

THE BULLETIN

FOR SOCIALIST SELF-MANAGEMENT

NEW FORMS

OF

STRUGGLE

IN BRITAIN

THE BULLETIN FOR SOCIALIST SELF-MANAGEMENT
BMS Publications, 16a Holmdale Road, London NW6 1BS.
August 1972 Special issue.

CONTENTS.

1. Self-Management and Conditions for a Revolutionary Crisis in Britain.
By John Diagg
2. Postscript: The Dockers and the Law
3. Workers' Councils and Self-Management.
By Michel Pablo

This is a special issue of the The Bulletin. Normally each issue will contain more short items of news of events from home and abroad, along with commentary on current events. As from September 1st The Bulletin will appear twice per month, on the 1st of each month and mid-month.

Subscription for The Bulletin is 30p for six issues, 60p for twelve issues. Bulk rates on application.

SELF-MANAGEMENT AND THE CONDITIONS FOR A REVOLUTIONARY CRISIS IN BRITAIN

There is no doubt that the last year or so has been a turning - point for the workers' movement in this country, a turning-point which has been awaited for perhaps a very long time but was always on the cards. You can look at the events of the period in two ways. You can chart them carefully and in detail, set down 'all the facts' about the new techniques of work in, occupation and mass picket, note the escalation in numbers of events and participants; this is all necessary work, and in buckling down to the task, papers like Red Mole and Socialist Worker have demonstrated their commendable awareness of the existence of such struggles, without being so bold as to go beyond the quantitative aspects of this unshaped mass of militant activity. On the other hand, you can note that these events contain some of the classic ingredients of revolutionary activity - the mass defiance of authority, the willingness to seize and run the ideologically sacred industrial property of the bourgeoisie - and you can deduce, correctly, that these are at the same time the elements of a struggle for self-management; however, if you do this by some magical yardstick, such as (from the future) your own blueprint for a society self-managed by its producers, and if at the same time you make a frontal, unconditional attack on the very existence of parties and unions (as if your fixing them with a cold stare would make such bulky objects go away), then in giving a shape to the undifferentiated mass of the first approach you have also twisted the matter out of shape, ignoring the present relationships in the struggle and thus making you incapable of recognizing the revolutionary way forward. This article will avoid both approaches. It is a summary - not a 'factual' summary but, deliberately, an 'eclectic' one, where the details will be chosen for their bearing on the following premise: that the past year has opened up a revolutionary perspective for our society by raising the issue of self-management - self-management, not in the sense of isolated seizure of this or that factory, but as a social, political and economic issue affecting the whole of our society; and that the base of this opening-up of a revolutionary perspective is the qualitative change within the working-class movement itself.

Some of the origins of this change are nevertheless external to the class, involving both the student movement and the crisis in British imperialism. In 1965 the word 'sit-in' arrived in Britain together with a new Director for the London School of Economics who had previously headed University College, Rhodesia. His history of collaboration with the racist regime led the students, under the leadership of a white South African, to use 'direct action' to try and block his appointment. This quite new, violent tone of British student politics remained frustrated and isolated within the universities, but within this isolation it was able, to some extent, to develop: thus in 1968, coinciding with the French May, the three - month sit-in at Hornsey Art College was a real exercise in self-management - administration and unsympathetic teaching staff were locked out, and the courses were completely recreated by the students and oriented towards social needs. These and other events have kept 'sit-ins', 'direct action' etc. in the media's vocabulary for several years, with startling results. The media's twisted presentation of the content of student struggles engendered enough hostility in the masses to enable organs of liberal bourgeois 'sociology' such as The Guardian (which, as eve ybody knows, is reformist, but at least it's readable, isn't it?) to preach the innate conservatism of the British worker and the impossibility of a British revolution, with the result that the 90% of the student and intellectual left who read papers like The Guardian were brought face to face with their own subjectivism, and the 100,000 Vietnam demonstrators of 1968 evaporated into thin air; the hostility of the masses, however, which was rather too eagerly assumed in the first place, turned out to be nothing compared with their understanding of the form of the sit-in and direct action as examples of battle technique - the examples were constantly before their eyes, and reinforced from the outside their growing need and willingness to use such techniques. And so, indirectly, the Rhodesian events had begun to move the worker, not only by the students' example but more basically

through the crisis in British imperialism, which helped to produce both direct action at L.S.E. and the shortening of the economic tether at the end of which the working class had been allowed to graze so peacefully and for so long. There are other examples. Bourgeois ideology, through the media, has for most people established that the root of the 'troubles' in Ireland is a combination of whiskey and insatiable religious bigotry; yet not even the media were able to raise a whisper of 'mass outrage' at the attempt to use the same technique and blow the Minister of Productivity and his holy family to bits not ten miles away from Broadcasting House - and this in a country with such a 'humane political tradition' (i.e. class peace)! Again, the peculiarly subtle flavours of liberal bourgeois racist ideology, quite apart from the pantomime Bad Baron Powell, obviously reproduce themselves in the false consciousness of the masses (though this also must not be too eagerly assumed in its entirety); yet, as in the U.S., blacks in court on implicitly political charges have politicized their trials and white juries have (more or less) acquitted them where the basic procedures of the court have been questioned. Under the Industrial Relations Act shop stewards may well have to learn from their example. The very term 'Black Power' has, with the assistance of the media, penetrated most sections of the community and been transformed into 'Worker's Power', 'Pupil Power', and even in the more heavily compromised sections as 'Community Power', for example in the defence of the Buckinghamshire lawn-mowers and golf-courses against the third London airport. In all these instances it is not workers' subjective attitudes to events beyond their experience that have changed, (although it may well be that even in this area the intellectual left, predicting a rule of the saints, has exaggerated the 'profanity' of the workers' acceptance of bourgeois ideology in order to gain even more credit for "saving" them in the end); it is the objective results of these events that have entered the working-class 'from the outside' (as it appears) and provided weapons to intensify the struggle (taking the intellectual left down a peg in the process).

