

AS NEW INITIATIVES AND NEW FORMS OF STRUGGLE ARE THROWN UP BY THE WORKING CLASS, THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CLASSES AND THEIR ORGANISATIONS ARE MODIFIED AND NEW PROBLEMS ARE THUS POSED FOR REVOLUTIONARIES. THESE TWO ARTICLES GIVE FIRSTLY A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF SUCH A STRUGGLE AND SECONDLY A CRITIQUE OF THE IDEAS OF THE I.M.G. IN THE LIGHT OF IT.



NEW TACTICS

VERSUS

NEW THINKING

1 MANCHESTER SIT-INS

2 LOW PROFILE MOLE

by ANDREW HORNUNG and JOE WRIGHT

1 MANCHESTER SIT-INS

1 Background

February 1972 was a month of tremendous excitement for the working class. The victory of the miners had winded an arrogant Tory government obviously surprised at the resources of creativity and strength at the disposal of the working class.

Fundamental to the victory of the miners was the use of the flying picket, and a certain edge of surprise in this regard. The employing class had simply not prepared for such an eventuality.

The engineers were in a very different situation. The Engineering Employers' Federation (EEF) had decided well in advance to dig in its heels and make a real fight over the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions (CSEU) claim. There were certain things on their side, too: the number of unions in the Confed, the high degree of organisation of the right wing in some areas, etc.

Ironically, the left nature of the union also tended to act as a disarming factor when leadership was expected and not given. The left in the union, although used to unofficial action (usually over before it can be declared official) was so closely related to the union leadership that when it was this leadership and not the right wing that was the problem, it found itself unable to break the tie between itself and the union tops.

For all this, however, the chief spur to the employers was not some disadvantage on the union side, but the disadvantage on their own side - the state of their order books

During the first three months of 1971 there was a 21% fall in overseas engineering orders and a 6% fall in home orders. Overall in 1971 there was an 8½% fall compared with 1970, this being the lowest figure for four years. It is estimated that the industry in general was working at 15 - 20% below capacity.

In a way Manchester was the obvious place for local action to start, given the inability of the Confed and EEF to find a "satisfactory solution" at the national level. On 15th December the Confed leaders broke off their talks with the EEF after the EEF had made the derisory offer of £1.50 in reply to the Confed's demand for a "substantial increase" with more for women as a step towards equal pay; a 35 - hour week; an extra (fourth) week's paid holiday; etc. It was important for Scanlon that some

localities begin the process of plant bargaining he had proposed (1). As soon as they had done this he was able (at Eastbourne, at Hastings, at Llandudno and at the many Confed area meetings) to use it as a stick to beat the right wing with when they demanded a return to national negotiations and to beat the left wing with when they demanded national action.

The combination of this pressure and the pressure from below at the end of the poor three year agreement reached in 1969 was to determine the whole trajectory of the struggle (2)

MANCHESTER

Why Manchester? Because Confed District 29, which is more or less Greater Manchester, was overwhelmingly pro-Scanlon. So much so indeed that at the announcement of the pro-Scanlon vote in the election for Carron's successor, the percentage of votes for him was so high that the AEF (as it then was) had an inquiry into the area, as they suspected ballot rigging. Scanlon himself, as well as the second most important of the lefts on the EC of the AUEW, Bob Wright, is from Manchester, and this reinforced faith in his judgment on the part of many militants. It also meant the existence of personal ties between some older leading militants and the union tops - not just between layers of officialdom. (3)

The Manchester area of the Confed is dominated politically by Scanlon in a second most important way. The politically dominant organisation in the AUEW is the Communist Party. Almost all the AUEW and thus leading CSEU officials are CP members, the local AUEW NC representative is a CP member, many of the convenors and stewards are CP members and many of those who are not are CP sympathisers. The sympathisers are, almost to a man, loyal to Scanlon, and the CP members, whatever vestigial traces of criticism of Scanlon they might have, do not openly criticise him.

The first meeting of Confed stewards in Manchester was held at the end of February. The meeting, which accepted the national claim together with a re-negotiation of local machinist and outworking agreements, was dominated by the left, in particular the Communist Party. Not one speaker opposed the resolution to give notice of going on to day work (4). Nevertheless the refusal of the Confed leaders to allow any contributions which were critical of

the union policy was, even at this earliest point, an indication of the inability of the "broad left" and the local leadership in particular to differentiate themselves from the national leadership. They might go it alone for the present - but clearly they were not going to stand up to pressure from the union tops in the future.

If we focus our attention at the end of the struggle for the district claim we will see a perfect example of this relationship. An example which will, moreover, introduce us to the one element not yet dealt with in this description of the trade union set-up in the district: the right wing.

THE RIGHT WING AND THE LEFT

On May 15th the Confed called the first meeting of the area's stewards since the beginning of the sit-in period. Two things stand out about this meeting - a) the attendance of the right wing; and b) the capitulation of the Communist Party AUEW officials.

The two previous Confed stewards' meetings (during the prelude to the sit-in period) were remarkable for the absence of the right wing. At this meeting (for report see WF no. 7 p. 11) there was a delegation of stewards from Trafford Park led by Bert Brennan. As we wrote: "Everybody has known for years that the dominant force in the huge Trafford Park works is the convenor, Brennan. Brennan is a yellow sell-out merchant who is paid by the firm to stay on past retiring age ... because he is so good for 'industrial relations'! More than that. 'Bro' Brennan OBE has actually been decorated by the State for his good services. The Trafford Park situation is nothing new, it's old hat and was known years before the strike ever got started. In any case, it is a betrayal of the struggle of the militants to impose the 'common denominator' of the weakest sections. After all, the Bredbury men and their kind are the leaders - not stooges like Brennan!"

The attendance of the GEC-AEI-EE Trafford Park stewards (paid for by the firm) just after they had called off their work-to-rule had two sides to it, though: on the one hand it meant a solid block of 60 - 70 voting for the most right wing proposal, but on the other hand it also constituted a real opportunity to polarise the meeting in favour of the left. If one had simply pointed to the GEC stewards, whose disgusting record is well known (and who were responsible for the sacking of some of the other stewards when they were at "Metro's", the main plant), saying in effect that any way these people voted was the wrong way for militants to vote, if, in short, one had had a fight against the right wing, the meeting could have come out with a quite different vote.

But why could this not be done? Precisely because of the relationship between the union's "left" wing nationally (Wright and Scanlon) and the Communist Party.

The main force at the meeting was Scanlon himself in the shape of a circular which in effect said "drop the struggle for shorter hours and accept money-only claims". This monstrous undermining of the struggle even forced a plaintive squeak out of the Morning Star: "They (the strikers) have not been greatly assisted by the circular." But although the Morning Star managed this brilliant titote, the CP members on the spot did not even manage that.

Reluctantly no doubt, but nevertheless with his blessing, local Confed leader John Tocher (member of the CP Executive) recommended the acceptance of the circular. The recommendation was accepted ... with about a third voting against! In view of the nature of CP discipline and local domination, this third must be seen as expressive of the tremendous opportunities that were not realised, and that from this point on could not be realised.

Simply to underline this last point: within ten days BSC (Openshaw) had settled for a £2 rise and one day's extra holiday ... after nine weeks on strike; and workers at the Bredbury steelworks where the whole sit-in movement had started settled on their £10 plus hours plus holiday claim for £3.50 plus one day's holiday ... after ten weeks of sitting in.

This example gives a cameo picture of the balance of forces in the area. It shows not only the relation between right and left but also the problem of certain large factories (including GEC-AEI-EE Trafford Park, Mather & Platt, Renold Chains, etc) being dominated by the right wing.

2 Chronology

Let us look at this in greater detail. The workers at the Bredbury steel works (Exors of James Mill - GKN) started their occupation on March the 16th, a full fortnight before the scheduled beginning of day work. These workers were full of self-confidence. As Alec Reese, one of the convenors, said "We are very well organised and we are prepared to sit it out to the bitter end." Alan Wells, the other convenor, said "I have never seen such a mood of solidarity among the men. But the reason is not hard to find. They are sick of low wages and a cost of living that's continually going up and up. We have decided to put an end to this."

Now you might say that reporters often make up or stage interviews and that they are bound to look on the bright side of things, but from having been there at the time I can say that this certainly was the mood of the men. Not just of them. As soon as the news got around representatives from Davis and Metcalfe and Nettle Accessories came to Bredbury to pledge their support. The Stockport District Committee brought its sanctions forward a week.

Threats to suspend stewards at Davis and Metcalfe were made on the 18th. Minneapolis-Blackstone (part of the Hawker Siddeley group) banned piece-work and went on to day-rate, agreeing to sit-in in the event of a suspension threat on the 20th. Within a week, 5000 of the 15000 engineers in Stockport were at least working to rule.

