

strategy for industrial struggle

a 1971 *solidarity* pamphlet with a new
introductory essay by chris kane

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the
commune

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introduction by chris kane

We republish below *Strategy for Industrial Struggle*, which was first issued in 1971 by the journal *Solidarity*. This was published on the eve of the mass strike wave which swept Britain in the 'glorious summer' of that year and broke the back of the anti-trade union Industrial Relations Act introduced by the Tory government. Today we operate in an environment which is markedly different. The very laws which were smashed in 1971 were successfully re-introduced by the Tory government of Thatcher in the 1980s and remain firmly entrenched to this day. But we do not believe that this in any way invalidates the arguments put forward in this pamphlet. Indeed what it seeks to do is even more relevant today: to develop a discussion amongst labour movement activists about our approach to workplace struggles.

The Group of International Communists consider that the traditional left is as unimaginative today as it was in 1971. It is important to recognise that it was the rank and file workers who made the summer of that year glorious with their imaginative and militant tactics, not the trade union bureaucrats of either the left or the right. Today unions in which the traditional left are in leadership positions have failed to develop meaningful strategies to win disputes, relying on tired tactics which have been a proven failure. Protest, not victory, appears to be the objective in a number of disputes, with many union members rightly bemoaning being treated like a stage army led by the Grand Old Duke of York! Some activists have been far more successful due to being in an extremely strong position due to the nature of their industry, such as the rail workers' unions. Though even here this not something to be taken for granted, as the cleaners' dispute on London Underground revealed.

The pamphlet *Strategy for Industrial Struggle* provides an outline - to a generation who have grown up in an environment of anti-union laws - of other tactics and ideas which can be utilised. The continued presence of the anti-union laws does not mean we can no longer utilise the tactics that were developed over generations by workers in struggle, often in worse conditions than our own. In any case, as communists our business is revolution, which, as some seem to have forgotten, is illegal!

Despite the legacy of years of anti-union legislation, many workers have been prepared to take strike action. Workers from all sections of the working class have shown a remarkable readiness to fight back. Many workers in public services, often with little or no experience of industrial action, have on occasion engaged in militant and sometimes long drawn-out action. In some ways the years



april 24th 2008 saw united strike action and protests by the national union of teachers, the university and college union and a section of the public and commercial services union. but where was the strategy to actually win?

under New Labour have been a lost opportunity in trade union struggle. No doubt, as the current phase of the structural crisis of capitalism continues, achieving a successful outcome in strikes will become more difficult. Aggressive management, the rising cost of living and growing unemployment could combine to discourage strike action. But this is not inevitable, and one thing that is absolutely necessary is that the questions often asked by workers being asked to strike are answered: can we win?; and what is your strategy? As such we need careful preparation, clear strategy and tactics, and the ability to carry them out.

Let's turn to consider some wider issues of strategy and tactics of action in the 21st century:

Getting organised

The starting point for a successful strategy must be a clear definition of what we are fighting for. Industrial action should aim:

- 1: to defend what we already have in terms of jobs, wages, conditions and rights;
- 2: to achieve improvement in terms of our conditions, living standards, rights and gain greater control.

Tactics will vary enormously according to the type of employer and size of establishment, whether it is public or private, involved in manufacturing or services, a single enterprise or part of a trans-national corporation. Tactics will also depend on the level of trade union organisation, past experience and a number of other factors. We have over 200 years of experience of industrial action. Even workers new to the traditions of the labour movement have proven they can acquire very rapidly organisational skills and tactical ingenuity. However, we can make some generalisations from recent experience.

Strike action

An all-out stoppage of work is the traditional form of industrial action in Britain. Strike action may need to be carefully timed to produce maximum pressure on the employers according to seasonal or other variations in workload. Action which can cause maximum harm to the employer and least cost to the worker is a difficult balance. Where achievable a short, sharp action to force management to concede is the preferred option. Workers cannot afford drawn-out, indecisive action — long strikes usually end in defeat.

The prospects for successful strike action depend partly on the balance of forces, partly on how effectively the forces on either side are deployed, and partly on the issues at stake.

Wages and conditions

As the current economic situation grows worse, strikes over raising the final settlement above the original offer will by necessity increase. So far, with the exception of the railway union, the movement has hardly managed to keep living standards in line with inflation. On the other hand actions have sometimes succeeded in holding off management attempts to introduce new working practices. However, more often employers have succeeded in pushing through changes in working practices after defeating attempts at resistance – e.g. in the civil service.

To defend real wages and preserve existing practices, workers need to formulate clear demands that make no concessions on basic living standards and working conditions. They then need to mobilise maximum support for these objectives and devise tactics to put maximum pressure on management. This will not guarantee victory, but it will at least make victory possible - and it will guard workers against shabby compromises being passed off as major successes.

Redundancies

For some years now, strikes against redundancies have rarely been successful in saving jobs. This is partly because of the union leaders' reluctance to lead a real fight to save all jobs, which has led to serious setbacks. Instead of leading industrial action against all redundancies, union leaders have reduced their horizons to opposing only compulsory redundancies. Fighting for limited objectives and accepting the same logic as capital has allowed them to claim substantial job losses as victories.

In the Civil Service we have seen devastating staff cuts despite – meanwhile the Trotskyist union leadership repeatedly claim no 'compulsory redundancies' as a substantial victory. Nevertheless, management have achieved their cuts targets by 'voluntary' means and mak-

ing working life intolerable. As unemployment grows this will become an additional powerful weapon to use against workers.

It is vital to adopt a target of no job losses in strike action against redundancies. Workers may be forced to settle for less, but if they begin by aiming lower, they will only invite defeats that are more serious. If our goal is to maintain workers' livelihoods then we can be objective about the success or failure of industrial action and form a realistic assessment of its efficacy.

Victimisation

The strike weapon is the most effective means of preventing employers from victimising activists. Employers commonly sack union members when workers return to work after the defeat of strike action and even when gains are achieved. Extensive victimisations have taken place in the aftermath of the cleaners' strike in London Underground. Employers often take advantage of redundancy packages to get rid of activists — this became a widespread practice in the 1980s. In these circumstances it is very difficult to rally an effective response, and most of the victimised workers have been forced to join the dole queue.

An immediate militant response to victimisation can still force the bosses to reinstate a sacked worker. The RMT has on a number of occasions acted swiftly with industrial actions - not necessarily 'official' - and achieved victory. This sort of hard-hitting reaction is the best way to protect union representatives against arbitrary dismissal.

Picketing

Picketing is a means of ensuring the solidarity and active involvement of all workers in a strike. It is also a long-established method of spreading the strike and sympathetic action. The two main functions of picketing are to stop scabs going into work and to prevent essential supplies getting in (or products getting out).

For many years unions have engaged in self-imposed restrictions on picketing numbers, accepting the legal guideline on six identifiable pickets. Our movement needs to overcome the years of passivity and inactivity with regard to picketing. Building mass pickets can be achieved and they are effective. In the safety dispute in the Department for Work and Pensions, PCS activists in Brent held a series of militant mass pickets in 2003/04. These strikers had no previous experience of such forms of picketing. When called as a 'demonstration' they can be used to win the support of other workers. If necessary strikers should go direct to the workers involved and not rely on the official channels - effective picket lines can be restored.

Stopping scabs

The main object of a picket line is to close down a workplace by stopping scabs from entering. The first place where a picket line is usually installed is outside the entrances of the workplace in dispute. Additional pickets may then be set up outside other linked workplaces or where sympathetic action could put pressure on the employer in dispute. Most workers will respond positively to an appeal not to cross a picket line when the strikers put the case for the strike directly to them. A small minority may require firmer persuasion. That is why a large picket line is most effective: what the bosses call 'intimidation' we should read as 'effective picket'.

Communists are clear; we reject the bosses' hypocrisy when they talk of 'intimidation'. They have no qualms about using intimidation to stop strikes and victimise workers. Where an employer brings in scabs during a dispute the aim of a picket line is to defend striking workers and to intimidate the scabs. In recent years, picket lines set up by striking workers have been widely defied. In many public service strikes — in the civil service and Local Government — more workers crossed picket lines than honoured them. It has become commonplace for members of the union not officially on strike to cross picket lines, and vice versa. In many strikes picket lines have become little more than token demonstrations when a dispute is in progress. Yet while it may be useful to have a demonstration, a picket line has a distinct function. If workers are allowed to cross picket lines at will, then the picket — and the strike — become ineffective. To make a strike bite against an employer it is vital that the principle of not crossing picket lines is firmly re-established. An additional aim of a picket line is to prevent supplies etc from entering a workplace and to block the distribution of products to customers.

