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SOCIALISM IN THE SIXTIES

THE FUTURE OF THE UNIONS

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THREE SHILLINGS & SIXPENCE

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I. Introduction

THE outlook facing the leaders of the British trade union movement today is uncertain, impossible to predict, and potentially disastrous.

The last two decades have developed in sharply contrasting directions. During the 1940's the unions gained in membership, power and prestige. From 1948 to 1958 total membership rose by 52 per cent—48 per cent more than the increase in the working population. The scope of collective bargaining was extended, the T.U.C. exerted a decisive influence over many aspects of government policy, the movement appeared to be united, and the unions were congratulated for their willingness to undertake wage restraint and productivity drives. As Allan Flanders has observed, 'One might have thought, many did at the time, that the unions had climbed to a pinnacle of responsibility from which they could never be shaken'.¹

Yet during the next ten years each of these developments was halted or reversed. Total membership rose by a mere 3 per cent, and the proportion of workers in trade unions fell by 1 per cent.² There were few extensions of collective bargaining, the T.U.C. constantly complained that Ministers were ignoring its advice, examples of trade union disunity (like the recent Rootes dispute) received wide publicity, and a recent public opinion poll announced that in '22 years of polling . . . we have never found greater criticisms of the Trade Unions with the rest of the population than exists today'.³

The question therefore arises: will the 1960's resemble the thriving forties, or will the tendencies which have emerged in the last ten years result in a continuing decline in membership, power and prestige? It is a mistake to assume that trade union leaders are not aware of these problems, and have no explanation to offer; on the contrary, they have a whole series of explanations and excuses.

Whose Responsibility?

Firstly, and most frequently, they blame the Tories. By periodically inducing unemployment, and failing to solve the problem of economic expansion, the Tories have created a situation in which it is impossible to obtain regular advances in wages and conditions and show existing and potential members satisfactory results. By influencing arbitration awards, and interfering with established negotiation procedures, the Tories have

¹ Trade Unions in the Sixties, *Socialist Commentary*, August, 1961.

² Trade Union Membership, *Political and Economic Planning Broadsheet*, July, 1962.

³ Gallup Poll on Trade Unions, September, 1959, p. 156.

forced the unions to employ unpopular weapons like strikes and working to rule.

Secondly, and almost as often, union leaders blame the newspapers. The Press, said a T.U.C. report in 1960,

‘ . . . which takes little interest in the positive achievements of collective bargaining, has shown an obsessional interest in irregularities.’¹

Left wing leaders, like Bob Edwards of the Chemical Workers, go even further. They suggest that the Press has built up the trade unions as a ‘bogey man’ to distract attention from the ‘real guilty men in British industry’ who have

‘ . . . forced the trade unions into the last six strikes because they refused to negotiate and because they were carrying out the business of the present Government.’²

Often, however, union leaders are not content to explain the events of the last ten years simply in terms of a right-wing conspiracy between the Tories and their allies in Fleet Street. Sometimes they blame each other.

Thus Bryn Roberts, the ‘left-wing’ ex-General Secretary of the National Union of Public Employees, charged the ‘right-wing’ leaders of the T.U.C. with over-caution, a failure to maintain contacts with the rank and file, and collaboration with the employing class. The result of this was ‘Labour’s defeat in the 1959 General Election, as well as the decline in the influence and effectiveness of the trade union movement.’³

On the other hand Bill Carron, of the Amalgamated Engineering Union, whom Bryn Roberts would undoubtedly regard as one of the ‘right-wing’ leaders most responsible, has blamed much of the growing unpopularity and disunity of the unions on the activities of ‘left-wing’ bodies like the ‘communist controlled’ National Council of Engineering Shop Stewards, which, he says, promotes unofficial strikes, undermines the elected leadership of the unions, and fosters ‘chaos and disruption’.⁴

Arguments of this sort easily develop into attacks on the mass of inactive union members and even into criticisms of the working class in general. Here both ‘left’ and ‘right’ can unite. The modern working man, we are told, is increasingly apathetic and reluctant to take his share of union work, unconcerned with anything outside his home and his family, and an unworthy successor to the pioneers of the past. Even those who do not go this far would generally agree with a recent statement of the General Secretary of the T.U.C., George Woodcock.

‘It may be a matter of regret that so many trade unionists think so little of their trade unions. But it is also a matter of fact.’⁵

Now there is clearly a great deal of truth in many of these explanations, particularly the attack on the Tories. Many of the issues which they raise

¹ T.U.C. Report, 1960, p. 126.