THE FIRST SETTLEMENT

On the 23rd Davis and Metcalfe occupied and Scraggs settled. There was reason so far for optimism as far as the elemental feelings of the workers were concerned, although a note of caution on the Scraggs deal was, we shall argue, essential.

The Scraggs deal was followed by a number of deals in Stockport, including one at Simon Engineering and Oil Wells Engineering. These firms' deals were outside the context of the claim. At this point, then, settlements, and not very good settlements (though the details were not published) were being made which tended to destroy the feeling of cohesion among the workers.

Many suggestions were put forward by individual militants to solve this, but we are still in no position to know which was correct. (5) From this followed a terrible lack of concrete tactical advice from revolutionaries. What was clear, though, was that the fact that settlements were being made without the details being disclosed was having an erosive effect on the solidity of the strike.

The sacking of the workers who occupied the Sharston engineering works by its owner, Mrs Dubost, and her taking out a writ against the workers who sat in, should have been met with a siege-picket, a really massive picket to defend the workers against the writ being served and against eviction should the writs be served.

The next day (the 28th) saw the occupation of English Steel, followed by the Newton-le-Willows works of Ruston Paxman. By the 1st April there were 7000 sitting in, in 11 factories. The weak areas were, as expected, the big factories. At this point John Tocher claimed that 14 settlements had been made. The disillusionment setting in was best represented by the settlement (later re-negotiated) in one Eccles factory for a straight £1.25!

The struggle took a temporary up-turn again when, on the 4th April, GEC-AEI-EE were locked out, although they did not occupy. This Trafford Park lock-out was echoed on the other side of town by a sit-in at GEC-AEI-EE Openshaw. Tocher was now able to announce 20 settlements. The next day saw a sit-in at Francis Shaw of Openshaw, followed two days later by an occupation at Hawker Siddeley, Woodford, by 1200 men. Now the action began to escalate: on 1st April there were 11 occupations; by the 12th April, when Viking Engineering sat-in, there were 23.

On that day Scanlon visited Manchester, and, though his talk to the stewards bolstered up those who attended (many were not informed that the meeting was on), it was probably the occasion for a word in Tocher's ear. Still the sit-ins increased in number, and news was coming in from Sheffield of a sit-in (on the 16th) and from Aberdeen of a decision to emulate Manchester (on the 17th).

A SET-BACK

On Monday 24th the struggle received a really big set-back. Mather and Platt's not only settled for £5.50 with nothing extra, but the stewards made a joint statement with the employers (leaders of the local EEF) that hours, holidays, etc. were matters for national and not local negotiation. The fact that this firm's workers would be weak was also not surprising given the firm's history of a skilful combination of ruthlessness and paternalism.

After Scanlon's visit, the local AUEW leaders must have realised he would not back them in an all-out fight on the hours question (6). The Mather and Platt's defeat, given this realisation, was the central turning point.

Mather and Platt's was immediately followed by a settlement at Simon-Vickers of Warrington for £2 and nothing more. This did not mean an end to the sit-ins, though - the struggle was not that even - for Bason and Sons sat in on the 29th. Still, by 4th May, 38 agreements had been made. Lawrence Scott and Electromotors settled for £3 and 2 days holiday while Hattersley Newman settled for £5.50.

That the tide was turning, though, was clear. Worst of all there were still no details being published, although poor settlements or rumours of them were alive everywhere.

On May 15th, the meeting already described in detail was held. This really marked the end of the strike as an effective offensive, even though it was the first meeting of the strike period, apart for the one called for the stewards to hear Scanlon get himself off the hook over the national negotiations farce.

By 25th May there were only 13 firms sitting in, and those settling were not getting much; the details of the BSC and Br edbury struggles have already been given; Mirreos settled for £2.50 plus 50p productivity bonus plus two days' holiday, while Ferranti's workers got £2 plus certain extra concessions, though nothing substantial.

From this point on the settlements were numerous: Tocher's reports in the AUEW Journal show 43 settlements (total) in the June issue, 50 in the July issue, and 300 in the August issue. The last settlement seems to have been that of Basons and Sons, in August.

THE TASKS

Given this situation and the determination

of the employers, what strategy should have been adopted by the leadership of the struggle? Firstly, in relation to the demands: it was vital really to campaign on the non-money elements in the claim. Although shorter hours is not exactly a novel demand, there has often been a tendency to use it as a bargaining pawn rather than as a serious demand. Also the higher than usual rate of inflation meant that money gains would soon be whittled away, while an hours gain would not only not suffer this fate, but would also be a beginning of the counterattack against increasing unemployment.

Secondly, in relation to tactics: it had to be understood that a district claim holds many dangers as well as advantages. Chief among these is the feeling of the action crumbling. It is one thing to be on strike in isolation, but quite a different and qualitatively more demoralising thing to be left isolated after an initially concerted struggle.

Some way had to be found of enabling the whole movement to cohere. The best method of doing this is open to much discussion. A whole number of ideas have been put forward, but to decide on the best would demand a far greater intimate knowledge of the individual factories, their organisation on both sides of the class lines, the level of the order books in each of the factories, the financial stability of the firms, etc. It would of course take months of detailed painstaking research (such as the union could carry out) to make these assessments. The ideas suggested ranged from plant-to-plant bargaining (which is what in effect took place) to district-wide bargaining. While the latter contains the obvious advantage of unity of aim, it also contains the disadvantage of being more demoralising if this unity cracks (as it might well have done given the right-wing nature of certain big factories). In any case some form had to be found which would prove an effective weapon against the employers.

When (in WF no 4) we wrote of the need for "a worked-out strategy of rank-and-file action" and the fact that the local leadership had not furnished the first Confed stewards' meeting with such a strategy, we were referring to the fact that many stewards went away from that February meeting full of fighting spirit, but also with a sneaky unease that they didn't quite know what was going to happen to them. This was particularly true of some of the small factories. (5)

Thirdly, in relation to techniques: it was necessary to elaborate definite techniques of struggle - particularly of the sit-in. The fact is that some of the sit-ins were not occupations in the full sense of that word. Nowhere was a sit-in conducted in the revolutionary manner associated with the famous Flint sit-in of 1936 - 37 (7) At one firm in North Manchester, for example, management was not only allowed in during the occupation, but was allowed complete

freedom of movement. This meant that management men were wandering around and talking to the workers individually, trying to 'nobbie' them. This had so demoralising an effect on the workers that they asked a local Confed leader if they could stage a conventional strike so that this would not happen.

There are as many examples as there are sit-ins. In short, though, we might say that there could hardly have been a greater disparity between the potential inherent in the form of the struggle and the outcome of the struggle in terms of content. To confirm this one needs only to refer to the settlement details given so far.

Fourthly: three levels of struggle, the local union, the national union, and the national class struggles, had to be related. It was necessary to argue for a national Confed strike in order both more effectively to organise the industrial strength of the engineers and in order to move boldly onto the offensive, destroying all government hopes of establishing norms for wage increases. This had to be done without in any way counterposing the local struggle to the national (and thus opposing the actual struggle in the name of a hoped-for alternative) (1). But it was necessary to demand a national organisation of the struggle which at the time was being developed at local level.

The abrogation of leadership by the union on the national level permits one to explain the nature of the union leadership and launching the call for national action gives a perspective for a struggle against that leadership and a means of measuring the union leadership.

Such a call had to be placed with a perspective of both smashing the current wage policy and the Industrial Relations Act. The railwaymen were at this point being threatened with the Act, and given their union strength and tradition, it was reasonable to suppose that they would be guinea-pigs for the Act. We explained that not only would a stand-up fight with the EEF on a national level be an effective means of fighting them, but, given the miners' victory, would send the government reeling a second time, aiding the weaker railwaymen.

This call could not be made without criticising the union bureaucracy, and no explanation of the situation could be 'rounded' without such criticism.

3 Intervention

We have assessed the forces involved and the course of the struggle. How does the intervention made by revolutionaries - in particular by Workers' Fight and by the International Marxist Group - measure up in the light of that assessment?

Both WF and IMG had tiny resources and no implantation in the industry.

Much of WF's activity had to be, in a sense, "hit and miss"—visiting picket lines to sell papers and talk with militants. The central point was that if a group of WF's size attempted to relate to this mass movement 'directly', we could only end up falling flat on our faces or drifting into political adaptation.

The point is that without a properly programmatic conception which appreciates the political differentiation of the mass (both in its relative stability and particularly its contradictory and changing nature) a direct relationship to this mass becomes either a purely organisational experience devoid of any political content (meeting the masses like Claimants' Union work) or an adaptationist practice. This latter (which may be linked complementarily with the former as in the Manchester example) means adapting to the given (static) consciousness at some hypothetical 'average' level.

