Industrial democracy
and
the nature of work

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In this issue...

We publish several articles about workers’ intervention in production and the nature of what is produced.

Frank Bollins, NSW president of the Amalgamated Metal Workers’ and Shipwrights’ Union, discusses workers’ roles in ‘creating alternatives’ to what presently exists by intervention in areas of decision-making hitherto denied working people.

Among other things, Bollins mentions the experiences at the Lucas aerospace plant in Britain. This is the subject of two other articles. The first is by Pete Cockroft who discusses his impressions of the organisation of the Lucas Aerospace workers and the demands they have put to the company.

The second ‘Workers and the World Unite’ discusses the ecological aspects of the Lucas Aerospace struggle and links this to the need for a wider workers’ interest in ecology and the nature of goods produced. This article is by Dave Elliott, trade union liaison officer of the UK Socialist Environment and Resources Association.

Another aspect of this theme is examined by Richard Grossman in ‘Being Right is Not Enough’. A leading campaigner for the anti-nuclear power movement in the United States, and now co-ordinator of Environmentalists for Full Employment, Grossman urges the environment movement to overcome its isolation from workers and unions by understanding and taking up issues which presently concern them. At a time when business and conservative forces in government and the trade unions are posing job against environment this and the abovementioned articles are useful beginnings in a fight to unite the economic and environmental struggles.

Ken Coates of the British Institute for Workers’ Control discusses recent developments in the general struggle for industrial democracy in Britain. Our regular features Comment and Economic Notes complete the issue.
The wages-price freeze campaign of the Fraser government was notable as an admission of the failure of its economic strategy - or rather an exposure of the fact that it had no coherent strategy for economic recovery at all.

It had tried this, that and the other thing without effect - except that the situation became worse. People were becoming restive, having naively believed Fraser's promises of "sound economic management". So, when Victorian Premier Hamer pulled the idea of the freeze out of his hat, Fraser grasped at the straw (is this a mixed metaphor, or is there nothing but straw in Hamer's hat?). A great campaign was launched by the media and employer groups and the issue was on everybody's lips.

The plan had little chance of acceptance, in the first place, because of its inherent weaknesses. In no country where it has been tried has it worked. What happens is that after the period (in this case three months was proposed) any price increases "foregone" are immediately fed in, so prices leap once again. Leyland and other companies in Australia made it quite clear that is what they would do. So did the Fraser government which "postponed" operation of its already taken decision to increase the price of Australian-produced petrol. It is also amending the Trade Practices Act to allow partial reintroduction of "resale price maintenance" (price-fixing agreements - always up, never down) banned in 1971.

It was clear that fruit, vegetables, meat, rents and other vital items in the "cost of living" - Mr. Jolly, ACTU advocate, said these amounted to 40 per cent of items - would not be included in the freeze.

The sincerity of the employers and government are to be judged by past performance, not present words. By freezing prices for one quarter, wages under indexation would not rise at all in the quarter following. If they believe their own propaganda, why haven't they already done it?

Obviously, the intention was to lock the unions in on a wage freeze operated by the Arbitration Commission. Prices could then have gone up and real wages been reduced. This is in fact the one central and constant element in the Fraser strategy.

Syntec, a private organisation advising the government, says "we find ourselves now teetering between an out-of-control inflation and a gradually winding down inflation .... the conditions (for the latter) are .... (i) two further quarters of declining real wages;
(ii) a drop significantly below $2 billion in the 1977-78 Government Budget deficit;
(iii) a conviction in the international (business) network that the Australian dollar is tending towards 'hardness' rather than 'softness'." (April 14, 1977.)

The first condition is clear, and was the intention of the "freeze" proposals. The second condition means no tax cuts and more cuts in welfare spending. The third condition means to dance to the tune of the multinationals.

The whole of the trade union movement, with the exception of the DLP-dominated Labor Council in Tasmania, saw through Fraser's ploy and rejected it. So the only kind of wage freeze that is on is one enforced by the Arbitration Commission in the wage case opening as this is being written. It appears unlikely that the Commission, which is at least partly concerned with its own prestige and standing, will take such a step in face of total union opposition. Furthermore, many employers have their own doubts about the value to them of such a confrontation.

In discussing the difficulty of getting a united employers' voice, journalist Michael Southern said:

"Unity of purpose is fine until it digs into profits .... Australian employers always speak with many voices .... None of the big companies has been or will be inclined to let
someone else speak on its behalf .... BHP speaks for itself. So does CSR - and the list goes on and on.” (Financial Review, April 26.)

This is hardly news, and is not peculiar to Australia. The employers therefore need an “executive committee” (government and top civil service, or more generally “state apparatus”) to conduct their affairs on policies arrived at by struggle and/or consensus. In this case, employers came in (some very reluctantly, and all with tongue in cheek) behind the Fraser Freeze.

Further in its “executive committee” capacity, the government is also setting the stage for confrontation with the unions, despite the reservations of some employers. The main instrument for this is the projected Industrial Relations Bureau, capping other legislation such as that on the form and control of union elections and proposals to give Ministers the right to stand down Commonwealth employees engaged in go-slows or work bans.

The Industrial Relations Bureau will have a director with the “rank” of Deputy President of the Arbitration Commission. The definition of “industrial action”, for which there is a great battery of new penalties, is extended to include go-slows, work-to-regulations or performing work in other than the accustomed manner, bans and limitations. De-registration can follow any “industrial action” that hinders trade or commerce with other countries (e.g. bans on wheat for the Chilean Junta), or which is not authorised by the rules of the union.

The IRB will have the power to act independently of both employers and unions, and would clearly be the most dangerous industrial police force outside the fascist countries, past and present. Indeed, public servants, particularly those in the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations, from which most of the IRB staff would come, are “totally opposed to the establishment of the IRB” (resolution of the department’s central office section committee of the Administrative and Clerical Officers Association).

Penalties include fines for “contempt of court”- that is, refusal to supply information and documents on demand or industrial action in defiance of an order; deregistration and/or suspension of the rights, privileges or capacities of a union, restriction or control of a union’s funds or property; prohibition of individuals from holding or standing for union office - and more.

The government clearly has the most far-reaching ideas to tie up the trade union movement hand and foot in pursuit of its disastrous economic, foreign, uranium and social policies.

But more immediately, these plans are linked with the Freeze in more ways than one.

A wage freeze is essential in the scenario so clearly drawn by Syntec. If this cannot be done voluntarily, it has to be enforced against union opposition - hence the IRB.

But, however dumb it is, the government is not so dumb as to neglect the ideological struggle - the battle for public opinion.

It is hard to know whether the government leaders expected the freeze to be accepted or not, but in any case they felt they could not lose. They calculated that if the unions rejected the freeze, they could then be “pinned” in the public mind with the responsibility for continued inflation and the economic crisis in general. This would in turn make it easier to bring in, and enforce, the penal legislation now on the books or in the pipeline, so that a freeze could be enforced anyway.

BHP's general manager, Mr. W. Burgess, took up these cudgels at the annual convention of the Industrial Relations Society at Bathurst at the end of April:

“It is patently evident that the economic malaise currently experienced is due, to a large degree, to certain sections of the trade union movement (militant ones, particularly those led by communists) exercising power far in excess of that which it rightly possesses.”

The community needs to be educated into accepting the penal provisions, he said, and put the failure of past efforts down to government weakness and “some unfortunate appointments to the bench” as well as “radical challenges from communist-led unions”.

As stated earlier, BHP and Mr. Burgess speak for themselves and not on behalf of the employers in general. But BHP is not your ordinary, run of the mill company, but
Australia’s biggest. It is in a strategic position in the economy with its monopoly of steel, near monopoly of Australian oil, control of the biggest field of natural gas on the north-west shelf of Western Australia, and it has its fingers in innumerable other pies here and abroad. It is closely associated with multinationals like Esso and Shell, and has clearly shifted its focus from Australian-based production and manufacture to the more profitable resources and energy fields.

It has the ear of the government, is one of the biggest benefactors from the last budget’s handouts to mining interests, and gives voice to the dominant line of government policy on the “restructuring” of Australian capitalism. It expresses the hard-line attitudes held by Fraser and others against the soft-line “workers’ participation” attitudes of CSR’s Jackson and Conzinc’s Carnegie.

When it was applying for enormous handouts at public expense in an Industries Assistance Commission inquiry recently, Mr. Richard Boyer chairing the inquiry hit the nail on the head when he said:

“It may be that we are approaching the time when national interests do not coincide with the company’s interests.”

If BHP cannot be trusted to put the steel needs of Australia above its profits - and it cannot - still less can it be trusted with a key position in raw materials and energy resources.

However, it is not rationality or justice that counts in such matters, but money muscle. For capital, as Marx said, is “concentrated social power”. BHP has plenty of this muscle, but needs, in addition, in Mr. Burgess’ words, “education (read: brainwashing) of the community into accepting the penal provisions”.

This is a battle for “hearts and minds” which the unions, generally speaking, are not well-equipped or, in many cases, even oriented to effectively join. The overwhelmingly private ownership of the media which plugs the bosses’ line day in and day out of course is a great obstacle.

But the unions have potentially, and to a degree actually, the close identification and contact with their rank and file which even the media cannot negate or over-ride.

Effective use of this priceless advantage requires a clear understanding of the causes and nature of the present crisis, much greater efforts to extend contact with the rank and file of the unions and draw them into the democratic control of their organisations, a combative spirit expressed in on-the-job activity, rejection of the “consensus” view which obliterates the deep opposition of interests of different classes, and projection of alternative economic policies to those being followed by the government - policies which are in the interests of the people and not the multinationals, policies which point in the direction of alternative values and an alternative model of society.

Progress along these lines is as yet slow. But the ideas are beginning to gel and movements are continuing to arise which express currents and aspirations deeply, if unclearly, felt among growing numbers of people.

Specifically on the IRB, firm action must be taken. At the time of writing it is understood that the ACTU has decided to call a Federal Unions Conference in Sydney on May 18-19. It is said that the ACTU executive may recommend to that conference withdrawal from the Australian Arbitration Commission should the government persist with the IRB.

This would be by far the most effective response. Not only would it frustrate the operations of the IRB which are to be part of the Conciliation and Arbitration Act, but it would really put the unions on their mettle, requiring, as the present set-up of dependence on arbitration does not, continual mobilisation of the rank and file and extended democracy within the unions.

Arbitration has served capitalism so well over the years, however, and is so deeply ingrained in Labor Party and trade union thinking and habits, that enormous pressure will be brought to bear to “stay within the system”.

Nevertheless, the floating of the idea is itself a great step forward, it bounces the ball right back into the government’s court and should serve as the lever for a wide discussion right through the trade union movement and the community generally on the way forward.

- E.A.,
4.5.77.
Since its inception, the trade union movement has been concerned with the question of alternatives. In its day to day activity, it has been concerned with putting up alternatives to situations created either by governments or employers. Most, up to this period, have been related to economic issues or in defence, or pursuit, of conditions.

A great expertise has been developed, not so much in creating alternative programs but more in the ability to overcome dead-lock situations arising from negotiations between workers and employers.

Most strike situations or, for that matter, any situation where workers take some form of action to achieve an objective, is precisely a situation where they plan and carry through an alternative proposition. The degree of victory is determined by how much of the alternative is achieved.

But is this the type of alternative situation we want to discuss? I think not. If so, then maybe our time and effort would be wasted because there is so much knowledge, experience and ability within the movement that it does not need this type of discussion to develop it further.

What we are talking about is a much more significant type of alternative; one that has a great deal more challenge, and which, if taken to its final conclusion and enforced over the opposition of a government or an employer, takes those involved into an area of decision making hitherto denied to working people.

This form of alternative takes the participants away from the reflex action type of situation in which the trade union movement has been engaged and opens up a new field of activity which has a tremendous amount more challenge to it than the economic campaign alternatives referred to.

Because of this, the creation of new alternatives opens up an entirely new area of thought and action. If it is to be successful, those involved must have a theoretical knowledge of why they are seeking the alternative and how it is to be achieved.

Why is this?

From my point of view it is because the end result of such actions, where these alternatives are achieved, has an element not contained in day-to-day alternatives taken up by the unions. That is, it really challenges the decision making prerogatives of those who regard decision making as their inalienable right.
From the beginning, the capitalist system has always demanded that decision making be the sole right of the owners of the means of production or of those to whom decision making powers have been delegated.

