

the Lucas Aerospace workers' campaign

David Elliott

young fabian pamphlet 46 50p



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the author :

Dr David Elliott lectures in the Faculty of Technology at the Open University. A physicist by training, he has worked for the UK Atomic Energy Authority and the Central Electricity Generating Board. His current interest is in the politics of technological decision making. He is a member of the Energy Group of the Socialist Environmental and Resources Association (SERA) and for the past two years he has acted as a voluntary technical advisor to the Lucas Aerospace Combine Shop Stewards Committee.

The Society is grateful to the Sara Hall Trust for making this study possible, believing that it is in accord with the principles of Robert Owen.

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" The Lucas Aerospace Alternative Corporate Plan has been immensely demanding on the time and energy of a great many of our members over the past two years. Consequently it is impossible for us to be dispassionate or unbiased about it. We believe the Lucas Aerospace workers have made a real contribution toward the advancement of society, and a more rewarding and satisfying working life for those who must earn their living in industry.

" It is gratifying to know that the ideas projected in the Plan are being taken up and extended by other groups of workers, and that the whole ethos is now receiving widespread support." Ernie Scarbrow, Secretary, Lucas Aerospace Combine Shop Stewards Committee.

1. introduction

" Perhaps the most significant feature of the Corporate Plan is that trade unionists are attempting to transcend the narrow economism which has characterised trade union activity in the past and extend our demands to the extent of questioning the products on which we work and the way in which we work upon them." *Corporate Plan*, Lucas Aerospace Combine Shop Stewards Committee, 1976.

Trade unions were created to defend and advance the interests of their members, in the face of employers motivated by profit and a socio-economic system that was not geared to protecting their interests. Historically their major role has been that of bargaining over the allocation of wages, leaving wider policy issues to the Labour Party. Of course the trade union movement also acts as a pressure group on matters of importance outside of wages.

Collective bargaining has gradually been extended beyond issues related to basic wages and conditions such as hours and holidays to include other areas such as

manning levels, the speed of the line, work allocation, job design and health and safety. Concern has also passed beyond these internal activities relating to what happens in the factory to the external effects of production, for example on the environment and the community. Trade unionists at ICI are "anxious that the growth of their real incomes should not be at the expense of the health of themselves, their families and their communities" (*Positive Employment Programme*, TGWU, 1971).

Building workers in Australia have imposed "green bans" on environmentally undesirable projects—such as office blocks—preferring to use their skills on more socially useful activities. This idea has spread to Britain, where the building workers' union (UCAT) and several other unions are backing a campaign to prevent demolition in Birmingham.

Apart from these public gestures of concern, there has been a gradual attempt by trade unions to subject corporate

policies to collective bargaining influence—to make the decisions made by company executives and boards more accountable and put some flesh on the idea, often espoused by management, of “corporate social responsibility”. Indeed this is the essence of the TUC’s 1974 proposals for industrial democracy and one aim of Tony Benn’s “planning agreements”. It is also central to the proposals for industrial democracy outlined in the Bullock report. The implications are that collective bargaining should transcend economism and be extended to cover both the way work is organised and the choice, nature, marketing, cost and destination of the product.

Although this sort of radical expansion of trade union concern will not happen overnight, the contradictions and crises within modern capitalist economies make such developments increasingly likely. Faced with recession many workers are finding that they need to go further than just “defending jobs” at the point of production, and that they must seek to influence longer term corporate policy concerning product choice and production philosophy.

If existing production patterns cannot guarantee jobs, then it is not surprising that workers will begin to consider alternative possibilities, particularly if at the same time they can see many social needs that are not being met and which their skills could be used to satisfy.

This situation has led one particular group of workers—represented by the Lucas Aerospace Combine Shop Stewards Committee—to campaign for “the right to work on socially useful technologies”. Faced with recession, rationalisation and the possibility of redundancy they have drawn up a proposal outlining a whole series of new products which they hope will both save jobs and better meet social needs. They have considered ways in which their skills can be deployed on a variety of socially needed technologies—including medical aids like kidney machines, transport systems including electric vehicles, alternative energy technology such as solar collectors and aero-

generators, and safety aids like electro magnetic retarder units for vehicles, teleheric (remote-handling) devices for undersea oil rig maintenance, fire fighting and remote control mining.

These proposals, together with plans for radical changes in production methods, work organisation and employee development, emerged from a lengthy process of discussion within the Combine, involving project groups on each of the 17 sites.

This pamphlet will explore some of the political economic and technological implications of the Lucas campaign. There are many problems—not the least that of “incorporation”. Why should a trade union body spend time and effort finding ways to rescue a capitalist firm? To what extent can trade union bodies determine what is socially needed? How in practice can such plans be implemented? Can the idea be taken up by other groups of workers? What are the implications for the Labour Party’s Industrial Strategy?

Lucas Aerospace and the stewards combine

Lucas Aerospace is part of Lucas Industries, a British based multinational firm, producing a wide range of electrical and mechanical systems and components for the motor car, aerospace and the engineering industries generally. Lucas Aerospace itself employs approximately 13,000 workers on 17 sites throughout the UK.

In general Lucas Aerospace deals in small batch precision engineering, rather than mass production—it is essentially a specialist accessory producer for the aerospace industry. It currently produces a range of sophisticated mechanical and electrical systems, for example: aircraft electrical generating systems and switch-gear, engine starting, de-icing, flying control, fuel management, thrust reversal and combustions systems, instrument lighting and cockpit transparencies.

The company has been involved with work on Concorde, the Russian TU 144

supersonic airliner, the A300B Airbus, the Lockheed Tristar, the RB 211 and the Anglo-French Jaguar and the European MRCA (Multi-Role Combat Aircraft). Approximately 50 per cent of its work is defence related.

The parent company, Lucas Industries, is highly profitable. Pre-tax profits in 1976 were £55.8 million, an increase of £23.5 million over the previous year. Total annual turnover in 1976 was £719.3 million with an overseas sales contribution of £221.5 million.

Lucas Aerospace's contribution to company profits is somewhat less than those coming from other divisions (for example CAV diesels), although sales in the period 1975-6 have risen from £71 million to £90 million.

The workforce consists of people with many different types of skill and expertise, including 2000 skilled engineers, designers, draughtsmen and technicians specialising in hydraulics, pneumatics, control engineering and aerodynamics. These workers belong to a wide range of "blue" and "white" collar unions—thirteen in all.

the stewards combine

The creation of a cross-union "Combine", covering all the unions—white collar and blue collar—and linking all the factories in Lucas Aerospace, has probably been the crucial factor behind the development of the Corporate Plan Campaign. The Lucas Aerospace Combine Shop Stewards Committee, on which each site is represented, was set up in 1972 to co-ordinate the fight for better wages, conditions and job security and won several key battles, including one on pensions and another on health and safety problems.