This hypothetical 'average' level is, however, at best only an extrapolation from the de facto relationships with the masses. Thus adapting to it inevitably involves adapting to these relationships and thereby the forces dominant within them and the practices which structure and confirm them. These relationships are complex. They include, for instance, the relation of the trade union bureaucracy to the rank and file, the relation of the mass or dominant parties and their leaderships to the rest of the mass, of strike committees to strikers, of stewards to other workers etc. They also include the relations of all these elements with forces external to the struggle under consideration. Thus the contradiction between on the one hand not seeing the mass as dynamic, concrete, and politically differentiated and on the other hand recognising a certain static de facto differentiation, is resolved in an opportunist practice.

Our stress had to be on systematic work with such contacts in the struggle as we could win. Their voices, putting forward our ideas, would be a thousand times more effective than any number of leaflets from us. (Though that's not to say that leafletting wasn't necessary — in fact, one big failure of ours was in not leafletting three of the four Confed stewards' meetings) Winning such contacts on the basis of an intransigent political struggle (which meant that we had to be prepared to take a firm stand ourselves, even at the risk of restricting our audience) we saw as the only way to lay the foundation for long-term political work in the industry.

Our understanding of this point about orientation was inadequate, and that partly explains the patchiness of our intervention and of the coverage in our paper, though purely personal, episodic, and contingent factors were also involved. Our comrades had been trained in the "audio-visual aids economism" of the International Socialists — the orientation defined by circulating sufficient leaflets and papers at a suitable level among the masses, and then collecting together such sympathisers as are fished out of "the masses" through this process in order to "build the revolutionary party". Correspondingly, our comrades were inadequately trained for more rigorous and demanding methods of work.

The other main criticism that needs to be made of our intervention is the fact that we failed to put forward clear ideas on the question of the conduct of the sit-ins. The IMG (in total contradiction to their stated view that "the working class has no need of anyone to . . . (say) . . . adopt this or that form of struggle"—Red Mole, 5 June, p. 5) in fact did better work

than us on this point.

Smaller criticisms of our intervention are made in the footnotes. It must be said, though, that while we wish to learn from our mistakes, and certainly not to push them to one side, that they were mistakes within a fundamentally correct political position. The IMG, we shall argue, while on the technical level (extent and accuracy of information, etc) doing much better than us, made basic political errors, errors, moreover, which derived from a systematic theoretical mistake.

We summed up the IMG's approach as follows in an internal bulletin of that period:

"1. To provide actual help for the struggle by work around the social security issue.

"2. To provide information.

"3. To make political points — by which they mean propaganda (a Red Mole.

"4. Not to criticise the union leadership (i. e. the local leaders).

"This is their policy as explained to me by an IMG member, not as I read it from my own observations. On the crudest level this is explained by 'well, you have to get some credibility with the workers with the social security work before you get a hearing for your political points'. For a more sophisticated justification see the Red Mole supplement on 'Building the Fourth International'". (8)

Let us start our assessment of the political validity of the IMG's approach by looking at their overall analysis of the situation and the relation of forces.

4 Perspectives

At the February meeting of the EEF (actually its annual meeting) one of its leaders, Mr D C Bamford, said "If the unions are out to test the fibre of our unity, we should leave them in no doubt as to its durability. . . . The unions will thus not find us unprepared to meet these pressures . . . The prospect that confronts us is a round of costly claims backed up by the threat of industrial action. I am sure I do not need to convince any of you of the importance of standing firm in this situation." Now, this announcement of determination was hardly unexpected given the state of the industry as well as the general problems of the economy. But did it mean that an essentially defensive struggle was to be conducted by the workers? No: not at all. The question of the character of a struggle cannot be read off from the economic data. The implications of so doing, if theoretically systematised, are very far-reaching, as they lead to an entirely vulgar-spontaneist conception of struggle, and a negation of the role of leadership.

The potentiality, the perspective for a workers' struggle, although obviously not unrelated to economic conditions, is essentially determined by the consciousness of the class. Indeed to say otherwise would mean simple defeatism in a period when the bourgeoisie decided to go on the offensive because of extremely adverse economic conditions.

The real determinant being the consciousness of the people in struggle, certain things follow in relation to perspectives. The balance of forces is not a fixed quantity, and it does not rest solely on 'material quantities'. Size of strike fund, situation of the economy, are significant primarily in so far as they determine the consciousness and self-confidence, the organisation and fire-power of classes. Perspectives

are meaningless from a Marxist point of view. If they are conceived as 'cold' assessment and prediction, rather than from the point of view of the possibilities of the conscious activity of the revolutionary forces and of the masses and their vanguard.

Having said this (and thereby certainly not exhausted the subject) we are in a position to look at the sit-in struggles from the point of view of Marxism.

The confidence and level of organisation of the employers attested to by Bamford's speech as well as the statements and level of organisation of the local employers must be seen in the context of what they saw as opposing them. This was a traditionally well organised, geographically coherent unit, politically as homogeneous as is ever likely - and, most important, one which was struggling in the wake of the tremendous and deeply inspiring victory of the miners. The nature and level of the demands, the general opposition to productivity deals as well as the sit-ins, are ample evidence of the fact that the workers saw themselves as going on the offensive after being tied down for over three years by the rotten deal accepted in 1968.

WEAKNESSES.

That there were weaknesses is not denied - we have tried to outline both the organisational ones (GEC, Mather and Platt for instance) and the ideological ones (reliance on Scanlonite leadership) already - the point is for the revolutionary to address himself to these weaknesses. WF tried to do this initially by stating that reliance on the leaders in view of the deals that they had made in the past was not justified. It tried thereafter, at the time of the Scraggs deal (see below) to go further.

If, of course, you think of the balance of forces statically, in more or less fixed quantities, then you do not see the Scraggs settlement in dynamic relation to the potentiality of the struggle. Let us see what the Red Mole said about the Scraggs deal. Nothing! Leastways, the only mention I can find is a passing reference in the Red Mole of 1st May which refers not to the deal but to the fact that Scraggs was booted out of the EEF!

SCRAGGS

In conversation with IMG members at the time, the reason for their silence on the matter was clear. They thought the deal was a victory. How did they argue this position? By reference to the percentage of the claim achieved, that is, by reference to classical trade unionist reformist methods whereby 100% of the claim is "unreasonable" and "never happens". As it happens the treachery of this approach was doubly and trebly evident here because the very urgency with which Scraggs sought to conclude a deal before stringent sanctions were imposed was at least a prima

facie case for holding out a little; after all, rushing to settle means needing to settle, and needing to settle betrays weakness - when the unions are strong and the employers weak, it is simple stupidity to throw away a chance.

For the present, however, we wish to limit ourselves to the observation that the IMG saw the struggle in terms of fixed quantities.

They - implicitly at least - saw the struggle as defensive on the workers' side. The reality was more complex. The offensive struggle of the workers, led in a conservatively traditional way, produced results that began to turn the tide to a situation which allowed the employers to go on the offensive with real confidence. The employers could turn their relative defensiveness (reluctance to go as far as Sharston's Mrs Dubost who took out an injunction against sitters-in whom she had just sacked) (9), into bolder and bolder attack, given the lack of aggressive tactics from the workers. The conflict saw many forward and backward moves in offense and defense, and moreover a very uneven development of each. For instance, the lack of confidence of GEC workers, which is the product of the treachery of the stewards there, was a factor from the outset, while confidence of the workers at Bredbury was live for ten weeks after the outset, even with a whole number of set-backs in surrounding plants.

Was WF right to stress the workers' offensive, when the employers were ready to dig in? Certainly: as revolutionaries we are concerned not only with the flat actuality of the situation (though of course we always strive for factual accuracy) and with the statistically probable outcomes, but also with intervening to strive to realise potentialities. (10)

5 The tests

THE FIRST TEST: SCRAGGS

We have already said that the correct attitude towards the Scraggs deal was a highly important matter politically. At the time WF stated:

"The first to settle was Ernest Scraggs of Macclesfield. The settlement sent a shiver down the employers' spine. But the point is not just to make the bosses tremble, but to defeat them. At Scraggs the workers won £3 on the consolidated rate, 3 days more holidays, and a 38½ hour week, as well as £1 on the women's share of the £3. The settlement was a breach in the employers' defences. But it also weakened the workers' side. The Confed originally called upon its members to accept no less than £4 on the consolidated rate, 5 days' extra holidays, and a 35 hour week. To accept less before the struggle is well under way - or before it has even started - has opened the road to the salami tactic. The 15 settle-

ments are not the "breakthrough" that the Morning Star and the local AUEW officials think they are..."

Let us just add here: if there is a moot point in relation to how to handle this deal it is not whether it was a victory or not. It is the following: as soon as we heard about the deal we smelled a rat because the deal was made so quickly and because the shorter hours should have led to at least a prospective agreement about increase in workforce unless there had been an undisclosed productivity agreement, or agreement by the official, Regan, not to oppose one. When we phoned Regan and asked about these matters in as roundabout a way as possible, he got very angry, said no, and hung up. We decided that a 'phone call like that was simply not evidence of anything and we had no right to expect anyone to listen to our suspicions on this score without more proof. So we said nothing in print, though we did mention the matter to individual engineers.