They have resisted, and will continue to resist, any attempt to take away those rights.

There have been many bitter disputes in the past over such questions as "hire and fire" and unless there is some legal breach committed by the employer, there is no law to deny him the right to dismiss. Not only does he assume that right, but he is also given that right by law - and the law invariably upholds that right.

Therefore, when any organisation or group of people set out deliberately to challenge an employer's rights by proposing an alternative which he does not want to accept, one of three things usually happens: they lose the fight because of the strength of the employer; they reach a compromise; or they have a victory compelling the employer to accept their terms and conditions.

The instances where clear-cut victories are achieved are few indeed and mostly occur with the smaller, less class-conscious employer. But it's a horse of a different color when you set out to challenge the bigger corporate employer. He will fight to the bitter end, even challenging the law itself when it tends to deny him his 'inalienable' rights of hire and fire.

This was evidence in a case over a dismissed shop steward, Ted Gnatenko, who had been dismissed more than two years ago by GMH in South Australia. After two years of job actions and legal argument, his union finally won his reinstatement.

Witness also the negative response of an employer when a worker, fully qualified and proud of his acquired ability, refuses to do a particular job because it is against all the principles of workmanship and quality that he has learned over his working life. Particularly where the fall-off in quality relates to an increase in profit, the employer will adopt a hard-line attitude of "do it or else" and the worker in question has to swallow his trade pride or be dismissed or, in many instances, sack himself.

This is getting to the real guts of the question before us, because this is an issue which is causing increasing concern in the minds of many, especially professionally trained people.

Of course, it goes much deeper than just quality of product. What remains is for us to change the situation from where management prerogatives reign supreme to a situation where the profit motive is not the sole criterion of whether a project should be designed and developed or not.

For quality of life and the preservation of our natural resources to become a fundamental consideration in our design, planning and manufacturing processes, something big has to happen. A change has to take place for the abovementioned criteria to apply to any project; the will of the people concerned will have to prevail. For that to happen as a continuing fact of life, the nature of the system under which we live and work must fundamentally change.

That is not an easy task as many people have discovered. However, after many years of activity to achieve a better life style I am fully convinced that for a lasting change to occur to the work ethic of the capitalist system, the system itself must change.

Recently I saw a photo of the tomb of Karl Marx. Deeply engraved on the tomb were these words:

"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it."

These words, first written in 1845, have a great relevance today.

That, I suggest, is what we are about. The world, in its many complexities, has been explained time and time again. The kind of change and how this should be brought about is still a matter of intense debate.

The cleavage of ideas on this matter is international. It has torn asunder philosophers and political parties and continues to do so.

One factor which emerges from the polemic on this subject is that whatever the change it will only be brought about by an ever-expanding section of society which has grasped the philosophical need to break finally and absolutely with all the past ties which are continuously being renewed to enforce the perpetuation of the capitalist system.
That is what this great debate is about. How to change the social relationships which bind the mass of people to a socio-economic system which has not only passed its developmental zenith but daily enters crisis situations for which it has no real answer other than continuous expansion of its power over the creativity and aspirations of the working people.

We live in the era of multinational corporations, possibly the final extension of the capitalist system. Their power to make decisions which determine the direction and extent of social development is massive and, as far as Australia is concerned, unchallenged to any real degree. But challenge it we must if we are to change, for the better, the future direction of our lives. There is a developing movement on a worldwide scale which is setting out to challenge the decision-making authority of the multinationals and for the extension of rights and responsibilities of decision making to those who carry out the production process and those who use the commodities produced.

Why should those who produce, and this includes the professional as well as the production worker, not have full rights and responsibilities to say what is to be produced and why, and the qualities to be included, as well as deciding the price both in terms of sale and cost of physical and natural resources?

Once this idea of changing social relationships takes hold of people's minds in a mass way then the future of the capitalist system is challenged.

Other people are thinking this too. The managers and ideologists of the capitalist system are becoming increasingly aware that this area of power and authority is the Achilles heel of the system.

The continuing alienation of people from the work ethic of the system within the workplace and in society generally is now assuming the characteristic of being a force for change; the incidence of "drop out" from society is being reduced in the sense that people are now starting to look for alternatives.

In answer to the continuing crisis within the capitalist system and the increase of people seeking alternatives by way of a greater say in decision making, the ideologists of the system are coming up with propositions which will widen the area of decision makers but at the same time eliminate any real challenge to the system.

Many programs and systems of worker participation and job enrichment have been developed to contain and reduce the growing challenge to the system.

As the crisis widens and deepens these efforts will be stepped up or force will be used to maintain the status quo.

We have two examples of these attitudes in operation at this moment.

The first is the thoughts of Gordon Jackson, General Manager of the CSR, and Chairman of the Jackson Committee which, during the period of the Labor government, undertook an investigation into the manufacturing industry.

This report advocates, among many other proposals, the strengthening of the position of the manufacturing industry and the introduction of systems of worker participation.

The fact that Jackson both publicly advocates and defends the principle of worker participation is unique as far as a person of his position is concerned.

Not only is he courageous but he is becoming more frank about the essential need, from an employer point of view, for an extension of worker participation as the economic crisis increases in intensity.

In a recent address to the 3rd National Productivity Conference he had this to say:

"Worker participation in management and employee ownership of shares only distracted from the real issues of industrial relations and were the not the solution. The challenge of improving industry should be just as great to the trade union movement as it was to management and government. Involvement would mean the trade unions becoming part of the system and committed to its success - gaining new power to influence the direction of affairs from within but giving up the option of remaining outside the system, free to confront its direction or even its existence."

The other example is that of the attitude of the Federal government.
As it wallows in the mess of its own making, it is setting out to destroy that section of the trade union movement which constitutes the main challenge to its policies.

As each day passes the intensity of attacks on the militant union leaders mounts. All the blame and responsibility for the economic crisis is thrown at them by the big five - Fraser, Anthony, Lynch, Street and Nixon. One could well believe that union leaders are making all the economic decisions which are taking the country deeper into the depths of the crisis.

I believe that the capitalist system will ultimately accommodate itself to mass systems of worker participation, despite the fact that there is still resistance to it in many areas, even to limited forms of participation.

Consultative Committees, Worker Directors, and works councils are but a few of the areas where management will make concessions. But, in a real sense, these do not constitute a challenge or alternative to the power and authority of the system.

We can, and must, develop alternatives. How far we can go with them will be determined by the level of understanding of the need for change which we can develop in the outlook of those involved in the process.

It is dangerous to oversimplify this proposition. Not only will the resistance of the employers be a barrier against an extension of power and authority being taken by the workers, but the resistance of workers to the need for change and all that it means has, and will, assume tremendous proportions.

Conviction is needed throughout all sections of the work-force.

In Australia, what little has been done by the worker to assume greater power has been both spontaneous and isolated, especially in the sense of the whole work force in a particular work place. Clerical and professional workers, as well as sections of production workers, have either sat on the side-lines with bemused smiles on their faces or been active opposition to those struggling for greater rights on the job.

We must change this situation and eliminate age-old divisions, both academic and craft, so that a whole work-force in a particular establishment goes into action
around an issue which has any semblance of an alternative or challenge in it.

In the process of developing alternatives, we cannot underestimate the need for an ideological understanding and conviction which will not only inspire such movements but give permanence of action and determination once they commence.

One of the points of conviction must be that there is no easy road or short cut out of the continuing crisis.

The massive unemployment situation that now exists will remain for a long time, if not permanently. Many of those who are not out of a job will most certainly never return to their old occupations. Why? Because they have vanished. Either because the job they were performing is now being done in an overseas country to be imported back into Australia or the job has vanished because of automation or technological change.

So, is there any percentage in wanting to return, if it were at all possible, to a so-called stable economy?

Is there any lasting benefit in continuing the rat race of a consumer-oriented economy in which commodities are valued not for their use to society but for the quickest and biggest return on capital invested? Do we have to continue to churn out commodities which have an inbuilt obsolescence and many of which, for example, the motor vehicle, stuff up the atmosphere and destroy the environment? Do we design and construct engineering projects for the purpose of extracting our mineral wealth without regard for our future resources. Do we set out to invest large amounts of capital in the manufacturing industry in the hope that it will bring about an end to unemployment, knowing that the new capital investment is designed to reduce the labor content of the manufacturing process and will increase, rather than lessen, the number of unemployed? Do we, in the hope that jobs will be created in the building industry, agree to the perpetuation of the madness that destroys valuable buildings, people's homes, in many instances part of our heritage, and in their place construct massive edifices solely for investment purposes, for them to remain empty when there is a crying need for public buildings that would serve a human need, knowing that because of advances in technology fewer and fewer building workers would be employed?

Do we, in a form of collective madness, proceed with the uncontrolled extraction of uranium ore and its refinement and the construction of nuclear plants, knowing the dangers inherent in these processes?

Do we bolster a system which has created these and many more problems - a system in which power and authority is being vested in ever smaller numbers whose powers, as individuals and organisations, are becoming greater than many governments?

I think not. For to do so is to perpetuate all these miseries and sufferings that human manipulation has created to maintain power and authority over people and the environment. Despite all human effort of the past and the tremendous advances of sciences and technology, poverty and misery continue to grow on a world scale. Therefore it is futile to return to the old order to find relief.

The time is long overdue for alternative work programs to take the place of this continuing madness.

Unfortunately it is not only the capitalist class which offers opposition to a cessation of all the work activity that is destroying the environment and exhausting our natural resources through criminal wastage.

Many others, including workers, justify the continuation of the process because it means a job to them. This human problem cannot be ignored or swept under the carpet; it is a real problem and one that must be answered.

Consumerism, even in a more rationalised form, is no permanent answer to unemployment.

Even the question of shorter hours, generally supported by the trade union movement as a part answer to unemployment, is no real solution.

Its logic is that you shorten hours but continue all the destructive production processes - by efficiently using fewer people by more automated processes.

Capitalism has always been able to accommodate demands for a shorter working week, despite the dire predictions of
CREATING ALTERNATIVES

those who claim that society would collapse once shorter hours were granted.

Sure, we have shorter hours but not to justify the maintenance of the capitalist work ethic - we need it to enhance the life style of the people - by the more humane and scientific utilisation of people rather than to justify automated monsters and the continued production of non-essentials.

What are some of the areas where we can commence to develop alternative work programs which will both fill the gaps caused by the crisis and start to challenge the decision making prerogatives of the employer?

The quality of goods and their price, elimination of inbuilt obsolescence, the more rational use of our natural resources; is the end result of a particular process going to be detrimental to society, either socially or environmentally? If so, it should not be produced. These are but a few areas where joint action of all productive workers, including professional workers, could be commenced.

Whole alternative work programmes can be developed and acted upon, such as the Lucas Workers Alternative Corporate Plan in the U.K. Alternative work programs to fight unemployment, to prevent the alienation of people, against misuse of natural resources, and, more particularly, a program of action which combines a multiplicity of unions and people in a common action.

There is a further aspect of the Lucas experiment which needs to be considered when talking of alternatives and that is the role of the multi-national corporation.

Lucas has a counterpart here in Sydney. Should the British Lucas workers engage in some action to enforce their demands the Lucas workers in Australia could well be used against them in many ways. So that when we are talking of alternative action, we need to take into consideration trade union and working class internationalism as part of the plan to change social relationships.

The same situation exists a little closer to Australia. Capital and machinery and production processes are being exported to Asian countries in a big way by an increasing number of employers. This is all part of the economic crisis and also part of the drive against the Australian worker.

We need to develop better relationships between our own and the Asian workers if we are to develop viable alternatives in place of the transferred industries.

One fact stands out in the Lucas experience: it should not be left as a negotiable issue. If there is to be any real challenge, any real alternative, then these and other workers should be determined to produce the alternative plan irrespective of whether management agreement is reached or not.

There are many and varied concepts on forms of worker involvement in self-management and co-determination. All have the element of alternative or change. How we go about our involvement in them or the degree of ideological conviction achieved will determine the ultimate outcome.