These external factors have merged with an ongoing process of qualitative change within the movement itself, often with deep historical roots, but which has only just begun to show itself as a change. Look at the workers' increasing confrontations with authority. In part, the bourgeoisie obviously has only itself to blame for this, having reached the stage (a common phenomenon of the senility of a class) of swallowing its own lies, it apparently believed that in secret ballot the workers really would turn against militants and agitators (the 'pushers' of the industrial world) and show a sense of 'responsibility' towards the national economy'. If the latter was always unlikely, there are other, deeper contradictions revealed. First, it is one thing to challenge the legality of strikes in a comprehensive and overt manner; but this is not the era of Peterloo and the Combination Acts, and it is another thing entirely to challenge their legality on the shifting and dangerous grounds of modern methods of production, since they must now (as in the case of the railwaymen's work-to rule) necessarily challenge also the right to have a holiday on Sunday or to stay in bed in the middle of the night. Second, shortening the workers' tether correspondingly means that the bourgeoisie itself also reduces its own traditional 'room for manoeuvre' - the two things are inevitably linked (the classic bourgeois mistake has been made of pretending to speak for the whole nation and forgetting that it is only one class, which has to allow for the existence of other classes); and so, when the response from the base is really threatening, as it was when the three stewards in the London docks were on the point of going to jail, dangerously makeshift and unconvincing methods have to be resorted to, such as the 'Official Solicitor', in order to temporarily re-establish the 'humane tradition', which is thus revealed as what the bourgeoisie has always insisted it was; namely an essential part of our (their) existence. Third, the workers' challenge to the law on picketing shows how the vagueness of the law is two-edged: it may be used to slap political charges on people when there is little overt political repression in law, but on the other hand, look at what happened at the Saltley coke depot during the miners' strike. 750 police confront roughly the same number of pickets - an officer gets his leg broken. The next day, eleven thousand pickets arrive at the same spot, and the police have a big decision to make: whether to operate the law (which as it stands means anything the government and the police wish it to mean) and grapple with eleven thousand people, or whether to ignore it.

In choosing, perhaps wisely, to ignore it, they admitted that the legal vagueness which they have always utilized against 'political' activity is a handicap when it confronts the power of the working class on the streets. More deeply, they are brought face to face with the dangerously unsound constitutional basis of a bourgeoisie which was never forced to carry out its own bourgeois revolution or create a whole fresh set of laws.

As far as the factory occupation movement is concerned, the act of occupation itself is of course a challenge to authority; apart from this, the development of this movement from U.C.S. onwards has shown that workers are increasingly conscious of what must be done, regardless of the law. After the respectability of the U.C.S. experience, controlled by the reformist C.P. in pursuit of 'perfectly legal' aims (e.g. a voice in a left Labour parliament, a seat - Jimmy Reid? - in the House), came the Plessey Alexandria occupation, in which the workers physically prevented the plant from being moved out of the factory and themselves chose, at the factory gates, which members of management they wanted inside (with strict promises not to touch the machinery) and whom they wanted to stay out. During the mass demonstrations in Scotland in support of the U.C.S. workers, it was the Plessey workers who, much to the anger of the U.C.S. stewards, used tactics which involved confrontation with the police. As a step forward from this, the January occupation of the Fisher-Bendix factory near Liverpool involved forcing the bosses and management out of their offices on the spot; steel barricades and hoses were installed as a defence against possible police invasion; raids were led on a company warehouse outside, to prevent certain Fisher-Bendix goods from being produced elsewhere. At Fakenham, Norfolk, the women shoe-workers had to find the machinery (which management had moved in anticipation) and get it back into the factory before they could carry on producing by themselves. In all these instances it has been jobs that have been at stake, and violations of the law may be put down to this 'special' reason; however, the occupations in the engineering industry, which have been in support of less 'special' claims over hours and wages, have not lagged behind in this respect. Managements have been locked out, or at least had their phones cut off. In some places where the local S.S. has refused to pay occupiers unemployment benefit, a simultaneous visit by the entire workforce has been enough to persuade the department's manager to reinterpret the rules instantaneously. To an extent, the violent elements of the engineers' fight were created unwittingly by no less a person than Hugh Scanlon, who, at the same time as breaking off national negotiations on the claim and ordering it to be fought factory by factory, told local shop stewards to avoid the strike weapon as this would be 'unconstitutional' under the Industrial Relations Act (in other words, he wanted to shield himself from the dreadful fate which later befell Jack Jones in the docks dispute, of getting trapped between his left-wing image - membership of the Institute for Workers' Control - and his 'corporatist' practice); since an overtime ban was out of the question in an area and an industry of high unemployment, occupation was the only weapon left. You could point out that these examples of violence are small (in the miners', dockers' disputes etc. as well as in the occupation movement), in comparison with the intensity of the struggles in France or Spain or Italy, where several deaths have occurred, but this is not the point (you don't prove anything by counting corpses, especially if they are your side's), and neither does violence by itself have any revolutionary tendency. The point is that the (relative) class peace and political calm which have dominated our society for decades have concealed a bitterness and class hatred that run permanently right through British culture and society; any rupture in the calm facade reveals the potentialities of that hatred.