The Combine's policies, developed at regular quarterly meetings, are passed as *recommendations* to each local shop stewards committee—so that individual site and union autonomy remains intact. Each site has one vote at Combine

meetings and is represented by an elected shop steward.

The Combine Committee provides a unique forum for discussion of issues and tactics relevant to the entire workforce and, as such, seeks to meet with representatives of the company in order to resolve any questions emerging.

Several key meetings of this type have occurred over the years. However the Committee is not formally recognised by the company as a negotiating body; collective bargaining negotiations are still carried out by the individual unions.

The Combine's aim is, where possible, to co-ordinate trade union policy on a company wide basis—an aim which in some cases can lead to conflict with individual unions, since they are organised "vertically" rather than "horizontally".

Similarly the company is not always eager to deal with the Combine, preferring to negotiate on a site by site or union by union basis.

In 1974 the Combine Committee set up a "Science and Technology Advisory Service", to draw on the skills and expertise of the workforce so as "to provide an early warning about the difficulties likely to be associated with the introduction of a new technology or process".

The Committee planned to be active on issues relating to "skill fragmentation, increased work tempo, job security, dangers of shift working, and possible hazards in the use of new processes and materials" and to "suggest work and wage patterns which should be negotiated". Where necessary, they would call upon "socially responsible and sympathetic scientists and technologists at universities and elsewhere" to provide expertise in areas where they were deficient ("Technological Self Help", *New Scientist*, 21 March 1974).

The emphasis was on defending workers against any new hazards and further exploitation instigated by management through the introduction of technological

innovations. Each new technology would be carefully assessed by the Combine Committee and the appropriate trade union response, including if necessary "blacking", decided upon.

redundancies

However, it gradually became apparent that, although very successful in some situations, this essentially defensive strategy—with the union reacting to management initiatives—was not sufficient to deal with some of the problems faced by the workforce.

Redundancy was a real threat for Lucas workers long before the recession following the 1974 oil crisis began to affect the aerospace industry. The company's rationalisation policy had led to a reduction in the Lucas Aerospace workforce from 18,000 in 1970 to around 13,000 in 1974, with the prospect of further cuts in the future. At the same time Lucas Industries were expanding their overseas operation in France, Brazil and other places. As Lucas Industries' management commented in 1974: "Lucas remains determined to concentrate all its major capital investment projects overseas . . . and leave Britain more or less on a care and maintenance basis" (*Investors' Chronicle*, 29 March 1974).

The Combine Committee felt that the Aerospace Division would be particularly vulnerable because of the likely rationalisation of the European aerospace industry within the EEC. The planned nationalisation of the British aerospace industry—which would not include Lucas—might also lead to reorganisation.

At the same time the Combine Committee realised that redundancies would follow the defence cuts being discussed by the Labour Government. In the *Corporate Plan* published by the Lucas Aerospace Combine Shop Stewards Committee in January 1970 it was conceded that they viewed these reductions "as both inevitable and desirable" and that "it was the national policy of almost all of the unions the Combine Committee

represents that there should be cuts in defence expenditure".

An alternative strategy for opposing these redundancies was needed for they were also only too aware "that the traditional method of fighting for the right to work had not been particularly successful. Between 1960 and 1975 the total number of workers in the aerospace industry had been reduced from 283,000 to 195,000. Apart from this specific internal problem in the aerospace industry there is the more general problem in which all industries are tending to become capital intensive rather than labour intensive with structural unemployment in consequence."

Some workers in the UK had already tried to defend themselves against redundancy and factory closures by "sitting in" and in some cases "working in". In a few instances this had led to the setting up, with government support, of workers co-operatives, run and owned by the workforce. There were grave problems with this tactic: the co-operative still had to operate within the competitive market economy, and the structural reasons for closure still existed. The end result was often that the workers had to exploit themselves in order to remain in business. The Lucas workers sought another approach.

2. the corporate plan

The introduction to the *Corporate Plan* outlines the background to the Combine Committee's activities in the following terms: "The idea of preparing an overall corporate plan for Lucas arose in the first instance at a meeting in November 1974 with Tony Benn, the then Minister of Industry. That meeting took place at the request of the Combine Committee to discuss the nationalisation of Lucas Aerospace. In the course of the meeting Mr Benn suggested that there was the distinct possibility of further cut-backs in certain aerospace and military projects. Even if this did not occur the rate at which new projects would be started was likely to be reduced. Accordingly he felt that the Combine Committee would be well advised to consider alternative products, not excluding "intermediate" technology on which our members could become engaged in the event of a recession" (*ibid*).

planning agreements

The idea of generating corporate plans to be discussed and negotiated between managers, unions and government was of course central to the concept of "planning agreements". Management would present to, and discuss with, government a corporate plan, so that long term industrial development could be integrated coherently. In return for making any necessary modifications, the government would give the company favourable tax concessions, regional development grants, etc. These plans would also be subject to negotiations with the trade unions, who would thus have some influence on longer term corporate development.

The Combine Committee however decided to follow Tony Benn's suggestion and develop their own corporate plan, independent of the company. Their idea was to devise a complete programme of alternative technological development which they would present to government, hoping to attract financial support for its implementation. The plan would then be negotiated with management through conventional collective bargaining process.

This was a highly original idea and required a considerable amount of work by the Combine Committee. Shop Stewards Committees on each site were asked to develop ideas for alternative products based on their knowledge of the existing products, the factories' equipment, services, siting and layout, and the skills of the workforce. Project teams were established on each site and at the largest, Burnley in Lancashire, a mass meeting was held to discuss the plan concept. Detailed technical feasibility and "state of the art" reviews were produced in the energy, transport, economics and medical technology areas and sent to each site to stimulate discussion. At each stage an attempt was made to link existing skills to the needs of the community and to subject proposals to assessment on environmental grounds. Contacts were made with potential customers, local community groups and trades councils in order to try to identify specific needs.

After several months drafts of the *Corporate Plan* were discussed by the Combine Committee and were circulated for discussion. The final version was made public at a press conference in London in January 1976. The complete *Plan* consists of five 200 page documents outlining some 150 new products and making a number of radical proposals for how production should be organised.

It is interesting to note the significant shift in the pattern of thinking that followed from these protracted internal discussions. In a letter to Tony Benn preceding the meeting with him in November 1974, the Committee made it clear that they felt the Government should ensure "that worthwhile alternative work" would be provided, and added "this could take the form of work on monorails and other forms of high speed transport where the skill and talent of our members could be fully utilised" and all this within the context of the nationalisation of Lucas.

The subsequent unilateral development of a detailed worker generated corporate plan indicated a shift away from total

reliance of government—although of course to implement the plan the Committee would need government support at some stage.