Controlling picket lines

Pickets are workers' organised resistance against the employer. It is essential that they are under the control of rank and file strikers. Yet workers have increasingly lost control of their picket lines in recent years — to union officials. Police often turn up in ones and twos, introduce themselves to whoever is in charge, chat informally — and then start giving out instructions. They like to decide on picket numbers and how they are distributed. They lay down ground rules about how the picket should be conducted, particularly how people and vehicles can be approached. Some unions issue detailed guidelines on picketing. These guidelines often aim to keep picketing firmly under control and to make picketing very ineffective.

Workers on strike cannot afford to have the scope of their picketing curtailed to suit the police and the union bureaucrats. The purpose of picketing is to close down the employers' operations. Local strikers have to take the measures necessary to achieve this objective. Pickets should

reject instructions or restrictions from anybody but their own elected leaders.

Solidarity/boycotts/sympathy action

The interruption of supplies, and/or the distribution and sale of an employer's products, by sympathetic trade union action can play a vital role in winning a strike. The refusal of workers elsewhere to take on work normally performed at the workplace in dispute is another form of action. This can only be carried out effectively by strikers themselves making contact with the rank and file workers who are in a position to carry it out. The experience of many strikers is that you cannot rely on official union channels to transmit appeals for boycotts and expect them to be carried out.

Sympathetic action by workers in unrelated industries can be used to increase pressure for a favourable settlement on behalf of workers who themselves lack industrial muscle. These days it is rare indeed, but we must not accept the fear of the union bureaucrats that they have tried to transmit throughout our ranks. We urgently need to score some victories to restore confidence in the ability to take solidarity actions.

Action short of a strike/ non-strike industrial action

Various forms of selective and direct action can provide a useful alternative to strike action for workers unable to participate in an all-out stoppage. When planning action it is important to identify key workers who can participate in action which disrupts workplace activities. Key computer operators in various departments can paralyse operations. The question is always — how can we hit the employer hardest at the lowest possible cost to the working class?

This question has to be asked carefully because selective action can be a cop-out from taking effective strike action. Look at the campaigns of selective action in the civil service: the safety dispute in the DWP picked some areas but spared the key processing and call centres that could have shut down the whole operation. The selective actions were led into a long drawn out action and ended up being ineffective and divisive — some workers bore the brunt of the action and others were scarcely involved.

Overtime bans may sometimes be effective alongside strike action or when targeted at times when it will hit the employers hardest.

'Working to rule', when workers disrupt the job by doing the bare minimum, is a difficult tactic to implement. It has to be careful not to allow workers to be isolated. It is generally ineffective and divisive. It is important to issue clear guidance on what is involved and tries and involve as many workers in collectively actions where possible. Such as common start and finish times, with mass meeting outside and after work.



anti-union legislation: in the wake of december 2005's two-day new york transport strike, the transport workers' union was fined \$2.5 million and local 100 president roger toussaint was sentenced to ten days in jail (he served three) under the draconian 'taylor law'.

Involvement/participation

The active involvement of the greatest possible number of workers on strike is vital to its success. A high level of involvement can be achieved through:

- 1: regular all-members'/ mass meetings;
- 2: democratic decision making - an elected and accountable strike committee;
- 3: every worker on strike should be drawn into picket duty.

When workers are fully informed and actively involved in a strike and in deciding its direction, the chances of following it through to a successful conclusion are much greater. Union officials always prefer to work behind the scenes and to avoid consulting the rank and file. They often claim that this is because the workers are backward or conservative and that consulting them might hold things back. In fact the officials' fear of going out to their members reflects their lack of confidence in their own strategy. They also fear that if they put matters in the hands of the workers they might lose control. A ballot is required before action but rarely do the union leaders hold a ballot before calling a strike off!

Survival

Long all out strikes are rare these days, even though many workers know they will be effective. This is not only because of union leaders but also the difficulty of surviving. Union dues should not be for the maintenance of

bureaucrats and full-time officials, or even less New Labour. Workers pay their subscriptions to unions while they are at work partly so that the union will help them when they are on strike. Workers on strike are entitled to demand that where appropriate their union helps to mobilise sympathetic action by other union members or makes formal approaches to other unions. A concerted campaign for the re-allocation of union members' money to funding effective action is long overdue.

It is also important to consider ways of maintaining control over independent funds to run a dispute, such as unofficial hardship funds held by local branches outside the control of the union HQ.

ACAS – a trap.

The 1974 Labour government, in response to the strike wave of the early seventies, set up the Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service. It is the culmination of more than a century of third party interference in conflicts between workers and employers. New Labour has enhanced the role of ACAS. Although its activities have declined slightly in parallel with the strike statistics, it continues to play an important role in disputes.

ACAS has two central functions as well as its role as a general industrial relations advisor. It conciliates between unions and employers by bringing their representatives together to discuss and resolve matters of conflict. It arbitrates in circumstances where the rival parties cannot come to an agreement, and they invite ACAS to make a decision as a third party. This decision may or may not be

binding according to the terms agreed among all three parties.

ACAS appears to stand above the industrial fray. Its judgements are presented, and widely accepted, as neutral and fair. In fact is neither: it is not neutral because it is dependent on the state — the agency that expresses the collective interests of the capitalist class. A joint body of bureaucrats, bosses and professors, without any commitment to the working class, it is not fair because it pretends to treat as equals two parties that are unequal. There is no equality between workers, who have to sell their labour-power to live, and those who exclusively own the means whereby everybody must earn a living. There can be no fair play in negotiations between the exploited and the exploiter.

ACAS is an agency of the capitalist state. It uses its spurious independence to encourage workers' representatives to accept compromises which are detrimental to workers' interests. It is an instrument of the employers, but it retains the loyal support of the trade union leaders. The unions favour ACAS because it seems to provide a safe and secure method of resolving conflict away from the aggravation of the rank and file.

The whole process of arbitration and conciliation helps to turn trade union representatives into mediators between rank and file members and the employers. Instead of organising the most vigorous possible fight for the workers' demands, union officials are drawn into discussions over how they can reconcile these demands with what the bosses are prepared to offer.

The ACAS trap is a wider problem than that has grown worse with social-partnership policies. Every major industry contains its own conciliation and arbitration procedures. Taking a strike into the conciliation swamp means taking it out of the hands of rank and file workers and abandoning any hope of victory. Arbitration and conciliation invariably mean delaying, postponing or prematurely calling off strike action. Delays always suit the employers. But they are invariably detrimental to workers. They allow resistance to dissipate and the day to day pressures of the employers — and their media — to demoralise militancy. Arbitration and conciliation can stifle industrial militancy by shifting the focus of the class struggle from the workplace and the picket line into the committee rooms.

Trade union representatives must represent workers, not mediate with employers. They should not have one foot in both camps, but both feet on the ground, on the workers' side, organising action to win. Workers must strike to win and only accept compromise if that is unavoidable. That way victory is always possible. If we fight for a compromise, then victory is out of reach from the start.

The Employment Tribunal Trap

A similar process of turning issues of collective conflict into matters of individual litigation affected matters of discipline, working practices, safety arrangements, con-

tracts, etc. There has been a long process of shifting the role of union representatives away from being an organiser to being solely a caseworker, and when that has become danger to the bureaucrats, they have been restricted to the role of a consultant. There has also been a turn toward tribunals and the law instead of organising industrial action to defend workers' interests. From a once remote and basic framework, the law has become a complex network extending into the most intimate workplace conflict.

We need to move away from reliance on the law as a solution, utilising legal rights may be used in circumstances as a weapon but it is no substitute for collective action. Whether boycotting, picketing or strike actions are legal or illegal is irrelevant if these tactics are necessary to achieve our demands.

Judge L J Lindley said in 1896, "You cannot make a strike effective without doing more than what is lawful." The law intervenes in the class struggle on the side of the employers. Workers should put no trust or reliance in legal procedures, including tribunals. Many workers have delayed and suspended industrial action in the hope of a favourable verdict — with uniformly disastrous results.

A degree of demoralisation among workers has allowed union leaders to get away with a conservative and defeatist approach to industrial action. The limited character of workers' demands and expectations has given the bureaucrats considerable scope for compromise. It has even allowed them to claim victories when little has been achieved. Many strikes organised are more as face-saving gestures than as serious attempts to defend workers' interests.

Communists put forward a break from the legacy of past defeats and the shackles of the anti-union laws. In our struggles, instead of accepting a compromise as a target at the outset, we should establish a clear goal in terms of jobs, pay, conditions, and go all out to achieve it. We may have to accept a compromise in the end — but that's no reason to give in to one at the beginning.

Selective action must be effective

Selective action may be unavoidable, but it is useless unless it hurts the Government. In fact, it is often worse than useless because it is divisive and demoralising for a section of workers to take action that has no effect other than to put their jobs at risk and cause loss of pay.

Strike hard — strike fast

We need to devise forms of action that produce results quickly. There are plenty of workers in a position to take such action if it is properly organised and coordinated. At present what is lacking is leadership and direction, not the capacity for successful industrial action — or the will to take it.



brendan barber speaks: but what purpose does the trades union congress serve?

