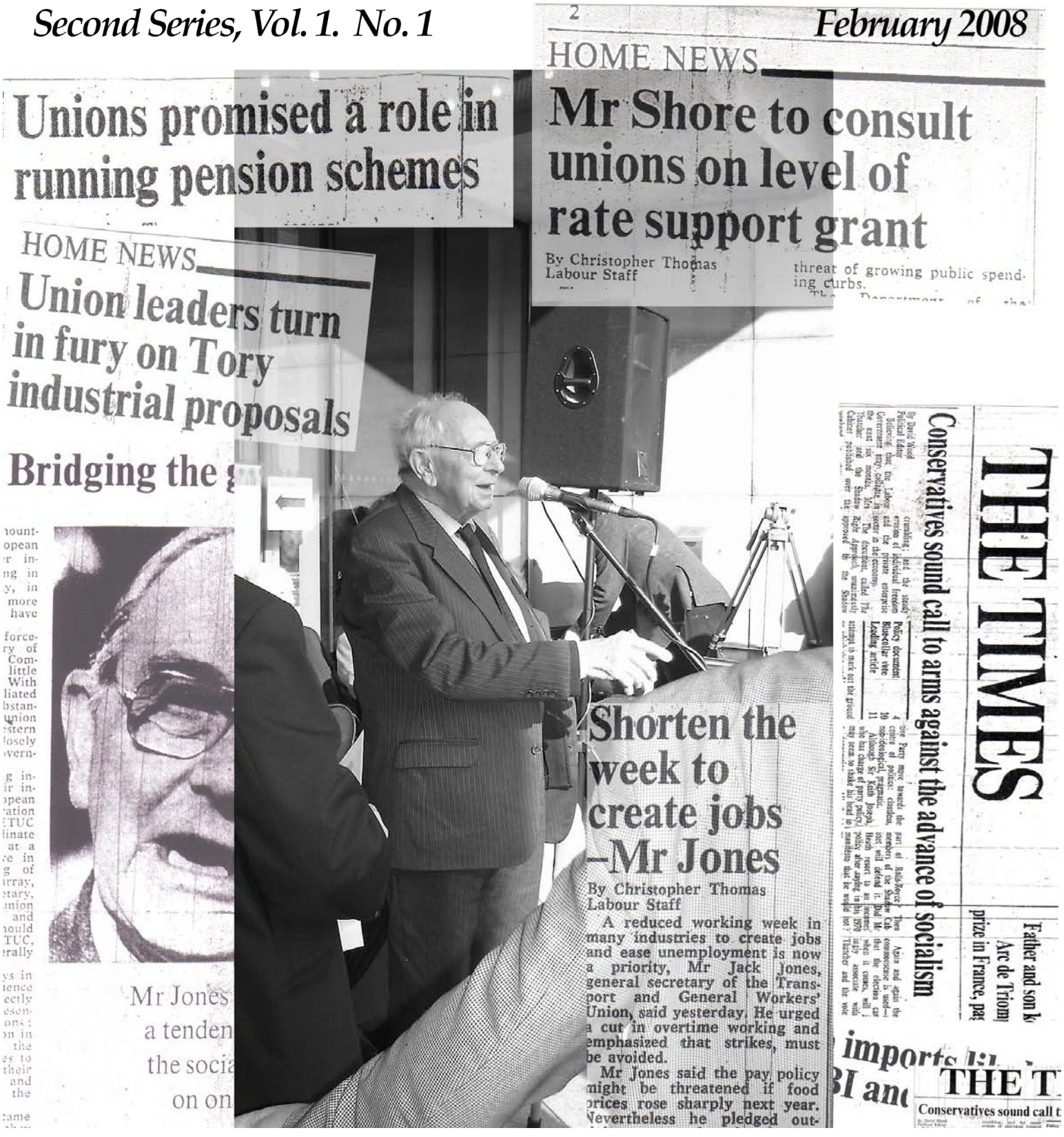
Problems Of Capitalism & Socialism

Second Series, Vol. 1. No. 1 *February 2008*



PROBLEMS OF CAPITALISM & SOCIALISM

The Debate on Workers' Control. From Discussion to Denial. From Failure to Fallout. From 1975 to Now.

Second Series, Volume One, Number One

Multi-user subscription rates available from the editor.

Next Issue—Individuals wishing to ensure their copy of the next issue, please send £4; €6 (payable to Athol Books) to 33 Athol Street, Belfast, BT12 4GX, Northern Ireland.

Subscription to this magazine in PDF format is available, price £1.50; €1.00, per issue. See Athol Books website for details

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INTRODUCTION BY JACK JONES

The great power of the trade unions and sympathetic Governments in the late 1960s and the 1970s provided an opportunity for the working class in Britain to start becoming the ruling class. These conditions were the result of the social and economic reforms introduced by Clement Attlee and Ernest Bevin following the Second World War. The Government was prepared to admit the unions as equal partners in planning the economy. The Bullock Committee, on which I had the privilage to sit, was set up under terms of reference devised by the Trades Union Congress and recommended a parity of power between employers and unions on the Boards of large private companies. Another committee was set up by civil servants to deal similarly with the public sector.

The opportunities offered were unfortunately not taken up in the wider union movement and Britain moved in a Thatcherite direction. This all happened over thirty years ago. A whole generation does not know about these things or about the world as it was at this time.

I am glad therefore that two of the workers' control activists of the time, Joe Keenan and Conor Lynch are publishing an account of these times and these events as a series in their magazine "Problems of Capitalism & Socialism". I am also pleased that most of the material will be in the form of reprinting journals, pamphlets, and articles from that era. This will not only inform this generation but to some extent help it to experience the arguments, the controversies and the atmosphere of that period.

JACK JONES, JANUARY 2008

(Note: The Bullock Committee was set up in 1975. Editor)

THE LEFT TO ITS OWN DEVICES

EDITORIAL

The second world war was won by Britain's allies; by America and, above all, by Russia. The British bourgeoisie contributed nothing of substance to the victory. Everything that British society achieved in the war years was achieved under working class leadership.

The British working class came through the General Strike and survived the Thirties under the leader ship of Ernest Bevin. During the war, while Churchill plotted military sideshows (that kept the war going by broadening it) and strutted in summits with the powers-that-be, Bevin exercised dictatorial power on the home front and organised the working class to win the peace.

The power that was built up by Bevin as leader of the Transport & General Workers' Union and the driving force in the TUC was applied by him as Minister for everything fighting the war depended on (officially he was Minister for Labour and National Service) to establish political rights for the working class in a social economy of his own devising.

The interdependent and self-reinforcing system of

social ownership, labour rights and welfare provision that underpinned working class power in post-war Britain was Bevin's. Others may have thought the economics of it and others still may have sketched the legislative framework of it, but it was Bevin alone who built the welfare state.

That welfare state, which survived the attempts of Tory administrations to undermine it, is currently in the final stages of being dismantled by the left wing of the Labour Party which never reconciled itself to managing the economic relations it found itself living within and hated Bevin extravagantly for involving it so intimately with power and the responsibility for the use of power. When it finally captured the Labour Party in the nineties under Tony Blair the left set itself to disentangle itself from everything that caused it unease—industry and state involvement in industrial affairs and the remnants of working class economic power. The Labour Left is currently privatising what remains of the British economy and subsidising the Bourgeoisie mightily to (mis)manage it. The left which so hated Bevin has so completely had its revenge on him and the class which followed him.

The British working class would be immeasurably better off today if Bevin's dictatorship had been of the vintage of the rights of man and subsequent revolutions. But it wasn't. The closest analogy to Bevin's use of dictatorial power is the classical one; that of Cincinnatus who in a time of military emergency was found plowing his fields and persuaded to take on dicatatorial power, then within sixteen days saved the state and retired back to his fields. Bevin established the working class in a power structure that ramified itself into its organised strengths and left the economic model to develop a political expression within the Labour Party.

It is by no means unreasonable that he should have expected the trade union movement to have block-voted the Labour Party into a routine of industrial common sense. Under Bevin's direction the unions had acted to either prevent left-wing ideological adventures, or where they occurred anyway (the Ramsay MacDonald adventure) to pick up the pieces and reconstruct the movement. The unions might easily have structured their role as reality anchor into a dominant party position.

As things worked out, Bevin died in 1951 and the unions refused to take a syndicalist step too far for them. They enrolled their members as Labour Party voters but refused to represent them as power brokers in the daily cut and thrust of Party and parliamentary business. Politically, organised workers were Labour Party members. Economically, Labour Party members were trade unionists. And Political Economy then? That was something foreign. Something a bit syndicalist sounding, something with a touch of corporatism about it. Political Economy was unEnglish and that was an end of it. Which left the Political Economy within which Bevin had established working class power to the loosest of its own devices. Which is to say it unravelled.

It took little more than twenty years for the strong working class position which Bevin established to be undone by the British left.

Let us be under no comfort of an old illusion here. Working class power was undone by the Left. The bourgeoisie in general, weak and demoralised as it was then, had nothing to do with it. Of that crime at least it is innocent.

At war's end the British bourgeoisie was less exalted than greatly relieved in victory. The retreat from Empire which followed can easily be exaggerated. In many ways it was conducted more as a strategic withdrawal than as a retreat. Much of it was in response to American expansion into its markets and American anti-colonialism. But, for whatever complex of reasons, the imperial tide was receding and the imperial ruling class no longer had confidence in itself.

As the bourgeoisie lost the historical thread of itself the British working class enjoyed something of an Indian summer; really an autumn that was brighter and warmer than the weather could afford. With the welfare system taking up the slack of its oldest fears and the state buying out managerial incompetence the working class proceeded to collectively bargain itself into an inflationary pit.

The thirties then seemed a long time gone. Sickness and unemployment had become mere nuisances for the most part, even lifestyle choices for a few. Strikes were forgone conclusions, exhilerating and risk-free; fun for all the family. At the end of a bumpy road the worst that could happen was nationalisation.

Throughout the British economy bourgeois managements were unable to function in opposition to shop-floor power. It was all very well for Hugh Scanlon to say from a postion of irresponsible strength that

management had a right to manage. Management was weak of will and unfit for purpose. All the talk about all the right in the world couldn't turn managerial flab to industrial muscle. And Hugh Scanlon never for one moment intended that it should.

What Scanlon meant was that management had the right to produce ships, planes, cars, loaves of bread, tins of beans, sides of beef, fridges and washing machines from clean, fresh air and plenty of it. Though if the bourgoisie had somehow found some way of doing that Scanlon would inevitably have found some reason for interfering with it.

It was really like that in England in the seventies. Everything seemed to turn on the will of the organised working class. But strong as it was the organised working class was merely wilful. It had all the wilfulness in the world, but really it had no will and no steady purpose of its own. For will and steady purpose it looked to the Left wing of the Labour Party. And the Left wing of the Labour Party knew those words, along with a great many other words which it used in a vast extended stream that seemed never ending.

There was an end to all those words, which was a strong desire possessing the left-wing of the Labour Party and the Left in general that the world should be remade in the image of its own rhetoric. Blessed are the poor in spirit; go, be poor. Blessed are the meek; go, be meek. Justified are the powerless; go, be justified. Righteous are the weak; go, be righteous. So they went. And meek and poor they were and justified and righteous and all magnified in Kinnock. And multiplied in Tony Blair.

The political movement which coalesced around the leftwingers Blair and Brown and their New Labour Project was of the left, by the left and for the left. Neil Kinnock was deeply involved in it. As was Peter Mandelson who had once taken his Young Socialist branch into the Communist Youth League. Then there was Geoff Mulgan, David Aaronovich and, God Bless Them, the Millibands, father and son. And Peter Hain. And Clare Short.

May we never forget Margaret Hodge of the People's Republic of Islington, not merely an Oppenheimer but also (now) an MBE. Or her one time deputy in Islington, Jack Straw. And of course Charles Clarke who would never have risen to the heights without his comrades in the depths. Then step up and take a bow, Nina Temple and Democratic Left, CPGB as was, New Politics Network as is. David Blunkett is too often ignored these days. So let us here remember Red Sheffield and its randy commissar. And oh yes, talking about commissars, the CPGB's John Reid. And so many more. You know who you are.

The figure-head with the teeth for it, Tony Himself, acknowledged their debt to a particular set of founding principles. When Mick McGahey, CPGB executive member and Scargill's deputy in the destruction of the Coal Industry, died in 1999, Blair eulogised him in these words:

> *"I knew him well. He had that combination of dedication to principle and toughness of mind that is the test of the trade union movement. He gave me advice often, never sneering and always sound. He was a genuine great of the trade union movement."*

Economic management is an indispensable social function, which in Britain in the seventies was not being performed by either of the economically involved classes whose business it was to see to it. That was an intolerable situation that the Bullock Inquiry into Industrial Democracy was set up to address.

