

Notes on the Labour Aristocracy in Britain; part two

"The war (First World War) and the post-war crisis dealt a further decisive blow to Britain's monopoly position. There were fewer super-profits, the crumbs which fell to share of British labour leaders began to dwindle away. Voices began to be raised more and more frequently about the reduction of the standard of living of the British working-class. The period of "peace and prosperity" was succeeded by a period of conflicts, lockouts and strikes. The British worker began to swing to the left, to resort more and more frequently to the method of direct struggle against capital."

(STALIN - 1926) (1)

The first part of this article (M.L.Q. 2.) summarised the views of Marx, Engels and Lenin on the reasons for British imperialist dominance in the period up until the first world war. These were that British industrial monopoly during most of the nineteenth century and then the huge foreign investment holdings enabled the ruling class to use the resultant super-profits to corrupt a section of the working-class. The article argued that the section so influenced - the "labour aristocracy" - was characterised by its mode of production, the fact that it was largely pre-industrial. (2). The combination of these two factors: the ability of the capitalist class to pay wages to this section well above subsistence level and the nature of the work done by the labour aristocrats, produced a mode of overall existence that can be summarised in the following way.

Firstly, wages paid to this section were approximately double those paid to the unskilled workers in the same industry. Secondly, their way of life, possessions, security of employment and political consciousness was much closer to that of middle management and the petit bourgeoisie (those owning small shops, businesses, etc.) than it was to other workers. Thirdly, the unions they formed were narrowly confined to a particular craft with severely restrictive entry qualifications.

The second and last part of this article will argue that with the decline of the international dominance of Britain, both industrial and financial, and the all-round development of mass production methods, the labour aristocracy, as an objectively existent stratum within the working class, has ceased to exist. It will also suggest why bourgeois ideology and opportunism continues to be the main enemy within the working-class movement and propose conclusions in terms of policies for the C.F.B.

THE DECLINE OF INDUSTRIAL MONOPOLY AND OF DIRECT SUPER PROFITS.

In 1870, Britain exported nearly three times as much by value per capita as her nearest industrial competitor and produced about one third of the world output of manufactured goods. But in the next forty years this position was seriously undermined by the

rapid industrialisation of western Europe and of the United States. This key period of inter-imperialist rivalry was characterised by Germany and the U.S. overhauling Britain in terms of industrial production - both produced more of the key industrial product, steel, by 1900, and by the drive to capture the colonial markets of the underdeveloped world. While Britain's exports fell sharply from 1872 to a level only to be regained in 1900, her trade deficits were largely covered by the results of financial and colonial dominance.

India, for example, whose own textile industry had been destroyed by Britain in the first quarter of the nineteenth century came to take nearly half of Britain's textile exports by the end of the century. In addition India ran an export surplus, largely by export of opium which British gunboats enforced upon countries like China and this surplus was then appropriated by the British ruling class. "Thus not only the funds for investment in India but a large part of the total investment income from overseas that gave Britain her balance of payments surplus in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, was provided by India. India was in truth the 'jewel in the imperial diadem.'" (3).

By such forms of exploitation Britain was able to compensate for her declining industrial importance. Returns from foreign investment reached a peak in the decade before the First World War reaching 9% of the national income - over a third of total profits. At the same time the share of output of manufactures, although increasing in absolute terms after 1900, shrank relatively from 32% in 1870 to 14% in 1913. (4).

Indeed as was argued in the first article British industry lagged behind other industrialised countries' technological advance over this period of unparalleled foreign investment. There is no doubt that foreign investment in this period produced immense super-profits.

It is not necessary in an article concentrating on developments of the British class structure to analyse in any detail the reasons for the general decline in British foreign investment since 1914. Certainly it must be said that such investment acted to destroy industry in the third world and that not only therefore is it, like any capitalist investment, exploitive, but in addition is non-dynamic: it fails to develop an industrial capacity which will form the base of a growing economy which in turn will raise demand for industrial products from the metropolitan countries. (see below). But in any case the decline in the return on such investment is clear. The first World War, the acute depression from 1929 through most of the 1930's, and the 1939-1945 war all acted to create the present situation where the net return of foreign investment is now only about 1% of national income. (5). This can hardly be regarded as a source of such super-profits as could bribe any appreciable section of the British working-class.