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Workers' control of disputes

The official union command structures and procedures are simply an obstacle to effective action. They disorganise and dissipate when they should be organising and coordinating. We need to take over the running of disputes at rank and file level and link up rank and file organisations nationally. A consistent challenge to the bureaucrats' strike strategy is vital to give a clear alternative direction to rank and file organisations.

Unity and solidarity

Conflicts between different unions, such as TSSA-RMT-ASLEF-UNITE- help only the employers and the union bureaucrats. Unity and Solidarity will need to be rebuilt from below for the battles ahead.

Open negotiations

We should insist that they conduct discussions and negotiations in public. Full minutes of all proceedings should be circulated at rank and file level to make the bureaucrats more accountable to the workers they are supposed to represent.

Blame the bureaucrats not the workers

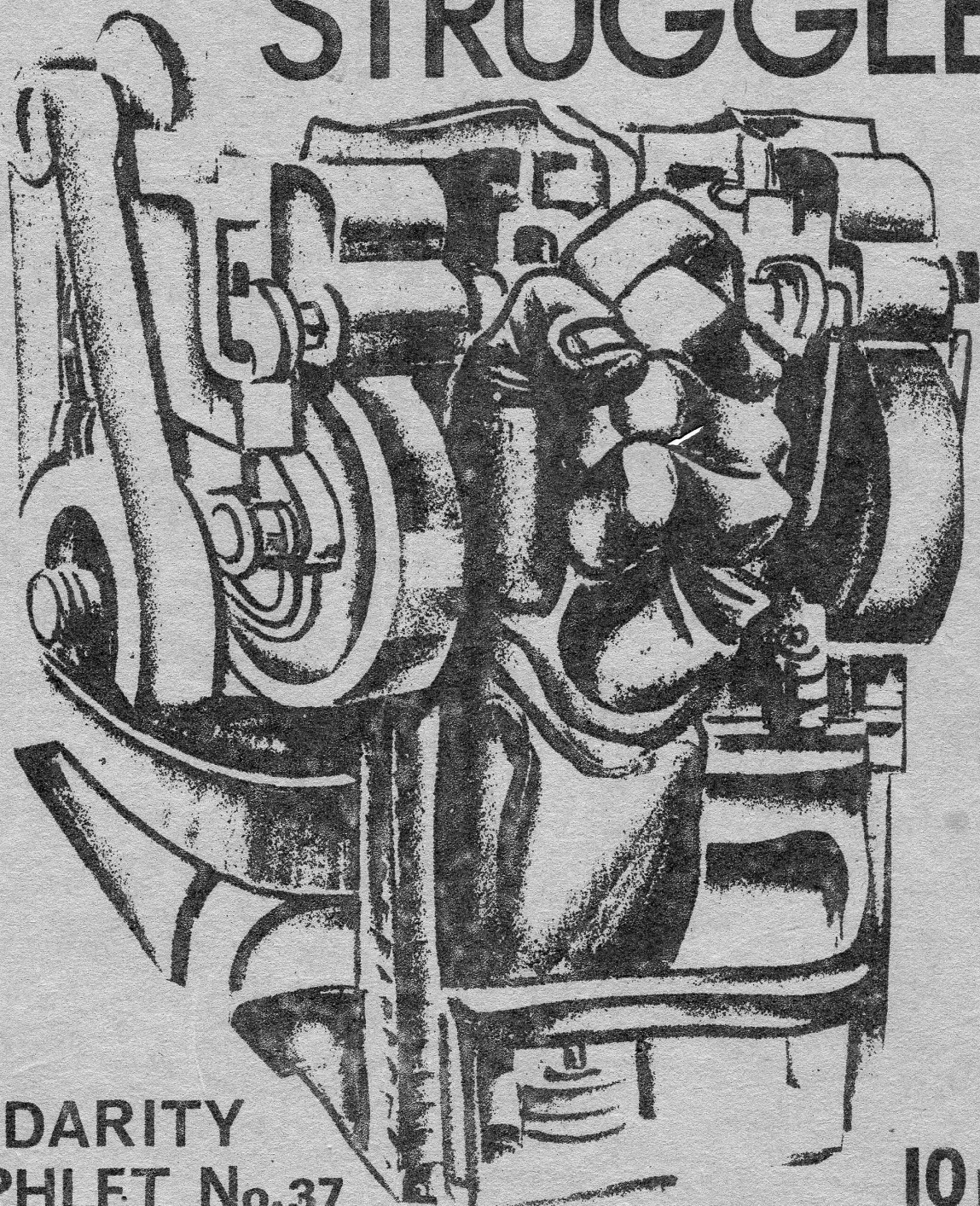
Public service union officials have been too closely tied to the state machine for too long to be able to lead effective action against it. This is why they prefer diffuse protests to hard-hitting action. They only make a show of leading strike action to retain the allegiance of the rank and file — not to defeat the employers. When workers become disillusioned with their union leaders — and even influenced by anti-union propaganda — the responsibility lies entirely with the bureaucracy.

Breaking with the past

To measure up to the scale of the problems we face the unions urgently require a new direction. The Group of International Communists call for a complete re-composition of the labour movement: we do not need another Labour Party or even the existing TUC. We need a new organising centre that combines the political and industrial wings of the movement that overcomes the narrow outlook of British trade unionism. That will seriously confront capital reject the restrictive and divisive politics of Labourism and move ahead on a wider front against the employers. A broad working class challenge to the bosses' austerity demands and the bureaucrats' capitulations can unite and involve workers in resistance, and strengthen the determination to win. The unions' failure to defend workers over the past five years shows the need for mass organisations that are totally committed to the working class. Our objective is to build, from below, mass combat organisations that are under the direct control of the working class. This pamphlet is a contribution to the debate, on the way to achieving this end.

STRATEGY FOR INDUSTRIAL STRUGGLE

by
mark
fore



SOLIDARITY
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10p

strategy for industrial struggle

by Mark Fore

The aim of this pamphlet is to help along the discussion now going on amongst industrial militants about a more flexible and imaginative approach to industrial struggle.

For far too long militants have tended to react in a thoughtless and almost reflex manner to problems of wages and conditions, calling uncritically for more frequent or longer straightforward strikes, without seriously considering whether there might be other options open to them for hitting the boss, options which in many circumstances are both more effective and cheaper for workers to carry out. Militants have too often concentrated on the techniques of getting workers out of the gate. Strikes are often entered into without due and proper consideration of timing selectivity, and the general tactics of the struggle itself.

Today, with the pending introduction of the Industrial Relations Bill, a discussion of these topics is relevant and urgent. The focus of struggle will increasingly shift from the trade union branch or Head Office to the shop floor. And as power workers (who are already restricted by law from strike action)* have recently demonstrated, there are more ways of killing a cat than drowning it in cream.

It is important, at the start, to dispel certain illusions. The use of a wider range of techniques of struggle will not necessarily by-pass the provisions of the new Bill. In addition to simple strike action the Bill is intended to prevent 'irregular industrial action short of a strike', which it defines as 'any concerted course of conduct (other than a strike) which, in contemplation or furtherance of an industrial dispute

a) is carried on by a group of workers with the intention of preventing, reducing, or otherwise interfering with the production of goods or the provision of services, and

b) in the case of some or all of them is carried on in breach of their contracts of employment'. (Clause 6 (2)).

Once the Bill is law (and, despite all the shouting, we can take it as granted that the union leadership

will register and cooperate with the new Registrar) there will in fact be no way to combat its provisions other than by 'lawbreaking' on the widest scale. To compromise will be to lose. No one wants martyrs, but in the long run a resolute struggle will mean less victimisation, as well as less damage to job organisation, than a situation where isolated militants can be dealt with one by one.

In considering the, techniques of struggle available we need both initiative and imagination, and some familiarity with what has been done in the past. There is a tradition, fortunately not entirely dead, of a much more sophisticated approach to industrial struggle than what is usually proposed - even by so-called 'lefts' - today. Since Social-Democracy and Bolshevism became the dominant ideologies in the labour and socialist movement they have seriously undermined this revolutionary tradition. Both of these currents see themselves as riding to state power on the backs of a politically unconscious horse (the working class) - if you see what we mean! This is not only how they analyse things, but how they prefer them, for it leaves them in ultimate control. Such methods of direct action as are described in this pamphlet, which depend on a high and developing level of consciousness, run directly contrary to the long-term interests of all the 'vanguardist' and 'elitist' organisations, for these methods make such organisations superfluous.

This pamphlet is basically a compilation, from widely varied sources, of useful industrial techniques which, in our view, should be considered more often by militants. We would like to discuss in turn:

- a) the informal resistance to production
- b) sabotage
- c) the 'go-slow' and 'work-to-rule'
- d) the 'good work' strike
- e) occupations and sit-ins
- f) methods of increasing the 'cost effectiveness' (for the men) of 'normal' strikes.