The big issue is whether we continue to be contained, or be contained more by involving ourselves in schemes devised by employers and governments, or whether we help to destroy the social relationships that maintain the system by developing Alternative Work Programmes irrespective of management agreement or not.

The issues of Worker Control and Self-Management as ultimate forms of social existence are, to me, not just good ideas or an academic ploy. No matter what title it may be given or where it might be applied, if carried through in a mass and international manner with the degree of ideological conviction that I have raised, then it must surely give life to those words of Marx when he calls for a “change to the world”.
Worker Initiatives 
& Alternative Technologies

.... The Lucas Aerospace Experience

Workers and the World Unite

Dave Elliott

Faced by the threat of unemployment, the Lucas Aerospace Combine Shop Stewards Committee have put to their management a proposal for a new set of production priorities: they are demanding the right to work on socially-needed alternative technologies. This initiative shows the way towards a new type of trade unionism which combines the traditional defensive economism, forced on it by the capitalist system, with a progressive and positive view of the possible alternatives for socially and environmentally appropriate production.

Trade unions are usually depicted by the press as narrow minded, self-interested, greedy wreckers. Some union spokesmen even obligingly provide quotes to reinforce the impression, such as: "We are going to be at the top of the tree and if that hurts anybody else, then I'm sorry ...."

The issue of income differentials is one that few trade unionists have yet fully faced - except in theoretical or rhetorical terms. Levelling up is their ideal - and, as far as it goes, a sound one. Even so, it still sounds pretty materialistic.

But trade unions are, after all, part of the current socio-economic structure. They may have been created as an 'oppositional' movement aimed at radically altering (or even removing) capitalism, but over the years they have, to a considerable extent, had to adopt a reformist role. They have become part of the system, in that their main activity, collective bargaining, is concerned mainly with the division of the roughly fixed share of the cake allocated to the workers.
Now, of course, when you say 'trade unions' this means different things to different people. For the press it's either the top union officials or the sinister shop floor militants who surface briefly into public consciousness. In reality, the union is the membership: the elected officers are only there to carry out the mandated policies and protect and advance the interests of the members. If some of the trade union officials have espoused reformist policies, this does not mean that the trade unions themselves as a whole are necessarily reformist institutions - although that is the danger. There are some countervailing tendencies at the grass roots, as the current rise in shop steward, rank and file, and cross union combine activity illustrates.

But in a society which trains its members to chase the carrot of material possessions, applauds conspicuous consumption and celebrates affluence as an end in itself, it is not surprising that institutions which are partly incorporated into it, like the trade unions, will absorb some of these values.

And there are quite strong tactical reasons why trade unionists will reduce all issues to economistic 'wages' issues - they are easily understood, quantifiable and, in theory at least, such demands attack profits and thus change the economic imbalance between wage laborer and capitalist. In reality, of course, and particularly in an inflationary situation, wage demands do not attack profits - they just lead to price increases, withdrawal of capital investment and further recession. No real redistribution is produced.

Management also prefer (to some extent) to deal with cash issues rather than the more diffuse (and unmanageable) 'control' issues - such as those concerning manning, safety, pollution, long term policy and so on. Management quite consciously introduces or accepts conflict-reducing institutions which force workers to define grievances in cash terms. As Michael Mann has put it:

"What we call the institutionalisation of industrial conflict is nothing more nor less than the narrowing down of conflict to aggressive economism and defensive control."


So wider issues are consciously reduced to economic issues. The fact that this tactic fuels inflation illustrates how unstable the system is. The tendency of management to encourage aggressive economism, for the sake of short term ease of managerial control, leads to longer term instabilities.

Furthermore, this economism might cause workers' expectations and aspirations to rise to a point when they cannot be satisfied within the present economic system - a point not lost on those who are working for the overthrow of capitalism. The problem with this tactic, in its revolutionary context, is that it does not equip workers with an awareness of, and an ability to organise around, the many equally-important non-economic issues and problems. After all, workers are not just faced with economic exploitation. Although this may be the central mode of their oppression, other more diffuse forms of control are in operation which help sustain, underpin and legitimise the economic exploitation. In their daily experience at work, as well as in the community or as consumers, workers are forced to realise that they lack even the basic elements of control over their lives. They are closely supervised at work, paced by machine and clock, bought and sold according to the needs of the capitalist system, and cajoled to adopt its required consumption and life style patterns. They are just hands and mouths. It is not surprising that some workers want more than just more money to compensate for this alienation. Not only do they seek to challenge the basic economic alienation (the exploitation of their labor power) but they also seek to have more control over the conditions and purpose of their work. This goes further than simply asking for better 'working conditions' and welfare provisions, and it is for this reason that management fears the demand for "workers' control". For, to press for control over such issues as line speed, job design and work organisation, manning levels, products design, production system choice - and perhaps even long-term policy on corporate pricing, marketing, employment, the environment and technology - is to challenge seriously the prerogatives and authority of management.

But is any of this really happening? Are there any signs of trade unions transcending wage issues? Yes, there are.
It has not escaped these workers that current modes of technology and production organisation affect them not only at work, but also in their communities: theirs is a quite logical response, even in self-interest terms.

For if a car worker spends eight hours a day shuffling along a conveyor line contributing to the production of 200 cars, and then has to walk a quarter of a mile past the 200,000 unsold cars stored in what was the car park, to his own car, so that he can then spend an hour driving through congested streets to his polluted, motorway-blighted home - and all in order to pay for his car and the consumer items and services to help him forget his work - then he is likely eventually to see the irrationality of it all.

Increasingly, his response is unlikely to be just a demand for more money to compensate: the demand is now for more control over conditions and policies. Trade unions are probably in an ideal position to influence industries' social and environmental policies - after all, their members are organised around a crucial point in the production and distribution chain: they have a strategic role. They could take a leading part in redirecting industry towards more sane forms of production.

But are they taking up this challenge, you ask?

A year or so ago, the Lucas Aerospace Shop Stewards Combine Committee set up a science and technology consultancy service which was aimed at providing technical advice to members who were faced with new technologies, work methods, speed up, potentially dangerous machines or processes, and similar innovations introduced by management. As such, this was essentially a ‘defensive’ organisation in the traditional trade union sense.

Recently the Combine decided that they must adopt a more positive stance, and develop counter proposals rather than just react to and resist management’s initiatives. The Aerospace workers are highly skilled and are used to tackling challenging new projects. They, like the car workers, can plainly see the environmental problems associated with current products and production - cars, weapon systems, and so on.

In a recession, when government Defence (and Welfare Service) spending is reduced, these goodies are likely to be in less demand. While at the same time the needs of the community - for houses, basic subsistence items, cheap sources of energy - keep growing.

Unemployment is, of course, the main impetus for the campaign. As the letter from the Secretary of the Combine indicates, it is the threat of redundancies - that has forced them to fight for the right to work on socially useful products.

But the Aerospace workers seem also to have adopted a radical view of what they mean by ‘alternative products’. It’s not just a matter of a shift in emphasis from military to civilian aircraft and associated systems (such as automatic blind landing systems) - socially useful and radical in the present context though this shift might be. For although the workers are considering these types of new priorities, and similar socially useful and urgently needed pieces of equipment at present of often only marginal or token interest to the firm - such as medical aids, like haemodialysis units, artificial limbs and other aids to the disabled, eddy current retarder braking systems for heavy vehicles and so on - they are also considering alternative technologies which may have more long term structural implications. They are interested in the whole range of alternative energy technologies, including windmills, solar collectors, heat pumps, solar cells, hydrogen electrolysis, fuel cells, batteries, inverters, electric vehicles, steam cars, stirling engines and even airships.

You might argue that some of these technologies imply ‘reform’ rather than radical change or revolutionary alternatives, in that they simply deal with problems thrown up by this existing society. But the implied ‘classification’ of radical/reform technologies is not necessarily a sound one. For one thing, medical and safety problems will exist in any society. And furthermore, whether a particular technology is truly a
'radical technology' depends to some extent on how, when, where and by whom it is developed and used - in some circumstances the creation and introduction of quite conventional techniques, or minor shifts in the pattern of production or usage, can be revolutionary. For the mass of people to have access to photocopying facilities would surely be a change which would shift the balance of power somewhat. The same could be argued for telex, radio, TV, or even computers. On the other hand, some potentially 'radical' alternative technologies could become the base for a repressive society.

This is not to return totally to a 'use-abuse' model of technology (i.e. technology is neutral, it depends on how you use it) for the 'means' cannot be separated from the 'ends' but simply to throw more emphasis on the social and political context of its inception, production and use. With this in mind it is interesting to see that it's not only alternative products that the Lucas workers are considering, but also alternative modes of production. They are well aware that it is pointless to produce environmentally appropriate products in a way that is socially alienating and environmentally damaging. So they will press for radical changes in the organisation and control of work and demand better designed jobs, autonomous control by work groups and project teams, new forms of management and so on.

All these changes must, they argue, be geared towards meeting the real needs of the community - that is towards providing socially useful products as opposed to the spurious consumer goodies thrown up by the present mode of production planning and 'market research'.

The urgency of the need for housing, for cheap wholesome food, cheap heating, acceptable public transport and education, does not require a 'market' for it to be articulated.

The fundamental question that is raised by this development is whether an advanced technological company like Lucas, assembled by capitalism to meet its needs can be diverted or modified to meet community needs. Can large centralised units produce appropriate technologies in a socially and environmentally desirable way - or must they be broken up into smaller decentralised units? Now it is important to realise that these large companies represent a huge social investment in human capital - a vast national skill and equipment resource. Many 'alternativists' want to dismantle such units, and they may well be right. But for the moment they exist and we must think about how to change them: we need a transitional strategy. The proposals put forward by the Lucas workers are a first step.

For it is not just a matter of technical reorganisation: it's a question of social change. Discussions on the possible
alternative types of production have taken place throughout the membership: the emphasis has been on the process of developing new priorities, new ideas, new attitudes to technology and, eventually, new ways to relate to ‘consumer’ need. All this activity was fed into the final ‘corporate plan’ which was presented to management in January 1976 as a collective bargaining demand. It was also hoped that it might be treated as part of a long term ‘planning agreement’ exercise as laid out in Tony Benn’s scheme for Industrial Democracy.

The five volume Corporate Plan contained detailed proposals for 150 new products and has not received wide-ranging support in the media.

Despite hostility by Lucas’ Corporate directors, it looks as if production of some items outlined in the plan will be forced through - partly because local managers themselves fear redundancy. Development work on heat pumps has already been sanctioned at the company’s Burnley plant. But this is possibly not the most important outcome. Much as it would be good to see windmills or whatever roll off the production lines, the main object from the campaign - from the workers’ point of view - is to halt redundancies. And the campaign has clearly worked already on those grounds. It has also had an immense ‘educative’ and consciousness-raising effect on Lucas workers - and workers elsewhere. Lucas style campaigns have now spread to many other firms - including Chrysler cars, the big electricity generating plant manufacturer C & A Parson, and a textile machinery firm in Manchester. The Lucas approach looks like becoming a standard tactic in British trade unionism.

**The Role of the Alternative Technology Movement**

The Lucas campaign has naturally attracted the attention of many environmentalists. However, despite the fact that the letter from the Combine (included at end of article) was widely circulated, few realistic offers of help emerged - most of the Corporate Plan idea came from Lucas workers which, perhaps, is all to the good. For many environmentalists and alternative technologists seemed unable to relate politically to the workers’ struggle. They came up with ideas suited to small communes or hill farms - or else talked about reconciliation between managers and workers so that they could ‘work together’ to fight the eco-crisis.

The result has been that, at least initially, the Shop Stewards at Lucas lost faith in the ‘AT’ movement’s ability to be of practical help. Personally, I feel this was a necessary stage - the AT movement, after all, is young and has much to learn from the workers’ years of experience of struggle. The point for us on the outside to remember is that workers who have some degree of power to turn the dreams we have had of ‘alternative technologies’ into reality.