A considerably more complex and unquantifiable issue is the overall structural relationship between the imperialist countries and those of the third world. By this is meant the overall relation-

ship between imperialist industrialised countries and those whose national economies have been prevented from developing. A huge body of writing has been devoted to this subject especially in the last decade. (6). There is no doubt that prices of raw materials can be driven down by relatively few buyers in the imperialist countries, that independent development is stifled and suppressed where possible as in the recent manoeuvrings of U.S. owned companies like I.T.T. in Chile and that in general every attempt is made to monopolise the production of capital goods in the hands of the main international companies and thus act to raise the prices of such goods as against those primary products on which the third world countries rely for their investment savings. To the extent that this is effective it can be argued that the metropolitan countries benefit and therefore potentially to an extent the working-class in these countries. On the other hand the 'development of underdevelopment' as it has been called limits the ability of such countries to purchase the products of the metropolitan areas and thus this relationship limits the sales necessary to overcome the perennial problem for capitalism - that of overproduction. The only way we can observe the effects of this process on the profits of the companies operating within Britain is to observe the movements of these profits and see if some new potential for buying off sections of the working-class has presented itself.

PROFITS IN BRITAIN

Again this is a highly complex area for analysis. Glyn and Sutcliffe (op. cit. note 4) estimate that in 1870 the share of property income (profits and rents) was approximately 50% of national income. The Prices and Incomes Board (7) quoted these estimates:

1911.....	25%
1921.....	21%
1965.....	16%

(See also National Income and Expenditure 1972). (8).

We must of course be sceptical (as always) of such figures. The share of profits and their significance, changes over time for many reasons. The other main part of the equation, wages and salaries, appear inflated because of the general process of proletarianisation whereby millions who were self-employed in the nineteenth century have been forced out of business by the increasing centralisation of capital. Thus the proportion who are forced to sell their labour power has continually increased. In addition the State controls directly a larger and larger proportion of the national wealth in a way which official statistics often conceal. (9). But this general trend of the falling share of profits is clear and goes a long way to explain the ever increasing attacks of the ruling class against wage earners. There exists at present no satisfactory analysis of the real historical relationship between property incomes and wages which takes account of the qualifying factors mentioned above but there is no evidence that the capitalist class has been able to use super-profits to buy off

workers. In fact since 1914 those profits have been barely sufficient to finance necessary (for capitalists) accumulation.

THE CHANGING MODE OF PRODUCTION AND THE TREND TOWARDS AN INDUSTRIAL ENGINEERING UNION

The first part of this article argued "by the end of the nineteenth century the skilled engineer who had till that point benefitted materially from the industrial revolution without suffering the attendant division of labour, became inexorably subjected to the machine so removing the basis for the wage differential and his status on which he relied for his aristocratic position."

The official historian of the Amalgamated Engineering Union describes the period 1890-1915 as encompassing "a minor revolution in the workshop" compared with the 'relative absence of technical change between 1850 and 1890.' (10). Capstan and turret lathes were developed for mass production methods and to some extent replaced the traditional centre lathe though that itself was adapted under similar pressures. The milling machine replaced much of the work that had till then been carried out by fitters using a chisel and file. Steel became the material used for engineering products and this in turn necessitated stronger driving power for all cutting and shaping tools. A paper read to the Institute of Mechanical Engineers in 1902 stated:

"The main object of these modern methods..was that of reducing as far as possible the number of highly skilled workmen, that is the fitters."

In fact the fitters job became fragmented but the craft remained. At the same time this technological change and the increased level of capitalist expenditure in engineering needed considerable changes both in planning and in increasing productivity. New jobs were created which helped separate the skilled workers from any remaining managerial function. Works engineers, planners, rate fixers and production engineers ('factory doctors' as they were ironically called) appeared and the foremen and inspectors jobs were split.

Jefferys comments:

"The revolution in the tools of the twenties and thirties of the nineteenth century had prepared the way for the united organisation of skilled men - the A.S.E. The revolution in the methods and tools of the beginning of the twentieth century was preparing the way for a further amalgamation and development of an organisation which included all grades of workers from the fully skilled to the unskilled." (page 126).

Nevertheless in the twenty years before the First World War 90% of those entering the A.S.E. were fitters and turners: functions which still formed the backbone of the industry. Similarly in general, differentials in 1913 were fairly near the high point of forty years before with the district rate for turners standing at 35 shillings (this however marked a decrease in his standard of living of twenty years before despite record super-profits) compared

with 21s. 10d. for the average machinist. Despite this differential life was not easy for the skilled man. An E.E.F. representative in 1908 reported 'little chance' for the skilled man finding a fresh situation after fifty or even forty-five. The expectation of life for a skilled engineer was only fifty-five (and for his wife fifty!), while Pensions and National Insurance provisions passed by the 1906 Liberal Government ('Lloyd Georgeism' as Lenin referred to it) improved the relative position of the unskilled and unorganised worker for the first time.