We will be concluding by seeing how these various methods of struggle, in addition to being of value in themselves, fit into the framework of an overall industrial strategy, itself related to our ultimate objective of a socialist society, based on the management of production by the producers themselves.

INFORMAL RESISTANCE TO PRODUCTION

One of the greatest unsung stories of the industrial working class movement is that of elemental resistance at the point of production. Work is not usually a pleasant occupation. But the matter goes much deeper than a natural and commendable generalised ergophobia among the 'working class'. In gen-

eral, there is a direct conflict between the needs of production and the human interests of the producers. From this - and whatever the level of wages - flows one of the basic contradictions of so-called 'efficient' capitalism. This conflict cannot be resolved without a fundamental change in the relations of production, i.e. without a vesting of fundamental decisional authority in the hands of the workers themselves.

This informal resistance, which goes on even in formally unorganised shops and sites, is what makes the difference between potential and actual production. Much of what is called 'industrial sociology' is devoted to research into reducing this gap. This working class resistance is expressed in such methods as piecework ceilings, agreements amongst workers as to what constitutes a fair day's work, and in a simple refusal by workers - in a thousand small ways - to participate in their own exploitation.

It attempts by management to solve this contradiction which explains the steady and massive expansion of work study, job evaluation quality control, progress-chasing, critical path analysis, inspection, and related pyramids within industry. All of these would be totally unnecessary, in the absence of resistance.

Management's second line of approach to solve this problem is to introduce 'workers' participation'. In

doing this they try to motivate their employees to identify with the interests of the company. Sooner or later workers see through this fraud, which seeks to ensure their silence by a spurious and empty representation (in a minority capacity) on various administrative bodies. In the long-term all these measures fail.

An example of this resistance was given in 'The Renault Story', by Ken Weller (*Solidarity*, vol.1, No.8). This described the expedience at the small Renault assembly plant in North West London. In 1961 the management decided to close the factory down and to import completed cars from Belgium. But as they had a last batch of cars to complete before closure they offered the workers a deal. The workers would receive the total images they would have earned had they worked at normal speed (43 cars per day) even if the batch to be completed was finished faster.

The men held a shop meeting and decided that as they were going to get the bullet anyway they had nothing to lose by finishing the job as soon as possible and then having a holiday. So they organised the job themselves. They increased productivity to 120 vehicles a day in spite of resistance by the management, who felt (rightly) that such an increase reflected on their ability to manage. This incident gives some idea of the scale and economic effect of resistance on the shop floor. It has been estimated that the loss of production resulting from such resis-



the "self-limiting revolution" in poland: strike at gdansk's "lenin shipyard"

tance is - in any given period - about equal to the volume of production itself.

A good example of how even unorganised workers make their feelings felt took place in 1952 at Price's Tailor's factory, Leeds. A worker was sacked by an uppity manager for allegedly sleeping on the job. The workers stopped work, forced the reinstatement of the worker but failed to get the manager sacked 'all the workers therefore booted him whenever he entered one of the workrooms. As a result he kept out of sight and stayed in his well-heated office'. (*Freedom*, March 1, 1952).

Resistance to production is not simply a Western phenomenon. Exactly the same process goes on in the 'Workers' States' albeit necessarily more deeply underground for obvious reasons. Following the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 there was widespread industrial unrest. On the first anniversary of the attack, the official Czech Communist Party newspaper *Rude Pravo* spoke - in a language reminiscent of the Economic League - of a movement coldly calculated to achieve the disruption of the national economy. Daily we witness attempts at incitement, a fall of working discipline, technological indiscipline, disintegration of the managerial system.

The effects of this movement were widespread: power cuts, shortage of coal, something very close to sabotage on the railways. Dr. Husak, in his eve of anniversary speech, referred to the fact that 'honest workers' were being made 'the objects of ridicule' - a situation which will be thoroughly familiar to militants who have seen how workers react to 'tear-arses'. Ridicule is usually the mildest sanction. (See Victor Zorza, October 22, 1969).

East and West the real struggle goes on, day after day, ignored and undocumented. It has nothing to do with who detains political power. It is related to the fact that the producers have no real control over the productive process and this control is in the hands of an external agency: the managerial bureaucracy. The struggle in production is the major symptom of the most fundamental crisis in class society: the inability of modern capitalism (whether of the private or state variety) fully to integrate workers into the productive process.

SABOTAGE

Sabotage is an emotionally loaded word. It sends shivers or thrills down the spines of employers and mindless militants. But the reality is both less sensational and more significant than the myth. Sabotage is essentially a part of the informal resistance. It usually takes the form, of individual actions. Taken altogether it is undoubtedly a significant form of struggle.

Where men are dominated by things (whether these be machines or institutions) and where human existence depends on these things stopping then these things will stop. There will tend to be breakdowns. These will result from benign acts of omission or commission. Or - put in semantically loaded sociological jargon - 'the existence of a frustrating atmosphere in a factory may easily be diagnosed by the presence of such symptoms as excessive criticism of management, malicious gossip, the voicing of superficial grievances, damaging of equipment, militant political attitudes, absenteeism and neurosis. Productivity- of course is low.

In his book *Strikes: A Study in Industrial Conflict* (Basil Blackwell, 1954) K. Knowles describes how men used to fight the speed-up. Knowles quotes: 'When it got over sixty, say, somebody would just accidentally drop a bolt in the line and as soon as it worked its way round to the end, bang, the line would stop. Then there would be a delay and everyone would take his break.'

This quotation could almost be about Ford at Dagenham. At one time in the early sixties, on the firm's own admission, damage to the track was costing thousands of pounds per year. (see 'Who Sabots?', by John Lane, *Solidarity*, vol.11, no.1). The same sort of thing goes on in every industry: 'neglecting to maintain or lubricate machinery at the correct intervals, pushing buttons on complex electronic gear in the wrong order, putting pieces in the wrong way, running machines at the wrong speeds or feeds, dropping foreign bodies in gear boxes, 'technological indiscipline'; each industry and trade has its established practices, its own traditions.

The problem is the same in America. Last year the prestigious business magazine *Fortune* (July 1970 issue) when describing the U.S. motor industry, said that 'in some plants worker discontent has reached such a degree that there has been overt sabotage. Screws have been left in brake drums, tool handles have been welded into fender compartments (to cause mysterious, unfindable and eternal rattles), paint scratched, and upholstery cut.'

Another common form of 'sabotage' consists in literally carrying out managerial instructions, even when they are known to be wrong, I had experience of this in a piecework shop where consistently and obviously wrong blueprints were carefully worked to. Everyone in the shop (including-the foreman) knew that they were drawn 'left-handed' instead of 'right-handed' (this is a fairly common draughting fault). The shop was suffering a sense of grievance - so everyone closed their eyes. It is a mistake to see lower supervision simply as a tool of higher management. They often have distinct interests and grievances of their own, which any reasonably intelligent steward can often exploit.

At Ford it is not unknown for the most obviously faulty vehicles to pass right down the track. In fact it is the minor defects, which inspection is better organised to detect, that result in a vehicle being pulled put. Examples of what may go right down the line are bodies with two doors on one side and one on the other (quite a good idea, if you think about it for a moment), or bodies with fittings for the foot pedals on the left and the steering wheel on the right (not such a good idea'..).

Sabotage has even been used as a direct bargaining counter. A New York report in the *Manchester Guardian* (March 6, 1948) stated that theatre operators and projectionists secured a new two-year contract and a 15% rise in wages by an unofficial campaign which had startled audiences with films shown upside down, alarming noises from the sound machinery, mixed reels from other films, and films projected onto the ceiling instead of the screen!

One interesting feature of sabotage is that in spite of its long and honourable history, the traditional left is nowadays united in opposition to it. One is tempted to suspect that the reason for this opposition is, that sabotage, by its very nature, cannot be centrally organised Sabotage tends to undermine the general concepts of relations of factory life which the traditional left share with capitalism. For example, in *International Socialism* (Autumn 1968) Laurie Taylor and Ian Taylor wrote in 'We are all deviants now':

'There is some suggestion that the amount of industrial sabotage which characterises a particular industry is inversely related to the strength of shop floor organisation. In tactical terms then outbreaks of sabotage might indicate the need for organisational assistance - that is the sort of assistance which I.S. typically provides to better organised and apparently more political workers'.

Even if the suggested relationship between sabotage and poor organisation were true (and it isn't), most workers are employed in poorly organised plants. This would in no way reduce the significance of this method of struggle..

THE GO-SLOW AND THE WORK-TO-RULE

'If [managers'] orders were completely obeyed confusion would result and production and morale would be lowered. In order to achieve the goals of the organisation workers must often violate orders, resort to their own techniques of doing things, and disregard lines of authority, Without this kind of systematic sabotage much work could not be done. This unsolicited sabotage in the form of disobedience and subterfuge is especially necessary to enable large bureaucracies to function effectively.'