This initiative seems to me to have partially circumvented the central problem of developing Alternative Technology in a capitalist society. It is often argued that you can’t develop AT until you’ve got an alternative society. The trouble with this is that it becomes a chicken and egg problem. But some people have argued that you can at least make a start - you can develop premature or semi-fledged alternatives which help stimulate and motivate others. The point is that this requires both social and technological changes to occur together in a sort of dialectical process. The experimental communes have been depicted this way by some people - as embryonic attempts to live in the future now. But the Lucas initiative, and the others that followed it, provide a much more viable route and context for this dialectical development. Theirs is an ongoing situation, rooted firmly in reality. Utopian ideas and technical and social reality can interact in a productive way and in a context which links immediately to the lives of large numbers of people - not just the readers of Chain Reaction or the commune-down-the-road.

I see this process of technological and social change as crucial, though it’s not the only possible vehicle for change. As the capitalist system gets further into crisis, many other types of development will become possible and appropriate. Where needs are no longer met by the system, people may move towards self-help, self-sufficiency and co-operative efforts (although they might also move towards a further state of dependence on centralised authority. And in either case there is the danger of isolationism, privatisation and individualism.)
The redirection of existing industry by those who work in it, towards new goals using new methods, holds out the hope of keeping the emphasis on collective organisation and control. This does not mean continued centralised, bureaucratic forms of control...it means struggling where people are, for new forms of social organisation, and new forms of technology.

Cynics may argue that the whole thing will be co-opted....the workers' initiative will be absorbed and their ideas will be used by the company to improve its profits, at the workers' expense. But remember that these workers are well organised. They will campaign for these changes within an oppositional frame of references: they are well aware of the dangers of co-option and collaboration. Whereas small, insecure groups tinkering with AT in the hills are much more likely to be ripped off and have their ideas misused by the system. The point is that well organised and technically skilled workers are in a good position to develop alternatives and to protect them from abuse -although it should be remembered that the alternatives thrown up by this process may not be what we would call 'AT' ....With this context in mind (and bearing in mind that there's no reason why we should know what is socially appropriate) what alternative technologies could be worth exploring?

Tactically, it might be wise to 'sugar the pill' somewhat by emphasising fairly 'high' technologies rather than 'low' technologies -although this would only be a temporary expedient. In the area of alternative energy technologies this suggests things like large scale water electrolyzers producing hydrogen for storage, transport (in cryogenic or metal hydride form) or for transmission as a gas along conventional pipe lines (as a basis for the so-called 'hydrogen economy'). Or district heating units using heat pumps run off conventional power stations. Or Silicon or Cadmium Sulphide solar cells which with new thin film techniques can be manufactured cheaply. Or large scale solar farms and solar furnaces producing steam for turbo-generators.

But I imagine there would be a better case (as far as the 'alternative technologists' are concerned) for less sophisticated and small-scale alternatives: methane production from anaerobic digestors; the local generation of hydrogen by electrolysis powered by a windmill; small water mills and turbines; electric generation by fuel cells fuelled by methane, natural gas or hydrogen; the development of electric powered and steam powered vehicles and so on.

Then come those techniques that we would accept as 'pure' AT - small scale, easily controlled, maintained and understood, amenable to local construction and use. For example, small scale wind-electric machines, flat plate solar collectors, and small scale convertors like heat pumps run from windmill-generated electricity - or even directly by mechanical power from a windmill operating the compressor.

Some of the items on this list might not turn out to be appropriate in social and environmental terms. It may be counter-productive in energy and resource usage terms to invest in large numbers of small wind machines or solar panels. Some of the more complex technologies, like fuel cells or heat pumps, may be too sophisticated to be classified as AT. On the other hand it may be more important (both socially and tactically) to focus on meeting urgent social needs, such as those for safer vehicles, cheap housing, medical aids and so on - areas which many alternativists tend to ignore as being too linked to 'advanced' technology but which, certainly in the interim, are vital.

These are the sorts of problems that must be thrashed out in the process of selecting suitable priorities for production - and they are obviously the sort of questions the AT movement has been chewing over for some time.

But now we are no longer alone. We are joined by a group of highly skilled, well organised and enthusiastic engineers, designers, technicians, administrators and junior managers. And remember, we are not talking about the absorption of AT ideas into an unchanged capitalist firm. The stewards represent a membership made up of blue and white collar workers and their families and communities. So that the ideas and changes that they introduce are likely to be geared towards the needs of the community. Hopefully they will be able to make links with those groups which are currently trying to get AT introduced into a community context. Initially this might mean dealing with Local Authorities, but ultimately it might be possible to forge links between
producing firms like Lucas and local collectives and communities who are trying to work towards AT - whether on housing estates, in rural farms or in production co-ops.

Here is a chance to get it together in a way that can help spread the idea and practice of AT on a mass scale. I hope we live up to our own rhetoric. And at the same time learn from the experience.

THE LUCAS LETTER

We are taking the liberty of writing to you as we understand you are interested in the possibility of deploying the skills and equipment of technically advanced firms on alternative technology, in particular those forms which are socially useful.

We should explain at the outset that this Combine Committee represents all employees of the 17 UK sites of Lucas Aerospace. It is therefore unique in the British Trade Union Movement in that it speaks for the entire spectrum of workers by hand and brain, from labourers to senior technologists and engineers. We design, develop and manufacture a wide range of aerospace components and complete systems. A substantial proportion of this work is on defence contracts. It seems to us that the "energy crisis" will result in a slowing down of many of these projects and the general economic climate is likely to result in cutbacks in defence contracts. This we regard as inevitable and even desirable. Our concern however is that cutbacks of this kind have always resulted, in the past, in the break up of teams of skilled workers and design staff, followed by the degradation of the dole queue.

We have, over the past two years, been engaged in a number of bitter disputes to assert the 'right to work'. It is our intention to do so in the future. However, instead of campaigning for the continuation of socially undesirable product ranges we will fight for the right to work on socially needed and useful products. In addition .... we also want to ensure that the work is carried out in such a fashion that the full skill and ability of our members is utilised, and that we depart from the dehumanised, fragmented forms of work which are now becoming commonplace even in a highly skilled industry such as aerospace.

The annual turnover of Lucas Aerospace in the UK is approximately 60 million. There are about 14,000 employees, and some 2,000 of these are engineers, draftsmen and scientific staff. A large proportion of the remainder are highly skilled manual workers. It is the kind of work force which, because of its skilled background, is extremely adaptable, and would be capable of working on a wide range of products .... We have just over 5000 machine tools and about 250 of these are numerically, automatically or digital display controlled. A list of test facilities shows that this is backed up by products, environmental and investigation laboratories.

There is a very genuine desire to work on products which would be socially useful, not only in Britain, but in the newly emergent and developing countries. It is certainly not the view of the Combine Committee or of the work force involved that the kind of capital intensive products which have come to characterise the technologically advanced nations will be appropriate to the newly emergent nations. It is therefore fully understood and accepted that entirely different forms of technology will have to be considered.

If you know of alternative technologies on which a work force of this kind could become engaged, in particular if these technologies would be socially useful, we will be very pleased to discuss the matter with you further. We are particularly keen to see that the very considerable skill and ability of our members is used to solve the wide range of human problems we see about us.

We should like, in conclusion, to point out that this initiative comes entirely from our workforce itself, through its Combined Shop Stewards Committee, and as such is completely independent of the normal commercial considerations of a large company of this kind. We will greatly appreciate your advice and suggestions, and would, of course, treat your reply in confidence.

E Scarbrow,
Secretary,
Lucas Aerospace Combine Shop Stewards Committee.

(This letter was written in Spring 1975. Emphasis added.)
The dilemma of revolutionaries in a non-revolutionary situation forces the movement to search for new and more advanced forms of struggle. This is nowhere more true than in the workers' movement.

The occupation/work-in pioneered at Clydeside and elsewhere, and campaigns to assert a degree of workers' control over the social consequences of their work initiated by the NSW builders' laborers, are shining examples in a generally bleak picture. The former tactic emerged out of a struggle to save jobs - a general issue which is of continuing importance as capitalism attempts to "restructure" its way out of recession.

The threat of structural unemployment was also the initial spur to a dramatic new initiative taken by the Lucas Aerospace Combine Shop Stewards Committee in the UK. Having seen their workforce cut from 18,000 to 13,000 through "rationalisation", the stewards resolved not only to fight for the right to work (which they did successfully, forcing the withdrawal of 800 redundancies in early 1974) but also to spell out to the company precisely how the workforce could be maintained.

This was presented in the stewards' Corporate Plan (CP), "a contingency strategy as a positive alternative to recession and redundancies". But the plan was much more than that. Lucas Aerospace rely largely on "defence" (i.e. war) contracts. The Corporate Plan also considered the social consequences of the firm's activities and proposed that it move into new areas of socially useful production. "There is something seriously wrong about a society which can produce a level of technology to design and build Concorde but cannot provide enough simple urban heating systems to protect the old age pensioners who are dying each winter of hypothermia." (CP).

The Lucas Combine covers 64 companies and their subsidiaries in 20 countries. In the UK, it employs 80,000 workers with an annual turnover of approximately Stg.£300,000,000. The Aerospace Division has gradually achieved predominance in its field. Indeed, "Lucas Aerospace is now the only company in the world with the capability of producing, within a single organisation, a complete range of aircraft electrical generating systems and switchgear." (CP).

The late '60s saw great turmoil in the electronics industry in the UK. Weinstock had amalgamated the giant GEC and AEI combines and by sacking 60,000 workers increased profits from £75 million to £108 million. "The lessons of the Weinstock escapade were not lost on Lucas workers .... Lucas Aerospace, if it were permitted, would embark on a similar rationalisation program." (CP).

This was the impetus for the formation of a cross-division, cross-union group of shop stewards in the Lucas Combine. The group began to campaign both to fight redundancies at the shop floor level and to obtain some control of the money in the employees' pension funds - a serious task as the two funds totalled £120 million - over three times the capitalisation value of Lucas on the stock market.
The idea that the Stewards Committee prepare an alternative corporate plan arose in late 1974 when it became clear that cutbacks in "defence" contracts would continue to threaten jobs.

Preparation of the plan was hindered by the fact that it was an attempt to project a strategy embracing 17 factories producing a diversity of products. But it was considerably aided by the nature of the Lucas workforce. By its nature, the aerospace industry employs a very high proportion of skilled engineers and technicians. Union membership embraces all workers up to and including senior engineers who, in many other industries, would be considered part of management. It has been, and will continue to be, very difficult for Lucas management to argue against design possibilities and projections drawn up by "their own" design staff. A senior engineer arguing with the strength of his own position, and backed by shop floor industrial muscle, can present a formidable opponent to management.

The plan began with a detailed questionnaire sent to stewards at each factory calling for a breakdown of the resources, human and material, which existed and for details of "any other products which your plant could design, develop and manufacture". A total of 150 ideas were then collated under six main themes. The method of preparation of these ideas varied with each factory. At some, the matter was put directly to mass meetings of workers; at others, stewards worked out the drafting and later obtained approval from their members.

At the end of nine months, the plan was drawn up in six volumes (one for each theme), each of about 200 pages, listing in detail the new products which could be made and how it could be done.

Understandably suspicious that management would take the more profitable aspects of the plan (which would have cost them millions of dollars to evolve "for themselves") and ditch the socially useful, but less profitable, aspects, the stewards have kept five of the volumes secret. One - on alternative power sources - has been submitted to management. This is seen as a test case. In mid-1976 management rejected out-of-hand both the detailed scheme and the overall notion of the plan.

Management also indicated a very clear understanding of the dangers they face from rank and file organisation. Lucas Personnel Director Whitney stated "We will not go into any negotiations with the Combine (Shop Stewards) Committee as we already have established contacts with the trade unions involved".

And so, like any other class confrontation, the issue comes down to one of power. Part of the struggle involves taking the issues to the factory level and building campaigns out into the local working class communities. At a mass meeting in Burnley, where there are two Lucas factories, overwhelming support was voted for the plan. It also revealed splits within the management. Local managers, who are as scared of losing their jobs as the workers, are becoming increasingly irritated with the central management's obstinate refusal to consider the plan. There is considerable scope for exploitation of this break in the ranks.

At first sight, the idea of workers proposing a series of measures (whether imbued with a social conscience or not) to "help" a company out of its troubles is a very worrying proposition. It must raise concern among marxists from a number of points of view:

* that it will do no more than preserve unemployment within that group until the long-awaited economic upturn returns us to business as usual;

* that it will assist in fostering the illusion of a unity of interest between workers and management in much the same way that worker participation schemes do (see ALR 55-56);

* that, through the exercise of providing the bosses with a gift of free expertise in product planning and design, workers will feel an increasing tendency to offer positive suggestions for the more profitable operation of the company.