The practical function of violence, and its significance for the concept of self-management, lie in its usefulness in overcoming the isolation and lack of political strength of the working class. The 'calm facade' has always depended on the bourgeoisie's room for manoeuvre; but since the vicious circle of lack of economic growth, loss of protected markets and the inability to compete on the open market, has been entered, the bourgeois system is only viable by imposing restrictions on whatever liberties the workers once had: but these restrictions must be imposed on a proletariat whose consolidated defensive strength and experience are beyond question. The measures of real control which it has gained over the years are considerable. The shops' stewards' movement, as delegates of

the base., responsible only (according to Lord Denning) to the base, is unique : it is not, as in other parts of Europe and the world generally, a fitful movement springing up at times of crisis, but a permanent and universal feature of working life, built up over fifty years. There have been industries where management cannot even walk across the shop floor without the stewards' permission. However, this strength, being defensive, has thus also been a caged, isolated strength bounded by the shop floor: there has been a notorious lack of working-class unity within society, within certain industries, and even within the factory itself, that is to say a lack of an offensive, political consciousness. It is precisely this knot which has been cut by the events of the last few months. The bourgeoisie has attacked defensive positions which are uniquely strong and consolidated: yet, while the strength of these positions has necessarily involved a retarded development of revolutionary political consciousness, this retardation means that the revolutionary movement in Britain is capable of bypassing the Stalinist impasse (which is much more important in a country like, say, France, where the revolutionary origins of the C.G.T. and the strength of the C.P. have led to a blockage), since it is emerging from a tested and long-standing base at a time when the needs of the masses are being increasingly recognised as the desire for self-management and the forces in its own ranks which it must overcome or transform are the ideologically weaker, openly non-revolutionary forces of the Labour Party and reformist Trade Unionism. With every act of aggression by the bourgeoisie against the entrenched positions of the working class, the only possible responses are necessarily those which raise the implicit issue of self-management, politicize the struggle and extend it to all areas of society and beyond the workplace. By making attack the only weapon of proletarian defence the bourgeoisie, already weakened by its internal crisis which led it to challenge the working class in the first place, has rendered itself extremely vulnerable.

There is a host of examples to show how the isolation is being overcome: perhaps it is best to start with U.C.S. , as an example of how not to overcome it. On paper, it looks like a blueprint for self-management: ' the workers' not only seize the yards, they run production, possibly even better than the old bosses used to. What is self-management, if not this ? We sounded a warning about 'blueprints' earlier on. First of all, the workers were forced to carry on production, given the nature of the product, in order to keep the yards open for their eventual buyer (a job which would probably , under Wilson, have been done by subsidies from the Industrial Reorganisation Corporation): in view of the fact that only a token number of workers was retained, productivity actually rose, though the articles produced were for the new bosses to dispose of at their pleasure. Lesson one: self-management under compulsion is a contradiction in terms (and in practice) - self-exploitation would be a better name. Secondly, the C.P. - led shop stewards' committee 'managed' the whole affair from beginning to end, actively discouraging initiative from the floor and keeping everything within reasonable, respectable bounds so that the cracks in capitalist administration could be papered over and their own image more favourably enhanced within bourgeois ideology. Lesson two: self-management in the name of the workers, even by organisations created by the workers themselves (i.e. the shop stewards' committee), amounts to its opposite - the bureaucratic suppression of self-emancipation. Third, these same leaders attempted to preserve the isolation by preventing the spread of their struggle: their support for Plessey (only a few miles away) was minimal, and at one mass demonstration they physically prevented the Plessey workers from putting up their banners on the U.C.S platform in front of the T.V. cameras. Lesson three: self-management does not and cannot take place in a shop-window display, especially one which accepts and assists in its own isolation within the capitalist economy; given the present relationships in our society, the elements of self-management lie in the means of struggle (this goes double when you are confronting a C.P. stewards' committee) as much as in its ends, and in this narrow context the idea of the 'self-managed' factory is a dangerous fetish.

It was precisely this lesson that was grasped by the Plessey workers and in the occupations that followed. At Plessey an agreement was quickly reached with shop stewards from the main Plessey factory at Ilford, in case management should try to transfer torpedo construction there. But they not only sought to overcome their isolation in the factory, they also extended the significance of their struggle to

the whole of society. As it says in one of their statements:

'The Plessey issue is political. What we say is this. Here and on the River Clyde workers have started something that they cannot finish alone. We need the support of an army and that army is the organized working class. We ask you, brothers, to come to our aid, not out of charity but to guard your own children..... In the past we migrated like dogs looking for work. We won't do this any more! Now the offensive must start.... We ask you to join our struggle. It's Plessey, Alexandria today. It will be your factory tomorrow. We ask you above all to call on your leaders at local and national level to start an offensive against the government by mass industrial action. We ask you to demand the T.U.C. to organise the unemployed now by affording them full trade union rights. We ask the Labour Party to pick up the Tory challenge now. Declare the socialist programme to take the property, without compensation, from the greedy few who control it.'