Every industry is covered by a mass of rules, regulations and agreed working practices, many of them

archaic. If applied strictly, they would make production difficult if not impossible. It is often forgotten that many of these rules were introduced to safeguard management's liability in the event of industrial accidents. Managements are quite prepared to close their eyes when these rules are broken in the interests of keeping production going. In many situations the selective application of rules can be a very potent weapon in the workers' hands. Even the modest overtime ban can be effective, if used critically. This is particularly so in industries which have an uneven work pattern.

We will now give a few representative examples of how the work to rule has, in the past, been applied in various industries.

Antwerp Docks 1965. 'Every conceivable safety precaution is being applied, some of them dating back well into the last century and made obsolete by port improvements.

'Locks have never been filled so slowly. It is many years since the levels were so minutely checked with a plumb line, or swing bridges so carefully examined lest a belated reveller be sleeping off a hangover on the turntable beneath,

'Lock-keepers too have unsuspected responsibilities when it comes to identifying ships and their masters or making sure that all the fire regulations are observed. Tugs are hedged in with speed and movement regulations.

'Priority for entry is still being given to oil tankers despite the fact that the Antwerp refineries have adequate stocks of crude oil.' (*Daily Telegraph*, January 8, 1965)

French Railwaymen: when under nationalisation, French strikes were forbidden; their syndicalist fellow-workers were delighted to urge the railmen to carry out the strict letter of the law... One French law tells the engine driver to make sure of the safety of any bridge over which his train has to pass. If after personal examination, he is still doubtful, then he must consult the other members of the train crew. Of course trains run late. Another law for which French railwaymen developed a sudden passion related to the ticket collectors. All tickets had to be 'carefully examined on both sides'. The law said nothing of city rush hours!'. (*What's Wrong with the Unions*, by Tom Brown. A Syndicalist Workers Federation pamphlet, p.11)

There have been many successful work-to-rules in Britain too. Here is an account of a struggle by a group of toolmakers after their wage demand was turned down. It took place at Standard Telephones and Gables, in New Southgate, in 1962.

'The men immediately held a shop meeting and decided to "withdraw goodwill" and lock up their

tools. We then witnessed the spectacle of . ' tool-makers queuing up to use the firm's limited stock of micrometers. We saw jobs 5/16 in dimension being tested for squareness with a 2 foot square, others a few inches long being checked with a 6 foot rule, job after job being impossible to assemble because the company's angle-plates were out of square. These and countless other happenings drastically curtailed the output of jigs and fixtures, which in turn meant huge pile-ups of work waiting for tools in the production shops, The men achieved their demands!'

The distinction between a 'work-to-rule' and a 'go-slow' is an arbitrary and often mythical one. A work-to-rule is usually highly selective in its application of rules and is rarely accompanied by normal working in areas where rules do not apply.

An interesting struggle took place in the P.T.A. shop at Ford (Dagenham) in 1962:

'The Company cited as a typical instance of restriction of effort the case of the headliners whose job it is to fit the interior roof-lining in a vehicles. It had been calculated that with reasonable effort a headlining in a small car could be fitted in 22 minutes, which meant that in a normal eight-hour shift at least 20 should be fitted by each employee in a section. The Company stated that the headliners had repeatedly refused to fit more than 13 heads in any one shift, saying that management's request was unreasonable. And yet the Company's statement continued 'they had in fact fitted, each headlining in less time than allowed, and spent the remainder of the time between jobs sitting down. Any attempts by supervision to improve the situation had resulted in a "go-slow" by these men. They took so long over each car that they prevented other employees on the line from performing their operations thus causing congestion and frequently leading to the lines being stopped and sometimes other employees being sent home. This also took place when the headliners were suffering any type of grievance, real or imaginary. On one occasion the Company had no choice but to send other employees home at 3:30 am as a result of this type of action *. Shop stewards, however, supported by the Convenor, had always maintained on these occasions that the employees concerned were working normally and refused completely, in spite of numerous appeals, to persuade their members to remove restrictions.'

This heartrending 'cri de coeur' by the Ford Motor Company was published in the report of the Jack Court of Enquiry (C.M.D.E. 1999, April 1963, H.M.S.O p.57). It is a pity that this great tradition of 'working normally' is not as strong at Ford's as it used to be. But matters are beginning to improve.

The 'go-slow' has a long and honourable history:

Glasgow Dockers: 'In 1889 the organised dockers of Glasgow demanded a 10% increase of wages,

but met with the refusal of the employers. Strike breakers were brought in from among the agricultural labourers and the dockers had to acknowledge defeat and return to work at the old wage scale. But before the men resumed their work, their secretary of the union delivered to them the following address:

"You are going back to work at the old wage. The employers have repeated time and again that they were delighted with the work of agricultural labourers who had taken our places for several weeks during the strike. But we have seen them at work; we have seen that they could not even walk a vessel, that they dropped half the merchandise they carried, in short that two of them could hardly do the work of one of us. Nevertheless, the employers have declared themselves enchanted by the work of these fellows; well, then, there is nothing left for us but to do the same and to practice *ca' canny*. Work as the agricultural labourers worked. Only they often fell into the water; it is useless for you to do the same."

'This order was obeyed to the letter. After a few days the contractors sent for the general secretary of the dockers and begged him to tell the dockers to work as before and that they were ready to grant the ten per cent increase.¹ (from *'Sabotage; Its History, Philosophy and Function'* by Walker C. Smith, I.W.W., 1913- Reprinted by Solidarity Bookshop, 75 Armitage, Chicago, Illinois 60614, p. 4.)

London Dockers' Strike of 1945: Good traditions die hard in dockland, as shown by the following account: 'In everything they did the men were unhurried in a way that looked deliberate. There was evidence that their actions were planned. True, the cranes were working and goods were passing from the dockside to the ship, but there was a leisureliness about the proceedings that made everything seem half-hearted,

'I soon learned the reason. At the moment bags of sugar were going aboard in slings. But it was pointed out that the slings were carrying only 4 at a time instead of the normal 12. Yet even the reduced number seemed to take just as long to be freed and the sling returned for more. Meanwhile the men on the dock below waited patiently until it came back, standing or sitting and chatting. Sometimes, after a load had been fixed and the crane had started lifting, a fault appeared to be observed. There was a call to the craneman and down it came again to have the hooks seen to.

The men who brought the goods from the warehouses to the dock were equally leisurely in their movements. There were always several with nothing to do at all outside the ship,

'Any excuse appeared to be good enough as an excuse to stop work. There was a general stoppage for instance when I and my P.L.A. (Port of London

Authority) guide approached. It was obvious we were the subject of discussion. The men were frankly suspicious. Only a day before a press cameraman visiting another dock was mobbed. The men became very ugly in their attitude and hurled epithets at him and the press generally. But for the protection of a dock policeman he might have been maltreated or at least have lost his camera.

'The effect of the "go-slow" working, said a Port Officer, is not only causing ships to be held up in London Docks for weeks before they can be dealt with, but it results in losses to the contractors who are employing the men. Under normal conditions a gang of 13 men could load or discharge 200 tons of sugar a day. Now the tonnage seldom exceeds 50. They could deal with 125 tons of timber, now it is about 25.' (*Daily Telegraph*, July 13, 1945).

Power Workers' Dispute, 1962: Due to their special legal position power workers have developed an expertise in work restriction which should be made much more widely available.

'The ways in which the work-to-rule operated in the West End District were many and varied because of the multiplicity of jobs and because of the militancy of the men doing them. In some cases it was a simple overtime ban. In others, many subtle interpretations of working rules were discovered which led to discussions with the management reminiscent of mediaeval theological disputes.

'Amongst the methods used were a refusal by drivers to move or help move any material beyond the tail board of their vehicles. Electricians would refuse to touch main fuses and would insist on waiting for an Installation Inspector to remove the fuses before the job could start. The Inspector would also have to replace the fuses *when* the job was done. Nor would electricians or their mates do any labourer's work. This meant that every time a cooker or other appliance was moved into a house, a van driver, a couple of labourers, an electrician and his mate, and an Installation Inspector would all be needed - 6 men at least. This applied to many other jobs too.

'If a job was inaccessible, the men would patiently wait until London Electricity Board step-ladders were brought from the depot. They would refuse to use the householder's ladders, since they were only insured for L.E.B. equipment.

The operating side is the key to the whole power industry. In this section the work-to-rule reached its most developed and effective form. Men would leave their turbines and other equipment unattended at the end of their contractual period, even if due to sickness or other reasons they had not been relieved. And of course due to the extreme cold, to the power cuts and to other factors (there was a lot of 'flu about), the sickness rate was very high.

In some cases the engineers in charge, instead of closing a turbine down when it was left unattended would tell the turbine driver to leave it running at a set speed. This can and did have very important consequences. A turbine is usually slowed or speeded up according to the load required. If the load required exceeds by a certain factor the output of the turbine while it is running at a set speed, the turbine automatically cuts itself out and sheds the load onto the other turbines. In conditions of maximum output this in turn overloads the other turbines. This can have a cascade effect, closing down the whole station, as each turbine cuts itself out as it becomes overloaded. This in fact did happen. This excellent in-built safety mechanism makes sure that equipment is not damaged by excessive loads.