All these dangers are very real, but even the most superficial reading of the shop stewards' publications reveals that the workers are as aware of the dangers as anyone. But before going further, it would be best to list also the positive aspects of the notion of the Corporate Plan.

* It challenges the fundamental prerogatives of management. Just as the

...
idea of “mere builders’ laborers” intervening in an environmental and ecological issue horrified Sydney bosses, so the concept of shop floor workers coming together to democratically discuss the goods they will produce strikes deep into the vitals of capitalist ideology.

* Because of the particular nature of Lucas Aerospace production - armaments - the workers have opened up a whole new dimension to the perennial problem of the arms race. They have shown, in a most dramatic manner, that you can’t have an arms race if the workers refuse to make the weapons of war. Since the war, British arms production has been dictated by two factors: foreign policy and the prevailing economic climate.

The moral posturings of the British Labor left have been an exercise in futility compared to these hard facts. It is true that the Corporate Plan did not originate from any revulsion at the nature of arms production - on the contrary, it stemmed from the fact that the arms were no longer in demand because the government could not afford to buy them. Nevertheless, there is now the clear possibility that the forces unleashed in the process of formulating the Corporate Plan will be such that, should the cold war warriors emerge from their caves, there will at least be substantial questioning within the Lucas workforce as to the possibility of industrial action to prevent a return to the arms race in the UK.

* Action can be an infectious disease. The first wage increase won by the first trade union did not persuade workers that the bosses were all nice people after all; it made them hungry for more. Forcing the bosses to change course through, if necessary, a process of confrontation, encourages workers to demand more control in more areas of work. In this respect, the Corporate Plan differs fundamentally from schemes of worker participation. “This Combine Committee is opposed to such concepts (participation) and is not prepared to share in management of means of production”. (CP).

The author discussed some of these aspects of the plan with Mike Cooley, Chairman of the Combine Shop Stewards Committee.

He displayed that combination of hard-headed realism and astounding adventure which characterises the plan. Radical technology has descended from the trendy magazines to the shop floor and, as a consequence, has become a genuinely political force. The creative abilities of the working class are being tapped, albeit at a microscopic level. But the five volumes of the plan remain locked in the safe because there is no question of trusting the management.

The Corporate Plan is not a suggestion made by participants. It is a demand - a new field of battle for the class war.

Had the management at Lucas Aerospace been less backward and blindly hostile to the stewards’ movement, they could well have attempted to absorb through prevarication and partial acceptance. That would not have headed off the conflict. Fitters and electricians, research scientists and design engineers have devised a mechanism for articulating an alternative set of ideas to those of the company. The dispute is as old as capitalism and will last until the end of capitalism.

Nobody at Lucas Aerospace believes they are making a revolution. But they have taken a giant stride.

A crucial element has been the degree of rank and file participation in the evolution of the Corporate Plan. Workers who have been divided from one another geographically, and by barriers of different crafts and different unions, have been drawn together through the direct medium of the shop stewards. The essential strength of the Plan lies in the commitment of the rank and file to its implementation.

But the plan is no panacea. It will not solve any of the basic contradictions of capitalism. As the Plan says, “progress can only be minimal so long as our society is based on the assumption that profits come first and people come last. Thus the question is a political one”. Only time will tell whether the Lucas workers will win their struggle. But, already, their example has sparked other groups of workers to prepare their own corporate plans as alternatives to redundancy. The combination of a new range of products, selected with a view to their social utility, has been taken up by the workers at the Ernest Scragg Engineering group.
No question is more important in Britain today than that of industrial democracy. More and more people are keenly discussing the issue which quite recently was of concern only to the smallest minority. In the next year or so, it is perfectly possible that general elections will be fought in order to decide upon proposals for the democratisation of work. With the British economy stumbling from one crisis to another it is becoming plain that autocratic management is no longer adequate to solve our economic problems. Improvements in education and trade union organisation have made workers impatient of petty dictatorship in their place of employment. Something has got to change.

In the words of the miners' leader, William Straker: "In the past workmen have thought that if they could secure higher wages and better conditions they would be content .... Employers have thought that if they granted these things the workers ought to be content. Wages and conditions have been improved; but the discontent and the unrest have not disappeared, and many good people have come to the conclusion that working men are so unreasonable that it is useless trying to satisfy them. The fact is that the unrest is deeper than can be reached by merely pounds, shillings and pence, necessary as they are. The root of the matter is the straining of the spirit of man to be free.

Once he secures the freedom of the spirit he will, as a natural sequence, secure a material welfare equal to what the united brains and hand can wring from mother earth and her surrounding atmosphere..." (The worker must not be left) "... in the position of a mere wage earner, whose sole energies are directed by the will of another. He must have a share in the management of the industry in which he is engaged, and understand all about the purpose and destination of the product he is producing; he must know both the productive and the commercial side of the industry. He must feel that the industry is being run by him in order to produce coal for the use of the community, instead of profit for a few people."

As working people and their organisations have increasingly given their support to this point of view, so the authorities have had to take notice. In the Labour Party and the trade unions, the intense debate on industrial democracy came to a head during the two years before the re-election of the Labour Government in 1974. As a result of strong pressures, in 1975 Mr. Wilson appointed the Bullock Committee to look into some of the relevant problems. It is necessary to examine how far Lord Bullock's team have
understood the demand that democracy should not stop at the factory gate, and to attempt to assess how much use the Committee’s proposals might be to trade unionists in their search for more power over the work-place.

1. The Background.

After the victory of the “yes” lobby in the referendum on the Common Market, early in 1975, the Wilson administration took a sharp turn away from the course of its manifesto and the interests of its supporters. Mr Joe Haines, who was the press secretary of Sir Harold Wilson between January 1969 and April 1976, recently scandalised far more of the British establishment than the small proportion of it which still votes Labour, when he published a sensational account of the day-to-day activity of the “kitchen cabinet” which surrounded the Prime Minister. If Mr Haines is not inaccurate in his story of the origins of current pay policies, the pressures on the trade unions began with an artificial run on the pound stimulated by the Treasury, whether with or without prime ministerial approval.

At the same time, a Governmental reshuffle ditched certain ministers and removed the main advocate of industrial democracy within the Government, Tony Benn, from the Industry Department. The Industry Act which he had brought before Parliament was neutered by removing all compulsion on employees to conclude planning agreements. Demands for new worker co-operatives which had been stimulated by the experiments at Meriden, Fisher-Bendix (KME) and the Scottish Daily News, were discouraged by allowing the factory occupation at Imperial Typewriters in Hull to sink unaided and that at Norton Villiers Triumph to drag on over many months.

An important part of this dispiriting drift of affairs was the announcement by trade secretary Peter Shore in the House of Commons on August 5, 1975, of the intention to appoint a committee of enquiry “Accepting the need for a radical extension of industrial democracy in the control of companies by means of representation on boards of directors, and accepting the essential role of trade union organisations in this process, to consider how such an extension can best be achieved, taking into account in particular the proposals of the Trades Union Congress report on industrial democracy as well as experiences in Britain, the EEC and other countries, having regard to the interest of the national economy, employees, investors and consumers, to analyse the implications of such representation for the efficient management of companies and for company law.”

When the personnel of this committee were finally appointed, under the chairmanship of Lord Bullock, and announced, four months later, we wrote in the Bulletin of the Institute for Workers’ Control:

“The October 1974 Election Manifesto, upon which the present Government returned to office, contained an explicit pledge to honour the decisions previously reached in a series of Labour Party Conferences. ‘We will’, it said, ‘introduce new legislation to help forward our plans for a radical extension of industrial democracy in both the private and public sectors. This will involve major changes in company law and in the statutes which govern the nationalised industries and the public services.’

Already in February 1974, the previous Manifesto had pledged ‘We intend to socialise the nationalised industries. In consultation with the unions, we shall take steps to make the management of existing nationalised industries more responsible to the workers in the industry and more responsive to their consumers’ needs.’

This is the context in which the newly appointed Commission on Industrial Democracy had begun to work. Charged to report within a year, and seeking written evidence before March, it seems to be in a hurry, and this could be taken as an earnest that legislation is intended during the current Parliament. No doubt that impression was intended: but it would be naive to accept that it accords with the likely future.

“Commissions of Enquiry, in the given political system, can be set up wherever there are technical complexities requiring legislative treatment, or, alternatively where contentious issues need resolution. In this second case, the function of a Commission may be to resolve antagonistic interests, or to simply provide an excuse to delay. Miners, for instance, still remember the post-first-
world-war Sankey Commission with great bitterness, as Lloyd George's escape route from the nationalisation of the mines. Is Lord Bullock another Sankey? It looks very much like it. Although Jack Jones, Clive Jenkins and David Lea (the draftsman of the TUC's programme for industrial democracy) are included among his committee's members, so too is the Director-designate of the Confederation of British Industry, whose views are known to differ greatly from the TUC's. Two independents (one of whom, Bill Wedderburn) is likely to sympathise with proposals along the TUC lines, while the other, George Bain, is not yet publicly on the record) will not suffice to tilt the balance even for TUC-style majority report. So it appears that the intention behind the establishment of the Commission is either to secure a dilution of the TUC's proposals, or a confusion of Reports, which might serve as an excuse for still further delay.

Now, with the publication of the Report in January 1977, we are able to begin to evaluate the results of all these pressures.

First, it is clear that the trade union contingent on the committee have put up a strong defence of the idea of joint determination. They have advanced some technically sophisticated proposals, which, were they to be introduced tomorrow, would undoubtedly strengthen union powers. The majority report, embodying these ideas, has provoked a veritable deluge of protests from employers, and the opposition has announced its intransigent and complete rejection of it. The Government has not promised to implement. Key ministers have publicly announced willingness to "negotiate" about it.

My own view on this matter is simply explained. Workers' control is not an ultimate aim which would, for a true industrial democrat, properly be a self-managed society of producer associations, without private industrial ownership except at the level of individual initiative (self-employment). "Control" means supervision, regulation, superintendence: and "workers' control" is sensibly seen as that transitional phase which opens when workers begin to get the upper hand, and consolidate their powers of representation, accountability and veto over irresponsible management prerogatives. Workers' control could well begin to assert itself through the effective extension of collective bargaining into that complex of decision areas defined by the TUC as relevant to a union invasion of the boardroom, if this were based on strict parity of numbers, and if we were presuming block voting on all major issues with lay member control over all elected representatives.

Workers' control does not imply that worker representatives should take responsibility for management decisions, but it rigorously implies the contrary, that management be brought into conformity with workers' interests. If workers' control is established, it will tend to lead to further demands for full self-management in which work-collectives become genuinely self-governing, and professions, whether managerial or technical, are hired by the collective to work under its direction.

Study of this report will quickly reveal that "joint determination" is seen by its authors as a much more modest objective.

The Bullock Committee insists that there is no viable basis for worker participation in management boards other than that of parity. Yet the Committee has recommended that, alongside equal representation of trade union and shareholder nominees, there should be appointed to boards an intermediary group jointly agreed between the two other factions. This formula has become known as 2x + y. It signifies equal numbers of shareholders' and workers' representatives with a smaller number of
agreed intermediaries. Of course, the Committee recognises that it might not be easy to agree about the intermediary group and accordingly a provision has been made for the government to appoint a special commission, with the power to resolve all disputes which arise by making its own nominations.

The argument for parity is central to the original TUC proposals on industrial democracy which emerged through various drafts which were initially provoked in reaction against the EEC’s draft fifth directive. (Reporting on European unions’ attitude to co-determination, the Congress document *Industrial Democracy* had pointed out that the Austrian government had recently been persuaded to raise employee representation on large company boards to 50 per cent. The Bullock Committee did not visit Austria, but it did visit Scandinavia and Germany where minority employee participation on boards has been the dominant form of involvement in company structure.) The TUC document favors employee representation on British boards, recommending that “one half of the supervisory board should be appointed by the workpeople, through trade union machinery”. When the issue was debated in Congress, the motion in question, which was approved, said:

“Congress .... requires that any extension of trade union participation in industrial management shall be, and be seen to be, an extension of collective bargaining and shall in no sense compromise the unions’ role as here defined.”