These changes were reflected in the development of contradictions within the A.S.E. itself. In 1896 the General Secretary, John Anderson had been defeated in the election for his post. His platform was that the A.S.E. should continue as a 'non-political' union, devoted to carrying out its previous main function of paying provident and pension benefits. The next year the defeat of the union by the employers' lock-out demonstrated that other unions were not prepared to come to the aid of a union bent on defending its relatively privileged position. George Barnes who had defeated Anderson in the 1896 election had however a very narrow view of politics - bourgeois politics. So confident was he of the effectiveness of parliamentary politics that he wrote in the union journal in 1908 (he was himself a Labour M.P.):

"We shall probably find that we need not strike at all except through the ballot box,"

a view strongly opposed by Tom Mann. The slump of that year showed that the existence of Labour M.P.s did nothing to halt the rise of unemployment, which increasingly hit skilled and unskilled alike. One member writing in the journal suggested that:

"the most charitable thing that can be said about political (parliamentary) action is that it is too slow, so slow that it breaks men's hearts."

Jefferys concludes about the engineers in this period that their "worsened position" meant that they were "no longer the 'aristocracy of labour', whether measured by wage rates, working conditions or as leaders of the trade union movement..."

The growing dissatisfaction among engineering workers (as well as railwaymen and miners) with the policies and leadership of their union developed very rapidly in the course of the war. A few militants strongly influenced by Marxism realised the imperialist nature of the conflict. Many more soon learned that it was being fought at their expense.

In March 1915 the unions, guided by their chauvinism, signed the 'Treasury Agreement' under which, with the 'Munitions of War Act' of the same year, they gave up previous rights, including those regarding the manning of machines and above all the right to strike. Prices rose consistently throughout the war: food prices for example increased by nearly 300% between 1914 and 1920. Real wages fell as a result of the Agreement, from 97 to 74 (as measured by Kuczynski's wage index, 1900=100) between the beginning of the war and July 1917. (11).

The centre of the opposition which developed to these cuts in real wages and deteriorating working conditions was the shop-stewards movement among engineering workers. (There is a good overview of this movement given in Jefferys, and Pollard as well as a considerable number of more detailed studies.) This development is of the greatest importance in British working class history and it is probably true to say that no other country has produced a comparable rank and file organisation. Its spirit at that time is best illustrated by an exchange between Lloyd-George and engineering stewards at a meeting on Christmas Day 1915 in Glasgow City Hall.

"When Lloyd-George, the 'best paid Munitions worker in Britain' - he was getting nearly £100 a week - got up to speak he was greeted with booing and cheering and two verses of the 'Red Flag' were sung before he could utter a word. When he did start every other sentence was inaudible and each point was capped by another from the floor. For example when he was stressing the need for dilution he said:

'We need a very large number of guns and projectiles and I am going to put to you a business proposition' (for the exploiters). 'Do you think the men in the trenches are exploiters?' (Don't hedge) (the shipowners are doing their bit). 'Do let me state the facts..' (We know them).. 'What steps have we taken? We have started great National factories State-owned and State-controlled ... My friends these are great Socialist factories.' (Violent interruption)."

(Jefferys op.cit. p.179)

There was little confusion among these workers on the vital distinction between 'nationally' and 'socially owned industries.

The power the shop-stewards wielded on behalf of the mass of workers, and their class-consciousness was not narrow or sectional, and as Lloyd-George realised was Socialist in conception. On the Clyde, the centre of the shop-stewards movement, it was estimated that 85-90% of all engineering and shipbuilding workers were organised in unions. It was this movement which spearheaded the drive for amalgamation in 1920 which created the Amalgamated Engineering Union and later the 1926 decision to open the union to all male workers in the engineering industry. There was in addition a growing recognition of the need to conduct national and not merely local campaigns of which the best example was the achievement of the 47 hour week in 1919, a reduction of six or seven hours depending on the district. The Glasgow district struck for a 40-hour week issuing a 'Call to Arms' and was supported by the Belfast and London districts, but the Government mobilised troops armed with machine guns, the Executive of the Union suspended the three District Committees, the strike was isolated and the leaders arrested. Such a campaign could not have been led on the basis of sectional craft interests. At this time there were still two hundred unions organising skilled engineering workers with about 450,000 members, twelve unskilled unions, with 75,000 members in engineering, and the National Union of Railwaymen which had 30,000 members in railway workshops (Pollard op.cit. p.81). The shop-stewards movement organised regardless of union membership: the most convincing way of denying the

continuing validity of the old craft-union structure.

The recession which followed the war and characterised the inter-war period continued this process. The creation of the A.E.U. and its 1926 change of rule has already been referred to. By the year 1925-6 only one-third of the youths under 21 in engineering were apprentices and the National Committee reported that only 16% of fair-sized firms were taking on indentured apprentices. In the period 1920-1925 the skilled sectors I and II comprised 75% of the A.E.U. membership, but by 1935-1939 this proportion had declined to about 50%. Unemployment of the A.E.U. membership, at 25% in the peak year 1932, was above the national average and in the most depressed industries of iron and steel, and shipbuilding, reached 50% and 62% respectively.

