Worker occupations, 1971-1975: a sociohistorical analysis of the development and spread of sit-ins, work-ins and worker co-operative in Britain

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Vol II

CHAPTER 7

REDUNDANCY: AN OCCUPATIONAL HAZARD.

"The British working class had . . . come through a period of rapid industrial mergers and rationalisation programmes involving large numbers of redundancies and closures, to reach the onset of a post-war record high in unemployment . . .
To a generation of workers raised in the expectation of "full employment" . . . the situation must have seemed unusually grim . . . This situation provided two major possibilities for a strong workforce facing redundancy: an atmosphere of fear . . . or of anger. The reality in many cases was a mixture of both . . .".

Introduction.

This chapter sets out to examine the employment 'climate' in which worker occupations first appeared. It looks at the (relatively) unique situation of the late 1960s/ early 1970s; marked by a record of unemployment unparalleled since the Depression of the 1930s, and by the rapid development of company mergers and (so-called) rationalisations which made a large contribution to the situation in the form of large-scale redundancies and closures.

It is argued that the economic situation changed so rapidly and so dramatically as to contribute to the feeling of a need for drastic action among militant workers facing redundancy. Unlike previous post-war periods of "high" unemployment this later period was unique in that hardly any areas or regions of the country could be considered to have "low" unemployment rates[1]. For the worker facing redundancy at the onset of the 1970s there was very little scope for imagining that a "move to the South" could help resolve the problem. Nor was there much scope for believing that economic recovery was just over the horizon; that a period of unemployment would just be short-term. The media, the trade unions, the Government and all other political parties were united in pressing home the point that Britain was part of a "world recession" with no

1. See chapter 3.

immediate sign of recovery[1].

In such a situation, it can be argued, the provision of redundancy payments (and allied sums) are of limited value. Such payments were meant to alleviate hardship faced in redundancy situations, make labour more "flexible", and - debatably - help to buy off industrial militancy. These schemes have worked up to a point[2] but usually where the recipient feels fairly certain of experiencing only short-term unemployment. In the pioneering occupations the prospect of long term unemployment was added to a feeling of anger at the unjustness of the situation.

The White Heat of the Technological Revolution.

When the Labour Government was returned to office in 1966 the economy was in a critical state. Among the measures announced to deal with the problem was a government programme aimed at modernising and expanding certain of Britain's industries. In many industries a large number of enterprises were badly in need of modernisation and were falling behind many of their overseas competitors: (this was crucially the case with the shipbuilding industry). Another major threat to British industry lay in the fact that many foreign multi-national companies had a competitive advantage in their economic size. As Newens (1970) explains it,

"There are considerable advantages to be achieved by the economies of scale which are possible. The larger production runs may involve the closure of inferior plant and fuller utilization of the best equipment but such operations provide savings in overall capital and labour costs provided that the market can be found.

In the marketing process, there are very considerable advantages in large-scale operations. The cost of exporting is always much higher per unit of output for the small firm. The cost of establishing nationally or internationally known brand names can only be recouped if sales are on a massive scale", (3).

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1. This phrase "world recession" always erroneously implies all nations including most of the socialist states which are experiencing rapid growth rates.

2. Cf. D.Wedderburn, 1965.

3 p.26

This was the case, for example, of companies in the electrical engineering industry. At this time three fairly large companies dominated the British industry but were too small to stay in competition in an increasingly competitive world market[1].

To improve the productivity, efficiency, and competitiveness of British industry the Government introduced a 'Prices and Incomes' policy which placed heavy emphasis on productivity bargaining; introduced a "Selective Employment Tax" to force the service industries to shed labour and thus direct it towards manufacturing; and set up an "Industrial Re-organisation Corporation" (IRC).

The IRC was established with the task of,

"promoting industrial efficiency and profitability and assisting the economy of the United Kingdom . . ." (2).

The Corporation had one-hundred-and-fifty million pounds available to achieve its task through rationalisations and mergers.

Over the next few years both productivity deals and mergers went on at a tremendous pace. In the first full year of the IRC (1967) the value of mergers stood at seven-hundred-and-eighty-one million pounds; over the period 1954-58 it had only averaged around one-hundred million per year. For 1968 the figure was around two-and-a-third-thousand million. By 1972 the value for the year climbed to a record two-and-a-half-thousand millions. For the entire period 1964-72 over eight thousand companies were involved in mergers[3]. Productivity deals which had only covered a

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1. G.Chadwick, 1970, p.178.

2. The IRC ACT, quoted in G.Doughty, 1970, p.57

3. Cf. Labour Research, Vol. LVIII, No.5, May 1969. "Mergers: Faster and Bigger"; Labour Research, Vol.62, No.3, March 1973. "Monopolies and Mergers"; S.Newens, 1970

half million workers prior to 1966 covered a total of eight-and-a-half million by 1969.

Redundancies were also going on at a tremendous pace. On the one hand, workers were being "shaken out" of industry due to the Selective Employment Tax, rationalisation schemes designed to reduce so-called inefficient sections of work, and through mergers which in several cases meant the closure of certain sections doing duplicate and/or less efficient work. On the other hand, productivity bargaining was reducing the margin of spare capacity within certain industries and thus reducing the number of workers required. In short, many of those made redundant faced a situation where replacement jobs were increasingly dwindling[1].

In the first full year of the 'Redundancy Payments Act', 1966' payments were made to 137,000 workers. This rose to a quarter-of-a-million in the year ending September 1969[2]. Certainly several mergers achieved one of their aims of increasingly profitability for certain companies[3], it is highly debatable, however, that such mergers are a success story in terms of competitiveness, efficiency, and employee welfare. Mass redundancies have occurred in many merged firms and in a number of cases these companies have not the achieved financial success to compensate for this. One study of mergers has shown that of 69 acquisitions by twenty major corporations a third could be classified as failures within seven years[4].

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1. See table 5. This shows a sharp and rapid gap between unemployed and vacancies from 1966 to 1971.

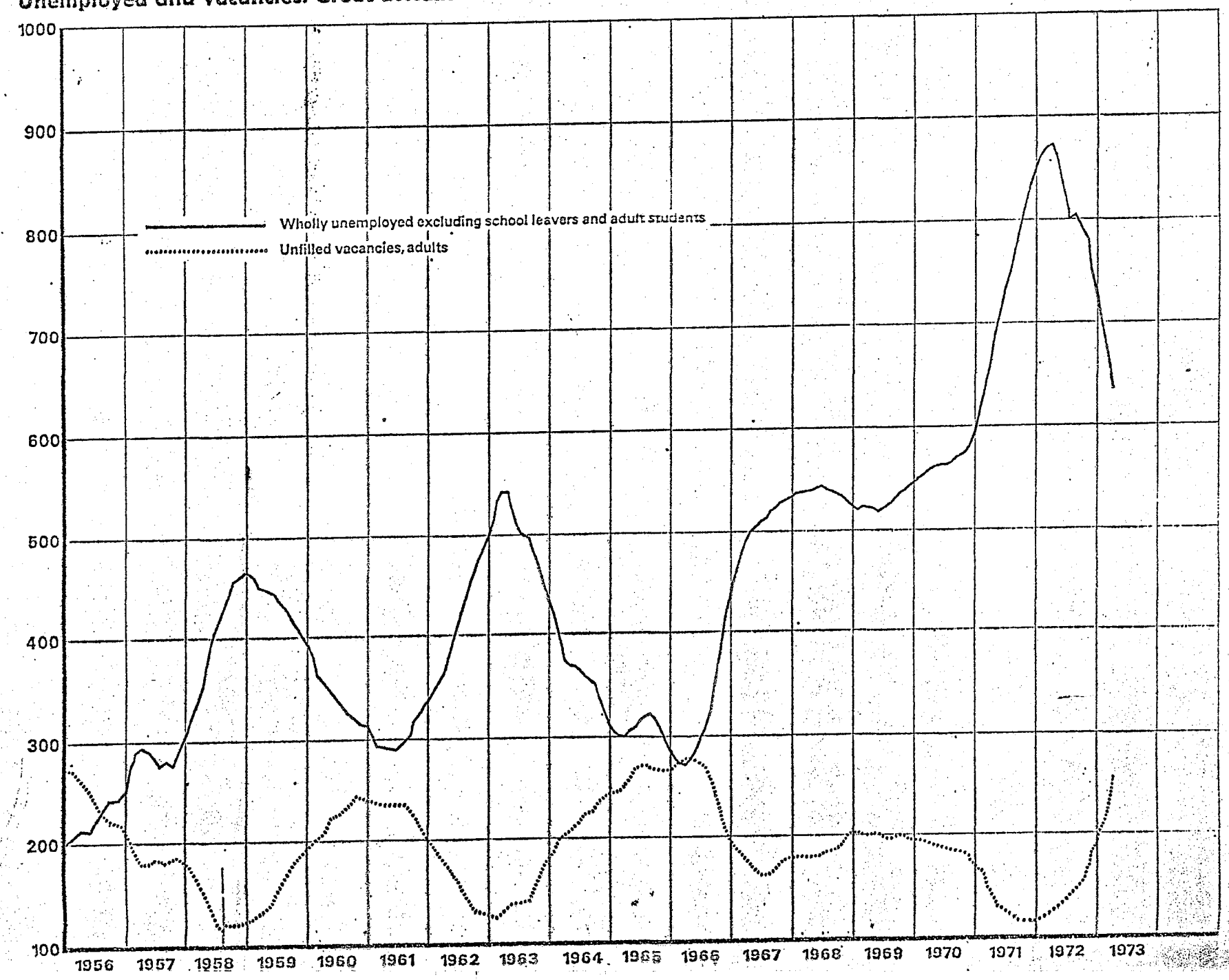
2. These are only those receiving such payments. As those with under 2 years continuous employment at a particular company are not eligible for such payments they are not recorded among the redundancies. Thus, the figures are underestimates.

3. "Mergers are extremely profitable to the shareholders of the taken-over company, and astute directors can wring more out of the bidding firm by opposing the bid". Labour Research, op cit, May 1969.

4. J.Kitching, 1967 - quoted in Newens, 1970, p.27.

TABLE 5.

THE WHOLLY UNEMPLOYED & THE NUMBER OF VACANCIES AVAILABLE, 1956-1973.



* From the Department of Employment Gazette, May 1973, Vol. LXXI No.5, p.518.

An estimate of the situation particularly regarding the United Kingdom puts the success rate at bearly one in nine[1].

In early 1968 'The Economist' was predicting that around one-and-a-half million workers would be effected by rationalisation and reorganisation schemes over the period 1968-69 and warned that, "rationalisation means men out of jobs" (2).

Indeed it did. Courtaulds took over Lancashire Spinners with a resulting loss in four-and-a-half thousand jobs. Tube Investment took over Coventry Tool and Guage in the same period involving the closing down of a factory which had been opened new less than a year previous. In January 1969 the British Leyland Motor Company was born of a merger and began by making no less than two-and-half percent of its workforce redundant, and the giant merger of GEC-EE Co, led to the lay off of several thousands in its first year as a new company (1968-69).

Within the public sector the trend was towards contraction. Tens of thousands were made redundant in the mining, railways and steel industry. In mining the number of colliery closures was running at one per week in 1969. Between 1956 and 1970 the labour force fell from 697,400 down to 295,650 as the number of pits dwindled from 840 to just 299[3]. Railway industry employment was halved over the period 1959-74 and the mileage of railway track was reduced to its lowest point since the 1860s[4]. In steel

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1. Quoted by S.Newens, 1970, p.27.
2. Ibid, p.59
3. M.McGahey, 1971.
4. C.I.S. Report, No.14, p.32.

50,000 jobs were lost over 1967-72[1].

As redundancies rocketed and unemployment soared the 'Sunday Times' was to comment that,

"Partly through the activities of Government agencies like the I.R.C., but partly also through the harsh facts of Britain's . . . economic situation, redundancy is sweeping the nation" (2).

What the 'Sunday Times' failed to say was that the Government's handling of the economic situation was further exasperating the crisis and adding to the growing unemployment.

Unemployment and Government Policy.

Unemployment had rarely exceeded a yearly figure of a quarter-of-a-million in any post-war year up to 1958[3], but that year it reached four-hundred thousand. The next year it climbed a further forty-four thousand but then fell away to below the third-of-a-million mark by 1961. It reached a new high of a half-million in 1963 but again fell away to the third-of-a-million mark by 1966. When the Labour Government retained office that year unemployment had only once exceeded the half million mark throughout most of the 1950 and 1960s. From that point on the figure was to never fall below the half million mark (with the lone exception of 1969).

Nineteen-sixty-six was a significant year: it marked "a turning point in Britain's post-war economic history"[4]. This was the year in which,

"the Labour Government abandoned its committment to full employment, responded to capitalist pressure . . . (and) took drastic steps to restore business "confidence" in the pound and in the orthodoxy of its policies" (5).

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1. 'An Expanding Future for Steel', produced by TASS section of the AUEW, -undated.
2. Quoted in S.Newens, 1970, p.59
3. The figures refer to Great Britain.
4. B.Rowthorne, 1973.
5. Ibid.

From this point the Government began to concentrate on combating inflation and at the expense of employment policies. Not only was the question of maintaining employment relegated to a secondary position but it was to be increasingly used as a means of creating deflation. The situation has been adequately summed up by Barratt-Brown (1972),

"Today the task of the State . . . of maintaining aggregate demand at home . . . is made the more difficult by the absence of captive markets overseas to be pre-empted.

Today the transnational corporations which alone can finance the large-scale plants of modern industry are engaged in mopping up the markets of their technologically less advanced competitors in each other's countries of origin . . .

The Governments of the advanced capitalist societies find it more difficult to control their foreign payments as giant corporations switch their funds, both long term and short term, across the national exchanges. The Government's armoury of weapons for managing aggregate demand and employment without inflation or foreign payments imbalances proves to be inadequate.

The deliberate creation of unemployment has to be added to the armoury; and full employment becomes a secondary aim to national economic competitiveness".

From late 1968 to July 1971 successive governments carried out intensive deflationary policies. This was done through the cutting down of public sector investments and through deflationary monetary and credit policies. Within the period there was a major fall in the capital expenditure of the nationalised industries to such an extent that the first post-war fall in overall public sector investment was recorded. Money supply was severely restricted, credit was made more difficult, and long term interest rates were raised to ten percent and above. This had the effect of pushing the annual interest payments of the nationalised industries and local authorities up by six-hundred million pounds over 1967-70. One of the major results was a substantial cut in construction work[1].

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1. Barratt-Brown, 1972.

These policies began to be felt in the winter of 1971-72 when, by November the unemployment rate was just short of the one-million mark[1]; the highest point since 1939. By January the figure had actually gone over the million mark. That month the Prime Minister, in direct contrast to the facts, was to state that,

"We stand now on the threshold of a period of growth and prosperity unparalleled since the war".

It was only the unemployment level, however, that was unparalleled and it was to remain so. Although the rate fell back slowly over the next months it was never to fall below seven-hundred thousand and has since risen to even greater levels after 1973; reaching one-and-a-half millions and rarely falling below a new "floor" of one-million.

There is little doubt that in terms of the rate of unemployment (and within that, the number of redundancies) confronting workers from the late 1960s onwards that it was an unprecedented situation. A situation which was inclined to impress upon certain workers the need for desperate responses. It was in fact the period when unemployment had first reached its highest post-war peak that worker occupations first began to appear.

The Pioneering Occupations: Some Case Studies.

In each of the early occupations the workforce involved faced a situation of redundancy against a background of high local and national unemployment. In some cases the redundancies threatened the community as well as the particular workforce.

The GEC-EE Company: Prior to 1967 three companies dominated the electrical engineering industry - GEC, AEI, and EE[1]. In January 1967

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1. The General Electric Company; Associated Electrical Industries and English Electric.

the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA) recommended the need for a rationalisation of the heavy electrical industry[1]. This was passed over to the new IRC in March with the brief of attempting to effect a merger of the industry's main companies. Before the end of the year the GEC and AEI companies were merged and shortly afterwards English Electric took over Elliott Automation (with fifteen million pounds backing from the IRC).

In 1968 GEC-AEI was encouraged to merge with EE. The Government - through the IRC - not only developed the merger but refused to refer it to the Monopolies Commission for reference. The Government,

"having carefully analysed the different sectors of industry in which the two companies operate (were) satisfied that conditions of effective competition would continue over most of the U.K. market" (2).

In addition it was noted that,

"there would be some instances where the degree of concentration would be high . . . in these cases the new group would be selling principally to nationalised corporations which are in the position of monopoly buyers and which, having been consulted, have raised no objections to the merger" (3).

The new company came into being towards the end of 1968 and with around a quarter-of-million workers it was easily the largest employer in the private sector. Internationally, in terms of total sales, the new company quickly became the tenth largest electrical engineering combine in the world. By the end of its first year its pre-tax profits stood at forty-nine million pounds and were to reach seventy-seven million for the year of 1972.

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1. The DEA had assessed that the ordering programme of the Central Electricity Generating Board - a key customer - would tail off by the end of the 1960s, leaving a serious overcapacity in the industry.

2. CIS Report, No.12, The General Electric Company Ltd, 1973, pp.12-13.

3. Ibid.

Much of the new company's increased profitability was due to the efforts and philosophy of the Managing Director, Arnold Weinstock[1]. When he took over the running of the company the 'Sunday Times' was to note that,

"When Arnold Weinstock entered G.E.C. his prime task was to weed out waste. Getting to grips with this has involved making every manager in the group acutely conscious of fractions of a penny, and personal responsibility for profit has been raised to virtually unparalleled peaks" (2).

A key problem for the workforce lay in the interpretation and rigidity of "waste" and "profitability". Arnold Weinstock's concept was geared to relative profitability to the extent that factories (or sections) could be closed down if they were not earning the right margin of profits and if the capital could be more profitably re-employed elsewhere[3]. Thus, workers in the company could face redundancy even in a factory making profit if management deemed that the work could be done more cheaply elsewhere.

To alleviate the obvious objections of the trade unions involved the company promised to confer with them, and appropriate government departments, about matters that would seriously affect the workforce or have a bearing on governmental policy for regional aid[4]. The reality, however, was to be very different.

Massive redundancies were one of the first items on the agenda of the new company, and in February 1969 the 'Economist' wrote,

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1. Weinstock's philosophy amounted to, "if it dosen't pay, it dosn't stay".

2. Quoted in CIS report, No.12, p.13.

3. G.Chadwick, 1970, p.179. One of Weinstock's measurements of efficiency was based on the ratio of profit to workers employed. In 1969 this was £213 for every employee but by 1972 had reached £424 (or £8 per week for every employee).

4. Before the merger GEC promised to create four thousand new jobs in Scotland, the North East and South Wales and received a government Development Grants Scheme award of £400,000. In addition it received £5 for each person that it trained. For 1968 alone GEC received £1.7 million in various forms of government aid.
Cf. CIS Report, No.12.

"Already there are rumblings around Whitehall about Arnold Weinstock not 'playing the game' the way the Government wants. As the Industrial Reorganisation Corporation was instrumental in the aggrandisement of GEC, some MPs feel that Mr.Weinstock should show a proper degree of gratefulness" (1).

Redundancies: Following the merger of GEC-AEI there were large-scale redundancies at nine of the company's factories in 1968; with the loss of eleven thousand jobs. One of the first to go was AEI Process Control, (Harlow) with the loss of four hundred jobs, despite the fact that the company's joint managing director had given assurances that there were to be no major redundancies[2]. This was followed with eight hundred further redundancies at the Temple Fields factory in Harlow. By 1972 GEC employment was down (by twelve hundred) to just two-hundred-and-fifty. At the time of the second Harlow redundancies the closure of AEI telecommunications (Woolwich) was announced; over five thousand jobs were to go. Seven other factories were closed in the next few months.

The story was the same with the new merger with EE. In February 1969 two-thousand-seven-hundred jobs were declared redundant at the company's factories at Rugby, Newton-le-Willows, Witton and Liverpool, and in May further redundancies were announced for Stafford, Birmingham, Cross Heath, Kidsgrove and at Watson and Sons[3]. In August six-thousand more jobs were under threat at Manchester, Ashton-under-Lyne, Chesham, Whetstone, Accrington, Stafford, Bradford, Trafford Park, and the three Liverpool factories of Netherton, Napiers and East Lancs Road.

From the first merger in 1967 more than sixty-four thousand jobs

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1. Edition of February 8th, 1969.

2. The previous November the question had been raised in the Commons by Labour MPs Norman Atkinson (Tottenham) and Stan Newens (Harlow) and as a response to the debate assurances had been given by the company.

3. In this round of redundancies 1,255 jobs were to be lost in addition to the 2,000 announced in February.

were axed by 1972 and almost half of these were due to direct redundancy: the workforce was reduced down to a total of around one-hundred-and-eighty thousand[1].

The Liverpool Factories: By the time closure and redundancy was announced for the Liverpool factories a whole series of redundancies had occurred in the company. Already nineteen factories had been affected and over fifteen thousand jobs axed. In addition ten other factories were announced due for three thousand redundancies the same month as the announcement about the Liverpool factories. Thus, for the Liverpool workers their redundancies had come at the end of a long line of redundancies and was part of a company policy of further, large-scale, redundancies.

Further, the Liverpool workers had the uneasy knowledge that little fight, and little co-ordinated effort, had been put up within the company. Where it had it had been defeated and despite fairly strong trade union situations[2].

The redundancies could hardly have been at a worse time. Unemployment was at one of its highest post-war points for the country as a whole[3]; it was over half-a-million for the third successive year. Locally[4] unemployment was slightly higher than the national average; with more than seventy-five thousand out of work. Against this background the Liverpool workers sought to take dramatic action to stem the GEC tide of redundancy and closure. It is more than a little ironic that of the

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1. See table 6 which lists the company's redundancies over 1968-72.
2. The Harlow workforce was 100% unionised and the Woolwich workforce were both strongly organised and had a militant local tradition to draw on.
3. That is, Great Britain.
4. "Locally" refers to the Department of Employment category "North West Region".
5. A planned work-in, however, was called off, see chapter 4.

TABLE 6

REDUNDANCIES IN THE GEC-AEI/GEC-EE COMPANY, 1968-72.

1968	Feb	Woolwich	5500
		Sydenham	400
		Blackheath / Harlow	200
		Harlow	400
	May	Witton (B'ham)	1650
		Wythenshaw	300
		Aldridge	80
		Coventry	1650
		Willesden	1200
1969	Feb	Rugby	140
		Newton-le-Willows	1200
		Witton	1200
		Liverpool	200
	May	Stafford	300
		Birmingham	570
		Cross Heath	150
		Kidsgrove	135
		Watson & Sons	100
	Aug	Manchester	50
		Ashton Under Lyne	140
		Chesham	40
		Whetstone	230
		Walthamstow	810
		Netherton	1400
		Accrington	285
		Stafford	305
		Bradford	50
		Liverpool	305
		Manchester	810
		Napier	1400
		Trafford Park	200
1970		(The Sunday Times 4.7.71 estimates a further 8000 redundancies in 1970)	
	April	Witton Moulded Plastics Ltd.	60
	May	GEC Power Eng. Ltd., Reactor Equip. Div., Whetstone	60
	July	GEC Semiconductors Ltd. Marconi Elliott Microelec. Witham	65
		Trafford Park Research Lab.	55
	Oct	GEC Elec. Components Ltd. Thermal Control Div. E. Kilbride & Motherwell	
		Marconi Elliott Computer Systems Ltd., Borehamwood	50
	Nov	Accrington Bushings Unit	
		GEC Transformers Ltd., Wythenshawe	750
1971	April to Nov	Witham	300
		Harlow	269
		Stafford	238
		Hersham	241
		Glenrothes	150
		Rochester	520
		Slough	280
		Willesden	210
		Amersham	200
		Winsford	90
		Hammersmith	65
		Lincoln	50
		Liverpool	350
		Trafford Park	775
		Whitton	80
		Bridgend	270
		Kidsgrove	230
		Rugby	200
		Basildon	80
		Walthamstow	290
		Bradford	70
1972	Jan	Chelmsford	605
		Coventry	150
		Wembley	500
		Stafford	492
		Greenwich & Lewisham	100
		Hersham	450
		Wembley	500
		Stafford	550
	March	Swinton	620
		Maryport	40
		Lewisham	60
		Newton-le-Willows	160
	April to Aug	Accrington	325
		Rugby	100
		Kidsgrove	555
		Lincoln	380
		Manchester (Barton)	60

*Table taken from the C.I.S. Anti-Report on the G.E.C. Company, p.24.

occupations which did occur within the company, since 1972, not one concerned redundancy. One concerned an equal pay issue and the rest was over pay and conditions.

Revolt on the Clyde: The UCS Work-in: In the 1890s the British shipbuilding industry produced eighty percent of the world's steam ship tonnage. A large percentage of this was carried out at yards on the Tyne, Tees and Wear of North East England and on Scotland's Clyde. Despite the continued importance of these yards, however, insecurity of employment was a feature of the work for the shipyard workers: there was always a large element of casual employment and the nature of the work process provided an avenue for the employers to dismiss workers as their particular element of work was completed.

Like other heavy industries, shipbuilding has suffered badly in times of economic recession. In the early 1920s/ early 1930s unemployment in the industry was over twenty percent: in 1933 it peaked to sixty-three percent.

After the second world-war the industry experienced something of a revival. British yards were producing about forty-five percent of the world's shipping tonnage by 1949 and employment levels were at their highest point since 1914. From this position enormous profits were made. The real problem was that very little re-investment was made in the industry at this time, and no real attempt was made to predict future trends in world shipping needs. Other countries, the Japanese for example, did modernise and as a result began to gain larger shares of the world market. By 1954 the British industry was reduced to twenty-seven percent of that market, and two years later down to twenty-one percent. Worse. These were reducing shares of an expanding world market in a period of post-war boom that was about to tail off.

The industry was moving into another critical situation. This was added to this time by the fact that the British industry was underinvested, competition was much sharper (more modernised and backed with government finance subsidies), and with increasing numbers of British shipowners buying from abroad. In the early 1960s a number of yards on the Clyde were closed down as Britain's share of the, now much reduced, world market fell to eleven percent.

When the world market revived somewhat in the mid-1960s the British yards were unprepared and illfitted to meet the demand - for giant tankers and bulk carriers; their share of the market now fell to eight percent.

As the situation deteriorated rapidly the new Labour Government set up the Geddes Committee to look into the industry. The Committee recommended, in February 1966, the rationalisation of the industry through amalgamation of yards within certain areas, through concentration of production, through high productivity and through a reduction of the workforce. A new 'Shipbuilding Industry Board' was to ensure the success of this report. Leading sections of the Scottish Labour and Trade Union movement argued that if public funds were to be used then it should be done to nationalise the industry, but the Labour Government were deaf to this proposal[1].

Upper Clyde Shipbuilders: The UCS was created as a result of the Geddes Committee report. It came into being in February 1968 consisting of five yards; Fairfields, John Brown, Connell, Stephens and

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1. Despite large-scale government assistance the industry continued into decline and by the mid-1970s the Labour Government of the time saw a definate need to take it into public ownership.

Yarrow[1]. From the first there were several anomalies. Yarrow maintained its own Board of Directors by virtue of the fact that the new UCS only owned fifty-one percent of its shares; this section was relatively profitable. Fairfields was also to some extent profitable[2]. The remaining three yards had been near to bankruptcy on the eve of the merger and, in fact,

"Without the merger John Browns would have gone bankrupt, and Connells and Stephens were probably heading for bankruptcy too. That was why they were in such a hurry to get into the merger" (3).

The UCS, thus, came into being with an inheritance of twelve million pounds worth of accumulated losses. The Shipbuilding Industry Board (SIB) was only to provide it with three-and-a-half million towards paying off this sum plus a further two million for the building of a covered yard for Yarrows. All further government assistance had to be repeatedly negotiated for and despite the fact that the nature of shipbuilding requires a reliance on large sums of credit and substantial liquidity. As Thompson and Hart (1972) have claimed,

"An adequate provision at the begining would have eliminated the need for continuous applications" (4).

Instead the UCS was to face, on various occasions, a capital starvation crisis. On one such occassion, in 1970, the government assistance was only forthcoming after shipbuilding had been discontinued at the Stephens yard, with the loss of three-and-a-half thousand boilermakers' jobs.

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1. In terms of ownership of the UCS the Government's holding was 17½% through its 50% ownership of Fairfields; the total Fairfields holding was 35%; John Browns, 30%; Yarrow, 20%, Stephens, 10% and Connells, 5%.

2. Although the trade unions were part owners in Fairfields they were not permitted any representation on the UCS Board.

3. Comment from the first Deputy Chairman of UCS. Reproduced in the 'Sunday Times', 24th June 1971.

4. p.42. I have drawn heavily on this work for this section and also - D.Harrison and P.Smith, 1972; E.Johnston, 1975; and Scottish TUC Report 'Committee of Enquiry into the Proposed Run-Down of Upper Clyde Shipbuilders, 1971.

Despite a number of difficulties by the beginning of 1971 the UCS had worked off a backlog of unprofitable orders and was one of the few shipyards in the world to have an order book composed of ships taken on at current prices. The order book of thirty-four ships worth ninety million pounds was enough to keep the yards employed for some years. And yet the Conservative Government of the time engaged in a remarkable series of events. To begin with, they both refused to provide any necessary or give any guarantees of any future aid. This prevented the acceptance of potential orders and provoked a situation of panic and alarm among various suppliers; a fact which helped to accelerate the yards' problems. In February of 1971 the profitable Yarrow yard, which had received the bulk of SIB financial assistance, was hived off from the UCS. The company was in a crisis situation but still the Government refused assistance to what it called "a lame duck". Instead it recommended that the yards be reorganised with a resulting closure of two yards and an overall loss of five-and-a-half thousand jobs.

Unemployment and the Scottish Region: Much of Scotland's industry was based, at the turn of the century, on the heavy industries of coal, railways, and shipbuilding. The Clyde at this point was the world's leading shipbuilder, and down the water Glasgow was Britain's greatest railway locomotive manufacturer. Both industries, along with coal, suffered a recession in the 1920s and 30s. After the war shipbuilding and railways saw something of a revival but this was shortlived. Shipbuilding went into crisis towards the end of the 1950s and railway locomotive building was cut back sharply as a result of the 'Beeching Plan'

at the start of the 1960s. In both cases the Glasgow area suffered particularly badly. The same was true of mining for Scotland as a whole: employment fell from over one-hundred thousand in 1950 to fifty-five thousand by 1967[1]. Shipbuilding employment, for the same period, fell from seventy-three thousand to fifty thousand.

Unemployment for the Scottish Region had for some time been at least double the national average as the 1970s approached. The 1970s began with more than ninety-three thousand Scots looking for work[2]; the worst period of unemployment since 1963. Nationally the figure had reached a new high point with over six-hundred thousand people registered as unemployed. By December national unemployment had fallen slightly by seven thousand but was still over the six-hundred thousand mark, but in Scotland it rose to a new peak of just under one-hundred thousand. In the new year things deteriorated rapidly; reaching one-hundred-and-twenty thousand in April and a national figure of three-quarters-of-a-million[3].

In July the UCS was on the verge of collapse and a request for six-million pounds worth of government aid was flatly rejected.

The Work-in: Towards the end of July the UCS workforce had experienced a period of erosion in the shipbuilding industry on a fairly large scale. Many jobs had been lost on the Clyde and indeed within the UCS itself. Unemployment, both locally and nationally, had risen rapidly

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1. Seventy-five percent of the pits were closed over the period.
2. The figure represents 4.3% of the Scottish labour force.
3. The respective percentage figures are 5.6% and 3.2%.

to previously unknown heights in the post-war period. In July itself Scotland had one-hundred-and-twenty-eight thousand unemployed; six percent of the workforce[1]. The figure does not tell the complete story for it masks even greater unemployment among shipbuilders and workers in the Glasgow area. In the trades most affected by the threatened redundancies the unskilled UCS worker faced a situation of one vacancy for every four-hundred-and-thirteen unemployed. Of the four most affected trades in the yards - joiners, plumbers, electricians and fitters - the ratio was one job for every sixty-two unemployed. Platers and sheet iron workers faced a one to thirty-eight ratio, and those in the professional, technical or executive category faced a one in five ratio. In the Glasgow area as a whole over ten-and-half percent were unemployed, of whom forty percent had been unemployed for more than six months. In terms of vacancies there was only one for every twenty unemployed. A survey made after the work-in had begun revealed that thirty-one percent of UCS workers made redundant nine months prior to the work-in were still unemployed[2].

Added to the debit side was the fact that upwards of thirty thousand jobs relied on the continued existance of the UCS[3]. In the words of Thompson and Hart (1972),

"Add to the breadwinners their families, and some appreciation can be gained of shipbuilding's significance on the Clyde" (4).

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1. The national figure had edged up to 3.3%

2. Scottish TUC Report, op cit, 1971. They found that of their sample forty-two percent of the 50-59 year olds had not found jobs.

3. Estimate by Thompson and Hart (1972), p.9. The STUC Report (1971) put the estimate at the least at a total loss of 16,000 jobs given a reduction in work to suppliers, etc. They felt that this could cost Scotland £300,000 per week.

4. p.9.

In short, the Clydeside community faced disaster. It is little wonder that the UCS workers saw a need for drastic action.

Unlike the Liverpool workers of GEC the Clyde shipyard workers had a situation of strength and experience to draw upon. The fact that the local community itself was under threat helped in the building of a community-wide campaign to save the yards. Another important feature lay in the fact that shipyard unity had been tested previously on the question of redundancy and had been strengthened as a result. In late 1965 the Fairfields yard had been completely modernised, had orders worth one-hundred-and-thirty-one million pounds, and yet was put into official receivership. The workers at that time, having watched other yards closing around them, were both anxious and angry; angry that a healthy yard was being closed due, mainly, to a liquidity problem. The unions mounted a campaign to save their jobs which "exceeded all precedents in the mobilisation of shipyard workers in the West of Scotland"[1]. Every shipyard and engineering establishment in Clydebank supported the campaign[2]. In the face of probable massive strikes throughout the area the Government stepped in and provided one-million pounds to keep the yard open. Its next move was to bring together a consortium, made up of private business concerns, government finances and trade union support funds, to support the continued existance of the yards[3]. The workers' campaign had won and by the time of the UCS work-in Fairfields' convenor, Jim Airlie, was a central figure on the new Co-ordinating Committee. Two-and-a-half years later, in

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1. Thompson and Hart (1972), p.36.

2. Ibid. In each of these shipyards and factories meetings were held in support of the Fairfields workers.

3. The trade union funds invested gave the unions some participation on the managing board.

February 1969, fifteen thousand Clyde workers staged a one-day strike against redundancies during the visit of the Technology Minister, Tony Benn. In June of 1971, in response to a call from the UCS Co-ordinating Committee, one-hundred thousand Scottish workers went on a one-day strike in solidarity and fifty-thousand of them marched through the streets of Glasgow. Against this background, of desparation on the one hand and widespread militancy on the other, the Co-ordinating Committee accepted the idea of a "work-in".

With unemployment widespread and redundancies a daily feature of life in the area the Co-ordinating Committee considered that a strike would simply speed them out of a job; it would allow the official receiver to close the gates on them. A new solution would have to be found if a fight was to be made and the UCS shopfloor leadership wanted a fight and knew that they could draw on widespread support. When the work-in idea was raised it was quickly seen that it was not put forward simply as a form of desparate protest: the process of shipbuilding, more than any other, lent itself to this kind of action. There were various ships in the early stages of being built and difficult to remove from the yards and there was a substantial supply of materials. When the Co-ordinating Committee put the idea to a mass meeting of the workers the idea was well formulated, it could be explained in some detail and defended if neccessary, and it was put to the meeting as the focal point of a possible fight back. When the overwhelming majority voted to accept the plan they had a fairly good idea of what was being asked of them. It was twelve days after this point, shrewdly, that the Co-ordinating Committee had arranged for the massive one-day strike of solidarity. The work-in

decision had helped in capturing widespread committment for the strike and the strike in turn helped to steel the morale of the UCS workforce.

With the work-in under way a special meeting of shop stewards from throughout the West of Scotland was called for ten days later; it was attended by twelve hundred stewards. The meeting was called to arrange a follow up strike and demonstration on August 18th. Support was boosted when, on August 16th, the Scottish TUC was addressed by UCS leader Jimmy Reid and agreed to put their weight behind the strike. On the day one quarter of Scotland's entire workforce, two-hundred thousand workers, went on strike and eighty thousand joined the march through Glasgow in "the greatest demonstration since the days of the Chartists"[1]. The workers occupying their yards must have received the biggest possible confidence boost possible.

With the UCS work-in in progress and receiving support from throughout Britain and the world the effect was bound to rub off on other workers facing their own redundancy problems. This was to be the case with the workers of Plessey's Alexandria factory.

Ice Cold in Alex: The Plessey Company. Plessey was one of those companies to benefit from IRC support in the late 1960s, and by 1969 was a major employer of labour in the private sector with sixty-five thousand employees.

The Alexandria works. This works since the second world-war had been a Royal Naval Torpedo factory and was employing twelve hundred workers in 1970 when its closure was announced. The workers protested and it was at this point that the factory was sold to Plessey for six-hundred-and-fifty

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1. Thompson and Hart (1972) p.53.

thousand pounds. The workers had misgivings about the situation but were assured by Plessey that the workforce would increase to two thousand within four years. Initially, however, it was only prepared to employ five hundred people from January 1971. By April this was up to seven hundred, but in May four hundred were declared redundant and in September the remaining workers were put on the redundancy list.

The factory was being closed and agreements had already been drawn up for the sale and removal of machinery and stock, including a dust-free unit worth one-and-a-half million pounds and stock valued at half the sum paid for the entire factory[1]. The company in fact stood to make a two-hundred-and-eighty percent profit in a transaction covering less than a year[2], and that did not include the sale or development of the factory site.

At this point in time unemployment nationally had reached an incredible eight-hundred thousand and for the Scottish region over one-hundred-and-thirty thousand[3]. In the town of Alexandria one in every eight was unemployed. Once again a group of workers faced a desparate redundancy situation tinged with anger due to the fact that it was to take place in the face of a boost to company profits. Most of the Plessey workers had been made redundant before and were anxious to put up a fight this time.

The Plessey workers certainly had no history of militancy.

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1. A.Milligan, Oct. 1971
2. That does not include any profits made in the course of production..
3. Nationally unemployment stood at 3.6% and at 6.2% for Scotland.

As Eddie McLafferty, the convenor, put it,
"(We) would not be considered militant in any way (usually)" (1).
They were surprised infact to find themselves in the forefront of the fight against redundancies, but in that forefront they were.

It is likely that they reacted both under the impact of the general unemployment situation and the seeming sense of company gain out of the situation, plus the very real impact of the UCS work-in only a few miles away and involving the same industry of shipbuilding and marine engineering. In any event they occupied their factory. The main aim was to prevent the removal of machinery and stock; one of their sore points in the whole situation. Unlike UCS they hadn't enough material and work to embark upon a work-in but they knew that if the machinery was removed then their jobs would surely be lost. They sat-in, and once they had got organised they reviewed their aims and decided to continue the sit-in until they received assurances concerning future employment prospects.

Eventually, with support from the UCS and from their shop stewards national combine, the occupation secured the jobs of those involved. Other occupations were to follow within the company.

BSA Burn Up: Also in September 1971 another group of workers faced large-scale redundancies; those employed at Birmingham Small Arms' (BSA) factory at Small Heath. Three thousand jobs were to be lost. Unemployment in the region (West Midlands) was abnormally high for one usually by-passed in post-war crises. Seventy-six thousand were without jobs, or three-and-a-half percent in an area experiencing one percent or less up to the late 1960s, and not above two percent prior to 1971.

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1. 'The Morning Star', 10th December 1971.

The BSA company had been producing large sports motor cycles and although at that stage it was unrivalled the market was in decline. Demand had rapidly switched to a range of smaller bikes, scooters and mopeds and very largely it was the diversified foreign firms that were taking a large share of the British market. The BSA company had avoided diversification and by 1971 were paying the price in terms of falling sales and a market already dominated by competitors. Large-scale redundancies were to be the price paid by the workforce.

In this case the influence of the UCS occupation was such as to influence the response of the BSA workers in a somewhat mechanistic fashion. The responded to the redundancy threat by threatening to stage "a UCS type work-in". As their campaign developed it began to dawn on them that such a strategy would have serious problems; that cycle production was very different to shipbuilding. Eventually the work-in idea was dismissed and a strike embarked upon. As one leading BSA shop steward was to express it,

> "Cycle production with its rapid flow production and dependence on a mass of small components from supplier firms is not necessarily able to conduct a work-in. Infact, many workers came to believe that a work-in would more quickly work them out of a job" (1).

Indications now were that in addition to the serious nature of the unemployment situation the influence of the UCS work-in was widespread. The BSA workers were desparate and turned to an action which had proven itsvalue in both publicity and in winning a reprieve on redundancies. The form of occupation, however, had been wrong. Whether a sit-in would have been more effective is somewhat hypothetical as the strike action did keep the works open and helped in the saving of a third of the jobs.

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1. Cf. Mills, 1976a, pp.21-22.

The problems of BSA and the British motor cycle industry continued to grow over the next few years despite a merger with the NVT company. Diversification into a range of small bikes remained a problem which was not tackled. Eventually all the factories in the merger - at Andover, Wolverhampton and at Meriden - came under threat of closure and all of them staged occupations.

