DISCUSSION

It is a pity that the otherwise excellent article by Joe Palmada in the October issue of the Australian Left Review had to be marred by an error in the use of statistics.

In the article he uses a table of official statistics of the number of industrial disputes over a number of years to substantiate a proposition that there is a growing number of strikes associated with political and social issues and questions of managerial policy.

The official statistics do not distinguish disputes arising out of political and social issues so there is no way of telling how many took place on those issues.

The statistics do however distinguish disputes arising out of managerial policy. The trends in relation to these have been analysed in the table below by providing what percentage such disputes are of the total number of disputes. A similar analysis has been made of disputes arising out of wages.

Three significant points are clearly revealed by this table. The first is that far from the percentage of managerial disputes increasing, the trend has been for them to fall substantially over recent years.

The second point is that the trend for wages disputes has been a substantial rise over the years.

The third point is that in 1966 the proportion of managerial disputes was greater than wage disputes, but in 1970 the proportion of wage disputes was greater than managerial disputes. That is, over that period the relationship between managerial and wage disputes was completely reversed.

This is a sad case of an ugly little fact murdering a beautiful theory.

J. Hutson.

REPLY

There is an old saying that one can form two opinions from one set of statistics, and both be right.

I neither agree that my argument is 'fallacious' nor that it is a sad case of an ugly little fact murdering a beautiful theory'.

If you read carefully that section of the article again, you will notice that I claim that the MAIN motivation for the rising struggle 'is the steady erosion of real wages through inflationary cost spirals, monopoly manipulation of prices, and the effects of increasing direct and indirect taxation'.

I also say that 'whilst these factors constitute the MAIN PRESSURES propelling the spontaneous movement, other issues of deeper significance are beginning to emerge which demand further analysis. This is the GROWING number of strikes associated with political and social issues and questions of managerial policy'.

By reducing the number of strikes on 'managerial policy' to percentages, you draw the erroneous conclusion that I am claiming that strikes over such issues have been increasing relatively as well as absolutely. You surely would not dispute that 785 disputes on managerial policy in 1970 is not greater than 529 in 1966, and that this represents a growth in the number of disputes on this question.

The number of disputes on all causes in the statistics has increased and the fact that the number of disputes concerning managerial policy have, at the one time, INCREASED in number and, at the same time, decreased IN RELATION to the number of strikes does not, in my opinion, invalidate my contention that this is a trend which requires further analysis.

It is true, as you say, that 'the official statistics do not distinguish disputes arising out of political and social issues, so there is no way of telling how many took place on those issues'. But the statistics are grouped under various headings which exclude specifically 'political and social' issues.

As you are no doubt also aware, the statistics define 'other' causes as disputes concerning 'protests directed against persons or situations other than those dealing with employer/employee relationships, e.g. political matters, fining and gaoling of persons, protests against lack of work, and lack of adequate transport; non-award public holidays, accidents and funerals; no reason given for stoppages; etc.'

I think it is logical to assume that these strikes are included in 'other' causes, and this has shown, with the exception of 1970, a tendency to increase in number.

One must assume that the strikes around the Vietnam war, penal powers (1968-1969), pensions, and, more recently, the actions around ecological and other issues, are included in the category of 'other'.

You have proved that, in relation to the total number of strikes, those motivated by 'managerial policy' show a decline, but you have not demolished my contention that the 'growing number' of such strikes is of no little significance, reflecting 'the BEGINNING of consciousness towards challenging the power base, and for greater workers' participation in decision making'.

J. Palmada.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total No. Disputes</th>
<th>Disputes on Managerial Policy</th>
<th>Disputes on Wages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. (1)</td>
<td>No. (2)</td>
<td>Percentage (2) of (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>1,273</td>
<td>529</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>1,340</td>
<td>572</td>
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<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>1,713</td>
<td>695</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>2,014</td>
<td>768</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>2,738</td>
<td>785</td>
<td>33%</td>
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