Not long after, the truth was clear. The sister plant in Oldham (Bodens) was scheduled for almost immediate closure. Such was the victory at Ernest Scraggs. We still do not know the exact nature of the relationship between the two: did Scraggs intend to increase its workforce, but only from the remnants at Bodens (11) ? - did they anticipate a fall in orders whereby a smaller workforce would do, or a workforce on shorter hours, seeing as they were going to save on the wages in Oldham ? We don't know. We do know, however, that that was what was debatable and nothing else !

THE SECOND TEST: FREE PRESS

An important part of the IMG's work was distributing leaflets produced with the Free Press (a local 'alternative' paper). The leaflets' contents related to spreading information about the struggle and briefing on social security. Obviously neither of these are irrelevant in a workers' struggle - we do not criticise on those grounds. The trouble was that the leaflets were not at all political and not at all critical. What was the result of issuing these bland though informative leaflets ?

To answer this, we must for a moment turn to IS's work in the dispute. IS had several leading engineers in the organisation, and decided to set up a duplicated bulletin - 'Greater Manchester Engineer'. GME was pretty a-political and certainly did not carry the criticisms we made. Nevertheless it did put forward certain correct demands, which, had they been met, would partially have vitiated the feeling of isolation and erosion: they demanded regular stewards' meetings and no secret deals, for example.

Thus, while not sharp politically, it did put forward demands which were clearly critical and would enable criticism of the leadership

to be taken up a little later in a direct form. In a dispute where the workers were starved of information, GME, despite the opposition of the union (CP) leadership and the hard-line CP members, met with quite a favourable response - the more so as the struggle went on.

Fearing the influence of the GME, and faced with open protests about their not informing the members, the officials saved themselves by . . . distributing the Free Press-IMG leaflet in bulk, free. That is, they used the Free Press and the IMG both as a cover for their inactivity and as a weapon against political criticism.

Now no one is claiming that that is what the IMG wanted. To suggest that would be a slander. But, as revolutionaries are not the only agencies in a struggle, they must think of how their stance interacts with projects of other tendencies and forces. Once again the IMG comrades seem to have seen the struggle in terms of something fairly static. Most fundamentally, they could be used by the trade union officials because the leaflets contained neither direct criticism nor indirect criticism by means of a "call to action".

This last point is discussed in the following article.

THE THIRD TEST - CLAIMANTS UNION

Most of the strike saw the IMG doing work through the Claimants' Union, helping workers with Social Security claims. As a representative of the Claimants' Union, a member of the IMG sat on the Gorton and Openshaw Liaison Committee. Through this position he received a great deal of information - very important, and very useful. There was a risk, though, that he would fall into political adaptation in order to "keep in with" this CP-dominated committee. The Claimants' Union work could not be ruled out in principle. In practice, however, the pressures towards political adaptation did take effect.

The arguments put forward by the IMG on the Scraggs deal were marked by precisely this adaptation to trade-unionist conservatism.

Because such ideas are not what we usually expect of the IMG, it is necessary to look at them a little closer. The IMG has in the past been characterised by ultra-left adventurism - the natural response of politically raw militants with little or no experience of working class struggle. In the past year or so, the organisation, partly under the impact of the sharp rise in mass workers' struggles and falling off of mass struggle in the universities despite the sharp governmental attacks, partly under the impact of the ideas of people whose political training has been in organisations with serious working class orientation (whatever their political errors) (11), has reacted sharply to that adventurism and has inclined in certain fields, of which the one presently dis-

cussed is a good example, to trade-unionist conservatism.

The fact that the attempt to orientate towards the struggles of the working class brought them necessarily into contact with those who operated with these notions further reinforced them. Thus instead of this over-reaction to adventurism, this "bending the stick too far in the other direction", being limited to the struggle of ideas within an organisation of revolutionaries, it became extended to the practical, material struggle of militants outside that organisation. Unfortunately, although the idea may be re-formulated with ease, its material result cannot ... We will take this up again below.

These two lines of development, the struggle against adventurism and the increased contact with trade union militants, joined with a third, the elaboration of a systematically sectarian passive theory, to produce a complex of pressures inevitably tending to the adaptation to trade-union fetishism.

We have already shown how the IMG's information leaflet led to a strengthening of the hand of the union leadership at a time when it was taking its first decisively wrong steps. We do not deny, however, that the spreading of information was of vital importance; the most important information was that relating to the numbers out on strike or occupying and the settlement figures.

The local union leadership argued a plausible case: agreements had to be kept secret because if they were not the firms would be thrown out of the EEF would be sufficient for firms not to make a settlement; in this case the question of discretion should not stand between the ability to settle or not to settle; furthermore if the EEF had members who had settled in secret it would not be able to operate, not knowing who were the renegades in their midst. Plausible though this sounds, the argument is wrong both in general and in detail.

First of all, if there is real pressure like a successfully operating occupation, a company will give in when it has come to the end of its economic tether with or without EEF approval. To be sure, in a period when short order books proliferate the sit-in would take longer, but the argument still stands. The EEF would then be faced not with suspicion of its members' steadfastness but a real break-up locally. More likely an impending break-up would force the EEF to forgo sanctions against "renegades" anyway so as to avoid the break-up. On this level alone the secrecy tactic was wrong.

Secondly, the general impact of not knowing what was happening but being daily exposed to local press reports in the bourgeois press had the effect, as we have described, of erod-

ing confidence.

Of course, there can be no question of simply saying "I don't care what the union says, I'm publishing", without taking up a struggle through the union. That is irresponsible. What should determine one's attitude is not the union but the workers and their consciousness and independent class interests. To break the rules you have to be assured a sympathetic response from the members. In a highly bureaucratised union like the G&MWU this might be possible without much preparation. In a comparatively democratic one like the AUEW this could not be done.

The arena for the necessary preparatory struggle was the AUEW district committees, the similar committees of other Confed unions, and the CSEU district committee itself. It was also necessary to fight for it in the factories where one had a base and where through this struggle one could extend it politically. Had there been mass meetings of stewards, that too would have been an ideal forum for such a struggle.

In other words, although there is no principle according to which the instructions of the officials must be obeyed where their effects are prejudicial to the development of a struggle - quite the contrary - without the necessary preliminary struggle such a move would be an adventure. But what if someone else does it? Then it becomes necessary to defend even these 'adventurers' from the attacks of those who demand uncritical and unquestioning obedience to the trade union leaders. Of course, one might observe that in this particular case the action was irresponsible, but the struggle against trade union fetishism would come first. One might compare this attitude to the attitude of revolutionaries towards a reckless attempt at break-away unionism.

After early indecision IS decided to publish some of the settlements against the wishes of the union officials (and a minority within the IS fraction). But they had not prepared systematically. For instance, after one of their leading engineers in the district had, at the first Confed stewards' meeting, said of the platform "we've got good captains here" - instead of fighting there and then for regular meetings, information of settlements, etc - taking the initiative to publish the settlements meant going out on a limb.

Even so, IS were not isolated after having partially carried out the initiative - which indicates a widening rift between some leading militants and the official leadership. (12)

Imagine then our surprise to find the IMG denouncing IS to its contacts as "splitters"! Imagine our surprise to find IMG members gleeful at the prospect of IS being out on a limb because of this! Imagine what actions this

would have led to if applied to the militants leaving the T & GWU for the 'Blue' union, the NAS&D, in the 'fifties!

The surprise was blunted by the fact that the IMG comrade who said that the CP was right to call such people splitters was the Claimants' Union representative on the Gorton and Openshaw Liaison Committee. And exactly the same was heard from a close contact of the IMG's, an engineer also on this committee.

THE FOURTH TEST: THE J. O. C.

As the struggle developed, then, we see more and more crass examples of the IMG being infected by trade union fetishism carried through their Claimants' Union work. In the case just cited, we do not demand that the IMG agree with IS or even defend its general line in the strike or general approach to the announcing of settlements - what we do have a right to demand of revolutionaries, however, is that they do not adapt to backward ideological currents in the working class - Chauvinism, reformism, trade union fetishism, etc. The IMG's principled stand on the first of these questions stands in stark contrast to its capitulation in the case cited to the last.

On May 10th an ad-hoc Joint Occupations Committee set up by the people round GME (mainly in IS) held a meeting in Manchester's Milton Hall. The purpose of this meeting was to set up a Joint Occupations Committee. The officials had allowed it to be rumoured that there would be a mass meeting of stewards after there had been about 15 occupations. By this time there had been more than that number of settlements and there still remained nearly twice that number of occupations still in effect.

Fundamentally the meeting represented an attempt by IS and one or two others to undermine the authority of the union leaders, who were doing nothing. This would have been tactically wrong if it had involved no-one else but IS, thus putting them and any one else who joined them out on a limb. But this was far from the case. Of the roughly 25 factories still occupying, 15 sent representatives or apologies (11 came, 4 apologised). Perhaps a better measure of the fact that they were not out on a limb was the fact that although the CP officials tried to put the block on people going, they failed to get this approved in Stockport, their strongest area, where a number of leading stewards said plainly that they intended to go along. And these were not just small factories either; factories like Ruston-Paxman and Ferranti (Hollinwood) were represented.

