Catholic Nationalist ideology reflects and serves).

Of course, from our point of view, nation-states as such are obsolete, barriers in the path of human development and the rational use of the earth's resources by men acting in common. But it is a spurious kind of "internationalism" which refuses to recognise that the fusion of present nationalities, which are real existents and not "ideas" of any kind, can only be called progressive if based on mutual consent - and this is a meaningless phrase without the right of nationalities to secede from or refuse to join larger units which include or wish to include them.

Thus Marx, although he wanted to see larger political-economic units and not smaller ones, supported Irish independence and right to secession, hoping afterwards for eventual voluntary federation of the two nations by free consent of each. But Marx, like Lenin, Connolly et al., never recognised the national character of the Ulster protestant community, a mistake which led to the sort of absurdities and ill-fated "predictions" seen in Lenin's articles on Home Rule (cf. Lenin on Ireland). They held to the myth of a single Irish Nation, in which the Protestant Ulstermen were a religious-political minority . . .

Co. Armagh
13-6-71.

B.D.

L.W. replies:

B.D.'s letter makes a number of valid points. The view of a politically conscious person (from a Protestant background) who can see more than the Catholic/Republican side of the picture is not often heard over here. He describes in some depth the complexities of the situation, at a time when many of the analyses we read are superficial and simplistic.

However, part of his criticism of the "Occupied Ireland" article is based on misunderstanding. Evidently the article gave rise to false interpretation by not being explicit enough about some of the terms used, which have particular connotations in the context of Irish politics. "Occupied" Ireland was meant to denote the areas subject to military interference, regardless of the nationality of the troops or the affiliations of the people around them. I would apply it to military action in both Protestant and Catholic areas, and indeed to patrols in the more or less neutral city centres.

When I found rifles being levelled at me and other passers-by, my resentment was not based on any sense of national identity with any section of the community. B.D. admits the obnoxious ways in which military forces are likely to behave when confronted with civilians. If we support

the demand for their withdrawal, it is not because they are "foreign" troops in Ireland, but because they are the armed forces of the State acting, in effect, if not expressly intentionally, to the detriment of people's lives.

I think B.D. plays down the extent to which the military have sinned rather than being sinned against in the matter of initiating and escalating confrontation. And recent developments seem to indicate that even if they were at the outset impartial or uninterested, the soldiers are now adopting sectarian attitudes. From the commanding heights of the military and political establishments they have been told they are at war with the I.R.A., and definite anti-Catholic bias has been observed in the ranks. Of course this is easily explained: resistance has come most consistently and effectively from the I.R.A. and the Catholic community around them - and army mentality encourages an image of the enemy as a completely alien sub-species.

Because of the nature and function of a state army, it is not revolutionary to advocate its use in any circumstances. At the same time, the demand for the withdrawal of troops from N. Ireland should not be made glibly or light-heartedly. I would like to think that the choice between the employment of British troops or civil war is a false alternative, based on the self-interested exaggerations of politicians. But the observations of people like B.D. cannot be dismissed so easily.

IRRATIONAL REVOLUTIONARY ATTITUDES

What is a false alternative is the choice between the British army and the I.R.A. The behaviour and attitudes of both are far from being acceptable to libertarian socialists. In fact, another reason for supporting the troops' withdrawal is the apparent fact that their presence tends to strengthen the I.R.A., and the most reactionary, authoritarian and mindless elements within it, inside the Catholic community.

The "Official" faction seems to be more class-conscious and to have a better grounding in socialist theory, but even so its structure is authoritarian and it can hardly be counted an ally of libertarians. We can appreciate B.D.'s dislike of phenomena like the front page of "Red Mole" devoted to the slogan "Victory to the I.R.A.", and the same chant echoed endlessly by International Socialists and others at the anti-internment demo on August 15.

British revolutionaries who take this line do little service to the "People's Democracy" comrades in the Crumlin gaol in Belfast. Uncritical support for the I.R.A. means ignoring some of the most significant work done by P.D., including all its propaganda against sectarianism and terrorism. It will be a great pity if P.D. members as well as their so-called supporters are driven into the arms of the "Provos" by the viciousness of government repression.

The "analysis" which sees British Imperialism, pure and simple as the end as well as the beginning of trouble in Ireland, and describes the struggle as one of National Liberation certainly fails to take account

of the realities of N. Ireland as it is, and as it has been for decades. Whether those who put it forward are being naive, misguided, romantic or just opportunist is not clear.

Salvation does not lie behind the guns of the I.R.A., U.V.F. or British Army. Nor, it must be said, can it be seen coming from the working class of N. Ireland. Both sections of the class are "backward" in the sense that the false, divisive consciousness of quasi-religion and crude nationalism has an amazingly strong hold. The process of demystification will take a long time yet. I do not see nationalism, any more than religion, as forming any real part of that process.

AGAINST INTERNMENT

It should go without saying, but let's say it anyway as loudly and as often as we can, that the vicious repressive policies of the state, particularly the horrible system of internment under the incredible Special Powers Act, must be opposed. We know that "they" can do anything we can't prevent them from doing, but it's always a bit of a shock when they really get down to it and lock up our friends and comrades.

Of the 300 men dragged in by the military net on August 9, only victims of "mistaken identity", taken to make up the numbers, seem to have got out at the time of going to press. The situation is quite aberrational even by bourgeois-democratic standards, and the policy has not even succeeded according to the rationalisations of Faulkner and his gang. It led to bloodshed on a scale unprecedented in the present troubles, and many of those "inside", far from being I.R.A. gunmen, have consistently opposed terrorism.