There are certain remarkable illusions in this text which we shall deal with later; what you have to admit is its consciousness of a whole social problem behind the economic one, both in the targets of the appeal (e.g. the granting of rights to Claimants' unions, which in themselves are an example of the increasing breadth of the struggle) and in its method, which is to appeal to base pressure on 'working-class' institutions - in other words an appeal, perhaps limited, for the self-management of the struggle as a priority.

Even in the short space of calendar time between the summer of 1971 and now there has been a remarkably rapid practical grasp of the need to overcome class isolation. The workers at Fisher Bendix, for example, sent delegates to U.C.S. and Plessey before taking over, to get advice on how to run the occupation and avoid a lock-out; their organisational preparation was evident in the way they formed various committees (e.g. for security, canteen, finances, etc.) and installed them in executive offices. Their awareness of the necessity to extend the struggle is clear from the fact that they attempted to get Liverpool dockers to black company products; internal organisation, based on a general assembly at which families were allowed to attend, was considerably more democratic than the tightly-run regime at U. S.

In the pay and hours struggle in the engineering industry there has been the same growing awareness of the social and political implications beyond the factory limits. In the Manchester area, the top priority in the package claim was, for most of the men, the 35-hour week rather than the pay rise. In the words of one shop-steward: 'Money can be eroded. Hours are permanent gains and hours are obviously the most important because of the vast increase in unemployment among Manchester engineers.' In other words, claims going beyond the factory limits and tending to politicise the struggle are the most important. One part of the growth of consciousness in the A.E.U.W. rank and file is the increased far-sightedness that led workers at B.M.C. Cowley and Ford Doncaster to conduct lightning occupations between shifts to prevent the removal of plant and the long-term possibility of redundancy. Another is the formation of joint shop-stewards' committees to give an organisational link between struggles at the base. However, in the Manchester area this was done very late: there was a considerable time-lag between the imaginative use of the occupation technique and its organisational expression in joint committees. Scanlon and, more explicitly, the district union committee were able to exploit this time-lag by using their control over the only apparatus linking the struggles at the time to bludgeon through an agreement which put pay above hours on the agenda; the result was that a considerable number of factories 'settled' on the basis of money, and two sets of people were happy - the bosses, who were willing to yield (relatively) on the question of pay as long as the broader questions were not touched upon, and Scanlon, whose original intention in ordering the claim to be fought factory by factory and whose attack on the priority for hours both helped to isolate the virus and keep the struggle on the floor. However, insofar as he did 'wash his hands' and put the struggle at the base, he put it where it really belongs, and the failure of the engineering occupations has been only a qualified failure: the lessons of isolation have been

learned, and in a process of self-education the practical necessity has been recognized of creating linking organisations at the base, bypassing the union bureaucracy.

In acting as he did, of course, Scanlon escaped by the skin of his teeth from having to be honest about his reformist position. If he were to reflect on how lucky his escape was, he would perhaps be a bit more charitable towards his new found enemy Jack Jones, who in rather more difficult circumstances was 'forced' to pay - temporarily, as it turned out - a large fine. (Who forced him? Were the police expected to arrest him?) In paying up, Jones too put the conflict where it really belongs - in the docks: his enforced retreat from his militant image both produced and in turn was caused by the growing militancy in the ranks of 'his' workers. It is clear how self-management is becoming an issue in the trade union movement, forcing members of the Institute for Workers' Control like Jones and Scanlon to perform extraordinary acrobatics when faced with the real thing from their own members: traditional labels of 'left' and 'right' within the T.U.C. are losing their meaning, and increasingly the real division appears between bureaucrats and the men on the job.

And so, in confronting authority and in striving to overcome political and organizational isolation the workers' movement necessarily touches upon the issue of self-management: but it does so not only in respect of the bourgeois state, but also of institutions which it has created itself, from the Labour Party and the trade unions down to the shop stewards' movement. The essence of the workers' activities of the last few months has been that they cut across all previous categories of authority, representation and delegation. We have already pointed to clear examples of this in the T.G.W.U. and A. U.E.W. If we look again at the Battle of Saltley Coke Depot, we find that the local A.E.U.W. had simply declared a sympathy strike for that day: it did not call on eleven thousand people from all over industry and different parts of the country to converge on the depot and fight the law. If there were initiatives for this spontaneous action, some of them certainly came from younger C.P. members acting independently of the party (compare this with the activity of senior party 'stars' at U.C.S.): the desire for self-management involves youth in particular. It was at this precise moment, a moment in which all the relationships of our society (including workers' institutions) were called in question, that the strike was won. The criticism which self-management makes of all relationships and institutions does not exclude the shop stewards' movement: there must be at least 20,000 shop stewards (if not all with that title) in the country, and most of them are not militants of any kind, except to the greater or lesser extent that their base forces them to be militant. The stewards' committee at U.C.S. suppressed the workers' initiative. At the Fakenham shoe-factory, the women occupied in defiance of the stewards' committee and on the initiative of their supervisor! You obviously cannot damn all other forms of delegation and make a fetish of shop stewards.