Disquiet Flows the Don: The Steel Industry. In many aspects the industry experienced problems similar to shipbuilding. In an early post-war boom large profits were made but not enough of this was reinvested in the industry to allow it to compete with foreigh competitors. Between 1950 and 1960 the profits of the twelve largest U.K. steel companies rose from forty-eight to one-hundred-and-sixty-seven million pounds. However, instead of building on this profitable base the industry was more concerned with paying out large dividends[1]. Meanwhile Britain's share of the world market was falling: by the 1970s the British steel industry had fallen from third place (in the 1940s) to ninth[2]. In terms of investment Britain was rapidly falling well behind its competitors. Over the period 1963-67, for example, investment per output ton was much lower than the Belgian, Italians, Dutch, Americans, Canadians and Japanese (investing 100% more) and the French and Germans (with 70% more).

Investment began to be ploughed into the industry after nationalisation in the mid-1960s. With nationalisation, however, came rationalisation and a loss of upwards of fifty thousand jobs by 1972.

The River Don Steel Works: The River Don works closure announcement came at the apex of BSC's[3] massive redundancy programme. Most of the

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1. CIS Report, No.14.
2. Britain was only producing 3½% of total world production.
3. The British Steel Corporation.

works was due for closure barring some of the more unprofitable sections which were being hived off to the Firth Brown company. Yet the works was the only British centre for the manufacture of heavy forgings and castings. Leading up to the end of 1971 the works began a drastic cut-back on its intake of apprentices. In mid-October of that year the Don closure began, with notices of redundancy being given to ninety middle management on the 21st. Shop floor redundancies were to follow a week later. In the meantime the company announced that it was to sell River Don's (administratively controlled) Openshaw works in Manchester.

Unemployment and the Sheffield Area: While the Don redundancies were being announced a number of others were occurring throughout the area. Unemployment had been just under two percent[1] in the city only a year previously but had reached four percent by October 1971[2]. Regional unemployment had also leapt up, from under three percent to almost four-and-a-quarter percent[3]. Sheffield had suffered one of the region's greatest increases. Twenty-five percent of the town's youth were unemployed at a time when the River Don were cutting back on apprentice intake, and twenty percent of the University's graduates were still without work. In the local steel industry, on which forty-nine thousand Sheffield workers relied for their employment, short-time and redundancy were part of the general picture. At the begining of October, for example, the Doncaster steel works was put on short-time working. Five days later redundancies were announced at BSC's Grimesthorpe section of the River Don works.

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1. The exact figure was 1.9%.
2. In Sheffield alone 11,349 were officially registered as unemployed.
3. The respective figures stood at 2.8% and 4.2%; rising from 56,000 registered unemployed to 83,000.

Three hundred were to be sacked. By mid-October forty Doncaster steel workers were made redundant and two-hundred-and-fifty Sheffield Steel workers were put on short-time. Towards the end of the month further steel redundancies were announced, this time at Rotherham where three hundred jobs were to go[1] and Tinslyet Park where sixty workers were to be made redundant.

How the Steel was Tempered: The Don workforce were not new to industrial action. They had previously taken militant action at the works over wage issues and "unjustifiable punishments"[2]. They had also been involved in the political strikes of the period.

Locally the town has a reputation for militant trade unionism stretching back several decades[3]. In the drop forge on October 19th a strike began of one hundred workers against reductions in manning levels from six to five workers per press[4]. Rising unemployment was already a burning issue among the labour force of Sheffield generally and support was steadily building for a TUC called regional demonstration against unemployment.

In the local press the major industrial issue was the continuing UCS work-in. This became a daily feature and at times would be discussed on more than one page of a paper's edition.

Very quickly it was decided to repond to the closure threat with, what the local 'Morning Telegraph' chose to call, a "UCS type work-in".

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1. At the same time Rotherham's remaining 11,000 workers were on a 3-day week.

2. Questionnaire reply from E.E.Webster, River Don works convenor.

3. Cf. K.Coates and T.Topham (eds), 1970, pp.103-105.

4. Shop stewards found the change in manning levels "very suspicious . . . because the drop forge (was) likely to be transferred to Firth Brown". Quoted in the Sheffield 'Morning Telegraph', 26th October 1971.

A measure of the feeling in the area about unemployment can be seen in the fact that six-thousand people responded to the TUC's march through the city of Sheffield on October 25th. Addressing the meeting at the end of the march shop stewards from the UCS and the River Don works "were given a wildly enthusiastic standing ovation"[1]. Significantly both of the two main speakers, Jack Peel[2] and Hugh Scanlon[3], spoke out in favour of worker occupations as a tactic for combating unemployment. Scanlon told the assembled crowd that,

"The days have gone when we run away from the fight. Work-ins should play a bigger role in securing the demands for reflation and more jobs" (4).

Already the tactic was having an impact on official trade union thinking.

The River Don work in received further suppport when it was announced by the engineering district committee that factories throughout the city would have regular levies to support it.

Like their predecessors, the River Don workers came under the combined pressure of job loss fear and anger at a time of unrivalled political unrest and mounting unemployment. The result was yet another dramatic form of industrial protest.

In the months that followed four other BSC steel works were occupied in pay disputes and one was threathened with occupation if redundancies went ahead[5].

The Tactic Continues: A number of actions against closure followed on in this period and became pioneers in their own way. At

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1. The Sheffield 'Morning Telegraph' 26th October 1971.

2. The then right-wing General Secretary of the Dyers and Bleachers' Union.

3. The then President of the AUEW.

4. Scanlon, in fact, reveals that he sees a potential in occupations beyond even redundancy issues, i.e., "in securing . . . reinflation".

5. This was at a BSC subsidiary - Redpath Dorman Long - in London.

Snow Engineering (Sheffield) and at McCormick Screen Printing (Glasgow) occupations followed on in the light of their more famous comrades at River Don and UCS. In January of the new year the occupation at Allis Chalmers marked the first to occur in Wales in the post-war era. Unemployment was then standing at a post-war record of almost five-and-three quarters percent[1] with over fifty-five thousand unemployed and almost one million unemployed for Great Britain as a whole[2]. This was quickly followed by a threatened occupation at Courtaulds' Flintshire factory but eventually strike action was taken. That same month there were two occupations and one threatened in Manchester, another in Stockport and one in Liverpool. Unemployment for the North West Region now stood at double the level it had been over two years previously when the GEC-EE work-in had been threatened[3]. Two further redundancy occupations occurred in the area in March, followed by the spate of engineering pay occupations.

Fisher-Bendix: The North Western occupations were shown the way by the workers of the Liverpool factory of Fisher-Bendix.

The Site. The factory had been built in 1961 by the British Motor Corporation with the aid of a government grant. At its peak it was to employed two-and-a-half thousand workers on the production of a variety of items[4].

In January 1969 the BMC company was merged with British Leyland and backed by a twenty-five million pounds loan at seven-and-a-half

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1. The exact figure was 5.7%.
2. The national figure stood at 4.1% unemployed.
3. Over 140,000 were unemployed in the region, or 4.9%.
4. Products included the Moulton bike, stainless steel and vitrous sinks, Bendix washing machines and dryers, and radiators.

percent. Shortly after this cut-backs in employment began to occur at the factory. First the famous Moulton bike patent was sold to the Raleigh company and shortly afterwards the factory was sold to Parkinson-Cowan. In 1971 the factory was resold to Thorn Electrical who acquired the entire Parkinson-Cowan company, with its various factories, for a price only slightly more than Parkinson-Cowan had paid for the Fisher-Bendix factory alone[1].

Thorn 's main interest from this point appears to have been in retaining the profitable sections of their new acquisition and selling off the rest - including the Fisher-Bendix factory. In the process Thorn recouped half of what they paid for the entire company in the sale of the first three factories. They then turned to the Fisher-Bendix factory and announced that it was selling off it Bendix washing machine business. The work was in fact transferred to Spain. In December of 1971 it was announced that the entire factory was to close. The workforce was instructed to dismantle the equipment used for making domestic and storage heaters to be transferred to the company's Newcastle and Birmingham subsidiaries.

The Workers' Reaction: The Fisher-Bendix workers underwent a rapid process of merger and rationalisation followed in each case by redundancies and closure threats. They were certainly angry that a government backed merger in 1969 led to cut backs in the workforce, and that the patent to the Moulten bike was sold when it was felt that this 'revolution in bike design' could have ensured the factory the future it needed: Raleigh instead went on to benefit. The Fisher-Bendix workers

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1. T.Clarke, 1972; E.Johnstone, 1975.

were also angry that production of the Bendix washing machine was shifted to Spain in the company's search for greater profitability.

All this was occurring over a period of deepening unemployment, but also workers' resistance to redundancy. The Fisher-Bendix workers had been involved in the campaigning for the GEC-EE work-in in 1969. The idea of an occupation had been very much impressed on their thinking. Earlier that year they had been involved in a political strike and they were involved in the December political strike the following year. Early in 1971 they took part in two further political strikes. In terms of militancy over issues at the plant they had staged a successful nine week strike later in 1971 against redundancies arising out of the transfer of Bendix work to Spain. It was during this latter action that the strengths and limitations of the strike weapon were sharply demonstrated: jobs were saved but by vacating the premises the company had been able to shift work out. Shortly following the strike the Fisher-Bendix workers took part in an all-Merseyside strike and demonstration against unemployment: such was the strength of feeling and concern within the area at that time.

The last straw came with the instruction to help the company dismantle machinery to transfer work elsewhere and facilitate the factory's closure. The workers marched into the directors' office and into the Board room and ordered management out. Once out the gates were secured. A new occupation joined the growing ranks.

Redundancy and the 'Redundancy Payments Act, 1965'.

With the return of the Labour Government in 1964 the process of a more efficient management of capitalism was put under way. One of the early

and key elements of this process was the introduction of the 'Redundancy Payments Act' which came into effect in 1965. It had several aims. It set out to 'provide financial compensation for the social and economic costs incurred by the individual as a consequence of his involuntary redundancy'[1]. While not denying that levels of genuine compassion lay behind this aim it was hoped that it would have important repercussions; in promoting 'greater occupational and geographical mobility' among certain categories of workers, and in achieving 'some reduction in (the) intensity . . . (of) union and workplace opposition' to redundancy[2].

An important study[3] of the first five years of the Act's operation claims that in all three aspects the Act has had some measure of success. Looking at the first two aspects, however, we find that the success refers only to a limited number of criteria. In terms of social effects all that is being said is that it was correct to discriminate in payments according to age and length of service as the older/long service workers do suffer more personal harship and therefore need greater compensation. (Hardly a selling point for the Act's virtues!). In regard to mobility it has to be admitted that a problem lay in the fact that many receiving redundancy payments 'were, generally speaking, immobile workers', i.e., their age and skills made them less willing to move and less attractive to potential employers. Nonetheless, it was found that there was 'some evidence to show that the redundancy payments made a contribution to' the workers' ability to search for a new job[4].

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1. S.R.Parker, C.G.Thomas, N.D.Ellis and W.E.J.McCarthy, 1971, p.7
2. Ibid, p.10.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid, p. 11

Possibly the biggest gain from the Act has been its effect on worker attitudes to redundancy. Parker et al (1971) found that workers were far more likely to accept redundancy if they were entitled to redundancy payments than if they weren't[1]; that some employers have been "led to treat the whole affair of redundancy more precisely and carefully"[2]; and, importantly, as a consequence of changed attitudes, that there had "been some decline in the extent of overt conflict over the issue"[3].

Theoretical and Methodological Issues: Attitudes. Parker et al (1971) appear to accept uncritically the assumptions of the Act concerning the causes of redundancy. Principally they accept that redundancy is the inevitable consequence of either 'economic' causes (e.g. due to a decline in the product market) or 'technological/organisational' causes (e.g. decisions by management to introduce technological or organisational changes within the establishment)[4]. This is a premise accepted throughout British research into the question of redundancy[5]. It is a valid premise but only in so far as we bear in mind that it is related to a capitalist mode of production. Certainly it can be shown that in various socialist countries (i.e., the East European bloc excluding Yugoslavia) unemployment does not exist and therefore there is not a redundancy problem as such[6]. The question is not merely academic for Parker and a number of British researchers assume that an "acceptance" of redundancy by the British worker can

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1. p.10
2. p.13
3. p.13.
4. Cf. pp.14-16.
5. Cf. D.Wedderburn, 1964 & 1965; P.L.Cook, 1964; and G.Goodman, 1962.
6. G.Goodman, 1962, has attempted to argue that unemployment does exist in the "communist countries" but clearly he is not making a direct comparison. In the communist countries he is refering to workers being "under-employed" but maintained in work "until the State machine is ready to absorb it elsewhere".

to some extent be equated with an acceptance of the philosophy of redundancy in a capitalist society.

Thus, at one point Parker et al (1971) claim that,

"An effective manpower policy which is consistent with the economic objectives of the firm requires flexibility in the development of labour, and this means that employees may have to be willing to accept both the need for redundancies in those circumstances where they are an inevitable consequence of economic or technological change . . ." (1).

Later they claim that, the Act's provisions,

"have made employees more prepared to accept the need for redundancy" (2).

Two points can be made here in reference to subsequent events in the early 1970s. Firstly, it would be surprising if some workers were not won to an acceptance of the "need" for redundancy. In a society in which the capitalist ideology has been predominant for more than two hundred years and where unemployment has been a continuing problem over that period we should expect to find worker expressions that redundancy is inevitable. On the other hand, the strength of such "acceptance" is related to a number of factors, including the strength and spread of 'trade union' and socialist consciousness. For instance, where socialist ideas are strong among a workforce their acceptance of redundancy may only be limited to a strategic acceptance of their weak position and not from seeing any supposed "need" for the redundancies. Thus, while Parker et al (1971) point to the fact that large numbers of trade union officials in the ASW, NUGMW, TGWU and EEPTU unions accept that redundancies are inevitable they fail to distinguish between expressions of resignation to the situation within capitalism and those of agreement with capitalist philosophy.

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1. p.10

2. p.13.

The point here is that it is erroneous to attempt to imply that a "decline in the extent of overt conflict over" redundancy has been an ideological victory.

It may well be that the Redundancy Payments Act has contributed to a strengthening of some workers resolve against redundancy. For instance, as Parker et al (1971) point out,

"the Act makes it quite explicit that workers do accumulate 'rights' in the jobs they hold" (1).

If this is the case then we might expect that some workers would feel even more outraged at a managerial decision to deprive them of those jobs. Certainly the slogan of the UCS work-in - "We demand the right to work" - was taken up by a large number of following redundancy occupations[2]. Of 12 leading stewards of redundancy occupations interviewed seven used the phrase "right to work" to describe to me their reason for taking such action. On questions as to whether people should ever be redundant "from time to time"[3] and on the view that given technological change redundancy was inevitable[4] only two stewards agreed (and in both cases), while the remaining ten strongly disagreed in both cases.

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1. p.16

2. Research by H.A.Turner, 1963 has indicated that increasingly strike statistics have revealed an expression of growing trade union demands for greater control (rights) over jobs.
"In the 20 years of high employment from 1940 the proportion of strikes about "wage-questions' other than demands for increases", and (particularly) about "working arrangements, rules and discipline" rose remarkably: from one-third of all stoppages to three quarters . . . One could say that these disputes all involve attempts to submit managerial discretion and authority to agreed . . . rules: alternatively, that they reflect an implicit pressure for more democracy and individual rights in industry'.

3. The question posed was, "Some people say that you are bound to be out of work from time to time. . . .".

4. The question posed was, "In your opinion would you agree or disagree with the statement that redundancy is an inevitable consequence of technological change?

The major point of interest in the study of Parker et al (1971) is the claim that the Act has had some effect in reducing redundancy strikes. This is especially interesting in view of the fact that they also point out that this was a critical economic period, marked by "the lack of economic expansion together with rising unemployment" (1). Within this they show, via a survey of two thousand employers, that redundancy has increased in frequency in the period since the Act's introduction[2], with the greatest incidence in major industries such as Shipbuilding and Marine Engineering, Electrical Engineering and Construction and in areas already experiencing high unemployment[3]. The results of their study of industrial conflict over redundancy, reproduced in Table 7 below, show that there has been a decline in the level of such strike activity in each of the major industrial groupings apart from Textiles & Clothing and All Other Industries and Services. The table also reveals that this decline occurred despite a general increase in strike intensity over other issues.

Basically this approach is not without its problems. For example, the evidence rests on the categories of the Department of Employment which refers to strikes directly concerning redundancy as the primary cause of striking. It leaves out of account strikes which have a number of aims including a protest against unemployment or planned redundancies but which centre on other issues, i.e., strikes due to all other causes

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1. p.9

2. Only 1% of surveyed companies had redundancies before the Act, 5% had experienced pre- and post-Act redundancies, and 20% had only experienced redundancies after the Act's introduction: (2% gave no information and 72% reported no redundancies for the period in question, i.e., 1963-68).

3. pp.16-17.

TABLE 7

A COMPARISON OF REDUNDANCY STRIKES WITH STRIKES ARISING OUT OF ALL OTHER CAUSES, 1960 - 69.

		Av. no. of working days lost through redundancy strikes per annum (1)	Av. no. of working days lost per annum due to all causes	Av. no. of working days lost through redundancy strikes per annum as a percentage of all strikes
		(a)	(b)	(a/b)
MINING AND QUARRYING	1960-65	5,550	432,000	1·28
	1966-69	725	331,000	0·21
METALS AND ENGINEERING	1960-65	35,288	959,000	3·68
	1966-69	23,605	1,207,000	1·95
SHIPBUILDING AND MARINE ENGINEERING	1960-65	14,146	277,000	5·11
	1966-69	3,981	183,000	2·17
VEHICLES	1960-65	52,682	668,000	7·88
	1966-69	21,605	985,000	2·19
TEXTILES AND CLOTHING	1960-65	694	32,000	2·14
	1966-69	2,095	56,000	3·77
CONSTRUCTION	1960-65	8,182	205,000	3·99
	1966-69	6,309	215,000	2·93
TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION	1960-65*	42,262	331,000	12·76
	1966-69	8,574	810,000	1·05
ALL OTHER INDUSTRIES AND SERVICES	1960-65	2,970	234,000	1·27
	1966-69	7,579	312,000	2·43
TOTAL INDUSTRIES	1960-65	161,774	3,137,000	5·15
	1966-69	74,473	4,205,000	1·77

* Includes a very large one-day national stoppage.

* The table is taken from S.R.Parker, C.G.Thomas, N.D.Ellis and W.E.J.McCarthy, 1971, p.13.

1. The statistics were specially prepared for the authors by the Department of Employment. "In essence, they are a sub-category of the set of causes 'Disputes concerning the employment or discharge of workers (including redundancy questions)' normally used in the presentation of strike statistics".

may well have included redundancy questions. Nonetheless, taking the results as a reasonable assessment there is some evidence that this effect of the Act is having a continuing effect on some groups of workers.

The two case studies of an 'engineering works' and a 'brick works' referred to in the preceding chapter[1] serve to illustrate the effect of the Redundancy Payments Act in cutting back on industrial militancy. However while this is a real threat to militant trade unionism there is some evidence that in certain industries the trend has changed and that the effects of high unemployment have outweighed any considerations of redundancy payments.

Direct comparison with the study of Parker et al (1971) has been made difficult by the fact that until 1973 the Department of Employment categories of strikes lumped redundancy questions with other employment questions: for the Parker study the Department of Employment especially isolated redundancy strikes in providing a particular service. Table 8 provides a comparison with Parker for the period 1973-75. It also includes a less accurate comparison for the earlier period 1970-72. This period lumps redundancy with other employment issues but has been included because it is the best possible evidence available and does provide some indication of trend. It is arguable that a sizeable proportion of the striker days can be attributed to redundancy strikes. By the same token the table includes figures for the combined period 1970-75.

Taking the more reliable period first (1973-75) it can be seen that redundancy strike intensity has continued to fall in 'Mining and Quarrying', 'Vehicles', 'Textiles & Clothing', and in 'All other Industries'. But that it has increased in 'Metals & Engineering', 'Shipbuilding & Marine', 'Transport & Communication', and in 'Construction'. Overall a very slight fall is evidenced. The picture might be claimed to be uneven, with most industries claimed

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1. The section entitles, 'The ones that got away'.

TABLE 8.

A COMPARISON OF REDUNDANCY STRIKES WITH STRIKES ARISING OUT OF ALL OTHER CAUSES, 1970 - 75.

Industrial Category.	Av. no. of working days lost through redundancy strikes per annum. 1970-72 1973-75	Av. no. of working days lost per annum due to all causes. 1970-72 1973-75	First column as % of second. 1970-72 1973-75
MINING AND QUARRYING	3,667	3,985,667	0.09
	167	1,925,000	0.009
(1970-75)	(1,917)	(2,955,333)	(0.06)
METALS AND ENGINEERING	258,000	2,707,667	9.52
	69,667	2,493,333	2.79
	(163,833)	(2,600,500)	(6.3)
SHIPBUILDING AND MARINE ENGINEERING	13,667	589,333	2.31
	11,667	490,333	2.37
	(7,417)	(539,833)	(1.37)
VEHICLES	133,333	2,425,333	5.5
	10,333	1,861,333	0.56
	(71,833)	(2,143,333)	(3.35)
TEXTILES AND CLOTHING	5,000	242,667	2.06
	3,667	267,333	1.37
	(4,333)	(255,000)	(1.69)
CONSTRUCTION	83,667	1,570,667	5.33
	22,333	216,667	10.31
	(53,000)	(893,667)	(5.93)
TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION	251,000	2,906,333	8.64
	9,667	486,000	1.99
	(130,333)	(1,696,167)	(7.68)
ALL OTHER INDUSTRIES AND SERVICES	131,000	1,709,667	7.67
	33,833	1,562,000	2.17
	(82,417)	(1,635,833)	(5.04)
TOTAL INDUSTRIES 1970-72	879,334	16,137,334	5.45
1973-75	161,334	9,301,999	1.73
(1970-75)	(515,083)	(12,719,666)	(4.05)

Table compiled from Department of Employment Gazette figures.
The figures in the first column for 1970-72 refer to "disputes concerning employment or discharge of workers (incl. redundancy questions)". From 1973 onwards the Department of Employment separated this section into 2 categories - "Redundancy questions" and "Dismissal and other disciplinary measures". Only the latter period - 1973-75 - forms a direct comparison with the work of Parker et al(1971) shown in Table 9, but the former does allow of some speculation.

to be still experiencing a lower strike intensity record compared with the pre-Act period but with half of them increasing in intensity over the previous post-Act period. This view rests on a false premise however[1] and a more meaningful reference point is the absolute number of striker days averaged in a given period. From this point it can be seen that a majority of industries have experienced increases in striker days beyond that experienced in the pre-Act period (Metals & Engineering, Textiles & Clothing, Construction, and All other industries) or at least greater than the first post-Act period (Shipbuilding & Marine, Vehicles and Transport and Communication). In terms of all the industries striker days has, for 1973-75, roughly equalled that of the pre-Act period and has thus exceeded that for 1965-69. Only in Mining and Quarrying has the figure continued to fall as against both earlier periods.

Taking the period 1970-72 and the total period 1970-75 the evidence of trends towards ever greater redundancy strike activity is even greater. In all cases (1970-73) absolute striker days is up on the preceeding period and in only two of these (Mining and Quarrying, and Shipbuilding & Marine) does the figure fail to exceed that of the pre-Act period. For the overall period (1970-75) the pattern is exactly the same.

To this impression we can add the fact that the widespread nature of workplace occupations evidences a new type of opposition to

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1. There is no good reason to expect redundancy striker days to increase proportionately to increases in striker days due to other causes given the uncomparable increases in both redundancy and in strike activity since 1965. Parker et al (1971) provide no good reason for placing importance on the ratio of one type of strike to other types.

redundancy and, by implication, is a clearer expression of the limitations of both the ideological and economic effects of the Redundancy Payments Act. Further more Parker et al (1971) have relied on Department of Employment data which excludes political strikes. This means that the action over the Pentonville Five will not be included in the figure although the issue was primarily a question of redundancy and involved at least one million striker days. Another problem is that such strikes as the national builders' strike in 1972 is included in the category of other strike causes and yet the strike had unemployment as one of its key issues. In short, unlike any other period before or immediately after the introduction of the Redundancy Payments Act the early to mid-1970s witnessed a sharp increase in activity against redundancy and the wider question of unemployment. This took the form of record strikes and demonstrations and workplace occupations. If ever the Redundancy Payments Act had the effect of dulling industrial militancy this was sharply overturned by events of the late 1960s/ early 1970s with its political strikes and record unemployment levels.

Summary.

Since the mid-1960s the British economy has been in a critical state. In an attempt to come to grips with this problem and to improve the management of British capitalism Labour governments have introduced a series of measures which have directly and indirectly helped to increase unemployment. The measures included rationalisations and mergers aided by an Industrial Reorganisation Corporation, productivity bargaining backed by a Prices and Incomes Act and Board, cut-backs in public spending,

and the use of unemployment to combat inflation. In the wake of these policies have come massive redundancies but without an upturn in the number of vacancies required to take redundant workers in to new industries. Large scale unemployment has followed.

Attempts to alleviate hardship and curtail industrial militancy in the face of redundancy have failed in the face of post-war record unemployment levels. Marches organised by the TUC General Council have attracted millions throughout Britain, strikes against redundancies and closures have soared and a new tactic of worker occupation has appeared to challenge redundancy. Of the first eleven groups of workers to take or threaten such action (GEC-EE workers through to Fisher-Bendix) five had been effected by merger and rationalisation programmes and one had suffered as a result of government cut-backs (BSC River Don). In all cases the actions occurred, or were threatened, at a time of record unemployment. In all but one case this was also true of local unemployment and backs up Parker et al's (1971) finding that redundancies appear to have occurred more in areas of high unemployment.

Finally, a common feature in all cases challenges the view that the Redundancy Payments Act has led to some improvement in management handling of redundancy situations; in all cases the reverse was the case and this forms one of the key focuses of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 8

OWNERSHIP, CONTROL AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS.

"Several features appear to be common to a large number of occupations. (Bad) management handling of situations . . . (An) extensive record of industrial disputes and strikes . . .(and an ownership situation which reveals occupied) factories (as) . . . among the largest . . . and more powerful . . . companies in Britain".

Introduction.

This chapter sets out to examine the specific industrial relations situation within occupied factories and companies. It is argued that these are among the worst employers in terms of industrial disputes experienced over the period, and that in certain cases the occupation actions might not have been embarked upon had the situation been handled differently by the employer.

It is argued that the nature of decision making is a key problem and that this has been contributed to, in a large number of cases, by the remoteness of that process; a remoteness due, among other things, to size and geographical diversity of the companies involved. Very much in line with Department of Employment findings this chapter indicates that the large companies (i.e., employing more than two thousand employees) experience a relatively greater proportion of industrial unrest - including worker occupations.

The High and Mighty.

Company size: In terms of company size by number of employees a majority of occupied companies are among the largest in Britain. As table 9 shows seventy-one (53.4%) employ more than two thousand employees. This indicates

TABLE 9.

OCCUPIED ENTERPRISES BY NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES

Standard Industrial Classification order	Sector / Number of UK employees	up to 500	501 to 1,000	1,001-2,000	2,001-5,000	5,001-10,000	Over 10,000	TOTAL
III	Food, drink and Tobacco	/	/	/	/	/	1	1
IV-V	Petroleum products,etc and chemicals, etc.	1	/	/	/	/	2	3
VI-XII	Metal manufacturing, engineering, shipbuilding, vehicles	27	6	10	15	14	26	98
XIII-XV	Textiles and Clothing	3	/	/	/	1	2	6
XVII	Timber and furniture	1	/	/	/	/	/	1
XVIII	Paper, printing and publishing	5	/	1	1	1	/	8
XIX	Other manufacturing	2	/	/	/	/	1	3
XX and XXII	Construction, transport and communications.	2	/	2	3	1	2	10
XXIII	Wholesale and retail distribution	/	/	/	/	/	/	0
XXIV	Insurance, banking, finance and business services	/	/	1	1	/	/	2
XXVI	Miscellaneous services	1	/	/	/	/	/	1
	Total	42	6	14	20	17	34	133

*The table is designed for comparison with 'Table 1' of the "Bullock Report", 1977, pp.4-6.

Public corporations (BSC/ British Rail) and authorities (Stretford council/ Strathclyde University) are excluded from the table, as is the head office of the AUEW. Three cases where number of employees has been unobtainable are also excluded.

TABLE 10

United Kingdom enterprises with over 200 employees in the United Kingdom*.

ANALYSIS BY INDUSTRY AND NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES

Standard Industrial Classification order	Sector / No. of UK employees	201–500	501–1,000	1,001–2,000	2,001–5,000	5,001–10,000	Over 10,000	Total over 2,000	TOTAL
		Number of enterprises (of which controlled from overseas)							
I–III	Food, drink and tobacco	21 (3)	30 (7)	28 (4)	20 (4)	9 (3)	22 (1)	51 (8)	130 (22)
IV–V	Petroleum products etc. and chemicals etc.	34 (18)	31 (19)	24 (11)	21 (9)	8 (3)	7 (1)	36 (13)	125 (61)
VI–XII	Metal manufacturing, engineering, shipbuilding, vehicles	55 (17)	140 (30)	138 (31)	125 (34)	45 (9)	48 (10)	218 (53)	551 (131)
XIII–XV	Textiles and clothing	11 (1)	44 (4)	44 (2)	37 (3)	8 (—)	10 (—)	55 (3)	154 (10)
XVI–XIX	Other manufacturing	32 (5)	78 (5)	62 (8)	57 (7)	35 (1)	17 (3)	109 (11)	281 (29)
XX and XXII	Construction, transport and communications	32 (2)	44 (3)	55 (2)	40 (1)	16 (—)	11 (—)	67 (1)	198 (8)
XXIII	Wholesale and retail distribution ...	43 (10)	65 (4)	55 (7)	59 (5)	17 (1)	22 (3)	98 (9)	261 (30)
XXIV	Insurance, banking, finance and business services	124 (19)	73 (6)	37 (1)	32 (1)	18 (—)	11 (—)	61 (1)	295 (27)
XXVI	Miscellaneous services	17 (6)	21 (6)	18 (4)	22 (1)	12 (—)	9 (—)	43 (1)	99 (17)
	TOTAL	369 (81)	526 (84)	461 (70)	413 (65)	168 (17)	157 (18)	738 (100)	2,094 (335)

* Taken from the Bullock Report, 1977, p.5.

that approximately 9.6% of all British based enterprises of this size have experienced an occupation, compared with 4.75% of those employing less than two thousand[1].

Financial standing: In total just under sixty percent of all occupied private companies[2] are among the most financially powerful in Britain: this includes fifteen companies employing less than two thousand employees[3]. Of the two thousand and ninety-four enterprises operating in Britain[4] sixty-eight of the financially 'Top 1000'[5] British companies were occupied (6.8%) which is somewhat higher than the percentage of those from the remaining companies; with fifty-four occupied enterprises of one thousand and eighty-three companies[6], i.e. just under five percent.

Thus it is the powerful companies (in terms of financial standing and size of employment) which appear to have experienced the development of the occupation tactic more than the small[7] companies: barely more than thirty-five percent of all occupied companies can be counted in this latter category[8]. When we consider the number of occupations a single company experienced over the period twenty-five of the large companies alone account for over forty-three percent of all occupations[9]; in terms of financial standing

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1. The percentage figures refer to those totals for number of UK based companies provided by the Bullock Report, 1977, p.5.
2. The financial standing of these companies is taken from the 'TIMES 1000' editions for the period 1971-75.
3. See table 11.
4. This is the figure refered to in the Bullock Report, 1977, p.5.
5. That is, those listed in the 'TIMES 1000', op cit.
6. That is, less the top 1,000 and 11 foreign owned multi-nationals referred to in table 11.
7. The term 'small' is used in this chapter to refer to those companies which neither employ more than 2,000 employees nor are included in the top 1,000 companies in terms of financial standing.
8. That is, 35% of the 133 private companies referred to in table 9.
9. See table 12.

TABLE 11.

THE OWNERSHIP AND FINANCIAL STANDING OF OCCUPIED COMPANIES.

1	2	3	4
Number of UK employees.	Top 1000 British Companies ++	Foreign owned multi-nationals not counted in '2'	Multi-plant co.s not counted in columns 2 & 3*
Up to 500	-	3[a]	1[b]
501-1,000	1	2	-
1,001-2,000	6[c]	2[d]	-
Total Small Co.s	7	7	1
2,001-5,000	18[c]	-	-
5,001-10,000	11[c]	3[e]	3
Over 10,000	32[f]	1	1
Total Large Co.s	61	4	4
Total all Companies	68	11	5

+Table compiled from newspaper reports, journal searches, interviews, etc.

a. Including the 63rd largest US company (by turnover).

b. Not included is a factory hived off from a multi-plant firm and then closed under the new ownership within a year.

c. In these cases at least one company is known to be US owned: likely the figure is higher.

d. This includes one US and one Japanese owned company.

e. This includes the 45th and 88th largest US companies.

f. This group includes no fewer than 7 of the Top 10 British companies, and 5 more in the lower half of the Top 20.

* This category includes those companies owning at least four factories.

++ This category is compiled by use of the 'TIMES 1000' editions for the period 1971/72; 72/73; 73/74; and 74/75.

TABLE 12

COMPANIES EXPERIENCING MORE THAN ONE OCCUPATION, 1971-75.

1 Number of UK Employees	2 Number of Co.s with 2 or more occupations	3 Col.2 as % of all Cos of same category.(a)	4 Total no. of occ'pts of Col.2 companies.	5 Col.4 as % of all occupations in pvte co.s*
Up to 500	2	0.54%	4	1.98%
501-1,000	1	0.19%	2	0.99%
1,001-2,000	2	0.43%	5	2.47%
Total Small Co.s	5	0.37	11	5.45%
2,001-5,000	7	1.69%	17	8.42%
5,001-10,000	2	1.20%	8	3.96%
Over 10,000	16	10.20%	62	30.69%
Total Large Co.s	25	3.39%	87	43.07%
Top 1000 British Co.s	22	2.2%	77	38.12%
Foreign owned multi-nationals	2	-	4	1.98%
Other Co.s (b)	6	0.5%	17	8.42%

*This column refers to private companies only, i.e., the 133 refered to in Table 11. These companies experienced a total of 201 occupations.

a. Figures are taken for comparison from the Bullock Report, 1977, p.5.

b. This refers to all remaining companies not included in the first two categories. As a comparison the Bullock Report (1977) refers to 1,083 such companies if 1,000 Top Companies are excluded along with the 11 foreign owned multi-nationals (refered to in table 11) from Bullock's total of 2,094 companies.

twenty-four top British and foreign owned companies accounted for just over forty percent of all occupations in private companies.

Industrial Relations: It could be argued that to some extent size is a determinant by that obvious fact alone, i.e., that with more plants and larger numbers of employees the larger firms might be expected to have more occupations. However, studies of the industrial disputes situations of companies by size indicates that the greater number of employees itself is not directly the answer. It would seem that greater numbers give rise to other problems which more directly bear on the industrial relations problems of a particular company. Certainly large numbers of employees, spread across several concerns, create organisational problems of communication, of bureaucratisation, of decision-making and control and of job satisfaction[1]. But these questions are not purely a "technological" or "structural" problem: there is sufficient research and argument to show that a key factor in organisational development rests in an understanding of the power structure of an organisation, those in control, and of the power structure and control of society generally[2]. In short, many of the problems of large companies rest in their primary concern to remain competitive and maintain levels of profitability, and in their secondary concern as to the effect of such organisational imperatives on worker satisfaction[3].

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1. Cf. R.Michels (1949); S.M.Lipset, M.A.Trow and J.S.Colemen (1956); D.Lockwood, (1958); R.Blackburn, (1967); G.S.Bain, (1970); J.Child, (1972, 73); and R.Payne and D.S.Pugh (1976).

2. Cf. G.D.M.Ursell and A.J.Mills, (1978).

3. I would argue that concern around questions of worker satisfaction has, where it has occurred, arisen out of the profit imperative and has thus been restricted in practice. Despite fine theoretical concern for worker satisfaction the practice of many companies has arisen out of different concerns. At the least worker satisfaction has taken a secondary place to issues of profitability and managerial control. Cf. N.Bogomolova, (1973); D.Birchall, (1975).

In February 1976 the Department of Employment published a survey which revealed that, in terms of 'working days lost per 1,000 employees', establishments employing over one thousand employees have the far greater number of stoppages and days lost[1]. Their survey in November of that year revealed that although only an average of just over two percent of all manufacturing establishments had any industrial stoppages in 1971-73 the percentage for the large establishments was as high as an annual average of almost nineteen percent[2].

Of companies occupied during that same period - 1971-73 - those employing over two thousand workers made up over fifty-five percent of the total. These companies, however, experienced sixty-two percent of the occupations which occurred in the period[3]. At the least, twenty-four occupied companies are known to have experienced seventy-six or more industrial strikes over these years: of these the large companies comprised twenty-one (87½%) and accounted for ninety-six percent of the strikes[4]. Adding a further dimension, fifty-four occupied companies also experienced political strikes at their establishments. Thirty of these (55½%) were in the large category and accounted for more than sixty percent of the nearly two hundred political strikes[5].

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1. Reviewed by E.Wigham, The TIMES, 26th Feb., 1976.

2. Department of Employment Gazette, Nov.,1976, Vol. LXXXIV, No.11, pp.1219-24.

3. Comparable figures for 1,000 employees as the base line is respectively 63% of occupied companies experiencing 68½% of all occupations.

4. The figures remain the same if we use 1,000 employees as the base line.

5. For a base line of 1,000 employees the respective figures are 33 (61%) and 66%.

   It may be argued that political strikes do not indicate bad (internal) industrial relations. The high number, however, does suggest a willingness of some workers to take such action where in a "good" company one might have expected workers to be hesitant about such action.

Many of the companies experiencing occupations within this period (and over the longer 1971-75 period) have already had a considerable amount written about their bad industrial relations situations. Companies such as GEC[1], with nine occupations, five strikes and over seven political strikes to its credit in 1971-73 alone; Ford's[2], with at least two occupations and fourteen strikes and political strikes; British Leyland[3], with no fewer than two occupations and thirty-nine strikes and political strikes; Plessey[4], with a total of ten occupations, strikes and political strikes, and Lucas[5], with thirteen, and so on[6].

Regardless of size those companies experiencing occupations in 1971-73 were among the very few in the country to experience any industrial unrest at all, and that speaks much of their industrial relations situation. The Department of Employment survey[7] showed that of all establishments in manufacturing industry less than six percent had any strikes at all over the three years 1971-73. Manufacturing establishments with two or more stoppages in the period were even fewer; only 0.9% had

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1. Cf. CIS Report, No.12, 1973; G.Chadwick, 1970; Newens, 1970, and chapter 5 of this work.

2. Cf. CIS Report, No.20, 1978; H.Beynon, 1973; J.Mathews, 1972; A.Nash, 1976.

3. Cf. CIS Report, No.5, 1974; Turner, Clack and Roberts, 1967; J.Fryer, 'The Sunday Times', 7th December, 1975; D.Whitfield, 'The Morning Star', 1st September, 1975; K.Graves, 'The Morning Star', 25th.Aug.'75.

4. Cf. P.Foot, 'Socialist Worker', 4th Oct.1975; A.Milligan, 'The Morning Star', 10th December 1971, and 29th October 1971.

5. Cf. CIS Report, No.12, 1975; 'New Scientist', 3rd July 1975, pp.10-12; D.Elliot, 'Peace News', 15th August, 1975; D. and R.Elliot, 'Voice Newspaper', October 1975.

6. Cf. CIS Report, No.10, 1974 (Courtaulds); A.Sampson, 1973 (ITT); P.Avis, 'The Morning Star', 20th March 1974 (Giltspur Investments); R.Smith and D.Sawbridge, 1975 (Parsons); M.Prior, 'The Morning Star', 4th April, 1975 (Imperial Typewriters).

7. D of E Gazette, op cit, November 1976.

two stoppages, 0.6% had between three and six stoppages, and only 0.1% had seven or more stoppages. The figures for the occupied companies show that only a minority - twenty-five companies (28%) - experienced no more than one industrial dispute, i.e., an occupation. Seven (8%) had two disputes, forty-eight (53%) had three to six disputes, and ten (11%) had seven or more. Thus it is likely that occupied companies' establishments were among the tiniest of minorities to have had industrial unrest beyond one dispute.

Case Studies.

The handling of redundancy situations: In many ways the losing of one's job is the most traumatic event that can happen in a person's working life. By that token the handling of such a situation needs to be done very skillfully if anger, fear and depression are to be avoided or minimised. The Redundancy Payments Act, 1965 aimed to at least defuse some of the elements of fear but this has been seriously weakened by the advent of high unemployment. Beyond this personal element the Act had hoped to defuse industrial conflict over this issue but a crucial problem has lain outside of the Act's provisions, namely with management decision making and subsequent handling of decisions made. A recent study has claimed, rather cautiously, that "some employers have been led to treat the whole affair of redundancy more precisely and carefully" since the Act's introduction[1]. This may be the case but the "some" referred to did not include companies experiencing occupations. In every case the workforce leadership complained of unfair treatment. This fell into two major categories; firstly, many of the decisions behind the redundancies were not seen as fair or for valid reasons, and secondly, the way the actual redundancy situation was then handled was not seen as fair.

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1. Parker et al, op cit, 1971, p.13. My emphasis, AJM.

Leadgate Engineering: On July 1st 1969 the Leicester based Stibbe company began operations at their new Leadgate factory in Consett, North West Durham. For opening in this "development area" the company received thirty thousand pounds in regional employment grants and forty-four thousands in operational grants over the next three years[1]. The company was thriving and by 1972 was rated in the 'TIMES Top 1000 British Companies'. By June of that year it was employing nearly two-and-a-half thousand people; three hundred at the Leadgate factory. Using government aided grants new machinery worth three thousand pounds was installed at that factory, and the company publically announced that its development was a success story. One week later, on June 30th, the Leadgate factory was closed.