This element of self-reliance meant that the Committee was able to develop much more adventurous and technically sophisticated proposals, and to consider in much more detail what was suited to their strategic needs. Self-reliance was in fact the keynote to the whole campaign. An open letter (later published in *Undercurrents*, 12 September 1975) inviting ideas for alternative products was sent to 150 organisations and individuals in the environment and alternative technology movements with meagre results. The Combine Secretary reported “one of the things that disappointed us most was that in spite of years of talk about alternative technology only from three sources did we get anything positive or useful. The *Corporate Plan* . . . is therefore largely our own work and of course there is nothing wrong in that kind of self sufficiency” (*Undercurrents*, 14 February 1976).

In practice, the fact that little external help was available did not prove to be much of a handicap—there was more than sufficient technical expertise and experience available to the Combine Committee from within the workforce.

the alternative products proposals

The basic demand made by the Lucas Combine was “the right to work on socially useful and needed technologies”. The objective was twofold. “Firstly to protect our members’ right to work by proposing a range of alternative products on which they could become engaged in the event of further cutbacks in the aerospace industry. Secondly to ensure that among the alternative products proposed are a number which would be socially useful to the community at large”. (*Corporate Plan op cit*). This approach was necessary because it was becoming increasingly clear that the company’s existing policies, product range and markets could not guarantee jobs.

Furthermore there were many social needs that were not being met and which the workforce’s skills could be used to satisfy.

When faced with the task of devising products that would utilise these skills, the Combine, perhaps surprisingly, did not automatically select just “advanced technology” ideas—they were concerned to explore socially and environmentally viable “low technology” alternatives and particularly to investigate “intermediate technologies” for the Third World. The fact that the Combine are not entirely wedded to advanced technology is well demonstrated by one of the projects already under way—the “Hobcart”, a simple vehicle for children with spinal disease. The Lucas engineers turned their advanced analytic and design techniques to producing a simple device.

One section of the plan focused on alternative energy technologies and included detailed cost assessments and technical proposals. In the past Lucas Aerospace had manufactured a small wind-electric machine and the company has considerable aerodynamic expertise, making it well suited to the development of windmill systems. Similarly the company had considerable experience of heat pumps. Fuel cells were another possible area for development. The *Corporate Plan* also pointed out that the company could make a major contribution to the development of solar collector systems—specifically with regard to the associated electrical and fluid control systems.

However the Combine did not feel that the Lucas workers should get involved with producing small scale alternative technologies—small windmills or solar collectors—suited only to individual domestic usage.

They were well aware that these alternative technologies could be, and already are being, sold for profit, like any other commodity on the market, to those who could afford to experiment with “self-sufficiency”. They were more concerned to devise medium scale systems suitable

for complete communities, housing estates etc, and to that end they were concerned to build links with local authorities and community groups, many of whom are currently planning energy conservation and alternative technology projects.

Some of the proposals were oriented towards high technology; for example they wanted to turn their control engineering skills to manufacturing remote handling gear for undersea oil rig maintenance, so as to avoid the dangers experienced in deep sea diving. They proposed the development of similar "telecheric" devices for use in fire fighting and mining. Some of this advanced technology could also be turned to producing artificial limbs and other aids for the handicapped.

They also proposed a number of alternative transport systems—including a hybrid electric-petrol vehicle which uses a petrol engine, running at constant speed continuously to charge batteries which, in turn, are used to provide motive power via an electric motor. Fuel consumption and pollution are lowered dramatically.

Another idea put forward was a lightweight rubber-wheeled vehicle, capable of running on roads or rails. This would have the advantage of being able to run up fairly steep inclines, so that the usually highly expensive and constraining requirement that railway tracks must be laid on flat ground, is avoided—a development particularly significant for developing countries. A prototype vehicle was constructed and tested in conjunction with North East London Polytechnic.

choosing the mode of production

The Combine Committee were concerned that the mode of production should also be considered. They argued that it would be foolish to produce socially useful and environmentally appropriate technologies in a way that was unsafe, polluting, exploitative and alienating.

The Committee wanted to ensure that the work was carried out in factories

in such a fashion that they would depart from the dehumanised, fragmented forms of work which were becoming common even in highly-skilled industry where computer systems have gradually taken over certain skills. "The result is redundancy for some and intensified, de-skilled, work for the remainder. Shift work is becoming common, as the companies try to make maximum use of the expensive capital-intensive computer equipment" (Mike Cooley, *The Future of Work*, Open University Press, 1975).

Work study methods are beginning to be applied to designers and technical staff and design jobs are being broken down into smaller and smaller fragments. The professional autonomy so keenly sought after by those engineers and designers—who see themselves as emergent "professionals"—has been eroded. The rearguard action of some of the conservative members of the trade, seeking to set up and defend professional associations, seems doomed to failure. Militant trade unions such as TASS and ASTMS are having much more success. Given the situation they have found themselves in, it is not surprising that, despite the traditional sectional differences, these technicians and engineers are joining unions and are beginning to both adopt the same tactics as shop floor production workers, and join with shop floor workers in a common struggle.

The setting up of the Combine and the development of a corporate plan are further examples of co-operation between technicians and production workers. One of the plan's main aims is to bring about the restructuring of all jobs, whether on the shop floor, in offices or in the design research development departments.

Consequently the *Plan* includes some fairly radical ideas for new modes of production organisation and control. The Combine was particularly keen to develop organisational arrangements "in which the skill and ability of our manual and staff workers is continuously used in closely integrated production teams, where all the experience and common sense of the shop floor workers would be directly

linked to the scientific knowledge of the technical staff. This would be done on a much more equal basis than is now the case, and would give rise to much greater job satisfaction" (*Press Release*, Combine Committee, January 1976).

Of course ideas like this for "project teams" made up of all grades, would come up against tremendous problems in terms of the traditional skill and job demarcations and wage differentials, and the Lucas *Plan* did not envisage that such changes could be implemented rapidly or without the agreement of all the groups involved. They hoped however, that some of these problems could be circumvented, at least in part, by the adoption of vastly improved employee development programmes to break down some of the divisions between production workers and technical and clerical staff. Extensive retraining schemes were proposed for both blue and white collar workers, coupled with the development of suitable educational courses and manpower planning arrangements to ensure that the necessary skills are available.

The *Corporate Plan* asserts that "very little is being done to extend and develop the very considerable skills and ability still to be found within the workforce . . . There is little indication that the company is embarking on any real programme of apprenticeships and the intake of young people. The company is making no attempt to employ women in technical jobs".

The Combine saw retraining and re-education as a way of "developing the capabilities of our people to meet the technological and sociological challenges which will come during the next few years . . ." Furthermore "in the event of work shortage occurring before alternative products have been introduced, the potential redundancy could be transformed into a positive breathing space during which re-education could act as a form of work sharing" (*ibid*).