A resolution to set up a J. O. C. was put by a steward from Ruston-Paxman, an IS member. The resolution was opposed particularly by the CPers who had come along (after failing to impose their ban the CP sent one or two along). They claimed that such a resolut-

ion would have to go to the Confed district committee. IS naturally and correctly argued that this was pointless, as it was precisely the Confed district committee that was doing nothing; the committee would just sit on the idea and squash it.

Cde D., an IMG member, sent by the GOLC to observe (so that their attendance would not lend support to the meeting), opposed the resolution. In so doing he put himself quite clearly on the side of the bureaucracy in this matter.

In the event IS lost the vote and therefore had to agree to a letter being sent to the Confed DC. Tocher never replied to the letter. Soon the sit-ins were almost all over, however, and IS did not follow up its line of the J. O. C.

The balance sheet of the Claimants' Union tactic seems to have been: on the positive side the IMG managed to gain information it would otherwise have been very difficult to gather; on the negative side, it appeared as an ally of the CP and trade union bureaucracy, representing nothing but a bunch of fawning dogooders who were easy to take for a ride.

The IMG claimed during a WF-IMG debate in Manchester at about this time that the principal political point they were making was in relation to the state. The struggle for a social security benefit was a struggle against the state, they said. On repeating this explanation to leading IMGers in London, they immediately broke into fits of disbelieving laughter. Let that be sufficient commentary on the matter.

THE FIFTH TEST: 'POLITICAL POINTS'

So far we have tried to show that the IMG's passive conception in relation to the conduct of the struggle led them, particularly through the medium of the Claimants' Union, to absorb certain backward ideas. The IMG may perhaps reply that, irrespective of particular opinions on tactical (secondary) questions, they put forward an independent political line throughout.

If we look at the Red Mole of April 17th we see an exposition by the comrades of Manchester IMG of their tasks in the struggle. Incidentally, if it was important to outline the 'strategy' of the IMG in the Red Mole, the IMG's national organ, then it was doubly important to make any criticisms of the struggle's leadership explicit in that same organ. Criticism passed on by word of mouth may forewarn and forearm those within earshot (13). The whole point of a national paper is to present political criticisms nationally, to all those workers, nation-wide, who need to be armed with those criticisms.

The first task the IMG list is the Free-Press-IMG leaflet already discussed. The sec-

and is the building of Claimants Committees in the factories (14). The third and the only one which appears to be in the name of the IMG as a political organisation is explained in the last paragraph:

"But it is precisely because a struggle whose objects do not go beyond that of wages and conditions is incapable of solving the basic problems of the working class that revolutionaries need to stress the importance of linking that struggle to a general struggle for workers' control and for a government which permits the working class to struggle for workers' control through its organisations. Not 'counterposing', but 'linking', basing one's explanations on the actual living struggle of the working class." End of article.

Well, did they link the actual struggle to this general struggle? The answer, not surprisingly, is: absolutely not! But no doubt the IMG is not even unhappy that this is true, because they have since ditched this quirkily nonsensical line! Who can blame them? Who can say it is not for the best that this reformist view of a workers' government and its relation to the struggle for workers' control has been ditched? Only those who think that the present position in relation to governmental and workers' control slogans is worse. What the "new-think" on the first of these questions is we do not yet know, but if it is true, as we are told, that the "new-think" line on workers' control is that you do not raise it outside a situation of dual power or at least pre-revolutionary upheaval, then the cheering at ditching the line of last April should subside in the light of the equally idiotic line of this January.

But if the first sentence of the quoted paragraph is ridiculous, the second is no better. At first sight it seems to be just saying the obvious. On second glance, however, we see that the 'linking' is posed in terms of 'explanation'. The real weapon for linking the struggles, however, is the use of the political programme - which certainly consists not only of explanation, but also of demands, 'calls to action', etc.

And this is not just another of the IMG's famous "bad formulations". It is a precise and exact expression of their passive-propagandist orientation.

The IMG had started out from a perception of the political error involved in identifying 'agitation' with 'calls to action'. They had reacted by defining both agitation and propaganda as 'explanation' and excluding 'calls to action'. Their anathemas against 'calls to action' did not, however, in the least stop calls to action and forms of struggle being daily issues in the real world. The IMG, in disavowing calls to action and interest in forms of struggle, can only end up separating them from their 'explanation'. They thus fall into

an oscillation between passive-propagandist abstract 'politics' and sub-political and opportunist orientation to 'servicing'.

NOTES

1. Exactly the same problem has recurred in the struggle against the Industrial Relations Act. The AUEW leadership has stood still and given no lead. The right wing of the union is calling for national action. What should revolutionaries do? IS, putting a minus where the right wing puts a plus has simply castigated the national strike call as being a right wingers' solution. The reason why the right wing relates to the national level is of course because a) it always relates to the union tops and not the rank and file, and b) it hopes the prospect is out of reach and therefore will result in workers being resigned to defeat. The point is to relate to both rank and file action and national action. Thus in Manchester one had to argue for full-steam ahead with the local action and for pressure on the leaders to make the action national (with a national levy being posed as an immediate possibility while the union balloted its members on a national strike).

2. The legal complication with the rule book that was experienced in 1968 also confused people in relation to the question of a national strike.

3. Often older militants would agree 100% on a number of criticisms of the union's tactics. But these same people would, as soon as the criticism was linked with Scanlon's name, shrink back from any conclusion and simply say, "You don't know all that goes on at national level, but I don't think Hughie'd let us down. He knows what he's doing."

4. The Manchester piecework agreement allows engineers to go onto daywork (as distinct from piecework) and still receive the basic rate of pay. That is, the basic day rate for no work, as all productive work is piecework.

5. In our next edition of "Permanent Revolution" we hope to be able to write fully on the

tactics of a district claim. The employers had grouped themselves into sixteen groups of twenty factories each in order to fight against the claim. One much discussed possibility for fighting for the claim was the grouping of factories along the same lines as the employers or across those lines, and then using these groupings as unbreakable negotiating units, where no factory would return until the whole group was ready to resume work. We are not yet equipped to assess either in general or in relation to Manchester the viability of mass picketing in a claim like this, concentrating on some factories and levying others, negotiating the skeleton on a district level and leaving the individual claims to "drift" later... etc.

6. Either with his authority or by backing disciplinary procedures (withdrawal of credentials)

7. The US Marxist group, "PL", has published an excellent pamphlet on this sit-in. A shortened version has been published in Britain by "Solidarity".

8. We also, during that period, debated the question of intervention in the engineers' struggle in a joint meeting with the IMG in Manchester. So let there be no claims that we are now "inventing differences with the IMG" or "nit-picking" with the benefit of hindsight.

9. From this point of view WF's report in No 5 should be criticised for writing so unclearly that it was possible to draw the conclusion that the EEF didn't want a fight. What the report says is that a tough line was not being taken by the EEF on the sit-ins. This was true (in the main they went on unhindered - because they weren't hampering the bosses too much) and is clear by referring to Sharston's by contrast. By adding the statement that there had been 15 rumoured settlements, however, the risk was run of confusing being "soft" on sit-ins with being "soft" on settlements. This is not what that or any other article says, but it must be admitted that there is an ambiguous statement here.

10. It is from this point of view that the headline in WF No 5, criticised by the IMG in Red Mole 17 April, "200,000 Ready to Occupy", must be seen. They write "It would be simple insanity to delude oneself that 200,000 are ready...". But, if WF 5 is read carefully, it will be seen that it relates the offensive of the workers to the offensive of the employers - no contradiction at all. But, it might be objected by our comrades from the IMG, what about that "over-optimistic" headline? Comrades, I refer you to the Red Mole of 30th March 1972, where we read, "These actions will be the prelude to mass occupations in several hundred firms if the employers carry out their threat of mass

lock-outs when 200,000 engineers ban piece-work...!! We could not agree more! But we are not accustomed to packing all that into a headline (unlike yourselves!) Besides, a headline does have a different function from plain text: if what we wrote is to be condemned, then the IMG's plain text statement is worse! IMGers have pointed out that in that issue of WF it says that both the workers and the employers were on the offensive, and that in general the aspect of the workers' offensive is stressed whereas in an internal bulletin article the workers were seen as being on the defensive. Quite right! Both statements! Both parties were on the offensive; while it was proper to stress the workers' offensive particularly at the beginning, the internal bulletin article written later was commenting after the tide had turned, partially. Now what is so odd about that? Or are the quantities so mathematically fixed that a is either greater than b or less and that's that?