Other methods used at Battersea included the refusal of the coal conveyor gangs to work with even a single man less than the prescribed quota. They also refused to accept transfers from one gang to another to make the number up after the start of a shift. The effects of these methods, which were increased by the very high sickness rate also prevailing at Battersea, led to conveyors being put out of action. In turn this meant that coal barges took much longer to unload. Many barges were in fact sent away half full. In fact the fuel shortage at the station became quite crucial towards the end of the work-to-rule.

'Another effective field was the non-emptying of the massive ash-bins. This is normally done during overtime. This led to a further reduction of output. Many furnaces were working at only 30% of capacity. I have no figures for Battersea, but at the 445,000 KW Barking station the output was reduced at times to just over 100,000 KW. The Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB) itself said that in the London area alone it lost a generating capacity of 1 million kilowatts on January 17. This increased to 1.25 million kilowatts on January 18, only 2 days before the end of the work-to-rule. The total capacity of England and Wales is about 29 million kilowatts.

The effect of such a method of working in the power industry can be seen from the CEGB's own figures of the consequences of the work-to-rule of December 1970 which averaged 43% of total output capacity, not counting losses due to sickness and the necessity of burning inferior coal stocks. February 25 1971.)

The Post Office, with its byzantine system of rules and working practices and reliance on massive overtime working, is an example where optimum conditions for working-to-rule seem to exist. It is a great pity that serious thought was not given to this technique before the recent strike was entered into.

Postal Workers' Work-to-Rule (January 1962):

An interesting account of what was achieved is given below:

'The work-to-rule began at midnight January 1st. On January 4th Mr. Bevins, Postmaster General, stated that "for the time being the Post Office cannot accept any large postings of circulars and advertising matter at printed paper and reduced rates..." On January 6th, Mr. Cyril Hears, Controller at the Mount Pleasant Sorting Station stated "Normally at this time we have 600,000 items here. Now, after staying all night at the office, there are nearly 3,000,000. We are losing leeway at the rate of 750,000 a day".' (*Evening Standard*, Jan. 6, 1962)

'By January 8, mail due for sorting was being directed as far as Edinburgh, Portsmouth, Cardiff and Peterborough. This diversion of mails for purposes of sorting created problems of its own. A union spokesman "claimed that 350 begs of correspondence for Essex, diverted from Mount Pleasant to Peterborough, had been relabelled and sent back to Mount Pleasant because the Peterborough office was full. On receipt at Mount Pleasant, the postal authorities had instructed members of the UPW immediately to send the 350 bags back to

Peterborough". (*Evening News*, January 10, 1962). The bureaucracy was now in firm and exclusive charge!

'Interesting developments took place at many railway stations. The rules lay down that Post Office staff are supposed to handle letter-mail, and railway staff parcel-mail. Normally both groups work together. The job is done: both parcels and letters catch the appropriate trains. Workers organise together on the spot. They ignore the artificial divisions which the "nationalised" Post Office and the "nationalised" Railways attempt to build up "between them. But the postal workers now decided to implement the rule. This resulted in widespread delays in the mail.

'Other things also happened. Mr. Bevins reported that one of his own letters had not been delivered to him because it had only been addressed "Postmaster General, London". The words "Insufficiently Addressed. State name of firm" had been scrawled on the envelope. Letters to Mr. Selwyn Lloyd, Chancellor of the Exchequer, which had been sent to No.1 Carlton Terrace (the residence he had occupied while Foreign Secretary) had been marked "Gone away" and returned to the Dead Let-



imaginative tactics: in september 1969 striking fiat workers refused to pay tram and bus fares; went into stores and demanded huge price reductions or just took what they wanted ('proletarian shopping'); formed neighbourhood committees that announced that they had decided to reduce their rent ('autoriduzione'); occupied government offices; and staged mass collective electricity-bill burnings.

ter Office. Normally, of course, postmen would have used their own initiative. Now staff in the Returned Letters Department were going through the motions of trying to trace his correct address'. (From 'Working to Rule', *Solidarity* Vol.11, No.1.)

THE 'GOOD WORK' STRIKE

One of the serious problems facing militants in general and workers in the service industries in particular, is that of isolation from the general mass of the population. This enables the authorities to whip up 'public opinion'¹ against the strikers. This isolation may be so marked a feature of certain struggles that one gets the impression that some workers, on the buses for example, see their passengers as almost as much the enemy as the boss. One way round this problem is to consider techniques which selectively hurt the boss without affecting other workers or better still are to the advantage of 'the public'. The 'good-work' strike often does just this as well as having intrinsic merits of its own.

The 'good work' strike is a general term which means that workers provide consumers with better service or products than the employer intended. An example would be if shop workers consistently under-charged and gave over-weight. Or if workers building working class flats put the best quality craftsmanship even into the most shoddy materials. Obviously there are numerous occasions' when the good work strike is not a serious proposition, but it could certainly be used more often than it is. For instance if car workers took the companies'¹ hypocritical appeals for 'more quality'¹ seriously, it would be interesting to see managerial reactions when they got 'more quality' than they bargained for. One good side-effect of the good work strike is that it places the onus of stopping a service on the employer.

Lisbon Transport Workers 1968. 'Lisbon bus and train workers gave free rides to all passengers today. They were protesting because the British-owned Lisbon Tramways Company had not raised their wages...

'Today conductors and tram drivers arrived at work as usual, but the conductors did not pick up their money satchels.

¹On the whole the public seems to be on the side of these take-no-fare strikers and schoolboys are having the time of their lives. Holidays have begun, and they are hopping rides to pass the time.' (*The Times*, July 2, 1968).

Paris Metro. On the Paris Metro tickets are punched as passengers come onto the platform - and a ticket bought on one day can be used on another. Selective strikes of ticket-punching personnel

enable hundreds of thousands of passengers to travel free. Such strikes are not resented by the passengers (mainly fellow-workers) and hit management hard.

'There should be food for thought here for British Transport workers who have tended to be rather unimaginative in their forms of struggle. It could be argued that a refusal to collect fares could lead to a lock-out by the employers. Even if this happened the passengers would clearly see that it was management, not workers, who was depriving them of transport. And it would not even be possible to counter a refusal to collect fares by a look-out if the workers acted suddenly, without notice, and for limited periods - and then repeated the treatment later on.

One might imagine similar situations in other industries, for instance postal workers behind a counter only accepting unstamped letters, or petrol pump attendants dishing out free petrol, etc, etc.

The Gospel According to the Rule

In the Beginning was the Rule

And the Rule was in the Book

And the Rule was Boss

And the Boss was God

So the Rule was God.

But woe unto them that worketh to Rule

For the Rule worketh not

(Even as the Boss worketh not)

And upon them that abide by the Rule of the Boss

Shall great strictures and vengeance be visited

By the press of the Boss, thy God.

For the Rule worketh not

Even though It be written in the Book

By the Boss and His agents in the working class movement

Great therefore is the woe to the National Economy.

For the Boss thy God, who created the Rule,

Who created the Book,

Is the Creator of great confusion.

And they that worketh to His Rule Shall post Epistles that shall not arrive But be lost forever.

They shall sit all day in Great Confusion In trains that runneth not

Even according to the Rule of the Boss, thy God They shall assemble faulty components Following

blueprints that meaneth little.

For although He made Heaven and Earth

The Boss resideth outside of production

And knoweth not its ways and means

Therefore thou shalt do only the works of the Boss,
thy God

And this sparingly –

Thou shalt heed not His Rules. Thou shalt use thy
loaf

Thou shalt take over His factories and manage pro-
duction For the Boss is both alpha and omega The
Beginning and End of Great Confusion.

E. Morse (Reprinted from *Solidarity*, vol.11. No. 1)

OCCUPATIONS AND SIT-INS

It is rather arbitrary to distinguish between occupa-
tions and sit-ins. The terms are often used synonym-
ously. It seems to me useful, however, to define
sit-ins as being relatively restricted and passive in
character, whereas occupation implies positive ac-
tion actually to take over a plant and deny access to
management. The latter predicates a high level of
militancy and solidarity, as well as good rank-and-
file organisation. There have been quite a lot of sit-
ins in Britain over the years. Most of them have
been of short duration. They have usually occurred
in the mines and in the motor industry.

An interesting occupation took place in July 1956
when some 200 clothing workers at the M. and L.
Goldstein factory at Warren Street (in the West End)
were locked out one week before their annual holi-
day. The factory had been the scene of a long
struggle with the management, with the workers
actually running the factory for two weeks and prov-
ing that the company's problems were due to de-
fects of the management. The following account
was given to the author by one of the participants.