The aim of these organisational and educational proposals is to enable all

the members of the workforce to exert a real degree of influence not only over the production process but over the aims, goals and priorities of production.

marketing

The twin aims of the *Corporate Plan* were to protect jobs and to manufacture socially useful products. However it was clear that some of the products outlined in the *Plan* might not be profitable in conventional accounting terms. The Combine Committee felt that the market-determined concepts of profitability were too narrow because they ignored social and environmental costs but that in the short term some clearly profitable proposals should be included. The *Corporate Plan* was therefore a compromise—roughly half were proposals for "profitable" products and half for products, which although socially useful and needed, were not at present profitable in strict marketing terms.

However the Combine Committee felt even this compromise could lead to problems as the company might try to draw off the "money spinners" from the plan and decline those products which were socially useful. It therefore did not give the company the entire plan—with all the 150 proposals—but only a general outline which focused on twelve selected products.

The Combine Committee also felt that many of the new products would be of interest to national and local government, for example the National Health Service, and housing and transport departments as well as being competitive on the open market. Thus in terms of markets, the *Corporate Plan* essentially implied a shift of funding from the Ministry of Defence to other government departments and, perhaps, the NEB.

It is however worth pointing out in this context that the Combine Committee did not envisage that Lucas Aerospace would suddenly cease to be deeply involved in aerospace. They recognised that the aerospace industry was going to remain a

major part of the economic and technological activity of a technologically advanced nation.

They aimed at a phased introduction to ensure that the tendency of the industry to contract would first be halted and then reversed as Lucas Aerospace diversified. In technical terms, their aim was to try to influence managerial decisions about product choice much as previous trade union campaigns had brought the questions of wages, conditions and, more recently, health and safety within the bounds of joint regulation through collective bargaining.

Given this limited tactical aim, the Combine Committee did not feel that it should involve itself in the marketing of the new products. That was up to the company. The market mechanism was a method of resource allocation which the bulk of the Combine Committee did not accept as being effective, equitable or desirable.

At the same time they were aware that no one group of workers could hope to develop a fully fledged alternative to the market mechanism. Although they made every effort to collate information as to their own members assessment of needs, and contacted a wide range of community groups, trades councils and similar groups, they could hardly expect to produce a truly representative assessment of needs. They could only hope to point to some currently unsatisfied needs and propose products that could be used to satisfy them. The Combine Committee thus did not believe that Lucas Aerospace "could be transformed into a trailblazer to transform this situation in isolation. There could be no islands of responsibility and concern in the sea of irresponsibility and depravity. The intentions are much more modest, namely to make a start to question existing assumptions and to make a small contribution to demonstrating that workers are prepared to press for the right to work on products which actually help to solve human problems, rather than create them" (*ibid*).

A number of possible implementation strategies were discussed. It had always

been hoped that the company might—under pressure—be persuaded to adopt the plan as part of a planning agreement with government, and contact with the Department of Industry suggested that this was indeed a possibility as was also funding from the NEB. However nothing specific emerged, despite energetic lobbying of MPs and Ministers.

Although the Combine Committee put considerable effort of this sort into trying to get the company to implement the plan in advance of any major crisis, their main strategy was to wait until the threat of redundancy became more immediate. They could then argue forcefully for the immediate implementation of the plan.

Their aim in having it published in advance was so that the membership (and the public) would be aware of its existence and could "reach for it" when required. To some extent this delay was a tactical necessity: for it would be difficult to mobilise the workforce (and widespread public sympathy) until redundancies were upon them. Even so, there was still some hope that given support from government and public opinion, the Company might accede to implementing the plan as a sensible preventative measure. These hopes proved ill founded.

ideology and implementation

There were of course many disagreements on both tactics and ideology inside the Combine. For example there was the considerable debate as to whether in general they should only go for acceptance of the whole plan or accept piecemeal introduction. There was particular concern that the company might simply set up one project on one site, and thus create divisions within the workforce—which is why the parts of the plan selected for presentation to management contained products that could only be produced by the co-ordinated effort of several sites.

At the ideological level there were those on the left who argued that the Campaign

was "collaborationist" and those to the right who said that it was not the responsibility of a trade union to choose new products.

Some people argued that many of the proposals could be absorbed by the company and could help it survive and continue to exploit its workers and customers. The dominant view however, was that if the Combine succeeded in keeping control over the implementation of the plan, then there could be an important shift in the balance of power: one managerial prerogative would have been challenged. At the same time the confidence and strength of the Combine would have been increased, the general level of consciousness raised, and links would have been forged with other producer and consumer groups in industry and the community.

The concept of the corporate plan received two 'dry runs' even before the plan was fully complete. In October 1975 the 400 workers at the Marston Green Electronics factory in Birmingham learnt that, as a consequence of the loss of a government defence contract for the Multi Role Combat Aircraft (MRCA) two thirds of the workforce were threatened with unemployment. The stewards quickly drew up a mini-plan, outlining potential developments in telecommunications and in remote control machines for dirty or dangerous jobs.

In the event however the company was able to find other aerospace work—control panels for the Russian Tu144, although as the TASS steward at Marston Green pointed out "... this contract is a sale of information with a minimum of actual production; increasingly the tendency seems to be for the British aerospace industry to act as a drawing board for the world and in the long run this will involve as many redundancies as no contract at all."

A similar threat occurred in June 1975 at the Rotax plant at Hemel Hempstead which manufactures recirculating ball screws used for precision control of aircraft flaps and machine tools. The

company wanted to abandon non aerospace industrial ball screw production on the grounds that it was not profitable, and this implied 480 redundancies. The shop stewards produced their own market research document which argued that the management were backing away from a booming market. The company had only five years before invested £2.5 million in expanding capacity. Sales had grown from £100,000 in 1961 to £1.4 million in 1969/70, with more than 70 per cent of output exported. The steward's 40 page report which predicted sales of £4 million by 1977/78 and a 15 per cent increase in market share, was submitted to Lord Beswick, then Minister of State at the Department of Industry who described it as "the most impressive piece of work from trade unionists I have seen".

The stewards pointed to management inertia as the main cause of lack of success—particularly in the marketing area. The management claimed that sales of the ball screws had fallen from 1.2 million in 1971-72 to only 850,000 in 1973-74. The stewards replied that year old orders for ball screws from Britain and elsewhere had still not been acknowledged six months later, that the Lucas ball screws were overall the best available and that the total market was worth £60 million.

The campaign included an overtime ban and a mass meeting of the 2,000 employees and even the threat of a work in. The management ultimately reversed their decision and no jobs were lost.

3. the company's response

The *Corporate Plan* outline was presented to the Company, and made public, in January, 1976. It received considerable press coverage and was acclaimed by *The Engineer* (5 February 1976), a fairly conservative management journal, which stated that "the Committee has done a great deal of detailed economic and technical homework."