² T.U.C. Report, 1959, p. 331.

³ *The Price of T.U.C. Leadership*, Allen and Unwin, 1961.

⁴ Presidential Address to the 1960 National Committee of the A.E.U.

⁵ *The Listener*, February 20th, 1958.

and the reasons for them are discussed further below. But as they are too often presented they suffer from one major defect: they are essentially defeatist, or at least put the onus for action on others. The electorate should return a series of Labour Governments; newspapers should print the truth; right wingers should become left wingers, left wingers should become right wingers; members should attend branch meetings. Meanwhile, nothing can be done.

If all this were really true it would be easy to predict the future of the unions; the sixties would be more likely to resemble the fifties than the forties. This pamphlet has been written because its author does not accept this pessimistic assumption.

There is a great deal which the trade unions can do to meet the challenge of the 1960's if only they can muster sufficient will and imagination to try. Essentially their many difficulties and opportunities can be reduced to four basic problems. The various explanations and suggestions advanced above are all related to these problems, but their nature and causes need to be analysed with more precision if the conditions of solving them are to be discovered. They may be termed:

1. The Problem of Membership Growth.
2. The Problem of Membership Communication and Control.
3. The Problem of Bargaining Priorities.
4. The Problem of Trade Union Relations with Government and Public.

The future of British trade unionism depends on the extent to which these problems are debated and how they are decided within the movement during the next few years.

2. The Problem of Union Growth

BEHIND the overall stability of total membership figures during the fifties there was considerable movement and change. Between 1951 and 1961, for example, the A.E.U. increased its membership by 36 per cent, while the E.T.U. and the Printing and Book-binding Workers grew by 27 per cent. Almost all the unions organising white collar workers grew by 25 per cent or more and the Clerical and Administrative Workers nearly doubled in size. On the other hand the cotton weavers' union lost over 30 per cent of its members, the N.U.R. shrank by 15 per cent and the Boot and Shoe Operatives by 5 per cent. Even the two great general unions, which ended the period with about the same number of members as in 1951, experienced very considerable shifts in the membership of their various industrial groups.

The most important factor affecting these changes was movements in the pattern of employment. The cotton workers, the railwaymen and the boot and shoe operatives were almost as highly organised at the end of the period as they were at the beginning; there were just fewer of them. On the other hand the total labour force employed in electrical contracting and engineering rose throughout the fifties, as did the percentage of the working

population employed on non-manual work. But all the variations and changes cannot be explained in this way. In coal mining there was a 1 per cent fall in the number of workers employed between 1948 and 1958 but the unions involved increased their membership by 7 per cent. In distribution the labour force increased by 15 per cent, while total union membership rose by no more than 3 per cent. In the food and drink industries, and in chemicals, increases in the labour force were accompanied by a decline in the proportion of workers organised. In building the number employed rose by 1 per cent, but the percentage of workers unionised fell by 5 per cent.¹

There appear to have been several different factors at work here. The miners were aided by the advent of nationalisation, and the chance it gave them to obtain an industry-wide closed shop, and the 'check-off'—i.e. an agreement for the deduction of union contributions by the Coal Board. U.S.D.A.W. was hindered by the decline of the co-operative movement, the only section of the distributive industry where it has either the closed shop or the check off. The building unions, and those organising in food, drink, and chemicals, have been afflicted more than most by a rapid turnover of labour, which makes it almost impossible for them to maintain a high level of membership without the aid of the closed shop.

The prospects which these developments conjure up are depressing. Many highly organised sections of the labour force will continue to decline during the 1960's—for example coal-mining, textiles, footwear and railways. It has been calculated that if the present level of unionisation continues in these four trades, the shrinkage of the labour force alone will result in a loss of over 200,000 trade unionists by 1968!²

Yet allowing for expected increases in the size of the labour force the unions must achieve a total membership of ten and a quarter millions by 1968 if they are to maintain their present degree of organisation. This represents almost a million new members—an overall increase of a little less than 10 per cent. Where are these members to come from?

For the most part, the expanding sections of the labour force—professional and business services, insurance, banking and distribution—are badly organised. It is true that there are two well-organised industries—engineering and paper box—which will continue to expand, but it is doubtful if there will be much more improvement in their degree of unionisation. Both are expanding much more rapidly among the non-manual grades, which are still badly organised. Despite gains made by the clerical workers' union in these and other industries during the last decade, it cannot hope to make up for the ground that will be lost elsewhere.