Politically and industrially the A.E.U. increasingly played the role of a progressive working-class organisation instead of a body defending narrow craft interests. There were strong remnants of the craft tradition which are still in evidence today as I will note later in more detail. But the qualitative change had been made. In 1926 at least half the A.E.U. membership struck work before the call came from the General Council. The collaborationist Mond-Turner talks between industrialists and the T.U.C. were opposed by the union. In 1930 the A.E.U. seconded the (unsuccessful) resolution which called on the T.U.C. to declare its:

"opposition to the false cry of industrial peace and to the policy of collaboration with the enemies of labour . . . and instructs the Council to put an end to such Conferences forthwith, as they are a serious menace to the interests of the working-class movement."

The 1936 National Committee condemned the foreign policy of the Government, urged the united action of the working-class against fascism and supported the affiliation of the C.P.G.B. to the Labour Party. The Union supported the collection of aid to the Spanish Republic in the fight against Franco and the Axis powers, and during the 1939-1945 War consistently opposed the ban of the 'Daily Worker'. The policy of the A.E.U. continued to be that of building one mass engineering union. At amalgamation in 1920 the membership stood at 450,000. There was a decline in the slump, but by the end of the 1939-1945 War it had reached 900,000 (women were allowed into membership at long last in 1943). In 1970 a new amalgamation occurred, creating the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers (A.U.E.W.), including a 'white-collar' section, with a total of over 1,250,000 members.

During most of this period the reactionary and class-collaborationist trend in the trade union movement was led by the two main general unions organising the unskilled (12) - the Transport and General Workers Union under Bevin and Deakin and the General and Municipal Workers Union led by the Honourable J.R. Clynes, Lord Dukeston, Sir Tom Williamson and finally Lord Cooper. ;

It has already been suggested that the primary reason for the decline in the craft and labour aristocrat tradition was the

developing mode of production. The other feature of industrial change which has to be referred to is the changed structure of that production: the growth of new industries. This forms another factor in the general argument that the engineering industry of the mid-twentieth century, based on modern mass-production methods, was qualitatively different from the craft-based industry of nineteenth century Britain:

	<u>1907</u>	<u>1935</u>
Percentage employed in shipbuilding	25.0	7.4
Percentage employed in electrical motors and aircraft production	12.0	51.0

Armaments production leading up to the war continued this process. The newer sectors of industry developed different traditions and had few links with the earlier period. There were of course privileged sectors, notably in the toolrooms of which the 'Tool Operatives Agreement' is a classical example. (13). But it would be difficult to argue that such privileges were the results of super-profits gained as a result of imperialist dominance (see above, 'Profits in Britain').

Throughout this section I have concentrated on the main developments in the engineering industry, and especially within the A.E.U. I have done this because skilled workers in this industry were by far the most important sector which developed from craft-consciousness towards class-consciousness. As I shall argue, this process is far from being completed and indeed only active and successful communist work in the working class movement can accomplish this. But objective industrial developments changed the face of this crucial industry and certain spontaneous developments in class-consciousness followed. Certainly in the 1920s and 1930s, and to some extent thereafter active militants in the C.P.G.B. played an important role and it is significant how many of their early leaders came from among engineering workers. (14). The failure of this work to develop a mass base and a correct political direction is a most important issue for communists today, but it is wilful dogmatism to argue that this was because of the class background of those involved. Any real scientific approach must be based on a recognition that it was a failure which characterised the work of parties now revisionist in most countries in the world, ranging from the metropolitan nations to those in the Third World. To postulate the labour aristocracy as the prime and continuing reason, regardless of stages of historical development, nations or political structures is to turn Marxist analysis into the simple repetition of a religious catechism.

WAGE DIFFERENTIALS

What remains in these 'Notes' is to show the change in the income structure of the working-class which confirms the arguments advanced already. Again the main change in differentials took place around the period of the 1914-1918 war. Between 191- and

1906- there was a 75% increase in the cost of living. Wages for contracting electricians and building workers rose by a similar amount. But for fitters and electricians in engineering they rose only by 45% and for shipbuilding joiners, shipwrights and electricians in shipbuilding only 18%. (15).

The Prices and Incomes Board in their report, already cited (see note 7) show a similar trend over a longer period as the following extract demonstrates:

Table 1. Unskilled workers time rates as a percentage of skilled time-rates. (16).

<u>Industries</u>	<u>1914</u>	<u>1920</u>	<u>1950</u>	<u>1970</u>
Building	66.5	81.0	84.1	85.5
Shipbuilding	55.2	77.2	81.7	79.5
Engineering	58.6	78.9	85.2	79.5
Railways	54.3	81.2	78.0	68.7

One other set of wage relationships is also worth citing, because it includes a further important phenomenon - the decline of white-collar differentials, which contracted particularly during the recovery from the slump and during the course of the 1939-1945 war.