Politics had produced Barbara Castle's In Place of Strife for the Labour Pary and Ted Heath's Tripartite Prices and Incomes Policy for the Conservatives, both of which had been rejected by the force of economics. The Bullock Committee was formally part of a later Labour Government's Social Contract, albeit a part of it which hankered after Political Economy.

The British Labour Movement of the seventies was disabled by being a constitutional fiction, in which the powerless political wing was hamstrung by an industrial wing which refused to accept responsibility for the activity it imposed on the politicians. Then, when a section of the trade union movement attempted by way of industrial democracy to take responsibility for itself it was outmanoeuvred by an alliance of powerless politicians and irresponsible union bosses.

For the next year or so, or however long it takes, this magazine has set itself to reproduce the documentary record of the struggle that took place in that period over that policy. As a beginning this issue contains Jack Jones' biography of Ernie Bevin, as well as Conor Lynch's account of the period which began last year in the Irish Political Review, and the first few issues of the journal of the North London Workers's Control Group of that period, Workers And Industry.

ERNIE BEVIN: THE TRADE UNIONIST

BY

JACK JONES

Text of an address by Jack Jones to the Ernest Bevin Society fringe meeting at the Labour Party Conference, Brighton, September 30, 1991

In the 1920s and 30s 'Lady Bountifuls' used to circulate around holding meetings among the very poor women, such as the wives of the unemployed, or very low-paid workers, to tell them about the benefits of nutrition and how to make a dinner very cheaply. At one such meeting the women were being told how to make a perfectly satisfactory meal with a cod's head. Whereupon some bright old lady in the audience asked, "What happens to the rest of the fish?"

I mention this because it is the sort of question Bevin would have asked as a young man in the early part of this century. He had been brought up on a farm. I don't know if he was exactly illegitimate, but he never really knew who his father was. He was also very poor and had quite a struggle to make a living. Eventually, he moved from a place called Winstrom, in Somerset, to Bristol. There he earned a living as a casual labourer in rather bitter conditions, very poor and struggling to survive, and occasionally getting a job driving a mineral water van. Later this became a more regular job. But he still lived in conditions of quite dire poverty and adversity, and I think it was this that moulded him early on in life into becoming very much of an agitator.

In l9l9 Bevin used the example of the cod's head to demonstrate what the dockers' wages of that time actually meant in terms of meals for a docker's family. He was arguing the case for a reasonable wage for dock workers before the Lord Shaw Enquiry, a major enquiry of the time. He was making the case that dock workers, who were then employed on a very casual basis, should be paid enough for at least a survival existence, given the hard work they had to perform. He was confronted by an employer's advocate, who maintained that the wages that a docker then received (eleven shillings a day, and not every day of the week at that) was quite adequate. If the docker, or rather his wife, would pay proper attention to nutrition, they could survive on it. Bevin then went down to Billingsgate, bought a cod's head, cooked it himself, with the help of his very able secretary, a Miss Fawsey, and paraded this *'dinner'* before the Chairman of the Enquiry, Lord Shaw, to demonstrate the impossibility of expecting the docker, his wife and their four children to survive on that sort of meal. And it helped to make his case.

This was Bevin, emerging from an adverse background, presenting a case before the distinguished advocate, Lord Shaw, and to the employers' legal men, in an enquiry that had arisen out of the strikes and troubles in dockland at the end of the First World War. And, despite his limited educational background, he was able to make a case which confounded those in authority. He conducted the case for the dockers over four hours, calling witnesses and so on, using all the attributes of a highly-trained legal man. He brought in what witnesses he could, including dockers themselves, to say what they would do with a cod's head, and, in his working-class language, got the essential points over. As a result of his brilliant, and indeed unusual advocacy, Bevin established a case which won from that distinguished Court an award of sixteen shillings for an eight hour day (44 hour week), which was a substantial improvement in one fell swoop upon what was then normal. (In much of industry the working week was then 54 hours.)

The important thing that Bevin was trying to argue for was maintenance: that dock workers who were employed on a casual basis should be guaranteed a reasonable income each week. He did not quite win that, but he won the principle of de-casualisation. But, one way and another, the employers managed to dilute that down, so that it never really came into existence in dockland until the Second World War. By this I mean guaranteed de-casualisation, getting away from a situation where workers turned up day by day, or even by the half-day, looking for work. And that even included registered dock workers. The Lord

Shaw Enquiry did, however, establish the principle of registration, which would eventually end the system of turning up each half day and often being turned away with nothing. He got a guarantee of some measure of payment, some measure of maintenance, and it was a distinguished achievement to have been able to get that.

This case generated enormous publicity at the time. The newspapers picked it up: the dock worker putting a case that was confounding judges and distinguished advocates. It was typical of Bevin (who was not able to afford Mandelsons), and greatly to his credit, that he would use any and every opportunity to get publicity for his case. And it eventually earned him the title, *"The Dockers' K.C."* My father always talked about Bevin as *'The Dockers' K.C.'*

Bevin was always anxious to prove the value of advocacy. Although he had led strikes and been involved in them, he knew that strikes could not be the only weapon by which you won major concessions. You had to be able to "seek negotiations", as he put it. He said that the greatest power you could have lay in establishing the principle of negotiation. If you could negotiate on roughly equal terms with the power of the strike weapon in the background, and not using it very much, you could establish the right to get agreements. Moreover, if you got an agreement, you should hold to it. It wasn't right to negotiate, and then tear up the agreement the next day. You tried to ensure that the thing was watertight, and that once you were able to make some progress, the progress, in terms of an agreement, would hold with the workers you represented. That was very important to Bevin.

As he developed his skills as a negotiator and advocate, Bevin was anxious to establish among the members of the union the idea that they should make realistic claims. Thus he believed it was foolish, as some unions did at the time, and for many years afterwards, to put in a claim for, say, £2 per week, and then settle for a shilling or two per week. It was quite normal in the 1930s for the Engineering Union to do just that. And it meant that a sense of despondency would set in, and trade unionism did not gain the advances it should have in that period.

There is another instance of Bevin's publicity abilities that I should like to mention. It comes from a period when he was unemployed, before he became an official of the Dock Workers' Union. Bevin had been persuaded to join the Dock Workers' Union, with the idea that he would become an official, by a man named Dan Hillman. Hillman was a very well-known trade unionist and socialist, the two things were almost indistinguishable at the beginning of the century. And Bevin was a socialist, make no mistake about that; he advocated socialism all through his life. As I say, he was persuaded to join the Union in the knowledge that he would be an official and work full time to try and organise what had been a relatively unorganised force in and around dockland. In the process of being so persuaded, he sought to organise the unemployed. He saw the unemployed as a threat to those who were in employment, casual employment as it was. Equally, he saw that poverty had to be challenged. So he organised a group of unemployed people in Bristol. He took this group one Sunday morning to the cathedral church in Bristol during a service attended by the aristocracy and well-to-do people of the city. He organised the group to go into the church, not with banners, but quietly, and one by one, until the entire church was virtually full of unemployed people, ragged, rough and unshorn. It made a tremendous impression on the well-dressed people of Bristol. It was another instance of Bevin's great ability to use his publicity skills to bring out the conditions of the unemployed of Bristol at that time. And he went on, of course, to try and organise them as trade unionists.

By 1926 the Transport and General Workers Union had been established and the unions were relatively strong. The General Strike was called. Four million people struck work. Unfortunately it was a nine days' wonder, a failure, for a variety of reasons. But Bevin sought to get the best out of a difficult situation, and to try and turn defeat into some measure of victory. He sought almost immediately after the Strike to have talks with employers, and made what contact he could. There were some employers who felt they ought to try and re-establish some relationships with the trade unions. The government of the day was inclined to attack the unions at every point. It introduced the Trades Disputes Act, which virtually put the civil service unions out of the Trade Union Congress, withdrew the right to strike, and trade unions to a degree were in a desperate state of defeat.

But Bevin still sought to find out those employers who were prepared to talk, and his main concern was to overcome the victimisation which was prevalent after the General Strike. People who had gone on strike, the leaders certainly, were blacklisted. They lost their jobs. Others who did not lose their jobs were kept out of work for months on end. Bevin was concerned,

first of all, with trying to recover the strength of his Union, but all the time trying to find ways and means of re-establishing people who had been victimised in employment.

In due course, Alfred Mond, later Lord Melchett, persuaded a number of employers to invite some of the trade union leaders to talks, to see what they could do by way of re-stabilising some measure of industrial peace. These talks were called the Mond-Turner talks. Ben Turner, of the Textile Workers, was Chairman of the Trades Union Congress at the time. Bevin was one of those who advocated that there should be a response to the approach of Mond and his associates. He believed that as long as they were prepared to talk, we should talk. He was denounced, along with others, as someone who was selling out the working class. It was said that the employers only wanted rationalisation, which meant modernisation of industry at the expense of workers. Arthur Cook, who was a very fine leader of the miners, said it was class-collaboration. Cook had very distinct views about socialism and capitalism, and took the view that you should not seek to negotiate, because that almost amounted to class-collaboration. The talks were thus denounced from the start as being wrong.

But Bevin took the view that you must still find ways and means of opening up discussion with employers in order to try and better the situation of working people, by hook or by crook. The result of the Mond-Turner discussions, which took place over some time, was that they did get the general declaration which laid down that there should be no victimisation of workers; that trade unions should be recognised; that there should be talks leading to guarantees of employment, guaranteed weeks, for example.

It was a very important development. And as regards Imperial Chemical Industries, the largest employer in Britain at the time, it led to the conclusion of Agreements (not only with the T&GWU, but with other unions too) which have stood the test of time. ICI is one of the major employers in Britain where labour-relations have been pretty good throughout the years.

Bevin made it his main business to remove the inhuman treatment both of workers at work and of those who became unemployed. He knew more than most people about the real fear of victimisation in the work place, because he had been victimised himself. It is the sort of situation that is recurring today, and I mention it because victimisation is the weapon by which employers try to browbeat workers against attempts to organise. One of the difficulties, at least for smaller companies, of trying to develop trade union membership, and hold it, is the danger that those who put their head above the parapet will be shot down; put out of work and kept out. Not many people make a song and dance about it, but it is a method that is now being used quite extensively. Trade unionists must seize the opportunity of trying to overcome that problem, as Bevin tried to do, in many ways successfully, in his time.

The General Strike was a failure, but the massive unemployment of later years was a lesson to Bevin of the weakness of Labour. He always wanted to have trade union strength to even up the balance of power in industry and secure the power to negotiate. When circumstances were against him industrially, he used his abilities to persuade the employers not to exploit their strength, and carried the same message to the government of the day. He warned of the dangers of retaliation if their attitude was unreasonable. Some of them took no notice at the time. I would hope that Mr Michael Howard will take notice of that possibility, because retaliation will come eventually. The trade union movement will eventually recover its situation, despite all the *'slings and arrows of outrageous fortune'* which have gone against us at the present time. When Bevin was Minister of Labour during the war years he was determined to limit the unilateral power of the employer, and to ensure that a strong trade union movement would develop on a democratic basis. He succeeded in this. It was a tribute to him that he was responsible for the repeal of the Trades Disputes Act in l947 (it had been passed in l927).

Bevin's greatest contribution as a trade unionist, i.e., from the beginning of the century until he became Minister of Labour, was, I believe, his initiative and driving power in helping forward the development of large-scale trade unionism. He brought into effect, with the Transport and General Workers Union, what was called *"the one big union"*. For years in Britain and America and other countries, the idea of the OBU had been talked about. Books were written about it. Meetings were held about it, and socialists proclaimed that it was a good idea. There were organisations like the American Knights of Labour which, to some extent, were established to achieve the principle of the OBU. But none of them were so effective as the union which Bevin devised. True, it was on the basis of a lot of earlier efforts which had nothing to do with him.

But he picked them up. He was a master of picking up other people's ideas and refining and building on them. Out of that he conceived and developed, indeed was the architect of, what is now the Transport and General Workers Union.

It was a new union. He developed it first of all on the basis of industrial groups linked together by an overall general executive council. There were also regional authorities that administered the finances on a decentralised basis. In other words, at the national stage and the regional stage there was unity of all the trades. Othewise the trade sections themselves virtually operated as industrial unions. You might say that that was a remarkable development. But Bevin had studied the American Knights of Labour, which was structured very much on the lines just indicated. When it came to recommending the name of the Transport and General Workers' Union, he borrowed the title that Jim Larkin had introduced in l909. The T&G was formed in l9l8. But in 1909, in Dublin, Jim Larkin had formed the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union. This was mainly a combination of the existing transport unions, as Bevin's union was, but he recognised that on the periphery of the transport unions were general trades and industries that ought to be linked together. Bevin had in mind there, of course, things like the mineral water van he used to drive (driving horses, by the way). He had in mind that they were not docks, or road haulage, in the normal sense, or buses or trams, but they were in the periphery, in and around dockland. He wanted to organise the places where the mineral waters were made, and that led him into a lot of other industries.

