

THIS IS A LETTER OF CRITICISM ADDRESSED TO SOLIDARITY (London) ABOUT THEIR RECENT PAMPHLET, 'UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT? THE FISHER BENDIX OCCUPATION.'

We think that the pamphlet itself is a product of the way in which Solidarity works, and that it shows a large gap between your theory and practice. Despite your theory of self-activity and self-management, you are mainly a pamphlet producing group. Therefore your response to any important issue is to write a pamphlet or an article about it. But because as a group you are divorced from working class struggles, you are unable to write about the situation with any real understanding.

A clear example of this is the way Solidarity acted about Fisher Bendix. Three of your members came up to Kirkby to visit the factory. But what can you understand from a visit? The draft for the pamphlet was written on the basis of a discussion with members of the occupation committee. Coming in from the outside, not knowing anyone in the factory, you could only speak to the committee, but remember, you get their view, which is not necessarily that of ~~xxx~~ all the workers.

Throughout the pamphlet there is a constant confusion between workers and shop stewards. On page 5 you say: "The stewards remaining in the factory had given the signal for workers to join in a march to the admin block as previously arranged with the stewards who were 'negotiating'." In fact, this march on the Admin Block was not organised or led by the stewards, but by a group of young workers.* Effectively you have denied the autonomy and self-activity of these workers - something which Solidarity has spent much time denouncing other groups for doing. But, as we said, this kind of thing is inevitable from the whole way in which you write about struggles, whilst being divorced from them. At least, when groups like I.S. do this, they know they're doing it - though this is also the logic of their position, which says they must recruit shop stewards as being the vanguard of the working class. Obviously they cannot criticise them too much if they want to recruit them. And they were trying very hard to recruit Jack Spriggs, the convenor

Although on page 4 you say "the ~~x~~ stewards then started to plan a course of action" and on page 5 you say "the stewards were now negotiating with their own objectives in mind." and again, "It was agreed that the workers would respond to a call from their stewards....." yet on page 6 you are able to say "the workers set about organising committees to take charge of various aspects of the occupation. This is not so, the stewards did it.

Towards the end of the pamphlet on page 10 we have some euphoria about how the occupation was run. We quote "The workers are developing their own self-confidence to act for themselves. They are showing in practice how to solve problems on the basis of real democratic decision-making. I learned something very new at Fisher Bendix. We asked about how decisions were made. How did the committees function?"

* For an account of the takeover by some of these young workers see the BIG FLAME broadsheet on Fisher Bendix. Available from 78 Clarendon Rd, Wallasey, Cheshire.

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" The Occupation Committee was based on the original shop stewards committee covering the workers as members of different unions. But it was now an autonomous committee with many additions designed to run the occupation in daily contact with all the workers. This is the great advantage of an occupation. There are always rank and file workers on hand to see what is going on. They can constantly be consulted, or for that matter, intervene if they feel it is necessary."

The reality was very different. All the decisions and all the interesting activity was done by the committee. Relationships did not basically change during the occupation. There was still a passive majority and an active minority, who ran the show. The mass meetings did not "send a thrill right through" anyone. They were passive events. The only speakers were those from the platform, sometimes only the convenor would speak. The speeches were followed by applause and a ritual show of hands for the TV cameras. There were no important questions asked or any general discussion. Everything was left to the committee and merely ratified by the mass meetings. Even at the last mass meeting, there was no discussion about the details or the implications of the agreement, which had been mediated by Harold Wilson.

When you say that the committee ~~X~~ " was now an autonomous committee" that was truer than you think. It was autonomous unto itself and not really accountable to the workers, because, with so little real involvement or information themselves, they were in no position to question the committee. There were several workers who were very critical of the way the committee was set up and the way it operated. But there were not enough of them, so they did not feel confident or strong enough to voice their criticisms.

Whilst saying all this, we don't really blame the people on the committee. They acted in the way that good trade unionists always do and within the structures that they have always known. Because of this, it is all the more criminal for revolutionary groups like Solidarity to bolster up these attitudes and these structures, which help to maintain the passivity of masses of working class people.

BIG FLAME will be publishing a fuller analysis of the Fisher Bendix struggle in the next issue of our bulletin, Price 5p. Available from BIG FLAME, 78 Clarendon Rd, Wallasey, Cheshire. We would also welcome any reactions to this letter.