On their present showing British unions face the certainty of a gradual reduction in the proportion of the labour force which is organised. This development can only end in them coming to be regarded as the increasingly outdated representatives of a declining industrial minority.

But further examination shows that the problems posed by this situation are not insoluble; certainly much more could be done about them. Essentially

¹ See Trade Union Membership, P.E.P. Broadsheet, p. 156.

² *op. cit.*, p. 189.

the future membership prospects of the unions depend on making advances, or at least holding the line, in three contrasting situations which must be considered separately.

The Established Centres of Strength

The problem here is to advance towards 100 per cent unionisation in the more established centres of strength—such as the railways, road transport and furniture. The model in this respect is the miners' union. The force of their example has not been lost on the N.U.R., which has been trying for some years to get the Transport Commission to agree to a closed shop, or at least a check off. Similarly the Transport and General Workers, and the Furniture Trade Operatives, have negotiated closed shops, and have supported members who refused to work with non-unionists. Other unions, like the General and Municipal, have sometimes resisted rank and file demands for the practice, particularly if it was liable to result in a strike. Few unions have given serious attention to the benefits of the check off.

Many officials still regard the closed shop as incompatible with an active rank and file. All the evidence contradicts this. Areas of industry where the closed shop predominates, such as mining, shipbuilding, or the docks, are not notable for an acquiescent and apathetic rank and file. In engineering, where there are both open and closed shops, union membership is not notably more vigorous in the open areas—if anything the reverse.

Similarly, it is sometimes argued that if the check off were introduced, the essential 'contact' between the member and the union, which is represented by the need to collect subscriptions, would be severed. This tiresome chore, which so often gives rise to arguments and bad feeling when the member is in arrears, is said to provide a unique occasion for the secretary, or shop steward, to give information to the member, and for the member to raise any queries and complaints. The fears behind this argument are quite bogus. As a recent study of trade union officers in 17 different unions drawn from all sections of industry concluded:

'The practice of the "check off" seems to yield at least two considerable advantages to the branch secretaries of the Mineworkers. Their secretaries are assured of their members and for the most part are freed from financial business . . . the Mineworkers' branch secretary appears to be able to spend far more of his time looking after his members' problems than the branch secretaries of other unions.'¹

This evidence can be paralleled in other industries, such as engineering and chemicals, where the check off has been introduced. Once they are freed of the burden of subscription collection, stewards find the job much more attractive, they are easier to recruit, and give a better service to their members.

The only case against a radical and open campaign to extend the closed shop is that if some employers resist union demands and force workers to strike to secure the dismissal of non-unionists, this will make unions even

¹ Trade Union Officers by H. A. Clegg, A. J. Killick and Rex Adams, *Blackwell*, 1961, p. 225.

less popular with the public in general and the middle class in particular.¹ If this is likely to happen there may be a case for relying on an essentially voluntary device like the check off.² Where unions are strong and active, as they are in the established centres of strength, management has a positive incentive to accept such a device. Employers in these industries often complain about the time stewards 'scrounge' to collect union dues, and of disputes that arise when members refuse to work with those who are in arrears. If the unions are prepared to defray the trifling expense involved in collection, the attitude of many employers might well be less of an obstacle than the prejudices of many union officials.

Areas of Low Organisation

However, in less well-organised trades, the check off is more difficult to obtain and the closed shop is not a practical proposition. Before either of them is feasible the level of unionisation must be raised. How is this to be done?

It is necessary to consider the problems involved in two different situations. The first occurs where the unions have secured recognition, and the right to bargain over wages and conditions; the second arises where recognition has yet to be conceded and the employer still denies the right of workers to join trade unions. The first situation is the norm among manual workers in industries like chemicals and the food and drink trades. In both cases most large employers recognise the unions, and belong to the national employers' association, but there is often little local activity and the overall level of organisation is not more than 35%. The second situation applies most typically to clerical workers employed in private industry. Here the overall level of unionisation is not much more than 5%, although some offices are highly organised.

In the first situation the key to a solution lies in the creation of a core of full-time officials whose job it is to inspire and organise a series of recruiting drives designed to lift the level of membership in the most promising places. At the moment the unions which organise in these industries are quite unable to undertake such a task; they just do not have the means.