Bargaining does not normally take place in conditions where intermediaries might determine the outcome. In that debate, Len Murray insisted:

“The General Council see nothing in the terms of Composite Motion 17 which is in opposition to their Report.”

Winding up the discussion on these matters, Len Murray further told Congress:

“Reference has been made to supervisory boards and co-determination in Germany .... There was a great philosopher .... who emphasised the need to stand Hegel on his feet. Well, we have stood the German conception .... on its feet.”

It is important to recall that the TUC proposals differed from the German conception in eliminating works councils, insisting on trade union appointment of all worker representatives to boards and claiming parity. This was the policy for which Congress voted, and it might be argued that its essentials should not be negotiable. Collective bargaining can enter the boardroom, imposing a significant shift in the balance of power in industry, and experimenting with “management by consent”: but this will happen only if the lines are kept clear, and the worker representatives remain strictly accountable. If it is thought that the extension of bargaining should be restricted to particular issues (closures, mergers, investment decisions, takeovers, etcetera) then it might indeed be better to preserve parity on a supervisory board with those specific powers than to yield it to a single tier structure without parity. (This, after all, is Congress policy, and Lord Bullock is not an elected member of any Congress governing body.)

The underlying reason for this policy is perfectly clear. Bargaining takes place between two sides. If trade unions are henceforth to negotiate at board level
because the procedures are to be changed in order to extend collective bargaining it is apparent that neither side must be allowed to "outvote" the other. The purpose of board-level representation of trade unionists is to impose prior consultation upon crucial matters, to change the climate of decision-taking by extending the principle of 'status quo' from the shop floor to major policy questions and to reach agreements wherever reasonably possible. All these purposes are consonant with the "extension of collective bargaining". Anything else is not. This means that "votes" will normally be either 100 per cent or 50-50: agreement, or failure to agree.

It could, of course, be argued that such a strong possibility of deadlock implies the need for appropriate mechanisms of conflict resolution. There would be no objection to these provided they had no mandatory powers. Union representatives might welcome the choice between arbitration and industrial action: however, they should not be bound to accept the ruling of any umpire. Neither should they be "pushed" by the existence of an arbitration system which could abbreviate bargaining in the employers' interest: so all recourse to such mediation should be strictly voluntary.

The Report is persuasive concerning the limitations of minority employee participation, and argues strongly for equal involvement of workers and shareholders. It cites the German experience of parity representation in coal and steel industries as being more effective than the minority representation which prevails elsewhere in German industry. The same Biedenkopf Commission which reported this reaction, however, also reported regular bloc voting by the "two sides" in coal and steel, which the Report sees as a regrettable tendency, to be reduced. We would see it as intensely regrettable if anything else were to happen in the discussion of major issues since this would imply the breakdown of representation, and the replacement of collective bargaining by something else. Of course, any joint board would have certain consultative functions in which discussion might easily cut across block lines on lesser matters. But where the work people's vital interests were at stake, we would see no virtue in worker representation which failed to defend them.

It is in this context that the "y" component must be evaluated. We can dismiss as ideological the notion that three or five outsiders can save a collective from "company egoism". Planning Agreements, already possible under the Industry Act, might offer a way to do this, but the government has shown no will to enforce its legislation on this important matter. There seems no advantage to labor in the appointment to boards of "solicitors, bankers, accountants", or "former non-executive directors" or even "senior personnel from other companies". Sadly, workpeople are not convinced that external appointments of union officers are always relevant, either. When a leader of the Boot and Shoe Union entered the National Coal Board (to say nothing of a former USDAW official) the prospects of miners were not transformed, or at any rate not transformed for the better.

The report specifically insists that the "y" group should have no obligation to be neutral. Yet, in Chapter II, it reveals that it would take a very dim view of them being biased towards the workers: "33. We considered a further problem. It arises where the boards of a holding company and of a large subsidiary company have both been reconstituted on a 2x + y basis. The board of the holding company has the power to appoint the shareholders' representatives on the subsidiary board. It might be argued that, if the law made no further provision, the board of the subsidiary might eventually come to contain a majority of directors who in practice were representatives of the employees. It is said that this could occur in the following way: if the employee representatives on the holding company board secured the agreement of the majority of the co-opted directors on that board they might ensure that one or more of the persons appointed to the board of the subsidiary as representatives of the shareholder (i.e. the holding company) would in reality represent the employees. For example, it is said that the holding company's employee representatives might persuade the co-opted directors that the holding company should appoint one of their own number to be a 'shareholder representative' on the subsidiary board. Such a person might then vote with the employee representatives on the subsidiary
board and form with them a majority to co-opt directors to the subsidiary board who were really acceptable to employees' interests only. This would produce the result that the subsidiary board contained in practice a majority of directors who were effectively representatives of employees, even though at least one of them posed as a holding company’s ‘shareholder representative’.

“34. We regard any such sequence of events as highly unlikely; and we are confident that employee representatives on a holding company board would not normally consider acting in this way or, if they did, that the co-opted directors on that board would not agree to their plan. Even so, we do not wish our proposals to be open to this criticism, however theoretical it may be. For it is no part of our intention to make recommendations which could possibly produce such a result.”

The likelihood of this “difficulty” happening would be small indeed, since, contrary to the assumptions of the Report, if both sides are loyal to their constituents, they will almost certainly need the services of the Industrial Democracy Commission to arrive at the final composition of the “y” grouping. Who might comprise the membership of such a commission? This becomes a key matter which poses a question of confidence in those appointing it. Who is likely to doubt that the present administration would feel compelled to appoint a Commission acceptable to employer/shareholders opinion? This would mean that the composition of all boards would not be 2x + y, but x (shareholders’ reps.) + y over x (workers’ reps.).

The rest of the Report’s recommendations concerning the paying-off of unwanted shareholder directors, and the time-scale implementation, insofar as this is separable from the impermissible “y” component, are unexceptionable. With the retention of the “y” element, however, the presence of redundant directors who must be compensated might well be utilised as an argument for their co-option, on grounds of economy, as the Report argues. This can hardly be regarded as desirable.

Many trade unionists, and a number of socialist Members of Parliament have strongly criticised the 2x + y formula along these lines. However, the Report contains a good deal more than this recommendation, and its overall impact has provoked a powerful reaction from the employers. It is clear that for them the whole thing is very nasty.

The Confederation of British Industry has identified three “sticking points”, all three of which must be removed, before they will cooperate. For them, there must be no legislation to put union directors on company boards; no parity between the two sides; and no trade union monopoly in the process of nomination. They have threatened to withdraw from the so-called “industrial strategy” working parties of the National Economic Development Council if their views are not met although it must be said that the collapse of these bodies would injure no one but the transnational sector leaders whose interests dominate both the forty working parties which have determined sectoral policy, and a sizeable chunk of the policies of the CBI itself. The government could certainly afford to let such industrialists amputate their own noses in order to improve their unacceptable faces: although it shows no signs whatever of wishing to do so. It is obvious from the hullabaloo which Bullock has stirred up that directors in general do not wish to declare themselves redundant, or to move over to make room in board meetings for other interests than their own, however limited the powers of those interests might be.

This reaction was echoed, with some number of added decibels, in the newspapers. The Sunday Times produced a mock minute from an imaginary directors’ meeting in 1980, showing that because two of the three “y” directors proved to have liberally weak knees, the board was totally boxed, and unable to go ahead with a South African take-over or a generous dividend handout. My own imaginary scenario would unfortunately, look very different: but then I would not follow The Times in characterising the Report as a “disaster”, gorging “the trade unions with power, like a Strasbourg goose”. In a limited acquaintance with such birds, I had formed the conclusion that power was almost the only thing that was not crammed into their throats, and that their fate was consequently such as would, if visited upon the trade unions, socialists in the Labor Party, or
other immoderate folk, be quite likely to delight the editor of The Times if only, alas, in reverie.

With such wild reactions to a set of very modest proposals, trade unionists will feel the need to draw up their own evaluation of them. Here is a possible balance sheet:

1. Favorable proposals from a trade union standpoint:
   a. The Report contains a number of careful arguments against the "divine right" of shareholders' nominees to determine industrial policy. Some of these arguments could be put to a more radical purpose than that advocated in the Report itself.
   b. The Report does recognise that industrial autocracy will no longer pass unchallenged, and that there are serious pressures for change.
   c. The Report rejects proposals for two-tier structures with a "supervisory board". There are some good things in this, some bad.
   d. Many of the specific arguments against reform, pressed by company spokesmen during the submission of evidence, are convincingly answered in the Report.
   e. Verbal concessions are made to the TUC insistence upon the extension of collective bargaining as the key principle of democratic advance.
   f. The Report does recommend proposals which could only begin to work effectively in the context of a striking advance in trade union organisation at Combine level. Currently this is opposed by management which seldom recognises combine committees as bargaining agents; and by some trade unions, which fear the concentrations of power which might arise, to the imagined detriment of executive authority. Quite clearly this is the major beneficial recommendation featured in the Report.
   g. The Report rejects demands for "consumer" representation which could only confuse the issue to the disadvantage of both workers and consumers. Consumer interests must be safeguarded by better organisation, adequate reporting, action against dishonest advertising and wider public disclosure of commercial secrets.
   h. The proposals for Joint Representation Committees to appoint employee representatives are carefully considered and sensible. They reinforce point f, above.
   i. The Report rightly insists that worker representatives should not receive directors' fees. It rightly makes certain provisions for the recall of representatives by their constituents.
   j. The Report rightly opposes exemptions for special categories of enterprises (banking, shipping, the press, etc.); or for multinationals. It rightly rules that the eligibility of holding companies for the reform should be measured against the sum of the employed labor force of all subsidiaries.
   k. The Report will arouse discussion.

2. Unfavorable proposals.
   a. The $2x + y$ formula is in itself objectionable. It virtually guarantees the hostility of a majority of board members to labor interests at key times in all cases, and always in those cases where multinationals and subsidiary companies are involved. This is blatantly the case when a subsidiary triggers the proposals while the holding company remains unaffected. The Report itself contains many arguments for parity, but it has attempted to pass over these by the use of misleading algebraic formulae.
   b. The initial requirement that companies employ 2,000 plus workers is too high. Most workers are excluded by it.
   c. The provisions for accountability are too fuzzy, and at crucial instances, harmful. Worker representatives in a parity committee should be strictly accountable at all times, and even the experiment of complete parity would be hazardous if this were not laid down with absolute sharpness from the beginning.
   d. Collective bargaining will not be possible in the established sense of the term, when hostile intermediaries are present with votes. This means that the Report opposes a specific TUC resolution -

"Congress .... requires that any extension of trade union participation in industrial management shall be, and be seen to be, an extension of collective bargaining and shall in no sense compromise the unions' role as here defined."
e. The difficulties of single-channel representation, supervisory boards, and similar questions require further consideration.

It will be seen that the list of objections is a short one, while the list of advantages is a long one. Unfortunately, the items do not weigh equally. Four out of the five objections are absolutely crucial, and require the actual gutting of Bullock's proposals before they can be brought into line with the basic commitments of the TUC.

There is a further objection to Bullock: as it stands, it is not going to be implemented. On the contrary, all its disadvantages are about to be systematically enlarged, and all its advantages reduced.

The newspaper clamor, and the taciturn noises of Lord Watkinson, joined with predictable menaces from the Conservative front bench, have persuaded several dozen Labor parliamentarians that the defence of Bullock is a worthy occupation. No doubt there is a lingering feeling in the country which will support this view, since, disappointed as they are with the government's performance in raising unemployment, cutting back on public and welfare spending, and putting aside their own election program, there exist large number of Labor supporters who have not yet learned to love the boss, or believe every last word that is printed in the press. Of course, trade unionists have every reason to fear that the government will run away from the implementation of its pledges on industrial democracy, and the observations of Mr. Edmund Dell on the Bullock Report itself reveal this process to be already far advanced. Speaking to the Society for Long-Range Planning, the Trade Secretary said:

"I think it will be widely agreed that management must not be hindered in its efforts to achieve success for the company. Companies are not social clubs ... we in the government have already made it clear that we do not wish to legislate under threat of repeal."