By developing what was, and still is, the largest union in Britain, Bevin demonstrated the economies of scale. A big union, he said in effect, ought to be able to produce effective service, yet require low contributions. You develop quite considerable finance, which enabled one section to help another. If you have a strike in docklands, the workers on the trams and in road haulage would be able, through one general union, to provide the finance necessary to sustain that strike which on their own might not have been possible.

Bevin took the view that, in dealing with employers of labour (which, as with ICI, were developing in size then), you had to have big unions to have some sort of effective possibility of negotiating with them. He used the example of an elephant and a mouse. An elephant to a mouse is very big, but one elephant to another is just about the right size. He took this view in relation to negotiating equality between employers and unions.

In forming the union, Bevin had in mind trying to deal with some of the real curses which affected the working population of the time. One of the major curses was casual employment. You might think that this was only a matter of docklands. Not at all. Casual employment was rife and typical in practically every industry. Tram drivers were employed on a casual basis, as were lorry drivers and carters. Even skilled trades were employed almost on a casual basis. This was not unusual in my own experience, working in the engineering industry. Skilled people would go to work in the morning and be sent home the same day without pay. There was no requirement to make any payment, no collective agreement which said that there should be a wage. So casual employment was a curse of industry in general and Bevin wanted to deal with it. And he succeeded in many industries in getting regulated employment, registration of workers, so that a limited number of workers had preference in getting work. Otherwise, it was open to anyone to go along and get a job for a night, or for a day, and in the process, because they were not organised, weaken the front as regards getting reasonable wages, and some sort of guarantees of employment.

He succeeded to a very large extent.

In addition, another great contribution he made to progress was raising the status of relatively poor manual workers in industries like the food industry and flour milling, for example, by introducing the principle of pension schemes. The idea of manual workers having occupational pensions, on top of the very low state pension of ten shillings a week, was almost unheard of. But Bevin was one of the first to raise it, and negotiate the idea of pension schemes for manual workers. Not very big, at first, but the principle was important, and began to raise their status to the level of white collar people. Always in his mind was the struggle to get equality of conditions between the manual worker and the staff worker.

One of Bevin's main activities was his insistence on gaining the power to negotiate. In the process he argued for the need for enquiries, for conciliation, and he was prepared to go to arbitration, when it was questionable on our side. He recommended the introduction of joint industrial councils, joint regulations so that workers and managers would sit on committees to adjudicate on matters affecting

discipline, and things of that kind. He made strong efforts to reduce unemployment, and published a plan to deal with the problem of two million workless (My Plan For Two Million Workless). It included proposals to subtantially increase Old Age Pensions, something which commended itself to me, and still does.

These were all new ideas and developments, often brought forward under very great criticism from those who took the view that the only thing that mattered, ultimately, was The Revolution. Such people believed you should conduct industry on a syndicalist basis which would lead towards the revolution, and that there was no solution in terms of some sort of ordered relationship with employers. But Bevin was basically a socialist. Certainly, for many, many years he proclaimed his socialism, and I personally think he remained so to the end. The fact is that he knew he still had to persuade ordinary working men and women that it was worthwhile organising, and that it was important to get results, even limited results, even little steps of progress. At some stages that had to take the form of accepting that there might have to be a reduction in pay, and then to try and make sure that that reduction would be as limited as possible.

In 1931 we nearly had a revolution in this country on account of the great economic crisis. The Wall Street Crash had occurred. There were three million people unemployed, and we had gone off the Gold Standard, so bad was the situation. The National Government was formed in the course of trying to solve the problems. As so many governments have tried to since, they tried to put the burden on the backs of workers. They decided to reduce Unemployment Benefit by ten per cent. When they tried to cut the pay of the troops and the navy by ten per cent there was a mutiny in the navy in consequence. Employers, of course, followed the pattern set out by the government, and sought to reduce wages. They succeeded in many cases. There were, in fact, ten per cent wage cuts in a whole range of industries.

In the Docks Bevin negotiated a seven per cent reduction on basic pay, and five per cent on piece work. It took quite a few years to start to go back on that and get a restoration of the l931 cuts. Indeed, the trade union movement conducted campaigns to restore these cuts. I remember having a big argument with Bevin; I was a very young man then, and I had come on to the docks from engineering, and was questioning him about how the trade union leadership could negotiate reductions in pay, which I did not think was a good idea. He replied that he had done better than other industries, and indeed he was able to persuade my fellow-workers that he had done a satisfactory job in that sense. He managed to hold the situation, and eventually we got a restoration. That was Bevin. He wanted to maintain organisation, despite adversity, rather than disorganisation and anarchy. He succeeded in doing so in a very difficult industry, the docks industry.

He carried on the struggle, frankly, as Minister of Labour from l940 to l945. He blatantly used the fact that he had taken over the Ministry of Labour to ensure that working people were treated reasonably well. He knew that there was great anti-union feeling among the establishment. In October l939 Bevin wrote:

"It must be appreciated that in their heart of hearts, the powers that be, the government, are anti-trade union. The ministries and departments have treated labour with absolute contempt. Yet without the great trade union movement the forces cannot be supplied with munitions, nor the country with food. The principle of equality has not yet been won. Equality, not merely in the economic sense, but in conception, and in the attitude of mind of those in power. We do not desire to serve on any committee or body as an act of patronage. We represent probably the most vital factor in the state. Without our people the war cannot be won, nor can the life of the country be carried on. The assumptions that the only brains in the country are in the heads of the Federation of British Industries and big business, has yet to be corrected."

And later, after six months of war-time government and just before he took the job of Minister of Labour, he said:

"After six months in office, the trade unions are tolerated so long as they keep their place, and limit their activities to industrial disputes, industrial relationships and similar matters, and are willing to bury all their memories and feelings, and assist the nation, or industry, when in difficulties, and go back to their place when the war is done. But there will have to be a great recasting of values. The concept that those who produce or manipulate are inferior, and must accept a lower status than the speculator, must go."

He took that view, a socialist view, very deliberately and strongly, and carried it through. And undoubtedly, that influenced much of the policy of the Labour Government when it came into office in l945. That was

to his credit.

As Minister of Labour, Bevin was confronted, of course, with organising the labour force for the war. He introduced very controversial measures such as the *'1305'*, the Conditions of Employment and National Arbitration Order. Technically strikes were made illegal (though we still managed to run a few), and there was compulsory arbitration. But he laid down, as a condition, that all employers would have to observe the recognised terms and conditions in the industry, not only nationally, but in the district, laid down in collective agreements. These were operable in law, so trade union negotiations had a force that could be applied to employers, and many employers who had refused to recognise trade unions, refused to pay trade union wages, had to do so. I could tell you stories of employers who refused to talk to me (I was a young negotiator at the time) but were forced by arbitration to comply with Agreements on conditions in that industry. He was very careful to do that.

Then there was his Essential Works Order, which required every able-bodied person, including women, to go to work. He laid down that no employer could dismiss people without the right to appeal to an Appeal Board, which included trade union representatives. These boards could reinstate, which, incidentally, the industrial tribunals today virtually cannot. But they did during the war. And if an employer suspended anybody there would be a right to appeal, and the suspension not only could be lifted, but the employer would have to pay compensation. There were many cases in my experience in which men had three days off, and then got full pay because the employer was proved to have unjustly suspended them. So employers became very much afraid, and began to realise the need to have some sort of ordered relationship with trade unions in consequence of that period. Bevin described that Essential Works Order and *'1305'* as virtually collective agreements given the clothing of law.

Bevin introduced at a very early stage in the war the principle of Joint Production Committees. First of all, he introduced Yard Committees in the shipbuilding industry, which were to discuss matters affecting production, as well as general relationships. This was a development in industrial democracy—elementary, but nevertheless a step along the road of industrial democracy in shipbuilding. That was picked up not only by Bevin, but also by the unions in the engineering industry. It was followed by the principle of Joint Production Committees, which meant that employers could no longer rule purely on their own prerogative. Management had to take account of the workers' point of view, and the latter had a right of appeal to higher authority.

Unfortunately this important principle was not followed up as strongly as it might have been after the war. But it showed Bevin's interest in the principle of industrial democracy, which, I know, the Bevin Society is very interested in, as I have been. Together with other colleagues in the trade union movement, I had a lot to do with what was later called the Bullock Report. I mention that because there are many instances in which I tried to follow Bevin's example, much as the Bullock Report follows on from the principles of industrial democracy which he pioneered.

I tried to follow his advocacy of conciliation and arbitration when I drew up proposals, for a Labour government, for the introduction of an Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service, on the grounds that there were times when the strike weapon could not be used effectively. In any case, workers do not use strikes as the sole way of dealing with their problems. It is the last resort. And you have to find ways and means of overcoming problems in industry. And if the employer would not negotiate then you had to go somewhere, where at least you could get some sort of elementary justice.

With the right sort of conditions, conciliation and arbitration could help to get justice without the need to involve workers in strike action. And in my belief the Arbitration and Conciliation Service had proved its worth—so much so, that the Conservative government has tried to emasculate it. It has reduced its authority and limited its function. It had quite a useful function in terms of allowing investigations where claims were being made by unions for recognition in industries where there was a limited measure of trade union organisation. And we made progress on that basis because not all workers are ready to take drastic action to achieve their aims. Many workers are not ready for that. The fact is that conciliation and arbitration has proved its worth. I simply make the point, in conclusion, that a lot of the ideas that we applied at the early stages of the l974 Wilson government took account of the sort of views which Bevin himself had expressed and had applied over many years.

REFLECTIONS ON THE CAMPAIGN FOR WORKERS' CONTROL IN BRITAIN

PART ONE—INTRODUCTION

When God was making Ireland He proclaimed a land that was green and fertile, populated by a cheerful, outgoing, carefree people, speaking a language of poetry. After much more in this vein, He was interrupted by the Angel Gabriel, who was taking notes, protesting at all this favouritism. But, says God, I haven't described their neighbours yet.

For a thousand years Ireland has had to exist with one eye over its shoulder. It has had no responsibility for England's reformations, Civil Wars, or foreign adventures, but has had to suffer the consequences of all of them. Cromwell's problems were not its problems until he made them so. It is still a good idea to keep an eye on the neighbours.

Ireland has survived campaigns of extermination and of incorporation to develop along very different lines to Britain.

While the English state preceded and produced the English nation, which then rewrote Britain in its own image, the Irish nation and state were together produced out of our necessary struggle against the neighbours.

England completely destroyed its own society as it industrialised. The rural society was smashed to bits and sent into the towns to work or it was made to work as virtual, and often as real slaves, digging coal or minerals or stone out of the countryside. What other societies produce for their own daily needs; food, clothing etc., were obtained for the English through conquests abroad.

The English state today is as clear as ever of its God Given, Historically Determined, Dialectically Necessary, sometime Religious, now Scientifically-proven mission to rule the world. And the English people of today are as easy to convince of the righteousness of that mission as ever they were.

But In 1914 English historians stopped writing objective factually-based histories (which confirmed what everyone knew, that England was the culmination of recorded history and intended by God etc. to rule the world as it was at any moment about to do) and started writing propaganda to suit the immediate aims of the moment. English historical writing, as Brendan Clifford has demonstrated in this magazine and elsewhere, never recovered from that.

From that point, because its historical education is woefully deficient, the English political elite has been strategically incoherent. The legacy is still there and still informs English politics. It is just that it is no longer understood very well. And is today put into practice with great incompetence.

Ireland emerged into the 20th century as a society of farmers, petty bourgeoisie and rural and urban workers, developed as a nation through the land agitations, industrial struggles and the political and military campaigns for national independence.

Such different histories also made for differences in the development of the trade union and socialist movements in each country. British socialism emerged from Liberalism in its Social Imperialist phase, the religious aspect of which was a kind of Darwinian Nonconformism. The only serious internationalists produced (by whatever series of accidents) within that tendency were Ernie Bevin and Jack Jones.

The Labour Party had at its core the famous Clause 4 of its constitution. This was a utopian clause that few really believed could be achieved, and many believed shouldn't be achieved. But it was a goal to strive for, and in the striving socialist measures could be put in place.

Outside (and sometimes inside) the Labour Party were Marxists who looked to a Soviet victory in the Cold War as the means of achieving socialism. And as soon as it was clear that this was not going to happen they retired from the fray or went over to the other side. And there were, and are, the Trotskyists who have no clear idea of what they want and so don't have to deliver.