11. Ross (CPBML and IS), Whelan (SLL), Pennington (SLL).

12. A leading IMG'er has argued that because the strike leadership was democratically elected, such an act was impermissible. But what does this mean? The AUEW is, after all, a model of trade union democracy organisationally: it has only elected officials, with right of recall, its highest body after conference is the NC which is a lay body; etc. Does this mean that in any strike where the leadership is a layer (national, divisional, district) of the elected officials, one must stick to their rulings? That the AUEW, in fact, has no bureaucracy, properly speaking?? The fact of the matter, in any case, is that this struggle was under the leadership not of the AUEW but of the CSEU DC, not all of whom are democratically elected. Thus, again, neither in general nor in detail can this argument stand.

13. Though the experience with the IMG's closest AUEW contact, cited above, leads us to doubt whether in fact it did.

14. We do not know of any of these unless a fancy name has been given here to the quite common phenomenon of strike committees having people look after the problems of benefit and hardship (often called hardship committees). Still there can be no doubt of useful work done in helping people with their claims.

2 LOW PROFILE MOLE

OVER THE PAST YEAR, THE I.M.G. HAVE been taking a hard look at their past, in which they include not only their history within the Trotskyist movement, but also the whole theoretical heritage of Trotskyism itself. This, in itself, cannot but be welcomed. There is a pressing need for a critical examination of post war Trotskyism and in particular the analyses made of post-war Stalinist expansion, the loose ends in those analyses, and the subsequent empirical revisions on such questions as the political revolution in China. Such examination inevitably requires that the theories of Trotskyism are brought up for scrutiny against the present reality, for reality is always more complex and more varied than theory and new realities demand that old theories are updated, developed and maybe even rejected.

Moreover, there are no Gods in heaven decreasing dogmas which cannot be violated. But if we want to develop our Marxist understanding of the world, then a critical frame of mind is not of itself sufficient. New theoretical developments are not plucked from trees. If they are to be worthwhile and not mere playthings, they have to be rooted in the body of theory already existing, for this theory represents, at the highest level of consciousness, the accumulated experience of the working class, interpreted and understood in such a way as to provide lessons for the present.

If it were not for theory, acting in this way as the memory of the working class, then the Paris Commune, the betrayal of social democracy in 1914, the Russian revolution, the rise of Hitler and the Spanish Civil War, would count as nothing more than historical episodes of academic interest.

So the existing body of Marxist theory has to be treated with some respect by would be 'developers', for it was not won lightly. And because of this we have some cause for suspicion when we see the 'developers' of the IMG weekly overthrowing established ideas with 'new thinking', in a fairly light-hearted fashion. Experience shows that many such attempts at 'new thinking' all too often turn out to be repetitions of old mistakes.

The purpose of this article is to deal with one such piece of innovation, namely on the question of the role of the revolutionary party. The most explicit summary of the IMG's new ideas can be found in article entitled "The Character of the Epoch ... and the nature of the revolutionary party", which appeared in a supplement to "Red Mole" no 39. This article

is a compressed version of a resolution submitted by the IMG National Committee to the IMG Conference, which later approved it by a large majority.

The practical outcome of the 'new thinking' is illustrated in the first section of this article, covering the engineers' sit-ins in Manchester.

ECONOMISM

Central to the IMG's conception of the party is a rejection of what they call 'economism'. Economism, as they see it, is characterised by making 'calls to action', making demands on reformist politicians and union leaders, and by 'mobilising the masses'. Thus they write that "The Leninist theory of the party completely rejects the administrative formulae of 'mobilising the masses' and 'calls to action'".

In this way the IMG rejects the idea of the revolutionary party having an organisational role within the working class and counterposes the role of the party as "explaining a rounded conception of the situation so that the working class itself can respond to any changes occurring in the situation or produced by its own activity".

Essentially this view is idealist and undialectical, for it fails to see the tasks of revolutionary explanation and revolutionary organisation in their interactions. Neither is it very surprising that the IMG should come up with such a one-sided view of the party, for it was not very long ago that they were exclusively concerned with "mobilising the masses" and "calls to action" to the detriment of independent revolutionary propaganda and agitation. In their eagerness to get away from the old image, the IMG has turned 180 degrees and like a magician has produced "new thinking", which is in fact nothing more than the inversion of all their old mistakes.

First of all, then, to deal with the question of 'economism' and the Economists' incorrect definition of agitation and propaganda Economism cannot be properly defined by "mobilising the masses" or "calls to action". We shall argue that Marxists are also concerned with mobilising the masses and also use "calls to action" to do so.

The point about the economists is that they wanted to restrict their political work amongst the class to that set of politics which springs directly from the trade union struggle. It is only in this context that their false definition of agitation and propaganda can be under-

stood. According to Plekhanov "A propagandist presents many ideas to one or a few persons; an agitator presents only one or a few ideas, but he presents them to a mass of people."

Martynov, a leading economist, wasn't satisfied with this definition and attempted to 'deepen' it: agitation should be defined as "calling upon the masses to undertake definite, concrete actions", whereas propaganda was to consist of revolutionary explanation. Martynov revised Plekhanov's formula because he wanted to restrict the practical work of the party within the class to that part of the working class struggle which was likely to show immediate, palpable results - i.e. the trade union struggle. But he didn't want to forget the rest of Marxism altogether, so he relegated political struggle which does not flow automatically out of the trade union struggle (in particular the struggle against the autocracy) to a category ("propaganda") which, according to him, did not necessitate calling the masses to action.

In "What is to be done" Lenin attacked Martynov's revision, re-emphasising that the difference between agitation and propaganda was one of form and not of content; both flowed from a common theory and both could lead to action. This simple lesson is one which we could be grateful to the IMG for repeating if it were not for the fact, that in doing so, they have completely distorted it. They quote from "What is to be done": "As for calling the masses to action, that will come of itself as soon as energetic political agitation, live and striking exposures come into play.", and from this they conclude that as long as everything is properly explained to the working class, then the correct activity will follow automatically and therefore the 'call to action' is redundant. This amounts to nothing more than the crass idealism of the SPGB, for although it may be true that in logic the correct action, and therefore the correct 'call to action' flow automatically from the revolutionary explanation, it is pure stupidity to think that they do so in real life. If it were otherwise then the revolutionary party would have no organisational tasks within the working class whatsoever. The point is that the working class does not become class conscious through explanation alone, but through the class struggle. And not that for that matter through any old struggle, but through struggles waged with correct slogans, correct strategies and correct leaderships.

For example, the struggle at UCS may through the intervention of revolutionaries, enlighten a few workers as to the nature of the Communist Party, but as far as the mass of workers are concerned the struggle has probably resulted in a deepening of false consciousness. Throughout the CP conducted the struggle, not with the aim of forcing the government to nationalise UCS, but by pleading with the good nature of the capitalists with arguments

that rested entirely within a bourgeois framework. The importance of the demand for nationalisation does not rest on some reformist attachment to state control, but on the interaction of a struggle for nationalisation with revolutionary explanations on such questions as workers' control. On the other hand the CP's strategy of making the yards attractive to capitalist investment, could only be combined with such thoroughly false arguments as "Isn't it terrible for the national economy to allow UCS to close down - we, the CP stewards, are the only ones who are really interested in the national economy".

Thus, for Marxists, and the CP do claim to be Marxists, the outcome of any particular struggle cannot be solely gauged in terms of whether it was a victory or a defeat, but also in terms of what lessons were learnt. And the greatest indictment of the CP is that in the UCS struggle all the wrong lessons were learnt, which is amply demonstrated by the failure of the yards to come out on a one-day strike against the Industrial Relations Act.

CLASS STRUGGLE

So the class becomes politically conscious through the interaction of revolutionary explanation and the class struggle. Are Marxists to concern themselves solely with explanation and forget the mass struggle side of this interaction? Obviously not. Marxists are concerned with organising within the working class; with leading the class struggle and thus necessarily with calls to action. Certainly Lenin was not opposed to "calls to action" as such. The whole point of "What is to be Done" is that fully scientific class consciousness cannot flow directly out of the trade union struggle and therefore Lenin wanted to extend agitation and propaganda (and therefore the "call to action", which "either naturally and inevitably supplements the theoretical treatise, propagandist pamphlet, and agitational speech...") to a far wider range of issues than the economists wanted. Thus the paragraph of "What is to be Done" which follows the one quoted by the IMG, reads:

A word in passing about "calls to action". The only newspaper which prior to the spring events called upon the workers to intervene actively in a manner that certainly did not promise any palpable results whatever for the workers, i.e. the drafting of the students into the army, was Iskra. . . . Iskra. . . . called upon "the workers to go to the aid of the students", called upon the "people" openly to take up the government's arrogant challenge. (Lenin's emphasis throughout)

Lenin could not possibly have been against "calls to action". According to Martynov the social democrats had "for a decade led the economic struggle of the working class" and this was not just true of the economists. Trade union leaders were either police spies, social democrats or leaders thrown up from the

masses by the masses. How could the social democrats lead the struggle of the working class without calling for strikes, demonstrations, occupations and ultimately for the armed overthrow of the government. Through their propagandist, agitational and organisational activities the Bolshevik workers won for themselves the reputation of being uncompromising revolutionary fighters in the class struggle. It is workers who have this sort of reputation who are the life-blood of any revolutionary party. The Bolsheviks recruited thousands of such workers; in this country to-day, only a few such workers are among the ranks of the revolutionaries. Yet the raw material still exists. How often do we talk about spontaneous strikes? And all we mean by the term spontaneous is that we do not know who the leaders of that strike are; we do not know who made the call to action. But the call must be made by somebody, and usually it is by the most audacious, class conscious workers - precisely the workers who should be party members. And if we, like the Bolsheviks, had thousands of such workers as members, would it not be ridiculous now to exclude "calls to action" from the armory of valid and necessary parts of revolutionary intervention?