This letter came from the wife of a P.D. comrade who is one of the victims of internment.

. . . This whole period has been a ghastly nightmare but I was allowed to visit John yesterday afternoon for 15 minutes, and he was amazingly cheerful in the circumstances. Once out of the horrors of Paratrooper tactics in Girdwood Barracks, Grumlin Road Prison seems almost humane.

Doubtless you have read the brutality reports in the papers -
 - . . . was taken in mistake . . . and released on Tuesday evening. He was thrown out of a helicopter to the chant of "There'll be no inquest here" - Mike Farrell was beaten etc., and savaged by a dog (his coat is torn and bitten) and put in solitary for two days. John was luckier, i.e. he was made to run the gauntlet of soldiers but he had his shoes on over the broken glass. They tried to annoy John by making him sing "The Queen", but this only encouraged him to yell it out (he is tone deaf) and this drove

them wild! They have taken over their wing in the prison and are staging a trial of the Stormont M.P.'s - long sentences are encouraged! . . .

. . . The best thing you can do is to organise as much propaganda against internment as possible, because this is being decided on over these 28 days.

18.8.71.



MAOISTS OF THE WORLD UNITE!!



Recent actions by the Chinese Government have set the cat amongst the maoist pigeons. Many have discovered they were never maoists at all or conversely that Mao wasn't. Others have interpreted events to show that China is really behaving in the interests of Proletarian internationalism after all. It is enough to make a horse laugh.

For the record, before the smoke screen gets too thick, we print below the texts of Chou En-Lai's messages of support to Mrs Bandaranaike and Yahya Khan.

FULL TEXT OF THE MESSAGE FROM CHOU EN-LAI TO YAHYA KHAN FROM "PAKISTAN TIMES". 13.4.71.

"I have read your Excellency's letter and Ambassador Chang Tung's report on your Excellency's conversation with him. I am grateful to your Excellency for your trust in the Chinese Government, China and Pakistan are friendly neighbours. The Chinese Government and people are following with close concern the development of the present situation in Pakistan.

Your Excellency and leaders of various quarters in Pakistan have done a lot of useful work to uphold the unification of Pakistan and to prevent it from moving towards a split. We believe that through wise consultations and efforts of your Excellency and leaders of various quarters in Pakistan, the situation in Pakistan will certainly be restored to normal.

In our opinion, the unification of Pakistan and the unity of the people of East and West Pakistan are the basic guarantees for Pakistan to attain prosperity and strength. Here, it is most important to differentiate the broad masses of the people from a handful of persons who want to sabotage the unification of Pakistan. As a genuine friend of Pakistan, we would like to present these views for your Excellency's reference.

At the same time, we have noted that of late the Indian Government has been carrying out gross interference in the internal affairs of Pakistan by exploiting the internal problems of your country. And the U.S.S.R. and the U.S. are doing the same, one after the other. The Chinese Press is carrying reports to expose such unreasonable interference and has published your Excellency's letter of reply to Podgorny.

The Chinese Government holds that what is happening in Pakistan at present is purely the internal affair of Pakistan, which can only be settled by the Pakistan people themselves and which brooks no foreign interference whatsoever. Your Excellency may rest assured that should Indian expansionists dare to launch aggression against Pakistan, the Chinese Government and people will, as always, firmly support the Pakistan Government and people in their just struggle to safeguard State sovereignty and national independence."

FOLLOWING IS THE FULL TEXT OF PRIME MINISTER CHOU EN-LAI'S LETTER TO MRS BANDARANAIKE WHICH WAS DELIVERED BY THE CHINESE AMBASSADOR IN CEYLON:

"I am grateful to Your Excellency and the Ceylon Government for your trust in the Chinese Government and your friendly sentiments towards the Chinese people.

The friendship between China and Ceylon is in the fundamental interests of the two peoples and can stand tests. The Chinese Government and people highly treasure the friendship between our two countries and no one with ulterior motives will ever succeed in trying to sow discord and sabotage our friendly relations.

Following Chairman Mao Tse Tung's teaching the Chinese people have all along opposed ultra 'left' and right opportunism in their protracted revolutionary struggles.

We are glad to see that thanks to the efforts of Your Excellency and the Ceylon Government, the chaotic situation created by a handful of persons who style themselves "Guevarists" and into whose ranks foreign spies have sneaked have been brought under control.

We believe that as a result of Your Excellency's leadership and the co-operation and support of the Ceylonese people these acts of rebellion plotted by reactionaries at home and abroad for the purpose of undermining the interests of the Ceylonese people are bound to fail.

We fully agree to the correct position of defending state sovereignty and guarding against foreign interference as referred to by Your Excellency. The Chinese Government and people admire this and firmly support Ceylon in her just struggle towards this end.

As Your Excellency is deeply aware the Chinese Government has consistently abided by the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence, has never interfered in the internal affairs of other countries, and is also firmly opposed to any country interfering in other countries' internal affairs, and particularly to foreign reactionaries taking advantage of the opportunity to carry out armed intervention.

.. 52 ..

I would like once again to reaffirm this unshakable stand of the Chinese Government.

In the interests of the friendship between China and Ceylon and in consideration of the needs of the Ceylon Government, the Chinese Government in compliance with the request of the Ceylon Government, agrees to provide it with a long-term interest free loan of 150 million rupees in convertible foreign exchange.

We would like to hear any views which Your Excellency might have on this matter.

We are prepared to deliver a portion of the loan in May and sign a document on it.

As for other material assistance, please let us know if it is needed."

Thursday, May 27, 1971.

From THORNY NETTLES, No. 2.