'We decided to oppose the lock-out by staging a
'stay-in', an occupation of the factory. We had to
answer all the objections to this course. We were
told that we would antagonise the leadership of the
Tailors and Garment Workers' Union, who had been
negotiating for some time', and that they would
"never give us recognition". We were informed that
the police would be called. Another problem was
that the labour force consisted of about two-thirds
women and girls. When it got to the vote almost
everybody was in favour of the "stay-in". We knew
that two factories in East London employing about
150 workers would strike in sympathy and that
about 70 workers in the remaining unorganised fac-
tory, with about 200 employees, would also support
us.

'It was decided that about half the workers would
barricade themselves in the factory on the top floor.
The rest including women with young children would
operate from the street. This meant organising food
and other supplies -which would be hoisted up in
buckets.

'About 100 workers proceeded to make themselves
secure on the top floor. The lift was put out of ac-
tion. The one door leading from the stairs was well
secured. The only way in was over the roof by way
of the fire escape which, in our own interests, we
could not risk closing. We knew that the police
would be called in and would try to get in from the
roof.

'Sure enough the police arrived and surrounded the
building. In the meantime we had been busy putting
up banners and posters on the outside of the win-
dows. People gathered outside and supplies began
to arrive.

We felt able to continue for a long time provided the
police did not intervene. But at a meeting to discuss
what to do if they did, it was decided that we did not
stand much chance of resisting physically as the
support on the ground was not big enough.

'Several hours later the attack came. A large force
of police came over the roof-tops and into the top
floor. We had to agree to leave or face a violent
struggle with very limited forces.

'Had this been a large factory with widespread ex-
ternal support the police would have had great diffi-
culty in removing us. And possibly would not even
have attempted to'.

BMC Longbridge, April 1962. There was a nota-
ble sit-in of 3,000 hourly-rated workers at this fac-
tory. It lasted a week. A Solidarist who was present
reported:

'On Friday, April 6, I spent some time inside the
factory and saw at first hand how production was at
a halt. As I walked around the vast shops I saw no
work at all being done. I did see, however, a few
card schools playing 'solo'¹, a group of men playing
darts, another group kicking a football around, a few
men asleep on their benches, others reading papers
and some 'chatting up' the girl clerks. In the proto-
type development shop I saw a small group of men
clustered around a man on a step ladder who v/as
giving an excellent take-off of an 'agitator' leading
off with 'Comrades of the revolution...'

'About the only sign of 'activity' were groups of fore-
men and supervisors talking nervously with one
another in small groups 'all dressed up and nowhere
to go'. Only one sound emerged from the forging
shop with its huge steam hammers: the hissing of
the tea urn from which the card players would occa-
sionally refill their teapots!'

The Longbridge struggle was successful because it happened at a peak of demand - management consequently treating the men with kid gloves-for fear of sparking off a more serious conflict. Although several thousand men were laid off (and would claim full benefit) those actually in dispute received full pay. After all they had come to their place of work.

An unsuccessful sit-in took place at the Pressed Steel Plant at Linwood (now Chrysler's) in May 1965. Forty die-setters refused to be laid off and sat-in for about three hours. The police were called and were arrested without any resistance. We quote this just to prove the point that there is a time and place for everything. A sit-in by a small isolated group, in a tactical situation favourable to the boss, is certainly no panacea.

Unity of purpose is essential for a successful sit-in. Its absence can lead to demoralisation and to discrediting the 'method'. Potential opportunities may also sometimes be lost because of lack of imagination and the dead weight of traditional thinking. On April 13 and 14, 1971 for example, just after the 10-week major Ford dispute, an interesting situation developed in the paint shop of the Ford P.T.A. plant at Halewood. In response to the management laying off some men, 200 track workers entered the offices on two successive nights. On the second night a full-scale sit-in and obstruction of the Administration only just failed to materialise because of differences of opinion amongst the stewards.

While there is a fairly long record of sit-ins in Britain there have been few, if any, large-scale factory occupations such as are 'now common in' both France and Italy. It is about time this omission was rectified. It would be foolish to deny that the technique raises a number of problems and is certainly no cure-all. It presupposes a high level of militancy and organisation on the part of the mass of workers concerned. It is doomed if the factory remains isolated in a sort of self-imposed ghetto. On the other hand, given the right conditions, it can be dynamite. And it is in a class by itself in terms of its revolutionary implications.

A good example of the pitfalls and of what should not be done was the abortive occupation at G.E.C. Liverpool, in October 1969.

'The fiasco was basically due to the failure of the Shop Stewards' Committee to carry the workers with thorn. This in turn was due to a real lack of basic information among the rank and file as to the actual aims, objectives and methods of the planned occupation. There was widespread confusion as to whether it was to be a symbolic affair, lasting at most three days, or something more serious and permanent. There were substantial and realistic misgivings about the viability of actually running a

factory in isolation within the present system - even for three days. And there were suspicions that the Action Committee was trying to sell them a pig in a poke. Much of the workers' opposition was due to a lack of information and to justified doubts rather than to any lack of militancy. The Company and its pawns were able to capitalise on these mistakes and drive a wedge between the mass of the men and the Action Committee.

But much more than just information was needed by the rank and file at G.E.C. What was needed was mass involvement. The workers should not just have been presented with a plan. The whole campaign should have been preceded by shop meetings, discussing the pros and cons, especially in the weaker shops and factories. There should have been many more leaflets, many more mass meetings, which should have been regarded as part of the process of planning. But most important, workers should not only have dominated the planning and decision-taking, but should also have directly controlled the application of any decisions taken. This should have been made absolutely clear. If this had been done, the spectacle of a small group of company men breaking up and taking over a mass meeting could never have happened.

'No Committee, however devoted, however honest and however militant (and the Action Committee may have been all of these) can substitute itself for the activity of the rank and file. And in any case, for us, even the errors committed by a truly revolutionary working class movement are infinitely more fruitful and valuable than the infallibility of the cleverest Central Committee".

While it is usually pointless to discuss what might have happened and easy to be wise after the event, it is very tempting to consider possible developments if the Pilkington men had occupied one or several factories at St Helens during their struggle in 1970. They would have had a number of things in their favour: concentration of main production in one town, a capital-intensive industry based on a continuous process, deep roots in the local community, and the probability of massive support from Merseyside. But there is still time, and anyone who thinks they have heard the last of the Pilkington men are in for a big surprise.

THE 'NORMAL' STRIKE

Even the traditional unofficial walk-out can be made much more effective than it normally is. The participation of the ordinary worker is often limited to attending the occasional mass meeting. He then stays at home, in isolation, watching the progress of 'his own' dispute on the goggle-box.

Apart from the question of mass involvement of all strikers in activities related to their strike, there is the



mass picketing: a summer 1977 picket at the grunwick film processing labs. the pickets were strengthened by miners from yorkshire, south wales and kent, and the union of post office workers blacked grunwick's mail

question of -the" hardship involved through loss of pay and now through new Social Security regulations relating to strikers' dependants. Italian workers have recently been leading the way in experimenting with techniques of increasing the cost-effectiveness of strike action. They have shown what can be done:

Italian unions, which have no strike funds, have developed a whole new armoury of activities to minimise the cost of such withdrawals to their members, and maximise the disruptive effect. There is the chessboard strike, where every other department stops the brushfire, or articulated strike which, over a period rolls through every key section of a works; the pay-book strike, where every man whose cards carry an odd number is in dispute on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, while the even numbers fight out their claims on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday; and the rather different variety, of odd-and-even strike, where the blue-collar workers down tools in the morning but return after lunch, only to find (surprise, surprise!) that the white-collar clerks and foremen are now out, making all work impossible - thus achieving a full day's stoppage for only half a day's loss of pay.

'Faced with such tactics, many big and famous Italian companies had an appalling year. Italsider, the Northern Italian-steel group, was crippled for

months; Alfa Romeo produced 10,000 fewer cars than its planned programme, with losses which could hit its whole ambitious expansion programme in the impoverished South; and SIT Siemens, the main telecommunications firm employing over 15,000 people, lost a total of 4 million working hours.

'Underlying the disputes, too, is a disturbing note of violence. At several factories, notably Alfa Romeo, the management themselves -have come out on strike, in protest against the unpleasantly aggressive actions of the pickets. At Pirelli and Siemens, executive cars had been set on fire, or plastered with threatening messages. And in Milan, there is an organisation called 'The Red Brigade' which distributes lists of managers it dislikes, with highly scabrous details about their sexual and financial affairs, which are hardly calculated to improve shop-floor relations. ('Europe and the English Disease' by Peter Wilsher, *Sunday Times Business News*, March 7 1971.)