The Company's response came in the form of a document issued on 24 April, 1976 called *Reply to a report entitled Corporate Plan*. In its conclusion, the Company stated that it intended to concentrate on its traditional business in the aerospace and defence industries and that the company was actively engaged in widening its international markets. It was maintained that its products for both civil and military use were of use to the community. It could not "accept that aircraft, military and civil, do not have a social utility. Civil aircraft are needed for business and pleasure activities and it is necessary to maintain military aircraft for defence" (*ibid*).

The Company also reminded the report's authors that it had a long-standing capability and reputation for producing a wide range of aerospace systems and components, and believed that the only way to secure jobs in a market economy was to manufacture the products which the Company was best at producing efficiently and profitably. "The Company strategy is to concentrate on work applicable to high technology aerospace and defence industries, but it constantly reviews opportunities in non-aerospace fields where there is a related equivalent level of technology" (*ibid*) and that "the Company proposes to widen the debate regarding some of the ideas in the report by referring these matters to the local consultative machinery, where elected plant representatives and local management can periodically review the order book and market trends at the point where the opportunities and difficulties can be properly identified" (*ibid*).

This statement, which was widely interpreted as a flat rejection of the *Corporate Plan* document surprised many observers,

who were expecting a more subtle response. *The Engineer* of 13 May 1976, published a critical article, chastising the company for having "scuttled potentially profitable ideas as well as a peaceful future" and pointing out that there could be considerable "damage to personnel morale inflicted on highly qualified senior engineers, technologists and shop-floor engineering workers . . ." many of whom "had spent hours of their own time on the detailed technical evaluation of a number of radical "socially-useful" alternatives to defence products." There was also support from even quite senior engineers—some of whom had decided to join unions, on the basis of their experience of the campaign.

Although, the company's rejection came as a shock initially, its effect was to harden the resolve of the Combine and to widen the support for the plan amongst the workforce. The company argued that there was no need to diversify—that the current product range was and would remain both profitable and of "social utility". The workforce were less confident that "aerospace" could both remain profitable and provide secure employment. Consequently the situation had been polarised—with the workforce waiting for the first redundancy to be announced, and fully committed to the *Plan*. There was rumours of the impending loss of 200 jobs on one site, and the (Lucas Industries) £42 million rights issue to fund expansion (some of it overseas—in Brazil, amongst other places) produced fears that Lucas Aerospace would contract and funds be withdrawn.

The company itself refuted suggestions that the whole of the plan had been turned down and pointed to a clause in their reply which opened the way for consideration of alternative products by the "local consultative machinery" which consists of elected plant representatives and local management. The Combine Committee saw this as a divisive tactic. As the Combine Secretary, Ernie Scarbrow commented "management always prefer to deal with union proposals on a site by site, piecemeal basis. It is a way of fragmenting the col-

lective strength and cohesion of the workforce" ("Uneasy Peace at Lucas", *Industrial Management*, July 1976).

The Company also seemed reluctant to deal directly with the Combine stating "we are anxious not to work through bodies which are not part of the recognised consultative machinery" (*ibid*) and this wariness was indicated by the way the formal reply was distributed—it went out to individual union officials rather than to the Combine Committee. The implication that the Committee does not consist of genuinely elected stewards is hotly denied by Scarbrow who pointed out that every member is a local steward, chosen by each sites shop stewards committee to sit on the National Combine Committee. The Combine Committee was he argued "an integral part of the company's union organisation" (*ibid*).

Naturally the degree of enthusiasm and commitment for the Corporate Plan varied from site to site—as did views on how best to keep up pressure for the implementation of the plan. Some stewards felt that they should take up the Company's offer of local consultative meetings with individual managements to discuss site-based "projects", based on the proposals in the Corporate Plan. These might start off as small design teams exploring particular new products. Other stewards felt this would be divisive and wanted to fight for national acceptance by Lucas managers.

Some activists felt that support for the *Plan* was now sufficiently strong that it could be implemented in advance of the threat of redundancies—they argued that many workers were committed to the idea of socially useful production as a matter of principle as well as being a way to fight off redundancies.

the Burnley meeting

Following the company's statement a "consciousness raising" teach-in for Lucas Aerospace workers at the Burnley, Lancashire plant was held on 28 July 1976. This attracted more than 200 Lucas

workers as well as local people, local trade council representatives and workers from other firms in the area.

The local Burnley stewards were determined to activate the plan—and the meeting demonstrated that there was considerable support from the workforce. Several local Lucas managers attended and while refraining from public comments, intimated that they felt some action to safeguard jobs, including their own, by getting new projects introduced, was long overdue. Some of them felt that Lucas had relied too long on guaranteed defence contracts and should now seek more challenging alternatives. A local manager, interviewed by Swedish radio, put it: "Eventually I think we will give it our blessing and I hope that also the central management will accept the plan when they see how enthusiastic our employees are about it" (*New Scientist*, September 1976).

For their part, the local stewards were keen to try to negotiate acceptance of some proposals from the plan at the Burnley site. They were however also aware that there was a danger in this and in relying just on managements goodwill on one site only. The corporate plan was a worker-generated initiative developed through the Combine and had to be implemented and co-ordinated both locally and nationally by the workers. Obviously they would accept the support and involvement of management, but this would have to be done in a negotiating framework. At the same time it was made clear by the stewards that they saw managers (particularly middle and technical managers) as workers themselves—and hoped that they would ultimately join with them as trade unionists. Clearly, if local managers were to support the *Corporate Plan* there was a possibility of a conflict between them and central management and the directors in which they might need to avail themselves of collective defence.

The Burnley meeting was highly successful in getting workers and managers involved in discussing the details of the plan, and similar meetings were held at

other sites. The Lucas campaign thus entered a new phase: while the first year or so mainly involved the Combine Committee, who of course consulted each workforce through the local stewards, the second phase involved the workforce directly in shaping the detailed proposals for each site.

But it was clear that in reality no one site could hope to go ahead implementing bits of the plan independently of the rest. The products in the plan require the co-ordinated effort of several sites. Indeed that had been a major criteria for selection of products by the Combine Committee.

In September 1976, just over two months after the Burnley meeting, the local Burnley management agreed to set up a programme of heat pump development and to look into other non-aerospace alternatives. In January 1977 agreement was reached for work to proceed on two prototype small scale natural gas powered heat pump units, which were eventually tested in council houses in Milton Keynes. It is unclear whether this will remain an isolated exception—or spread to other sites. It is also unclear how the central managers will react. This is more than an academic point since full production of heat pump systems would, as stressed above, require the co-operation of other Lucas Aerospace sites, for example the electronics plant in Birmingham. Even so this development is clearly a major breakthrough for the *Corporate Plan* concept.