The workforce responded by staging a sit-in which was a remarkable event for that part of the country. The factory itself was under the leadership of trade unionists to the right of the movement. Fred Carlyon, the convener, for example, had once used his influence to get a local trade union militant removed from his union and sacked from his job.

"I've made enemies, when as a union man, among my own people. I got a Communist's (union) card took off him: I got his job took off him. He was causing unneccessary trouble in the works" (2).

Carlyon was part of the traditional right-wing trade unionism of Consett where anti-communist and anti-militant trade unionism reign. Even the local Steel works which, as the town's major employer, was under closure threat did not have an 'action committee' though there was a prolification of such organisations throughout Britain's Steel industry at this time[3].

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1. 'The Morning Star', 7th July, 1972.

2. Interview with Carlyon, October 1976.

3. Cf. Ursell, 1976.

The major organisational exception in the town was the local trades council which had only come under left wing leadership weeks before. In fact, one of their first major actions was to set up an "Action Committee Against Unemployment" to assist the Leadgate workers who were now giving something of a militant lead to the area's workers.

The main factors which drove the Leadgate workers 'over the edge' included the fact that no consultations what-so-ever took place over the redundancies, no advanced warning of the closure was given - the workers were given days' notice and the full-time union official was not even informed, the factory was being closed after barely meeting the minimum operating period after which grants need not be paid back, and on top of everything else new machinery was bought only, apparently, to be shifted to the company's Leicester factory a few days later.

As Carlyon was to express it,

"We were all very bitter when the announcement was made. The men were called to a meeting in the canteen and told that they were going to lose their jobs; it was the first they knew." (1)

They left that meeting "gasping with shock and indignation"[2],

"But we just couldn't sit there and cry. We held a meeting and the next morning we put a lock on the gate and organised a sit-in. There were men at the factory 24 hours a day" (3).

The focus of the workers' anger is revealed in the fact that their first intention of the sit-in was primarily aimed at preventing the removal of the new machinery. They knew that with it went their jobs but they also saw it as a symbol of what the company had done in moving to Consett. Now when asked if he was a militant Carlyon was to reply,

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1. The Newcastle 'Evening Chronicle', 15th December 1972; interview with Carlyon, October 1975.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

"The way some people say it, militancy is not a compliment. If by militant you mean a person who stands up for his rights, then I'm a militant"(1).

Baynard Press: The situation at this small, central London, printing establishment echoes that of Leadgate. The establishment was owned by Reed International which was at the time ranked among the top twenty companies in Britain. However, they were in the process of going through a series of closures: immediately prior to the Baynard closure they closed down Odhams Press, Fleetway Printers, Cornwall Press, Temple Press and Fisher Bookbinders. Three further factories were to be sold off, including Baynard Press, to property developers. The three hundred workers were given only one week's notice of closure. In addition, their shop floor leadership were unconvinced that the company's closure programme was warranted.

Unlike Leadgate workers these workers had a history of relative militancy and had been among the earliest supporters of the Briant Colour Printing work-in. They quickly responded to the closure threat - part in anger, part drawing from experience - by staging a sit-in. Interestingly, as if to underline their doubts about company closures, after only twenty-four hours the company conceeded and withdrew the closure notices.

Linpac: This Liverpool factory began under the ownership of the Reid-Medway group. As is usual in these cases the company was sold off - to Linpac of Featherstone - without any reference to, or consultation with, the workforce. On the transfer the new company informed the workforce that they were going to close down for three months in order to re-equip and re-employ on a selective basis. The plan, in fact, was

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1. The Newcastle 'Evening Chronicle', 15th December 1972.

to reduce the number employed and mainly by sacking all the women workers. Re-employment was also designed to achieve other aims. The management informed the workers that they could not guarantee that existing conditions of employment would be maintained. Angry, the workers sat-in to prevent sackings and win assurances that working conditions would be maintained.

Dawson and Barfos: For the period 1971/72 this company was ranked as Britain's 860th largest. Within that same year it was to face two occupations at its factories. The first took place at the Gorton (Manchester) works in January 1972 when management attempted to close it down. The second occurred just five months later at the unmilitant Thetford (Norfolk) works, and again over redundancies. The company, without consultation, began by announcing that there would be thirty-five redundancies. The situation was made worse by the relatively short notice given[1]. At this point the unions intervened and after discussions the company agreed to reduce the redundancies to a total of sixteen. The agreement was hardly fresh, however, when, without warning, consultation or reason, it was announced that the number of redundancies was to be increased to twenty-eight. It was at this point that the occupation began.

Once again a seemingly unmilitant group of workers, based in an unmilitant environment, reacted sharply against what they saw as unreasonable action. A reflection of the feelings of the workers at how they had been treated is further revealed in an incident in which scuffles occurred when a manager - allowed in to inspect the works -

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1. At the same time 100 redundancies were announced at another of the company's factories.

attempted to tear down a notice declaring that the factory was under the control of supervisory and clerical workers[1].

Extrusion Machines: The occupation began at this Runcorn (Cheshire) factory after the workers had been faced with an ultimatum that they had to accept a new working agreement. When the workers refused the management responded by ordering them to collect their cards because the factory was being closed. This kind of tactic is not too untypical but there are increasing signs that it is leading to the type of response embarked upon by the Extrusion workers.

Allis Chalmers: This company was rated as the country's 873rd largest when, in January 1972, it was in the throes of closing down its factory in Mold (Flintshire). No warning of closure was given beyond a few days' notice and there was no consultation. This was not surprising in a factory where industrial relations practice has been described as being "poor" prior to the closure announcement[2]. The workers, however, were far from convinced that there was a sound reason for closing their factory so they embarked upon a sit-in. As with Baynard Press their case seems to have been proven by the fact that, after only seventeen days of occupation, the closure was rescinded. Four years later it was still open employing roughly the same number of workers. It must surely be questioned that if financial reasons alone had forced the company to make the closure announcement then no occupation could have forced it to keep it open; at least not for such a long period.

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1. 'The Morning Star', 3rd May 1972.

2. Questionnaire return from Hugh Hughes, convenor at Allis Chalmers.

The handling of other workplace problems: Two classic cases.

Within the bad industrial relations' situations of many of the occupied companies there were some extremely bad cases. While such cases were untypical most of the others were not exactly good situations.

Bainbridge (Manufacturing) Ltd: Here was a case of mismanagement in various directions, even to the extent of contravening the law.

Towards the beginning of May 1975 the company collapsed; owing thirty thousand pounds to various people including the workforce who were owed four thousand pounds in wages and holiday money. At this point, fearing the worst, the workers staged a sit-in to ensure that they would get the money owed to them. The action was facilitated by the fact that there was still considerable salable stock on hand in the factory. At this point the thirty women involved were as yet unorganised into a union. The action was quickly called off when the manager gave them assurances that all would be well with the establishment of a new company - 'Two Glo'. In short, with a change of ownership and name the same factory would continue trading. The new company appeared with the former owner, David Bainbridge, as the new managing director and with his wife as part owner. However, within five days of its formation the new company also collapsed, and with it the assurances given to the workforce. Bainbridge at this point appealed to the workers to stay on and complete five-hundred dresses which he claimed would be sold and the money shared with them. The workers felt no reason to trust this situation and seized the factory, along with the dresses, instead.

Settled in for a battle the workers now approached a trade union - the NUGMW - for membership and advice. (They were, in fact, advised

to give up the occupation and take out writs against the company).

In the meantime the company books had been impounded by Social Security officials for non-payment of National Insurance Contributions[1]. The Department of Employment had been called in by the union to investigate the fact that only six of the employees had contracts of employment. The Inland Revenue was, at the same time, looking into the company's tax affairs. The Wages Inspectorate was investigating the fact that the workers had been normally paid only two-thirds of the minimum rate for the industry. The Inspector of Health and Safety had earlier been called in and had ordered improvements and a wiring check, and Health officials were to be called in to investigate the fact that the factory had two sub-standard toilets[2].

Through all this the managing director had expected his workforce to work on for nothing in the hope that they might get back some of the money owed to them.

Coles Cranes (Sunderland): At the other end of the scale (in size of employment only) is the Acrow company under the chairmanship of W.A.de Vigier. Mr.de Vigier rapidly managed to turn a peaceful, non-militant, factory into the battlefield of one of the North East's most militant and longterm industrial disputes of the post-war era.

Up until 1972 the Sunderland factory of Coles Cranes was an old "family" firm owned by the Steel Group.

"If you wanted a safe and steady job in Sunderland you came to work at Coles"(3).

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1. The Bainbridge concern had previously been fined for a similar offence.
2. 'The Northern Echo', 30th May 1975.
3. This was the view expressed by Matty Wake, the works' convenor, at an interview in 1975.

For the man who had led the Coles occupation the company previously had been "progressive and forward looking" and was "one of the finest and happiest companies in the country"[1]. Over the entire post-war period industrial relations had been "good", and there had not been more than one or two isolated strikes. Much of this was reflected in the company labour turnover; described as "embarrasingly low at one percent"[2]. Many of the workers had fifteen to twenty years service with the company.

Trouble began in early 1972 when the Steel Group came under pressure from an asset stripping group which was buying up its shares. In this situation the company turned to the Acrow company to buy them out. Acrow agreed, during the spring, amidst assurances to Sir James Steel[3] that the company would continue the existing business and that all rights of the existing Steel employees would be fully safeguarded[4].

For the first six months things did continue as normal but in November shop stewards were informed, through the local directors, that there was to be an immediate reduction in the workforce: that was the first ever they heard of their new employer. To make matters worse the company stated that redundant workers were to be informed of the decision only one hour after their stewards had been informed and that they had to be off the site by the end of the week - just four days later: ten percent of the workforce was to be affected. Apart from being callous in its severity and approach this decision broke all existing procedures and agreements and contravened both the Redundancy Payments Act

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1. Interview with Matty Wake, 1975.

2. Ibid.

3. The Steel Group President.

4. The statement to this effect was printed in one of the newspapers put out by the occupation workforce leadership. It is reproduced in Mills, (June), 1976a p.36.

and the Contracts of Employment Act[1]. To cap it all the shop stewards were informed that the redundancies were total unnegotiable. Then began the first of a series of twists and turns in de Vigier's decision making. The shop stewards went immediately to London to attempt to get the redundancies delayed for one week while negotiations to place. De Vigier agreed. On their return back to Sunderland, however, they were told by local management that the original decision was to be upheld[2].

Not yet having recovered from this shock the next news to be passed to the workforce, through declarations on the factory notice boards, was that all existing agreements and procedures were to be scrapped[3]. The new procedures and agreements were presented to the shop stewards on the 15th December (1972). These included a plan to re-time the rates in the assembly shop and without any allowance for consultation or trade union appeal in the fixing of new rates; "flexibility of labour" was to be introduced; the number of shop stewards was to be reduced by two-thirds; the composition and number of the union works committee was to be determined by the company; the union convenorship was to be reduced to a part-time post, and shop steward business was to be restricted to the last hour of any day only. Here was a plan which intended not only to deal with internal company affairs but directly with the affairs of trade unions. Not even the Conservative Government's 'Industrial Relations Act' had dared to go so far.

The shop stewards were now told to ratify these changes or be

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1. Both require that a minimum length of notice of between one and four weeks be given depending on length of service.

2. De Vigier was to claim later that the problem lay with local management's interpretation of his decisions.

3. Interviews with Coles Convener, Matty Wake, and the APEX union official - John Creaby - and national official (Horace Green) involved in the dispute.

suspended, and the assembly shop workforce was also threatened with suspension if they failed to accept the new rates. Both the shop stewards and the assembly shop workforce refused and were duly suspended, but the assembly shop workers also refused to accept suspension and worked on: in effect, staging an occupation. The company now threatened to suspend any worker supplying materials or assisting these workers. Eventually some storekeepers and two crane drivers were suspended but they too worked on. Eventually the situation was cooled down through discussions with local management but with the problems merely delayed rather than resolved. Nonetheless the shop stewards had achieved a tactical victory in avoiding being provoked into a strike immediately prior to Christmas[1].

As the workforce stopped work for the Christmas break they knew that a series of management demands awaited their return. Management were insisting, through a public notification, on "the right to employ modern work study methods", to "fix fair and realistic times in the assembly shop" - by which they meant an alteration of the shifts, to do away with demarcation lines and institute "flexibility of labour", to do away with staggered holidays, to institute compulsory overtime working, and to change the whole shop steward structure within the factory.

Some changes had already been made in working conditions. The canteen facilities had been seriously cut back[2].

On the post-Christmas return to work a mass meeting was called by the unions to press forward four demands. These were, firstly,

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1. It was the shop stewards' impression that the management were deliberately attempting to provoke such a strike, and at that time, in order to break the unions. (Interviews with Wake, Creaby and Green.)

2. Previously there had been a choice of four hot meals, hot pies, or sandwiches. The choise was reduced to one hot meal and no pies or sandwiches.

the withdrawal of all notices cancelling existing agreements; secondly, the restoration of all previous agreements, procedures, etc; thirdly, meaningful negotiations on security of employment, and fourthly, no victimisation. The mass meeting went on to agree that failing management acceptance of these points an immediate occupation of the factory would take place. In the event management refused even to discuss the demands and the occupation began. A bitter three month battle followed.

This was not the first time that the Acrow company and its chairman had been involved in such actions. In 1964 the company had taken over Adamson and Hatchett (Cheshire) and proceeded to declare that trade unionism at the factory was unneccessary and that "flexibility of labour" had to be introduced. A nine-day dispute resulted but in this case trade unionism was seriously eroded within that factory.

In 1968 the company took over S.H.Heywood (Reddish) and adopted the same anti-union policies. This time the workers won a three-week strike but in 1971 the factory was closed down only to be re-opened some time later with non-union labour. The story was repeated a third time at Thomas Storey's, another of the company's acquisitions. Here fifty-five workers, including the union convenor, were declared redundant during a period of trade union recruitment within the factory. After a strike the workers were reinstated but four weeks later de Vigier personally sacked the convenor[1].

After the occupation of Coles in Sunderland the workers were eventually persuaded to look into the company files. Some interesting facts were revealed. For instance, it was shown that de Vigier had ordered

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1. Quoted in newspaper produced by Coles occupation leadership. Reproduced in Mills, June,1976, p.37.

local management to make a ten percent cut in the labour force, and that this order had been received days before a meeting with shop stewards at which it was claimed that there were no plans to introduce redundancies. It was also revealed that, despite management charges that redundancies were due to low worker output, production problems lay chiefly with the difficulties of new cranes, the introduction of flow-line production and the transfer of certain workers to other work. In short, behind the scene management were aware that difficulties had arisen out of managerial decisions but in public these were blamed on worker output[1].

A tortuous three month battle ensued with management refusing to talk to the shop stewards and then doing so, with points agreed at meetings and then denied, with meetings called to discuss certain issues and then something else entirely introduced, until finally agreement was reached (and then denied) but with a victorious return to work for the Coles workforce[2].

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1. Interview with Wake, Creaby and Green.

2. At first de Vigier refused to meet the workforce and when he changed his mind (January 19th) he chose a time and place difficult for the shop stewards to meet. He then refused their suggestion for an alternative place. In February the local manager (D.Hassall) held talks with national union officials. Hassall was said to have full powers to settle the dispute and yet said that his decision would be sent on by post. No settlement was reached. At the end of that month a new meeting was held between management and shop stewards and agreement seemed near on a return to the status quo and a phased return to work. The meeting ended after eight hours to resume to a conclusion the following day. Instead the stewards were faced with a management refusal to agree anything but a phased return to work. Even here the management wanted a longer phased return to work. Meanwhile de Vigier, at a meeting in London, agreed to accept the unions' four demands and a mass meeting was held to plan a return to work. The following day local management were denying any acceptance of the four demands. This was followed by an attack by de Vigier on the three leaders of the occupation: this was in the form of a full-page advert in the local press. Writs against these leaders followed.

   After more meetings, which consisted mainly of denials of previous agreements, de Vigier finally agreed to the four demands.

The Acrow company had taken over a company with years of "peaceful and harmonious industrial relations" and had turned it into a militant battlefield. They had taken over a company led by men to the right within their trade unions[1], and put them to the head of North East workers fighting for trade union rights and against redundancy. Company attempts to undermine the occupation failed equally well. When a group of Swiss workers broke into the occupied factory and removed a large crane for export support came in to Coles workers from workers throughout the Acrow group and from dock and railway workers; one result was the establishment of an Acrow combine committee. Support even came from influential international sources[2].

Ironically, given the situation at Coles de Vigier may well have achieved his aims if he had taken it at a much slower pace. This is a point agreed by the convenor,

"If only he had eroded the rights and conditions bit by bit he might well have succeeded, but doing it all in one go just got up the backs of everyone" (3).

Nonetheless, the Acrow company does not appear to have suffered from the experience. The same year in which the occupation took place the company recorded a pre-tax profit of just under six million pounds and by 1975 it had become the largest manufacturer of equipment used in the construction industry[4].

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1. Wake, for example, when interviewed in 1975 was standing for election in the AUEW and his opponent was a candidate of the "Broad Left"; ironically, for this work, his opponent was Norman Temple who led the North Road (Darlington) railway struggle over 1962-66.
2. Charles Levinson, Secretary General of the International Confederation of General Workers wrote to de Vigier asking him to "desist from these irresponsible practices". Cf. Mills, June, 1976, p.38.
3. Interview with Wake.
4. 'The Times', Business News section, 8th September 1975.

A brief survey of other occupation situations.

Bason: After being taken over by an American company eleven redundancies were declared, including all of the factory's shop stewards. Workers suggestions of work-sharing and voluntary redundancies were rejected and it became clear that some element of anti-trade unionism was involved in the sackings. An occupation ensued which was forcibly smashed by thirteen bailiffs and twenty police officers.

Balfour Darwin: The company was taken over by the Edgar Allen group in March 1972 and with assurances that there would be no redundancies; six months later ninety people at the Sheffield factory were sacked. According to management these redundancies were in line with "efficient working within the revised concept"[1]. The workforce wanted none of this "revised concept" and staged an occupation.

F.C.Bloomfield: The occupation of the site worked by this company began when the employer withdrew leaving his workforce redundant: the cause was blamed on 'financial difficulties' but the workers were left with wages owing.

Bowden Cables: Here twelve workers involved in an overtime ban and work-to-rule in connection with a pay dispute were laid off. The workers then occupied the factory. (During the course of the occupation the company issued dismissal notices to office staff not involved in the occupation. These were withdrawn on the basis that these staff accept lay-offs without pay).

Briant Colour Printing: The first of the BCP occupations occurred when the workers were given redundancy notices to take affect

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1. 'The Morning Star' 25th September 1975.

from that same day.

British Leyland: The company had ten years earlier purchased their Hants site for a half-a-million pounds and were now, in August 1972, planning to sell it to the Eaton Corporation and to English and Continental Property for two-and-a-half millions. The new situation was to mean that one-third of the factory's twelve hundred jobs were to be made redundant. The shop stewards were convinced that redundancies were not neccessary and that they were occurring against a background of company gain. When demands for work-sharing were rejected an occupation began.

Sometime later, at the company's Cowley works, another occupation occurred when workers involved in an overtime ban over pay were laid-off.

B.A.C. During a dispute at the company's Weybridge factory in which workers "blacked" certain jobs certain of the workers were suspended. This triggered the occupation.

Peter Brotherhood: An occupation began at this East Anglia factory when the management threatened to withold the pay of twenty engineers unless they resumed normal working.

Bryant: An occupation began at the company's Birmingham (Ringway Priory) site and, later, at one of its Manchester sites when it became clear that a blacklist was being used to prevent the employment of militant trade unionists. At the Birmingham site a militant worker was sacked when it was discovered that he was on the company's blacklist.

Cammell Laird: After a series of disputes, ending with the laying off of one hundred boilermakers, an occupation began with the demand for a Government enquiry into the "mismanagement of the Birkenhead yards"[1]

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1. 'The Morning Star', 2nd September 1975.

Caterpillar: Draughtsmen at the Birtley factory occupied their offices after being suspended, without pay, for attempting to "black" the work of non-union staff and prevent the incursion of company unionism into the factory. At that time Caterpillar, along with other companies, were attempting to destroy the TASS section of the AUEW through the use of a body known as the 'UK APES'[1], and through use of the 'Industrial Relations Act'.

Chesterfield Tube: An occupation occurred following the suspension of workers involved in a work-to-rule over pay.

Henry Boot: The company's site at Coney Street in York was occupied following the sacking of eight workers who had complained about safety conditions.

Crosfield Electronics: The company was taken over by De La Rue who claimed that the move would actually increase job security. Six months later three hundred workers at the North London factory were made redundant, including half of the shop stewards' committee. The company refused to discuss the issue with the joint shop stewards' committee or even to allow the convenor on the site. An occupation ensued and ended when the company took out a writ.

Cubitt: Similar to the Bryant cases, an occupation occurred at the company's Chelsea site when militant workers were sacked.

Camco: An occupation began following the sacking of ten workers for working-to-rule in pursuit of a wage claim.

Educational Audio Visual Inc: Staff pursuing negotiation in regard to an annual pay agreement were met with management refusal to negotiate and were sacked instead.

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1. R.Smith and D.Sawbridge, 1975, discuss the use of this body at the firm of C.A. Parsons in Newcastle.

Ferranti: Five of the company's Manchester factories were occupied in response to a lock-out threat during the engineering pay battle of spring 1972.

L.Gardner and Sons: The factory was occupied following the suspension of three hundred workers for banning piecework during a pay dispute. The remaining workforce had been put on a three-day week. During the occupation the management refused to negotiate with the union and instead introduced "scab" labour into the situation.

The year earlier during a similar dispute the company refused to allow a union meeting on the premises and prevented the workers from leaving the factory to hold the meeting outside.

G.E.C. At the company's Manchester Ruston-Paxman factory an occupation began after workers were told that they would not be paid while they worked-to-rule. This formed one of the engineering pay battle occupations.

The 'Gravesend and Dartford Reporter': Printers occupied their section after being dismissed for refusing to man the presses during a national pay dispute.

G.K.N. The company's James Mills (Salford) factory was occupied during the engineering pay battle when the workers were threatened with a lock-out for working to rule. This action led the occupations in that general Manchester area pay battle.

Gainsborough Cornford: An occupation began here when the union convenor came across secret information, not known even to local management, that the factory was due for closure.

Hawker-Siddelley: A main cause of the occupation at the company's Gloster Saro (Gloucester) factory was stated as anger towards the fact that redundancies were carried out without negotiation or consultation, and that there was no regard for service. For instance, workers with long service, (12 years or more) were included in the sackings.

Hick Hargreaves and Co: In a now familiar pattern an occupation began at this factory after workers, involved in a pay dispute, where informed that they would not be paid while they were working-to-rule.

Kromberg and Schubert: During a policy of non-cooperation with management over planned redundancies the workers were sacked with only fifteen minutes notice. They occupied the factory.

Lovell: As with other leading building firms this one had its Guildford Street (London) site occupied after operating a blacklist and sacking militant workers.

Lucas: This company's Wolverhampton factory was occupied during a pay dispute when the management attempted to sack the workforce and employ non-union labour.

McAlpine: When workers were locked off the firm's Strand (London) site during a dispute over the employment of "lump labour" the action was turned into an occupation.

Mabbutt and Johnson: During two previous pay disputes the firm had sacked twelve workers on one occasion and threatened to close the factory on the other. Now when faced with yet another pay dispute they again employed the tactic of sacking the workers involved but this time they were met with an occupation.

Charles McNeil: The workers here felt compelled to occupy the

factory when the management attempted to remove machinery during their strike over pay.

C.A.Parsons: Workers in the TASS section of AUEW occupied the company's Kent offices in a battle linked with that at Caterpillar; namely, an attempt to prevent the incursion of the UKAPE association into the works. The occupation was preceeded by the sacking of TASS members involved in sanctions against the work of UKAPE members.

E.Peart and Co: This was yet another case of an occupation arising out of management threats to workers working-to-rule during the engineering pay battle.

Aberdare Cables: Not part of the engineering pay battle these engineers nonetheless faced a similar problem of a work-to-rule being countered by a management threat of lock-out. In the event the workers raised their hand and played the now widespread occupation card.

Plessey: An occupation followed management attempts, at the Beeston (Nottingham) works, to lay-off the entire workforce during the course of a pay dispute.

Rolls Royce: At the Ansty (Coventry) factory an occupation began when the company threatened to lay off the entire manual workforce due to a dispute with thirteen internal drivers. The drivers had threatened to withdraw their labour because the company had, without consultation, upgraded nine workers and "upset" the differential in wages between such workers and the internal drivers.

Seiko: When the company sacked one of the workers the rest of the small workforce went on strike and joined a union. The management refused, however, to recognise the union on the grounds that it was not

registered according to the Industrial Relations Act. They also refused to guarantee that all striking workers would be reinstated. At this point the workers regained admission to the works and occupied it.

Strachans Engineering: An occupation began immediately after the workers were informed that the factory was to be permanently closed from that day. They were given one-and-a-half hours notice of redundancy. During the course of the occupation it was revealed that the Special Branch had been operating inside the factory and that John Grist, the firm's chief accountant had been acting as their 'contact man'. The occupation committee went on to call for an inquiry into Special Branch activities[1]. In the end, however, the workers were forcibly evicted from the factory and a security firm was subsequently hired to guard the premises.

Taylor Woodrow: After struggling for ten-and-a-half months to secure trade unionism on the company's Guildford Street (London) hospital site management re-introduced non-union labour. This led to the occupation.

Tillotson Print Co: The four leading shop stewards were sacked for calling a work-to-rule over twenty-six redundancies. They then led their fellow workers into an occupation.

Tress Engineering: During the national engineering workers pay claim battles of 1972 the workers at Tress in Northumberland began a work-to-rule. The management laid them off in response and the workers began the North East's first occupation.

Viking Engineering: Also during the engineering pay battle, this time in Manchester, the workers here staged an occupation when an electrician's shop steward was suspended.

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1. Reported in 'The Sunday Times', Business Section and reproduced in 'The Morning Star' the following week on 15th April 1975.

It would seem that a fairly common problem in occupied factories has been management threats to suspend workers, lay them off, lock them out or sack them. This was the situation at least in sixteen of the cases which occurred during the period. In each case the threat (or action) immediately preceeded the occupation. What appears to have happened is that an already difficult situation was escalated and led to an escalation of worker action.

Another widespread problem - occurring in a minimum of thirteen cases[1] - is that of management attempts to undermine trade union organisation, including the use, in four cases, of "blacklisting". In four redundancy cases the workers were angered to extreme action by the extreme lack of notice given; in three of these cases notice given was in hours. In four other cases the management stepped up disputes by witholding or threatening to withhold wages. In at least three cases take-overs led to redundancy situations which were mishandled even to the extent of following on from assurances that the take-over would not lead to redundancies. In a minimum of two cases the employer's handling of economic affairs brought about a crisis situation leaving the workforces without jobs or wages. In a further seven cases a variety of situations were so badly handled by management as to seriously escalate the situation beyond its original dispute.

Added to these forty-nine cases there are the two 'classic' cases of Coles and Bainbridge and eight redundancy cases[2] along with those refered to in previous chapters[3]. This makes a total of at least sixty-four cases of mishandled/ bad industrial relations situations. Thirty

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1. The number refered to includes other cases not detailed in this section.

2. Of the forty-nine cases, those not detailed include - British Rail Workshop (Swindon), Peter Lind (Liverpool), Mirlees Blackstone (Manchester), L. Scott (Manchester) and Timex (Dundee). Non detailed redundancy cases include RCA(grford Ness) and Sexton and sons (Fakenham).

3. Chapters four and five detail events at Fisher-Bendix, Snow, Propytex, UCS, Plessey (Alex) and the River Don works (Sheffield).

percent of all occupations to occur within 1971-75.

The Government Connection.

To the extent that certain of the occupied companies can be accused of mismanagement then the Government of the day must take a certain degree of blame (or responsibility) also. That is, in regard to those cases where they had a direct interest. This was the case with nationalised industries such as the occupations at British Rail Workshop (Swindon), and at five occupied steel works, including the River Don. The government also had a key or controlling interest in the occupied RCA and Cammell Laird establishments (where four occupations occurred) and where the government had a fifty percent interest; at B.P. (Stroud),with a forty-eight percent interest in the company; and in the case of the British Leyland Company where an eighty-five percent interest was acquired- three occupations have since occurred up until the end of 1975 alone.

Less directly the Government contributed to the occupations at Plessey (Alexandria) in the manner of the sale of the factory, and at UCS and Sealand Hovercraft where they refused to use public funds to save these companies from a liquidity problem. Thus in seventeen occupations involving nine companies the government had some kind of substantial interest or influence.

To say that the government directly played any role in fostering bad industrial relations (or mismanagement of situations which led to occupations) would be far too strong. The links are indirect, but they are links none the less.

The Links: The situation of Plessey and UCS have already been discussed earlier. In the Plessey case the government contribution is

less than clear but in the UCS case the Conservative Party, both in Opposition and in Government, can be seen as playing an important contributory role to the work-in. In a similar way but to a lessor extent the same can be said in regard to the Sealand Hovercraft occupation.

Sealand: The company, on Board of Trade advice, moved to Millom (Cumberland) in 1970. The move along with company plans were approved by the Board of Trade (BOT) and a grant was offered of around one-hundred-and-fifty-nine thousand pounds[1]. The financial assistance was an important factor in encouraging the move.

From 1970 to the end of 1972 the company experienced two major problems. On the one hand, the owners ran out of capital and on the other hand government bodies appeared to be both slow and unwilling to make payments available. In the meantime the government prototype development grant scheme had been dropped and over thirty-two thousand pounds of grant money had expected to be in this form as part of the aid to Sealand[2]. By the end of the year, having only received just under seven-and-a-half thousand pounds of the estimated grant money[3], the owners were desperately pressing the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) for the realisation of the potential grants they felt owed them. The DTI, however, now stated that they would only match further granted aid, pound for pound, against what the owners could come up with. The company was to be forced to prove that they could raise private capital[4].

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1. Of this sum £127,000 was to be operational grants and the rest in the form of prototype development grants.

2. It seems that even as late as the end of 1972 Sealand's owners were unaware that this type of grant had been stopped.

3. Five thousand had been provided for staff training and two thousand four hundred pounds for the first prototype.

4. R.Eglin, 'Slaying the Whitehall Dragon', 'The Sunday Times', 24th Dec.1972.

In the middle of this haggling was the workforce, many of whom had been made redundant four years earlier when the Millom Iron Works was closed down. Faced with a situation of closure in a factory with orders providing work for at least nine months the workers staged a 'work-in'. Not unsurpisingly this began with the full support of the management and staff. Within three weeks the factory had been saved when a consortium of business interests offered to put one-hundred thousand pounds into the company[1]. Now the DTI came forward with much needed capital.

In very different ways a much greater responsibility lies with the government in regard to occupations which occurred at the BSC River Don works and at BLMC plants.

The River Don Works: The heart of the Don works' problem lay in the governments attitude to the future of Steel production in Britain: an attitude debated throughout the country by a multitude of Steel workers, giving rise to a number of 'action committees'. It has been argued that part of the price of entry into the European Economic Community (EEC) was a serious cut back in steel production to the quotas set by the EEC authorities. As a result certain steel works were closed to meet political objectives[2]. Certainly, some of the leading action committee activists saw the closures in this way and this made resistance to closures even more compelling. This was the case at the River Don works where the workers' leaders did not believe that there was a sound economic case for closing the works. The fact that it was conceived as a political decision helped to exascerbate the situation.

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1. The consortium included Vickers Shipbuilders, James Fisher and Son, Ferranti and an anonymous Yorkshire businessman.

2. Cf. G.D.M.Ursell, 1976.

British Leyland: While the particulars of each occupation were not the direct responsibility of the government the structuring of the industrial relations system certainly was. The government, a Labour administration at that, acquired the company (to the extent of 85%) when it was going through a critical period both in terms of finance and in industrial unrest.

In mid-1975 the government injected seven hundred million pounds into the company and yet resisted the call from various trade unions to fully nationalise the company. While some effort was made to change the industrial relations system (with some level of worker participation) management were still left to declare massive redundancies[1] and to use threats of closure in cases where the workers were accused of not co-operating with company policy. In fact, on more than one occasion the government itself threatened to pull out its financial backing if the unions did not follow a certain course of action. Old, and bad management practices, it seems have been allowed to continue such as, for example, at the Southall (AEC) factory where an occupation occurred after workers involved in a pay dispute were threatened with lock-out.

Cammell Laird: As has been pointed out earlier, boilermakers in 1975 felt compelled to occupy the shipyard and call for an inquiry into mismanagement and yet all that happened was that an injunction was served on fifty of the occupiers, two full-time boilermaker officials and every shop steward included, forbidding them to enter the yards.

B.P.: The actual occupation at Stroud can not be laid at the door

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1. Worker participation ended at questions of whether redundancies should occur or not.

of government but their investment in the company does reveal something of the extent to which they have been prepared to leave current decision making and industrial relations practice unchanged[1].

Although owning, through the Bank of England, forty-eight percent of BP shares and having the right to nominate two Board members with powers of veto this right have never been exercised. This policy of 'non-interference' was continued when the Labour Government, again through the Bank of England, acquired Burma Oil's twenty percent share in BP. With a sixty-eight percent interest in the company the government pledged not to use its majority shareholding "to interfere in the company's commercial affairs"[2].

In the same way the government of the day has failed to intervene in the industrial affairs of companies in which it has a holding except to back up management decisions.

It will not, of course, be surprising to find that the government has acted in the ways it has done. It can of course be argued that the significance of its role in occupations is minimal in most cases and surely very indirect. That is not the point. What is being identified is the role of government (Conservative and Labour) in industrial capitalism. They are as indirect a part of the development of occupations as capitalism itself but they are definitely less impartial and more directly responsible for the political-decision making that they make.

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1. That is not to forget that an Industrial Relations Act was introduced and later repealed. What is being argued is that the bases of capitalist decision making was left in tact.

2. G.Nuttall, 'The Morning Star', 17th September 1975. The quote is taken from the 1975 Annual Report of BP.

Finally, it needs to be said that there was some difference between the Conservative and the Labour Governments in regard to the question of occupations. While both lend responsibility in certain cases for a brief period of time - late 1974 - the Labour Government did lend its support to three occupations to aid them in the establishment of worker co-operatives[1]. However, as is discussed later, the period was all too brief. The decisions were made against the advice of influential sections of the government and within the Cabinet and they may have cost leftist Minister, Tony Benn, his job at the Industry Ministry. After his departure government involvement in the worker co-operative became as much a hindrance as a help.

The Legal Connection.

Beyond any considerations of management action or government involvement one or two cases of local police action have played a direct part in encouraging the transformation of a strike into an occupation. This was the case at Hawker-Siddelley's Lostock (Bolton) plant, at Walmsley's Wigan plant and at L.Gardner and Sons. In all three cases the police warned that strikers' picket lines were "causing an obstruction" or needed to "be drastically reduced" in number. Fearing arrests the strikers occupied their factories instead.

In another case, at Cammell Laird's, police action had an indirect but substantial influence. Early in 1975 a strike at the yard encountered trouble when police attempted to cut back a picket line. Violence ensued and eleven pickets were arrested. In the September of that year boilermakers occupied their yard and made reference to the result of other forms of action as being partly responsible for their

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1. See chapter 9.

particular course of action.

In a somewhat less direct sense it can be argued that some of the Manchester pay occupations had been influenced by the trouble over picketing at the long running, and violent, Roberts Arundel strike in Stockport in 1970-71. One of those arrested at that time was Bill Anten the convenor of the Hawker-Siddelley factory at Woodford that was occupied in April of 1972.

Beyond any possible influence on the decision to occupy in the first place legal action has been used in a number of cases to attempt to end such actions. This has been so in at least twelve cases, but with varying success. Namely, at Bason; Briant Colour Printing; Coles Cranes; Crosfield Electronics; 'The Gravesend and Dartford Reporter'; Imperial Typewriters; Lovell; Massey-Ferguson; Propytex, Sharston Engineering; Scott's Bakery and at Strachan Engineering.

In five cases writs were issued against the occupation leaders but successfully defied, (Briants, Coles Cranes, Lovell[1], Propytex and Sharston[2]). In the case of 'The Gravesend and Dartford Report' the police were called in but left after they were satisfied that there was no damage done. But in the remaining six cases writs were successfully

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1. At Lovell the High Court judge gave permission for a court order to be served (on a trade unionist occupying a crane) by pinning on the bottom of the machine and shouting the contents through a load hailer. It was ignored and the occupation and accompanying strike continued to a successful conclusion.

2. In this case the Chancery Court, at Preston, granted a writ for eviction on the grounds that the workers had been sacked and were therefore not entitled to be on the premises. (The employer had in fact sacked them as a tactical move during a pay dispute). In making his decision the judge, Sir Thomas Burgess, stated that, "This is a small firm and it would be possible to get them out but if it were a big factory you might want 2,000 police with tear gas. I want to be sure that any order I might make can be enforced". ('The Morning Star, 1st April 1972).
Ironically, the decision failed in its enforcement with Strachans being fortified by a mass picket of engineering workers.

enforced[1].

Summary.

Industrial relations practice has played a vital part in the enactment of a substantial number of occupations, i.e., bad management handling of situations. So few enterprises experienced industrial stoppages over the early 1970s that this throws a light on the situation at those places which were occupied. Further, the fact that a majority of occupied companies experienced more than one type of industrial action in the period puts them among the most industrially "strife torn" in the country.

In at least thirty percent of all occupied enterprises a direct link is revealed between bad management handling of a situation and the occupation which followed.

Within the general picture it was the large and financially powerful companies which experienced a proportionally greater incidence and number of occupations, strikes and political strikes. In short, occupations occurred where there was already evidence of a relatively high degree of industrial unrest within the recent period.

As might be expected, in a capitalist society government policy - backed by force of law - lends itself to the maintenance of the existing structure of industrial decision making. The actions of both Conservative and Labour Governments over the period have not done much to dispell this view. Infact, Conservative Government action played a role in encouraging occupations at the UCS and River Don works, and Labour Government policy was a contributory factor to the continuing unrest

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1. At Strachans, Scott's bakery, and a second Bason's occupation violence ensued in the eviction of occupiers. At Scott's, for example, 60 security guards with eight dogs broke their way in to evict 17 bakers. At Bason's thirty-three bailiffs and police used hammers and crowbars to smash their way into a section guarded by five workers.

(including occupations) within British Leyland.

The law has been used on several occassions to attempt to evict workers from occupations and in at least three cases police interpretation of the law has played an influential role in workers' preference for occupation action as opposed to a strike.

Finally, the trend of government maintenance of the status quo and the legal means at its disposal was reinforced in 1977 with the passing into law of the 'Criminal Trespass Law'. Introduced by a Labour Government, this new law seriously undermines the legal position of trade unionists considering the use of the occupation tactic[1].

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1. Cf. 'Workplace Occupations and the Law', by the Campaign against a criminal trespass law, 1978.

CHAPTER 9

LEADERSHIP AND THE A.U.E.W: TOWARDS A SOCIOLOGY OF MILITANT TRADE UNIONISM.

"(In) a number of . . . occupations . . . AUEW membership involvement and leadership far outweighed that of any other union. That union has been involved in more occupations than any other union and in a majority of cases its shop stewards played a leading role.
(An) explanation lies in the fact that . . .(it) both encourages and reflects shopfloor opinion at all levels . . . (and has) a membership more strongly organised at shop floor level, with established traditions and experience of influence and participation, and being better placed to respond to events".

Introduction.

This chapter sets out to examine the role of the engineering (AUEW) union in the development of the occupation tactic. Attention is drawn to this union because it has been found to have played an overwhelming role both in a majority of occupations and in many of the key events of the period from the mid-1960s.

Given the role of the AUEW the question is then posed as to why and how it was able to feature as it did. The answer appears to lie in the structure and decision making process of the union and its traditions of militancy. It is further argued that the initiation of the early occupations, especially as they arose at shop floor level, required a lay leadership not only experienced in industrial action but organisationally capable of acting quickly. In short, an organisation which assists the role of the shop steward in taking quick decisions and which allows the steward relative ease to act upon them. Ideally, in terms of British trade unions, the AUEW fitted this bill.

The Engineers in Battle.

The AUEW and its predecessors - primarily the AEU and DATA - have dominated

the events of the period described throughout this work.

Engineering union members and organisations played a key role in the various battles against wage freezes and anti-trade union legislation. Engineering union members formed the backbone of the early political strikes and later the organisation officially gave a lead in this field[1]. Along with the TGWU the AUEW was a prime target of the National Industrial Relations Court. During the arrest of the Pentonville Five it was a resolution from the AUEW which led to the TUC General Council's general strike threat. At the 1975 TUC Congress it was the union's TASS section which seconded the resolution stating TUC policy against planned legislation to curb occupation activity.

Engineering union members also played a significant role in the development of worker occupations (see table 13). Organisationally the DATA union was the first, in the post-war era, to be prepared to support the use of the occupation tactic; this was in regard to the one planned by GEC-EE workers in 1969. At the UCS the new AUEW leadership very quickly made the work-in action official within a week. This pattern was followed in several other cases. At River Don the AUEW District Committee played a key role in the initiation of action there.

In terms of local leadership the idea of an occupation at the GEC-EE factories originated with Frank Johnson, the local AEF District Secretary[2]. At the UCS the idea of a work-in came from engineering steward Sammy Barr and the organisational (Jim Airlie) and propaganda (Jimmy Reid) leadership came from two other AUEW members. Engineering

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1. During the December 8th, 1970, strike DATA and CEU were among a handful of unions to give official backing. The AEF at that time facilitated support by its members by allowing them a free hand.