Table 2. Weekly earnings in manufacturing, indices added in brackets, 1938=100.(17).

	<u>1924</u>	<u>1938</u>	<u>1971</u>
(a) Males over 21 (includes overtime).	2.65(75)	3.55(100)	29.80(838)
(b) Skilled fitters, over 21 (includes overtime).	3.67(66)	5.55*(100)	32.40(584)
(c) D.A.T.A. members over 30 (basic earnings, i.e. excludes overtime).	5.25(94)	5.60(100)	33.60(597)

*1939 only available

These figures do show that the major variations in wages are not determined any longer by the skilled status of a certain stratum as was the case in general before the 1914-1918 war. It is certainly true that the same range of earnings is apparent now as in 1906.

Table 3. Dispersion of average weekly earnings of full time male manual workers, all industries covered by surveys. (18).

Deciles and Quartiles as a percentage of the median*

	<u>Lowest decile</u>	<u>Lower quartile</u>	<u>Median</u>	<u>Upper quartile</u>	<u>Highest decile</u>
1906	66.5	79.5	100	126.7	156.8
1970	67.3	81.1	100	122.3	147.2

*(note: when a range of figures are put in order of magnitude, the lowest decile is one-tenth of the way from the bottom figure, the lower quartile one-quarter of the way, the median is the middle figure, the upper quartile three-quarters of the way up, and the highest decile nine-tenths of the way from the bottom figure (one-tenth of the way from the top figure). Thus in 1970 for every 67.3p. the worker on the lowest decile point earned, the worker on the middle earned 100p. and the highest decile worker earned 147.2p.).

Even with the higher relative incidence of taxation now levied on the better-paid workers the range of earnings is still considerable.

But to confirm that it is not the craft or skill that determines wage levels now it is necessary to refer to the following results of the New Earnings Survey of 1970. (19).

Table 4. Dispersion of Earnings, unskilled workers by industry, £'s.

	Lowest decile	Median	Highest decile
Metal manufacture	17.10	26.60	38.20
Mechanical engineering	16.30	22.40	34.80
Vehicles	19.00	27.00	36.90
Textiles	13.20	18.90	28.00
Construction	16.70	22.30	33.00

The range of earnings for unskilled workers is therefore much the same as the overall range for all manual workers (see Table 3).

A considerable proportion of unskilled workers in metal manufacturing and vehicle production in fact earn nearly three times as much as those in textiles (i.e. ten per cent earning above £38.20 and £36.90 respectively, compared with ten per cent earning below £13.20). And within each industry the top 10% of unskilled are earning around twice as much as the bottom 10%.

The same table in the New Earnings Survey shows a similar range within the categories of the skilled, the foremen, clerks, draughtsmen etc. An analysis of these figures, combined with other wage information now available, indicates that these variations can at one level be explained by locating such factors as the type of industry, the size of the plant, the level of trade union organisation, the capital intensity of the plant, the amount of overtime worked etc. But this would be merely to engage in empirical description. This article is not intended to be a general exercise in wage theory except insofar as it relates directly to the question of the 'Labour Aristocracy'. However it may be useful to make a general observation for comrades to test from their own experience. This is that the central factor which narrows the range of earnings for all workers from unskilled to 'white-collar' is the plant in which they work. This seems to me to be worth pursuing in future and in so doing seeing if the relative level of earnings plant by plant is most closely related

to the ratio of capital invested per worker: the organic composition of capital. (20). In any case craft restrictions seem to play very little part in the determination of wage-levels.

BOURGEOIS IDEOLOGY AND THE WORKING CLASS

Reference has already been made to Engels optimism about the development of Socialism in Britain in 1892, and Stalin's in 1926. (21). The failure of the General Strike and the fact that the revolutionary mood of the years immediately after the Russian Revolution ebbed away, left the communist movement in the West in confusion. The "third period" and then the "United Front" policies of the 1930s and after (see for example M.F.'s article in MLQ 2) were signs of the lack of consistent strategy to deal with the changed situation. Neither the slump of the inter-war period, nor the relatively steady post-war growth and high levels of employment in the metropolitan countries were developments which objectively favoured revolution in those countries. Only since the mid-1960s has Marx's "spectre" of Communism began to re-assert itself. Of course such a "spectre" does not develop spontaneously: it requires the conscious and collective work of a genuine Marxist-Leninist organisation.

I have argued that this lack of development cannot, in the last fifty years, be laid at the door of a disappearing labour aristocracy. Some alternative explanation is therefore called for. What follows are only some brief suggestions as to the outline of such an explanation.