In parallel with the attempt to press for implementation of the plan at site level, there was a move to open up a new line of attack at the national level.

In June 1976 TASS national officers, negotiating on behalf of the 4,000 TASS members in Lucas Industries, introduced elements of the Combine proposals into the 1976 round of wage bargaining.

In their wage claim they asked the Lucas managers how much they were prepared to spend on the design and manufacture of alternative socially useful products

which have already been proposed by TASS members. They felt strongly that since the recent wage settlements—and the proposed 1976 settlement—represented wage cuts, that the company should make use of these unpaid wages on projects which were of wide social use. A 40 per cent increase in the production of kidney machines at the Neasdon factory was called for.

the 1977 redundancy threat

The announcement in February 1977 by Lucas Aerospace Ltd. that there was a labour surplus following a loss of orders—which implied a total of 1,100 redundancies, 500 from the Liverpool plant, 350 from Birmingham and 350 from Burnley—triggered off an immediate response from the workforce. An overtime ban and selected blacking of movements of parts was enforced and it was made clear that industrial action—including strikes—would follow any sackings. The Combine Committee pressed for urgent talks between government, the unions and the company on the future of the industry and called for the rapid implementation of the corporate plan proposals.

Considerable disquiet was expressed by constituency MPs at the likelihood of redundancies in areas already suffering from heavy unemployment and a special meeting on Lucas was called in the House of Commons on 1 March 1977. This was attended by a dozen or so constituency MPs and junior Ministers together with more than 70 representatives of the Lucas workers. The Lucas stewards argued that the company's continued indifference to the corporate plan, and its current threat of lay-offs was a direct attack on the government's industry strategy. Later Jeff Rooker MP, whose constituency in Birmingham includes a Lucas Aerospace factory, invited senior executives to visit the House of Commons to discuss the Company's future.

The meeting was attended by 11 Labour MPs and two senior Lucas managers. According to Audrey Wise MP, reported

in the *Guardian* of 21 March, 1977: "the Company representatives assured us that they were anxious to diversify and that they didn't need the Combine Committee to tell them, but when we tried to pin them down to what new products they were thinking of, they became extremely vague."

During the summer of 1977, the Company, according to *Combine News* (the newspaper of the Combine), encouraged a "breakaway" combine involving manual workers on five sites. "Whilst the Company now refuses to recognise the real Combine Committee it provides facilities for this 'alternative' to meet, appropriately enough, on the Company's premises." (*Combine News*, August 1977). However, despite this attempt at "divide and rule" support for the *Corporate Plan* remained high and as yet (November 1977) no redundancies have occurred.

an interim assessment

Overall it might be felt that, with the exception of developments at the Burnley plant, the impetus of the campaign had been slackened by the companies' apparently intractable response. But such an assessment depends on what one views as "success".

It is worth pointing out that although many people expected a clear "victory" (or defeat) for the Lucas campaign—presumably to be signified by windmills rolling off the production line—this is not necessarily the only possible and desirable outcome. Obviously it would be more than symbolically attractive for the plan to be fully implemented and the products actually produced.

But the campaign will have been successful (as it apparently has so far) if it halts redundancy and increases the influence, support and confidence of the Combine. Whether the plan itself can be fully implemented at this stage is essentially a tactical question, reflecting the balance of power in the industry. What is crucial is that by raising social, environmental and technological questions, the work-

force were able to halt and reverse a managerially chosen development—redundancy.

But even if the Campaign does not succeed in this limited aim of halting redundancies, the wider aim of shifting the balance of decision making power, it will have raised a number of key issues of significance both for Lucas workers and others. As such it will have been a valuable educational exercise. For example, it is an interesting comment on the nature of modern industry that the initiative for technological enterprise and inventiveness should come from the workforce—while the company seems reluctant to adopt the entrepreneurial risk taking approach which is meant to be the redeeming feature of capitalist competition.

The workforce had come to realise that their jobs could not be guaranteed by complacently relying on government defence and aerospace contracts, and that new products and new markets had to be found.

There is limited value in speculating on the reasons for the Company's negative response to the Corporate Plan. Their main public justification was that the proposals were either unworkable or already under development. However, many members of the Combine believe that in fact the Company's directors were prepared, in the words of the *Engineer* (13 May, 1977) "to scuttle potentially profitable ideas" rather than yield to pressure from the Combine. They would thus defend what they regard as a crucial management prerogative—the right to choose what to produce—from encroachment by well organised shop stewards. Given this situation it may be that the Lucas workers may prove to be unsuccessful in the long term. However the significance of the alternative corporate plan concept transcends Lucas. This is indicated by the advent of Lucas-type campaigns in other industries both in Britain and abroad.

4. the spread of Lucas style campaigns

Lucas style campaigns, involving the development of positive alternatives to the existing range of products produced by a firm, and usually growing out of redundancy threats, are spreading. The prediction in the July 1976 issue of *Industrial Management* that "what has happened at Lucas is likely to be the forerunner of a development which will ultimately affect the whole of British industry" seems to be coming true.

The following examples should indicate the wide range of industries involved. Many people initially argued that Lucas would be a one-off exception. Firms like Lucas Aerospace are possibly unique in that they combine a highly skilled workforce with a highly adaptable technology—they make one-off items, or small batches, rather than mass produced goods. However the sort of diversification the Combine are planning is not impossible in other industries. For example, the car industry in both the UK and the US switched rapidly to producing tanks and aircraft during the war and back again afterwards. A shift to public transport and private vehicles does not seem impossible, given time.

A recent policy statement by the joint delegation of Chrysler (UK) stewards and staff representatives, indicates that they are thinking along the same lines. "The widespread ecological and environmental criticism of the private petrol driven car as a socially irresponsible form of transport, suggests to us that we must explore the feasibility of new kinds of product of a socially useful kind to harness the skills of the existing workforce and the existing plant and machinery, and to direct it away from a commodity whose profitability and usefulness is rapidly declining" *Workers Control Bulletin* Number 32, Institute for Workers Control, May/June, 1976.

The statement points out that "long waiting lists for British buses and coaches, land rovers, diesel engines, agricultural tractors and heavy trucks show the need that exists for this kind of vehicle". It goes on to propose a series of short and long term policies to

ensure the gradual conversion of their industry to these more socially needed products—including the nationalisation of Chrysler.

In September 1976 200 workers at Ernest Scraggs, a textile machine manufacturing firm in Altrincham, Manchester, faced with the threat of immediate plant closure, tried to fight redundancies by drawing up an alternative products proposal. Amongst the ideas that were considered were health and safety equipment for the textile industry and special equipment development initially within the textile industry that can be used in machine tools.

Workers at C A Parsons of Newcastle, and GEC who manufacture generating turbines and associated equipment have also been considering diversification in response to the lower demand for generating plant resulting from the current overcapacity of the Central Electricity Generating Board.