Here we come to a Hobson's choice between two kinds of false consciousness. You can be a 'realist', down-to-earth, and put up with the traditional forms of leadership as long as they start using revolutionary ideas, 'after all we can't change everything overnight', being thus fairly motionless, you implicitly have just as much interest in the status quo as the bourgeoisie, and you will be landed with a revolutionary government consisting of a few 'left' Labour Party and trade union bureaucrats, a token member of the I.W.C. and a largish helping of 'progressive, professional management' of the Catherwood type (as one miners' leader said on T.V. during the strike: 'If we'd been able to talk things over with a progressive, professional management, none of this would ever have happened'). On the other hand you can close your eyes and dream of the abolition of compulsive authority, of smoothly-interlinking systems of workers' councils; however, with the scenery before your eyes not corresponding to the actual scenery around you, you would find it very difficult to get up out of your carpet slippers. We propose to explain the apparently difficult problem of getting from A to B by charting the present tendencies of the working-class movement.

(i) The question of leadership. It will be noted that the Plessey workers' statement calls on the Labour Party 'to declare the socialist programme, to take the property, without compensation, from the greedy few who control it.'

This is the same Labour Party that was second to none in the 'Socialist International' in its obsequious errand-running for American imperialism and its dog-like eagerness to operate the 'rationalisation' of capitalism at home. How can the Flessey workers reconcile their imaginative practice in occupying their factory with their appeal to such a leadership? There is no doubt that to most of working Britain it would not sound odd at all. In fact this attitude recognizes the reality of the situation: that there are now in this country the necessary conditions for a revolutionary crisis, as we have demonstrated earlier; and that in the short-term event of a crisis occurring, the only apparent alternative is precisely the kind of combination of 'left' leaders and 'progressive management' that we described above. But there is a weapon with which this latter course of events can be controlled, and that weapon is the theory and practice of self-management. If self-management is a critique of all hierarchic relationships inside and outside the working-class movement, and if the issues raised in the current class conflict are issues of self-management, then the proletariat will, to the extent that it grasps these ideas (and it is doing so, in reply to the rather desperate attacks of the bourgeoisie), have the means of increasingly controlling any leadership which, because of the present relationships of our society, will naturally arise. In the long-term event of a crisis - if, for example, our practically senile bourgeoisie temporarily finds the elixir of youth and expansion in the ECC - by then the means will feasibly have developed of bypassing this 'natural leadership' altogether. Here we must qualify our inclusion of the shop stewards' movement in with the Labour Party and union bureaucracies. This movement is strong and ingrown, is a ready-made means of organizing the struggle at the most important point - the base, and is the rock on which the Industrial Relations Act will founder. It is obvious, then, that part of the controlling process will be conducted by stewards' committees, which will in the process have to find more and better ways of meeting, organizing and agitating jointly; however, they must recognize the fact that they are mere delegates and so must control themselves, not only by shedding the influence of this or that party or clique but also by making allowances for the fact that in a hierarchical society it is a general rule that the further you climb up the ladder of representation, the more feeble are your demands: the shop stewards' movement is only one rung up the ladder, but even that one step makes a difference.

(ii.) Workers' control or self-management? The British worker thinks of 'workers' control' in so many words as the running of society by its producers, the expropriation and disappearance of the bourgeoisie: what he understands by the phrase, even when he is 'hostile' to it ("it sounds fine, but you'll never get it to work here"), is not far from what Marx understood by 'communism'. However, the theory of workers' control as expressed by a majority of thinkers from G.D.H. Cole onwards is based on a simple mistranslation of the French 'contrôle' and the Russian 'kontrol', which both mean something much broader - in most cases the proper translation would be 'supervision' or 'checking' (an Institute for Workers' Supervision?) In other words, both foreign expressions contain a large gradualist, reformist element. It is obviously not just a question of a linguistic error. The difference between the priesthood's and the layman's definition of the word 'control' reveals the depth of the gulf between British socialist theory and the lived experience of the class in struggle. The opportunity is now available to bridge this gulf. The recent experience of the dockers and engineers has justified in practice the unease which one has felt about the association of men like Jones and Scanlon with the Institute for Workers' Control: it is the Industrial Relations Act which has brought their reformism into the open and carried the struggle for self-management, for the essence of workers' control, out of the conference-room and into the workplace. The task for the I.W.C. and similar groups must be to follow this change and to continue their services of publicity, information, linking and assistance at the base level. Only in this way can they justify their name and existence. The purpose of revolutionary Marxism is to locate the essence of self-management in the workers' control movement. After all, given the fact that the conditions for a revolutionary crisis exist, given the fact that this is the most heavily industrialized country in Europe - a country with no peasantry, a petit-bourgeoisie that is more or less declassé, and where as elsewhere there has been a staggering growth in the proletarianization of the white-collar worker: in these circumstances, need there be so much difference between 'workers' control' (workers in the

boardrooms) and 'self-management' (society run by the totality of its producers) ? - John Daigg

POSTSCRIPT : THE DOCKERS AND THE LAW

This article was written in May. What is the significance of what happened in July and August ? The essential and fundamental point is that the qualitative changes have quickly become much clearer and more explicit, and that their visibility at the same time has produced a development in consciousness among large sections of workers.