Firstly, we are still undeniably in the epoch of Imperialism. On a world scale this means that the principal contradiction is between the imperialist countries and those peoples and nations fighting imperialist domination. Both the effect of imperialist oppression on these 'underdeveloped' countries and the increasingly successful struggles against it, make the remittance of super-profits more and more difficult. Within each imperialist country the main contradiction is between the ruling class and a working-class increasingly augmented by middle strata becoming progressively proletarianised as the mode of production becomes more technologically advanced. The development of state monopoly capitalism has served temporarily to obscure the system's essentially moribund and decaying final stage. In order for this process to succeed, even temporarily, the leadership of the trade unions, and if possible the whole organisation, have to be progressively incorporated into the state. It is no longer sufficient or even possible to bribe certain strata. The majority of the class has to be ideologically disarmed or physically coerced. While the essential class-contradiction between those who own and those who operate the means of production make any permanent incorporation impossible, the history of this century has demonstrated that this is possible to achieve for a time. In this the fight between revolutionary, and reformist and revisionist ideology, is crucial. While reformism had an objective economic basis during the period of the ascendancy of capitalism this basis has been progressively eroded. But experience and Marxist philosophy also shows that there is no mechanical and immediate relationship between the decay of an

economic base and the superstructure of bourgeois ideology. More concretely the negative experience of the overthrow of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the Soviet Union and most of Eastern Europe, and the positive experience of the successful Cultural Revolution in China shows that this battle between the two lines has to be continued not only under decaying capitalism, but all through the period of socialist construction.

Thus, despite the fact that there is not an economic basis for it, a certain craft narrowness still exists among some skilled workers. An illustration of this is the composition of the Executive of the Engineering section of the A.U.E.W. (the old A.E.U.). Of the nine executive councilmen (including the President and General Secretary) all apparently come from a time-served skilled apprentice background. In general the same applies among district officials and National Committee members. Although the union has been open to all male engineering workers since 1926, the T&G.W.U. and the G.&M.W.U. have continued to be able to organise a large proportion of unskilled, and more important, semi-skilled workers, throughout the industry.

Nevertheless unions of skilled workers have shown themselves more willing to oppose state policies of incorporation. Reference has been made to the A.E.U. and the Mond-Turner talks. More recently under the 1964-1970 Labour governments the early opposition to an incomes policy was led by white-collar unions like D.A.T.A. and the A.C.T.T., representing relatively well-paid workers. Opposition to the 1971 Industrial Relations Act was in union terms led by the A.U.E.W. To a considerable extent therefore the position has been reversed since 1892. At that time the emergent unskilled unions were the important factor in the developing potential of the Socialist movement. Since then the decline in relative earnings, social status and hopes of 'advancement' of skilled workers seems to have been the major factor in making this sector the leading force in working-class opposition to capitalist attacks.

It should be made clear that I am referring to relative movements of consciousness within a reformist tradition. No sectors of the working-class (or any other strata) have developed into a revolutionary movement, and there is as yet no Marxist-Leninist force with sufficient experience and understanding to give the necessary powerful lead. A revolutionary programme for trade union work will only emerge as Marxists develop not only their theoretical understanding of the history and class-contradictions of the working-class movement, but also their involvement in mass struggles of all kinds. But there are certain components which must form an essential part of such a programme.

Firstly there are no important contradictions existing between white-collar, skilled and unskilled workers. The economic changes of the last seventy years or so have seen to that. The majority of productive workers are now organised, and the weakest area - white collar workers* in private industry - is one where unions are now growing faster than ever before. Even more important is the unionisation of women workers.

In developing unions, all barriers between trades and crafts must be broken down. The policy decided by the First Congress of "Red Trade Unions" in 1921 - "to encourage organisation by industry as against old-fashioned unionism of organisation by craft" - is correct. Industrial unionism, organising workers on the basis of where they work rather than their particular function, must be our constant aim. Thus policies of 'horizontal' trade unionism (organising technicians, foremen and supervisors in whatever industry they work) is reactionary. The policies of such a union, Clive Jenkins's A.S.T.M.S. increasingly reflects not only its social base but also its stratified concept of building a union. Thus one premise of unions must be established - 'industrial unionism'.

Secondly our policies within such unions must be where possible to mobilise for national combined action to develop from local guerilla action. Even in such economic struggles the lessons of common interest of workers wherever they work is a vital one. Similarly where national actions, on better wages or conditions or against State repressive policies, can be developed on a much wider basis than any one industry, it will mark a further stage of development of common struggle. This is especially so in a period when any such struggle puts dangerous pressures on the very existence of employers' profits and therefore has a strong political potential.

Thirdly the recognition must be widened that although such struggles deepen the employers' and Government's economic and political crisis, the politics engendered are not themselves revolutionary politics. The fight against economism is still the most vital one for those in trade unions. A conscious socialist working class will only be able to recognise the need for scientific socialism when involved in action that is wider than that of trade unions. Lenin's statement in 'What is to be done?' is most important:

"The Social Democrats ideal should not be the trade union secretary but the tribune of the people, who is able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression no matter where it appears."