The main socialist achievements in Britain were not achieved by a revolution or by any coherent demand or agitation in the working class. They, the Welfare State, The National Health Service, the Nationalisations, etc., were imposed by a dictatorship.

During the Second World War, while the Prime Minister was concerning himself with military matters, Britain was being run by one man, Ernest Bevin. Every aspect of the economy and of people's daily lives was controlled by Bevin. He used exhortation for the most part in the hope that socialism would catch on, but he relied ultimately on extensive coercive legislation, and was not averse to such things as strike breaking and jailing.

It was in this period and by these means that Bevin laid the foundations for the reforms which were formally enacted by himself and Clement Attlee between 1945 and 1951.

Irish socialist development was bound up with the revolutions that brought the state into existence. It was given substance and direction by the revolutionary, James Connolly. His Irish Citizen Army was forged during the Dublin lockout of 1913 and was the driving force behind the nationalist rebellion in 1916, where he was the overall military commander.

In the period leading up to the rebellion he embraced German socialism and took Germany's side in the Great War after it was attacked by Britain. These two positions are reflected in the 1916 Proclamation—the founding document of the Irish Republic.

Arthur Henderson, the British Labour representative in the British Cabinet, doesn't seem to have had any problem approving Connolly's execution after the rebellion. He acted as a British Imperialist and socialism and internationalism didn't come into it.

After the General Election victory for Sinn Fein in 1918, The First Dail drew up a social and economic programme drafted mostly by Connolly's trade union successor, William O'Brien. This was a socialist programme in principle and in practice. It was also an achievable programme, much of which was implemented over the years and the rest of it is routinely referred to in the politics of the present day.

The first Minister of Labour was also a leader in the Irish Citizen Army, Countess Markievicz. Both Sinn Fein and its offshoot Fianna Fail have held to socialist principles to a greater or lesser degree down the years. Today each seems to be trying to out-socialist the other—which reflects a socialist culture in the country of some kind—i.e. there must be votes in it.

(The Irish Labour Party seems to have lost its way under the leadership of unstable social elements in the 70s, and hasn't been helped by being led by lapsed Soviet admirers in more recent times.)

The Irish working class movement, political and trade union, has been bound up with the State from the formation of the latter, as it was intimately involved with that formation. It is at ease with the State. It does not feel it to be unnatural to form pacts with the state—to be one of the Social Partners, to help form economic and social policy, to have wage agreements, to sit on State boards, to sit on the board of the Central Bank.

The British Labour Movement is not and has never been so easy about its relationship with its state. Whatever eccentric, even revolutionary, things may at times have been said in the heat of propaganda, the British Labour movement has normally taken the common English view that the state is, at the end of the day, above the hurly burly, an arbiter, the voice of the nation (not quite reproducing the argot of the upper fourth remove here, but who can these days?). It is from this, for lack of a better word, 'patriotic' view of the state that a corporatism-by-name was so feared by both left and right. All alike feared the British state would be sullied and cease to be able to act impartially for the nation. That's one of those things which no one ever thinks through or says out loud, because it can't be spoken of or thought about. They just know it. It's what being English is about. Being English you just know such things.

Neither Bevin nor Jones was English in that unthinking patriotic kind of way. Being internationally-minded, they could actually see the English state and speak of and think about it. They could therefore engage strategically with it and propose ways of making use of it (which practically no one else since August 1914 has been able to do; Heath may be the only other exception).

These things need to be understood if sense is to be made of the rejection by the British working class and its leaders of the offer to give them an equal share in the running of the British economy thirty years ago.

This Rejection led directly to Margaret Thatcher and to the Blairisation of the Labour Party.

Having been involved intimately in the agitation to bring about workers' control in British industry in the 70s, and knowing a fair bit about British labour history, it seems, on reflection, that defeat was always the most likely outcome.Perhaps it was necessary for Harold Wilson and Jack Jones to simply announce that the workers' control measures were going to happen and to get on with it. But hindsight is a wonderful thing and even then it may not have worked out.

In the coming months an account of those times and the agitation will appear in this journal along with interesting relevant documents giving the positions of the British Government, the unions, the employers, and politicians. We will start with the body that one would expect to be at the heart of the agitation—the Institute for Workers' Control.

by CONOR LYNCH

(originally published in Irish Political Review, January 2007)

REFLECTIONS ON THE CAMPAIGN FOR WORKERS' CONTROL IN BRITAIN

PART TWO—THE INSTITUTE FOR WORKERS' CONTROL

The Institute for Workers' Control was founded in 1964 by Ken Coates. Coates had left the Communist Party after 1956 and joined the Labour Party. He was later expelled from the Labour Party and established a base for himself in the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation. Russell was Honorary President of the IWC until his death in 1970.

(Bertrand Russell had originally been an advocate of nuclear war on the Soviet Union, but became a peace advocate after the USSR acquired the bomb in 1949. Coates later returned to the Labour Party and became an MEP.)

The premises and resources of the foundation provided the base and the network of contacts for establishing the IWC. Coates, so far as I could gather, held no office in the IWC. But he was its undisputed leader. His principal assistants were Michael Barratt-Brown and Tony Topham, neither of whom held office either. That kind of control, once established, was invulnerable, and therefore the most secure kind.

Coates wrote much of the IWC's literature and edited anthologies on workers' control. One didn't think of the IWC without thinking of Ken Coates. He was rarely absent from meetings and rallies but seldom took part officially. My memory of him is of a kind of satesman cum prophet who was deferred to at crucial moments.

I remember two large conferences in particular where the business of the day was over and the IWC Chairman, Bill Jones, called on Coates to sum up *in a few words*. Coates wandered about the back of the hall shaking his head and making noises to the effect that any intervention by him would be superfluous—an intrusion even. Jones would then seek encouragement from the floor of the meeting for a Coates speech. This would rapidly build up into widespread chanting for Coates to speak. After five minutes or so of this, Coates would make his way through the noisy scene to the rostrum to deliver a fiery and polished speech which got the audience into a state of great excitement.

I found myself somewhat embarrassed by this kind of thing, but thought it couldn't do any harm to get the troops worked up a bit. Unlike speakers like Tony Benn, Jack Jones or Brian Nicholson—or even to some degree Neil Kinnock or Michael Meacher—I could never remember a single word that Coates said. But the theatre was most memorable indeed.The aim of the IWC was:

> *...to assist in the formation of Workers' Control groups dedicated to the development of democratic consciousness, to the winning of support for Workers' Control in all the existing organisations of labour, to the challenging of undemocratic actions wherever they may occur, and to the extension of democratic*

control over industry and the economy itself, by assisting the unification of Workers' Control groups into a national force in the socialist movement. These aims are based on the conviction expressed in the declaration (of the 6th National Conference on Workers' Control) that 'democratic controls can only be defended if they are systematically extended throughout the unions, the political movement of Labour, and national and local governments, as well as into education and every form of industry and work'.

When I first came into contact with the IWC (ten years after its formation) I could discover only one such local group. If others existed they were not obvious, nor did they become obvious later. That one group was the South East London Workers' Control Group, organised by John Jennings, a tireless and practical organiser for industrial democracy during my time in the IWC.

Otherwise there seemed to be no effort put into organising a definite structure of local or industry groups which could form a concrete base for activism in the IWC.

The Institute seemed to operate on the basis of contacts everywhere. These contacts would organise parties of their constituents or associates to be delegated to attend Conferences, where they would be urged to spread the word. But should a concrete demand or campaign be in the offing, there was no established organisation to go straight into action at a local level.

One example should illustrate this. Every Conference had a delegation from the Kent Area of the National Union of Mineworkers. The IWC had two main contacts in Kent—Jack Dunn, the Area Secretary, and Terry Harrison, President of the largest pit, Betteshanger. These two men would always arrive with a group of Kent miners. But this group rarely consisted of the same individuals. The trip was financed in Kent by the NUM's Educational Trip for Members. This in itself was very useful but never led, nor was it encouraged by the Institute to lead, to the formation of any permanent body in the Kent coalfield which agitated for workers' control.

In June 1974 members of the IWC in North London, led principally by Nina Fishman and Steve Boddington, decided to set up the North London Workers' Control Group. Boddington, like John Jennings, was one of the editors of the IWC's bulletin, Workers' Control. He had for a long time been the Communist Party's leading economist, writing textbooks under the name of John Eaton. In 1974 he was in the Labour Party and widely known throughout the labour movement.

It appeared to me that he had his own group of followers or admirers in the IWC and was prepared to use this circle to develop our local group and even other local groups. He was also cultivating Nina Fishman and other members of the British and Irish Communist Organisation, and was showing off these young activists for workers' control to his associates in the IWC.

Nina Fishman, an American, had been responsible over the previous two or three years for changing BICO from being a largely Leninist organisation to absorbing the British empirical approach to politics more than any other group on the left. She had replaced ideas of Communist party building with a position of aggressive reform with workers' control at its centre, and with an eye very much to the radical reformism of the Bevin/Attlee Labout Party. She got the B&ICO, as a first logical step, to affiliate to the IWC. Nina also had a lot of contacts in the unions—especially the dockers and the miners, and was involved in the organisation of the successful 1972 miners' strike.

I always had assumed that a whole other discussion took place at the centre of the IWC involving people like Coates, Topham, Boddington, Barratt-Brown, Fleet, Newton, etc., to which the rest of us—even those on the IWC National Council—were not privy. I also assumed that there was political or personal factionalising in this group and that the North London Group and the B&ICO were considered by Boddington as troops on his side. This is the way of the world and bothered me not at all so long as the main business of organising for workers' control was in hand by these leaders.

But the B&ICO in particular did not behave like anybody's troops. Not only did its (very few) activists in the IWC not line up with Boddington on all occasions but were as likely as not to engage publicly in fairly violent disputes about workers' control among themselves. Quite an unmanageable lot!

After a year or so Boddington largely cut his ties with both the B&ICO and the NLWCG (most of whom had nothing to do with the B&ICO).

This rift was driven home to me personally at

an IWC Conference in Sheffield in 1976 when, along with the main activist in the North London Group, Joe Keenan, we were refused admission by Boddington to the Conference because we couldn't afford the entrance fee of two pounds. Both of us were unemployed at the time and had hitch-hiked from London.

Ken Fleet,the IWC Secretary, eventually managed to get us in, but could not prevail on anyone to put us up for the weekend—at least not without paying another fee of nine pounds. We spent the weekend sleeping in a field—joined in solidarity by another London Group member, Madawc Williams.

But to return to the story! The first Conference of the North London Group was held on the 1st June, 1974. It was decided that the initial function of the group would be educational, that it would meet once a week in a school and take the form of an Adult Education class.

Under this guise leading figures in industrial relations could be invited along and the subject of workers' control debated with them.

These *classes* took place between October 1974 and June 1975 and were addressed by, among others: Jack Dunn, General Secretary of the Kent NUM; Jim Mortimer, head of the conciliation service, ACAS; Stuart Holland, later a Labour MP; Bert Ramelson, Industrial Organiser of the Communist Party; the West German Labour Attache; and the industrialist, Adrian Cadbury.

The inaugural Conference was very well attended and the immediate purpose spelled out:

> *There won't be any textbooks, just hard experience to learn from. The point of the class is to bring people together who are interested in finding out just what the pros and cons of industrial democracy are and how important it is for all of our futures that the workers should be able to take over running industry. The class will hear peoples' ideas from many sources—and have a chance to question and discuss these ideas freely.*

These classes were indeed very educational and proved a source of knowledge and inspiration for those of us who got involved in the workers' control agitation around the work of the Bullock Committee a year or so later. But the hope that the attendance of people from outside North London and the fact of the new organisation itself would inspire the spread of local groups, was not to be fulfilled. Example was not enough. There had to be a positive will at the centre to organise, and that was absent. (The North London Group did later try to take on the role of a new centre and do the job itself. This proved largely impossible.)

by Conor Lynch

(Originally published in Irish Political Review, February 2007)

REFLECTIONS ON THE CAMPAIGN FOR WORKERS' CONTROL IN BRITAIN

PART THREE—THE INSTITUTE FOR WORKERS' CONTROL (CONTINUED)

1974 was the year that finally saw workers' control move towards the centre of labour movement politics, with concrete proposals from both the TUC and the Labour Party. In the London area a Workers' Control Co-ordinating Committee was organised by John Jennings to begin the agitational work necessary in the new pro-workers' control climate. His own SE London Group managed to get an Open Door programme on TV.

This Committee saw its role as transmitting the work of the IWC: it supported the policies of the Trades Union Congress against opposition from within and without the labour movement. This was a mistake. No such work was going on in the IWC. Conferences were still held regularly. But they still took the form, at best, of a general exhortation to campaign for workers' control.