One of the sectarian aspects of the "no calls to action" position is that calls to action are considered to be purely executive or administrative in function. What is necessary is political explanation, the making of "political points" (For instance if you just look at the front-page of the Red Mole over the period around their conference you will see the marked avoidance of anything that might be thought of as a demand or call to action, and the use instead of blunt propaganda "headlines").

For instance in the Red Mole of June 5th, on page 5, under the heading "programme", in an article titled "LCDTU Basingstoke adopts a fighting programme", we read in point 2 of the preamble:

'The self-activity of the working class. The working class has no need of anyone to make administrative "calls to action" - strike on such and such a day, take this or that action, or, adopt this or that form of struggle. On the contrary it is daily in a struggle against the employers, and is constantly inventing new forms of struggle suitable to obtaining its ends - the NUM's flying pickets, the sit-ins in Manchester etc.'

We finish the quote there not because the rest of the article is objectionable but because this should be enough to prove the point being discussed. Firstly, the fact that this passage was drafted by workers opens up two possibilities: either these workers are out and out anti-political syndicalists of the worst type, or they are revolutionary militants misled by petty-bourgeois elements. Why petty-bourgeois elements? Because the whole notion betrays

that the writer speaks from outside the class. How can a leading militant say that it is not his business to say "strike on such and such a day", how can a self-respecting class conscious worker shrink from saying "take this or that form of struggle"? It is precisely because workers are "daily in a struggle against the employers" that they must do so! And are they "constantly inventing new forms of struggle suitable to obtaining its ends" only to be prohibited from calling on their fellow workers to adopt them?

Only a totally confused tendency could get workers who are class conscious, who do do lead struggles, who are militants to propose such a thing to other workers. It is obviously the subjective gut-reaction of petty bourgeois elements sensing their impotence in the face of creative and powerful workers' struggles. But that is not all. This statement relates to the notion mentioned above that calls to action are administrative. Let us consider this.

It assumes that the meaningfulness of a political slogan is dependent on the political preparation it has been given by the party. That is not true. What is true is that it must flow from the theoretical totality held and developed by the party. But it may do that without flowing from any immediately foregoing and propagandistically expressed ideas.

The main mistake - and this is the sense in which this line is fundamentally sectarian - is that it leaves out the dynamic of the class. Thus the class may learn in a week what revolutionaries have been trying to explain for a year, for ten years. The raising of a call to action, like "General Strike to Smash the Act" may take on a meaning in that week which it failed to take on in the previous period. The point is that the preparation of the class is only meaningfully related to the calls to action made in so far as the ideas contained in that preparation have become material factors in the consciousness of the class itself. And - since the development of the class struggle doesn't proceed according to neat, predictable schemas - the fact is that often revolutionaries may have to raise "calls to action" without previous propagandist preparation.

That the party must try to prepare the ground for certain ideas and practises is indisputable. But life is not centred there. The relation between slogans is not provided by the syntax of political argument but the syntax of class struggle.

Look at it from another point of view. Is there no idea contained in the call "For a democratically elected strike committee"? Is it administrative? Clearly there is an important political idea here, firstly, and secondly it may focus a struggle whose dynamic is not purely administrative and which opens up perspectives for raising other ideas and initiating other practices which also are not administrative.

The IMG's view is totally static and propagandistic.

THE BUREAUCRACY

But the fact that revolutionaries do not now lead the struggle of the working class raises another question to which the IMG has applied its "new thinking" and come up with some curious results - namely, the problem of the reformist labour leadership and the fight against its influence within the working class. The IMG's idealist formulation about the purpose of the revolutionary party as being "explaining a rounded conception of the situation" effectively writes off the "crisis of leadership" and instead leads to the conclusion that the fight against the labour aristocracy is simply one of a fight against wrong ideas. Traditionally revolutionaries have sought to fight against the influence of capitalism's lieutenants within the labour movement by putting demands on them. These demands are put on trade union leaders and reformist politicians, but they are directed at the mass of the workers. They are intended to point the way forward and expose the labour fakers. By organising around these demands it is intended to create a leadership which will be able to replace that of the bureaucrats.

Now the crude, mechanical way in which this has been carried out by the SLL and the "Militant" group is that demands seem merely to function in providing headlines. The exposure (?) is purely journalistic and (in the case of the Militant group) there is no attempt to organise around the dry bones of a programme of demands and give them some flesh, while (in the case of the SLL) the flesh comes in the rather anaemic form of the All Trade Union Alliance.

But in justifiably turning away from these mechanical conceptions the IMG have managed to completely throw overboard one of the basic Marxist tenets about capitalism in an imperialist epoch. Thus in the first sentence of the 'extremely theoretical' section of the Red Mole Supplements, we read:

'The fundamental feature which divides revolutionary Marxism from Social Democratic and Stalinist reformism is a conception of the epoch.'

Perhaps the most significant thing here is that Social Democracy and Stalinism, the two most important trends within the labour aristocracy, are defined not socially but in terms of their conceptions. Now, 100 years ago it was quite reasonable for Marx to adopt this sort of attitude. After all, Marx sat on the General Council of the 1st International, together with trade union leaders like Ogden and Cremer, who may have been confused but agents of the ruling class they were not. Thus in his famous polemic with Citizen Weston, Marx begins by saying:

'He (Weston) has not only proposed to you, but has publicly defended, in the interest

of the working class, as he thinks, opinions he knows to be most unpopular with the working class. Such an exhibition of moral courage all of us must highly honour.'

Now Weston's proposition was that strikes did not benefit the working class. And what would be our attitude if Lord Cooper was to come up with a similar thesis today. Do we begin by saying: "Well, Lord Cooper is a very brave fellow to put forward the ideas he honestly believes in, but....". No! We might well decline to take up the debate with him at all and simply declare Lord Cooper is a scab. The difference is of course that while Citizen Weston could be defined in terms of his conceptions Lord Cooper cannot. The latter is a member of a definite social layer within the working class, which arose in the imperialist epoch as capitalism's agents within the labour movement. Whereas it may have been quite correct for Marx simply to put his 'political points' within the General Council, for us, in relation to Lord Cooper and alike, a totally different approach is required.

Now all this may seem nitpicking - perhaps the error in the first sentence could be just due to slackness of formulation? And if this were so it would indeed be nitpicking, but the fact is that the same idealist line of thought pervades the whole document. And the importance of the question is paramount, for the working class can only fight with the organisations it already has and until it replaces the leaderships of these organisations it has to fight with that leadership still in command of the union structure. What can come out of any struggle both in the way of economic and political gains for the class and in terms of lessons learnt, is crucially dependent upon the nature of the labour bureaucracy. And unless the labour bureaucracy is understood dialectically as a social force, which relies both on the strength of the working class and the continuing subservience of the class to capitalism, one is quite likely to come up with such gross confusions as:

'If mass struggles are launched on the perspective of reforms, then they are based on the premise that the immediate problems of the working class can be solved within the framework of capitalism which is to reject the Marxist conception of the epoch. When the masses struggle for these ends, then what they realise at some point in the struggle is either that the aims of the struggle would not solve their problems even if achieved, or still worse these aims are achieved and do not solve the problems. The result of this realisation is demoralisation, apathy, despair, the seeking of individual solutions to social problems, decline of workers' organisations, etc.'