Fourthly one prime "manifestation of tyranny and oppression" arising from British imperialism is the existence of racialism. The strong tendency in many industries for West Indian and Asian workers to be given the worst jobs at the lowest pay is particularly difficult to fight in a period of high unemployment. Nevertheless all communists must stand firmly against such practice, whatever short-term unpopularity it causes.

Fifthly and allied to the previous point Britain has a tradition of chauvinism and narrow national pride which affects all classes and strata. In a period of multi-national production by international companies, close links must be forged with workers in other countries. These can be most immediately achieved for our part with workers in Europe. Only a tiny minority of plant organisations have these links (Fords, Dunlop-Pirelli and a very few more) and international trade union organisation at rank and file level would be a considerable

step forward.

These are policies which will enable wider forms of action to develop which will help to overcome many of the traditional weaknesses and faults of the British working-class movement. They are not such as would limit involvement to those with a revolutionary perspective. But in different ways they have the potentiality of countering much that formed the labour aristocrat tradition. The need however exists for a consistent and all-round trade-union programme to counter the whole ruling class attack and destroy the influence of reformism. The C.F.B. has a duty to help in the formulation of such a programme. The objective trend towards a less differentiated working class, the end of the labour aristocrat stratum and proletarianisation of many white-collar workers all make the situation very favourable for such a programme. It will also be a key task in the formation of a Marxist-Leninist party.

S.M.

NOTES

1. STALIN: C.W. 8. 165.
2. See M.L.Q. 2. p. 25-26 and notes
3. A.J.P. Taylor quoted in Hobsbawn "INDUSTRY AND EMPIRE".
4. Shares of World Output of Manufactured Goods - percentages.

	United States	Germany	U.K.	France	U.S.S.R.	Japan
1870	23	13	32	10	4	-
1913	36	16	14	6	5	1
1953	41	6	6	3	14	2
1963	28	6	4	2	20	4

(from Glyn and Sutcliffe "British Capitalism, Workers and The Profits Squeeze" Penguin 1972)

5. Share of income from abroad (gross) in British Gross National Product.* (in percentage terms).

1863-73	1894-1900	1910-14	1919-21	1946-50	1969-70
4.0	6.2	8.6	4.3	3.7(1.7net)	3.7(1.3net)

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* Gross national product is the amount of wealth produced each year.

** Net figures are quoted where available as the most relevant for this subject. They represent the income remaining in Britain when other countries profits from investment in this country have been repatriated. Before the First World War there was very little foreign investment in Britain so there would be very little difference between gross and net figures.

It should also be noted that since the 1920's and especially since the mid-1950's foreign investment from Britain and other capitalist countries has increasingly been directed to the growth areas within the metropolitan countries where the international companies can make higher profits. (See for example Barrat Brown op.cit. table 2).

6. See for example: H. Magdoff. . .The Age of Imperialism, Monthly Review Press 1969. P. Jales. . .The Pillage of the Third World, 1968. A. Frank. . .Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America, Monthly Review Press 1967. A. Emmanuel. . ."Unequal Exchange" N.L.B., 1972.
7. P.I.B. Report No.169 General Problems of Low Pay p.158-159.
8. National Income and Expenditure.....1972 (H.M.S.O.) Table One.
9. See for example "Struggle" December 1971.
"In 1970 about £42,000 million worth of wealth was produced. Of this £23,000 million was spent by the State. (This compares with spending only one sixteenth in 1860 and one eighth in the 1930's).
10. 'The Story of the Engineers' by James Jefferys. (L. & W. 1945)
The strength of this study compared with most official histories of unions is the way in which it relates technological change to the developing consciousness of engineering workers and the structure of the A.S.E., later the A.E.U. Jeffery's, a member of the C.P.G.B. at the time he wrote this book, is conscious of the contradictions within the working-class although to an extent limited by the official nature of his commission. This section of the article relies heavily on Jefferys' study and unless otherwise stated, all references are to this book.
11. Sidney Pollard, "The Development of the British Economy 1914-1950", (Edward Arnold, 1962) pp.76-87.
12. See for example "Labouring Men", Eric Hobsbawm Ch.16.
The reasons for these unions developing leaderships which formed the basis of the far right in the Labour Party for over forty years (longer of course for the G.M.W.U.) must be the subject of other articles. Reference is made to their policies to counter the assertion or inference sometimes made that unskilled workers are necessarily more progressive and open to revolutionary ideas than other workers.