The existence of a specific set of demands from the TUC, to be legislated by a reasonably willing Labour Government, seemed to be lost on the IWC.

Conferences were needed to organise campaigns in every town, in every Union, in every Constituency Labour Party, and in every workplace, behind the TUC plan.In practice the Conferences became less rather than more focussed. The range of campaigns and causes widened at a time when concentration on the main issue, workers' control, was required.

At first I, among others, put this down to the type of bad habits acquired in any movement which has to concentrate on a general campaign for years and is suddenly faced with the need to focus narrowly, suddenly, for a quick victory.

At meeting after meeting, London members argued for a focussed campaign—both from the floor of Conferences and in the private discussions that took place on these occasions. It was in this spirit that Joe Keenan, probably the most articulate and thoughtful of the rank-and-file members, submitted a discussion document to a national Conference in 1975. Below are some extracts:

In 1917 the demand for workers' control was utopian. The bourgeoisie was still the dominant force in society. The working class played a subordinate role. A long struggle lay ahead...

Sixty years on that struggle has been won. The demand for workers' control is no longer utopian. It marks the only way forward for the working class.

There is no excuse for the subculture mentality now. But it still exists...

The time has come for the working class to rid itself of the attitudes and reflexes it developed as a subordinate class. It must begin to think and act as a ruling class.

The politics of the left which promote and reinforce the old attitudes are nothing more or less than a millstone around the class' neck. The politics of workers' control represent the only way forward.

Workers' control should be an heretical doctrine which challenges all the assumptions of traditional working class politics. But the strategy of workers' control cannot be advanced unless those who subscribe to it not only recognise the fact of their heresy but compound it. And this the IWC has not yet done.

The principal agent in the movement for workers' control cannot retain in itself so much of the attitudes, habits and reflexes of the old politics if it is to supersede them. Nonetheless the IWC has not yet overcome the subculture mentality

...workers everywhere applaud these sentiments [the sentiments expressed in the aims of the IWC—CL]. But they will remain sentiments until a movement for workers' control aims for more than polite applause...

The basis of the workers' control strategy should be that workers have power which they exercise in a negative fashion as a veto: what is required is that 'fundamental and irreversible shift' in that power towards the working class which has already occurred SHOULD NOW BE PUT TO POSITIVE USE...

The IWC has so far raised the issue of workers' control in limited areas inside the Labour Movement. This it has done very effectively. But it has stopped there and has made no attempt to go beyond explaining the 'idea' to workers. It has not made the effort to mobilise workers for the implementation of its policies. Is it any wonder that workers find it difficult to take the IWC (and by implication the whole idea of workers' control) seriously?

The IWC must rid itself of the subculture mentality. What is required at present is not an abstract commitment to a well-structured idea but rather a concrete commitment to a realistic and effective strategy...

This was a fairly hard-hitting paper, but should in no way be interpreted as hostile. The expectation was that at best the ideas advocated would be taken on board by a leadership waiting to encourage whatever activists it could lay its hands on. At the very least it was expected that the leadership would dispute the ideas and demonstrate that they had in their own way every intention of going now for the main chance and didn't need to be told their business by some young upstart. The reaction turned out to be one of hostility but no argument.

There was no recognition that an opportunity was presenting itself for the main aim of the IWC to be achieved. There was even the odd dark hint that people like Jack Jones, General Secretary of the T&GWU, and Clive Jenkins, General Secretary of ASTMS, (and even Tony Benn), had slipped the leash and were prepared to sell out for a mess of pottage.

Those of us who wanted some action began to have

it subtly explained to us that the IWC was something more than a movement for something as pedestrian as workers running their firms and industries. We tried to find out what this great task might be and felt that those doing the hinting weren't sure themselves. Since no straight explanations were forthcoming we began to arrive at the tentative conclusion that Coates didn't want HIS movement overtaken by the actual achievement of its aims.

The basis on which we campaigned for workers' control, and urged the IWC to do likewise, was the policy adopted by the TUC at its Conference in 1974.

The following account of the TUC position was published in Workers & Industry No.1.

For private industry the TUC proposes:

1. A two-tier board structure with the supervisory board appointing the day-to-day Management Board.
2. One-half of the supervisory board to be elected through the trade union machinery.
3. This supervisor board would be the supreme body with power to over-ride the shareholders' Annual General Meeting.
4. Workers' representatives to be elected for two years and subject to recall and re-election.
5. The system should only come into operation where there is trade union recognition.
6. It would apply at first to companies with more than 2,000 workers and later be extended to those with over 200.

For the nationalised industries the TUC recommends:

1. 50% direct trade union representation on the boards of nationalised industries.
2. The other 50% to be appointed by the minister.
3. A similar system to operate at lower levels, with scope for variation and experiment.

The essential points in the TUC's Report, 50% worker representation with election through Trade Union machinery, would, if legislated, have lead inevitably to workers' control. Following the introduction of a 50/50 system, the employers' representatives could argue as much as they liked in favour of their own views on running the firm, but that is all they would have been able to do. The workers' representatives could back up argument for any alternative plans with go slows, overtime bans, strikes, and all the other weapons in the working class arsenal. Workers would then be in a position to make sure that any of the decisions which affect them on investment, manning, rationalisation, re- location of plant, etc. would be made in their interest. They would be able to make those decisions for themselves. A summary of the process that led to the Bullock Committee being set up in late 1975 was printed in Workers & Industry No.2 and is given below.

In 1968 the Labour Party Conference accepted the Report of a Working Party on Industrial Democracy chaired by Jack Jones. The Report was broadly in favour of the development of worker participation, particularly in the public sector. It recommended that there should be:

"...experiments in placing representatives of the workers directly concerned on the boards of publicly owned firms and industries (or alternatively provision for attendance at board meetings) and this representation should not be confined to full-time officers of unions. Workers' representatives should be drawn into decision making at every level, particularly at the various points of production. Labour's 1974 (February) Election Manifesto pledged the government to:
"...socialise the nationalised industries. In consultation with the unions, we shall take steps to make management of existing industries more responsible to the workers in the industry and more responsive to their consumers' needs."

In October of the same year, a further Election Manifesto committed the Government to:

"...introduce new legislation to help forward our plans for a radical extension of industrial democracy in both the private and public sectors. This will involve major changes in public law and in the statutes which govern the nationalised industries and the public services."

The TUC's Report On Industrial Democracy, adopted in October 1974, recommended that, throughout industry, there should be a two-tier board structure with 50% worker representation on the top tier policy-making board.

The Government, keeping its pledges for once, set up a Committee of Inquiry, under the Chairmanship of Sir Alan Bullock, to examine the implications of worker representation on the boards of private

firms. Bullock's terms of reference, having been dictated by the TUC, were clearly progressive:

"Accepting the need for a radical extension of industrial democracy in the control of companies by means of representation on boards of directors, and accepting the essential role of trade union organisations in this process, to consider how such an extension can best be achieved, taking into account in particular the proposals of the Trades Union Congress Report on Industrial Democracy as well as experience in Britain, the EEC and other countries. Having regard to the interest of the national economy, employees, investors and consumers, to analyse the implications of such representation for the efficient management of companies and for company law."

Clearly, within the preceding ten years or so, there had been a development of interest in, and a commitment to, industrial democracy within the Labour Movement which culminated in the Labour Government, under TUC pressure, setting up a Committee of Inquiry as a prelude to legislation.

In other words, the job of the Bullock Committee was to find out HOW to implement TUC policy on industrial democracy, and not whether to implement it. The terms of reference of the Civil Service Inquiry for the nationalised industries were much the same.

No lead on galvanising support for the TUC position, either before or during the Bullock hearings, or for arguing against anti-workers' control trade unionists like Frank Chapple or Hugh Scanlon, was forthcoming from the IWC. Indeed we began hearing that Ken Coates was privately making derogatory comments about the whole inquiry process. (Frank Chapple had been a member of the Communist Party but by 1974 was a very anti-Communist General Secretary of the Electricians' Union.)

In at least one case Coates was too subtle by half. At a post-Bullock Report Conference Audrey Wise, then Labour MP for Coventry, told the meeting that Coates had said to her that she needed to watch out for the Bullock Inquiry. Not being in on these coded ways of speaking, Audrey Wise said she took him to mean something positive. Having previously been a bit sceptical, she now took a great interest in the proceedings and became a wholehearted supporter of Bullock's findings.

This was the first and last time I heard any senior IWC personality criticise, let alone denounce—which she did—Coates in a public forum.

But to return to the North London group. Four London members, by residence not birth—three of us were Irish and one Welsh—Joe Keenan, Peter Brooke, myself, and Madawc Williams (soon joined by others) decided to reactivate the North London Workers' Control Group, and use that base to do the job that the IWC should have been doing.

When the Bullock Committee was set up, Joe Keenan wrote a pamphlet called From Plowden To Bullock. This was the story of how the opportunity for workers' control in the electricity industry was lost when the Plowden Committee on the industry rejected it.

That rejection was solely the result of opposition to industrial democracy from conservative Trade Union leaders in the EETPU (electricians), GMWU (public service manual workers), and NALGO (public service clerical workers), coupled with a lack of any effective counter to Frank Chapple and his friends from people who knew better—the IWC included. The pamphlet urged that the greater opportunity provided by the Bullock Committee should not be thrown away in the same manner.

A weekly four-page newsletter was produced as a campaigning journal for industrial democracy. It contained a few items of general Trade Union interest. But most of its contents dealt with workers' control matters.

Week by week it reported on practical campaigns for workers' control throughout the country—e.g. the Triumph motorcycle co-operative at Meriden and Wolverhampton, the workers' attempted takeover of the Scottish Daily Express, the anti-closure campaign at Crossfields in North London, and the 50-50 workers' representation at Harland And Wolff shipyards in Belfast.

Most important of all, Workers & Industry published details most weeks of the written evidence presented to the Bullock Committee by various bodies, and commented on the submissions. Amongst the bodies which engaged with the Commission were the TUC, The Confederation of British Industries (CBI), individual Unions, employers' organisations, and

political organisations. Extensive extracts from this journal will appear later in this series.The NLWCG (North London Workers' Control Group) persuaded Labour Party branches in its area to affiliate to itself, and held regular, if not always well attended, public meetings on matters related to workers' control in the Tottenham Labour rooms.

Unfortunately neither our example nor our activity was followed—either in terms of influencing people in the Labour Movement or getting support for workers' control legislation via the Bullock Committee. Along the way we showed at least that such organisation was relatively easy if the will was there. It wasn't.

The IWC was neither persuaded nor shamed into doing its duty. At no point did we behave in a sectarian manner and attack the IWC and thereby force it into a position of hostility. It CHOSE to remain aloof. It clouded the main goal by diverting its activities into secondary issues when it should have been grasping the opportunity provided to achieve its main goal—workers' control.

The NLWCG decided to try to influence directly the leaders of the Union movement. This appeared to us a daunting task. Ken Coates and his circle had known all of these people personally for years. To them he was Mr. Workers' Control. We were a small locally-based group, mostly in our early to mid-twenties, new to labour and trade union politics and, in many cases, new to Britain itself.

The response surprised us. The research officer at the T&GWU, Steve Bubb, kept in almost weekly contact, discussing workers' control and keeping us informed of developments. Sid Weighell, General Secretary of the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR), kept us abreast of development there and at the European level, and we had access to the NUR and T&GWU libraries. At the TUC David Lea, then Economics Officer and a member of the Bullock Committee, was helpful and spoke at one of our meetings. We had regular contact with leading officials at the NUM, NALGO, NUPE (local government manual workers), and other Unions. Nobody closed the door, including Unions which were not in sympathy with our views.

We were now *"well connected"* and well informed and spread our information as widely as possible. We were also instrumental in setting up two more local groups. Peter Brooke moved to Cambridge and started an active group there. In Belfast a well-attended meeting launched the Belfast Workers' Control Group organised by the late Eamon O'Kane of NASUWT (teachers) and George Wilson of SOGAT (printers).

By this stage we had probably reached the limits of our abilities. It was time for a last try with the IWC. The Bullock Committee finally made its report. It was good beyond our wildest expectations.

Prior to the Report we had been agitating for a recommendation from Bullock more or less in line with the TUC position. The actual proposals in the Report were even more extensive and radical than those of the TUC.

Conor Lynch

(published in Irish Political Review, February 2007)

Future issues of this magazine will reprint as much as is practical of the evidence which was presented to the Bullock Committee by the Trades Union Congress, the Confederation of British Industry, individual trade unions, individual employers and employer associations and political parties.

We will reprint as much as we are able of the polemic of the debate; especially material from our own side, which we have readily to hand, and also as much as we can recover from the oppositionist left's campaign against Workers' Control. We are not interested in being neutral on the matter. Thorough will do.