2. Johnson was to the right of his union. Cf. G.Chadwick, 1970.

TABLE 13

THE AUEW AND OCCUPATIONS LEADERSHIP, 1971 - 75.

TRADE UNION.	No. OF OCCUPATIONS INVOLVED.*	
AUEW (Eng.)	134	(112)
(TASS)		(21)
TGWU	23	(21)
(NUVB)		(2)
ASTMS	21	
EETPU	18	
APEX	14	
UCATT	9	
NUGMW	8	
NUSMW	7	
ASBSBSW	5	
SOGAT	4 each	
NATSOPA		
NGA		
SLADE	3	
NULJ	2 each	
NUFTO		
AMS	1 each	
NUS		
ASTW		
SGA		
NUDBTW		
NUTGW		
NUFLAT		
B.U.		
[illegible]		
NUSMW		
ACTT		
[illegible]		

* The table indicates how many times a particular union was refered to in regard to different occupations. Information is taken mainly from press reports - MORNING STAR/THE TIMES - and supplemented by articles, interviews and questionnaires.

It is likely that several more unions have been involved beyond the 27 refered to here and it is equally likely that the reporting of several unions has been understated: in the Manchester Engineering cases the action was taken by the regional [illegible] with more than 22 unions. Nonetheless in reporting and recording events those playing leading roles are far more likely to be picked out than those who are not. The table thus is likely a better indication that the AUEW played a leading role in a large number of cases.

Union shop stewards were also to the fore at Plessey (Alexandria) and Snow Engineering. Thus, of the first four pioneering occupations, beginning with the UCS, engineering union shop stewards played leading and initiating parts in occupations.

In the progression of the tactic's use into pay disputes it was AUEW lay and district officials, particularly in the Manchester area, who played a vital role in the widespread nature of occupations.

In the development of the tactic into the North East region of England again the members of the AUEW were predominant. Shop stewards of that union led the first four of the region's occupations and in total played leading roles in eight of the first twelve of such actions.

The occupation which led the way was at Tress Engineering where not only did the workers draw inspiration from fellow engineers in occupation in Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield but were also involved in the same national AUEW claim.

At the region's second occupation - Leadgate - Fred Carlyon, the convenor, described the role of the AUEW as follows,

"The AUEW have been involved in events . . . over the period . . . and are in fact still the predominant factor" (1)

At Coles Cranes (Sunderland) twelve unions were involved in the third of the region's occupations, but one full-time official of APEX has since stated that at the plant the AUEW were the strongest body, both in numerical strength and in having "the most able leadership".

"You had a very astute convenor in Matty Wake, who was also District President of the AUEW and obviously, therefore, very aware of the conflict situation . . . in the broader sense. Therefore he was able to grasp various things (and) within days of the occupation things came very quickly together; the thing gelled" (2).

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1. Letter from Carlyon, 2nd September 1975. Reproduced in Mills, June, 1976. My emphasis, AJM.
2. Interview with John Creaby. Reproduced in Mills, June, 1976.

On the first evening of the Coles occupation the Wear District Committee of the AUEW met and gave full backing to it. Within a week the occupation was made official by the executive committee of the union. During the course of events John Tocher, the divisional organiser for the Union's North West region, provided valuable assistance in the form of information on Acrow's activities in plants within his region[1].

Membership of the AUEW, thus, has been a significant factor in development and spread of workplace occupations[2]. From a number of standpoints it can be called a militant trade union. It would be a thesis in itself, however, to attempt to explain why it has been so. This chapter attempts a compromise in suggesting the direction in which an understanding of the problem might go.

Militancy Hypothesis: Those factors underlying the actions involving the AUEW have been looked at throughout the earlier part of this work. Many other unions faced the same set of problems and yet did not respond in the same way. A central problem lies in the character and

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1. Tocher also played a key role in the development of occupations in the Manchester area in the spring of 1972.

2. It would be entirely wrong to leave the impression that the AUEW alone had members playing leading roles in occupations. Members of the TGWU, for example, played leading roles in some of the hardest fought occupations. TGWU shop stewards were to the fore in several early cases; River Don (Oct'71), Fisher Bendix (Jan '72), Linpac (Mar '72), BLMC (Cowley) April '72, Lovell (May '72), Westinghouse (May '72),etc. They also played substantial roles in 15 other occupations, including BLMC-TET (Aug '72), Lucas, Liverpool (Oct '72), Triumph Meriden (Oct '73), and Imperial Typewriters (Feb '75).
White collar workers have also played important roles. APEX was the first union to recognise the UCS and Coles (Sunderland) occupations. ASTMS was the first to advance the tactic beyond redundancy issues and barring the AUEW and TGWU has been involved in the greatest number of occupations.

organisation of the union itself and it is to these factors that the chapter is directed. An analysis of the AUEW will possibly help to provide an understanding of some of the essential features of union militancy[1].

The main ingrediants of the AUEW's militancy appears to lie in three areas of organisational and social-psychological factors: firstly, the union has a long and well established system of shop floor organisation; secondly, the Union's structure facilitates speedy action and allows the predominance of shop floor views in union policy making; and thirdly, the Union contains a large number of workers who are confident, capable and willing to provide leadership.

Shop floor organisation.

The existance of shop floor organisation is a vital prerequisite for militant trade unionism[2]. It is the nature of the labour market and the labour contract which have given rise to trade unionism because it is at this point that the contradictions of capital/labour relations arise. By that token, it is at this point - at the shop floor level - that trade unionism is likely to have its greatest need of expression.

If a trade union has an involved and lengthy process of negotiation, with equally drawn out procedures for union response and action, then its members will be less likely to be able to deal with the very basic and immediate problems as they arise.

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1. The term militancy is being attached here both to the actions of AUEW members in specific cases and to the organisation's policies and responses, relative to other unions, over the period in question.

2. This thesis agrees with the perspective put forward by V.L.Allen, (1966) in regard to the basis of trade unionism and the nature of the labour market in this process, and agrees with R.Blackburn (1967) in regard to the role played by the labour contract in engendering unionism and industrial conflict.

In such cases a union's capacity to respond to events will be lacking, regardless of intent. As Allen (1966) states, "militancy" refers to those union actions which exploit to the full "whatever power or influence is possessed . . . in a prompt, speedy manner"[1]. Assuming that all unions have the aim of protecting and improving their members' interests then the method and speed of achieving this is the crucial element in militancy. Added to this a union should also be capable and able to speedily reflect the views of its members on a specific issue in a given time. But militancy implies something more,

> "If unions are to maximise their returns they must uninhibitedly play the market by demanding what they think the market will bear and refusing to accept terms which are less than that. By doing this they would satisfy the criteria for militancy" (2).

Militancy is thus a combination of quick action, reflective of member needs and interests as far as is possible, and a preparedness to go to whatever lengths to achieve effective results. Organisationally shopfloor representation meets a major part of the first two elements. Research into the third element might usefully be directed at leadership factors arising out of the unique combination of shopfloor organisation and independence which has existed within the AUEW over many decades.

Shop stewardships: The Big Four Unions: The AUEW, TGWU, ETPTU and the NUGMW accounted for just over half of the total number of British shop stewards in existence in the early 1960s[3].

Within these four unions shop stewardships appear to have had the greatest increase in the engineering union[4]. Along with the electricians'

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1. p.19
2. V.L.Allen (1966) p.24
3. W.E.J.McCarthy, 1966.
4. Ibid, p.5.

union it appears to be the best organised (at least) in the engineering industry[1] and has one of the longest records of shop steward recognition and militancy of any British trade union[2].

In many respects the AUEW is the best organised at shop floor level of any trade union in Britain, has one of the longest histories in this regard, and has consistently been one of the most militant unions. However, in terms of union militancy those unions with the most shop stewards can be roughly divided into militant (AUEW, TGWU) and non-militant (EEPTU, NUGMW) unions[3]. Thus, the existence of stewardships alone provides no full explanation of militancy. An important key lies in the extent to which shop floor organisation has autonomy over plant-level negotiations, and the extent to which it is able to influence crucial areas of union policy making.

Union Structure and Rules and the Functioning of the shop steward: Recent studies have thrown considerable light on the fact that the engineering union structure provides the most flexible and democratic of any British union[4].

The A.U.E.W: The shop steward in this union has, by far, the

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1. Cf. A.I.Marsh, E.O.Evans and P.Garcia, 1971. With, respectively, 4.3% and 41% of all union members in the engineering industry these two unions provided 6.2%/54.4% of all convenors; and 6%/68.1% of secretaries of joint shop steward committees. They also provided a low membership/steward ratio of 28:1 & 30:1; a high membership spread across the industry (with members in 67%/93% of all engineering establishments); and a high percentage of closed shop arrangements.

2. Cf. J.B.Jefferys, 1945.

3. Militancy is here related to the policies pursued by the union organisation at an official level.

4. Cf. R.Martin, 1968; J.D.Edelstein and M.Warner, 1975; I.Boraston, H.Clegg and M.Rimmer, 1975. Much of the comparative detail for this section is taken from the latter work of Boraston et al.

greatest range of representational scope within the workplace[1]. This fact arises out of the rules and procedures of the union itself. Beyond this structural factors of organisational size have an added bearing on the situation. Within the AUEW steward independence from full-time officials appears to grow with size of plant, whereas in the other three unions the positive effects of large plant size are to some extent circumvented by a lack of confidence among some sections and by the role that full-time officers insist on playing[2]. In workplaces with less than three hundred employees full-time officers play a more substantial role in the negotiation process although relatively less so in the case of the AUEW. Many small workplace organisations of the AUEW in fact "managed for themselves"[3] while the largest, in the same AUEW district, "were almost entirely independent of the district secretary, calling him in to transact formal business only"[4].

District committees are important bodies within the AUEW: they have a large degree of autonomy and are empowered to call strike action. The body usually covers a relatively small number of members and branches[5] and is thus not too remote from grass roots opinion. In addition it is made up of delegates elected by the branches and with a section, of three to six delegates, elected directly by a quarterly meeting of the district's shop stewards. Where there is a full-time secretary that person is elected by ballot of all the district's branches and elected persons have to

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1. Cf. Boraston et al, 1975. They contrast the AUEW with the EEPTU, TGWU, NUGMW and 10 other unions.
2. Ibid. They add that, shop stewards are severely constrained in any collective bargaining function where "tight" agreements and conditions exist - negotiated at higher levels by the full-time officials.
3. Ibid, p.39.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid, Chapter 2 and Edelstein and Warner, 1975, chapter 9. The latter point out that the mean number of branches per district in 1960 was 8.7 but that 30% of the districts were single branch districts.

periodically submit themselves for re-election. The overwhelming composition of these district committees consists of delegates who also hold the position in their workplace of shop steward, senior steward or convenor. Meetings of district committees take place weekly or fortnightly, depending on the district, thus facilitating a quick consideration of a local dispute situation. At Coles Cranes (Sunderland), for example, this meant that the occupation could be backed within days of occurring.

The highest policy making body of the union is composed entirely of lay members who will almost entirely be shop stewards at their place of work. This body is called the National Committee and meets annually and as and when the situation dictates.

The decisions of the National Committee are implemented by a seven man Executive Committee, presided over by the Union President and attended by the General Secretary. All these are full-time posts and are subject to periodic re-election. The decisions of the Executive Committee can be overruled by a final appeals committee composed of lay members and elected by the National Committee.

While the system is not without its problems the decision making process within the AUEW is highly representative of shop floor opinion relative to any other British union.

The T.G.W.U: With the election of Jack Jones as General Secretary of the union in late 1960s much more emphasis was put on the role of the shop steward and moves were made to set up district committees which would be, to some extent, similar to those of the AUEW. At national level a Shop Steward Delegate Conference was established to enable stewards to ratify national agreements made by national officers.

The move towards a more grass roots representational approach appears to have had an impact on the manifestation of militancy at official union level. Nonetheless a number of features remain which act to curtail (or potentially so) grass roots expression through official channels. The picture of shop floor representation is a sporadic one.

In various ways their strength at plant level resembles that of the AUEW where strong organisation exists within a large plant, but even here the full-time officers are able to exert a greater influence than either the district secretary or regional officer can within the AUEW.

"If the stewards usually went their own way in the end, it was only after full discussion" (1).

District committees of the TGWU do apparently have the effect of supporting the stewards in the smaller plants and have contributed to the building up of shop floor organisation that has been weak. And they are made up of senior stewards from throughout the district. However, in terms of power and autonomy their freedom of action falls,

"short of those possessed by the Engineers' district committees" (2).

The meetings are quarterly and full-time officers have a large degree of control especially over information:

"consequently shop stewards and convenors were more dependent on information"(3)

At higher levels the Executive Council is one of the few bodies with elected members subject to periodic re-election. This body appoints the union's full-time officers. The General Secretaryship is elective, on

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1. Boraston et al, 1975, p.51.
2. Ibid, p.45.
3. Ibid, pp.51-52.

a ballot of the entire membership, but is not re-elective; the post is held until the incumbent retires.

Plant size and union tradition play some role in adding to the negotiating strength of some sections of the union's shop stewardships. This is the case in some large engineering plants, in steel works' branches, and on the docks[1].

Thus, within the TGWU there are a number of avenues for the expression of shop floor needs but these exist alongside several factors which can (and do) serve to inhibit such expression.

The N.U.G.M.W.:[2] In a number of ways the full-time officer predominates in this union. At the highest policy making level there is the Annual Congress consisting of delegates elected within the districts. Full-time officers along with full-time branch secretaries can (and do) play an influential role at these congresses. The Union's governing body is the General Council which consists of ten regional secretaries and fourteen lay members. The General Council's executive body is the National Executive and it consists of five of the regional secretaries and five of the lay officers. However, within the category "lay" officer

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1. A study by Boraston et al, 1975 of a situation prior to Jones' election throws some light on the democratisation process opened up. They found a case of a full-time (appointed) branch secretary being previously responsible as the sole negotiator for more than one thousand dockers. Following a protracted strike, the election of Jack Jones, and a recommendation by the Devlin Committee advocating the institution of shopfloor organisation, a shop stewards' committee was established. It began to operate with a procedure which gave them wide powers to negotiate on rates of pay, hours of work, overtime, piecework and manning scales. Boraston et al conclude that this case indicates that,

   "A workplace organisation which is capable of running its own affairs may stay in a subordinate position for years if both union and managers co-operate to keep it there", (p.54).

2. I am refering to the situation prior to 1976. By 1975 there were calls at the Union's Annual Conference for more power to be given to lay officials of the Union.

full-time branch secretaries (or "administrators") can be included. Thus the highest policy making bodies consist of a large number of full-time officials.

Elections within the NUGMW are a rare thing. The General Secretary is elected (through the branches) but then holds the post for life[1]. District officerships are appointed positions (at district level) and subject to approval by the Governing Council. National officers must stand for election at some point in their life but having done so once they need not do so again. Once elected they are deemed to have been elected a union officer for all time and can thus be appointed to any other and higher officer position barring that of General Secretary[2]. At branch level full-time administrators may be appointed by the Union's leading bodies.

To a large extent the shop stewards' function in the NUGMW is not as significant in the negotiating process as stewards in the TGWU and AUEW. A sizeable number are not involved in negotiations of any, but a minor, kind[3]. There is evidence that things are different to some extent

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1. It has not been unknown for the job to continue beyond "life", i.e., beyond the official retirement age. In 1946 Charles Dukes was due to retire from the post but instead the General Council decided to "retain his services in an advisory capacity for such a period as (they) consider neccessary", (NUGMW Annual Conference Report, 1946). Interestingly a sizeable minority opposed this move. The voting records 170 for the move and 92 against. Duke's services were retained.

2. The Union's rule 30 (clause 3) allows that if a candidate for office has already contested an election in which they had been successful no additional contest was neccessary (Cf.NUGMW Annual Conference Report, 1945, pp.143-44). The rule was quoted at that time in connection with the "election" of 3 National Officers. Three candidates, having satisfied the rule, were appointed to the posts, including Jack Cooper who later became the General Secretary.

3. Boraston et al, 1975, chapter 4.

in large plants[1] but even so full-time officials spend more time in large plant negotiations than at the smaller ones[2].

By and large, shopfloor expression in the NUGMW is handled through the official machinery of the Union and despite the existence of shopfloor organisation. Formal union decision-making avenues are greatly dominated by those employed in a full-time capacity.

The E.E.P.T.U: This Union was once the most militant in Britain but since the early 1960s it has consistently been to the forefront of the non- and anti-militant unions. Its historical development in the post-war era provides a useful contrast in itself.

Prior to 1961 the leading body of the Union[3] was the Executive Committee (EC) composed of lay members elected, by ballot of members, for a period of two years, and the Annual Delegate Conference (ADC) composed of lay delegates elected from their respective districts. The relationship between these two bodies is not entirely clear. Allen (1954) has stated that,

"(T)he EC has control of the union but the Annual Delegate Conference considers policy", (4).

Theoretically this could be interpreted to mean that the EC could choose to ignore ADC policy considerations if it so wished. The extent to which this did occur is open to debate. Executive Committee members were all subject to periodic re-election as was the General Secretary[5].

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1. That is, those employing 500 workers or more.
2. Brown and Terry (1977), unpublished paper.
3. The Union at this point was the old ETU - Electrical Trades Union.
4. p.74.
5. The General Secretary has to stand for re-election after a 5 year period.

Defiance of ADC policies could have endangered re-election prospects[1].

At area or district level committees existed which operated in a similar fashion to AEU district committees albeit without the same extent of influence and autonomy.

Shopfloor organisational activity was assisted by the Union rules which ensured that strikes were official without the prior necessity of going through a number of long procedures. Further, shopfloor organisation of all kinds was officially encouraged: the ETU pioneered industry-wide organisation and supported a whole number of joint shop stewards committees. In 1960 when the organisation of joint shop steward committees was being frown upon by the TUC General Council, and with industry-wide committees receiving condemnation, it was the ETU leaders who were speaking out(at TUC Conference)in favour of such bodies.

Since the war the Union had grown five-fold, its shop steward organisation had been strengthened and it had a militant industrial policy which, prior to 1961, had increased membership wages by a greater amount than that achieved by any other union[2].

The New Leadership and Union Changes. In 1961 leading members of the Union were found guilty, by a Court of Law, of operating 'undemocratic' practices. Within a very short time those men who brought the Court action were to close off many of the basic democratic channels

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1. Hughes(1967) appears to have no doubts that the EC did act undemocratically. However, he seems to have ignored the existance of the Union's Appeals Committee, consisting of rank-and-file members, which had the power to overturn EC decisions.
   Hughes makes reference to the ETU ballot-rigging trial of the early 1960s in such a way as to deem the ETU leaders of the time guilty of previous undemocratic practice by retrospective association.

2. At that time the Union achieved a then post-war record £2 week pay rise. Cf. A.Hutt (1975), p.206.

which had previously existed to encourage and allow shopfloor expression. Communists were banned from holding office from 1965 onwards;removing the eligibility of many cadres to play a full part in their union. Strike procedures have been centred in the Union's leadership and certain combine and industry-wide committees have been frowned upon and even disbanded. Area committees have been formally disbanded and replaced with 'industrial advisory committees' with very limited powers and distanced from the branches. Quarterly meetings of engineering industry shop stewards are now very much under the control of a full-time officer of the Union.

At the highest level of the Union the Appeals' Committee has been ended and the Executive Committee is now "judge, jury and appeals body"[1]. The EC would seem to be the leading body of the Union nowadays. Several of the powers of the ADC have been curtailed and it now meets biennially. The EC now consists of full-time officers and the policy of electing national officers has been replaced by EC appointments. The diversified organisational and political functions of the President, General Secretary and Assistant General Secretary have all been constrained into the single post of General Secretary.

It is not difficult to agree that,

"(The) administration of the union is far more centralised than that of the Engineers" (2).

One thing that does appear to have continued has been the strong shop floor organisation. This does not apply to combines of stewards and even where there does exist a strong organisation many shop stewards are restricted in their activities by tightly drawn up plant agreements between the Union officials and management.

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1. 'Struggle for democracy in electricians-plumbers union', article in The Morning Star, 25th Oct.1971.

2. Boraston et al, 1975, p.81.

Union democracy: Defining union democracy to mean the extent to which a formal organisational structure facilitates member ability to act and to be heard then the AUEW can be claimed to be one of the most democratic trade unions in Britain. Ironically much of the theoretical debate around the theme of union democracy has been directed elsewhere than a union's formal structure[1]; its rules, constitution, representational bodies and its participatory processes. Yet, it is surely the ability of union members to take (relatively) quick action at the point of conflict (normally at shop floor level) without hindrance and with some encouragement from union rules, procedures and officials, that is the nub of union democracy.

Some early debate chose to centre on the question of attendance at union branches as being of prime importance in judging a union's level of democracy (cf.J.Goldstein, 1952; B.C.Roberts, 1956)[2]. This was an unnecessarily narrow scope of interest and ignored the increasingly important growth of a devolution of union affairs to shop floor organisation within a number of unions.

Other areas of debate have continued along the pessimistic theme of enquiry began by Michels prior to the First World-War[3]. This line of enquiry, already giving up any great hope for membership participation, directs its attention to the question of union "factionalism", (cf. S.M.Lipset, M.A.Trow and J.S.Coleman, 1956; R.Martin, 1968; J.D. Edelstein and M.Warner, 1975). The problems with this approach have been taken up elsewhere (cf. A.Gouldner, 1964; J.Hughes, 1967; G.D.M.Ursell and A.J.Mills, 1978): it has been accused of being one-sidedly pessimistic

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1. I do not intend here to go over ground already well argued elsewhere - cf. G.D.M.Ursell and A.J.Mills, 1978.

2. This question has been discussed at length in A.J.Mills, 1977.

3. R.Michels, 1949.

- leaving out of account the democratic aspirations and internal action of members; of underestimating the influence of human action on organisational structures - overemphasising the deterministic power of structures on human freedom; and of failing to examine the actual nature of factions.

Thus, for the very wrong reasons, Martin (1968) reaches the conclusion that the AEU is a much more democratic union than the contrasted NUR, and Edelstein and Warner (1975) hold that the AUEW - along with the NUM - is far more democratic than a number of contrasted British and US trade unions. The existence and relative equity of strength of factions is held up, in both studies, to symbolise evidence of union democracy. Hughes (1967) has already cautioned that the actual nature of existing union factions needs to be examined and that in so doing it will become clear that certain factions, if given a chance of power, could destroy established democratic practices[1].

A more fruitful direction of study then is to look at which groups or factions have a commitment to democratic unionism in so far as it is concerned to enhance the ability of shop floor representation to influence policy and to take relatively immediate and unfettered action at the point of dispute. Historically the evidence, in various cases, indicates that the 'left' (or 'broad left') groupings in the trade union movement are more committed to this perspective[2]. This was the case in the ETU until the early 1960s where it was the right-wing who reversed

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1. Hughes had in mind the activities of the Communist Party of Gt.Britain.

2. In terms of British trade union history factions have been made up of 'left' groupings and 'right' groupings. The left, in post-war times, has often enough had Communist Party leadership and has included Labour Party "lefts" and 'non-aligned' militants. By that token the right have tended to be anti-communist groupings often made up of a Catholic faction and including Labour Party right-wingers.

many of the democratic trends[1]. Within the NUGMW democratic structures have failed to materialise under continual right-wing leadership and in the absence of a significant left opposition. In the TGWU democracy was opened up with the election of Jack Jones as General Secretary. Jones, pledged to strengthen shop floor opinion and organisation within the union, was elected with broad left backing. Prior to 1969 the AEU underwent a decade of dimunution of democratic expression under the leadership of President Lord Carron[2]. This was altered by the election of Hugh Scanlon and a number of other left shifts in union leadership at lower levels of the organisation.

The importance of union factions, thus, would appear to lie in the fact that certain factions can open up a union towards greater democracy or prevent its permanent erosion. The strongest left-wing faction within any British trade union is that which exists within the AUEW. Barring the ETU prior to the early 1960s the AUEW's "broad left" has held this position for two or three decades of the post-war era. This may go some way to explain the continuance of democratic structures within that union[3].

Union Leadership.

In terms of the availability of leadership skills there is evidence that Engineering Union members contrast favourably with many (if not most) other trade unions - including the ETPTU, TGWU and the NUGMW[4]. Certainly

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1. From the transcript of the 'ballot rigging' trial and in discussion with ETU activists of that time it would appear that the ballot rigging was the fault of individuals and in no way formed part of the left faction's strategy for holding onto power.

2. On numerous occassions Carron is known to have cast the vote of his entire union in a direction favoured by him but in conflict to a majority of his union delegation members.

3. R.Martin (1968) makes some attempt at explaining the factors which help to maintain union democracy but very few of his categories are valid. Relevant categories include "pattern of membership distribution" and "industrial environment". K.Ingham (1974) appears to support the latter.

4. Boraston et al, 1975.

there is an indication that AUEW members played leading roles in a greater number of worker occupations than any other body of trade unionists: this was the situation even in a number of cases where other unions were well organised, e.g., Coles Cranes (Sunderland).

Union contests: The evidence is scant but there is an indication that the Engineering Union is better able than many to find members to fill shop stewardships and branch secretaryships. A study in 1961 showed that AEU shop stewards were more subjected to a re-election process (88% of those interviewed) and faced more opposition (54% being opposed at their first election and 28% finding opposition at subsequent elections). This incidence of opposition was greater than for TGWU and NUGMW stewards[1].

The later study of Marsh et al (1971) indicates that in the engineering industry AEF members tend to have a disproportionately greater number of shop stewards than other unions: with forty-one percent of all engineering industry trade union membership they have over fifty-seven percent of all the industry's shop stewardships. Likewise they have a greatly disproportionate number of members occupying convenorships (54.4%) and joint shop steward chairman/secretaryships (68.1%).

The recent work of Boraston et al (1975) points out that the AUEW appears to have a great deal more experienced shop stewards than most of the other unions (in particular the TGWU and the NUGMW) studied. A possible reason, they state, lies in the fact that these other unions have a far greater number of women[2] and immigrant workers, cover industries in which trade unionism has been traditionally weak, and cover

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1. H.A.Clegg, A.J.Killick and R.Adams, 1961. Of TGWU stewards interviewed 73% were subject to re-election as against 78% of NUGMW stewards. Respectively 36% and 39% faced opposition at their first election and 27% and 4% at subsequent elections, (p.164).
2. Women members of the respective unions constitutued, in the period 1971-75, 12.88% of the AUEW, 15.44% of the TGWU and 32.28% of the NUGMW.

occupations in which the development of stewardships is traditionally difficult by fact of geography (e.g., in road haulage concerns).

The Engineering Union has also had a very high number of candidates for high office (President/General Secretary) over its history. Comparing the union with contests for similar posts in twenty-two other unions (in comparible years between 1919 and 1954) there were more candidates in the Engineering Union on five occasions [1] and they had the second most on the remaining three occassions[2].

Ideological leadership: In terms of support for industrial action of a political nature over the period 1969-74 AUEW membership provided the backbone of the series of strikes which occurred. One reason to explain this lies in the fact that there are a large number of ideologically left activists among the Union's membership. The Communist Party, for instance, has more members of this union than any other (see table 14). In this case members are generally among the skilled category of AUEW membership which suggests that they served an apprenticeship within the industry. This indicates that such members became Communists as a result of some crucial factors within the industry and the union rather than that, as Communists, they were attracted to seek work in the engineering industry.

As Table 14 shows a disproportionate share of Communist Party members are AUEW members. This probably contributes to the Union's militancy but it is just as likely that certain features within the Union and the industry contribute to the creation of ideologically left militants.

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1. In 1919 the union post was contested by 22 candidates, with the nearest rival being 8 candidates in an NUM election. In 1921 the two unions respectively contrasted 32 to 9. Similar gaps were evidenced in the other years. In 1943 the AEU was second to the NSP in a contrast with a further 11 union contests.

2. Details compiled from Edelstein and Warner, 1975, pp.217 and 273 and V.L.Allen, 1954, pp.303-4.

TABLE 14

COMMUNISTS AND TRADE UNION MEMBERSHIP, 1971-75.

Percentage of CPGB membership	Trade union.	Percentage of CPGB membership	Industry and profession.
18%	AUEW	20%	Engineering, Metal, Shipbuilding (a).
9%	TGWU	9%	Teaching
6% each	ASTMS ETPTU UCATT	8% each	Building, Transport and Rail.
4% each	APEX NALGO NUM	6%	Clerical
3% each	ATTI NUT	5%	Mining
2% each	NUGMW NUR USDAW	4% each	Professional and Technical.(b) Public employees. Print and publishing
1 - 2% each	NUJ SOGAT TSSA	3%	Power
Under 1%*	ASBSBSW ASLEF BISAKTA NGA NUPE NUS POEU UPW	2% each	Distribution. Social Services. Chemicals.
		1%	Post Office
		Under 1%	Textiles and Clothing

* The unions in this category make up a total of 5% of CPGB membership.

(a) This was the category used by the CPGB in 1971. In 1975 only the term "Engineering" is used. No "Metal" or "Shipbuilding" categories appeared at this time.

(b) It is difficult to assess what is included under this category, but in 1975 the figure of 22 delegates in this category accords exactly with the number of ASTMS delegates.

** Compiled from CPGB "NATIONAL CONGRESS CREDENTIAL REPORTS" 1971-75.

The figures in the table are rounded up and leave out of account groupings of undescribed unions - "other teaching union" (2%), "other clerical" (1%), "other mining" (under 1%) and "other unions" (3%).

Of the remaining CPGB members approximately 9% were housewives, unemployed, retired, self-employed and students.

The table only provides a rough guide to CPGB members' union affiliations but experience indicates that it is likely to be a reasonably accurate one - see chapter 8.

One main reason appears to lie in the widespread existance and tradition of the Union's shop stewardships - allied to the formal structure of the Union. As Martin (1968) puts it,

"In the AEU . . . the shop-stewards system provides a training ground for opposition members as well as an independent power base, whilst the Lay District Committees provide a means for lay members to acquire wide experience and to spread their name".

To a greater extent than most unions the Engineering Union has continually provided an extensive training ground for lay members that has led, over the years, to a building up of a sizeable number of experienced people.

Educational and craft considerations: A final and vital factor in the character of the membership of the Engineering Union seems to lie in the fact that an important core of the membership are fully skilled. Various studies of union activism have pointed to the fact that skilled workers tend to be more active than other workers[1], and several of these have pointed to the fact that leadership within the Engineering Union consists of a relatively high number of the better skilled and better educated members[2]. The study by Clegg et al (1961) found that Engineering Union officials were generally better educated than those of other unions,

"Part of the explanation . . . may be that virtually all of them . . . are drawn from skilled occupations" (3).

In short, skilled workers tend to be more active than unskilled and semi-skilled workers and, more than most TUC affiliated unions, the AUEW has a large core of such workers and is better able to provide . . . avenues for encouraging and training them.

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1. Cf. W.Spinrad, 1960; Perline and .Lorenz, 1970; Clegg et al, 1961; Martin, 1968; Edelstein and Warner, 1975.

2. Cf. The three latter studies refered to above.

3. p.49. See table 15.

TABLE 15.

THE EDUCATIONAL ORIGINS OF TRADE UNION OFFICERS.

(A)

Type of Union	Type of School Attended			
	Elementary	Technical	Grammar	Other
Skilled	82%	3%	12%	3%
Ex-Craft*	71%	-	24%	5%
Single-Industry	77%	6%	6%	11%
General	72%	5%	18%	5%
White-collar	37%	-	50%	13%
Mean Average	74%	4%	15%	7%

THE PREVIOUS OCCUPATION OF FULL-TIME UNION OFFICERS.

(B)

Type of Union.	Previous occupational level					
	Un-skilled	Semi-skilled	skilled	clerical	Supervis. & Admin.	Other
Skilled	-	3%	94%	-	-	3%
Ex-Craft*	-	-	95%	-	-	5%
Single-Industry	5%	34%	41%	8%	1%	11%
General	5%	48%	14%	18%	8%	7%
Mean Average	3%	28%	47%	11%	4%	7%

Table compiled, respectively, from Clegg, Killick and Adams (1961), p.48 and p.50.

*This category refers largely to the then AEU.

Summary.

In the post-war history of British worker occupations the Engineering Union holds a leading place. More than any other union its activists played a leading role. This was true both numerically and historically. Not only do AUEW activists appear to have been involved in more occupations than other trade unionists but they played key roles in the pioneering actions (concerning redundancy in 1971 and wages in 1972). Regionally it appears that AUEW militants played key roles in introducing the tactic: this was

true in Scotland, Yorkshire, Wales, the North East, Merseyside, Oxfordshire, Cumberland, Derbyshire, Buckinghamshire, Surrey, Hantshire, and Kent.

Reasons for the leadership qualities and committment to militancy within the Union appear to hinge on one or two important factors. A main consideration is that the Union structure and procedures allows speed of action at shop floor level and allows rank-and-file opinion to influence the highest levels of the Union. In using these procedures over many decades the Union has been able to build up a pool of experienced leadership. Further, the organisational and political climate within the Union has strengthened leadership tendencies. To begin with there have continually existed large numbers of skilled workers concerned to be involved in Union affairs to some degree[1]. Many have been encouraged to become involved because of the fact that the Union has had a two party factional system for some years. The factions have been roughly equal in strength and have both had their share of power over the years. On the one side, factional activism has been ensured and strengthened by the fact that a large number of Communist Party members hold AUEW union cards. In all the AUEW has provided its members with both avenues and rationale for becoming active and in the process many ideologically aware activists have come out of the process.

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1. That is not to say that lesser skilled members are not active within the Union. They do have a traditional prejudice against them however in that rarely, if ever, will a lesser skilled member win a position of high union office. Still today the skilled tool maker has a greater chance of high office than the (dilutee) capstan-lathe operator.

CHAPTER 10

LEADERSHIP AND THE C.P.G.B: THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY IN POST-WAR INDUSTRIAL CONFLICT.

"(T)he initiation of both political strikes and workplace occupations required an ideologically left-wing leadership and one which was embodied in the strength of the trade union movement - shop floor organisation in particular. More than any other left-wing organisation the C.P.G.B. filled that bill at that time. The CPGB played the key role in almost all of the main actions of the period".

Introduction.

This chapter seeks to gain an understanding of the role played by 'ideological' leadership in the development and spread of the worker occupations. That is, to examine the importance of the left-activist trade unionist to the development of certain action. It is argued that such leadership does seem to have played an important role not only in regard to worker occupations but in the development of political strikes also. In particular Communist Party members appear to have played a more substantial role in the character of the industrial conflict that developed from the late 1960s.

Given the significance of these political activists the chapter seeks to broaden the study to the role of ideological leadership in industrial conflict generally - centering on the affairs of the Communist Party. It is argued that this Party has been one of the most influential elements in the direction of British trade union policy (and in the developments of industrial conflict) in the post-war era.

Worker Occupations and Ideological Leadership.

Prior to the 1970s the major British trade union weapon was the strike. Strikes undoubtedly provide a challenge to managerial prerogatives and in some cases 'raise the consciousness' of those involved about the nature

of capitalism. However, the nature of the "challenge" is to a large extent limited by the structural context of the 'strike': this, in turn, has limited the scope of "consciousness raising". The 'strike' involves a withdrawal of labour designed to win concessions within existing productive relationships of ownership and control. Thus a major practical and ideological stress is on the temporary prevention of the exercise of employer rights over labour to a result in which the payment of labour is altered but not the "relations of production"[1]. This stress strongly undermines those elements of a strike situation which throw up anti-capitalist ideas. It also helps to facilitate the potential use of the 'strike' among large sections of British workers. The strike weapon, nonetheless, does contain a significant level of challenge to capital rights and managerial control to prevent its ready use even among those with a long held grievance. In situations of hesitance a crucial factor in determining that action shall be taken is the question of leadership.

In earlier chapters it has been shown that those sections of workers which became involved in workplace occupations were largely drawn from the ranks of the more 'strike prone' trade unionists. Even so it is still arguably a big step to have taken and will have required leadership qualities of a certain kind. To begin with, the workers involved will need to have been convinced that the situation warranted action of a more radical nature. The fact that they were convinced relied on the fact that those in the positions of lay leadership had little hesitation, by virtue of their political beliefs, in challenging existing property rights at whatever level possible. In short, what is being argued here is that

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1. Cf. R.Hyman, 1972; P. Anderson, 1967; V.L.Allen, 1966

worker occupations (at least initially) involved a much clearer perspective of challenge to capital. Much more the stress was on challenging managerial decision making (over disposal of labour and of capital) and not always clearly to an end result which maintained particular property relationships. Indeed many of the leaders of workplace occupations have declared that part of the aims of the action has been to raise a sharper challenge to capitalism. Thus, in certain ways, the advent of the workplace occupation represents a qualitatively new form of industrial action - in type, in ideological undertones, and in possible outcomes[1]. As such, actions of this type required a type of leadership able to see the effectiveness of this form of struggle, being somehow committed to challenging capitalism, and being prepared to consider more radical outcomes as end results of industrial actions. As chapter two indicated where-ever industrial disputes have developed into much more politically challenging forms left activists have usually been at the fore of the initiation[2]. To a considerable extent this has also been true in the development of workplace occupations in Britain.

The Pioneering Occupations: The early - "pioneering" - occupations certainly owed much to the existance of left leadership as did the spread of the tactic into the field of wage negotiations. At Briant Colour Printing most of the lay leadership were of, or to the left of, the Labour Party:

> "Briants' workers were in the main overwhelmingly inclined to Socialism in as much as this would mean being supporters of Labour. There were, ofcourse, people who supported the more revolutionary sorts of socialism as opposed to the social reformism" (3).

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1. The UCS workers, for instance, could see one possible outcome in the form of nationalisation. The Fisher-Bendix, Scottish Express and Triumph Meriden workers sought co-operative ownership.
2. Lenin, 1961a, 1961b; Lozovsky, 1972; Marx & Engels, 1967 predicted, and indeed encouraged this.
3. Interview with Bill Freeman.

The convener, Bill Freeman, counted himself amoung the "revolutionary" left. Although comming from a family of Communist Party members Freeman remained a member of the Labour Party until close to the end of the second Briant's occupation in 1972. Freeman was to state at the time of joining,

"Why have I joined the Communist Party? Do you know what the real question ought to be? Why have I taken such a long time about it?"

"I thought I could do more to change policies in the trade union and labour movement by not being a Communist Party member. But I eventually came to the conclusion that if you're going to get anywhere you can't do it on a false basis - you've got to come right out with what you really believe in" (1).

In addition to Freeman two other leading members of the Joint shop stewards organisation joined the Communist Party and another the Workers Revolutionary Party in the course of the second occupation.

At the U.C.S. there was a much clearer 'revolutionary' leadership. The concept of the 'work-in' was put forward by Communist Sammy Barr who was to play a leading role on the Co-ordinating Committee along with Communists Jimmy Reid and Jim Arlie. Airlie and Reid, ofcourse, played the key roles of chief organiser and spokesman of the work-in. Nor can it be argued that these were simply CP militants acting outside the knowledge and dictates of their party[2]. Reid, for instance, was a member of the CP's highest body - the Political Committee, and along with Airlie was a member of the Party's most important (Scottish) district committee[3]. Of the four yards making up the UCS Communist Party members held three of the convenorships and convenorship of the Co-ordinating Committee itself. The overall strength of the CP within the UCS is further revealed in the fact that

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1. 'The Morning Star', 12th April 1973.

2. There is no evidence that the 'work-in' idea originated at any official meeting of the CPGB but considerable evidence that the issue was discussed and member activities co-ordinated once the decision had been taken.

3. Reid was no ordinary member. He was a leading element of the CP's Scottish District Committee and prior to working in shipbuilding he was its full time Secretary. And, before that, he spent many years as the General Secretary of the CP's youth organisation - the Young Communist League (YCL).

the apprentices were under YCL leadership[1] and that both a branch of the CP existed within the yards as well as a YCL "industrial group"[2]. In the course of the work-in the CP branch doubled its membership - from fifty to a hundred.

The situation was very much the same at the River Don works in Sheffield. Here the importance of the Communist Party needs to be understood at two levels - within the works itself and within the district leadership of the local AUEW. For some considerable time now the CPGB have been a powerful influence within the Sheffield District of the AUEW[3]. This is reflected in the great proportion of full-time convenors who are CPGB members and in membership of the District Committee. There is certainly evidence that the idea of the River Don "work-on" originated at a meeting of the AUEW District Committee[4]. Inside the works several of the leading shop stewards were CPGB members including Cliff Wright, the chairman of the joint shop stewards' committee and Tony Hope, the convenor for TASS shop stewards. The Don convenor has since described the leadership thus,

"The leaders of the Don campaign were a mixture of communist and labour party members. If there were members of any other parties among the leadership I wasn't aware of it", (5).

Following the Don work-on decision came the sit-in at Snow Engineering and here the convenor described himself as being sympathetic to the views of the Communist Party[6].

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1. Again these were no ordinary YCLers. Tam Brotherston was a member of the YCL's biggest district committee (Scotland) and was soon to be its secretary and a member of the Executive Committee. So too with Alan Ritchie who became an E.C. member.

2. This was only one of three such YCL groups in the whole of Britain. It had a membership of about 30 at its peak.

3. Clegg et al, op cit, 1961, for example, refer to the power of the CPGB within the Sheffield AEU.

4. Information from the research officer for the CPGB "Steel Committee" and 'Morning Telegraph' (Sheffield), 7th October, 1971.