One important comment was made by J.R. Campbell in May 1924 in "Communist Review":

"If we examine the unions approximating the industrial form, the N.U.R., the T.G.W.U. and the I.S.T.C. (Iron and Steel Trades Confederation) we find that while they are approaching the industrial structure they are far from adopting the outlook which alone makes better organisation valuable and without which larger organisation only leads to bureaucracy and stagnation. . . . Active men must beware of propagating amalgamation (of unions S.M.) in a mechanical fashion without

reference to the need for a most vigorous struggle and without reference to the need for trade unionists to hew their way out of capitalism."

None of this of course is to say that unskilled workers have any less revolutionary potential than other workers.

13. The agreement signed in 1940 guaranteed toolroom workers earnings not less than those of skilled piece-workers. It was only brought out by employers in Coventry in 1972 after a long stoppage.
14. Willie Gallacher, Harry Pollitt, J.T. Murphy, Tom Mann and Wal Hannington are obvious examples. I am unsure from what industries other working-class militants came, such as MacManus, Bell and Paul.
15. "Story of the Electrical Trades Union" (1952) published by the E.T.U. This book as its name suggests is not a serious history of the union. But it does show similar trends to those followed by the A.E.U.
16. Without a much closer analysis these can only be taken as showing a general trend (the same applies for Table 2). Two points, however, should be made. Rates as opposed to earnings, especially in a period of relatively low unemployment, underestimate to some extent the wages of those who can push up earnings through securing different forms of bonus payments and of course by those working overtime. Certain advantages are evident here for skilled workers especially for those skills in short supply. Secondly and allied to this point is the observable increased differential between 1950 and 1970. I am not sure about the reasons for this, except that certainly in engineering it again relates to some extent to shortage of certain skilled categories. However even this does not appear to fit the 'labour aristocrat' argument. In the 19th. century this stratum certainly imposed severe limitations on entry to their crafts where privileges were so marked. By that means, accepted by many employers (see Part 1 of this article) they could impose a Monopoly over the purchase of their skilled labour-power and thus raise its price above its value. But once those specific limitations on entry are removed and technical change makes it possible to substitute unskilled (or semi-skilled) labour they cannot at all easily be re-imposed by any section of workers. It seems much more likely that the increase in differentials where they occurred were the results of the particular need for skilled labour over a relatively short period of time in order to keep production going, e.g. re-tooling for a new production line, at a time of growth in demand for goods. This shortage of skilled labour was caused exactly by the previous decline in differentials. Skilled labour takes more time to produce and where its production does not seem worthwhile to workers, i.e. the time spent at low apprentice wages, evening classes etc., compared with the relatively increased price obtainable for selling unskilled labour power, it will not be forthcoming. For we must

remember that skilled labour does produce more value, that while labour power is a commodity, skilled labour-power will in general command a higher price, but that that price will be varying around its real value. See for example "Wage Labour and Capital" and "Wages, Price and Profit", which also deal with the impact of advanced machinery on skilled labour. Also e.g. Capital Vol.I Part III, 'Production of Surplus Value':

"The higher more complex labour which counts as worth more than average social labour is the manifestation of labour power in which higher costs of training have been incorporated, of labour power whose production has cost more labour time. That is why it has a higher value than simple labour power."

(p.192, Everyman edition)

The fact that Marx devoted little time to this problem was precisely because he was concerned with overall relationships between Labour and Capital, and realised better than anyone that value produced by individuals or strata within the working class could not be precisely measured, and that any variation in value could be observed, not at any one particular time, but only historically, over a considerable period.

17. The same qualification on important details apply as in the above note.
 - (a) From 'British Labour Statistics', Dept. of Employment 1971. Until 1938 for engineering only. 1938 onwards, all manufacturing industries.
 - (b) Excluding toolroom and maintenance fitters. From the Engineering Employers Federation until 1964, D. of E. thereafter.
 - (c) D.A.T.A. (now A.U.E.W. (TASS)) averages. Figures predominantly of draughtsmen, estimators and planners for 1924 and 1938. 1971 includes larger numbers of other engineering technicians, because of change of membership composition.
18. P.I.B. Report op.cit. Table 1.
19. New Earnings Survey 1970 (H.M.S.O.) Table 36. The figures quoted all refer to the general category, 'Unskilled building or engineering workers', except for 'Textiles' where the nearest comparable category: 'Unskilled textile clothing or foot-wear worker', is used.
20. This in turn would of course relate to the intensity of labour i.e. speed of work, mental and physical pressure on workers etc. For example even at a time of high unemployment the turn-over of labour at car factories among production-line workers appears to be very high despite the relatively high wages offered, e.g. Fords at Dagenham; Chrysler at Ryton Coventry etc.
21. See also the Comintern resolution on the 1926 General Strike, e.g. "The economic basis of reformism in Great Britain has disappeared for ever...The British bourgeoisie more than the bourgeoisie of any other country maintained its power by bribing the masses (excess profits) and deceiving them ("glorious traditions of the British Constitution!"). The possibility to bribe no longer exists."