There will be more issues of "Workers & Industry", and more from pamphlets produced by the North London Workers Control Group. There is a lot more to come.

WORKERS & INDUSTRY

VOL. 1 NO.1 FRIDAY APRIL 9, 1976

ONLY WORKERS CAN SOLVE THE CRISIS

We are told there is an economic crisis in Britain. We are asked to help solve it by taking cuts in our living standards. By and large, the workers in Britain have agree to take these cuts in order 'to put the country back on its feet'.

But is it just an ordinary economic crisis? Is our crisis just another part of the general world recession? We don't think so.

The world recession has certainly affected us, and economic measures similar to those taken in other countries must be taken here. But something far more fundamental is involved in the British crisis.

Since the war, the trade unions have rapidly become the strongest power in the land. At almost every turn they have intimidated the bosses and beaten them into submission. Only a few isolated pockets of resistance remain. Finally, in 1974, they unceremoniously booted a government not to their liking out of office.

But, powerful as our unions are, theirs is, with a few exceptions, merely the power to say no. No, you can't introduce this or that process. No, we won't tolerate this law, etc.

This is all very well if the bosses are still a vigorous class of producers and innovators. They could organise production and we could demand and get high wages and better conditions.

But in fact the bosses have been intimidated into a jellied mass, interested only in clinging on to their miserable social and monetary privileges. In the factory they exhibit all the signs of degeneration. Last in—first out. Isolation from the shop floor, and so on.

(If Hugh Scanlon thinks, as he says, that "it's management's right to manage", he ought to spend a few weeks in Keith Blackmans.)

The crux of the British crisis, then, is this social stalemate. The workers have massive power but no control over the means of production. The bosses control the means of production but are virtually powerless. THE ONLY SOLUTION IS FOR THE WORKERS TO TAKE CONTROL.

Fortunately there are trade unionists, such as Jack Jones, who see this this. Consequently they have proposed a scheme for workers control of industry via 50% control of the boards of all major companies, and other measures. (The TUC scheme is outlined on page 2.)

This paper is in business to promote the TUC plan and similar measures which will resolve the crisis by putting the most powerful and most progressive class in command of the economy.

HUGH SCANLON AND WORKERS CONTROL

WORKERS CONTROL, IF IT MEANS ANYTHING AT ALL, MEANS WORKERS CONTROL OF INDUSTRY. It means workers determining wages and conditions, deciding what to produce and organising to meet production targets they themselves set.

It means the working class accepting its responsibilities as the only force capable of developing society and consciously directing the weight of its immense power and energies to that end.

It has absolutely nothing to do with the bureaucratic manoeuvrings of trade union officials like Hugh Scanlon of the AUEW.

Scanlon claims to be in favour of workers control. He wrote the first pamphlet to be issued by the Institute for Workers Control.

In March '68 Scanlon claimed that:—

"...democratically elected committees should supervise the appointment of shop managers and foremen, the deployment of labout, promotion, the hiring and firing of workers, safety, welfare and disciplinary matters. They should also have special responsibilities for training and education, and other responsibilities delegated from the combine or group workers' council."

However, an older and wiser Scanlon appeared on Panorama recently and condemned out of hand the notion that workers on the shop floor should elect even workshop committees. These, he said, would inevitably interfere with legitimate negotiations between management and full time union officials. How dare ignorant workers interfere in matters which don't concern them!

But the crisis is forcing workers to realise that either they run industry or stand by and watch as the economy collapses and their jobs and living standards go down the drain. In these circumstances not even Scanlon can prevent the development of a workers control movement and the vast extension of democracy which that entails.

For all that, he stands solidly in the way of the movement for workers control, and when that irresistible force meets Hugh Scanlon it will find him anything but immovable.

WORKERS CONTROL AND THE T.U.C.

THE CURRENT CRISIS IN BRITISH INDUSTRY HAS BEEN CAUSED BY THE SHEER INCOMPETENCE OF THIS COUNTRY'S MANAGERIAL 'ELITE'. Since the last war, managements have, by and large, got used to deferring to the workers and have lost whatever independent ability they had to run industry efficiently.

The employers' right to manage, their famous prerogative, is now non-existent, simply because they have ceased to apply it and a right which is not used quickly disappears.

Such rights depend on ability to use them. Now only workers have the ability.

It's high time workers siezed the right to manage and used it to safeguard their jobs and living standards by managing firms efficiently and profitably in their own interests.

The past ten years has seen a growing body of opinion in the Labour Movement asserting that the time has come for workers to use their immense industrial power constructively to wrest control of industry from doddering senile capitalists and build a strong, prosperous, socialist Britain. Under pressure from the TUC, the present Labour Government has set up a Committee of Enquiry into Industrial Democracy which is to decide how far future legislation should go to involve workers in the running of industry.

The TUC's own evidence to this Committee (chaired by Sir Alan Bullock) will be based on its Report on Industrial Democracy adopted by Congress in 1974.

For private industry the TUC proposes:—

1. A two-tier board structure with the supervisory board appointing the day-to-day Management Board.

2. One-half of the supervisory board to be elected through the trade union machinery.

3. This supervisor board would be the supreme body with power to over-ride the shareholders' Annual General Meeting.

4. Workers' representatives to be elected for two years and subject to recall and re-election.

5. The system should only come into operation where there is trade union recognition.

6. It would apply at first to companies with more than 2,000 workers and later be extended to those with over 200.

For the nationalised industries the TUC recommends:—

1. 50% direct trade union representation on the boards of nationalised industries.

2. The other 50% to be appointed by the minister.

3. A similar system to operate at lower levels, with scope for variation and experiment.

The essential points in the TUC's Report, 50% worker representation with election through trade union machinery would, if legislated, lead inevitably to workers' control. Following the introduction of a

50/50 system, the employers' representatives can argue as much as they like in favour of their own views on running the firm, but that is all they can do. The workers' representatives can back up argument for any alternative plans with go slows, overtime bans, strikes, and all the other weapons in the working class arsenal. Workers would then be in a position to make sure that any of the decisions which affect them—on investment, manning, rationalisation, re-location of plant, etc.—would be made in their interest. They would be able to make those decisions for themselves.

Given election through trade union machinery and the right of recall, it is highly unlikely that workers' representatives will feel any great urge to sell out and collaborate with the employers. If they tried, workers would still have recourse to strike action, etc., which would be just as effective against renegade unionists as it is against the employers. There is no way worker representatives could act against their constituents' interests. Whatever happens, provided the TUC's proposals are adhered to, those representatives can only be agents for workers' control.

SUPPORT THE TUC.

Collective bargaining only provides workers with the means to modify decisions which the employers take by themselves, for themselves. The TUC's proposals lead to a situation where workers will make those decisions in their interests. Then workers will be able to overrule incompetent management, restore direction and purpose to the decrepit British economy, and safeguard their jobs and living standards.

Every worker with an eye to his own best interests should support the TUC by demanding WORKERS' CONTROL NOW.

JACK JONES SPEAKS OUT

FOR YEARS JACK JONES HAS BEEN FIGHTING FOR WORKERS' CONTROL: IN HIS OWN UNION, THE TGWU, IN THE TUC, AND THE LABOUR PARTY. Largely because of his efforts the Bullock Commission, of which he is a member, has been set up to enquire into industrial democracy along lines more or less dictated by the TUC.

Now Jack Jones has taken the fight to the country. Speaking at Telford on 5.3.76 he said:—

"Industrial democracy is not a marginal luxury. We will not overcome the problems we face until we provide for the individual worker a rightful place in the nation's industry. Legislation has been promised for the next session of parliament. Trade Unionists will expect this promise to be kept.

"The crisis we have to face in Britain today is deep seated. When we have won our battle against inflation, and it is trade unionists who are in the front line of that battle, we will still face many problems. What we seek is nothing less than a regeneration of British industry.

"Essential to this, indeed central to the struggle, if we believe the prospects for economic recovery depend on industry, is the need for a new basis of consent and involvement in industry.

"Participation without a sharing of power is not worthy of the name. I fear that participation agreements would only act as a democratic camouflage for authoritarian structures.

"To influence corporate strategy, and not just in a negative way, we must have trade unionists sitting on the top boards of all the large companies in this country. And they should have parity with the shareholders' representatives. I do not think any other system will work."

Right on Jack. We couldn't agree more.

INDUSTRIAL DECLINE IN LONDON

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HALF A CENTURY, LONDON TOO HAS GOT AN UNEMPLOYMENT PROBLEM. Unemployment in two labour exchanges in the heart of the East End, Poplar and Stepney, runs at 11%, 2% higher than in Glasgow. Typically, the unemployed workers are ex-dockers with no other skills: many of those in the East End who had skills have moved out to other areas. Greater London has lost half a million industrial jobs in the last decade, and though the working class in the city have proved themselves mobile enough in some areas to move with the work, there has been—as in the East End—serious dislocation between employment and workers.

This dislocation is in part a product of government

policy. Since the thirties, the industrial strategies of all governments has been based, as far as regional policy went, on the assumption that London was rich in employment compared to other areas in the UK. Thus increasingly large parts of the country have been designated development or special development areas over the last 40 years—until it is now the case that the South-East of England is the only major area not assigned some sort of development status.

Development status for an area means that there are positive incentives given to industries which locate themselves there. Though those regional policies have had only limited success, still industry has tended to shy away from London. Now, London—or parts of it—is suffering.

Complex questions are raised for the workers control movement when it comes to consider these problems. In a recession, regional policy is seen to mean that where unemployment is gained in one area, it is lost in another. However, if this position is adopted as a guiding principle, it can be (and is) used as a conservative argument against workers taking the future of their enterprises into their own hands. Restraining hands in Westminster and in Whitehall will attempt to hold them back on the grounds that, if they attempt to run an industry successfully in London, they will be cutting the throats of their comrades in Newcastle or Glasgow.

But there is a simple counter to that argument. It is that regional policy in a declining economy where no-one—not the old management, not the workers—controls industry effectively, is simply an equalisation of stagnation. Workers who begin to take up the reins of responsibility in their factories and enterprises will, if they are successful, no doubt distort the symmetry of a regional plan. But better to do that than to allow decline to continue.

WORKERS & INDUSTRY

VOL. 1 NO.2 FRIDAY APRIL 23, 1976

MR. HEALY'S THREE PER CENT

SO DENIS WANTS US TO CUT BACK OUR LIVING STANDARDS EVEN FURTHER, AFTER THE PRESENT PAY CURB ENDS IN JULY. And one must admit there is logic in his argument.

The country produces a limited number of goods. This puts a limit on how much is available for investment and consumption. Over all, at present, we spend more than we produce. Therefore we are living on borrowed money and so are mortgaging our future.

Furthermore, the proportion of the national product which we consume is disproportionately high compared to what we invest. Therefore our productive capital—eg. machine tools—is fast becoming obsolete and new technology is not being produced.

It is Healy's plan to cut living standards to the point where spending equals production, and consumption does not eat into necessary investment.

Up to this point his policy can work and therefore has so far received the support of the great majority of workers.

But this only guarantees falling inflation and balanced books in the area of national income and expenditure.

A vigorous capitalist class could take advantage of this situation to re-tool, recruit and seek out new markets. But a vigorous capitalist class is something Britain has not got.

If the bosses do not make use of low inflation and greater investment resources—and all the signs since the war are that they will not—then the result will be ever-decreasing living standards and ever-decreasing employment.

Healy has given no guarantee that his policies will lead to increased production and, ultimately, growing living standards. HE IS UNABLE TO DO SO.

All the economic power in the country now lies with the workers. We are the people with the necessary knowledge of industry to reshape and regenerate it. We are making all the sacrifices. We will bring down inflation and guarantee investment resources. WE MUST THEREFORE TAKE CONTROL OF INDUSTRY AND BUILD IT UP.

It is true that a return to free collective bargaining could ruin our future. But Healy's plan on its own can at best mean slower and more orderly ruin. Only Workers' Control—at least on the lines proposed by the TUC—can insure us against unemployment and guarantee our living standards.

A REARGUARD ACTION

As the crisis rolls on and her own dead weight drags Britain deeper into bankruptcy, the rulers of our broken-down industries are preparing to frustrate increasing pressure from workers for radical change.

While Bullock considers and analyses, weighing the TUC's evidence against that of the employers; while the Treasury co-ordinates the efforts of several departments in Whitehall's internal inquiry into industrial democracy; individual employers are working night and day to produce alternatives to workers' control.

Some companies have taken the CBI at its word and, ignoring the Bullock Commission which, heaven forbid, might possibly recommend legislation based on the TUC's proposals, are pushing ahead with schemes designed to take the sting out of industrial democracy.