5. Questionnaire return, sic.

6. Questionnaire return.

The Manchester Pay Occupations: In the spread of the tactic into other issues (i.e. non-redundancy issues) the CPGB and other "lefts" played an overwhelming role. In early 1972 the AUEW Executive Committee was a fine balance of left and right, with the right having the edge. The left's main strength rested in the powerful North West Region which returned to the E.C. Labour-left Bob Wright. At divisional level Communist John Tocher held the vital post of Secretary of the CSEU (No.29 District), and at district level a whole series of important posts were held by Communists and their sympathisers. Communists held the post of district secretary or president in Stockport, Oldham, Bury, Manchester. In fact, when the occupations began to spread throughout the region the local engineering employers' association complained that the occupations were "Communist inspired" and organised by a "Communist-dominated district committee and union officials"[1].

In no other AUEW region were the Communists and their "Broad Left" so well organised and in no other region did any widespread occupations take place. At local, plant, level individual Communists and Sympathisers played a vital initiating role but undoubtedly the official backing and co-ordination helped to widen the tactic's use throughout the region.

The Regions: Even looking at a regional level it was left activists which are to be found pioneering the tactic in their area. Scotland and Sheffield have already been detailed. In Liverpool a leadership of left Labour and Communists brought the tactic to the area in the form of the Fisher-Bendix occupation. The first of the Birmingham occupations was initiated by the Communist dominated "Building Workers' Charter". In Norfolk

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1. 'The Morning Star', 29th April, 1972.

the first occupation (Sexton's) was initiated by someone describing their views as being closest to the International Socialism Group, while in Oxfordshire the ground was broken by a combination of CP, Labour lefts and SLL[1] shop stewards with an occupation at British Leyland's Cowley works. In the North East of England the region's first occupation occurred at Tress Engineering and would not have done so but for the intervention of an active Communist Party member. Although not even a shop steward Communist Alex McFadden was able to give leadership to the situation and encourage occupation action rather than a strike. McFadden shortly afterwards became a shop steward, then soon after that deputy convenor, and eventually convenor, and district committee member. This was the only AUEW occupation in that region's engineering pay battle[2].

Communist Party and other left militants can be found playing a leading role in most of the many other occupations to occur over the period[3].

The Role of the CPGB in modern post-war industrial actions.

In order to appreciate the important role of the Communist Party in the development of workplace occupations it is important to see their overall role in the development of the situation of which the occupations were a part. The arguement here is at two levels. It is being claimed that the CPGB played an important role in the development of workplace occupations, but that is not to say that this was a direct result of any preconceived CPGB plan. Nor is it to say, for that reason, that the CPGB alone were

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1. This refers to the Socialist Labour League; later renamed the Workers' Revolutionary Party.

2. Information on Tress was gained through personal and political association with McFadden.

3. Communist leadership can be found at Bryant sites (Manchester) 1972, Lovell (London) 1972, McNeil (Glasgow) 1972, McAlpine (London) 1973, Ford (Dagenham) 1973 & '75, Tillotson (Liverpool) 1973, Hawker-Siddelly (Bolton) 1973, Adwest (Reading) 1973, Scottish Daily Express 1974, Rolls Royce (Ansty)1975, Propytex (Hartlepool) 1974, Hawker-Siddelly (Woodford) 1974, Corah (Wales) 1975, Cammell Laird (Liverpool) 1975, Sumlock Anita (National) 1975, Balfour Darwin (Sheffield) 1975.

were directly responsible. They would be the first to deny that they alone played any initiating role. More importantly it was the CPGB that played the crucial role in creating certain militant conditions out of which the occupations came, and when such a situation did arise it was the CPGB that took the initiative where ever possible in pressing the situation ever further.

To a much lesser degree, it was Communist Party militants that gave the lead to the development of shop steward committees in the late 1950s and early 1960s and it was they that led the defence of such bodies against attack and criticism from the TUC General Council and certain trade union officials[1].

In a much more significant fashion the Communist Party played the key role in opening up the counter offensive against government attempts at new, restrictive, trade union legislation. The heart of the campaigning out of which came the calls for political strikes was a body called the Liaision Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions (LCDTU). In organisation and political direction this body was essentially a Communist Party front. But, not only did the CPGB provide the organisational apparatus for the development of political strikes and campaigning work of the late 1960s/early '70s it also provided leadership in many of the linked individual actions of the period. It is not co-incidental that two of the arrested Pentonville Five, and Des Warren of the Shrewsbury Three were CPGB militants, for example. Detailed accounts could be provided for many of the events of the period which indicate the vital role of the CPGB and its activists - these would include the organising of engineering worker support that culminated in the "Battle of Saltley Gates"; the significance of Communist leadership in the official and unofficial miners'

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1. See T.U.C. Annual Congress Report, 1960 - discussion on General Council Report on shop floor organisation. It is CPGB militants from the ETU that speak out in favour of extending shop floor organisation.

strikes of the period; and the importance of the Building Workers' Charter Group in the calling of an official national builders' strike in 1972.

How the CPGB operates in industry[1].

The importance and nature of the role of the CPGB in industrial affairs has variously been underemphasised and distorted to a point where it is difficult to believe that they should be taken seriously. Critics seem to fall into two basic camps - those who see the Party as a band of foreign dominated infiltraters and those who see them as an ineffectual bunch of non-revolutionary do-gooders. These points will be taken up later. Interestingly its supporters, for good reason, have been loathe to defend the Party's role for fear of giving too much away and those who have left the CP have a recurring habit of putting a sinister slant on activities they were once involved in[2]. However, a reasonably straight account of the affairs of the CPGB does reveal in which way they have indeed been able to play a vital influencing role on trade union policy.

Theory as a guide to action: The Party aims bind members to the cause of "working for the attainment of socialism" - "guided by the theory and practice of Marxism-Leninism"[3]. To this ultimate end the Party have evolved a strategy detailed in its "British Road to Socialism" document. This document envisages the winning of political power[4] through a process of "parliamentary and extra-parliamentary struggle".

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1. I am presenting here an ideal type case. The theoretical position of the Party naturally varied in application according to members involved and was going through a period of revision towards the middle of this period. Likewise its organisational structures were not always as perfectly structured as suggested here.

2. As one such ex-member I write of a Party and Party activities which I respected but which I no longer am convinced exists.

3. Taken from CPGB Aims & Constitution, 1969, p.3.

4. This is to be initially in the form of a Parliamentary majority of Labour and Communist M.P.s.

A central part of this "extra-parliamentary" struggle refers to activity within the industrial sphere. In short, industrial struggle was to form the backbone of the Party's strategy for winning socialism.

This perspective imposes a number of particular requirements on CPGB industrial militants. The creation of a "transformed"(Socialist)[1] Parliament is to be achieved through strength drawn from a "left trade union movement"[2] and through a process in which great concessions will have been achieved at industrial level (the advancement of closed shop agreements, for example) and at parliamentary level (the establishment of picketing rights, etc); the power of the employers will have been eroded by this time through having been forced to yield concession after concession[3]. The nub of the relationship of parliamentary to extra-parliamentary struggle is that industrial unrest and consequent gains will open up a situation where the left can gain electorally and in turn introduce legislation to strengthen the industrial struggle. Where legislation of this kind is threatened from the right and from Capital itself then struggle within industry would be invoked to strengthen the parliamentary fight.

The implications and demands, thus, are that all CPGB members must belong to their "appropriate trade union or professional organisation"[4] in which they must "assist (its) work (and) take an active part". An "active part" must include attempts to win union members and the organisation itself to support Communist policy and this, in turn, can mean working to end any bans and proscriptions against Communists and getting members and fellow travellers elected to leading positions.

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1. The 'British Road To Socialism', 1968 version, p.56.
2. Ibid, p.23.
3. Ibid, p.22.
4. Aims & Constitution, p.9.

Much of this is summed up in the statement that,

"In the course of struggle important inroads will be made into the power of the monopolists - economic, political and social. The aim must be increasingly to isolate the monopolists and the Tories, to break right-wing domination of the labour movement, and to win a left majority in the Labour Party" (1).

In essence, then, the function of a CPGB member is to constantly strive for industrial unrest to a number of ends. This means that within industry there are a number of committed activists whose strength lies in the fact that they share a common set of goals in contrast to the majority of workers (even those with Labour Party cards) with their diverse needs and demands. Secondly, again in contrast to a majority of workers, strength is drawn from a willingness both to join unions and to stand for office. Thus, in many industrial situations Communists are more likely to stand for union office and are thus more likely to get elected: once elected, where there are other Party members, they are more likely to get their policies across in the face of competing and usually unformulated policies[2].

Organisation in winning the general line: The CPGB leave none of these possibilities to chance. At the top level it has an "Industrial Department" based at the King Street headquarters. This is headed by a member of the Party Executive Committee, and oversees all of the work of the lower industrial bodies. It both provides organisational and political direction for the Party's work in industry. Members of this department did indeed play an active role in the national seamen's strike of 1966. It was they who helped establish and co-ordinate the activities of a left ginger group in the NUS which both pushed the strike into effect and kept it going; which broadened support for it from the dockers and which

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1. P.48.

2. V.L.Allen, 1954 details quite effectively how the tiniest minority can get their view point across within trade union organisation.

campaigned for a change in NUS leadership.

The next level of organisation is that of the "Industrial Committees" made up, and co-ordinating the activities, of Party members within a particular union[1]. These bodies hold meetings on a more or less regular basis to discuss ways of effecting policy and leadership changes. They are made up of delegates elected from district level industrial comittees. It is not unusual for these meetings to be followed by a series of similar resolutions to be passed in a number of branches, by certain candidates being either supported or nominated by certain branches, and by several Party members being elected as delegates to the Union national conference[2]. Naturally this means that certain policies and certain candidates have a fighting chance of being accepted by conference. The chairman of the Industrial Committee generally sits on the Party's "National Industrial Advisory Committee" which, in a similar way, co-ordinates member activity across an industry. Both bodies are directly responsible to the Industrial Department.

At the most basic level there is the Party "industrial branches" which are based on a particular workplace, e.g. UCS, River Don, etc. These bodies operate within the terms of the Party's industrial/political strategy and carry out decisions taken at the higher bodies. This ensures that a decision, for example, to oppose a "five percent pay norm" will find the same opposition both within Ford's and within British Leyland at the same point of time.

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1. The name of the industrial committee helps to mask activity in a particular union. Thus, to use a ficticious example, work in the National Drug Makers Union would be hidden under the title "The Chemical Advisory" committee.

2. Recently the 'Morning Star' (September 9th 1978) boasted that over 100 of that year's TUC Congress delegates were CPGB members.

Young workers: The Party is also able to influence the development of struggle among young workers through the activity of its youth organisation, the YCL. The role of the YCL is basically to win young workers to join the trade unions and once in to play an active role. This aspect of its work is in the charge of an Executive Committee member of the YCL who acts as the "National Industrial Organiser" aided by a "National Industrial Committee". Below this are one or two national "industrial collectives" consisting of YCLers from particular unions: these operate in a similar fashion to the Party's Industrial Committees. At the lowest level there are the "industrial groups" in which members at the same place of work co-operate on effecting YCL industrial policy but who, unlike the Party, are attached to branches based on the locale.

Party Press: The work of all levels is aided by the 'Morning Star' and the YCL's monthly 'Challenge'. These readily inform members and supporters of industrial disputes in progress (and in need of support) and industrial issues (to follow). Members and supporters are also informed of union elections and policies and are made aware of which line and which candidates to support.

Organisational Strength: Naturally very little public information exists which details the various strengths of Party organisation. What can be discovered is that the CPGB (and the YCL) are strongest within "engineering". They also have collectives for printers, miners, draughtsmen, technical workers, teachers, students, and academic staff.

In terms of"factory branches"the Party National Congress Report for 1971 indicated that delegates had come from one-hundred-and-sixty such bodies. This fell to around onehundred-and-fifty by 1975.

Branch organisation[1]: Personal experience indicates that the existance of at least two CPGB members in the same branch can have an important influence in the direction of branch policy. A review of 'The Morning Star' for the period 1971-75 reveals that no fewer than forty union branches supported the paper in one way or another[2] and that of these at least three existed at concerns which were occupied at one time or another: fourteen different trade unions were involved. A further fifty-one branches (of 18 unions) are reported as being associated with the work of the LCDTU[3]. In both cases these figures are only the tip of the iceberg.

Shop floor organisation: The CPGB has been an influential and consistant force in the building of shop floor organisation within British industry:

"The ideas that had informed the shop stewards' movement did not die (after 1918) for they passed over to the Communist Party, taken to it by those shop stewards who were so influential in its formation in 1920" (4).

Indeed, to this day the classic works on shop steward organisation are still those drafted by CPGB militants - such as Willie Gallacher, Arthur McManus, Tom Bell, etc. Such was the influence of the Party that during the General Strike it was they alone that,

"had the organisational capacity to mobilise rank and file discontents" (5).

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1. In each section - branch, shop floor, trades council, etc - information is limited to personal experience and 'Morning Star' reports of the period. Thus, an underestimate of CPGB influence is presented in each case.

2. That is, either through a direct donation or an indirect one in the form of a "fraternal" greeting through the paper's columns, i.e., greetings for May Day, Christmas or the opening of the TUC and Labour Party conferences.

3. In total at least 22 different trade union organisations are reported for either case - support for the paper or involvement in the LCDTU.

4. T.Lane, 1975, p.118.

5. Ibid, p.154.

The Party's influence in shop floor organisation grew to a new level of significance in the post-Second World-War period. Many - if not most - of the major references to shop floor organisation in this period have refered to the CPGB and its militants. For example, in the mid-1950s a Court of Inquiry was set up to look into industrial unrest at the Dagenham works of the then Briggs Motor Bodies Company. The Court had been set up to inquire into the sacking of Johnny McLoughlin the chairman of shop stewards at the plant. McLoughlin and five other stewards had been suspended during a period of industrial action against redundancy threats and speed-up.

In declaring its decision - against McLoughlin - the Court's chairman, Lord Cameron expressed concern at the "Communist influence" within the stewards' committee at the plant and was worried that the re-instatement of McLoughlin "could be interpreted as a gesture of appeasement of the extreme elements in the shop stewards' organisation"[1]. McLouglin, himself a CPGB member at that time, was described by Cameron as a man who "showed considerable capacity for . . . agitation and propaganda"[2].

The Communist Party has continued to be an important force among shop floor workers at the Dagenham plant which has since come under the ownership of the Ford company. Beynon (1973), while attempting to argue that the CPGB plays a very limited role in industrial relations[3], gives ample evidence of the Party's continued leadership and importance. Pointing out that active Ford militants continue to be drawn into the Party's ranks[4].

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1. Quoted in Beynon, 1973, pp.49-50.
2. McLoughlin became disillusioned with the CPGB over the 'Hungarian Uprising' but initially remained a member because it had "the largest number of people who could deal hammer blows at the capitalist system" and because of its factory organisation. "The Communist Party branch at Briggs was of great value to the workers there".(D.Widgery, 1976, p.84).
3. Cf. p.56.
4. Cf. pp.56 & p.60.

Infact, CPGB members have continued to play key roles in the various shop steward committees throughout Ford's and have been involved in the occupations within that company. Still on the question of Ford's CPGB members and their sympathisers made up the majority of those stewards sacked from the Dagenham plant in 1962. One of those sacked workers - Kevin Halpin - went on to found the LCDTU just four years later: a testimony to the activism and militancy of CPGB Ford stewards.

Another major discussion in the history of British shop steward organisation was that which took place at the T.U.C. Congress of 1960. Again the Communists figure large. At the Conference certain types of shop floor organisation were frowned upon - "joint shop stewards' committees", "combine committees" and those steward organisations which united stewards across an industry or on a "national" basis. In the latter case the Communist dominated E.T.U. were to the fore in their establishment and it was the leaders of this union that led the defence of such bodies at that T.U.C. Congress. Communist Frank Haxell went on to defend his shop stewards' involvement in a number of company-wide combine committees:

"The ramifications of industry, the establishment of large combines, creates conditions in which it is necessary for shop stewards in certain industries to meet to discuss common problems and exchange experiences. Without this, the interests of the workpeople at workshop level cannot adequately be taken care of, and the absence of machinery of this type enables the employers more easily to exploit the situation in one factory as against another" (1)

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1. T.U.C. Annual Congress Report, 1960, p.350.

The year prior to the TUC Congress the CPGB had made a concerted effort to establish a "National Shop Stewards' Conference" and this was refered to directly in the General Council's condemnation of such organisations. This body had been called into being by the joint shop steward committees of Firth Brown (Sheffield) and Ford (Dagenham). In both cases the CPGB had members playing leading roles and one such member - George Caborn, Firth Brown convenor - was suspended from union office for one year as part of an Engineering Union effort to kill off this new organisation: it succeeded.

The failure of such efforts did not deter the CPGB and the TUC debate of 1960 is dominated by its members' attempts to get the General Council's Report "refered back"[1]. In the end the criticisms stood but a following motion placed on record the TUC's "appreciation of shop stewards" and deplored "the misrepresentation of disputes which has magnified them out of all proportion". This resolution was seconded by CPGB member George Elvin in his capacity as General Secretary of the cine technicians' union (ACTAT)[2].

An example of the tenacity of the CPGB in regard to shop floor organisation can be found in the docks industry:

"The Communist Party decided in the 1930s to work through the unions and establish an industrial power-base by representing the rank-and-file in the labour movement . . . (they) did not seek to break the authority of the TGWU but to swing it to the left by shopfloor pressure. Banned from office after 1948, Party members either went underground or were forced to work outside the union structure" (3).

"Many of the militants who formed the nucleus of the (unofficial) liaison committees in London were Party members . . ."(4).

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1. Communist Scottish Miners' leader, Abe Moffat, was one of those pushing the reference-back: "If every one of us here . . . had been expelled . . . every time we . . . took part in unofficial stoppages, very few of us would be present at this Congress". TUC Annual Congress Report, 1960, pp.349-50.

2. Elvin pointed out that his union had "only six full-time officials but between 200 and 300 shop stewards". TUC Annual Congress Report, 1960, p.356.

3. D.F.Wilson, 1972, p.130.

4. Ibid, p.131.

While the banning of Communists from office within the TGWU hindered the Party's effort to play a part in various areas of union work this was partially overcome by the continuance of unofficial port committees. Towards the end of the 1960s the situation began to change under the impact of a Party onslaught on the prohibitive rule:

> "Early in 1968, the election of stewards in the Royals (group of Docks) saw many members of the unofficial committees returned and five, at least, were associated with the Communist Party - Dash, Rice, Buck Baker, Ted Kirby and Danny Lyons. Their fellow stewards refused to see them excluded from office and resigned en masse when the Docks Group Committee tried to enforce the union rule.
> It was a chaotic position since the stewards in other parts of the port had (gone along with the proscription) but in Bristol and Liverpool the proscription had been waived in deference to the known preferences of the shopfloor.
> The impasse was referred to the TGWU executive, where opinion was divided about the relevance of the ban but united in the desire to protect the officials. It was decreed that the ban need not apply so long as Communist stewards did not take office on constitutional union committees. The stewards were then established and the ban was rescinded in 1969" (1).

This view stands in marked contrast to that of Beynon. Communist militants played a leading part in the establishment of shop floor organisation on the Docks; organisation which among other things helped to get the anti-trade union Defence of the Realm Act, Order 1305 removed from the Statute Book[2]. The long militant record of men like Jack Dash and Danny Lyons is well known: Dash was one of the men singled out by Harold Wilson as one of the 'politically motivated men' behind the national Seamen's strike of 1966. From a position of continued rank-and-file militant leadership the Communists were able to launch an offensive which succeeded in winning the removal of a twenty year old ban on Communists holding office within the TGWU. At times Beynon appears to recognise that the CPGB's record is one of proven militancy:

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1. D.F.Wilson, 1972, p.198.

2. Cf. A.Hutt, 1975, chapter 12.

"(In) times of crisis the stewards revert to the old style 'proven' leadership of either the Communist Party or the Left Wing of the Labour Party. The takeover and 'work-in' at UCS only highlights a general tendency within the politics of militant shop floor committees. On Merseyside the Communist Party is the only 'left' group with long-standing membership amongst proven militants" (1).

By the mid-1960s and the onset of a new economic crisis the CPGB was entrenched in a whole number of shop floor organisations which it had been to the fore in establishing. So much so was this the case that the Party's role was highlighted in the reports of the official researchers for the Royal Commission on Trades Unions and Employers' Associations. McCarthy (1966), for example, pointed out that a large number of shop steward organisations were affiliated to the Communist influenced Labour Research Department[2] and that national committees of shop stewards,

"were front organisations, for the most part organised by members of the Communist Party" (3).

Following McCarthy the report of John Hughes (1967) stated that combine committees,

"serve as targets for extremist groups, but it may also be true in so far as communists in the trade unions have been among those taking the initiative in developing such committees they are bridging a real gap in union structure"(4).

The power of the CPGB, it can be argued, has not been simply in contributing to the establishment of shopfloor organisation but also in providing it with organisational goals and a leadership capable of achieving those goals. This can be seen in a number of industries. The Docks has already been exampled. By the late 1960s, with a number of achievements at local level, the CPGB helped to bring into being an unofficial national shop stewards' committee of dockers "under the leadership of a militant NASD Londoner, Bernie Steer"[5]. In 1972 the issue of containerisation ...

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1. Beynon, 1973, p.228.
2. McCarthy, para 86. He lists some 216 affiliated shop steward committees.
3. Ibid, p.54.
4. Quoted in W.E.J.McCarthy (ed), 1972, p.183.
5. D.F.Wilson, 1972, p.209.

and consequent job losses within the docks presented the "unofficial committee with a ready-made platform"[1]:

"The committee played a large part in keeping the container crisis on the boil and it was instrumental in forcing the TGWU to launch itself towards a national strike" (2).

It was over the containerisation issue that Steer and four other unofficial leaders were arrested and jailed by order of the National Industrial Relations Court in 1972. The Pentonville Five, as they became known, included two CPGB members - one of them Bernie Steer; a third, Vic Turner, joined the Party a short while later.

The issue of the Pentonville Five led to widespread unrest and a call for a General Strike to achieve their release. Here the CPGB played an important role at three different levels. Its militants were to the fore on the docks and in the leadership of the national stewards' committee; rank-and-file militant action was assisted by the existance and agitation of the LCDTU; and at TUC General Council level the Broad Left balance within the AUEW helped push that union into action which demanded militant response from the TUC leadership.

Steel: For some years the very conservative Steel workers' union (BISAKTA) had succeeded in preventing the development of any national stewards' body within the industry. The CPGB had tried unsuccesfully for many years to establish such an organisation. However, around the turn of the 1970s the threatened closure of several steel works opened up new possibilities. At the Shotton works the shop stewards united against closure threats into an 'Action Committee' and they sent out invitations to other stewards within

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1. D.F.Wilson, 1972, p.209.

2. Ibid.

the industry with a view to the establishment of a national body. The CPGB, in fact, had no members in leading positions at Shotton but the Shotton initiative was heavily supported with (behind-the-scenes) CPGB backing. Where the CPGB were strong a number of local action committees quickly sprung up and these formed the strength of the new national body. Where the CPGB was not strong action committees were not established (i.e., at the threatened Consett works in N.W.Durham) or gave little or no support to the national organisation (i.e., the action committee of the threatened Hartlepool works).

Many of the decisions of the national action committee originated at the CPGB's "Steel Workers' Advisory Committee". This body co-ordinated the activities of its members involved in the Steel workers' action committees.[1] The most successful campaign against closure was mounted by the CPGB dominated River Don stewards' committee, and in the shape of the famous "work-on".

Aerospace and Telecommunications: In both cases national combinations of shop stewards exist across the industries and in both cases the TASS section of the AUEW is the leading body involved. That union section had in advance its own national organisation of TASS stewards within the telecommunications industry and has since pioneered international contacts. Its stewards, for instance, have contact with their counterparts of the French (Communist) C.G.T. unions[2]. It is difficult to claim that the CPGB alone has played the initiating role, through the unions, in the establishment of such bodies although many of the published claims are in this direction[3]. What is clear is that moves towards the setting up of such organisations

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1. I am indebted to the CPGB Steel Advisory research worker for information on that body's activities.

2. 'The Morning Star', 28th Oct. '75 reported contacts between these two bodies.

3. Cf. W.E.J.McCarthy, 1966 and J.Hughes, 1967.

were supported by the heavily Communist dominated ETU in the late 1950s/early 1960s and the equally heavily CPGB dominated TASS in the late 1960s/early 1970s. As has been mentioned in previous sections of this work, the national organisation of telecommunications' stewards helped in the support and spread of workplace occupations throughout the industry.

The 'National Aerospace Shop Stewards' Liaision Committee' is also noted for having CPGB members within its leadership including its national secretary, Phil Higgs[1]. This body has brought together shop stewards representative of onehundred-thousand workers within the industry including those from Rolls Royce[2], Hawker Siddeley[3], B.A.C.[4], Lucas Aerospace[5], Dunlop[6] and Westlands - all companies in which workplace occupations have occured.

Construction and Print: Within these industries the CPGB have been foremost in creating industrial associations of shop stewards - grouped around a broadsheet or 'Charter'. This is the case with the"Building Workers' Charter" and the "Print Workers' Charter"; both heavily dominated in production and philosophy by CPGB members. Bill Freeman, the Briant Colour Printing work-in leader, has edited the latter since the mid-1970s and Pete Carter has continued to occupy the position of leading spokesman of the Building Workers' Charter Group[7]. The Group has been very influential in a number of industrial actions

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1. The CPGB have long been associated with shopfloor organisation in the aerospace industry. Cf. A.Hutt, 1975, chapter 11.
   Higgs, standing for the post of AUEW National Organiser in late 1975, stated that if elected one of his aims would be "the fostering of machinery and organisation to bring wider consultations with the shop floor representatives on all matters of policy . . . and strengthen the international links of trade unionists in the face of the growth of multinational companies" (The 'Morning Star', 8th Oct. 1975).
2. The CPGB has at least 2 factory branches within this company.
3. The CPGB has at least 1 factory branch within this company.
4. CPGB stewards have some influence at least within the Weybridge plant stewards' committee of this company.
5. CPGB stewards are to the fore in the Lucas Aerospace stewards' committee.
6. The CPGB has at least 1 factory branch within this company.
7. Carter is a former Executive Committee member of the YCL and has been a member of the CP's National Executive Committee since 1975.

including a successful campaign within the leading building unions which helped to facilitate the calling of a national strike in 1972. It was also involved in most of the building site occupations of the period, and - in co-operation with the LCDTU - organised various protest actions against the arrests and court appearances of the "Shrewsbury Twenty-Four"[1].

The Communist Party has also been highly successful in building strong organisation within a number of other industries - particularly engineering. The evidence of support for the LCDTU reveals that the great majority of supporting union organisations were drawn from the AUEW and the TGWU.

The connection between CP influenced shopfloor organisation and workplace occupations is quite revealing. At least nineteen such organisations can be found which played a direct part in a workplace occupation[2].

The LCDTU: A study of the role played by the LCDTU shows the extent to which the CPGB is successful in bringing its influence to bear on a whole number of trade union organisations. An examination of the reports of those associated with this body[3] reveals the following support: - onehundred and-thirtyeight shopfloor organisations of which nineteen had been directly involved in workplace occupations and two others in threatened actions[4]; forty-eight trade union branches drawn from seventeen unions; forty trades councils including four that had given significant support to workplace occupations; thirty-two district and regional committees - mainly drawn from the AUEW and

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1. This refers to a group of building workers who were arrested and charged with a number of offences, including conspiracy, arising out of events during the 1972 National building workers' strike.

2. This information arose out of various 'Morning Star' reports and interviews with occupation leaders. The figure is the tip of an iceberg and refers to situations where the organisation is found to have given some kind of support to the 'Morning Star' and/or has CPGB members in leading positions.

3. The information is limited to reports appearing in the 'Morning Star' over the period and is thus to be taken as an underestimate in each case.

4. These organisations were drawn from at least 10 major industries.

the TGWU but also from SOGAT, NUVB, NSMW and the NUM; six national bodies were also associated with the LCDTU including the TASS and CEU sections of the emergent AUEW[1], the National Youth Committee of TASS[2], SOGAT, ACTT and the WLTU[3].

Trades Council Organisation: The success of bodies like the LCDTU could not have been achieved had the CPGB not been so firmly entrenched within important sectors of the trade union movement, including trades councils. The importance of such bodies for a party like the CPGB has been summed up thus,

> "The trades council, like the joint shop-stewards' committees in several industries, . . . (provide) a natural platform for radical and 'militant' criticism of official union policy and one from which would-be rivals to established leaders would advertize themselves.
>
> For organised oppositionalist factions the joint shop-stewards' committees at the work-place and the trades councils in the locality could be seen as offering the basis of an alternative system . . . to that of the national unions, cutting across the latter's structure and particularly adapted to mobilize class, rather than sectional, labour sentiment" (4).

Indeed the CPGB have not been slow to mobile rank-and-file support for certain issues using trades council and shop-steward committee organisation and, at times, even where this conflicted with official union policy.

The CPGB had considerable influence on trades council affairs prior to the issuing of a TUC anti-communist document in 1948 and consequent banning of CPGB members from standing as trades council delegates[5]. The ban set back the Party's efforts in this direction for some time. Those trades councils

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1. The General Secretaries of both sections were leading CPGB members.
2. This body was heavily dominated by CPGB/YCL members and the Secretary was a Party member.
3. The General Secretary of this union was a long-standing CPGB member.
4. H.A.Turner, 1962.
5. The document was called 'Defend Democracy'. At the TUC Congress the year earlier (1947) at least one communist was elected onto the six member TUC 'Trades Councils Joint Consultative Committee'.

that ignored the ban were disenfranchised by the General Council[1].

It is difficult to say just when the ban began to break down but by the mid-1960s CPGB members were once again firmly entrenched in a number of trades councils throughout the country. They weren't, however, represented at the annual conference of trades councils. As CPGB influence grew rapidly during the next few years of socio-economic crisis the Party felt that the time had come tc press for the removal of the ban. This was achieved at the 1972 TUC Congress by a resolution moved by Eddie Marsden, the communist General Secretary of the CEU section of the AUEW, and supported by another communist - Lionel Jacobs - from the ASTMS union[2].

Shortly after the lifting of the ban the Annual Conference of Trades Councils was attended by at least fifty card-carrying CPGB members as delegates[3]. The General Council Report in the lead up to the 1973 TUC Congress was moved to caution that the lifting of the ban did not extend to any "association of trades councils with the Communist Party or any subsidiary organisation of that body"[4]. Trades council association with the LCDTU, however, was already a fact of life which the General Council appeared constrained to act against.

It is difficult to assess the extent of influence which the CPGB has within trades councils. Again figures are hard to obtain. Nonetheless, experience of one region of the CPGB suggests that their influence is very substantial. Thus, for instance, in the North East region of the country the CPGB had around eight-hundred members in the early to mid 1970s. Trades councils numbered eighteen active bodies and no fewer than fifty-four

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1. For example, they moved against the Dagenham trades council in 1949 for inviting a CPGB speaker to address a meeting. In 1950 they deregistered the Hackney, Stepney and Wood Green bodies for failing to provide "proof of their ability or willingness to work loyaly within Congress policy". (TUC Congress Report, 1950, p.106).
2. Interestingly Jacobs, despite the long ban, had been both president and vice president at trades council level and president at trades council federation level for 20 years of the ban's supposed operation.
3. Interview with Bill Kerriss one of the CPGB members who attended that Conference.
4. TUC Annual Congress Report, 1973, p.53.

CPGB members were active within seventeen of them. In several cases CPGB members held important posts on these bodies. The same was true at the higher levels of County Associations of Trades Councils and when it came to elect an officer from the region to be represented on the national body a CPGB member obtained more votes than the other three candidates combined.

While it is difficult to generalise from this one regional example it is possible that the CPGB's influence on trades councils is stronger where infact their Party organisation is stronger. At a low guess they have some influence in around seventy trades councils[1] or approximately 15% of those in England and Wales[2].

District and Regional Trade Union Organisation: The CPGB have been particularly successful in gaining some influence in those unions with district or regional structures which enjoy some degree of autonomy and which draw their strength directly from the grass roots level. This has been the case in the AUEW and the NUM.

The AUEW: In a large majority of AUEW District Committees there can be found at least one member of the CPGB. On a good number of these the Party member can be found holding the key post of either Secretary or President. For example, one brief survey[3] revealed that at least twenty-three CPGB members were active District Committee members of important AUEW District Committees[4] during the period 1971-75. Of these, nine were full-time Secretaries and a further seven held the post of President. In addition a survey

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1. This figure is arived at by adding the 17 from the North East Region to the 40 refered to as being associated with the LCDTU plus a further 13 reported - over the period 1971-75 - as having in some way supported the 'Morning Star'.
2. In the period 1971-75 the various TUC Annual Reports reveal an average of 480 recognised trades councils.
3. A survey of 'Morning Star' reports over the period supplemented by personal knowledge of various of the activists involved.
4. These included Manchester, Glasgow, Birmingham (West), Stockport, Coventry, and London (North).

of AUEW District Committees[1] reveals some degree of CPGB influence on at least twenty-eight; twenty-three of which are in addition to those mentioned above. Thus the CPGB have some significant influence on at least forty AUEW District bodies. Arguably this influence has been more than token. Within the AUEW the CPGB has, for some time, operated at the centre of an inner-union 'Broad Left' faction. This faction works to effect certain policy decisions and changes within the union and to get various of its cadres elected to a variety of lay and full-time union posts. The 'Broad Left' was particularly successfull in the late 1960s/early 1970s in getting a large number of its activists elected or re-elected to key posts including that of President and for three of the seven Executive posts. It was also influential in gaining official AUEW support for the political strikes of March 1st and 18th 1971. It did this at two levels. Firstly through policy resolutions through union channels and by capturing important union posts and secondly by the fact that a large number of district committees committed their support to political strikes prior to these dates.

Finally, the fact that AUEW District Committees of the Engineering Section are automatically composed of a group of 3-6 shop stewards elected directly onto them has allowed the CPGB a vital extra channel for its activists to get onto such bodies[2].

The NUM: The CPGB have long had a significant impact on the affairs of the Miners' Union dating back to the Miners' Federation of Gt.Britain. The Party strongholds continue to be in Scotland and in South Wales but by the approach of the 1970s the Kent Area of the NUM was firmly under communist

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1. A survey of 'Morning Star' reports detailing those bodies associated with the LCDTU and those supporting the 'Morning Star' in one form or other.

2. In addition to the detailed influence of the CPGB within shop steward committees one report has estimated that around one in thirty AUEW shop stewards are cardcarrying CPGB activists, R.Taylor, 197 .
In a case know to myself one CPGB member who had been defeated in an election to be returned to the local AUEW District Committee gained a place 3 months later by standing as a shop steward: he had been defeated at a branch vote.

leadership and important Party gains were made in Yorkshire and in Nottinghamshire.

At national level two of the three NUM General Secretaries to-date have been CPGB members[1]: the third, Lawrence Daly, was an ex-Party member who was elected with the support of the CPGB machine within the Union.

The key to CPGB power within the NUM lies in the autonomy enjoyed by the Union's Area Committee structure: this was a result of the heritage of the old federalist MFGB. With Areas having automatic representation on the Union National Executive Committee the Communists have been assured, for many years, of a significant representation. The gains made by the Party in Nottingham and Yorkshire helped to add to the Party representation on that body.

Despite claims to the contrary[2] the CPGB have had an important influence on the direction of the NUM. It is true that throughout the 1960, despite the existance of a Communist General Secretary, the Union's Communist led left made little impact on achieving a united policy to fight pit closures or to tackle other pressing issues: that is not to say, however, that they did not attempt to unify the workforce. One of the keys to unifying the Miners, as the left saw it, was to achieve the abolition of the piece-work system and replace it with the introduction of a national day-wage system. The CPGB were the main proposers of this plan which was launched in their publication 'A Future for the Miners'(1965). The Party intention was the unification of the miners to struggle against erosions in conditions and jobs in the industry. On the face of it this appeared as if they were flying in the face of their assumed strategy in other industries where

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1. Arthur Horner and Will Paynter. Interestingly, the Party has consistently failed to win the Presidency since the inception of the NUM; all four Presidents have been right-wing Labour Party members opposed to the Communist Party. The Party's lone success in this field was quickly eroded: in 1960 they supported a fellow traveller, E.Machen, who won the ballot but died immediately prior to taking up office and in the re-election Communist Abe Moffat was defeated by a right-wing candidate.

2. Cf.R.Jenkins, 1960; J.D.Edelstein & M.Warner, 1975.

supported local level bargaining. Infact, support for this new line brought the Party hostility from some left-wing quarters[1]. Indeed, the new national system stood to shift the ground from almost self-regulatory supervision towards a marked increase in direct supervision[2]. Nonetheless,

"The Party recognised that in raising all wage negotiation to the national level one of the main factors inhibiting the common action and unity of facemen and the lower-paid day-wage men would be removed. Now the facemen would be in the same boat as the outbye workers, both having to win wage increases at the national level. However, it was also recognised that the new wages system for faceworkers would sooner or later result in the re-direction of their militancy away from the individual face, district or pit level, and towards the sphere of national bargaining.

Inevitably this would result in considerable pressure being brought to bear on the NUM leadership, and with increasing rank and file pressure for firm action on pay, the role of the Left in the NUM would be considerably strengthened"(3).

Meanwhile events slowly began to take shape. The NCB, for its own strategic reasons[4], introduced the National Power Loading Agreement in 1965 and made provision for the eventual equalisation of faceworkers' wages throughout the country[5] alongside the progressive elimination of contract work and its replacement by a day-wage system.

In 1968, despite a fierce attempt, the right-wing failed to win the post of General Secretaryship in the election of that years Lawrence Daly defeated Joe Gormley in a closely fought contest. By now the new wage system was beginning to have the desired effect and pressure was coming to bear on the National Executive

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1. Cf. D.Douglass, 1972.
2. I.Rutledge, 1974.
3. Ibid.
4. Cf. Rutledge, op cit. The NCB had hoped that the scheme would lead to a reduction in the number of industrial disputes which occured throughout the coalfields, and that it would keep back the wages of the stronger elements within the industry.
5. This was finally achieved in 1971.

Committee to push ahead with a national pay claim. The following year a series of unofficial strikes on this issue broke out throughout the Yorkshire coalfield and, at times, supported by the Scottish and Welsh miners.

At the 1971 NUM Annual Conference the time was ripe for the CPGB to press ahead with the new found militancy within the Union. The Scottish Area successfully put forward a resolution for a substantial pay increase and with the proviso that the NEC be instructed to use industrial action, if need be, to achieve the claim.

In the meantime negotiations between the NUM and the NCB were severely hampered by the new Conservative Government's insistence that any pay award should be in line with their incomes policy. Communists on the NUM's executive were subsequently active in pressing for an all-out strike. Once the strike was underway one of the key turning points of the struggle - the 'battle of Saltley Gates' - was, by-and-large, attributable to the organisation of the CPGB:

"When the Yorkshire miners contacted the party's Birmingham offices for help during the 1972 coal strike, it was forthcoming. The communists were able to call out 10,000 engineers to man the picket lines at Saltley coal depot on 10 February" (1).

In the wake of all this militancy - and its successful results - the NUM Left made further gains. In 1973 all three Yorkshire National Executive Committee seats were won by the Left[2]; a fact never before achieved in that Area. In Nottingham a further unique situation occurred with the election of Communist Joe Whelan to one of the Area's NEC seats. And that same year Communist Mick McGahey won the Vice Presidency of the Union. Thus, coming up to a further impending dispute situation, the CPGB was able to estimate that on the NUM's NEC, "the solid left wing will have at least 11 of the 27 voting executive positions"[3]

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1. R.Taylor, 1974.

2. Former-CP militant, Arthur Scargill, won the Presidency. Left-winger Owen Briscoe won the post of Area General Secretary,and Communist Peter Tait won the remaining post on the NEC.

3. 'The Morning Star', 25th April 1975.

and of these six were CPGB members - one of whom was shortly to hold the vice-presidency[1].

By the time talks had broken down again a new Miners' strike was shortly embarked upon following an overtime ban and work-to-rule. The result is well known. The Conservative Government, facing a direct challenge to its statutory Incomes Policy imposed a '3-day working week' on industry. When that failed to shift the Miners a General Election was called, on the issue of 'who runs the country - Unions or Government?', and the Conservative Government was defeated. Certainly the Miners, on the one hand, had been under a lot of pressure from declining conditions and a series of pit closures while, on the other hand, gaining a sense of industrial power from the changed oil supply situation[2]. What the CPGB did was to provide the pressure for structural changes which helped unify the Miners. They were then to the fore in providing the direction and leadership for the new found militancy and, at crucial times, played a vital role in providing solidarity action from other sections of workers.

Summary: Beyond the AUEW and the NUM the CPGB have managed to gain a number of district and regional positions in various unions. They have, for example, been particularly successful in ASTMS and to some extent in UCATT and the TGWU. There is little doubt that a sizeable minority of trade union lay and full-time officials at this level are CPGB members and, as such, will have a significant influence over certain areas of industrial action[3].

National Trade Union Organisation: Once again the CPGB can be found to have a substantial number of its activists holding national union office. A brief

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1. The vice-presidency was to prove an important position for the CPGB during the 1974 National Strike; providing an important platform. In 1976 McGahey was effectively the President on many occassions while Joe Gormley was involved with the EEC Coal and Steel consultative council.

2. Once the Arab states had realised their power to affect oil prices to their advantage this made other forms of energy much more important than they had been previously.