In May 1977 AUEW (TASS) stewards from the AEI factory at Trafford Park, Manchester, working with the Energy Group of the Conference of Socialist Economists, produced an outline assessment of possible technical alternatives for the power plant and energy industries. This assessment (*Workers' Power*, AUEW-TASS/CSE, May 1977) which discusses amongst other topics wind, wave, tidal and geothermal energy, was presented in the hope that it will stimulate workers to develop detailed alternative corporate plans along the lines of that pioneered at Lucas.

the defence industry

The Vickers National Shop Stewards Combine Committee have been working with Mary Kaldor of Sussex University on possibilities for diversification. Together they have produced a paper concluding that "most attractive opportunities lie in the development of new sea-based technologies, of which the best prospects are wave power, submersibles and ocean tub barge systems. There is no reason

to suppose that the export potential of these projects would be less than that of armaments" (*Defence Cuts and Labour's Industrial Strategy*, CND, September 1976).

Plans for alternatives to arms production have also been circulating amongst shop stewards at the British Aircraft Corporation in Preston. They include machine tools, processing plant, agricultural equipment, body monitoring equipment and a variety of aids for the severely disabled.

Similar questions have been raised, albeit informally, at Rolls Royce, by an AUEW deputy convener, who has proposed diversification into machine tools, process plant, marine engineering and transport and energy systems, as well as expanding the civilian aircraft area.

At the national level, the Executive of AEUW (TASS) in May 1976, "asked its standing advisory committees on aerospace, shipbuilding and computer industries to examine alternative product possibilities bearing in mind the possibility of defence cuts as well as the general market situation in those industries" (*ibid*).

The TGWU have also lent support to the idea of defence conversion and diversification. A statement produced in June 1977 for the union's Delegate Conference, entitled *Military Spending, Defence Cuts and Alternative Employment* included the following recommendations: "The Government should commit itself to consultations with the trade unions before any planned cut-backs, closures or cancellations of projects, with a view to finding alternative employment for any workers involved. To this end the Government should establish an office for Defence Conversion, which would work closely with the Manpower Services Commission and the various training boards and other government agencies.

The Government, through its control of British Shipbuilding, British Aerospace and the ordnance factories, should help research and develop alternative products and to diversify their operations.

In the private sector of the defence industry (for example Lucas Aerospace) the conclusion of planning agreements is a matter of urgency. The Government should use its bargaining power as a buyer of defence equipment to insist on planning agreements. These agreements would lay down alternative products for development by these companies. The Government can also help with contracts, for example for medical equipment for the National Health Service. In the meantime "shop stewards' committees can take the initiative . . . and follow the Lucas Aerospace Combine Committee's example and draw up their own plans for alternative employment".

The sort of industrial diversification, of which the Lucas campaign is an isolated example, could perhaps be carried out within the context of existing ownership patterns. However, there is, as the TGWU statement noted, a strong case for bringing these sorts of developments under some form of public control and planning, if not through nationalisation, then through planning agreements.

As the CND pamphlet *Arms, Jobs and the Crisis* (1975) comments: "Local initiatives cannot . . . do the whole job. If the goods the people need are to be not only made . . . but sold—to consumers, local authorities or whoever—then the government is the only body which can ensure that the market is there. The single biggest need in the present situation is for planning with teeth."

Labour's Programme, 1976 (The Labour Party, 1976) indicated that the Labour Party believes this sort of conversion should be an implicit component of the government's industrial strategy: ". . . defence conversion should simply be seen as a special case in an overall industrial strategy, providing investment resources needed to stimulate employment and exports, and representing a fund of experience in the design and development of new technologies and in quality production".

Detailed analyses of the problems and potential of defence conversion have

been carried out by the Labour Party NEC Study Group on *The Arms Trade and Alternative Employment*.

conversion campaigns in other countries

Lucas-style campaigns have also occurred abroad. For example a group of glass-bottle makers in the SURTE factory in southern Sweden have adopted a similar approach. Faced with threats of closure, caused by the company's preference for profitable but environmentally damaging non-returnable cans, the workers, aided by technical advisers from a nearby university, have been against closure on both social and environmental grounds. Peace conversion activists in the US have adopted a similar approach, pointing out that military equipment production is capital and energy intensive and that more jobs could be created through investment in civilian oriented projects — such as mass transit, environmental protection, energy conservation and alternative energy technologies. At the same time the question of ownership and control is being raised.

This argument has also been adopted by some Labour unions. For example a resolution passed at a United Auto Workers' "Aerospace Conference" included: "A solar unit for every American home, noise reduction units for American factories. People movers for our big cities. New ventilation systems for noxious workplaces; these are the places where US aerospace workers are likely to find employment in the upcoming years. Skills of aerospace workers are readily adapted to perform the work necessary for the design and building of equipment and systems that could help in the resolution of some of the pressing problems of our society, such as mass transportation, energy, education, environment, housing and dozens of other aspects of modern life" (quoted in *Environmentalist for Full Employment* Number 2, Spring 1976).

Workers employed by Lockheed in the San Francisco area are also beginning to raise the same questions. As one

Lockheed engineer put it in an interview in *Ploughshare Press* (Volume 1 Number 2, Spring 1976) a US peace conversion newspaper: "I think that diversification in general is probably a good idea in that it would offer Lockheed or any other company an opportunity to make broader use of its personnel". His suggestion was for emphasis on "... things like mass transit, solar heating or other alternative forms of energy".

So far little progress has been made, partly because of the disinterest of the union bureaucracy. One Lockheed machinist saw a need for more grass roots militancy: "the union could play the most important role, but it will never do it because it is not oriented to being a leader in the field of progress or revolution. The IAM (machinist's union) staunchly believes that the type of work that the facility does is the management's prerogative. What we got to do is say, hey, it's the management's prerogative but its also (in) our interest to see that other things are done" (*Ploughshare Press* Volume 1 Number 1, Spring 1976).

Even senior engineers are beginning to see a need for collective organisation at the local level, despite their traditional resistance to collective action. As one engineer put it: "The unfortunate thing is having to organise or band together in order to talk objectively about these things within the context of management — employee relations. You like to think you are important enough that they are going to listen to you, but then you find they are not taking you seriously" (*ibid*).

It seems then that even in the very different US context both blue collar workers and senior engineers are adopting an approach in terms of technological demands and organisation structure similar to that of the Lucas workers. The senior engineer quoted above argued that there was a need for an organisation which would "be vitally involved in working for conversion. One of the reasons for its existence would be job security for its members, so therefore

such an organisation should play a fundamental role in organising and negotiating for alternative job situations for its members" (*ibid*).