Now this statement would not be so ludicrous, were it not for the fact that it appeared in print just two months after the miners' strike. Can't you just see those demoralised, despairing miners going back to

work after having won 90% of the reformist aims of the strikers

Here, again, the same idealism creeps in with disastrous results. It is true that the class struggle is far from independent of those who lead it or of the working class itself, but it does have a basic dynamic, which is due to the objective situation of the worker under capitalism and not what goes on in men's heads. The actions of the labour bureaucracy in any particular struggle are not determined by their 'perspectives' (do they have 'perspectives', in this theoretical sense at all?) but by their social position. Sometimes trade union leaders or reformist politicians are forced into struggle by the pressure of the working class below them, with whom they have to keep in step. Sometimes they initiate struggles themselves, with quite a genuine desire to win them, because by so doing they enhance their own position as bargaining agents with the ruling class on behalf of the working class. In any event, whether they are 'left' or 'right', their 'perspectives' and 'conceptions' are determined by their social existence as labour bureaucrats. This social existence also determines their interest in containing the class struggle within the limits of the capitalist system, for the ending of capitalism will just as surely be the ending of the bureaucrats position as capital's lieutenants within the working class. This is, of course, precisely "the real nature of the communist objection to reformism". The objection that "the reformists will actually destroy the militancy and organisation of the working class" is a false one because this is one thing they will not do. The reformists depend on the objective strength of the working class for their very existence - if this strength is smashed and the workers' organisations destroyed then capitalism would have no need for reformists. Some reformists also depend on the militancy of the working class. The 'left' trade union leaders and 'left' labour politicians, would not be in business if it were not for the fact that they lead militant unions, which gives them a lot more importance in the state/trade-union set-up than the likes of Lord Cooper, who has next to nothing to sell in terms of the power of his union.

As for the workers who take up the class struggle; do they do so with any particular perspective? A very few, i.e. the fully class conscious revolutionary workers, do have a perspective, but for the most part workers enter a struggle with an elemental 'gut' class reaction combined with a reformist consciousness. Any reformist leader has to walk the tightrope of using this basic combativity of the class (and possibly even actively encouraging it), while keeping the struggle well within reformist limits.

The tougher the struggle, then the more heavily does the reformist leader have to rely on the self-activity of the class, and the more

dangerous becomes the tightrope. So all class struggle, regardless of who leads it and regardless of what level of consciousness it is conducted at, has this positive effect of fanning the self-reliance, independence, and fighting qualities of the working class. Thus it is not at all given that struggles led by reformists with reformist 'perspectives' will result in 'demoralisation', 'apathy', 'despair', etc (even if they do achieve their reformist aims !)

It is only crushing defeats - defeats without a struggle, as in 1933 in Germany; or defeats as a result of betrayal which make workers believe that defeat was a result of their own incapacity or the incapacity of the organisations which they regard as their own, as in 1926 in Britain - which result in setting the movement back for years. A victory for the reformist aims of the miners' strike was also a victory for the miners and a boost for their level of consciousness.

TRANSITIONAL PROGRAMME

For revolutionaries in such a struggle, the task must be to take the elemental class identity of the workers and render it conscious. The chief weapon for doing this is the demand, and in particular the programme of transitional demands codified by Trotsky in the Transitional Programme.

The purpose of transitional demands is to link in struggle the 'gut' reaction of the class with a conscious recognition of its class position under capitalism. A factory closing down could lead to demands for an occupation; the occupations could lead to demands for a workers' militia; the militia could lead to a demand for a council of militias, an embryonic form of workers' power.

All the time the demand and the struggle to implement it would interact with revolution; any explanations about capitalist property relations and the class nature of the state's repressive forces.

In this way, linking with the felt need of the class to defend itself, the struggle is taken outside the bounds within which the reformist leaders wish to contain it. But the merit of a transitional programme does not lie in the formal wording being such that if it were implemented capitalism would no longer exist. Rather the programme seeks, through struggle around specific demands, to raise the consciousness of workers so that they will themselves destroy capitalism.

Neither is it accurate to say that it is necessary for "a revolutionary organisation (to advance) at all times a transitional programme". This statement seems to betray the same sort of idealist thinking which sees the party as solely concerned with explanation. The transitional programme can only be seen as a series of links in a chain and the point is to know which link to grasp. That particular link may not be a demand which destroys capitalism (Nationalisation, sliding scale of wages, workers' militia). The

other interpretation is to see the programme as unconnected with the organisation and mobilisation of the social forces that will implement it but rather as an explanatory document. And, now, to advance the whole programme of demands "at all times" would simply amount to turning it into the sort of abstract propaganda so tediously churned out by the SLL.

INVERTED ECONOMISM

In their efforts to avert 'economism' the IMG have turned up with an 'inverted economism'. Whereas the economists wanted to put all their emphasis on the mobilisation side of the class struggle, and restricted themselves to trade union politics where they thought that mobilisations were most easily available, the IMG wants to put the whole emphasis of the party on presenting "a rounded conception of the situation". This leads not only to incorrect ideas about the organisational tasks of the party, about the labour bureaucracy and the role of demands in the class struggle, but also to incorrect criteria of centralism within the party itself.

To our mind the theory of the democratic centralist party (1) rests on the need to maintain and develop theoretically and practically the class interest of the proletariat and to ensure its leading role in the face of the hegemony of bourgeois and other reactionary ideas on the one hand, and independent of the ideas programmes, and practices of other classes which comprise the masses on the other.

This aim of raising the consciousness of the class requires first of all a theoretical estimation of the relationship of class forces from which strategic conclusions can be drawn. It requires intervention in the class struggle; the training and education of workers as revolutionary class fighters, and ultimately leading the class in the overthrow of capitalist state power.

But the working class, unlike the capitalist class, does not have at its disposal a high degree of culture, or repressive state machinery, or the safety of legality, the control of meeting places and the press. The capitalist class which dominates society does not need clear theoretical ideas; rather it requires to mystify and hide the true nature of class society. The working class, however, fights from below - precise political formulations, an understanding of the true nature of society and correct strategies do not flow naturally from the everyday appearance of things and often have to fly in the face of everyday appearances. It is out of this that the need for democratic centralism flows, and it is both a political and an organisational-concept, because the organisational hold of the ruling class on society and on the workers' movement is every bit as important as the political and ideological hegemony.

But if the party is only to function as a band of "enlighteners" and not as the political and organisational leaders of the class, then it would appear that the only centralism necessary would be for the administrative purpose of

getting the pamphlets out on time. So what place does democratic centralism have in the IMG's schema?

In point 6 of the article we learn:

'Democratic centralism is a political and not an organisational concept. It signifies the necessity of centralising the experience of the party for the task of theoretically working on this experience for its elaboration as part of the theoretical totality ... The necessity of the party intervening in all social groups and strata of society is therefore not simply a practical one aimed at recruiting and building the organisation. The political role, and the organisational structure, of a revolutionary organisation is determined by its task of developing revolutionary ideas. The revolutionary organisation acts as the centraliser and thereby political analyst of the experience which is the base of the political ideas of Marxism... Therefore the revolutionary organisation must attempt to intervene in all sectors of society. The analysis of Marxism cannot be drawn from the experience of the working class alone, even if it were the case, which it is not, that the theoretical concepts of Marxism were directly visible.'

But the correct statement at the end of this passage (about Marxist theory not being directly visible) contradicts the whole argument. Marxist theory is not "based on" crude and 'direct' experience at all; it is based on reality, and the true reality of things is often far from their outward appearance which can be directly experienced.

It is certainly true that a party which has thousands of members in the oppressed classes has at its hands sensors with which it can estimate aspects of reality (say, the mood of the working class), and this is extremely important for tactical decisions. It is also true that the historical experience of the working class is a tremendously rich source for theoretical and political lessons.

But if theory were strictly limited by direct experience, then Marx would never have written Capital; nor could he have written the 'Civil War in France' without directly participating in the Commune!

The IMG quote Lenin on the importance of the working class observing "every other social class in all the manifestations of its intellectual, ethical and political life". One of the most important social classes for the working class to observe and understand is the bourgeoisie, but according to the "epistemological" ideas of the IMG the only way this can be done is by intervening in bourgeois circles!

Neither is the strategic decision of which social strata to intervene in determined by the need to form a theoretical totality. Rather it is a scientific estimation of the strategic importance of any particular layer in the socialist revolution which determines what intervention there is to be.

For example, Lenin analysed Russian

capitalism, not from 'experience' but mainly through books and statistics, and came to a conclusion about the importance of the peasantry in the coming revolution. On that estimation the Bolsheviks intervened in the struggle of the peasantry. But it certainly did not happen the other way round, neither did he come to his conclusion about the leading role of the working class by living the life of a worker.

In actual fact, given the tiny "groupuscule" size of every Trotskyist group in Britain, and therefore their limited contact with even the working class, such a 'pragmatic' approach is a far stronger argument against any attempt at democratic centralism for such groups than it is an argument or even explanation for it.

CONCLUSION

The IMG is a notoriously difficult organisation to pin down - slipping and sliding, restlessly changing its political emphasis as it does. Nevertheless, whatever its leaders now say about the ideas of their May conference, the Manchester experience, under the direct personal guidance of one of the two main leaders of their "Cultural Revolution" is a decisive test of those ideas in practice. The ideas must be measured rigorously; it is not enough simply to lop off the more absurd conclusions, with the glib explanation "a bad formulation", without rendering a strict account on the central argument.

NOTE.

(1) The question of democratic centralism does not, in any case, comprise the whole of the Leninist theory of the party (as one might suppose from the IMG).

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