3. A brief survey - drawn from 'Morning Star' reports ('71-76) and personal knowledge - shows at least 46 CPGB members holding 16 regional, plus a TUC & an STUC post.

survey reveals that, at the very least, in the period 1971-75 there was a Communist on the TUC General Council, two others held the STUC posts of General Secretary and Vice-President, three others in the post of Union General Secretary and one as General Secretary of a Union Youth Committee, three in the post of Assistant-General Secretary, five holding Union Presidencies and one Vice-Presidency, one with a National Union Chairmanship, one editor of a Union Journal, and one Union National Treasurer[1]. In addition to these nineteen officers a further twenty-six can be found on Union National Committees. Looking at the figures for individual unions the evidence is of an even greater Communist representation. Taylor (1974) for example, claims that "the communists can reckon to elect 15 of the 52 members to the (AUEW's)delegate conference"[2]. He also estimated that, at the time, there were at least two communists on the UCATT Executive Committee, four each on that of the NUR and the UPW, and ten on the TGWU Executive[3]. Taylor also confirms that there were six communists on the NUM Executive. Wilson (1972) indicates that in the period of the late 1960s at least a quarter of the WLTU Executive were CPGB members. Added to this list is the fact that, in the early 1970s, a majority of the TASS Executive, six of the ASTMS National Executive and at least three AUEW Engineering Section national officials were CPGB members. This gives credance to the claim of Taylor (1974) that, "10 per cent of (national) officials in the trade union movement are card carriers".

While the CPGB have suffered various defeats towards the approach of the 1970s on balance the period seems to have been something of an advance. The ban on CPGB members holding office in the TGWU was dropped by the turn of the '70s. In the draughtsmen section of the Engineering Union a communist gained the position

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1. Remarkably the editor of the ASTMS Journal was concurrently, at one point, the editor of the CPGB backed 'Labour Monthly'.
2. My own research bears this out.
3. While this figure appears exaggerated it seems to be supported by Eric Jacobs of the 'Sunday Times' (Business News, 23rd Nov. 1975.)

of General Secretary in 1973[1]. In the Seaman's Union (NUS) a number of reversals of Party defeats[2] in the mid-70s culminated in the return of three Party members to the NUS Executive and the election of a CP-Left to the vital post of General Secretary. Alongside Party gains in industrial unions, such as the NUM, a number of gains were made in the growing and powerful 'white-collar' unions. In the early 1970s the first ever Communist was elected to the Executive committee of NALGO and she was joined, in 1975, by another Party member from the Yorkshire Region of the Union. In APEX a Communist pulled off a remarkable feat in defeating a long established incumbent to become the first Communist to reach that Union's national committee: that was the early '70s and he has been re-elected every year since[3]. Party gains were also being made in ASTMS and in the NUT where, in 1972, one of their members was elected to the post of President. Communists were also making striking gains at the very top levels of the trade union movement. In 1974 Ken Gill was elected to the General Council of the T.U.C; a post he has retained ever since and has been joined by another Party member in 1978. The following year, 1975, James Milne became the first ever Communist to hold the post of full-time Secretary of the STUC[4]. The 'Morning Star' was moved to decribe his election as "a reflection of the growing development of left advance in the Scottish trade union movement"[5]. Infact, if it had not been for the death of the STUC's

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1. This crucially strengthened the Left in the AUEW. Ken Gill joined the Left-backed Engineers' leader Hugh Scanlon and the CPGB General Secretary of the Construction Engineering Section.
2. In 1971 two Communists had been unseated from the NUS Executive.
3. The incumbent was in a very good position being employed in the Regional office of the NCB which employed thousands of APEX organised clerks. The Communist, on the other hand, was handicapped in that he was employed as a full-time district secretary of his Party and was a Union member out of political principle only, i.e., he was not concerned to press the CPGB leadership for higher wages, etc. Nonetheless, Green won the election by a very large margin in a four cornered fight.
4. Milne was elected unanimously. He had previously been Assistant General Secretary and STUC Chairman.
5. 15th April 1975.

Communist Vice-President - in 1971 - the Party would have made even greater advances.

The results of Union elections is not a simple list of CPGB members filling positions it represents a series of activities and events out of which election gains were only one element. The exact role of the CPGB is difficult to unravel because in almost every union they operate within the framework of a 'broad left' organisation. It is nonetheless clear that in almost every case they have been the key sector of the broad left - providing leadership and policies to be followed. In virtually all of the major political struggles of the 1970s the Communist Party played a key role - the Miners' Strikes; the various Engineering Union strikes against the NIRC; the call for a General Strike in the face of the arrest of the Pentonville Five; and the numerous political strikes organised by the LCDTU.

The CPGB at National Level - the TUC: The strength of CPGB representation at TUC Congresses has been sizeable during the late 1960s/ early 1970s and in certain cases this strength has achieved some notable results. A survey of one small and very weak CPGB district, in 1972, reveals that at least eight Party members were elected - from four Unions - to be delegates to that year's TUC Congress. It is likely that nationally a sizeable number were so elected. This is confirmed by a brief survey of the delegates lists for the 1973 and 1974 TUC Congresses[1]; respectively at least thirty-four Party members (from twelve unions) attended one year and thirty-three (from fourteen unions) the next year. By the late 1970s the Party's 'Morning Star' were claiming that over one-hundred of their members were attending the 1978 TUC Congress[2].

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1. This survey merely amounts to a recognition of CPGB members from the delegates list reproduced in the TUC Annual Congress Reports. Naturally, the figures arrived at will underestimate the number.

2. September 9th, 1978.

Numerous examples of CPGB initiated policy could be cited as indications of how TUC policy has arisen out of the Party's activities[1]. For example, at the 1972 Congress the delegates voted to set up an annual TUC Youth Conference. The successful resolution was moved by a Communist Executive Committee member of a particularly unmilitant union and the result represented a victory for the Party's youth organisation (YCL) which had been studiously working for the establishment of such an organisation for some time. At that same Congress another Communist successfully moved a resolution calling for the removal of the existing ban on communists from taking part in important aspects of trades council work.

In the lead up to the 1973 TUC Congress the Communists were active within their stronghold - the AUEW. At the Engineering Section's National Committee meeting Party policy was successful on a number of fronts[2]: a resolution was carried which instructed the Union's EC to -

"press the TUC not to participate in any discussions with the Government on any form of wage freeze and to declare that we will not be bound by any decisions arising from talks between the T.U.C., the C.B.I. and the Government which would place restrictions . . . upon the free collective bargaining of wages and conditions"[3].

A further resolution reaffirmed the Union's opposition to the NIRC and called on the TUC to press all unions into a policy of non-cooperation with the Industrial Relations Act and its NIRC[4]. And a further resolution aimed at the TUC reaffirmed Union opposition to British participation in the Common Market[5]. The National Committee also went on to instruct its EC "to give support to the 'Labour Weekly', 'Morning Star' and 'Tribune' in these publications' efforts to publicise the policies of our Union, the T.U.C. and Labour Movement"[6]. In regard to international

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1. For, hopefully, obvious reasons only a few 'harmless' examples have been selected.
2. In each case resolutions were moved and seconded by a combination of 'Broad-Left' and CPGB members.
3. The call to the TUC was defeated by about 3-1 at the TUC Congress.
4. This resolution was also defeated at the TUC Congress by the closer margin of 5,573,000 to 4,024,000.
5. This policy position helped to get the AUEW votes cast against a consequently unsuccesful USDAW resolution seeking Common Market entry.
6. All references to the AUEW's NC meeting are taken from: - 'Report of Proceedings of the Third AUEW (Engineering Section) National Committee, 1973'.

trade union links the NC meeting voted to seek "the utmost co-operation and fraternal relations with the (communist) W.F.T.U." and to call on the TUC to initiate "immediate discussions between the I.C.F.T.U. and the W.F.T.U. with a view to amalgamation". Interestingly, a slightly watered-down version of this latter section was successfully moved at the TUC Congress by the Boilermakers' Union.

With the exception of this resolution (on international trade union links) and the Common Market policy statement the Communists might be felt to have faired badly at the 1973 TUC. Infact, they were remarkably successful in so far as they raised the political discussion about the need to fight against Government attempts to interfere in trade union affairs. On the vote regarding outright opposition to the Industrial Relations Act, for instance, Left M.P. Joan Maynard has stated,

"The trade union movement continues its leftward march; it is not a headlong rush but it is inexorably moving forward in a left direction.
The first sign: the four million votes cast for the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers' resolution for a complete boycott of the National Industrial Relations Court, a very much more fundamental call than the call to de-register. For the AUEW resolution was saying: Defy a court; defy the law" (1).

From another position the Party had cleverly maneouvred to leave a joker in the pack. Namely, should the AUEW resolutions be unsuccessful the Union was still free to raise the fight itself. This, in fact, it did and such action helped to develop opposition to the Act and the NIRC within other unions.

At the 1974 TUC Congress the CP-led Left had mixed fortunes. They lost the central battle in moving Congress against the so-called 'Social Contract'. What they did get through included,

"A policy for grappling with the multi-national companies; extension of public ownership and improved policy content of existing nationalisation;

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1. 'Labour Monthly', Oct. 1973, p.447.

". . . reaffirmation of opposition to membership of the E.E.C.; strengthened co-operation of trade unions at international level; an integrated energy policy including nationalisation of all natural resources; pressure for a 35 hour working week; dissociation of Britain from all uses of nuclear weapons and the closing of nuclear bases" (1).

Perhaps a more significant gain was seen in the election to the TUC General Council in which Communist Ken Gill gained a seat along with the left NUS leader Jim Slater and two other "lefts". This "leftward trend", as the 'Morning Star" refered to it, was continued at the TUC Congress the following year. On the one hand, the right-wing Roy Grantham of APEX lost his seat[2], while, on the other hand, two new left-wingers gained seats. As the 'Times' was to put it,

"The political upset overshadowed some other important changes in representation on the general council, which reinforced the trend of recent years towards the left. Mr.William Keys, the General Secretary of the Society of Graphical and Allied Trades, won the printing industry seat in competition against . . . Owen O'Brian, General Secretary of Natsopa . . .

The general council has its first Maoist in Mr.Reginald Birch, of the engineering workers, who took the seat vacated by the moderate Mr.John Boyd . ."(3).

Key's Union had been one of the few to consistently back LCDTU strikes and it was Keys that successfully moved the 1975 TUC resolution calling for opposition to the introduction of any law curtailing workplace occupations.

The election of Birch was not looked on with the same favour by the CPGB. The 'Morning Star' reports failed to list Birch among the 'lefts' recently elected to the TUC General Council; he is simply listed with "other new members" elected.

The National Union Battle-Front: Apart from mixed, but nonetheless significant, results at TUC Congresses the CPGB seems to have been the leading force behind a whole number of battles at various union conferences. For example, a report by the 'Sunday Times' Industrial correspondant (Eric Jacobs), in late 1975,

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1. H.Smith (TASS 'Journal' editor), 1974.

2. Grantham was replaced by the left-wing Musicians Union leader, John Morton. He went on to blame his defeat on the Communist Party. "I face the Communist Party every year. I shall face them again next year. People have been gunning for a long time and they take advantage of circumstances to achieve their ends" ('The Times', 3rd Sept.1975).

3. Ibid.

was headed 'The Right wins a Battle - but not the War'. He was refering to right-wing gains in the AUEW but commented that the CPGB and its 'left' supporters were making headway in the EEPTU, the TGWU and UCATT. Jacobs went on to explain how it was that communist pressure had won the UCATT union away from TUC pay policy; a policy which, in fact, had been initiated at a previous UCATT annual conference[1]. By the 1975 UCATT conference the CPGB and its allies were strong enough to dominate and push through a number of radical reforms. These included the introduction of periodic re-election for all full-time officers and the lifting of a ban on communists taking part in branch political discussions[2].

At the same time important gains were being made inside the NUS. The Union, under right-wing leadership, had been expelled from the TUC in 1972 for co-operating with the machinery of the Industrial Relations Act. With the death of the General Secretary shortly afterwards the left not only gained the post but returned three Communists to the executive committee and mustered a majority at the following Union conference. Now the 'Times' was quick to comment that,

"The political shift in the NUS leadership is likely to pose a fresh threat to the TUC's social contract, because the union is committed to pursuing a wage claim that would add more than 40 per cent to the industry's wage bill. A demand for £40 for a 40-hour week will be submitted this month" (3).

This was a prediction that was soon realised and the TUC General Council and the Shipping Owners had to work hard in the ensuing period to prevent a national strike of Seamen.

The Impact of the Young Communist League: Another, albeit small, area of work in which the CPGB have had significant successes has been among young workers. Until fairly recently it is fair to say that the YCL were the political

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1. The 'Sunday Times', 23rd Nov. 1975.
2. The 'Times', 3rd Nov. 1975.
3. The 'Times', 4th Jan. 1975.

organisational force among young workers. A primary aim of the YCL has been to win young workers to join the trade union organisations and, once in, to become active members. From there they are ripe for winning to the YCL and then the Communist Party. This has had a number of significant implications over the years. For instance, many young people have not been easily attracted to the trade union movement[1] and thus of those which do join many will have been encouraged in, through some means or other, by the YCL or young CP members. This in turn will make them susceptible to activity initiated by the communists[2], and it will draw them into trade union youth organisations dominated by communists[3]. Given that so few trade unionists become firmly committed trade union activists this further means that a sizeable minority of activists will have been trained to some extent by the communists. This needn't always work to the advantage of the left but it does have a bearing on trade union development. For example, current trade union leaders trained by the communists include Hugh Scanlon, Clive Jenkins, Arthur Scargil and Jimmy Reid.

Apart from having some success in involving young workers in CPGB led industrial (political) activities the YCL has achieved success in pursuing some of its aims through the TUC. The drive for an annual youth TUC, for instance, began at YCL Executive level in 1970. To further this aim a front organisation was established under the title the 'Trade Union Youth Congress Committee' (TUYCC). This body held well attended conferences with delegates officially represented from a host of unions. Had it not been for internal dissention within the YCL in the late 1970s the annual youth TUC might well have come under some degree of YCL control.

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1. The report of the '1971 National Congress of the YCL' claimed that 3 million young workers under the age of 25 were not union members.
2. Mainly the YCL campaigned around such issues as demands for the full rate of pay at 18, day release for all young workers, etc.
3. The YCL campaigned for the establishment of youth committees in each union and such things as youth sections of trades councils.

On the question of worker occupations the YCL also had a degree of success. In one case YCL executive member, Pete Kavanagh, initiated occupation action at a Lovell's building site. Kavanagh occupied a crane. At another building site it was YCLers that initiated an occupation over wages. Their role was equally important at the UCS where it was YCLers that got the engineering apprentices involved in the work-in. In all cases YCL Executive Committee members were involved. In the North East of England in 1972 the Tress Engineering occupation was initiated by the YCL District Organiser who, at the time, had only been employed at the factory only a short time.

As with the CPGB the role of the YCL in industrial affairs, in the period 1971-75, was largely limited by its size[1]. A survey of YCL activists reveals the depth to which they were heavily involved within the trade union movement - holding a wealth of positions at various levels[2].

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1. That is, up to a point. It cannot be denied that the CPGB was, by now, undergoing deep political divisions which must surely have limited its impact on trade union affairs.

2. Surveying the 1971 YCL National Congress list of nominations the following information is revealed: -

   Trade Union Membership TASS/AUEW - 15; ASTMS - 10; EEPTU - 6; NUT - 5; UCATT, TGWU & APEX - 4 each; NALGO, UPW & POEU - 3 each; NUR & CPSA - 2 each; and 1 each from - NATSOPA, NUM, USDAW, NUGMW, BISAKTA, NUFLAT, NUJ, MU, ATTI, AUT, MPU, TSSA, NATKE and GLC Staff Federation: total - 75 of 87 nominees. The remaining number were school or college students.

   Trade Union Posts. 13 holding union branch posts; 18 with shop stewardships; 7 on area, district or divisional committees; 20 on trades councils; and 2 with national positions, i.e., STUC Youth Committee and 1 national union conference delegate. These 60 positions were held by only 41 YCLers. The remaining number - excluding 6 EEPTU members barred from holding office - held no position at all.

   Surveying the 1973 YCL National Congress delegates list the following information is revealed: -

   Trade Union Membership. TASS/AUEW - 27; NALGO & ASTMS - 15 each; EEPTU & NUT - 13 each; APEX - 12; TGWU - 10; UCATT - 9; NUM & USDAW - 6 each; NUJ & CPSA - 4 each; POEU, UPW, NUR - 3 each; NUTGW, NUGMW, BISAKTA, NUSMW, ACTS, NUPE & TSSA - 2 each; and 1 each from - ATTI, NATSOPA, NGA, NUFLAT, NUAW, SOGAT & GLC Staff Fed: total - 164 of 255 delegates. Of the remainder 66 were either members of the NUS(students) or the NUSS (school students), and 25 were not members of any organisation.

Summary.

The CPGB has, since the late 1960s through to the mid-1970s, played a significant role in the direction of industrial relations in Britain. They have been the leading force in the left leadership or left opposition within a number of trade unions and within the delegations to the TUC Congresses. Communist Party inspired policy and activity, through various front organisations, has helped to shape elements of TUC policy, has contributed to the withdrawal of government policy on trade union legislation ('In Place of Strife') and to the downfall of a Conservative Government. In a whole number of ways the role of the CPGB has been to further politicise the industrial relations scene in Britain and to such a pitch that new forms of radical actions could appear - including worker occupations.

When those new actions did emerge it was the Communists who, yet again, were to the fore; leading political strikes through the LCDTU and initiating workplace occupations such as the one at UCS.

That is not to say that the CPGB alone provided leadership, nor that they provided the correct leadership. Other, aligned and non-aligned, left wingers played important roles. Nonetheless, the role of the CPGB far outstrips all the others. Indeed, Leninists have long argued that any revolutionary upheaval will far outweigh the energies and numbers of the revolutionary party but that the presence of such a party would provide the necessary leadership to creater the greater situation. While it is not claimed that the CPGB created anything like a revolutionary situation their numbers should not be taken to imply that their impact has been small. On the other hand, the extent to which the CPGB were able to provide a political direction to events was severely limited in the size of the Party; one of the smallest in Europe.

What happened in the early 1970s was that a number of events needed certain responses. In order for trade unionists to respond in certain directions

i.e., in order for them to take more explicit political action, a (political) leadership was required, and at the level of challenge. The CPGB fitted that bill. It members were by now schooled in political leadership and were entrenched in a number of rank-and-file union positions. Their philosophy was to turn industrial situations into political consciousness raising exercises and this they had been engaged in over a whole number of instances. Now the seriousness of the economic situation provided them with a crucial vehicle to exploit and they took their chances. Active trade unionists facing legal curbs found a vehicle of protest in the LCDTU's political strike calls and workers facing redundancy were offered the way forward in the form of workplace occupations. The CPGB had never planned the advent of the worker occupation, nor did it advocate the tactic's use as a specific way of challenging capitalism. But what it did do was to school its members and supporters to exploit each and every situation that would weaken capitalism and raise the fight of trade unionists to a new level. And here we can see the real contribution of the CPGB.

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CHAPTER 11

THE WORKER CO-OPERATIVES.

"On balance, the worker co-operatives have presented a challenge to property rights. (The) act of workers running and controlling workplaces in which they were formerly employees challenges an essential element of capitalist ideology - concerning questions of both ownership and control. (But) the extent (and endurance) of this challenge is limited by the economic situation in which they operate and by the limited nature of their initial objectives. The need to survive in a capitalist economy places certain constraints on the running of a co-operative and can compel a situation where co-operative management principles can be undermined . . .".

Introduction.

This chapter is concerned with those productive co-operatives which arose out of workplace occupations during the period 1971-75. Their inclusion here is due to the attention which they have received and the claim - stated and implicit - that they somehow represent a further radical development in industrial action.

The chapter is concerned to take up the arguement about the nature of such organisations through an examination of their economic (and ideological) viability, their leadership and their primary rationale[1].

It is argued that the establishment of such worker co-operatives indeed presented a radical challenge to capitalist rights of ownership and control; in many ways taking the challenge to a new level. But that the nature of the challenge was severely limited by the primary intent of the workforce, by the nature of the workforce leadership, by the small number of actions involved, by the economics of the industries involved and by the need to survive in an hostile economic and political environment.

The New Worker Co-operatives.

In total only six organisations of this type arose out of the two-hundred occupations of the period. The first was at the Navan furniture factory in Wales in April 1972.

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1. It is not intended here to provide any comprehensive discussion of the development of co-operative ventures generally. This has already been more than adequately dealt with elsewhere. Cf. T.McAlpine, 1969; P.Derrick, 1974; R.Hadley, 1973; A.Campbell & B.Foster, 1974; A.Campbell, 1976

That same year two others were established, one at the leatherwear factory of Sexton and Sons (Norfolk) in June, and the other at a small machine engineering factory (Leadgate Engineering) in County Durham in December. Two years elapsed before three more came into being - all with the aid of government financial backing: the Scottish Daily Express workers set up their co-operative in July of 1974 as did the motor-cycle workers of Triumph Meriden, and these were followed, in November, by the workers of the I.P.D. factory in Liverpool. At the same time two other workforces in occupation called, unsuccessfully, for government assistance in financing similar ventures; the workforces of the Propytex textile factory in Hartlepool and the typewriter firm of Imperial based in Hull.

The year of 1974 was a golden year for the worker co-operative and captured the imagination of many workers beyond their ranks - reaching inside the cabinet itself, in the form of Tony Benn. And yet four years later only the former Triumph workers were holding - grimly - on to their co-operative venture. The others had collapsed or had been taken over, and Tony Benn was an almost spent and quiet voice within the Labour Cabinet.

The Years of Triumph and Optimism.

For many activists within the British labour movement the worker co-operatives represented a new advance in the fight against capitalism. Like other workforces facing redundancy those at the worker co-operatives had initially responded by occupying their workplace. Unlike the others, however, these workers went on not simply to demand the retention of their jobs within the same ownership structure nor to campaign for a new owner. On the contrary a new demand was raised; one in which it was envisaged that the workforce themselves should become the new owners. This, indeed, was a radical departure from the normal trade union action; it was action with a resolve which stood to create an entirely new industrial 'relations' situation.

Worker co-operatives had begun from workplace occupations and as acts of defiance against 'unjust' or 'misguided' closure decisions made by 'unfair' managements. As such they captured the headlines in a time when such actions were still newsworthy. The action at Navan and, to some extent, at Leadgate received largely local attention but the occupations at I.P.D., Meriden, the 'Scottish Daily Express', Propytex, Imperial Typewriters and Sexton's[1] attracted nationwide interest. With the same kind of defiant determinism the idea of a workers' co-operative was formulated and campaigned and worked for at each enterprise; actions which fired the imagination of many throughout the labour movement[2].

The tiny group of workers at Sexton's attracted support for their co-operative ventures from workers at UCS[3] and at Fisher-Bendix[4]; from the local Norwich trades council and ASTMS branch; from women's liberation organisations; from the co-operative movement[5]; and, primarily, from the Scott-Bader co-ownership organisation. The Leadgate workers received immediate backing from the local AUEW district committee, the trades council and from the town's M.P., David Watkins although, interestingly, not from the IWC[6]. Workers at the Scottish Daily Express were supported from a number of quarters including the STUC, several of Scotland's trade union organisations,and even the Scottish National Party. Similarly, workers at I.P.D. received widespread support which included the local Labour M,P. and support from the IWC. Triumph workers had the active involvement of the region's TGWU secretary - Bill Lapworth - and a host of other trade union support. No less a person than Hugh Scanlon joined Bill Lapworth on the Board

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1. Sexton's attracted support despite the fact that only 15 workers were involved.
2. Navan is the exception here. All that is known about it is that the 28 workers involved, after an eight-weeks sit-in, bought out the owners and began a co-operative venture.
3. The UCS workforce donated £250.
4. They gave a "large donation".
5. The 1975 annual Co-operative Congress urged all branches to assist: the London Co-operative Party donated £250 and Luton CWS sent in £50.
6. This was the only worker co-operative that they did not support in one way or another. See K.Coates,1977, p.13.

f the workers' co-operative. In their campaign to become co-operatives Imperial ypewriter workers received the support of their M.P. and a feasability report as drafted by the district of the TGWU along with supporters in Hull University. ropytex also had TGWU support and the backing of almost the entire community of lartlepool, including a local soliciter, lecturers from the Polytechnic and even he Industrial Society organisation. Support was also nationwide, with donations oming from trade union branches and trades councils.

In the midst of this widespread enthusiasm[1] the Labour Government, prodded y Industry Minister Tony Benn, provided ten million pounds to help get three of he worker co-operatives established. Ken Coates (1977) has since described the dvancement represented by the move to establish worker co-operatives and the ubsequent government aid:

> 'The profound attachment of the British people to democratic ideals becomes, today, a powerful economic resource in its own right. If the present political leaders prove unwilling to recognise this truth in time, they will fall in some ignominy. But the idea of industrial democracy is in the air, and it will find spokesmen equal to its promise: Meriden, KME and, yes, the Scottish Daily News have all converged, in the words of Tony Benn, to let the democratic genie out of the bottle. Neither the Queen's horses, nor the Queen's men, will ever get it back in again" (2).

ertainly 'industrial democracy was in the air' and the worker co-operatives had ade a contribution towards this but Coates had read too much into the situation and ad not sufficiently seen the various weaknesses in each case.

eadership and Intent.

o begin with, it should be made clear that the move towards worker co-operatives nvolved only a handful of those who had occupied their workplaces; it was not movement and certainly not a mass movement. What evolved, over a two year period, as a handful of very weak and insecure enterprises. A widespread movement might

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. That is not to say that this 'enthusiasm' was general throughout the labour movement. Criticism of worker co-operatives have come, for example, from the former IS group; the IMG; and the workforce of Briant Colour Printing. A much less explicit critique has come from the CPGB. Cf. K.Coates, 1977, pp.17-18.

. Introductory chapter.

both have contributed to a raising of worker consciousness in the direction of some form of "worker control" and contributed in some economic sense as worker co-operatives established some form of interchange. As it happens even the small number that were established had very little contact with each other and, in fact, two of the largest - KME and Triumph - were openly hostile to each other.

The facts of the matter are that not one single worker co-operative began from the conscious decision of the workers involved to set up an experiment in worker control. In each case some form of co-operative ownership was an added, but incidental, bonus.

Sexton's: The workers at Sexton and Sons took action after the company announced that the factory was to close. They occupied. However, this course of action had been embarked upon under the influence of the publicity surrounding the, then on-going, UCS work-in and the initial intent was only barely formulated, namely,

To preserve (their) own skills in leatherwork until some ideas of saving the factory had been explored" (1).

Even then more than two-thirds of the original workforce had not supported the occupation; only fifteen remained to fight on.

In the course of maintaining the occupation the workforce hit on the idea of producing small items of leatherwear which could be sold from a stall at the local market[2]. This in fact contributed to the eventual idea of a worker co-operative but at this early stage the workforce were seeking ways to get a new owner for the factory - in the same way as the UCS workers were doing. Certainly they "had a little idea of common-ownership - but no concrete knowledge"[3].

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1. Questionnaire from occupation leader, Nancy McGrath.
2. They produced belts, skirts, jackets and handbags which were sold from a stall at both Fakenham and Norwich markets.
3. Questionnaire return from Nancy McGrath.

Shortly after this point the workforce were approached by the Scott Bader :ommon-ownership organisation[1] with an offer of help to form a worker co-operative. Having failed to find a new owner, and by now fairly entrenched in small-scale production, the workforce decided to set up a worker co-operative with outside help and advice. It seems more than evident that the idea of the worker co-operative - called Fakenham Enterprises - originated from the intervention of the Scott Bader organisation. Certainly this organisation provided the majority of the working capital[2] and initially held a controlling interest on the Board of Directors. Further, the ICOM - Industrial Common Ownership Movement - organisation was involved and Fakenham Enterprises,

"provided ICOM with its first experience of working from a redundancy situation with only a truncated work-force, lacking any managerial, costing, selling or accountancy know-how" (3).

The part-time, financial adviser to the new venture was also drawn from ICOM - in the form of David Spreckly, the chairman of a co-ownership business called Landsman Caravans[4].

Although providing the initiative for the co-operative venture the 'outsiders', in line with their principles of common ownership, did not retain any controlling interest in Fakenham Enterprises. The co-operative was established on the basis that all remaining workers had a single one pound share in the new company while, "the outsiders who have given us financial backing don't have any

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1. This organisation was founded from 'liberal' principles. It created a common-ownership situation with the initiative coming downwards, i.e., the factory was shared out to the workers by the former owner. See 'This is ICOM. A description of the Industrial Common Ownership Movement', ICOM Pamphlet, 3rd Edition, Sept.'75.
2. They provided an initial loan of £2,500 and then further loans totalling £10,000 over the following three years. K.Coates, 1977, p.12.
3. 'This is ICOM . . .", op cit, p.15.
4. As with Scott Bader, Spreckly - a member of the Liberal Party - had shared his company with his workforce; a latter-day Robert Owen.

shares"[1]. The new venture, living up to its name, was to be run on the basis of one share one vote,

"In its organisation, we will all be involved in the discussions and decisions - from the littlest to the biggest.
We are having only a few directors because we are required to by company law. But as far as we are concerned there are no directors: we are just the same bunch of people" (2).

It was this kind of internal democracy that led Ken Coates, of the IWC, to describe Fakenham Enterprises as a brave "experiment" which "helped to draw attention to a time-honoured prescription for industrial democracy"(3). Such was the measure of the contribution to 'socialist' ideas made by this tiny group of workers. However, it needs to be recognised that the workers' action was primarily to save jobs. They succeeded for a while and with outside initiative and finance and as such it was a very limited 'onslaught' on capital.

The Leadgate: In a similar vein the workers at Leadgate Engineering occupied their factory in response to a closure threat. Once again only a third of the workforce became involved in the initial occupation; two-hundred out of three-hundred left the works without a fight. The latter were not untypical of the town, on the contrary, the occupation was an outstanding event. Consett, in North West Durham, had been dominated for many years by a combination of right-wing catholic elements working through the conservative BISAKTA union.

Inside the occupation the leadership was not untypical of the locale. The convenor, Fred Carlyon, had no history of militancy and if anything stood to the right of centre within the Labour Party. Asked by the local press if he was

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1. 'The Morning Star, 18th July 1972.
2. Ibid.
3. 1977, pp.12-13.

a militant Carlyon replied, somewhat vaguely:

"If by militant you mean a person who stands up for his rights, then I'm a militant"(1).

In fact, sometime prior to the occupation Carlyon had played a dubious role within the union. In his own words,

"I've made enemies when as a union man among my own people. I got a communist's (union credentials) took off him. I got his job took off him. He was causing unneccessary trouble in the works," (2).

It was the leadership of men like Carlyon that led Leadgate workers into an occupation action. As at Sexton's, it began without any clear idea of direction. As far as Carlyon was concerned there weren't any jobs in the area. They occupied to fight for "human dignity" and "the right to work"[3]. The idea of a co-operative venture only came later, but it is debatable as to how far the final organisation could justly claim such a title as 'worker co-operative'.

Once the occupation began the workers, to keep the action going, let it be known that they would be willing "to consider any offer to take on contract work"[4]. The idea of some kind of a 'work-in' was conceived as a way of buying time until the company began negotiations on the remaining workforce's future. They were not sounding out opinion on the feasability of a workers' co-operative. Eventually the company did agree to talk when the occupation workforce announced that they had concluded a deal elsewhere to do sub-contract work using company machinery[5].

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1. (Newcastle) 'Evening Chronicle', 18th December, 1972.
2. Study tour interview, October, 1976.
3. (Newcastle) 'Evening Chronicle', 18th December, 1972.
4. 'Morning Star', 10th July 1972.
5. That is, without the company's permission.

The subsequent negotiations with the company resulted in an agreement that the Leadgate workers should establish a sub-contract unit to receive company work[1]. The company were to provide a loan of £2,500 towards the payment of the first month's wages and guarantee at least six months sub-contract work to help get the unit off the ground. The local director, William Reed, was to act in the capacity of consultant but would still be under the parent company's employ[2]. Thus, in January of 1973, the new venture came into being; renamed 'Nightbridge Engineering'. Of the original occupation workforce only thirty remained, and of these nineteen were directly employed at Nightbridge while the remained were paid by the parent company until the new venture could absorb them.

The running of the new venture was stated to be along 'co-operative' lines but there were many in the labour movement that had their doubts, including the normally supportive IWC. Leading IWC spokesman Ken Coates spelled out these doubts sometime later,

"This situation raised one of the most common arguements about the difficulties of the co-operative strategy: it differed little from the old trade union device of the 'collective contract', which, for various reasons, aroused suspicion among some modern trade unionists" (3).

Within Nightbridge itself operations were under some form of 'workers' control'. The venture was run by a Board of Directors made up of six former shop floor workers and Jack Rostron the local AUEW district secretary. This Board handled many of the important decisions regarding the running of the factory but various crucial issues were put to full meetings of the whole workforce. The fact that the venture was run in this way is an indication of the shift in thinking of certain trade unionists and of the Leadgate leadership in particular.

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1. It was Fred Carlyon's opinion that the company signed the agreement, "thinking that we wouldn't last the length of time it took to write out a document as a sub-contract unit", (Study tour interview, Oct.'76).

2. The company was Stibbe of Leicester.

3. 1977, p.13.

Debatably, however, the 'co-operative' spirit only appears to have been half-hearted and as such this seems due to a weakness in the leadership situation. Commenting on the level of 'worker democracy' within the factory one worker put it that,

"Sometimes we just get cat's tail of the argument with bits rubbed off. But mainly they tell you as much as you want to know" (1).

Apart from a Board of worker directors no attempt was made to alter the pay structure within the factory. Old ideas were taken over with small modification. According to Carlyon,

"If you pay the lowest-paid men a reasonable wage the rest will find their own level. If you start at the top you find that the man at the bottom is starving"(2).

Eventually, a year later, faced with the loss of Stibbe work and the chance of a sub-contract for different work for Churchill Tools Carlyon put it to the workforce that the choice before them lay between "wrapping it up" or "sacking twenty people . . . and bringing in skills necessary"[3]. The majority chose to leave the venture and share out existing finance while Carlyon and one or two others went on to found a new - private enterprise - establishment.

The new establishment was run, under the directorship of Carlyon, along strictly capitalist lines. The Board "runs the company and has total say within it". Carlyon "as the managing director, passes the instructions down to the works' superintendent, he to the foreman and the foreman to the men; like any other factory"[4]. And, as is standard with most firms, the new private Nightbridge

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1. Quoted in (Newcastle)'Eveining Chronicle', 27th December 1973. While it is true that 'worker democracy' hardly works perfectly and that such attitudes can be found to be expressed even in the 'best' worker co-operative it did not seem untypical of the situation within Nightbridge Ltd. Carlyon himself pointed out that the venture had "unfortunately . . . lost some of its ideals as a worker co-operative" (Study tour interview, Oct.'76).

2. (Newcastle) 'Evening Chronicle', 27th December 1973.

3. Study tour interview, Oct.'76.

4. Ditto. The new Board consisted of a chairman who was brought in from 'outside' on the basis of nis investment in the firm to the extent of becoming a one-third owner.

firm engaged in sackings and lay-offs. In the first years of operation, up to October 1976, the firm sacked "eight or ten" workers and usually "in the first month of employment". Carlyon's major lament in this connection was that, "the Employment Act in this country is stacked-up against management"[1]. And these were not the words of a man who had been converted from a left-socialist position to one of the right of centre in the Labour Party. They were consistent. Encouraged by the militant situation of the time and the pressing circumstances at Leadgate a right-wing socialist had led a small group of workers into radical action. A combination of both ideological and - more telling - economic weaknesses had brought about the end of the advances made and, faced with a new situation, Carlyon reverted to his old style of thinking and leadership.

Despite the criticism of the IWC the situation at Leadgate did represent an advance. A small group of workers did manage to wrest some vital control over at least a part and an important part of their working lives. The situation they were faced with, however, and the weakness of the leadership meant that the radicalism was both short lived and failed to have more than a limited impact on other workers.

The 'Scottish Daily Express': Events at the 'Scottish Daily Express' must, to some extent, be treated as unique. The development of 'worker co-operatives' holds the potential of widely publicising trade union and socialist ideas. The 'Scottish Daily Express' workers had the added potential - in the ownership of a newspaper - of promoting those ideas in a regular and powerful fashion. In this the role of leadership was crucial. In fact, the style of the eventual 'worker owned' newspaper revealed serious leadership weaknesses.

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1. Study tour interview, Oct. '76.

When the Beaverbrook organisation announced the loss of two-thousand jobs from its Glasgow newspapers[1] in March 1974 the local print chapels set up an 'Action Committee' to fight the decision. Clearly the unions were strong and united[2] but what action should they take? A key problem lay in the fact that they were influenced by the company's arguement that the transfer of the Glasgow papers to Manchester would help maintain the jobs of print workers elsewhere within the organisation. Thus, for the 'Action Committee' the alternatives to unemployment appeared few. It was at this point that the idea of a workers' co-operative was floated. As Alistaire Mackie, the Action Committee leader, was to put it,

"At first when the idea was placed on the Action Committee's agenda . . . no one would give it serious consideration. It was just too ambitious - yet there was no alternative" (3).

That the idea of a workers' co-operative arose out of weakly formulated notions of saving jobs and not out of any major desire to establish some form of workers' control is seen in a number of other statements made by Mackie.

"The entire history of the 'Scottish Daily News' is founded on the determination of a group of trade union activists to fight against unemployment. Any other consideration was incidental" (4).

According to Mackie a majority of the Action Committee,

"simply believed that by effort and organisation they could create employment for themsleves through the setting up of a newspaper under a co-operative structure"(5).

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1. The papers involved were the 'Scottish Daily News', the 'Sunday Express' and the 'Glasgow Evening Citizen'.
2. A.Mackie, 1977, p.109.
3. Ibid, p.111.
4. Ibid, p.109. (My emphasis, AJM).
5. Ibid, pp.112-113.

Even the "political" approach of the minority reveals a number of serious weaknesses. As Mackie points out, the minority - "being the more politically conscious" - saw the co-operative idea as a "vehicle of protest". Its

> "successful outcome (being) . . . so remote that it appeared almost an impossibility but not quite. The effort and the protest would have to be made" (1).

Thus, while a majority of the leadership were primarily interested in saving jobs the minority could see no further than the establishment of a co-operative as a form of large-scale protest. It was a divided leadership in which even the "politically conscious" were not fully convinced of the viability of a co-operative venture; a lack of conviction that may well be counted in their subsequent inability to overcome problems within the co-operative.

Further evidence of leadership weaknesses was to be revealed in a number of ways in the running of the co-operative itself. True the workforce were united in a powerful Federated House Chapel whose strength "was difficult to match in any national newspaper in Britain"[2] but it was a unity built around specific ends and in opposition to a specific structure - the Beaverbrook Organisation. Faced with a new task, of stating what it stood for and of where it was going, it failed quite badly and again the leadership question was crucial. The establishment of a worker co-operative is relatively unproblematic in manufacturing concerns such as domestic heating production or motor cycle production. There will be relatively little dispute about the nature of the product to be manufactured. This is not

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1. A.Mackie, 1977, p.112.
2. Ibid, p.109.

the case with the production of a newspaper. A domestic heater only reflects on the worth of a co-operative in so far as it is a well made item. A newspaper, on the other hand, can potentially reflect the very values and ideology of those running such a venture. It was a challenge that was to a large extent to break and divide the co-operative leadership.

The unity that a workforce might build around production of the same products but under workers' control just could not be sustained when it concerned the philosophy of the product; the philosophy of the newspaper that was to be co-operatively produced - 'The Scottish Daily News'. This was to be expected in a situation where the Action Committee consisted of a combination of "Labour sympathisers with perhaps two or three SNP sympathisers" and a communist or two[1]. Coupled with this the entreprenurial Labour M.P. Robert Maxwell was involved in the venture in a managing role and the chairman of the Scottish Nationalist Party, William Wolfe, was involved as a financial advisor. Reflecting this diversity of interests and the leadership's inability to come down firmly in one way or another Alistair Mackie announced, immediately prior to the new paper's launch, that it would be,

"Scottish, independent and radical - politically liberal with a small case 'l' " (2).

In fact, over the paper's short life its identity altered from day to day and from page to page. Part of the problem appears to lie in the fact that, to begin with, editorial direction was left to the journalists on the paper instead of being open for discussion generally among the workforce.

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1. A.Mackie, 1977, pp.112-113.

2. The 'Morning Star', 2nd April 1974.

Yet even here Mackie, the most able of the Action Committee, appears unable to draw the lessons. The problem lies not with the fact that editorial direction was left to the journalists but rather, according to Mackie, that those journalists were not competent enough to handle the situation.

> "They were . . . given a chance no other group of journalists had ever previously been offered - the right to determine the editorial content of their own newspaper. (But) sadly the editorial content did not rise to meet the aspirations either of the workforce or of the Works Council.
>
> (They) seemed unable to produce a page with a distinct identity. The effect was that the paper's philosophy varied from page to page and story to story. (They) were not experienced in their roles, and were selected more by their contribution to the struggle to create the paper, than by their individual talents" (1).

Mackie could only see a way out in the appointment of an editor "who had not been part of the struggle and who therefore could be objective" in his choice of editorial staff[2]. It indicates that Mackie, and others around him, had adopted the old methods of overall control in regards to editorial content of a newspaper.