All in all it appears that Lucas-type strategies are being taken up fairly widely in a number of different industries. Certainly there has been considerable trade union interest in the Lucas campaign both in Britain and abroad—and members of the Combine Committee have contributed to a large number of conferences, publications and broadcasts, in this country and elsewhere.

It is clear however that the Lucas workers and those who are following them are putting a whole host of fundamental questions as to the nature and use of technology and the sort of society we can develop, firmly on the agenda of the labour and trade union movement.

alternative industrial strategy

This is not to suggest that workers will automatically or inevitably opt for alternative technologies. However it does seem likely that workers will increasingly begin to ask whether economic growth and the associated technological development of the current type is in their interests. If the "white heat of technological advance" is seen only to burn up jobs, people and the environment, while lining the pockets and reinforcing the control of a minority, then it is to be expected that questions will be raised as to what sort of technological advance and social growth is needed. The outcome of such questioning, if it is matched by political organisation, could be a very different type of society, based on a changed pattern of social and technological priorities.

For example, the Combine *Plan* contained proposals for sophisticated telechelic (remote control) devices which would enhance workers skills rather than replace them, thus countering the trend to automation induced unemployment. Many of the Combine's proposals are labour and skill intensive rather than

capital intensive, an approach which the Combine Committee see as vital if structural unemployment is to be avoided.

5. lessons for the labour movement

Clearly the type of social and technological changes alluded to in the previous section will take time—perhaps several decades. The Labour movement's attention will naturally be equally directed at more urgent problems. In dealing with these, however, some thought can usefully be given to the longer term perspective. What is needed is rational co-ordination by government and careful attention to manpower planning and long term technology policy. This sort of redeployment and industrial conversion could have far less impact than, say, the various closures and mergers that workers have experienced in the private sector under the impact of the high technology boom of the past few decades.

One of the prime necessities in this regard would be a concerted national programme of retraining to make this sort of redeployment feasible. Such a policy coupled with appropriate employee protection legislation would be central to any national industrial strategy to ensure flexibility in the face of rapidly changing economic and technological environment.

More specifically Labour Government support for campaigns such as that being waged at Lucas, is vital—in both cash and moral terms. So far, although individual labour politicians have spoken in support, official approval has been limited.

The Lucas campaign clearly has considerable implications for the whole idea of Labour's Industrial Strategy—and in particular the planning agreement concept. As Stuart Holland, one of the architects of the planning agreement concept, has commented, "if there was a real commitment to industrial planning, the Lucas Corporate Plan could form the basis of a planning agreement with Government through which its proposals could actually be implemented".

At the same time the Lucas approach is both different to and demonstrates the weakness of the current concept of planning agreements. For in the Lucas case, the initiative was firmly in the hands of

the trade union side. If planning agreements are to be anything more than just a new sort of bureaucratic administration, coupled with token involvement of the trade union bureaucracy, then shop floor initiated campaigns like that at Lucas, must become the norm rather than an exception.

For such initiatives to have an impact on long term company level policy in industry generally, there will be a need for more company-wide combines. The TUC has now accepted this concept in principle, even though some affiliated unions are more concerned about the threat to existing union structures. As well as having a role in planning agreements, Combine level organisation is also an important component of the Bullock proposals for Industrial Democracy. However, if combines of this sort are to be able to function effectively, they will, particularly if they are not as well developed in terms of organisation and access to technical expertise as the Lucas Aerospace Combine, require external support in the form of technical and economic advice. If we expect trade unions to expand their role in a creative and responsible way, then they must have access to the necessary means, and not continue to operate on shoe-string budgets and voluntary efforts from outside. In 1975 the TUC asked the Government for a grant to help expand union educational facilities, saying "it is clear that industrial and political changes are adding to the work and responsibility of trade unions. These new union responsibilities are not being matched by the growth of trade union education services". The Government responded with a grant of £400,000 a year.

The Lucas campaign has demonstrated that there will be a growing need for a considerable extension of education technical research and advisory services in the trade union movement. Some trade unionist may of course be wary of seeking government support for research and "tactical advisory" services, fearing co-option, and would prefer independent organisations. The British Trade Union Movement does have access to some

support of this kind, through Ruskin College and elsewhere, but few of these are concerned as yet with the sort of technologies and corporate planning issues raised by the Lucas campaign.

The Lucas Combine campaign should provide a sobering lesson for those who believe that the voluntary planning agreement concept would usher in a new era of industrial democracy and a creative, positive approach to industrial development. Planning agreements were heralded as, hopefully, providing "one of those all too few opportunities when trade unions will be allowed to be constructive and forward thinking, contributing something positive not being forced to react to event already dictated" (J. Bromborough and D. Smythe, *Planning Agreements in Practice*, Labour Economic Finance and Taxation Association, 1975).

The Lucas workers certainly attempted to do all these things but, so far, with the exception of the breakthrough at Burnley, the company has been able to resist implementation of the plan. Would strong hints from government or even offers of tax concessions or development grants as proposed in the voluntary planning agreement scheme, have changed their minds?

The lesson rather seems to be that, in the absence of firm government intervention it will be up to workers themselves to challenge some of the dominant policies that guide industrial development. Given the imbalance of power that prevails in industry, industrial democracy will inevitably involve a confrontation between managers and workers. The outcome of this will depend crucially on the power and initiative of shop floor organisations, of which the Lucas Combine was and is an example.

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Lucas Aerospace : the shop stewards combine

This pamphlet describes the campaign mounted by the shop stewards' combine committee representing 13,000 workers at Lucas Aerospace Ltd. Faced with the threat of redundancy, the combine committee produced an ambitious "Alternative Corporate Plan" outlining 150 products which they hoped would secure the employees' jobs and meet the needs of the community. This campaign "for the right to work on socially useful and needed products" has been widely recognised as a major development in industrial democracy and a demonstration that organised labour is well able to take part in corporate planning.

The rejection of the Plan by the company and the inability or unwillingness of the Government to support the stewards combine and its proposals are recorded and conclusions are drawn for the future of the Government's industrial strategy, the concept of voluntary planning agreements and the policy of both the TUC and the Labour Party on the enlargement of the range of issues covered by collective bargaining.

young fabian group

The Young Fabian Group exists to give socialists not over 30 years of age an opportunity to carry out research, discussion and propaganda. It aims to help its members publish the results of their research, and so make a more effective contribution to the work of the Labour movement. It therefore welcomes all those who have a thoughtful and radical approach to political matters.

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The group publishes pamphlets written by its members, arranges fortnightly meetings in London, and holds day and weekend schools.

Enquiries about membership should be sent to the Secretary, Young Fabian Group, 11 Dartmouth Street, London SW1H 9BN ; telephone 01-930 3077.

Cover design by Dick Leadbetter. Printed by Civic Press Limited (TU), Civic Street, Glasgow, G4 9RH ISBN 7163 2046 0 ISSN 0513 5982