Does this mean that no white paper will ever appear after Bullock, or that no bill will ever follow such a white paper? I think not. All the evidence appears to indicate that industrial democracy is part-way embarked on a long downward escalator. At the top, on stable ground, stood yesterday's TUC policy, based on parity representation. A good way down, today, we see Bullock fidgeting with all the complexities of $2x + y$. Tomorrow, or more likely a little later, in the white paper, we shall be offered a British compromise with the EEC proposals, carefully damped down in order to avoid shop steward abuses of institutions designed for more stolid, tranquil and disciplined Germans. By the time everything arrives at the bottom, assuming that Mr. Callaghan's administration is still there waiting to legislate, the outcome will be one more example of that dithering equivocation which has, in the days since 1964, become the hallmark of Labor governments when pressed for serious social reform. Indeed, the talk-down escalator has been a classic piece of Wilsonism. In mutiny against Ted Heath, the TUC arrived at some radical ideas. Restored to office, Mr. Wilson bought time. The names of a Commission were listed. Four or five of them were liable to sympathise with the original proposals. One or two would be willing to compromise, given only a hint of goodwill. The rest would be hostile. The compromise agreed, one of its instigators would bale out, leaving the Committee with a verbal commitment to the key issues of parity and accountability, and the government with a vast amount of scope for subsequent dilution.

But it might be the active trade unionists who speak the last words, when all this argument winds to its conclusion.
It's been a bad month for women workers. They have been singled out and blamed for the main symptoms of the recession: unemployment and inflation.

The extreme rightwing led Clerks Union made the first attack. The March issue of the Victorian branch’s journal explains: “.... of all women in Australia with children under 12 years, 34.6 per cent were in the workforce - a total of 528,600 - more than one-and-a-half times the total unemployed. Whatever the rights and wrongs of that situation, it explains where all the jobs have gone.”

Well, we don’t expect much economic sophistication from such people nor even that they’ll look after the interests of their own members: the 67.5 per cent of all clerical workers who are women and in particular the 60 per cent of these who are married.

The second attack, though, came from a more prestigious quarter. On May 5 the Financial Review carried an article by Peter Scherer, a lecturer in industrial relations at Sydney University, that nailed the blame for the 1974 “wage explosion” on increases in female earnings due to the move towards equal pay.

Next day, the Review argued in its editorial that this increase “was a major contributing factor in the squeezing of profits and the increase in unemployment”.

The answer? Well, “if the Arbitration Commission had considered the impact of the move to equal pay on the total wages bill from an economic point of view”, the paper goes on, “it might well have considered that a reduction in male wage rates should have accompanied the move so as to leave the total wages bill unchanged.”

This bit of retrospective wishful thinking isn’t tempered with any assessment of how workers generally - both men and women - would have responded to a cut in wage rates at a time when unemployment rates were relatively low and workers were confident and militant.

Even if such a wage cut had been achieved the paper believes the move towards equal pay would still have encouraged the substitution of male for female labor, thus boosting female unemployment.

The Financial Review of course is not against equal pay: “This is a principle which ought to be defended, as the only basis for a rational labor market.”

“But it does demonstrate the kind of unfortunate effects the implementation of such a reform can have on the employment of some elements of the labor force.”

In fact, what all this demonstrates is how the Review’s version of capitalist ideology - in which the market dominates everything - obscures economic reality.

There is no single labor market in which the “substitution” the Review talks about takes place.

As Margaret Power has argued (1) the labor market is divided into different segments and the conditions under which men and women sell their labor power are very different.

Women are concentrated in industries like textiles and clothing which have historically maintained low wage levels. Women are now becoming unemployed in growing numbers precisely because these industries are being
Low wages have meant capitalists in these industries have been able to avoid new investment and have allowed plant to run down and techniques to remain backward. Capital per worker in the clothing industry, for example, is less than a fifth of the average for the whole manufacturing sector.

Capital per worker in, say, chemicals is nearly 14 times that in the clothing industry.

These industries now have to compete with imports from modern plants in low wage countries. For example, women textile workers in the Philippines get only 80 cents a day.

Blaming unemployment in these industries on the comparatively small increase in female wage rates in Australia ignores the structural crisis Australian capitalism faces - and lets off scot-free those responsible for this crisis.

The Financial Review is even prepared to see workers in inefficient industries carry more of the burden. In the interests of "less painful structural change", it believes the whole concept of a National Wage should be abandoned and wages be determined for each industry in the light of their relative prosperity.

"It would then be up to the individual workers to decide", says the paper, drunk with free-market ideology, "to stay in a job in a low-wage industry, or move, if qualified, to a job in a high-wage industry."

What more needs to be said to show the gulf that separates such ideologists from the realities workers - especially women workers - have to face?

Looking behind these ideological attacks on women workers we can discern real structural changes in the workforce that are going to have continuing ideological - and political - effects.
The proportion of women - especially of married women - in the workforce has grown dramatically over the last decade. This process has not been checked by the recession, although many women have lost their jobs and unemployment among women is much higher than for men.

In the mid-1960s about one woman in three was in the workforce; for married women the proportion was about one in four.

Now 44.5 per cent of all women are in the workforce, as are 41 per cent of married women. The comparable figure for men is 80.2 per cent.

All through this period the female workforce was growing much faster than the male workforce. Between 1971 and 1974, for example, as the graph shows, female employment grew about twice as fast as male employment. When the recession hit both male and female employment stopped increasing and started to contract.

Unemployment in both groups rose dramatically with the female rate much higher - between 1½ times and twice the male rate.

The proportion of women who gave "keeping house" as their reason for not being in the labor force has been declining as female employment grew. In 1964, for example, there were 77 per cent more women keeping house than in the labor force; by last year there were only 11 per cent more. If this trend continues by 1980 there will be more women in the labor force than keeping house.

An important feature of the current recession is that the proportion of women keeping house has continued to fall. This contrasts with the experience of the 1972 recession.

The Australian Bulletin of Labour pointed to this last year:

"One of the most interesting aspects of the present recession", the Bulletin said, "has

Unemployment Rates

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been the extent to which female employment has been maintained despite the reduction (or at least slow-down in growth) of employment generally and the moves towards equal pay for men and women.

“The are two sets of statistics which illustrate this: the monthly payroll tax based statistics and the quarterly labor force survey statistics, both from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

“While one would not like to go to the stake on the precise magnitudes involved”, the Bulletin concludes, “both sources agree that female employment increased while male employment fell.”

Part of the explanation lies in the fact that there is a greater concentration of females in the government and service sectors in which employment continued to grow during the period the Bulletin examined.

“However, even within the private sector, female employment fell by much less than male employment. Comparing November 1975 with November 1974, male employment in the private sector fell by three per cent but female employment by only two-thirds of one per cent - despite the moves for equal pay.”

We can bring this evidence up to date by looking at what happened last year. Between January 1976 and January this year, male employment in the private sector fell 0.5 per cent while male employment in the government sector fell 0.2 per cent.

Female employment in both sectors rose, however. In the private sector there was a small increase of 0.5 per cent, while in the government sector the rise was 2.9 per cent.

The Bulletin finds another explanation for why female employment has been maintained in this recession when it examines the recent dramatic increase in part-time work.

Part-time work accounted for 12 per cent of total employment in November 1972; now it’s about 15 per cent. Over this period, part-time employment increased by 27.6 per cent while full-time employment increased only 1.1 per cent.

Only about 3 per cent of males work part-time, but about 42 per cent of married women are part-time workers, as are about 19 per cent of other women.

“Hence”, the Bulletin says, “growth in part-time employment opportunities are likely to attract disproportionate increases in female workers compared with male workers.”

“Especially given the conditions attached to unemployment benefits: the alternative to part-time earnings for a married woman whose husband is working is no additional income; whereas, the alternative to part-time earnings for an unemployed male is unemployment benefits (which may not be very different from part-time earnings).

Sexist ideology, too, plays a role. Part-time work “enables married women to accommodate their (socially-approved) ‘home’ work”, the Bulletin says, while “part-time work is not particularly socially acceptable for most males.”

The Bulletin argues that the increase in part-time work is not simply due to lack of full-time jobs in the recession. “The increase in part-time workers who prefer part-time work is almost the same as the increase in the number actually employed part-time.

“This was especially true of females where the two trends were very close, but not so true of males, a greater proportion of whom were in part-time work because they could not find full-time work.”

In fact, many married women search for part-time work precisely because even when they are working outside the home they still have all the responsibility for housework and childcare.

It’s not what’s “socially acceptable” that matters, nor what women “prefer”. Working class women in Australia are caught between towering realities: their families cannot exist on one wage, but if they work outside the home they end up with two jobs, not one.

On top of this, they are blamed for unemployment and inflation. It’s a bit much!

- T. O’S, 5.5.77.

FOOTNOTE:

Seven nuclear safeguards initiatives have been defeated-in California last June, and in Montana, Arizona, Colorado, Oregon, Washington and Ohio this November (i.e. 1976-ALR).

Opposition to nuclear power exclusively, and exclusive opposition to nuclear power, has led to these defeats.

Organised and unorganised working people, minorities, the elderly, the poor, those in low population zones and crumbling urban communities—these people (along with the increasingly beleaguered middle class, which is learning) know first-hand American industry's record on health and safety. They know industry's low regard for the worth of an individual. Yet the majority is supporting industry's pitch for nuclear power. I suggest they are driven primarily by distrust of those who are opposing nuclear power. I suggest that they consider the anti-nuclear movement to be a threat to their jobs and families, that they are convinced anti-nuclear zealots would take the future into their own arrogant, elitist and moralistic hands.

If nuclear opponents want more than moral victories, they need to build locally based coalitions directed towards development of safe, affordable energy and the creation of an ecologically-attuned, full-employment economy.

It was more than three years ago that discussions about a nuclear safeguards initiative began in California. The objective was a document which could be supported by Californians with diverse views on nuclear energy and the political process. It should be noted that in 1973 the public generally was unaware of the nuclear danger issue, and that consequently it was believed that an initiative which sought a direct, simple ban of nuclear energy would not be able to attract the 200,000-plus signatures needed to place it on the state ballot. Election victory was considered a long shot—but it was hoped that once an initiative had qualified, the campaign around it would help raise the issue before Californians and the rest of the nation.

The final product, the result of several series of state-wide meetings and extensive revisions, was a complex and verbose document. But this version did receive sufficient support to qualify for the ballot in the spring of 1975.

To the surprise of Proposition 15 sponsors, nuclear power dangers began to receive more attention than had been anticipated. Events such as Nixon's decision to sell nuclear reactors to the volatile Middle East, the fire at the Brown's Ferry reactors, the shutting down of operating reactors because of real and suspected pipe cracks, and the publicised resignations of industry and regulatory personnel helped keep nuclear energy in the news. But as the campaign attracted
attention, the initiative, under attack by the nuclear industry, turned into a public relations nightmare. Many of its supporters began to realise that the very qualities which made it acceptable to a broad coalition of supporters rendered it vulnerable to industry’s claims of fraud and deception. And as the election approached, it became obvious that the jobs and energy availability issues were going to be extremely difficult ones to handle. To combat industry’s lavish propaganda about threatened job losses and “freezing and starving in the dark”, pro-initiative forces found they had to offer convincing alternatives for energy supply and employment - alternatives they simply did not have.

Following the defeat of Proposition 15, anti-nuclear pioneers John Gofman and Egan O’Connor urged initiative proponents to deal directly with what a reactor ban would mean in terms of jobs and energy. They emphasised the needs for facts and data to combat industry’s (and the US government’s) predictions of economic chaos in a non-nuclear future. They were correct, as far as they went. But “facts and data” from strangers, especially strangers portrayed as “the enemy”, don’t go very far. Necessary were trusting, working relationships with people from many spheres and diverse economic and social levels.

It was unfortunate, then, that last winter people in six states rushed out to qualify similar initiatives, even before the vote on Proposition 15. They did not allow themselves time to assess the California experience, or put together authoritative responses to the nuclear industry’s predictions of economic disaster. Nor did they give themselves time to establish a record of co-operation with a wide range of urban and rural people, with labor union locals and others. And by locking themselves into what was essentially the California model, they missed the opportunity to strengthen their initiatives by simplifying them and adding provisions for job protection and job retraining.