Last month the Stock Exchange gave preliminary approval to BONSER ENGINEERING's plan to switch to a two-tier board system. It's not much of a change. The top tier supervisory board will still be elected by, and be responsible to, the shareholders, and will appoint the day-to-day management board. The novelty is that BONSER plan to co-opt a couple of worker-directors; more for show than anything else.

Oddly enough, BONSER already have a tame worker on their present board. Brother Jack Shirland, an AUEW member, was co-opted in September 1974. How come the AUEW, which has so strongly attacked the TUC's demand for equal representation, has done nothing about this blatant example of class collaboration within its own ranks?

CHRYSLER—not so much a lame duck as a multinational swan on NHS crutches—has launched what it calls an *"open management communications programme"*. As part of this long-winded exercise in industrial relations, CHRYSLER are offering two seats on the board to worker representatives. BIG DEAL.

Why should workers accept one or two seats they can do nothing effective with, when, by backing the TUC's demands, they can take half the board as a base from which to run the whole show?

The employers' pathetic attempts to outflank the TUC should be seen for what they are: petty diversions. They deserve nothing but contempt.

THE TUC'S PROPOSALS OFFER US HALF THE BOARD AND ULTIMATE CONTROL. NOTHING LESS IS ACCEPTABLE.

AIMS OF FREEDOM AND ENTERPRISE

ONCE UPON A TIME THERE WAS A BOSSES ORGANISATION CALLED AIMS OF INDUSTRY WHICH ASKED ITSELF THE BASIC QUESTION;—WHAT ARE BOSSES FOR? AFTER MUCH DEEP REFLECTION THEY CAME UP WITH THE IDEA THAT BOSSES EXIST TO PROMOTE *'FREEDOM'* AND *'ENTERPRISE'*. IN CELEBRATION OF THIS DUBIOUS DISCOVERY THEY CHANGED THEIR NAME—TO *'AIMS OF FREEDOM AND ENTERPISE'*. NOW *'AIMS'*, LIKE SO MANY OTHER BOSSES ORGANISATIONS, HAS SUBMITTED EVIDENCE TO THE BULLOCK COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY INTO INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY ATTACKING THE TUC'S PROPOSALS FOR 50% WORKER REPRESENTATION ON COMPANY BOARDS, WITH ELECTION THROUGH TRADE UNION MACHINERY.

According to these philosophers, legislation to create trade union seats on boards of directors would expose companies to the ravages of barbaric hordes of industrial agitators led by Atilla the Trot.

AIMS say…

> *Although many trade union officials are responsible and democratic men, we have a large number of Communists, Trotskyites and Maoists whose avowed intention is to cause industrial strife to bring down society.*

They haven't the wit to see that British workers aren't led around by the nose—not by anyone. If a majority of workers decide to use the TUC's proposed

system to bring down society rather than simply change it for the better, then society is finished. That's hardly likely, but the point is that the decision on how to use industrial democracy is up to the workers themselves. No leftie minority, however extreme, is going to make that decision for them.

Paranoid fantasies apart, the real likelihood is that workers will use industrial democracy to take control of their firms and start running them efficiently and profitably. They will use it to make employers redundant. When management is made responsible to workers, when workers make sure managers do their jobs properly, then the bosses may as well go on the dole.

[LINE MISSING]…with the bosses. In fact freedom in Britain has been fought for and maintained by the Labour Movement. The bosses have had little to do with it. Furthermore, the bosses in Britain today are about as enterprising as a herd of cows. Enterprise and freedom are the rightful preserve of the working class.

There is in fact no reason for the bosses at all. They're good for nothing. It's high time *'Aims of Freedom and Enterprise'* realised that and hobbled off to the old folks' home for a well-earned rest.

PARTICIPATION AGREEMENTS

EVERY EMPLOYER AND EMPLOYERS' ORGANISATION IN BRITAIN, UP TO AND INCLUDING THE CBI, HAS REJECTED THE TUC'S PROPOSALS ON INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY. ACCORDING TO THE CBI, THE TUC'S STRATEGY IS…*concerned not with genuine participation, but with control.*

They're right of course. The TUC is out for control. Its proposals would lead to a situation where management would be responsible to the workers. Bosses can't be expected to like that.

The CBI has gone so far as to advise its members to forget about the Bullock Committee of Inquiry into Industrial Democracy (whose terms of reference were all but written by the TUC) and, without waiting for its report, to set about negotiating *'participation agreements'* with their employees. The CBI has said…

We believe that the CBI should put forward a practical policy of its own and stand by it, rather than attempt to negotiate or compromise on the extreme proposals of others.

The employers have recognised that the TUC's proposals amount to a serious threat to their parasitic existence and are attempting to outflank them by diverting attention to their scheme for *'participation agreements'*.

The stated aim of participation agreements is the achievement of *"...a more competitive, more efficient British industry...by ensuring decision making is, wherever practicable, with the acceptance of the employees involved."* Under participation agreements, workers would be given a little more information on how their firms are run, and would be consulted about, and be able to 'influence' management decisions.

The employers' schemes are a straightforward attempt to sieze the initiative from the TUC and turn what is an opportunity for movement towards real workers' control into a way to gain the consent of workers for their discredited industrial policies. They offer nothing worth considering for a moment.

Any attempt by employers to introduce these pathetic agreements should be opposed, and countered with the demand—WORKERS CONTROL NOW. The best way to fight the bosses and expose their ridiculous schemes is to support the TUC all along the line until Bullock reports in our favour.

GENESIS OF BULLOCK

In 1968 the Labour Party Conference accepted the report of a working party on Industrial Democracy chaired by Jack Jones. The report was broadly in favour of the development of worker participation, particularly in the public sector. It recommended that there should be…

> *...experiments in placing representatives of the workers directly concerned on the boards of publicly owned firms and industries (or alternatively provision for attendance at board meetings) and this representation should not be confined to full-time officers of unions. Workers' representatives should be drawn into decision making at every level, particularly at the various points of production.*

Labour's 1974 (February) Election Manifesto pledged the government to…

> *...socialise the nationalised industries. In consultation with the unions, we shall take steps to*

make management of existing industries more responsible to the workers in the industry and more responsive to their consumers' needs.

In October of the same year, a further election manifesto committed the government to…

...introduce new legislation to help forward our plans for a radical extension of industrial democracy in both the private and public sectors. This will involve major changes in public law and in the statutes which govern the nationalised industries and the public services.

The TUC's 'Report on Industrial Democracy', adopted in October 1974, recommends that, throughout industry, there should be a two-tier board structure with 50% worker representation on the top tier policy making board.

The government, keeping its pledges for once, has recently set up a Committee of Inquiry, under the chairmanship of Sir Alan Bullock, to examine the implications of worker representation on the boards of private firms. Bullock's terms of reference, having been dictated by the TUC, are clearly progressive:—

Accepting the need for a radical extension of industrial democracy in the control of companies by means of representation on boards of directors, and accepting the essential role of trade union organisations in this process, to consider how such an extension can best be achieved, taking into account in particular the proposals of the Trades Union Congress Report on Industrial Democracy as well as experience in Britain, the EEC and other countries. Having regard to the interest of the national economy, employees, investors and consumers, to analyse the implications of such representation for the efficient management of companies and for company law.

Clearly, within the last ten years or so, there has been a development of interest in, and a committment to, industrial democracy within the Labour Movement which has culminated in the Labour Government, under TUC pressure, setting up a Committee of Inquiry as a prelude to legislation.

But no British government can legislate for the society from above. Heath found that out when the Working Class smashed his Industrial Relations Act and Incomes Policy and kicked him unceremoniously out of office. Laws in Britain are made and unmade by the movement of substantial social forces. However willing it may be, no Labour government can institute industrial democracy simply because it likes the idea (or vice versa). The impetus for reform and the muscle to back it up must come from the organised workers of the Labour Movement.

The conservative opposition within the unions will have to be countered. The employers will have to be shot down. The Bullock Committee will have to be convinced that it has no option but to recommend WORKERS' CONTROL NOW.

WORKERS & INDUSTRY
VOL. 1 NO.3 FRIDAY APRIL 30, 1976

UNIONS AGAINST WORKERS' CONTROL

The TUC's Report on Industrial Democracy, which will form the basis of its evidence to the Committee of Inquiry, marks a change in the attitude of the trade union movement towards the issue of workers control. As the TUC itself says in the report:—

The traditional British trade union attitude to schemes for 'participation' in management of private industry has been one of opposition. It has been considered that the basic conflict of interest between the workers and the owners of capital and their agents prevents any meaningful participation in management decisions. The reasoning behind this opposition has varied from the claim that the trade union's job is simply to negotiate terms and conditions and not to usurp the function of management, to the proposition that trade unions should not be collaborationists in a system of industrial power and private wealth of which they disapprove...

The present change in attitude has come about, not

in response to vigorous discussion and debate within the movement, but privately, in the heads of influential individuals on the General Council who have manoeuvred skillful to drag a pliant majority along with them. Jack Jones (along with David Lea and Len Murray) showed considerable bureaucratic skill and practical political ability in forcing the issue of workers control to the attention of the government and TUC. But skill and ability do not in themselves convince opponents of your argument's validity. And plenty of opponents have been left in the wake of the General Council's bureaucratic conversion.

As in the past *"opposition has varied from the claim that the trade union's job is simply to negotiate terms and conditions and not to usurp the function of management"*, which is the position taken by the GMWU, EETPU, EPEA and NALGO, to the *"proposition that trade unions should not be collaborationists in a system of industrial power and private wealth of which they disapprove"*, which is the position being taken by the AUEW.

Neither of those views has any bearing on the real position of the working class in Britain today.

In the first place, a trade union's duty to its members goes far beyond simply representing them in negotiations. To be effective in this day and age unions must involve themselves, on behalf of their members, in running industry efficiently and profitably. Productivity and efficiency are not matters for negotiation and compromise. In such areas, it is a simple matter of telling management what to do and forcing it to do the job properly. Here there can be no realistic alternative to the TUC's plan for workers in the board room to monitor progress and report developments to the shop floor.

The AUEW's attitude isn't much better. They are afraid that workers on the boards of private companies will *"collaborate"* with employers to hammer the shop floor; and they would at the very least become enmeshed in management's Machiavellian schemes to wring the last drop of sweat out of an unwilling workforce.

This attitude is not at all realistic. It is not, after all, as though the TUC were advocating that the existing trade union machinery should be scrapped. In the unlikely event of workers' representatives deserting to the enemy, the workers themselves will still have the ability, lessened not one whit by participation in management, to down tools, go slow, ban overtime etc. Unless the working class en masse deserts Hugh Scanlon and Ernie Roberts and goes over to the employers, there is little danger of *"collaboration"* amounting to anything worth worrying about.

The TUC's proposals can stand up to any criticism from either right or left. They do in fact offer the only coherent way forward for the working class. But, by and large, the advocates of workers control in the TUC have done very little to mobilise support for this potentially very effective strategy and have left their opponents a clear field.

Its high time progressives in the Labour Movement started to rectify past mistakes by going to the working class to argue their case. Genuine moves towards workers control can only get under way in the context of a vigorous and wide ranging debate within the movement as a whole.

Last week we reported on a speech Jack Jones made recently in Telford which was full of grit and determination. More of the same would go down well.

BRENTFORD NYLONS—A WORKERS' CO-OPERATIVE?

Towards the end of February this year, Brentford Nylons, after months of growing mismanagement, finally went into liquidation and called in the Official Receiver. Last December the firm had made 600 workers redundant at its factory in Cramlington, Northumberland.

On the first of March the 1,400 workers in the Cramlington plant announced that they wanted to take over the firm and run it as a workers' cooperative

In this they were supported by the Receiver, Mr. Kenneth Cork. However, he was pessimistic about the chances of getting the necessary state aid for the venture.

Now the workers' Joint Union Committee has drawn up a report showing how not only can they keep the present firm united and a going concern but also how they intend to open up retail outlets which the management had closed.

Since the liquidation announcement the workers of Cramlington have in fact been running the factory and in their first weeks, according to the Receiver, sales

rose to almost a million pounds.

In an interview with the T&GWU paper, 'Record', two of the union officials said:—

Customers are crying out for the products—there is nothing wrong with our market. It was just eighteen months of mismanagement that caused the crash.

Frank Barber, the ACTS secretary, added—

The situation is unbelievable. We're working very hard, production has been better since the old management gave up, and shops are crying out for our products.

Tentative proposals have come from the Government for a scheme to give a 60% share to the state, with 40% of the capital coming from the workforce. This means about £2m, an almost impossible task.

Brentford Nylons, a modern and, by all accounts, profitable firm is a clear case for the state subsidising a firm and handing it over to the best possible management—the men and women who work there.

If it can dole out £160m to Chrysler's American gangster bosses, it can surely spare £10m for a firm with some guarantee of success.