The conflict between the base and the union bureaucracy and the consequent meaninglessness of 'left' and 'right' labels in the TUC has taken physical forms - dressed in blue uniforms. We can believe Jack Jones when he says that he did not ask for hundreds of police to protect him when the dock strike was called off; we ought to find out, though, how the police know what the result of that meeting was going to be. In fact the TGWU leadership used a combination of techniques: collaboration with the forces of the state, a gerrymandered vote (one delegate for 22 dockers in North Cornwall, two delegates for the 6,000 in the Royal group) behind a democratic facade of lay representatives, and the erection three days before the meeting of a steel anti-demo barricade inside Transport House (a trick handed down from the LSE directors).

This conflict also appears as a dual power situation within the union, between the office leadership and the unofficial shop stewards' committee. This situation has existed for some time, notably in the days of Jack Dash, but starting an unofficial strike was always easier than carrying on an official strike unofficially, after a "settlement" had been reached. However, in regarding the Liverpool dockers' defiance of the official decision as a great victory and therefore (logically) at the inevitable despondent return to work elsewhere as a terrible defeat, we have accepted to fight on a battleground chosen by the bourgeoisie and its ideologues in the media. This is not the point. The victory was, from the point of view of the socialist movement as a whole, already won: the shop stewards' organisation was seen to confront the union bureaucracy openly and directly, and an essential part of the bureaucracy's facade has crumbled away while the base increasingly believes in its own actual power. It has been, essentially, a demystifying process.

This growing power at the base, a power which has gained from the struggle forced on it by its own unions and by the direct attacks of the bourgeoisie, has expressed itself in two ways. First, it has pressured the union bureaucracies and the TUC into quite untypical activity: for Feather to be cornered into calling a general strike is obviously some achievement. However the limited value of this kind of pressure is shown by the fact that five days later, Feather, Scanlon, the CBI and Anthony Barber were all sitting round the same table at no. 10. Of course, no one should be surprised at this sight; but equally, no one should be too optimistic about the value of power at the base when it is content with merely pressuring its divine-right leadership - in fact if the twenty-four hour general strike had actually occurred it would probably have resulted in a setback, since a limited-duration strike achieving nothing is bad for morale, especially for a proletariat unused to being headed off with this kind of token activity.

It is much more important to point out that this power at the base has developed its own forms. In fact the five imprisoned dockers were released, not so much because of a threat of an official general strike, but because of an unofficial general strike which had already begun. It would be interesting to know exactly how many factories apart from the mines, press and other well-organised sectors, had either stopped or voted to stop work before the men were released. Away from this, the new forms of base power described in the article have increased in scope and number. We have had the first example of an international strike against a multinational company. Dunlop-Pirelli, organised by rank-and-file delegates, and linking workers in Milan, Liverpool and Carlisle in a fight against redundancies. Strategic picketing has developed from the miners' initiative: the dockers carried their picketing away from their workplace to the smaller wharves, and the 'Bristol flying picket' of the building workers seems from this point on to have institutionalised the practice of strategic, visiting pickets taking the struggle to any point

where it is needed. One of the most interesting new forms of picketing occurred 'on the job' at British Leyland, where 250 Austin-Morris finishers stopped all traffic entering or leaving the factory for three hours because they had not been paid for a period the previous week when, management said, they had been 'disrupting' the track by their 'non-cooperation'. In taking this action they were defying their own works committee, who wanted them to take it through procedure first ("procedure" is, of course, a common fetish both of "progressive, professional management" and of shop stewards, often quite left-wing, who have been through their personnel courses). Apart from these new forms of picketing, it should be noted that factory occupations are still occurring each week, and that in the dockers' struggle itself the first real initiative came from the Hull workers who planned to set up their own stevedoring company in the face of redundancy.

All these events have shown that the more their livelihood and existence are threatened, the more mobility and flexibility are gained by the workers. In the words of Marx (who is quoted here not out of reverence, but to save space);

"The question is not what goal is envisaged for the time being by this or that member of the proletariat, or even by the proletariat as a whole. The question is what is the proletariat and what course of action will it be forced historically to take in conformity with its own nature."

The question is not the repeal of the Industrial Relations Act or the preservation of a certain kind of job carrying the proletarian stigma; the issue is not that 'we are seeing the greatest militancy since the General Strike of 1926' (... 'therefore to avoid the failures of the thirties we must -guess what - build the revolutionary party'). The question is what has changed since 1926, and one of the most important changes has been the initiative of workers at the base in managing their own struggles, involving masses of people in the work of organization, demonstration and picketing. Of course, the mobility and flexibility of the workers' movement in defiance of the law has been matched by a startling flexibility in bourgeois law itself; for example, the appearance of the Official Solicitor, or the amazingly rapid (and fortuitous) House of Lords appeal decision which released the imprisoned dockers. However, this same legal flexibility of the bourgeoisie works to its disadvantage in the long run, by contradicting the old myth of 'British justice' and the 'rule of law'. firstly because the half-cynical, half-scared 'political' manipulation of the law finally makes explicit the principles of political economy that have always been inherent in it; secondly, because the apparent legal flexibility masks the immobility and ossification of bourgeois political power, which is stuck, concreted into a centuries-old past, by ceaseless compromise not having been periodically uprooted and re-erected as in most European countries.