Concerned citizens, splinters of the labor movement, a minority of scientists, those isolated as “environmentalists”; no one of these groups can by itself provide the jobs and resources needed by this nation. The money, talent and means for safe energy and full employment will become available only after the nuclear venture is over. Similarly, the concept that citizens can provide for more and more of their own needs - including energy needs - by themselves, in their own communities, will not achieve popular acceptance until government-assisted and government-directed highly centralised fission (and fusion) nonsense is over. And efforts to ensure that new enterprises are kept sane and honest - such as keeping multinational corporations from controlling the use of solar energy and building huge, money-hungry, central stations on earth (or in space with potential for warfare), clearly will be necessary. By sharing accurate information on the high costs and disastrous consequences of a nuclear economy with
diverse groups approached as equals; by helping to encourage a groundswell for safer, cheaper energy sources which are locally controlled and efficient and provide more jobs; by assuring that no one group or class of people will bear the burden of discarding the nuclear technology; and by assisting diverse people with their economic, health and safety battles, nuclear opponents can mercifully finish off the nuclear experiment and help provide alternatives this country can afford.

Industry's divisive portrayal of anti-nuclear forces was to some extent distasteful and hypocritical. But it worked. It worked not only because industry had a lot of money to throw around, but also because many pro-initiative people believed and acted as if their issue were the most terrible, the most crucial, the most significant of this or any age, one before which people active in other realms must bow.

Such arrogance obscures the interrelationships of important social, economic and political issues. And it is certainly not conducive to coalition building among people who daily face a range of non-radioactive health threats, accompanied by fear of losing their jobs.

Many people have become politically active and environmentally aware through involvement in anti-nuclear struggles. Many of these people believe that nuclear energy is somehow a terrible aberration, that it does not fit into the American industrial tradition. These people need to look more closely at the history of government and science in service to industry. They need to look at who the nuclear industry is: the oil and chemical companies, large manufacturers of electrical generating equipment and appliances, the utilities along with interlocked politicians, science and engineering establishments, universities, federal and state agencies, banks and investment houses. Nuclear opponents need to know that these conglomerations are responsible for a terrible record of health and safety created by their use of asbestos, beryllium, coal gas, mercury, lead, pesticides, arsenic, food additives, drugs, PVCs, PBBs, PCBs, Kepone, taconite, and on and on. They are the ones who have been fighting workplace and natural environment protection, who have suppressed toxicity and disease data, and who have used environmental blackmail tactics to avoid cleaning up. They are the ones responsible for the nearly half million workers disabled yearly by occupational diseases.

Radiation is not the only substance which causes genetic damage. And neither is it the only industrial by-product difficult to prove responsible for specific ill-effects. The same "show us the bodies" arguments which industry uses to defend its record with radiation are used in many non-radioactive areas.

It is also important to be aware that industry propaganda used to defeat nuclear safeguards initiatives has been and is being used to fight air and water pollution control, coastal zone management, energy conservation, waste recycling, decreases in defense spending and the development of cheaper, more controllable industrial complexes. These arguments consist of threats of job losses, economic "dislocation", and dependence upon foreign powers. And as United Auto Workers president Leonard Woodcock has pointed out, these were the same arguments used to fight child labor laws, workman's compensation, unemployment insurance and the minimum wage. Yet few people today blame our nation's economic ills on the existence of these laws. "Data and facts", furthermore, indicate that pollution control makes economic sense, creates jobs, increases overall productivity, and saves energy, resources and lives. It is clear that those resurrected "economic chaos" arguments are no more valid today for the nuclear realm.

Anti-nuclear activists therefore need to join the efforts - on the local and national levels - to control all toxic substances and processes, not just radiation and nuclear reactors .... and not only in the natural environment but in the workplace as well. Indeed, some dangerous substances and processes will have to be banned altogether. Methods will have to be developed by which the public can review the various "danger-benefit tradeoffs" for a long list of menaces this country is being told it needs.

For all this to be possible, workable full employment guarantees which consider the kinds of jobs, their products, the processes they use, and the costs in energy, health and dollars, will have to be created. The next round on a national full employment bill will begin early in the spring. Nuclear power foes can help make sure the legislation is responsive to the above requirements; and
they can also lend considerable support to its enactment. Finally, it will be necessary to establish job training and retraining guarantees, along with relocation assistance and employee protection from employer harassment and retaliation.

The anti-nuclear movement has been built by hard-working volunteers. Admittedly, there is only so much that volunteers can do. Involvement in health, safety, employment and alternative energy issues may be attacked as diluting the resources of the movement. But without effort in these realms, anti-nuclear people will be forced to continue battling fellow citizens who may be just as terrified of nuclear power, but who have been convinced they have no other choice if they are to preserve their jobs and families.

It is dumb to allow industry to split one group off against another in such fashion. It is dumb to allow industry to spend its money to create ill-will and then sit back and watch the people knock each other off.

A lesson can be learned from the Clamshell Alliance, the coalition which is organising non-violent occupation of the Seabrook, NH, nuclear reactors construction site. The Clamshell people do not believe in a "we-
they” division of the public. They have no animosity toward the police who arrest them or the Vermont Public Service Company employees who are trying to build the reactors. All are considered neighbors, individuals who might one day be fellow-sufferers - or allies. Clamshell is working with the local fishing community and other interests, and is directly addressing the need for safe, satisfying jobs. Clamshell members are for people and for jobs; therefore, they must oppose nuclear power, which clearly provides limited jobs while offering potential for great destruction.

In a variety of realms, new working relationships are proving to be possible and formidable. The co-operation between the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union and the National Organisation for Women over the Karen Silkwood case has led to an effective coalition and a broadening of both groups. In several states, labor union locals are joining with community groups to fight utility rate increases and work toward municipal takeover of investor-owned utilities. On the national level, coalitions of labor and environmental groups helped win passage of the new Toxic Substances Control Act.

It is critical that people throughout the country trust their own intuition, their knowledge of local and regional conditions, personalities and traditions. Pressures for national legislation, along with litigation and participation in administrative hearings, are necessary. But on the local level, activists should be wary of national panaceas which do not have popular support, which do not have participation from diverse people and regions. They should be leery as well of outside advocates promoting sweeping solutions. It should be noted, for example, that strong impetus to take the California nuclear initiative model into other states came from Los Angeles and Washington DC-based groups. These groups, without consulting those who had direct experience with the California initiative campaign, set out to do major but premature selling jobs. In their zeal to qualify California-type initiatives in as many states as possible (their original goal was not just six state ballots but almost a score), they may have overwhelmed local people, leading them to rely on the “experts” who seemed so experienced, so certain. The initiative sales team came and went, leaving shaky anti-nuclear coalitions which did not have enough time, resources and experience - and perhaps confidence - to give the campaigns appropriate focus and scope. Several organizing groups needed assistance from out of state even to qualify their initiatives. This should have provided a warning that they were not prepared to undertake the difficult campaigns to come. After the defeat of Proposition 15, victories were necessary, not just a little more publicity.

In Missouri, a diverse group of people chose to use the initiative process to prohibit power plant construction costs from being included in the utility rate base (for both fossil and nuclear plants). The organisers decided to keep outsiders out. They specifically requested Californians for Nuclear Safeguards, which had been supplying some funds and assistance to the other six initiative states, to keep away. They also did not encourage Ralph Nader, who has become a symbol of national anti-nuclear passion, to come to Missouri. In short, they controlled the selection of the issue, the strategy and the campaign tactics. They won.

Industry must be prevented from dividing and conquering over the issue of nuclear power danger. Therefore, it must be prevented from dividing and conquering over other dangers people are fighting. And so today, a variety of health and economic issues must be addressed and complementary efforts launched on local and national levels for safe energy and full employment.

Failure to assemble the broad coalitions today will make it much more difficult to organise tomorrow for jobs and against recombinant DNA, laser and other sophisticated weaponry, behavior modification, complex industrial chemistry, and future solutions proposed by science and government laboring in the service of American business and industry.


Mainstream American films - particularly those that win Academy Awards - fall into the general category "entertainment." This usually means that they are long on blatant illusion, simple-mindedness and technique and short on anything that even vaguely resembles critical thought. Rocky is an interesting exception to the general rule.

If you go along expecting the uncomfortable realism of *Requiem for a Heavyweight*, you'll be disappointed. Rocky is in that great tradition of boxing films illustrated by *The Wizard of Oz* and *Singin' in the Rain*: it's a fairy tale and one that uses the fight game as the vehicle for its down-market Cinderella message.

What's interesting about *Rocky* is the limited nature of the rags to riches transformation that takes place. The hero, a mediocrity both in his Friday-night club fight career and in his job as stand-over man for your friendly neighborhood loan shark, doesn't beat the reigning world heavyweight champion. And even more interesting is his realistic assessment of what he can actually achieve in the crack at the crown which has fortuitously come his way: all he wants to do is to "go the distance".

In a previous generation, *Rocky* would have been made in rampant Horatio Alger terms. It would have portrayed the come-from-nowhere-challenger as the eventual victor, celebrating the inexhaustible opportunities of the American dream. Today, in an America battered by Vietnam, Watergate, recession and the Arabs, the goal of just going the distance marks a fascinating reappraisal of the free enterprise myth.

It is this shift that makes *Rocky* interesting. It is also well-made - the final fight scene is stunning - and is studded with first rate performances. Some clichés remain - the mousey woman who becomes beautiful when she takes her glasses off - and there is a basic unbelievability about the plot - a South Philadelphia stumble-bum as heavyweight contender is stretching things more than slightly, and in these respects, *Rocky* is a dream factory product. But the limited nature of the hero's goal, of just making a creditable show rather than beating the opposition to a pulp, must send a shiver of uncertainty up John Wayne's ramrod spine. I sincerely hope so.

Most people on the left will welcome *The Front*. Martin Ritt's treatment of the infamous Hollywood "blacklist". A product of McCarthyism, the unofficial, unadmitted "blacklist" denied film and television employment to thousands of writers, entertainers, and producers in the 50's. Many of those blacklisted went to Europe to find work, some committed suicide and some were lucky enough to be able to work through a pseudonym or a "front" - someone who would allow their name to go forward publicly, thus hiding the identity of the blacklisted person.

In *The Front*, Woody Allen plays such a public person, fronting for 3 communist scriptwriters. His personal transformation from an apolitical, look-out-for-number-one "typical" American to a politised opponent of the House Un-American Activities Committee is an interesting study, reflecting in some ways, the experience of many Americans who were not communists, who perhaps contributed to Russian relief (during the time when Russia and America were allies) or marched in May Day peace marches etc., and who were therefore regarded as untrustworthy, subversive, or whatever. This murky point is well made - that the fear of contamination represented so visibly by McCarthyism was inchoate and confused. Therefore, it was impossible to specify what kinds of behaviour or activities qualified as un-American, and therefore every citizen was suspect.

The film also displays the petty nature of the allegedly offensive behaviour without making the whole enterprise seem ludicrous. As a pronounced spasm in the long tradition of American anti-intellectualism, anti-radicalism and xenophobia, McCarthyism often seems unbelievable to non-Americans. How could intelligent and creative people, as well as the nation as a whole, get caught up in such patently insubstantial bullying and innuendo? The risks you ran if you tried to buck the witch-hunt is convincingly portrayed, and in highly competitive and commercial industries like films and television, the network of fear based on self-interest could obviously reach frightening proportions.

What is disappointing about the film is the absence of any analysis of the social forces that produced McCarthyism and the blacklist. The entertainment industry would merely appear to be in the grip of weak and/or mad and/or evil individuals who "somehow" got control of things. By concentrating on the plight of the persecuted - an unlovely aspect of the American dream which is well worth exposing - we fail to get an understanding of the origins of the persecution, of the continuing current in bourgeois democracies to repress criticism and alternatives. Without such an exploration, *The Front* may be viewed as portraying an aberration - after all, both the producer and many of the actors were blacklisted in the bad old days of the 50's, but they are obviously working again now, so everything's alright.

We may conclude that McCarthyism is something which could obviously never happen again in these enlightened times, and, of course, something which could never happen here. We would be wrong.

- Kathe Boehringer.
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