What the country needs most is growing, vigorous modern industry. Brentford Nylons is modern. Its workforce has show vigorous leadership. It is now up to the state to ensure the means for growth.

INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY IN THESHIPYARDS

THE GOVERNMENT IS PLEDGED TO NATIONALISE ALL BRITAIN'S SHIPYARDS LATER THIS YEAR. IT IS ALSO PLEDGED TO *"INTRODUCE NEW LEGISLATION TO HELP FORWARD…A RADICAL EXTENSION OF INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY IN BOTH THE PRIVATE AND THE PUBLIC SECTORS."*

So how are plans proceeding to *'socialise'* the soon-to-be-nationalised shipbuilding industry.

There is of course an internal Whitehall inquiry in progress at the moment, involving the Department of the Environment and the Civil Service Department, and co-ordinated by the Treasury. But how that's going, nobody knows. Civil Servants, like the pen-pushing petty bureaucrats that they are, love secrecy.

What we do know is that the *'Organising Committee'*, which after nationalisation will become the *'Board of British Shipbuilders'*, has made proposals to the Shipbuilding unions which go some way to meeting their demand for 50% worker representation on the Board.

They are offering the unions half the seats on a joint union-management board which will be under the main board. The same 50/50 structure would apply at company level. One of the trade union members should come from middle management.

This is all to the good as far as it goes. But why should the joint board be subordinate to the main board? Why shouldn't there be workers (with equal representation) on the main board.

There is a statutory limit of 20 directors on the main board—including part-timers. According to the Organising Committee that leaves no room for worker-directors. What a pathetic excuse!

Let them increase the size of the board or accept the fact that ten of its members are going to be workers' representatives. There is no reason why workers should accept anything but equality of representation with employers (be they private owners or the state). SUBORDINATE WORKERS HAVE GONE OUT OF STYLE SINCE THE WAR.

The fact that the *'Organising Committee'* has gone so far as to meet the unions' demands means they'll go further if they're pushed. Rather than take the present proposals for granted, workers should demand parity of representation at the top, where it really matters, and shove workers' control down the Organising Committee's throat

We look forward to further proposals for a *"Joint Board of British Shipbuilders and Shipworkers"*.

TOWARDS WORKERS' CONTROL—VIA THE UNION

In its proposals for 50% worker representation on the boards of all major companies the TUC has insisted that the workers' side should be elected via trade union machinery (as is the case with shop stewards), and that the scheme should come into force only in companies where unions exist.

Of all aspects of the TUC's policy for industrial democracy, this is the one most strongly attacked by the employers.

Some of the employers have used the *'democratic'*

argument that non-unionised workers in a firm and non-unionised firms would be left out. But these same employers also oppose the rest of the TUC's proposals. How then can we believe them when they weep crocodile tears for unionised workers.

Election via trade union machinery ensures constant pressure on worker representatives to represent and ensures their instant dismissal from the board if they try to sell out.

Furthermore it puts restraint on—though it does not eliminate—competition between workers in different firms.

The main reason why the employers want no truck with the union elected representatives—insofar as they are willing to accept worker representatives at all—is their desire to dilute industrial democracy by ensuring that some, if not most, of the worker representatives are isolated individuals and therefore buyable.

To those workers who feel that the TUC proposals are unfair to the 50% of workers who are not unionised, we answer simply—JOIN A TRADE UNION NOW…

A CAUTIONARY TALE

WHILE THE INDUSTRY BILL (REMEMBER IT?) WAS MAKING ITS MUCH HERALDED WAY THROUGH PARLIAMENT, DR. JEREMY BRAY PROPOSED AN AMENDMENT WHICH WAS REJECTED BY THE GOVERNMENT. HE WANTED THE NATIONAL ENTERPRISE BOARD TO BE REQUIRED TO CONVERT ANY COMPANY EMPLOYING 200 OR MORE PEOPLE INTO A WORKERS' CO-OPERATIVE IF A MAJORITY OF WORKERS WANTED IT. HIS AMENDMENT WOULD IN OTHER WORDS HAVE TURNED THE INDUSTRY BILL INTO AN ENABLING ACT:—A WORKERS' CHARTER. JUST THINK OF IT. IF THE WORKERS IN PRACTICALLY ANY FIRM IN THE COUNTRY DECIDED THEY WANTED TO CONTROL IT, THE GOVERNMENT, THROUGH THE NATIONAL ENTERPRISE BOARD, WOULD HAVE TO BUY OUT THE SHAREHOLDERS AND GIVE THE FIRM OVER TO THE WORKERS TO RUN IT. SHOCK! HORROR!

Dr. Bray got slapped down pretty sharpish. His amendment disappeared from sight. After all, as the then Secretary of State for Industry, Mr. Anthony Wedgewood Benn (alias Viscount Stansfield, alias Tony Benn) understands only too well, workers control is a nice idea which goes down well in speeches and such, but you're not actually supposed to do anything about it.

Its all right for Wedgie (in true aristocratic style) to hand over the odd few thousand quid to the odd workers' co-op. That's firmly rooted in the glorious tradition of *'socialism'* adopted by the ruling class when it developed a conscience (and dropped its titles). You see, its up to those best fitted by birth and position to rule, not for themselves of course, bu in the name of the workers. It would be unrealistic, and unnatural, to expect the workers to do anything for themselves. The poor dears would only make a mess of things.

That's what was wrong with Dr. Bray's amendment. He was leaving the decision to workers. Once they decided they wanted control the governent would have to fork out, like it or not. That kind of nonsense would leave no scope at all for our noble benefactor. Workers wouldn't have to feel grateful to him any more.

So the Industry Bill was passed into legislation minus Dr. Bray's amendment. The NEB is required only to 'promote industrial democracy' (whatever that means) in the enterprises it controls.

The moral of this little story is two-fold.

In the first place, if you leave people in Parliament to do things for you, they'll do you and leave you feeling grateful for crumbs.

In the second place, Parliament is primarily a talking shop. MP's mostly talk about what they're going to do. They only do something when they're forced by pressure from outside.

Tom Mann put it well when he said:—

> *Socialists and Labour men in Parliament can only do effective work there in proportion to the intelligence and economic organisation of the rank and file.*

Our *'Socialist'* members of Parliament will be worth having only when the workers organise to tell them what to do, and force them to do it.

If the working class had organised to back Bray's amendment and had put pressure on Benn and his colleagues we'd have a bill on the statute book today that workers could really use in the struggle for control of the factories. But we didn't, so we haven't.

Its as well to remember that now Bullock and his Committee are on the job and effective legislation is once more on the cards. We'll get nothing for nothing. Its organise to win or sit back and lose. SO ORGANISE NOW!

FROM THEN & THERE TO HERE & NOW

BY CONOR LYNCH

For the foreseeable future, Problems of Capitalism and Socialism will be dealing with events in the British Labour Movement in the second half of the 1970s, and the consequences of these events in the 1980s and later. This is not a mere history lesson. The period marked a triumph of the traditional British economic and social model over attempts to remake the country in the image of the European social model or to even leapfrog that model. The victory of conservatism in Britain was followed by the attempt by Britain to foist it on everyone else, in Europe, and beyond. That attempt is continuing today and, it has to be said, has achieved a good deal of success.

So the battles fought in Britain in the 1970s are battles being fought out in the rest of the world today. Problems of Capitalism and Socialism is also distributed in Ireland. The Irish Social Partnership system is under constant attack. And this is mainly from trade unions and left-wing organisations which are primarily based in Britain – where many of them contributed to the triumph of conservatism in the British political economy of the 1970s

So it is not all a matter of things that happened more than thirty years ago. An understanding of those events can prevent the same mistakes being made elsewhere, and especially in Ireland, today. Nevertheless a generation has grown up in the meantime with little knowledge of what the world was like then. Some things like the problems in the Middle East may look the same. But other things are remarkably different.

The world was then divided into two superpowers and their spheres of influence – The United States and the Soviet Union. With China trying to develop as a third superpower. The US had just been defeated militarily in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. The Soviet Union had decided to intervene in Afghanistan. Latin America, apart from Cuba and Mexico, was firmly in the camp of the USA, mainly run by particularly brutal, and often racist, military dictatorships. In 1973, General Pinochet had ousted a Socialist Government in Chile and a similar development occurred in Argentina in March 1976.

The EEC, later the European Union, had nine members. Future members in Eastern Europe, like East Germany, Poland and Hungary, were members of the Soviet-led Comecon, and the Warsaw Pact alliance. In Western Europe, three countries were just emerging from right-wing military dictatorships.

Portugese left-wing soldiers rebelled in 1974 and withdrew from its African colonies of Angola, Mozambique and Guinea. That same year the regime of the Greek Colonels, in power since 1967, fell after stirring up a right wing coup in Cyprus – a coup which brought the army of the left-wing Government in Turkey into Northern Cyprus to defend the Turkish population there. In Spain General Franco had died, and political parties were finally legalised on the 15th of November 1976. Democracy came to Spain but was challenged again five years later in a failed military coup.

Even Italy, at the heart of the EEC, was in turmoil. An election was called for July 1976 and it was widely expected that the Communist Party would win. It lost by a whisker. But the Christian Democratic leader, Aldo Moro, had been determined that there would, if necessary, be a peaceful handover. He was impressed by the military takeover after the election of the Socialist/Communist coalition In Chile. He discovered a coup plot by his senior security people and interned them. (This plot we now know was hatched with the CIA and MI6.) He permitted the stockpiling of weapons in Communist Party centres around the country.

Germany was, of course divided into two states. And the Belgian Flemings and Waloons were, as often before and since, at each others throats. In Ireland,

the war in the North was at its height with 297 people killed in 1976.

In South Africa apartheid was rife and the Soweto uprising began after the shooting dead of 72 protesters. South Africa invaded the newly free Portugese Colony of Angola, while the white-supremicist Rhodesia attacked the ex-Portugese colony of Mozambique. The guerrilla war in Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, began in earnest.

In the United Nations, the US vetoed a Security Council resolution to give the Palestinians their own state. At home, the US reintroduced the death penalty.

In Britain it seemed that the colonial days were over forever and Harold Wilson declared that the Labour Party was *"the natural party of government"*. The trade unions were THE force in the land. The capitalist class was utterly demoralised. The main industries and services were in public ownership. There were 13 million trade unionists with the new white-collar sector and women employees making considerable gains. (Now the figure is a little over half of that). The National Union of Mineworkers had over 200,000 members. (It now has 1,690 and falling.) The dockers' unions were given a closed shop anywhere with half a mile of any docks.

That is a mere glimpse at the world in 1976. Hopefully, it will help to put the events covered here into some perspective.

From "Socialism Made Easy"
by
James Connolly

Those orators who reproach the workers with being divided on the political field, although united on the industrial, are simply misstating facts. The workers are divided on both, and as political parties are the reflex of economic conditions, it follows that industrial union once established will create the political unity of the working class. I feel that we cannot too strongly insist upon this point. Political division is born of industrial division; political scabbery is born of industrial craft scabbery; political weakness keeps even step with industrial weakness. It is an axiom enforced by all the experience of the ages that they who rule industrially will rule politically, and therefore they who are divided industrially will remain impotent politically…

…That natural law leads us as individuals to unite in our craft, as crafts to unite in our industry, as industries in our class, and the finished expression of that evolution is, we believe, the appearance of our class upon the political battle ground with all the economic power behind it to enforce its mandates. Until that day dawns our political parties of the working class are but propagandist agencies, John the Baptists of the New Redemption, but when that day dawns our political party will be armed with all the might of our class; will be revolutionary in fact as well as in thought.

To Irish men and women especially, I should not need to labour this point. The historic example of their Land League bequeaths to us a precious legacy of wisdom, both practical and revolutionary, outlining our proper course of action. During Land League days in Ireland when a tenant was evicted from a farm, not only his fellow-tenants but practically the whole country united to help him in his fight. When the evicted farm was rented by another tenant, a land-grabber or 'scab,' every person in the countryside shunned him as a leper, and, still better, fought him as a traitor. Nor did they make the mistake of fighting the traitor and yet working for his employer, the landlord. No, they included both in the one common hostility…

The Irish tenant uniting on the economic field felt his strength, and, carrying the fight into politics, simply swept into oblivion every individual or party that refused to serve his class interests, but the American toilers remain divided on the economic field, and hence are divided and impotent upon the political, zealous servants of every interest but their own.

Need I point the moral more? Every one who has the interests of the working class at heart, every one who wishes to see the Socialist Party command the allegiance of the political hosts of labor, should strive to realize industrial union as the solid foundation upon which alone the political unity of the workers can be built up and directed toward a revolutionary end. To this end all those who work for industrial unionism are truly co-operating even when they least care for political activities.