The sickness of the British bourgeoisie is not only political but economic, as we have seen. The coming wage demands of council workers and electricians, reaching to 40%, will be objectively political in the present state of affairs; after that, when Britain formally joins the EEC there will be the Borschette Plan (which seeks to impose a uniform wage for major industries in the EEC: the government has had to admit in a white paper that the average wage is 25% to 50% higher in the EEC than in Britain). The rope is getting tighter. In these circumstances, the mobility of the class, their unity (such as the continuing unity between the London dockers and the lorry-drivers who originally took them to court), their exposure of the destructive nature of capitalism, their questioning of their own forms of representation from Labour Party politicians and union bureaucrats to shop stewards' committees, are all of growing importance; also, these developments are the product of those economic circumstances, and because of this it would be wrong to talk pessimistically about the 'shadow of the thirties'. On the other hand, the power of bourgeois ideology through the media to split and divide (black and white, lower and higher paid, 'workers' and other sectors, workers from each other) should not be underestimated. The only thing which can clarify this contradiction is the theory of self-management. If this does not develop, hand in hand with the practice of self-management which is already developing in struggle, we shall be faced with 'objective' revolutionary conditions which we are totally unprepared for: there will then be plenty of room for 'progressive, professional management' and populist cretins on the Labour 'left' to head off our aspirations. Let's by all means watch out for repression, but let us also guard against what might happen if we 'win'.

Self-management, as a theme in theoretical and political thought and in revolutionary practice, is relatively new, essentially dating in France, for example, from May 1968.

This theme is now encountered, in various ways and more or less explicitly, in the innumerable works of social criticism which have sprung up since that historic month of May 1968, as well as in the political texts of several tendencies appealing to socialism and the proletariat, in the programme of some parties and unions, and in the practice of the workers' movement (with numerous strikes and mobilisations advancing slogans and forms of struggle which are of a more or less explicitly "self-managing" nature). Of course if one links up the theme of self-management with the more general idea of "direct democracy" and the direct management of social life by its producers and citizens, it is an old theme which has stimulated and prompted many past revolts and revolutions. But in our opinion, the content of self-management for militant revolutionaries who fight for socialism is new and cannot be directly linked with any past concept or practice.

This statement can be backed up by simply recalling that the experience of Soviets during the October revolution, to which many revolutionary Marxists continually refer as an exemplary experience, was extremely limited not only in time but also in the scope acquired by socialist democracy at that time. The Soviets only survived for a short time and did not succeed in articulating themselves into a system of democratic management of social life in all spheres and at all levels, not only in factories and local areas. In fact they only played a role of co-management, in certain spheres, along with the representatives of the "workers" state and the party, which by delegation took on the real power of the class and the workers.

The self-management that we are talking about today corresponds to a quite different historical context, whose essential characteristics are: the new needs and aspirations of the younger generation in particular, in the evolved capitalist and so-called "socialist" societies; and the development of productive forces following the incorporation of science in them. These two factors are, moreover, in a continuous process of interaction.

It is on the basis of an ever higher material and (above all) cultural level that the masses of the younger generation experience, more deeply than in the past, the multiple effects of alienation in the present conditions of their entire social life. But the raising of the cultural level of the masses, of youth and the workers is also produced by the evolution of productive forces, which demands training, the recycling of learning, and permanent education. Thus we are dealing more and more with a growing number of young people and workers who are acquiring a more elaborate vocational, general and even political culture and who, as a result of this, are opposed to the normal social relationships of the hierarchic capitalist society which is oppressive, authoritarian and dualist in every sphere.

The same phenomenon is for similar reasons typical of the situation in the so-called "workers" or "socialist" states which in fact are only preparatory, in varying degrees, to a possible evolution towards socialism. From this point of view, May 1968 in France and the "Prague spring" were symmetrical phenomena which showed the same fundamental aspiration of broad masses of young people and workers towards the democratic society of tomorrow, towards "self-managed socialism".

It is the duty of every political tendency appealing to socialism and the proletariat to fully understand this new, historic tendency and to draw all the conclusions from it. Of course, these conclusions are truly "revolutionary" in comparison with many past concepts and practices.

Where it is a matter of organisations and institutions which claim to represent the power of the class and the working people by delegation (parties, unions, "workers" or "socialist" states), self-management signifies, not their suppression, but the transformation of them into bodies which by degrees assist the working classes to manage social life directly themselves, in every sphere and at every level. This means that from now on we must get down to preparing the class and

the working people for such a role; we must assist them right now in structuring their power (partial though this may still be) in the factories, offices and schools; we must help them to really participate in the formulation of demands and organisation of their struggles; to know how to transform the inevitable major moments of national revolutionary crisis which may spring up in an advanced capitalist country (following the occupation of factories, offices and schools and the initial attempts to manage these places and their production) into situations which can trigger off a real struggle for total power.

A political training which claims to be a vanguard must carry out its own re-education within this kind of concept of its role, by widening the framework of its internal democracy, and above all by "revolutionising" its manner of working with the masses and its relationships with the mass movement's own, autonomous forms.

We must urge the political organisations to rethink their role in the context of the revolutionary project of "self-managed socialism": to respect the autonomous forms of the mass movement, to help them evolve freely towards more advanced ideological positions, to stop trying to domesticate them for the benefit of the "revolutionary party", to avoid creating "party" fractions in the unions and the movements of youth, women and ethnic minorities (since the aims of these fractions are narrow and sectarian and destroy the autonomy which all these movements must necessarily possess in their relationships with the parties and, tomorrow, the "workers" state).