One of the major problems of industrial -conflict is that of achieving mass participation at all levels of action and decision-making. An example "of how this is not always the case is provided in the interview with Jock Macrea, Convenor of the Body Group at Ford, Dagenham, published in 'Black Dwarf' (January 30, 1970). Macrea describes his

ideal mass meeting as follows:

'You get to the meeting, in five minutes you tell the workers the salient point and you say we're on strike. You don't have interminable discussions because that leads to no bloody action. The longer a meeting goes on, the less chance you've got of getting a strike action carried. It's better to have a well planned, well organised meeting with all your own people ready to say the right things and do the right things and you're in. You take your strike vote and that's it. Once workers have made their minds up, they'll stay solid. Then you can have your talk later on.'

While such techniques can - in the short run — be effective in manipulating workers (albeit for good ends), in the long term they contribute to a lack of confidence between stewards and workers. This can become a serious problem. It is probably no coincidence that it has been particularly acute in the past at Dagenham. With such attitudes, and even with the best of intentions, it is not surprising that stewards are sometimes let down by the workers they 'represent'. One of the positive effects of the recent struggle at Fords has been the move towards some reorganisation of the Shop Stewards' Committee at Dagenham, making it more responsive to the men's demands.

To mobilise workers good communications are absolutely necessary. Unfortunately unofficial factory papers are few and generally poor and amateurish. Even leaflets are usually sparse and badly produced. Posters are almost non-existent. One of the best side-effects of the general upheaval on the radical left has been an increasing attention to this problem. Outside help is now more available to service rank-and-file organisations. This process of collaboration in action between the new radical movement and industrial militants has just begun. It could be a very fruitful development.

One of the hurdles which has to be overcome is the traditional suspicion of industrial workers towards outsiders. We hope to see it replaced by a calculated willingness to use the abilities and services of the new movement to increase the penetration of radical ideas inside industry.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this pamphlet is simple. It is to help start a critical discussion amongst industrial militants on the armoury of techniques of industrial action which are available to them. It would be foolish to follow uncritically any of the examples here described. The individual requirements of a particular situation cannot be filled by any blueprint drawn up in advance. It depends on a flexible assessment of various factors: the level of consciousness of the workers, the widely varying vulnerability of various

employers to various techniques, objective conditions (such as the time of year, state of demand for the firms products) and the local situation.

The 'normal' strike method is often not only relatively ineffective and inefficient, its main drawback is that it does not challenge in any fundamental way the present industrial situation. It tacitly acknowledges the boss's 'right' to manage 'his' factory. A change in attitude towards industrial conflict is badly needed. What is needed is not simply more and longer strikes. What is needed is to relate the forms of industrial struggle to a revolutionary socialist perspective and to one's total conception of a self-managed society. This is what we mean by an industrial strategy.

This pamphlet will have been well worthwhile if it gets an argument going on strategies of industrial struggle and on their relation to the socialist objective. Throughout, our thinking has been deliberately geared to this problem of the relation of ends and means. If we stress certain methods of struggle it is because they challenge fundamental managerial prerogatives - and because, for us, the whole structure of authority relations in industry and the whole question of man's fate in production are at the core of any meaningful concept of socialism. We also stress these methods because they are methods that will have to be initiated by (and are most, likely to remain under the control of) those who will have to implement them. Such methods can't be used for purposes of manoeuvring or manipulation or for getting this or that official into a position of power. They can't be absorbed by the system.

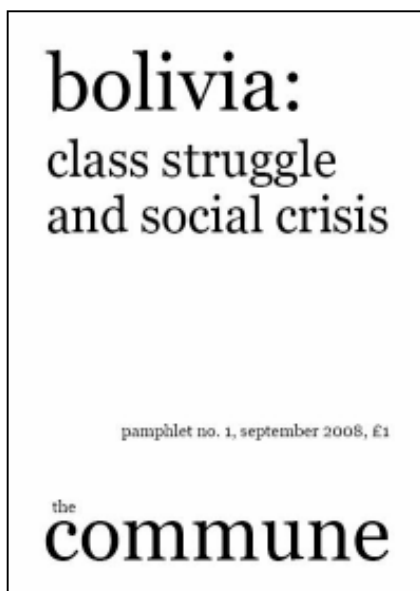
As We See It (the Solidarity basic statement of aims) puts our attitude towards industrial struggle very clearly:

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

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

Our pamphlet is just a beginning. As usual, we would welcome comments, criticisms, other experiences, and offers of help from our readers.

also available...



Bolivia is the poorest country in Latin America: but it is second only to Venezuela in its natural gas production, and its people have suffered a long history of exploitation by foreign powers and multinationals.

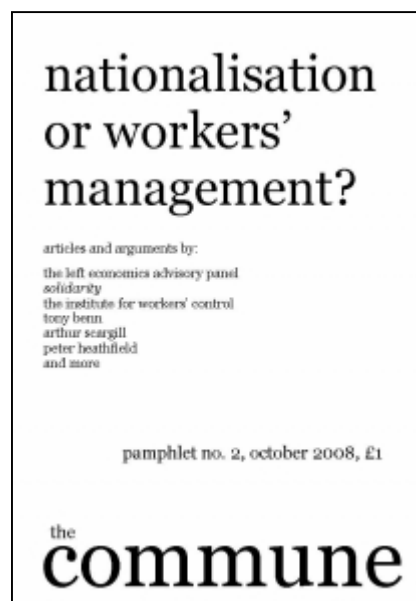
It also has a traditionally strong workers' movement, and the organised working class played a central role in the 2000, 2003 and 2005 uprisings.

In September 2008 the Bolivian oligarchy used fascist militias to seize control of half the country, perpetrating a massacre of indigenous people and trade unionists. And yet the soft-left indigenous government led by Evo Morales, which has used police to break up miners' strikes, feebly sat on its hands. It was up to workers, indigenous people and the urban poor to defend themselves.

This pamphlet explains the fighting between the government and the oligarchy in recent months as well as documenting the struggles of the Bolivian working class.

This pamphlet counterposing workers' management of workplaces to nationalisation by the state bureaucracy includes the following articles:

- A review of the Left Economics Advisory Panel pamphlet on social ownership for the 21st century
- The struggle for self-management (by *Solidarity*)
- An exchange between *Solidarity* and the Institute for Workers' Control
- The ambiguities of workers' control (by *Solidarity*)
- The Harrogate debates: the 1977 debate between the then secretary of state for energy Tony Benn, Arthur Scargill and Peter Heathfield from the NUM on workers' control. Includes summaries of contributions from the floor.



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“The Commune was therefore to serve as a lever for uprooting the economic foundation upon which rests the existence of classes, and therefore of class rule.” - Karl Marx

draft platform of the group of international communists

We are communists: we fight for a new self-managed society based on collective ownership of the means of production and distribution and an economy organised not for value production but for the well-being of humanity and in harmony with our natural environment. Communism will abolish the system of wage-labour so that our ability to work will cease to be a commodity to be sold to an employer; it will be a truly classless society; there will be no state, no managers or organisations superior to those of workers' self-management.

We are internationalists: we seek the greatest possible collaboration with communists in other countries; we build solidarity with workers' movements around the world; we are opposed to all borders and immigration controls; and we unconditionally support the right of nations to self-determination.

We know that communism can only come from below, through the organisations of the workers themselves. This conception of communism has nothing in common with the fake “socialisms” of the Stalinist state planning of the former USSR, of the sweatshops of China, and social-democratic “humane” capitalism. No nation in the world today is communist, nowhere is the economy managed by the workers. These models of “socialism” have all proven to be complete failures, maintaining and in many cases aggravating the working class's lack of self-determination. There is no particular connection between socialism and nationalisation by the state, which merely replaces one set of managers with another; alongside fighting day-to-day battles we advocate a struggle for vestiges of workers' control in the here and now as preparatory steps towards real workers' self-management and collective ownership.

We are the most consistent advocates of social liberation in all its forms. We fight sexual repression, sexism and homophobia and advocate sexual liberation; we champion anti-racist and anti-fascist struggles; we oppose all limits to freedom of speech and free cultural expression. These struggles are not just some adjunct to working-class struggle but are the cornerstone of democracy and human freedom.

We know that it is impossible for the working class to fight for and create a communist society if it is unable to control its own organisations: we support rank and file movements against the bureaucrats who lord it over the unions and parties of the left; we are for openness and democracy in the workers' movement.

We have no gods, not even revolutionary ones. We reject the practice of using the works of this or that socialist of decades past as sacred texts from which “revealed truths” can be read off as gospel. The “traditions” to which the traditional left groups appeal are universally ahistorical and anachronistic, used for the sake of feigning historical legitimacy rather than to critically examine and draw lessons from the past.

We believe that the defeats of the workers' movement in the last three decades; the decay of the left and the absolute poverty of its ideas and slogans; its abandonment of class politics; and the sectarianism of the groups vying for supremacy with their own front campaigns and so-called unity projects; are all evidence of the need for ground-up rethinking of the left's project and the re-composition of the workers' movement.

For more articles and historic documents relating to the types of working class action discussed in this pamphlet, visit:

<http://thecommu.ne.wordpress.com/category/organising-for-class-struggle>

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