Ultimately the character of the leadership and the nature of the workforce's commitment to co-operative principles was to be revealed in the support given to Robert Maxwell in his efforts to gain effective control over the direction of the paper. With the setting up of the co-operative paper the Action Committee had been transformed into a "Works Council" charged with overseeing the running of the venture. Initially this body was led by Mackie and a majority sympathetic to his slightly left of centre[3] position. Slowly but surely Robert Maxwell appealed to the workforce for the removal of those who opposed his own direction and he succeeded. Early

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1. Mackie, 1977, pp. 131-134.
2. Ibid.
3. During an interview with former 'Morning Star' Scottish industrial journalist - Arthur Milligan - Mackie was described to me as "a middle-of-the-road Labour man who has recently found militancy". (Interview, July 1975).

on "politically conscious" elements James McNamara and Charles Armstrong were removed. Later Maxwell turned his guns on Mackie and James Russell (a financial journalist). Interestingly, he was able to appeal to the workforce to remove them on the grounds that they were committed to some form of co-operative principles. A 'Sunday Times' report on the affair is particularly revealing:

> "Maxwell's method was to denigrate the works council as incompetent fools more interested in political experiments than producing a successful newspaper, and to appeal to the workforce over the head of the council, holding himself up as the only man who could save their jobs because only he could raise advertising revenue. By playing on the workers' worry that they could not only lose their jobs but their investment . . . Maxwell broke their spirit to such an extent some of them began to wonder if their critics had been right: that running a business should be left to management. "We've got to face it", one of the workers said after a particularly stormy meeting, "we need to feel the master's whip". "(1).

The emphasis on saving jobs and through the reliance on old style management, as described in the 'Sunday Times' report, resulted in a vote of three-hundred to twelve in favour of Mackie and Russell's removal from the works council.

Very shortly the political mess within the paper was to be caught up with the economics of running a business of this type and the newspaper's life came to an abrupt end.

In the end the idea of a co-operative newspaper had been an inspiration to many throughout the Scottish labour movement and beyond. The fact that a good part of the finance had come from the Labour Government and representing a victory of the Tony Benn 'left' inside the Cabinet added greatly to the sense of importance attaching to the opening of the co-operative 'Scottish Daily News'. In short, the event had tremendous ideological value for the forces of socialism within the labour movement.

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1. Report by Ian Jack, Phillip Knightly and James Fox, 'How Maxwell Sabotaged the Workers' Dream', 21st Sept. 1975.

For a short, but only a short, while events within the venture were to represent an advance in control for those workers involved. However, overall the internal situation within the 'Scottish Daily News' far from matched up to the ideals projected by its launch: the reality did not match the dream[1].

Triumph Meriden: Meriden - along with the K.M.E. co-operative - has served as a beacon light of co-operative principles. If any ideological strength can be said to have been drawn from the advent of worker co-operatives then Meriden can claim much of the credit. It is the example that has manged to divert attention from many of the shortcomings of the others.

As with sit-ins at other factories facing closure the workers at the Meriden works began their action very much as a protest action aimed at buying time. The action did not begin with the aim of wresting control and establishing a workers' co-operative. When, "without any prior notice or consultation", the company announced that the works were to be closed within months the workforce imposed an immediate embargo on the movement of finished products (motor-cycles) and plant from the works. The managing director, Dennis Poore, responded to this action by announcing that the works would now be closed down immediately. At this point the workers escalated their action and staged a sit-in. Their previous action had been a kind of 'work-in', with the workforce continuing production but exercising control over its distribution. Now the workforce sat-in and extended control over plant and the production itself: they offered to release from the factory one new bike for every new order placed but this met with management

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1. The situation inside the Scottish Daily News has since been severely criticised by Bill Freeman - convener at Briants Colour Printing:

"Print unions have given good support to them; not so much the official leadership but from the membership. But they are working machinery with staffing conditions that are a threat to the rest of the industry. Employers say to us openly that they are overmanned and that if they could have the sort of staffing that the 'Scottish Daily News' have then they could survive better. And, that they wouldn't have needed to close the 'Express' with such a staffing. We (at Briants) wouldn't have been prepared to get into that field where to save our jobs we would have to do something that was harmfull to the movement". Interview, Sept. 1975.

intransigence[1].

As with the other co-operative workforces the Meriden situation began with a vital weakness in internal support. Over one-thousand of the Meriden workforce did not become involved in the sit-in and left the factory once management declared in closed: leaving seven-hundred to battle on alone. Unlike other co-operative developments the decision to opt for a workers' co-operative seems to have been substantially discussed by the remaining workforce prior to any campaign or completion of any contracts. The idea itself - i.e., of campaigning for a workers' co-operative - appears to have originated from the local TGWU Divisional Organiser (Bill Lapworth) and local Labour M.P. Leslie Huckfield[2]. The strength of the workforce's enthusiasm for the idea can be seen in the fact that they began campaigning to become a workers' co-operative just two weeks after the management's closure announcement and only three days into the sit-in. Lapworth and Huckfield were asked to negotiate with the company to this end.

An added strength in the workforce's enthusiasm which differed from those in other occupation situations was a belief in the worth of their product. Possibly in some cases this commitment, as suggested by one supporter, was stronger than any commitment to co-operative principles:

" (The) workers' enthusiasm for motor cycles and their confidence in their own ability to construct them attractively and effectively, were stronger than any arid dogma either of the right or the left . . ."(3).

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1. Cf. E.Johnson, 1975.

2. 'The Morning Star', 2nd November 1975. Also K.Fleet, 1977. p.92.

3. K.Fleet, 1977. A similar point is to be found in other sources:-
The Co-operative Party 'Notes' (Aug.'75) states that,
"The Meriden co-operative was started because the men had great faith in their product and were outraged at the proposal that the "Bonneville" should cease to be produced at Meriden".
'The Times', 17th January 1977, similarly reported that,
"At Kirby the workers were seeking nothing more than the right to work and to escape the dole queue. At Meriden there was an emotive attachment to the kind of job that was being done and, more especially, to the product itself".

If Meriden workers were in any way committed to the idea of a workers' co-operative many within the labour movement were not. They were given a "hard time from some trade unions" and some trade unionists even "hoped to see Meriden fail"[1]. The idea also met with hostility from various leftist political groups[2]. A major exception was the IWC. This is of interest because it is sometimes believed that the establishment of such worker co-operatives signalled an advance among the British labour movement, when clearly certain sections were not at all happy with the situation[3].

It was to be some time after the campaign was begun before the Meriden co-operative became a reality. It was, in fact, to be another eighteen months before the co-operative began operations, but this provided ample time for the workforce to discuss and work out the details and principles of the co-operative venture.

The character of the Meriden co-operative was two-sided. On the one hand, the production details resembled that at Nightbridge, i.e., a form of 'collective contract': the workforce owned the production end but relied heavily on the former owners to purchase and market the finished product. On the other hand, the management and operating principles of the venture were along the lines of egalitarianism and strong elements of direct democracy.

Management structure: The venture began with a Board of eight directors responsible for day-to-day decisions. These directors are elected from each

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1. Interview with Felix Keane (External Relations Manager) - October, 1976.

2. The International Marxist Group (IMG) and the International Socialism Group both condemned the idea. 'Journal of the International Marxist Group' Vol.2 No.3, Winter/Spring 1975; 'Socialist Worker', 20th July 1974.

3. Even Meriden's architect and staunchest supporter, Bill Lapworth, did not see the establishment of a workers' co-operative as the signal for any further developments in the labour movement. As far as he was concerned worker co-operatives were "not some sort of panacea for the ills of British industry, but a course of action in this particular case". 'Morning Star', 9th October 1975.

of the unions involved. Managers are appointed by the Board but neither do they bear the title of 'manager' nor do they have the ultimate right of dismissal. All persons performing a supervisory or managerial role are refered to as "organisers", and they have the initial right to dismiss workers. Dissatisfied workers, however, can ultimately appeal against the decision of an organiser to an 'Appeals Committee' made up of five workers elected directly from the shop floor[1].

Ownership: Unlike other worker co-operatives the Meriden workforce decided that shareholding should be kept to the bare minimum required under company law, i.e., three persons. The three shareholders each have a one pound share but do not have a greater say in the running of the co-operative than non-shareholders. They are in effect trustees for the co-operative and are bound by trust deed to vote as directed by a majority of workers at a general meeting[2].

Decision making: Without a doubt the Meriden co-operative is the most democratically run of the worker co-operatives, i.e., in regard to direct democracy. Directors are all subject to re-election; with a third being required to put themselves up for re-election each year[3]. Major decisions are put to a mass meeting of the workforce and majority votes are binding. Regular monthly meetings are held where the workforce receive reports from the directors and can raise questions and problems with them. In addition a

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1. Before any appeal goes that far it goes first to the Personnel Manager and then - if the person is still dissatisfied - to the Managing Director.
2. The co-operative is registered as a private limited company with the name "Synova Motors". Interestingly, the workforce continue to refer to the venture as Meriden.
3. The directors were all, at the start of the venture, the former senior shop stewards.

number of special meetings can be held during working hours to discuss matters of importance that require urgent consideration. At such meetings directors could be forced to resign on a vote of 'no confidence'[1].

The workforce also exercise some influence over the appointment of organisers. Although appointed by the Board an organiser first has to be approved by the section of workers involved. If ever a section of workers express serious disapproval an organiser can be removed or demoted[2].

On the whole the organiser has tended to function as a co-ordinator of production rather than an authority figure controlling the workforce. Each worker acts as their own inspector and, with a few exceptions, everyone is able to change work tasks[3]. Work tasks themselves were initially enlarged to allow the workforce to gain a wider appreciation of the process and gain better job satisfaction.

The hiring of new labour is done by the Personnel department but even here the workforce have an important say. All successful candidates for employment have ultimately to be vetted by the workforce section in which they are likely to be employed[4].

In the area of design enthusiasts from the workforce meet on a

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1. The voting distribution is the only major anomaly in this otherwise egalitarian institution. Each person who has been with the co-operative for twelve months or more is allowed a vote. A person can, however, acquire extra votes by having a longer employment record. Thus, the person with two years employment with the co-operative is entitles to two votes; three years employment gets you three votes, and so on up to a maximum of five votes.

2. This has actually happened during the life of the co-operative.

3. The only exceptions are those jobs in which a special skill is required and where the job is dangerous to the untrained person, i.e., welding.

4. The Personnel department keeps a list of former employees of Meriden who have expressed an interest in working for the co-operative, plus a number of other interested persons who have writen in for work. Candidates are drawn from this list - of over one-thousand names - when a vacancy occurs.

regular basis and discuss ideas for improvements and modifications to the motor cycles.

Wages and conditions: For much of the developing years of the co-operative the principles of egalitarianism were reflected in the very wage structure itself. Up until 1977 everyone at the Meriden factory received the same wage regardless of skill, sex, age, years of service, and work done. Everyone was, initially, paid fifty pounds a week and this was increased to fifty-six in late 1976[1].

Morale: In a number of ways Meriden was a shining example to the British labour movement. They had occupied their factory and eventually became its new owners. They boldly declared that they would have no truck with narrow demarcation lines or pay differentials, nor would they retain traditional structures of authority and control. Ownership was to mean an active and on-going process. What is more, despite a number of severe difficulties, these changes seemed to be paying off in terms of improved production.

Direct decision making surely made some contribution to the "high morale" of the workforce well into 1976[2]. Absenteeism had been reduced to a two percent rate compared with a seven percent average for other firms in the Coventry area[3]. As a result of changes which included job enlargement and voluntary job rotation the workforce were quickly able to overcome any bottle-neck that occurred: demarcation disputes were a thing of the past. The wages structure, it was claimed, led to an improvement in the quality of production.

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1. During a study tour in October 1976 it was pointed out that the tea lady received the same wage as the Director who was showing us around the factory. The strength of egalitarian feeling at the co-operative is shown in the fact that for many of the skilled workforce staying with the co-operative meant a drop in wages in the order of £20-30 week. Cf.Fleet, 1977, p.105.
2. When asked whether they liked working at the co-operative Meriden workers largely seemed to answer to the effect that, 'of course I like working here, I own the factory'. Several workers were questioned informally during the October 1976 study tour.
3. Within the factory in 1976 notices indicated that for the 47 weeks up to the middle of October the absenteeism rate was 1.8%, i.e., lower than that officiall stated.

This was largely due to the ending of productivity arrangements. In addition the very fact of a flat-rate pay system allowed the co-operative to do away with the need for a huge wages department as had previously existed under the former company.

If ever a workers' co-operative can be pointed to as having made a positive contribution both in providing a challenge to capitalist ideology and raising sections of workers' aspirations then it must be Meriden. They had a leadership commited to some form of co-operative principles and a workforce similarly inclined due to months of discussions about the nature of the new venture. The only serious flaw in the whole situation was the curious fact that the Meriden leadership would have nothing to do with the co-operative at Kirkby. Infact, there was mutual hostility between the two co-operatives: both claiming to be the only true co-operative in a situation reminiscent of the dispute between China and the Soviet Union. This was doubly sad given that in time an even bigger enemy - the capitalist economy - was to undermine various of the egalitarian trends within Meriden.

K.M.E. - Thorn or Flower? The sit-in by workers at I.P.D. in Kirkby began as a reaction against planned redundancies and closure. And, as with many other such actions, the primary motivation of the I.P.D. workers was to save jobs. In fact, in the early stages of the crisis at IPD the shop stewards supported the firm in its efforts to get an Industry Act loan. On several occasions stewards lobbied the Labour Government for aid to keep open the firm and certainly at this stage the idea of a workers' co-operative was not in their minds.

The idea of a workers' co-operative very much arose out of the negotiations that senior stewards had with the Minister at the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) - Tony Benn. A statement by Benn reveals the role.

that he played in pushing the idea:

"There was suspicion among the shop stewards when they came to the Department of Industry: suspicion about what we were trying to say to them.
First of all they said "We want you to save the firm. That's what we want. Will you give money to save the firm?". And to get them to believe that we were really not interested in saving the firm but we were interested in saving the jobs and saving the production - it took a very long time to persuade them that it was not a con-trick by a Minister who was finding some excuse for not helping them in the ordinary way that Ministers help firms - by giving money to the firm" (1).

Elsewhere it has been pointed out that,

"The co-operative idea . . . emerged from the talks between Tony Benn and the Conveners, Spriggs and Jenkins" (2).

Eventually convinced of the idea the conveners began to put together the outline of a plan for a co-operative to be submitted to the DTI for financial assistance. In the meantime the Official Receiver was in the process of attempting to find a new buyer for the firm. Not until they were relatively sure of government aid did the conveners then take the plan to the occupation workforce. As convener Jack Spriggs was to put it,

"We first ensured that the co-operative idea had a good chance of acceptance and then we could go to the workers and say 'look, we've got the chance of government backing for a workers' co-operative if you'll agree to it" (3).

Faced with such a compelling proposition the workers did accept the idea but,

"as a pragmatic, expedient prospect for running the business; it did not come from any deep groundswell of unified political commitment. It was primarily reactive" (4).

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1. T.Benn, 1977, pp.71-87.
2. T.Eccles, 1977, p.155
3. Study Tour interview, Oct. 1976.
4. T.Eccles, op cit, p.155.

Once again the new co-operative began with only a minority of the original workforce; in this case less than seven hundred became involved in the sit-in with a further eight hundred staying out of the action. Despite the various weaknesses in the situation the workforce leadership did manage to forge some commitment to co-operative principles among the workforce as a whole.

Management structure: At the Kirkby co-operative - renamed Kirkby Manufacturing and Engineering (KME) - democratic principles were made a central element of management but more in the form of a representative democracy rather than the direct form prevalent at Meriden. It was decided to have two Directors only. These were given responsibility for the day-to-day decision making. Below these a number of departmental heads were created or maintained along with the roles of General Manager, Personnel Manager and Works Manager. The ultimate decision making body, however, is the governing body consisting of the former shop stewards' committee[1]; the majority decision of this body is binding.

The right of hiring lies in the hands of the Personnel Manager but only from a list of candidates vetted by the governing body[2]. Similarly, the General Manager has the sole responsibility for sackings but his actions are bound by a "code of operations" and sacked workers have the ultimate right of appeal to the governing body[3]. This right had, in fact, been tested in the early life of the co-operative. A strike occurred after the General Manager sacked two workers for failing to move to other tasks within the factory. The

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1. At first a "Works Council" was established - separate from the shop stewards' committee - to take on this function. Very quickly it became defunct and the shop stewards' committee effectively took over the function. This body of course is ultimately responsible to the entire workforce in mass meeting.

2. Priority employment is given to unemployed trade unionists. Anyone with a record of having previously accepted voluntary redundancy is not eligible.

3. Sacking, according to the "code" is to be restricted to "industrial misconduct". Redundancy was not to be allowed; worksharing was to be the rule where the situation warranted it.

strike lasted for twenty-four hours and was resolved by the intervention of the two Directors[1].

One potential problem area with the process of democratic management at KME lies in the fact that both the Directors retained their union positions of convenor and deputy convenor and as such continued to sit on the shop stewards' committee. This put management on those committees which considered policy and the appeals of disgruntled workers. The safety valve, however, lies in the fact that as union representatives they would be liable to re-election on a periodic basis.

Ownership: Unlike Meriden the KME co-operative decided that all employees should be a one pound shareholder. All shareholders have an equal vote in the say of the co-operative both at shareholder meetings and works' mass meetings. No plans were made to introduce the Meriden electoral system of one vote for every year of employment at the co-operative; the only uneven situations were in regard to new comers who were to be allowed a vote only after twelve months employment with the venture[2].

Decision making: Directors are responsible for many of the day-to-day decision making but they are subject to re-election every year on a majority vote of the shareholding workforce. In the meantime the shop stewards committee are empowered to over-rule Directors' decisions and in turn this committee have to answer to mass meetings of the entire shareholding workforce. The majority decision of mass meetings is binding and such meetings can be

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1. Director Jack Spriggs has since stated that the General Manager acted "hastily" in giving the order to the two workers to change tasks and acted "hastily" once more in sacking them.

2. One danger in universal share holding, that the Meriden workers hoped to avoid, is the fact that if people leave the co-operative's employ they are legally entitled to take their share with them. Further they are also entitled to sell their share if they remain with the co-operative or not. This creates the danger of "outside" shareholders. Aware of this the co-operative "encouraged those leaving to give up their £1 share".

called at any time by the Directors or the shop stewards' committee. The workforce are entitled to raise any item at these meetings. Such mass meetings were being held about every six weeks during 1976. In addition there is a constitutional annual general meeting of all shareholder members to decide on policy.

Wages: At KME economic "realities" rather than political principles determined the wages structure. The wages structure was rationalised into three categories of payment; a skilled, semi-skilled and an unskilled rate. All KME workers were paid on one of these grades. This excluded the Directors. They received a wage according to their previous level of skill - both were semi-skilled. This entitled them to the going rate of forty-nine pounds a week. However, the egalitarianism ended there because in addition they received a further sum of three thousand pounds a year as a Director's fee[1].

Morale: After eighteen months of operation morale at the works seemed high. According to the Directors morale was a lot higher than it had been under the previous employer and certainly this was the impression coming from the shop floor[2]. It is difficult to gauge just how definate an effect this had on absenteeism as the Directors would say no more than that there was "some improvement" over the old employer situation. Labour flexibilty, however, had improved considerably. Skilled workers were willing to take on lesser skilled work when required to and this was assisted in the fact that it did not require them to experience any drop in wages[3].

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1. Such a situation is not necessarily out of keeping with the principles of co-operative working. Extra responsibility and extra hours can be a good case for unequal payment. It is curious, however, that Jack Spriggs chose to stress - during the Study Tour interview - that his wage was at the semi-skilled rate and that he did not receive any overtime payments "despite working irregular hours".
2. The workforce appeared, indeed stated that they were, happy. The workpace appeared leisurely and in some cases two people carried out tasks where one might have been used elsewhere.
3. The choice of flexible working relations lies with the workforce and is tempered only by situational requirements and skill requirements.

The fact that the co-operative was run along democratic lines will have undoubtedly contributed to the morale within the KME factory but there is some evidence that many of the workforce were still not fully committed to co-operative principles. For many the co-operative still represented, "nothing more than the right to work and to escape the dole queue" (1). Nonetheless, despite various problems the KME co-operative contained many advances in democratic management; serving, again, as an inspiration to many within the labour movement and acting as a new challenge to capitalist ideology. But once again economic factors were to help undermine these advances; factors which played on leadership weaknesses[2].

The Hostile Economic and Political Environment.

As a political challenge the worker co-operatives - especially Meriden, KME, and (to some extent) Scottish Daily News - represented a new stage in the ongoing open political-industrial battles of the 1970s. The challenge, however, lay more in the nature of a contribution to socialist ideology rather than representing any genuine inroads into the power of capital. The threat lay in the fact that other workers in thriving industries might begin to attempt to emulate their co-operative brothers and sisters. A major weakness in the worker co-operative situation lay in the fact that they all arose out of situations of industrial crisis for the previous company[3]. This represented a weakness both in terms of the survival of the co-operatives themselves and the continued strength of the co-operative principles in force. A workers

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1. 'The Times', 17th January 1977.
2. One weakness was the fact that KME Directors had a hostile attitude to the Meriden co-operative; accusing them of being sectarian and too utopian in the running of their affairs. They also held the attitude that Meriden was doomed to failure and that KME should have nothing to do with them. In fairness, they had made attempts to contact Meriden with a view to some form of co-operation but were rebuffed.
3. To a limited extent the Leadgate situation is different given that the closure was more due to the company's manipulation of regional grants.

co-operative at Ford's would have had far more practical, as well as ideological, implications for British capitalism.

Fakenham Enterprises Ltd: Whatever the financial situation of the firm of Sexton and Sons its conversion into a workers co-operative would have made very little practical impact given that it only employed forty-five workers in a weak industry. As it happens the start of the process began in March 1972 when the company were informed by their bankers that no more funds would be available to them[1].

The co-operative started life with the old machinery from the previous company, purchased with a loan from the Scott Bader organisation. The product consisted of various oddments of leather wear at first but after a while the workforce concentrated on the production of uppers for shoes but, necessarily, on a sub-contracting basis. This, however, put the co-operative at the mercy of the self-same market situation that had killed off their previous employer. Indeed, with a heavy recession in the shoe industry the firm sub-contracting out the work faced serious financial difficulties and the co-operative lost their main source of employment. They continued for a short while after this and began to work on wool and tweed designs but by the end of 1976 the IWC were referring to the end of a "brave experiment"[2]. It had indeed been a brave experiment. At best the co-operative only ever employed thirty and paid a maximum wage of around twenty-three pounds a week. For a period of some weeks wages had been as low as ten pounds a week and the venture had to survive several shortages of cash before finally collapsing[3].

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1. 'The Morning Star', 27th July 1972.

2. The IWC, remarkably, did pronounce death a little too soon as the co-operative was still to be found in operation as late as July 1977.

3. They had to survive the loss, in early 1975, of their part-time financial adviser, David Spreckly. Spreckly resigned after the co-operative failed to take his advice to liquidate the firm that year.

Nightbridge Engineering Ltd: A major factor that undermined the Nightbridge venture was the economic arrangements that it concluded in order to begin operations. The sub-contract work that it concluded with the former company - Stibbe - was both the making and the breaking of the venture. It is difficult, however, to know if they could have done better by taking a different direction.

The product at the Leadgate factory was textile machinery and this provided a compelling reason for attempting to come to a deal with the Stibbe company. Unfortunately, the venture did not diversify its outlets and products and faced a serious crisis when Stibbe ran into financial difficulties in the midst of a recession in the textile industry. For the Stibbe company the first to go was the sub-contracting work. The country was experiencing a steel shortage about the same time and this affected supplies to the ailing Nightbridge. The crowning problem was the introduction by the then Conservative Government of the infamous "Three-day working week".

Faced with such a vast crisis it was decided to close down the venture and re-open as a new company operating along much more traditional managerial lines. The idea of a new company was made possible by an agreement made by Director Fred Carlyon with the Churchill company to work on the assembly of machine tools. Why the co-operative venture could not continue is explained by Carlyon:

"The factory was in desperate trouble and couldn't ignore the Churchill offer, and yet twenty of the thirty employees were specifically trained to the Stibbe product and couldn't cope with the change in the product" (1).

For Carlyon there was no scope, either in time or finance, to allow for re-training.

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1. Interview, Study Tour, October 1976.

His advice to the workforce was to close down, distribute any funds left, and re-open with new labour and with funds attracted, in part, from private sources. The workforce agreed, but a number of questions remain. Wasn't it possible, for example, to attempt to diversify the work at an earlier stage and allow for some element of retraining? And just how true is it to say that two-thirds of the workforce could not have coped with the change of product? The factory was new and was staffed by a workforce which included many who had gone through government retraining centres[1]. Couldn't other work have been found that the workforce could have coped with? There may be no easy answer to any of these questions and, if nothing else, they reveal the economic difficulties that confront a co-operative leadership and which can defeat even the ideologically strongest workplace leadership.

In this case the leadership, in the form of Carlyon and Rostron, was ideologically weak on the question of worker co-operatives and the economic difficulties served to strengthen their views of reality. Sadly, the man who had fought "for human dignity" in the summer of 1972 was declaring by December that "a state of goodwill exists between us and the company"[2] and by October of 1976 was stating that,

> "I still have socialist ideas but we've got to manage a company. It's got to be viable. You've got to convince other people because you live in a commercial world . . . We were forced to conform to the established commercial ways of doing things. Now confidence is building up" (3).

In late 1976 the new company headed by Carlyon was somewhat different from the former venture. Carlyon continues as director but at a salary at

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1. Carlyon himself had been retrained. Interestingly, in the course of the new company work was diversified and reliance on Churchill weakened.

2. (Newcastle) 'Evening Chronicle', 15th December 1972.

3. Study Tour interview. The "confidence" refered to by Carlyon refers to that of the banks.

least double that of a shopfloor worker in his employ. The company chairman is now an "outsider" with no connections with the former workforce struggle or indeed with the workforce. The new chairman - Mr.Johnson - bought his way into the new firm and owns no less than one-third of the company. Morale has also changed. When asked how employees like working for the new Nightbridge company[1] Carlyon replied that it was,

"not really different from working for other companies. We started off with broad democracy - consulting mass meetings. But then we got the articles of association changed and now operate as a limited company" (2).

Shopfloor workers at the factory expressed the view that Nightbridge was like any other employer in the area and that it was no more satisfying to work there than anywhere else[3]. One worker admitted that he was in the process of looking for another job.

Carlyon did express the view, in 1976, that he hoped that one day Nightbridge would once again operate as a workers' co-operative. However, there is little evidence to suggest that steps were being laid in that direction, on the contrary a number of factors were developing which would serve to prevent such an occurrance, i.e., the involvement of Johnson. What was a temporary advance in workers' control was rapidly convèrted into an exercise in petty capitalism. The weight of capitalist ideology in a situation of economic difficulty was too much for the ideologically unprepared Leadgate workers. For the time being the leaded gates of commercialism would appear to have closed around what had been something less than a radical experiment.

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1. The company name appears to have been retained.
2. Study Tour interview, October 1976.
3. Study Tour factory interviews, Oct.1976.

The Scottish Daily News: The economic viability of the 'SDN' was undermined by a number of serious weaknesses. Firstly, the former owners had felt compelled to close down two of its newspapers due to economic difficulties. Certainly the newspaper industry was experiencing a serious crisis[1]. This meant that the co-operative venture would need to overcome serious marketing and advertising problems in order to survive in such a cut throat industry. An early analysis estimated that the new paper could break even if it could gain a circulation of two-hundred thousand per day, with an advertising content of forty percent and with a total workforce of around six-hundred[2].

The great problem for such a newspaper would be that it would have to appear with a relatively clear identity, which, as exampled earlier, it failed to achieve. Thus, secondly, in a situation of crisis the paper failed to produce a product with a distinct identity.

Thirdly, the newspaper needed a skillful and relatively unified management. Again they were sadly lacking. Fourthly, the newspaper needed considerable financial backing if it was to have a chance to survive. Many new ventures take the view that they may need to run at a loss for anything up to a year before they begin to become established and hold an important element of the market. The financial backing for the 'Scottish Daily News' was piecemeal, inconsistent and badly thought out. Indeed it can be argued that the nature of the financial arrangements is the key to much of the newspapers failure. The question of management is strongly linked.

To begin with, the Government decided to help the co-operative get off the ground with a loan of one and three-quarter million pounds. Without this loan it is more than certain that the co-operative would not have been

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1. The Unions involved accepted to a certain extent that to argue for the retention of the 2,000 Scottish jobs could involve a challenge to the security of the jobs of their Manchester and London collegues.

2. This was the estimate of William Wolfe the co-operative's financial advisor.

embarked upon. Regrettably the loan was given with a number of strings attached and surrounded by a number of uncertainties. The Minister responsible, Tony Benn, agreed the loan against the advice of his own advisers. In addition Benn could only agree the loan if it had a number of conditions attached. The co-operative, for instance, had to raise almost half-a-million pounds already promised plus a further half million in equity or unsecured loans with a further three-quarters of a million in secured loan[1]. As if that task wasn't large enough potential investers would have to be made aware of the unfavourable report prepared by the DTI and the City of Glasgow consultants.

The financial arrangements were such that they almost inevitably put an important element of the co-operative into private control. Things might have been better in another direction but in this case the financial requirements of the loan allowed in the capital investment of Robert Maxwell. Robert Maxwell agreed to invest fifty pence for every pound invested by the workforce, and he made no bones about his involvement. He apparently stated that 'his return would be in political capital; the publicity of his involvement would be his reward, it could prove to be an aid to his future political life'[2].

The Action Committee, aware of Maxwell's former bad financial record with the Pergamon Press company, nonetheless decided to go along with his offer "but to be careful"[3]. But Maxwell's involvement was to cost them dearly. Maxwell had ambitions of his own which interfered with the running of the co-operative venture and on the eve of publication he put forward an ultimatum conditional on his continued financial involvement:

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1. A.Mackie, 1977, p.122.

2. Ibid, p,116

3. Ibid, p.116. In 1971 a D.T.I. investigation into the business affairs of Maxwell concluded that, "he is not . . . a person who can be relied on to exercise proper stewardship of a publically quoted company".

"The co-operative would have to agree to producing an evening edition; would have to accept Maxwell as Publisher; would have to put the needs of the paper before the demands of the unions; directors would have to commit themselves to resign in advance should they find themselves in a position of disagreement with the other directors" (1).

Faced with these conditions or the collapse of the co-operative the Action Committee, according to Mackie, had no alternative but to go along with them.

This was not to be the last time that Maxwell would use economic threat to impose conditions on the workforce. At the start of the venture he occupied the position of non-executive co-chairman but, aided by the Paper's economic difficulties, he was soon to assume day-to-day responsibility for the running of the paper. The venture had begun with a circulation of around three-hundred thousand daily but by the second week this was down to two-hundred thousand. Nonetheless, the General Manager could state at the end of May that the Paper was selling enough copies to make the venture viable. By August, however, several difficulties had set in and at this point Maxwell stepped in. He offered additional financial support but with himself in a leading position. Tragically this brought a double problem for the venture, not only did it signal a shift away from democratic management but at a cost of incompetent management. Without reference to anyone Maxwell announced a four point plan to save the paper: the price of the product was to be reduced, there was to be a pay-back scheme for advertisers in which rebates would be paid if circulation had failed to meet a two-hundred and forty thousand daily print, a new tabloid style was to be introduced, and the paper was to be run on a twenty-four hour basis with morning and late afternoon editions. Maxwell's plan not only failed but may have further damaged the paper's economic viability. Towards the end of September daily

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1. A.Mackie, 1977, p.127.

circulation was running at one-hundred and eighty thousand and the paper was losing twenty thousand pounds a week[1].

In addition to changes in the newpaper's style Maxwell had introduced a managerial style that was to severely hinder unity within the venture. The 'Sunday Times' was to comment that by now Maxwell had turned the paper into "an instrument of his own ambitions" imposing "an astonishing personal regime",

> "Frequently, production of the paper (was) interrupted as Robert Maxwell (came) onto the public address system, booming out exhortations to the workers and execrations of "saboteurs" and "malcontents" who (were) opposing his plans and - by extension - threatening the workforce with unemployment" (2).

Maxwell, in turn, appeared to place the failings of the venture not on his own errors of judgement but on what he called a campaign of hostility on the part of the 'Sunday Times'[3]. In the midst of an even greater financial crisis Maxwell resigned from the paper's executive position claiming that he was doing so in the interests of the paper; reasoning that in doing so the 'Sunday Times' would cease its "malicious campaign". That was October 1st. Six days later the Government turned down pleas for more financial assistance and the Prime Minister refused to meet a deputation from the paper[4]. On the 21st October a provisional liquidator was appointed and five days later the 'Sunday Times' announced that the,

> "Scottish Daily News has . . . temporarily ceased to be a co-operative. The workers no longer control the organisation now that the provisional liquidator . . . has taken over".

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1. 'The Times', 23rd September 1975.

2. I.Jack, P.Knightly and J.Fox, 'How Maxwell Sabotaged the Workers' Dream', 21st September 1975.

3. Ibid. Before Maxwell resigned he had managed to force several opponents off of the Action Committee & contribute to the resignation of the financial advisor Richard Brinston. Brinston resigned after his firm had been dismissed as auditors at an Executive Meeting that he was specifically asked not to attend. His firm was replaced by another who had acted as auditors for Maxwell's Pergamon Press.

4. The paper, it can be argued, was sacrificed to political expediency. With the transfer of Tony Benn went any further commitment to worker co-operatives.

A key element in the collapse of the 'Scottish Daily News' was undoubtedly the way in which the venture was financed. That a Labour Government supported the funding of a worker co-operative is remarkable but the strings attached to the finance reveals that the action was born of a political compromise. Tony Benn had won the day in winning support for the venture but only after severe restrictions were placed on the support. Those restrictions helped bring Robert Maxwell[1] into the picture. Additionally, far from putting political support into the venture the Labour Government withheld any further financial support and this factor finally helped to ensure the venture's death. This was a factor that was to weigh heavily against the survival prospects of the other ventures of K.M.E. and Triumph Meriden.

Synova Ltd: If the worker co-operative at the former Triumph Meriden works can be held up as a prime example of co-operative principles then it was also to be a prime example of how such principles can be undermined by economic circumstances.

The new co-operative venture of Synova was to be hindered by its industrial context, namely a failing British motor-cycle industry. To have overcome this inheritance would have required a massive re-investment programme and some product diversification. This did not happen and again the nature of the venture's initial funding is a vital key to the problem.

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1. Maxwell had been accused from an early stage of having an interest in the production of an evening newspaper and of using the co-operative to this end. In September 1975 (21st) The 'Sunday Times' stated that,
"Maxwell . . . makes no secret of the fact that he proposes to relaunch the 'Scottish Daily News' as an evening paper under his own control".
Maxwell described the charge as "totally untrue", and continued
"I have ambitions to control and own a Daily or Evening paper but none that concerns the 'Scottish Daily News' "(BBC 'Nationwide' interview, 10th Nov. 1975).
Once the provisional liquidator was called in the first person, in fact, to show any interest in buying the plant and building was Robert Maxwell. This was not accepted, and interestingly Maxwell had declined to take over the paper as a going concern, (The 'Times', 21st Oct.'75).

The crisis in the British motor-cycle industry: In the 1950s there had been in existance over twenty British motor-cycle manufacturers enjoying the vast majority of the market sales. At that time motor-cycles were enjoying boom years - reaching a peak in 1959. In a situation paralleling that in the British shipbuilding industry[1] motor-cycle manufacturers concentrated on short-term profitability, failed to substantially re-invest within the industry and failed to diversify their products. With a growing slump in the market throughout the 1960s and the growing competitive challenge of the Japanese several British manufacturers went out of business. By the onset of the 1970s and a revival of the market the Japanese were well placed to capture a sizeable part of the British market[2].

In the early 1970s sales of new machines rose by a steady twenty to twenty-four percent with the biggest growth area being that of mopeds[3]. Only a handful of British firms remained at this time and these produced mainly large bikes of 450 cubic capacity and bigger, four-fifths of which were being sold abroad. The British firms included the Triumph factory at Meriden which concentrated on production of the large bikes; the Wolverhapton factory of Norton Villiers in which over sixty-percent of its machine tools were more than twenty years old; and the BSA factory at Small Heath with inefficient buildings and lay-outs dating back to the First World-War and earlier[4]. The major Japanese companies entered the market with a range of motor-cycle capacities and with a capital investment almost four times greater than the major British firms[5].

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1. See Chapter 5.

2. Cf. 'An Industry Outclassed', The Times (editorial), 1st Aug. 1975; J.Fryer, 'Norton's final backfire?', The Sunday Times, 3rd Aug.'75; 'Motor cycle sales set for boom', The Times, 21st Aug. 1975; J.Fryer, 'Is Britain's bike business now into its final skid?', The Sunday Times, 26th October 1975.

3. The Times, 21st Aug. 1975.

4. K.Fleet, 1977, p.89.

5. J.Fryer, op cit, 3rd Aug. 1975.

As a consequence sales of British bikes in the USA over the period 1969-74 remained constant at thirty thousand units while Japanese sales rose from twenty-seven thousand to two hundred and eighteen thousand units[1]. In Britain the Japanese had, by 1974, captured eighty-three percent of the market while British manufacturers could only manage three percent[2].

Government aid - a political football: Clearly, if the British motor-cycle industry was to survive then fairly drastic measures had to occur and chiefly in the field of investment and diversification of product. Measures taken by the Conservative Government in 1973 brought about an amalgamation of existing manufacturers[3] and formed, what was to become, a disastrous link between the Meriden factory and those of Wolverhampton and Small Heath.

From the begining of the merger management policy proved divisive. The managing director's first major move was to attempt to close down one of the three factories and concentrate production at the other two. The factory chosen for closure was Meriden and this led to an occupation which increased the new company's problems[4]. The occupation

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1. J.Fryer, 'Norton's final backfire?', The Sunday Times, 3rd Aug.1975
2. P.Waymark, 'Motor cycle sales set to boom', The Times, 21st Aug.1975
3. The new company was called Norton Triumph Villiers (NVT).
4. Poore, the managing director, had been advised to close the Small Heath factory which was a lot older and less efficient. He chose Meriden however. Felix Keane, a Meriden Director, claims that Poore at that time was probably motivated by the fact that he would have been able to get a better price for the Meriden site. (Study Tour Interview, Oct.1976). K.Fleet (1977, p.90) adds that, "Poore wished to 'rationalise' production, concentrating on Small Heath simply because wage rates were lower there and the workforce more docile". Fleet also assesses that Poore probably had the intention of selling the Meriden site "as a spares depot to one of the motor manufacturers . . . and thus make a nice, fat capital profit for his company".

prevented the company from removing completed bikes, both weakening NVT's financial position and creating a situation in which it missed the vital spring sales drive in the USA[1].

By the spring of 1975 the company was in serious difficulties. The Meriden factory was in its eighteenth month of occupation - and non-production, and Dennis Poore was pressing the government for forty million pounds aid for a massive re-investment programme. Meanwhile Meriden workers were pressing the government for funds to establish a co-operative venture[2]. The government came up with the worst of both worlds. It financed the establishment of a workers' co-operative but in such a way that it would prove difficult for it to survive economically[3], and it failed to provide any more financial assistance to NVT which forced it to close down shortly afterwards. In the process it tied the co-operative's fate very much to that of NVT by the arrangements it had established in providing public funds.

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1. J.Fryer, 'Norton's final backfire', The Sunday Times, 3rd Aug.1975.

2. Dennis Poore and the workforce at the BSA works were very much opposed to this. In fact, the BSA workers carried on a long divisive struggle against the Meriden co-operative.

3. It provided the Meriden venture with £1.5 million in the form of a grant to purchase the company from NVT, plus a loan of £4.2 million at a concessionary 10% interest rate to be repaid over a 15 period and with the first payments begining after 5 years of operation. These terms were "less favourable . . . than (that given) to NVT". They received, at the begining of the amalgamation, £4.8 million in Government preferential shares with all dividends waived for 3 years before the option to buy out the shares or pay interest. (The Morning Star, 31st July 1974). As it turned out the co-operative was to receive no more financial assistance; NVT, on the other hand, received a further sum of £19 million.

   A further problem was that the ownership of Meriden's marketing arrangements and outlets was to remain with the NVT company.

The short of it was that a Conservative Government had made a financial commitment to saving the British motor-cycle industry but maintaining the ownership and control structure which had presumably presided over the developing crisis. At the same time it turned its back on the possibility of assisting a workers' co-operative venture. The change of government in 1974 caused added problems for the industry in that it represented for a short while a struggle of opposing left and right forces with the left marginally gaining the ascendancy on the question of workers' co-operatives. That ascendancy was quickly ended but left the new workers' co-operative in existance but faced with an unsympathetic Industry Minister. Unwilling to nationalise the remaining motor-cycle industry but equally unwilling to put any more public funds into a privately owned one the Labour Government allowed the industry to die-leaving, ironically, a weak and unaided co-operative to battle on.

Indeed, by 1979 the Meriden co-operative remained the sole British manufacturer of motor-cycles but now it faced the repayment of nearly one and a quarter million pounds in interest due on government loans and a new Conservative Government. In early July the co-operative, in financial difficulties, appealed to the new government either to waive the interest payments or to defer them until the end of December. The answer once again depended on the political character of the government and with the Industry Ministry in the hands of one of the Conservative Party's most ardent right-wingers[1] Meriden's closure was forshadowed. The political football had bounced in yet another direction.

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1. Sir Keith Joseph. Sir Keith announced in the House of Commons on the 17th July 1979 that,"Having considered carefully all the material put forward by Meriden in support of this request, the Government has decided that it should not be granted". (Financial Times, 18th July 1979)

Synova in the world of capital: The Synova co-operative was born against a background of an industry in crisis. Various economic problems beset the venture even before it got off the ground. The fact of the occupation itself meant that the famous Triumph motor-cycles were not marketed for almost two years. This along with a public uncertainty about the future of the British motor-cycle industry and fierce Japanese competition helped to ensure the loss of a vital element of the market.