The union leaderships themselves should reconsider their role and associate themselves more closely and organically with their base in formulating demands and running the struggle. This is the significance of the movement of shop-floor delegates, working hand in hand with the assembly of workers and union representatives, which has sprung up in various forms in a number of experiences in Italy, France and Britain and which are of capital importance for the renewal of unionism.

With regard to the role of the vanguard after the victory of the socialist revolution and the establishment of a "workers" state, they should above all tackle the crucial danger of the rapid bureaucratisation of this power and the appearance of an omnipotent bureaucratic layer, which is capable of the worst errors and crimes.

Several of us were forced to reflect on the profound reasons for this phenomenon, and it is one of the routes (among others) by which we arrived at our present concept of self-management. One cannot attribute the phenomenon of bureaucratisation and the bureaucracy solely to "objective" factors (the low economic and cultural level, the national limitations of the socialist revolution). One must add a subjective factor: owing to the lack of sufficient historical experience of the sort of phenomena that follow the seizure of power, there has been a tendency to systematically encourage the delegation of social management to the state, parties and unions which claim the name of socialism and the proletariat, but which are not necessarily identified with the workers, the working people generally, and the citizens. Therefore it is necessary (and from the beginning) to build the structure of the real power of the class and the working people as a whole, to let them be capable of directly managing the whole of social life by themselves. Hence the importance of Councils of working people (and not only "the workers") in factories and offices, and of organs of direct management in schools, universities, local councils, regions and the whole nation.

Of course, we know that self-management is a historical process and cannot be created "perfectly" in one go. But what matters is to go along this route from the beginning, with an adequate ideological preparation on the part of the so-called vanguard, and with a radical revision of its way of looking at both the "model" of socialism and its own role.

Among the measures to be taken to achieve this I would, personally, insist on the following: to aim at eliminating the proletarian condition in its material and cultural aspects, for as long as this condition exists, bureaucratisation and the omnipotence of the bureaucracy are encouraged. This immediately involves abolishing the wage-earning class by introducing a mode of payment according to the labour supplied - i.e. according to the wealth produced by labour - and by

progressively closing the gap between incomes. It is thus a matter, no more or less, of applying the mode of payment envisaged by Marx in the "Critique of the Gotha Programme" during the lower stage of socialism which, for a whole period, is unable to do without this criterion or the use of the methods of the monetary market economy. We find that the attitude of those faced with this problem is either to accept the principle of the "socialist wage" arbitrarily fixed by the state bureaucracy, or to resort to moral considerations to evade a just mode of payment and thus in the last analysis (sometimes unwillingly) to favour the privileged bureaucratic layers.

Before quasi-automatic planning liquidates the remnants of bourgeois society in all spheres, it is necessary to reach a high level of productive forces, an equalisation of the conditions of production in every economic section on a national and international scale, and a very high cultural level among the working people. It is only then that it will be possible to proceed to perfect planning, to the quasi-automatic administration of society which among other things will suppress value, surplus-value, commodities, the market and money. But we fully understand that this is the vision of a relatively far future.

For the moment, we are dealing with national experiences which are in varying degrees preparatory to socialism. Therefore it is necessary to strive to abolish the wage-earner, in real economic terms, by introducing a mode of payment based on the labour supplied. Of course, this raises a number of still unsolved problems about how to determine the labour supplied, especially since science is organically incorporated into productive forces and research workers, experts and technicians all contribute, along with the workers, to the production of value and surplus-value. However, these problems are not insoluble as long as one accepts the principle that it is up to the working people, at local and national level, to determine democratically on the payment for their labour and the deductions to go to the maintenance of society. This presupposes that a democratic regime of "self-managed socialism" will replace the present dictatorship of an omnipotent bureaucracy.

As a parallel to this, and here again from the beginning, it is a question of working towards the abolition of the proletariat's lack of cultural training, which perpetuates the distinction between qualified and unqualified, between intellectual and manual, between leaders and led. One cannot properly attack this crucial problem without the aid of a radically different concept of socialism and "growth", of a concept based on the well-balanced development of the society of tomorrow.

It is possible, in fact necessary, (and the significance of this is contained in the present development of productive forces), to foresee that in a transitional society, preparatory to authentic socialism, the social labour-time is divided into two parts: one part devoted to productive labour, the other part devoted to education, with both parts paid for by society. "Educational" labour springs from the concept of a permanent education that is political, vocational and general, and organically incorporated with productive labour, which it thus valorizes continually.

Of course, this concept demands a true "cultural revolution", firmly anchored in the present tendency of productive forces, and conforms with the revolutionary project which consciously and voluntarily seeks to build the new social relationships that are now perfectly possible. This brief outline of general considerations is the framework for our fight for socialism, for an end to the prolonged capitalist barbarism which for each one of us is illustrated, in an ever more intolerable way, by the demented, frenzied bombardments of American imperialism in Vietnam, and by the reign in the so-called socialist states of a bureaucracy which atrociously disfigures and endangers the face of socialism.

Michel Pablo.

(Speech from a meeting organised in Paris on 27th June 1972 by the "Centre of Communist Initiative", a group of excommunicated and opposition members of the French Communist Party).