Badly needing funds to get off the ground the Meriden workers instead faced procrastination as hostile elements in the government and civil service worked to hinder and constrain the positive assistance offered by Industry Minister Tony Benn[1]. The NVT company at the same time kept pushing up their asking price for the Meriden machinery as the conclusion of the government agreement drew nearer. This added three-quarters of a million pounds to the buying price[2].

The fact that NVT retained control over sales outlets was very quickly to cause the new co-operative problems. In July of 1975, with the co-operative in its infancy, the NVT company was in serious trouble.

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1. The co-operative began on the basis that they would lease the plant from NVT - who would supply components and purchase finished machines. This situation would continue for a month - until April of 1975 - when the co-operative would have to make an offer to purchase the factory outright and complete the deal by August of that year.
   The fact that the whole process took over a year to complete - from the time Tony Benn took office in February 1974 until March 1975 - was due to opposition from the Industry Developments Advisory Board (IDAB), from certain members within the Cabinet, and from the Treasury which "dragged its heels over the final agreement". Cf. K.Fleet, 1977.

2. Fortunately the government agreed to provide the extra money in the form of a grant. (Felix Keane, Study Tour Interview, Oct. 1976).

The difficulty seemed to lie in the acquisition of the provision of six million pounds in export finance from the government. The loan had been offered by the government to NVT but the company were refusing to go ahead with it on the ground that it contained "twenty pages of impractical conditions"[1]. In the meantime NVT were unable to purchase the machines that the co-operative had produced for the North American market. Synova was caught in the middle of a row between NVT and the government and in the meanwhile vast stockpiles of bikes were building up and the venture was facing a serious cash flow problem.

This situation continued for nearly three months at the end of which the co-operative was faced with a stockpile of over one thousand bikes[2]. To add to this further blow to the Triumph's marketability both Dennis Poore and Hugh Palin, another NVT director, launched verbal attacks on the co-operative. Poore blamed much of NVT's problems of the co-operative's existance,

"Without Meriden there would have been no problems" (3).

Palin, in a more damning criticism claimed that the first two prototype models produced by the co-operative had a number of design faults which made them unsatisfactory from a marketing point of view[4]. In fact, they

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1. The Times, 9th Oct. 1975.

2. At the end of October 1975 the Export Credit Guarantees Department were reported to be willing to underwrite £2 million worth of exports. This boosted the cash-flow of both NVT and Synova.

3. The Times, 3rd July, 1975.

4. The Times, 23rd June, 1975. Palin claimed that the bikes were too noisy, made excessive vibrations, and did not meet recognised safety standards.

had been tested at the Motor Industry Research Association premises in the Midlands and had passed with "flying colours"[1].

Marketability of the co-operative product was to prove a continued difficulty throughout the rest of Synova's existance. Unable initially to compete over the range of motor-cycles and even to compete on price to some extent the co-operative emphasised the quality (and nostalgic history) of their product. To some extent this paid off in a specialised market but buyers were continually concerned about parts and this concern was continually exageraged by news of the impending closure of Synova, and by a continued difficulty with marketing caused by problems at NVT and a forced stockpiling at Synova. Thus as late as October of 1976 Synova was still experiencing problems with NVT in the marketing of the co-operative's machines and that month a report of the Public Accounts Committee dealt a serious blow in the claim that Synova - along with KME - was not "a viable project". The report went on to suggest that the Synova and KME ventures were on the verge of collapse[2].

Being competitive was, ofcourse, always a key problem for the co-operative venture. To some extent it needed to diversify and to a great extent it needed re-investment. Any possibility of re-investment was problematic. Government funds were no longer available and ironically the egalitarian wages system put a serious block on the achievement of greater economy through economies of scale. At its peak the co-operative's seven hundred workers produced three hundred and fifty bikes per week at

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1. Derek Johnson, Synova company chairman, quoted in The Times, Business News, 4th August 1975.

2. PAC report quoted in The Times, 22nd October 1976.

which point a maximum profit rate was being achieved[1]. In order to increase profitability at that rate an almost immediate doubling of production would have had to occur but that was not achieveable. The problem lay, in part, in the fact that all workers including non-production workers received the same wage and small increases in production would result in the employment of a number of non-production workers along with production workers and lead to a drop in the value of each new machine per capita.

The situation was increasingly difficult for Synova as they badly needed new machinery to replace existing machinery. Slowly but surely the co-operative began to enter into associations with private capital and to alter some of their principles. In early 1976 Ken Fleet of the IWC wrote a note of warning that was so rapidly to be overtaken by events,

> "The Meriden co-operative looks remarkably well set for a good future but we cannot ignore potential threats to its success. It could be that private industrialists, when they are shown that the workers can indeed run industry better than themselves will try to destroy it. A future Government may be hostile and would be in a position to make life difficult for the enterprise. More subtly, if the concern needs the help of outside finance to expand, it may be forced or tempted to modify its democratic arrangements . . ."(2).

In November of 1975 the co-operative had already concluded a deal with "outside finance" to help them diversify. The deal involved the assembly of bikes for the Italian moped manufacturer Moto Guzzi.

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1. Felix Keane, Study Tour Interview, Oct. 1976.

2. p.106.

In fairness it would be difficult to claim that this association led to any erosion of Synova's co-operative operating principles[1]. A more dubious association was to occur in 1977. As that year began the co-operative was in a critical position and by July its marketing agreement with NVT was to expire and it would have to survive with its own marketing arrangements. In January Synova appealed to the government for a one million pound loan to enable them to purchase the sales agency from NVT and to have some working capital to develop new products and achieve greater diversification. The government turned this down[2]. Curiously, two days later the Minister of State for Industry, Alan Williams, met with representatives of the co-operative while informally Jack Jones, the TGWU General Secretary, met with government financial adviser Harold Lever on the co-operative's behalf. A week later co-operative representatives and government officials held talks with the chairman of the General Electric Company, Arnold Weinstock, whose company was reported to be considering the allocation of sub-contracting work to Synova.

In the meanwhile the government reversed its decision and agreed to loan the co-operative some money, but only enough to buy the sales agency. The loan of further funds was going to depend on the GEC company. While Synova waited for the outcome of talks with GEC its financial position grew critical and it was forced to close down for three weeks and then follow this up with a four day week for assembly workers. Its fate very much depended on GEC. In fact, GEC provided a

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1. Ideologically it may have been a disappointment to some within the labour movement.

2. Audrey Wise, Labour M.P. and IWC supporter, described this decision as "tantamount to sabotage". (The Morning Star, 8th Jan. 1977)

loan of one million pounds. Announcing this in the House of Commons Industry Secretary, Eric Varley, stated that GEC would take over motor-cycles from Synova until they were sold[1] and they would also provide some technical assistance, management and marketing advice. In addition Lord Stokes, the former chairman of British Leyland, was to act as consultative to Synova on international sales.

Outside finance had moved in and in a big way and in the event the co-operative experienced an erosion of its managerial perogatives and hence its democratic management. Furthermore it had done so to a company that had experienced more occupations than any other, and with the involvement of the former director of a company which had experienced the second largest number under his directorship. The situation was summed up by a Conservative front bench spokesman, John Biffen, who stated that,

"there would be much fascination that Sir Arnold Weinstock, an unabashed apostle of capitalism, would be providing support for the Meriden co-operative"(2).

The situation certainly caused consternation within sections of the labour movement[3] and has since seen a situation within the co-operative where leading figures resigned or were replaced in management positions, the wages structure was altered to reintroduce differentials and productivity incentives. The last part of the Ken Fleet prophecy unfolded with the

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1. GEC took control of Synova motor-cycles at cost and once sold returned the profit to Synova.

2. Quoted in The Morning Star, 8th February 1977.

3. Dennis Skinner, Labour M.P. for Bolsover, for instance, pointed out that "intriguing" developments occured during the negotiation of the "Meriden -Weinstock Venture". These included a £163 million rights issue which benefited GEC and also a delay in the building of the Drax B Power Station and other related power policy matters which also benefited the GEC company. In the words of Skinner, "Could it be said that the Weinstock involvement in the Meriden affair was a sprat to catch a mackerel?" (The Morning Star, 8th Feb. 1977).

election of a Conservative Government in the spring of 1979. This indeed proved to be an hostile government and Synova was forced to begin the process of winding up its affairs, being unable to gain the funds necessary for economic survival.

Without a doubt the Synova co-operative had a strong leadership: ideologically left and committed to co-operative principles. What killed off the co-operative[1] in the end was a series of almost insurmountable economic and political problems beyond the control of Synova. However, its death will not signal a total failure. Its existance and relatively long commitment to co-operative principles has made a significant impact on the thinking of British trade unionists. As the 1980s approach groups of workers facing redundancy and closure still consider the possibility of establishing their own worker co-operative and to that extent the Meriden workers must take a large part of the credit[2].

Kirkby Manufacturing and Engineering Ltd: -The story of KME shares a common theme with that of the Scottish Daily News and Synova, namely that the occupation workforce received government funds to establish a co-operative and then found themselves faced with a change of Industry Minister and a consequent lack of continued support.

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1. At the time of writing the co-operative has not yet been liquidated but it would appear to be just a matter of time.

2. Amoung those workgroups recently considering the prospect of a workers' co-operative are the following: - print workers of the 'Daily Jang' (London, August 1976); textile workers at Courtaulds (Skelmersdale, January 1977); textile workers at Courtaulds (Grantham, May 1977); shoe workers at Tweedsdale's footwear (Preston, April 1978) and bakery workers at Spillers (East Anglia, April 1978).

The basic problem that the new co-operative faced was that it inherited a failing business and one which could not be revived without massive investment funds and some radical restructuring. The government had already, in June 1974, refused the former IPC owners an Industry Act loan on the grounds that the company "did not appear to have a viable future"[1].

A feasability study on the prospect of a workers' co-operative, commissioned by the DTI assessed that, at best, employment could only be found for six hundred of the nine hundred employees and only provided that there was enough finance to run the business and substantial subsidies to cover losses for the initial period of trading. The DTI's Industrial Development Unit concluded that the proposal for a co-operative employing nine hundred and thirteen people would result in overmanning, would be overburdened by overheads, would lack sufficient capital and would fall short of its sales targets[2].

Against the advice of the DTI Tony Benn went ahead and agreed a grant of three million and nine hundred thousand pounds but with the removal of Benn shortly after the DTI could now achieve its own prophecy by ensuring that KME did lack sufficient capital.

The KME co-operative began operations with a government grant out of which they had to give one million and eight hundred thousand pounds to the Receiver for the purchase of assets. The assets included an overly large factory[3] which was designed to employ three thousand

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1. T.Eccles, 1977, p.150

2. Ibid, p.158.

3. The factory main building is 1020 feet by 300 feet.

people. This created a problem of overheads which only have been covered at high levels of turnover spread over a large volume of goods[1]. Production at the factory, in fact, included a soft-drinks line which had only briefly in the past ever been profitable[2]; a panel radiators line in a market of fierce competition; an electric storage heating line in a market slump situation; and a line of metal presswork for a car industry that was in recession[3]. As the Industrial Development Advisory Board summed it up in advising against a grant for a co-operative venture, "there wasn't enough profitable activities to offer a prospect of generating a stable positive cash flow; some of the markets were depressed and there wasn't a stable product base; the sheer scale of the factory was an obstacle to making economies by curtailing unprofitable activities such as the soft drinks"' (4).

To add to the co-operative's problems stocks of raw material and finished products were out of balance with sales needs and it was almost impossible for it to obtain new supplies except on a strict immediate cash payment basis. Adverse press publicity had not helped in this direction[5] and the co-operative were forced to seek suppliers in Holland (for glass) and in Germany (for steel)[6].

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1. Previous attempts to cut back on production of some of the less profitable lines had led to a cut in the overall costs and an increased average profit margin of the remaining goods, but it had left the high fixed overheads to be spread over the smaller volume of goods. "The net result was a negligible change in the overall unprofitability". T.Eccles, 1977, p.145.
2. Half of the volume of the soft drinks sales were lost during the interuption of supplies during the closure and occupation.
3. Contrary to the workforce leaders' expectations this did not improve and motor manufacturers diverted press work back into their own underused factories.
4. Quoted in T.Eccles, 1977, p.159
5. This kind of publicity was to continue over the years and KME were to suffer the same criticism as Synova in the Public Accounts Committee Report in 1976.
6. Jack Spriggs, KME director, study tour interview, Oct.1976.

Despite various handicaps, however, the new workers' co-operative began to become successful where previous owners had failed. The soft drinks line had already become marginally profitable within the first six months of production[1] and production of domestic radiators had to be stepped up from seven to ten thousand units per week[2]. The Business News section of 'The Times', in fact, was moved to comment that, "Kirkby Co-operative Confounds its Critics" and claimed that the factory was already "heading for profitability by the end of the year".

Part of the early success story lay in the conclusion of a deal with a Midlands company for the exclusive manufacture of its ventilation systems.

The Co-operative Party were equally optimistic and couple of months later,

"(KME) may well show that a co-operative conglomerate can succeed in a plant where a succession of capitalists failed over fourteen years" (3).

Unfortunately the co-operative had a long way to go before it could climb above the serious cash flow handicap that it started operations with. It began with a grant which had tied to it terms which prohibited the seeking of any private cash loans, and yet fairly shortly was effectively starved of any further government support. Although

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1. This was remarkable given that they started production under the handicap that the Receiver had been selling off product lines cheaply to get rid of them. Thus, the new production appeared to retail at a greatly increased price.
2. This offset a failing in regard to electric storage heaters which, contrary to co-operative leaders' expectations, did not experience an upswing in the market situation.
3. 18th August 1975.

achieving some success in sales and marketing the Co-operative began operations with a loss of around thirty thousand pounds a week. By the end of the following year production again seemed promising and the directors were confident that several lines would become profitable[1] but nonetheless they expected to experience a loss of one million and four hundred thousand pounds for the year's trading.

Bravely the co-operative venture struggled on but continually hampered by a cash flow problem and a lack of government support. By late 1978 it was rumoured that far from providing cash support to the venture infact the government were to support an attempted takeover by a subsidiary of Metal Box[2]. While this never finally materialised the venture was forced to close in the early summer of the following year[3].

Although with more organisational problems than Synova the KME co-operative strongly raised the banner of worker co-operatives among sections of the British trade union movement and its eventual failure was due largely to economic and political problems beyond its control. One commentator has summed it up neatly,

> "Has it been possible for KME to succeed? The answer, given KME's intractable commercial problems, the state of the economy and the underfunding, is "barely". Has KME's performance been good, bad or indifferent when gauged against what was possible? The answer is "good", with occasional lapses into "indifferent".
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> Should KME succeed, it will be a potent example of the value of commitment and gritty determination against all odds. Should it fail, the verdict on the merits or demerits of co-operatives would have to be "not proven" " (4).

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1. Jack Spriggs stated in October 1976 that only the fruit juice line was making a profit. Developments were, however, occuring in other directions. On storage heaters KME were producing directly for the electricity board which was in the midst of a successful sales drive, and competition had been reduced to a handful. On domestic radiators KME were supplying six companies and interest was growing.(Study Tour Interview)
2. The Morning Star, 19th Sept. & 15th Nov. 1978.
3. The empty factory was filled with slogans which read, "Seven years ha ha" and "We are all doomed" - Financial Times, 6th June 1979.
4. T.Eccles, 1977.

Summary.

Over the period 1972-75 six "worker co-operatives" came into being. By the middle of 1979 only one remained and even that looked set to close. In all cases the workforce inherited a failing or weak industrial base and against a background of general economic depression. This was certainly a key contributory factor weighing against any chances of survival. In the cases of KME, Synova and the 'Scottish Daily News' government aid, with its problematic conditions and subsequent lack of assistance, was an added political factor in their demise. It is difficult to say, however, whether continued government aid would have ensured these ventures existance much longer and particularly within the context of an absence of change in government economic policy generally.

Weaknesses in leadership was an important contributory factory in the demise of the 'Scottish Daily News' and,to a lessor extent, the Nightbridge Engineering venture.

In terms of ideological strengths the majority of the workforces involved acted primarily to save their jobs; co-operative principles were either secondary or non-existant. In several instances the leaderships varied little from this stance. The Synova leaders and to a slightly lesser extent those at KME were exceptions to this rule. Yet despite these weaknesses the 'worker co-operatives' did represent a challenge to capital. They did raise the idea - both in the minds of some workers and some capitalists - that it was quite a reasonable thing for workers to attempt to own and control their own workplace; to do without capitalists. The weaknesses went largely unnoticed for many trade unionists along with the negative factors of leadership displayed at Nightbridge and the 'Scottish Daily News'. The strength of leadership at KME, Synova and Fakenham,

the very histories and fact of the various takeovers themselves, and the reasonably long existance of some of the ventures contributed to a raising of the banner of 'worker co-operatives' specifically and socialism generally. To this day groups of workers in redundancy struggle continue to consider not only sit-down action but the establishment of a workers' co-operative. The idea lives on where once, prior to 1971, it was confined to the thinking of a few leftwing activists.

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CHAPTER 12

CONCLUSION: WHICH WAY WORKER OCCUPATIONS?

"The occupation tactic has thus far failed to fulfil its more radical challenge; being limited to narrow objectives. At this latter level, however, it has proven superior to the strike in both its ability to achieve limited objectives and in raising generally working class consciousness".

Introduction.

There can be little doubt that the "work-in" at the UCS, in July 1971, shattered age-old traditions of industrial relations in Britain. It was the first[1] of over two-hundred workplace occupations.

This thesis has set out to examine how it was that such actions occurred and developed throughout the British labour movement. Several factors seem to have emerged, albeit in varying importance. These can be summed up as the existance of a socio-economic crisis with consequent effects at the micro level; the 'mishandling' of that crisis at both the macro (government) and the micro (company) level; the existance of a strong and "mature" trade union movement containing a growing militant infrastructure in the form of shop stewardships; and the existance of a political (CPGB) and industrial (AUEW) leadership ready and able to exploit the situation through that infrastructure.

Within the context of the development of occupations the advent of the "workers' co-operative" merits attention. To some extent this represented the realisation of the challenge inherent in the workplace occupation. These grew out of a situation of widespread militancy which included the regular occurrance of workplace occupations and the winning of office of a Labour Party ready to accede to some of the demands of that militancy.

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1. Although not actually the first post-war British occupation it was the first of what became a sequence of workplace occupations.

Beyond summarising those factors which contributed to the advent of workplace occupations this chapter sets out to assess the significance of the work for an understanding of "industrial relations" generally.

It is suggested that while "industrial relations" is maintained by the existance of a dominant ideology it is not the only one operating within the situation and its vitality rests to a crucial extent on the existance of an healthy economic base[1]. This is also the case with social policy which arises out of the dominant ideology; which helps to explain the inadequacy of the 'Redundancy Payments Act, 1965'. More forcibly, it is claimed that the CPGB plays a significant and regular role in certain aspects of "industrial relations". Leadership is considered a crucial issue and it is claimed to be the ultimate determining factor in the success or failure of the various actions and situations described throughout this work[2]. It is claimed that this work confirms that of Professor V.L.Allen that there is a strong link between militancy and shopfloor leadership. Another vital link in this chain appears to be the existance of large-scale capitalist organisations.

Finally this chapter goes on to examine events since 1975. Significantly there have been some reversals concerning the key factors under consideration: many former occupation workforces continue to face closure, redundancies and curtailment of real wages; the Labour Government which came to office on the wave of militancy was defeated after four and a half years in office; the right-wing regained the leadership of the AUEW, and the CPGB suffered the worst split in its history.

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1. That is not to suggest that it is impossible for capitalist ideology to be challenged under conditions of economic strength, but it would appear more likely to be the case in periods of economic crisis, (see Chapter 2).

2. That is not to ignore the fact that leadership is a relationship that is shaped by a particular set of circumstances.

It is argued that the Labour Party was unprepared and unwilling to build on the militancy of the period and make inroads into capitalism, and as a result it failed, when in office, to adequately tackle the crisis situation. The CPGB at this time was undergoing an ideological shift with consequent divisions within its ranks. Thus, it was unable to provide some of the political leadership necessary to ginger up the left opposition within the Labour Party and the militant sections of the trade union movement. The problems within the CPGB were also vital factors in explaining the demise of the Broad Left in the AUEW and the consequent rise to power of the right wing.

Despite these reversals the occupation tactic proved to be a more effective weapon than the traditional strike action. As such the period since 1975 has witnessed the continued use of the tactic and its spread to even more sections of the labour movement. Large companies still predominate among occupied workplaces and AUEW members still figure substantially among occupation workforces.

Socio-economic crisis.

Periods of socio-economic crisis appear to have an impact on the working class in several ways: objectively their living standards are curtailed and, at the subjective level, their attitude towards capitalism may change as a result. At such times sections of the organised working class seem more willing to take part in radical action. This appears to be the lesson of the historical overview of occupations in chapter two.

The handling of crisis.

Whether sections of the working class take part in radical action and to what extent depends on a number of crucial factors. One such factor is the extent

to which governmental handling of the situation can be percieved as "fair". There will be some in the labour movement already convinced that capitalism is unable to solve the needs of the working class but there will be some who remain to be so convinced.

Government statements in the Britain of the late 1960s did not contribute to the maintenance of confidence in capitalism (see chapters 3 and 4). More so, government actions in the form of wage restraint and trade union curtailment laws drew attention even more to the problems of capitalism and in such a way as to encourage the view that these were being tackled in an unfair way. What had been economic crisis now turned into political crisis as a sizeable number of trade unionists engaged in political strikes against government policies.

In the context of widespread unemployment the handling of redundancy situations at workplace level also needed to be perceived as "fair" and, more crucially, "necessary". In many cases neither factor appeared to be evident (see chapters 5 and 6). Many workforces were given short notice of impending redundancies and in a number of these cases the companies were large and wealthy institutions. In short, militant action was heightened, in a situation where workers were concerned about the general economic situation, by the bad handling of affairs by employers.

The trade union movement.

With the onset of economic crisis and its exasperation by government and employers actions the reaction of working people depends on a number of factors; primarily the nature and strength of the trade union movement.

When the crisis began to bite in the late 1960s the TUC affiliated trade unions had almost nine million members; the leaderships of some

important unions had shifted leftwards, and there was in existance a powerful shop stewards movement. As a consequence the left and certain shopfloor elements within the movement were able to set the TUC on a collision course with government and to involve sections of the trade unions in radical action, (see chapters 3, 4, 7 and 8).

The shop stewards movement grew as a result of a 'full employment' situation and in the face of the growth of large scale companies and large scale union organisations. In the competition for labour among employers shop stewards were able to use the situation to gain extra concessions, this encouraged further the development of stewardships. At another level shop stewardships were likely to be encouraged by a growth in the number of problems needing urgent attention but being ignored in the machinery of the large-scale organisation and/or delayed in the processes of the large scale trade union organisation.

These twin factors may also help to understand the growing disenchantment of sections of working people with capitalism. On the one hand, 'full employment' helped to encourage expectations of continually rising living standards[1]. While on the other hand, the growing remoteness of industrial organisations will have, ironically, prevented the maintenance of any significant commitment to the system providing those expectations, i.e., ideological conviction of the value of capitalism.

When the crisis came sections of workers were further angered in the realisation that their expectations could not be met but they were well organised to resist inroads into their living standards.

It was shopfloor organisation that gave a lead in the struggles

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1. Cf. S.Mallet, 1963; R.K.Brown, 1978, pp.443-4.

against anti-trade union laws and predominant among them were the workforces of the large companies, i.e., Ford, BLMC, Plessey, etc, (see chapters 3 and 4).

The existance of organisational forms which allowed immediate response to industrial problems was thus an important element in both encouraging and enabling large sections of workers to respond quickly to political events.

The AUEW.

Organisationally shopfloor organisations may not have responded so readily had not large groups been in a position to do so without incurring the wrath of union officialdom. It was no accident that engineering shop stewards were to the fore in the many political strikes and workplace occupations of the period. The organisational structure of the AUEW places much emphasis on shopfloor organisation and is in many respects responsive to, and reflective of, opinion at this level. This operated in two ways in the period under discussion. Militant shopfloor opinion began to dominate the policies and then the leadership of the union. The leadership by early 1971 were swung to support the actions already initiated by many shopfloor organisations of that union. On the other hand, the relative autonomy of shop and district organisation allowed them to take action in advance of their national leadership, (see chapter 7).

With their hands relatively free during this period many AUEW shopfloor organisations could give a lead to other such bodies from unions which allowed less freedom of movement.

Political leadership.

Finally, in order for sections of workers to be drawn into action there

needs to be a lead given as to whether action should be taken and in what direction. Here the CPGB played a significant role. Clearly their role would have been difficult if it had not been for the existance of a large number of shopfloor organisations. Thus, the question of organisational structure was a crucial one. It was through such organisations that the Party initiated actions against anti-trade union laws. They did this by the establishment of the LCDTU which primarily brought together various shopfloor and rank-and-file organisations, (see chapters 4 and 8).

The Party, through active membership within many shopfloor organisations, was at the same time able to exert influence on the policies and leaderships of various unions.

The workplace occupations.

Once the CPGB's front organisation had managed to involve large numbers of workers in political strikes this had an important impact on the attitude of many towards industrial affairs at workplace level. But first came the UCS work-in. Here CPGB militants provided the suggestion (Sammy Barr), for the action and provided the key drive (Jimmy Reid) and organisational co-ordination (Jim Airlie).

Now we can see the full picture of groups of workers facing redundancy and/or falling living standards. These workers have built up a shopfloor organisation and have become militant in the process. Their militancy, however, has been directed at gaining concessions within the existing system. In the late 1960s, in something of a dilemma as to how to react to political events, they responded to a call by the LCDTU for political strikes. Engagement in such strikes and the results they were achieving altered the thinking of many. By the early 1970s they faced a

serious problems at their own workplace. Which way should they go? Once again CPGB members, this time operating at workplace level, had provided an answer. These workers, schooled in militant and then radical (political) action, were ready and able to apply radical action to their own workplace. The workplace occupation was set into motion.

The workers' co-operatives.

In the midst of this situation it was almost inevitable that some sections of workers would consider going 'further'. In some cases small groups of the non-communist left argued for the mass seizure of workplaces as a prelude to a more radical challenge to capitalism. In other cases the situation appeared to be ripe for attempting to gain legal and formal control over the workplace and continue to run it as a co-operative venture. Of those workforces discussing this six finally went ahead.

The action of those establishing co-operative ventures arose out of the context of the widespread development of workplace occupations, the militant unrest and the gaining of office of a Labour Party containing Ministers sympathetic to the co-operative idea, (see chapter 9). This latter fact was a major factor in understanding the development of the workers' co-operatives. It is likely that the idea would not have merited much attention at this time had not Tony Benn encouraged it among certain occupation workforces.

Workplace occupations and "industrial relations".

The development and spread of worker occupations provides us with an indication of the processes involved in "industrial relations". Primarily it indicates that the framework of "industrial relations" is too narrow to allow an adequate analysis of important industrial occurrances[1].

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1. This is particularly true of the hitherto dominant "pluralist" view within industrial relations schools of thought.

While it can be argued that the seeds of unrest can be revealed in policies and procedures pursued within a particular company this thesis, hopefully, has revealed that the analysis cannot end there; that other key factors lie outside of the immediate situation and in the realm of what might be called "political economy".

That the thinking and action of workers is influenced by factors outside of their immediate working situation needn't rest with any abstract or logical arguement: one need only point to the previous involvement of occupation workforces in political strikes whose aims lay well outside of the concern of the particular companies involved.

There is little need here to go over the now well discussed critique of pluralist thought in industrial relations[1]. As R.Hyman (1978) has so ably put it,

"Pluralist complacency was bound to wilt in a cold climate; in an epoch of crisis, the doctrine has received a practical refutation . . ." (2).

This doctrine accepted the existance of the status quo as given and portrayed the parties to "industrial relations" as more or less equal in terms of power. It failed to recognise the actual imbalance which the ownership of the means of production gives to one side to the detriment to the (working class) other side, nor did it recognise the powerful and partisan intervention of the State as a further source of imbalance. The crisis conditions of the recent period have revealed that many workers have seen the existance of serious contradictions between labour and capital and reacted accordingly; even though they may well have not gone so far as to gain a fully "revolutionary consciousness".

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1. Cf. R.K.Brown, 1978, pp.442-448.

2. p.461.

As R.K.Brown (1978) has succinctly pointed out, pluralist philosophy failed to adequately understand that,

"Given widespread subscription to egalitarian values, inequalities in employment-related rewards and deprivations must always, therefore, be a potential source of instability in British society, though one which can be diminished if the existing pattern can be successfully legitimated" (1).

Arguably such legitimation is more likely to be successful in situations where "industrial relations" procedures are able to meet workers' "rising aspirations and the expectations of increased rewards from work"[2]. Such opportunities have proven increasingly difficult since 1968[3].

A study of the role of the CPGB in the sphere of industrial affairs indicates that from time to time, particularly during critical economic periods, another ideological voice is listened to. This has only ever been partial but there are indications that a sizeable minority of trade unionists have been drawn to the CPGB's interpretation of events and away from the dominant capitalist version[4].

Up until now the role of the CPGB has either been treated superficially, ignored, and/or regarded as insignificant. This thesis has

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1. p.443.

2. Ibid.

3. Cf. Brown (1978), p.443; and Hyman (1978), p.461.

4. For example, the CPGB managed to convince some trade unionists that the Conservative and Labour Governments' legislation on trade union activities ('Industrial Relations Act, 1971'/ 'In Place of Strife (1969)') were anti-worker actions introduced by elements of the capitalist state machine.

   That is not to suggest that sizeable numbers of workers became communist but that they were, at least for a time, won away from acceptance of a "consensus" or "post-capitalist" view of industrial life, and towards a "conflict" or Marxian view. In such cases workers involved would be more likely to see their struggle not simply against a bad employer but as against the 'employers' or "owning class" and their state representatives.

attempted to show that the Party's influence has been far more significant than its numbers might suggest: while claiming little more than twenty-five thousand members it was able to play a crucial role in initiating political strikes which involved anywhere from a quarter of a million up to three million workers. In short, the CPGB needs to be counted as one of the crucial parties to "industrial relations" in Britain and, without overplaying this fact, it does provide a peculiarly different insight into developments and events within this sphere.

Anatomy of the strike: The unique nature of the occupation tactic allows us to observe some of the processes involved in the development of an industrial dispute in a way that would prove difficult in the case of a traditional strike. If, for example, a group of workers who went on strike could be found to have been associated with another group of workers that had previously been on strike it would not be clear whether the association had been influential on the latter action. It may have been that the second strike was largely the result of factors internal to the workplace situation. If, on the other hand, we are dealing with workplace occupations then there is a clearer indication that an association between groups of workers was an influential factor. After all it is hardly usual that various groups of workers would have independently embarked upon a new, radical, course of action. Somehow the choice of action was probably influenced by association with other groups of militant workers[1].

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1. I am not claiming here that this argument is unproblematic. An important difficulty lies in the fact that already-militant workers are the more likely to join militant associations. That, however, helps us to understand the process by which militancy is sustained and developed and by observing the spread of worker occupations we can see more clearly how this occurs.

In fact, as has been shown in previous chapters, occupation work-forces were linked by a myriad of industrial and political organisations. The occupation tactic was spread through the affiliates of the LCDTU; through combine committee organisation; through official and unofficial industry-wide stewards' organisation; and/or through local trades council organisation. Workers used to thinking about a certain course of action when faced with redundancy were encouraged to move in a radically different direction; firstly, to resist redundancies and, secondly, to do so in dramatic fashion by the staging of an occupation. The fact that it was the occupation tactic which these workers employed helps to reveal more clearly the significance of these political and industrial organisations in the spread of militancy.

This argument expands on the work of Professor Allen[1] in regard to the role of the shop steward in the development of militancy. Clearly, not all shopfloor organisation is militant nor able to respond militantly to events (see chapter 7). In a number of cases the militant action of a group of workers is facilitated, possibly even inspired, by their links with other shopfloor and branch organisations. There were cases where previously non-militant workers occupied their workplace due to affiliation with (e.g., Metal Box, Manchester, 1972) and encouragement from (e.g., Fakenham, 1972) fellow trade unionists. Thus, the factor of inter-related shopfloor links might well be more crucial than hitherto believed.

Again the role of the CPGB has to be taken into account as an important factor in the spread of militancy. Allen (1966) understated the role of politically motivated activists in this regard. The question of

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1. V.L.Allen, 1966.

leadership has been an important consideration within this thesis. It has been argued that those who took part in the early workplace occupations had previously been drawn into political strikes. The initiative for such radical action in both cases stemmed from CPGB members and like-minded others.

For those who want to deny the role of the CPGB and to play up the role of worker spontaneity they can point to a large number of workplace occupations where the workers involved apparently responded without a certain kind of leadership and certainly without any direct CPGB involvement. What they cannot do is to pick out such examples among the "pioneering occupations". Nor can they date such "spontaneous" occupation actions to the period prior to the advent of the political strike in 1969. Of course many actions will arise "spontaneously" with the absence of a certain kind of leadership but probably only after certain conditions have been created. Here the role of the CPGB was important in providing the leadership which created those conditions.

Events since 1975.

There have been many reversals since 1975; many of which throw doubt upon some of the conclusions of this thesis. Indeed some commentators have already anticipated the problems involved in this approach. For instance, R.K.Brown (1978)[1] points out that,

"The growth in militancy between 1968 and 1974 now appears much less permanent in the light of the decline of strike activity since that period . . . ; there has been widespread acceptance by unions and their members of further pay restraint since 1975, however much this may be for 'negative and pessimistic reasons'; and some of the supposed 'explosions of consciousness' associated with strikes or occupations have proved short-lived" (2).:

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1. This recent summary of current trends in industrial relations provides a useful starting point from which to counter possible criticisms of some of the thesis' arguments.

2. p.453.

Brown goes on to comment further on the question of the workplace occupation:

"Indeed the challenge presented by an occupation is in most cases less than it seems; the demand is for work under another, conventional, employer, not except in cases like the Meriden motor-cycle factory, for workers' control or workers' ownership" (1).

The base of the criticism appears to centre upon the question of "class consciousness" and the acceptance or non-acceptance of the legitimacy of the existing social order. Indeed this has continued to be a critical question for Marxists. The problem for this thesis can be stated thus: if CPGB leadership was crucial in the decade described and workplace occupations signalled a development in class consciousness how is it that strike action declined, apparent wide-spread support was given to pay restraint, the right-wing gained power in the AUEW and a new Conservative Government came to office with a large majority? Further, how was it that these things occurred in a period of continued socio-economic crisis?

The answer is by no means unproblematic but Brown touches upon it, albeit without allowing it too much credence:

"Faced with this sort of evidence the Marxist argument has focused especially on the question of leadership, arguing that full class consciousness is unlikely to develop spontaneously . . . "(2).

I would argue that leadership is the crucial issue here. That the CPGB were unable to bring large numbers of workers into social conflict around revolutionary demands in no way denies their ability to provide leadership around a number of issues which involve a partial recognition of the weakness of capitalism. Indeed I would claim that the economic situation was volatile enough to allow the CPGB to provide leadership to large numbers of trade unionists, but that this could only be taken so far due to the

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1. p.453.

2. p.454.

numerical and ideological weaknesses within the Party's ranks[1]. The crisis threw up leadership needs but the CPGB was at one of the weakest points in its history. Its membership was dwindling[2] and it was undergoing a crisis of identity[3]. In addition its industrial influence far outweighed its political influence. Consequently the CPGB's strategy was to channel industrial unrest towards political victory for the Labour Party and as pressure for leftward change within that party.

That the Labour Government remained basically unchanged is substantially a question of the weakness and relative absence of revolutionary leadership. If it is true that leadership is an essential element in raising working class consciousness then it is surely true that this needs to be strong and able enough to maintain and develop that consciousness and that is what the tiny CPGB lacked.

This raises the whole question of class consciousness which, although axiomatic, Marxists have not yet fully come to terms with. It is often supposed that class consciousness arises out of class conflict, is somehow maintained and developed and is then translated, through leadership into revolutionary action. It is rarely conceived that at the time of the "revolution" the class consciousness of the great majority might only be partial and potentially temporary. And it is rarely conceived that class consciousness among the many may possibly only be maintained in the event of a successful revolution and not otherwise. What is so surprising about the fact that so many workers achieve a high point of class consciousness only to lose it

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1. It should be added that the CPGB's strategy for revolution did not include turning such industrial unrest directly into the seizure of capitalist property.

2. I am not unaware that this in itself is in need of explanation but that is an argument that rests elsewhere and involves discussion of developments in the world communist movement.

3. The CPGB at this time were rapidly moving towards the development of a "Eurocommunist" line involving a re-think on many treasured issues. The debate diverted much energy inward and proved too much for many activists who left and formed a "New Communist Party".

within a short period in the context of a situation where the means of ideological production remains firmly in the hands of the capitalist class!

Marx dosen't really help in the resolve of this problem. Throughout his writings he indicates that, ideally, revolutions are made by a class conscious working class. Yet Marx is also concerned with the question of leadership and in the Communist Manifesto he talks of the need for a revolutionary party which is defined as one which contains the best and most class conscious elements of the working class. In other words, it is possible to be more and to be less class conscious. Whatever, the historical evidence seems to support the view that revolutions can and have been made by populations in which a substantial majority have only partial class consciousness.

I would argue that "explosions of consciousness associated with strikes or occupations" cannot simply be said to have been "short lived". It is too early to tell. While it may be argued that such consciousness has regressed it could be that given a resurgance of revolutionary leadership this might only prove to be a regression to the back of the mind[1].

On the question of the challenge of worker occupations themselves Brown misses an important consideration. It is true that such actions were less radical than they might have seemed if one expected that they were part of a movement for immediate "workers' control". However, at one level - as Brown admits earlier - occupations represented a "challenge to property rights (and) can be considered . . . more challenging than a strike"[2].

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1. One could say, to the back of the consciousness!

2. Brown, 1978, p.453.

As such they helped to raise the consciousness of many involved. On the other hand, collectively they formed part of the onslaught on capitalist policies which, if only temporarily halted, may well have prevented a rapid move towards more authoritarian rule. This gives the occupation a much greater social significance; with the argument that the actions should be seen as a collective contribution to working class attitudes in the struggles of the period, and should not be looked at individually.

Finally, I would comment that it is disappointing but understandable that Brown should concentrate on the work of Hyman with its emphasis on the trade union official/shop steward leadership dichotomy. The nature of such leadership, in turn, will depend on the existance and nature of a revolutionary party. That is, that the question of leadership cannot be ultimately left within the context of the trade unions themselves. Thus, for instance, I would argue that the reason for the demise of the AUEW Broad Left is to be found in the divisions within the CPGB. With the Broad Left's leadership undergoing a crisis of identity the right-wing were able to win control of the Union.

That many trade unionists appeared to accept pay restraint under the Labour administration is explained by several factors. A key point lies in the fact that it is easier to gain a united front against something than in favour of something. A large number in the labour movement were already committed to social democratic policies. This divided them from those who weren't but who nonetheless had accepted the need to fight for a Labour victory. This latter group were inevitably forced to fight the issue out within the organisations of the labour movement as opposed to strike actions against employers or government. This struggle might have

been somewhat more significant if the CPGB had been stronger.

Such factors go some way towards explaining the decline in strikes over the period. However, it is disappointing to find Brown talking about a decline in strike activity as if we were now facing a period of relative industrial harmony. To begin with, by his own figures the years since 1974 show high numbers of "working days lost" which fall little below the militant years of 1968-70. Secondly, the industrial situation in 1979 indicates a level of widespread unrest unequalled since 1970-71.

Economic crisis continues as Britain approaches the 1980s and once again there is evidence of a growing militancy among trade unionists - once again faced with a Conservative Government. How the situation will develop will depend on those factors which have been the subject of discussion in this thesis.

Workplace occupations since 1975.

My estimate in 1974 that the workplace occupation has become a standard weapon in the armoury of British trade unionists has proven correct. During the years 1976 and 1977 there have been at least forty-three occupations (eight and thirty-five respectively). Members of the AUEW continue to predominate; being involved in at least fifteen cases, with the TGWU and EETPTU following with eight cases each. In at least twenty-seven cases large companies were involved including Rolls Royce, Plessey, G.K.N., ICI, Massey-Ferguson and Chrysler. Of the remainder ten involved national or local government institutions including steel works, hospitals and power stations.

Taken at the level of a localised dispute the occupation tactic has proven superior to the strike in a number of ways. Pickets can stand

duty out of the rain if not actually in the warm. Solidarity can be built in a number of ways not possible on an outside strike picket line, e.g., through the introduction of films and discussions inside the works. And, most importantly, blackleg labour is rendered virtually impossible. It also makes it extremely difficult for the employer to gain access to supplies and stock without the permission of the strikers. Until the passing of the laws on tresspass[1] the occupation tactic also helped strikers to avoid difficult legal problems raised by the police in regard to picketing. This is still proving to be the case but there is no telling whether or for how long the new Conservative Government is going to avoid using the terms of the tresspass laws against workers involved in an occupation. The future of the occupation tactic, it would seem, is inexorably bound up with a number of factors which in essence will determine the future of the British labour movement and "industrial relations" over the next decade or so.

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1. In December 1977 the 'Criminal Trespass Law' (Part 2 of the Criminal Law Act, 1977) came into force. Cf. C.A.C.T.L. pamphlet, 'Workplace Occupations and the Law', March 1978.

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