There are about 3,000 full-time officials in the British trade union movement, approximately one for every 3,250 members. This is the lowest ratio of officers to members of any trade union movement of comparable size in the world. A recent survey shows that they work, on average, a 57-hour week, spending between one and three evenings in seven on union business.³ They are employed to negotiate, to administer the union, to write letters, to attend meetings, to listen to members' grievances and to serve on innumerable committees. If they have any time left they can go out and recruit new members.

¹ For example, the Gallup Poll on Trade Unions discovered that while 70% of trade unionists supported the closed shop principle, only 23% of non-members were in favour. *Op. cit.*, p. 7.

² The compulsory deduction of union dues as a condition of employment would be an offence against the Truck Acts.

³ Clegg, Killick and Adams, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

In the last ten years most unions have tried, from time to time, to free full-time officers for recruitment work. Results show that where the approach is sufficiently concentrated, and well staffed, gains can be made; particularly if the union is able to take advantage of some local problem or dispute which can be exploited to show what the union can do for its members. But it is impossible to maintain the impetus behind recruiting drives, as most unions are organised at present. Pressing work piles up on the desks of officers who are not primarily employed for this purpose. Gradually the amount of time they can spare for recruitment dwindles and opportunities are lost.

Of course it will be said, with the experience of the N.U.G.M.W. in mind, that it is no use engaging special 'recruitment' officers because the members they enrol must be serviced and in time the additional work involved will cause them to be 'drawn in' to help overworked office staff and help out in negotiations. This is what happened in the N.U.G.M.W. before the war. In six years over seventy 'recruitment officers' were appointed before the scheme was abandoned, largely because district secretaries came to use the new officers to do traditional work.¹

But, properly considered, the experience of the N.U.G.M.W. does not prove the futility of appointing a special class of recruitment officer; quite the reverse. In fact during the six years of the scheme, and partly as a result of it, union membership went up rapidly, so that the ratio of members to officers actually rose despite the appointment of seventy-seven officers in six years. The true moral of the story is that one of the strongest arguments for appointing special recruitment officers is that they will pay for themselves by recruiting new members.

Nevertheless, bearing in mind the existing degree of pressure on all sorts of officers, it must be recognised that unless something is done, at the same time, to lighten their burden, future experiments on the lines of the N.U.G.M.W. are unlikely. The unions must plan to expand not merely by appointing a special class of recruitment officers, but by raising the ratio of officers to members in other directions as well.

In fact there are good reasons why this should be done, quite apart from the needs of recruitment. It is arguable that most union research departments are understaffed, and it is doubtful if any union has a sufficient proportion of women officers.²

Finance

The difficulty here is finance. British unions are not merely the most understaffed in the world, they are also the cheapest. In 1960 the average trade unionist in Britain paid about £3 a year in union dues. The average weekly earnings of male trade unionists are in the region of £15 a week. This means that, on average, workers pay less than 1 per cent of the sum they take home each week to their union; a smaller proportion than before the war. Out of

¹ See H. A. Clegg, *General Union*, Blackwell, p. 75.

² Most unions would also need to employ a number of women recruitment officers, who could give special attention to ways and means of attracting women into the union. The example of the C.S.C.A., where the great majority of members are women, shows that this can be done.

this the union meets increased financial benefits, officers' salaries, and the rising cost of administration.

Since 1956 the T.U.C. has tried to get groups of related unions to raise contributions. The main obstacle has been the fear that if any one union raised its dues more than others it would find it more difficult to recruit new members, while old members would gradually desert it and join rival organisations. One suspects that this objection is often advanced as an excuse for inaction, but the General Council could overcome it by urging the next Congress to call a conference to draw up a plan for raising the dues of all unions *by equal degrees*. The object would be at least to double union dues over a period of three years. For most unions this would mean raising weekly contributions by less than 6d. each year.

If this were done, and much of the additional revenue was spent on recruitment officers in industries like chemicals and food manufacture, membership in these industries could reach the level now existing in engineering and furniture. In these two industries alone, this would represent just under a quarter of a million new trade unionists.

But it can be argued that even without raising subscriptions more money could be found for recruitment, and existing officers could be more effectively used, if there were more amalgamations between unions in the same trade. This was the view of the T.U.C.'s 1946 report on *Trade Union Structure and Closer Unity*. Yet although Congress accepted this report, the General Council found it was impossible to persuade many old-established and fiercely independent organisations to merge. They had to be content with persuading them to co-operate, rather than coalesce. However, in this way the worst examples of overlapping and wasteful competition were eliminated.

In the changing conditions of the 1960s there is a case for another survey of union structure. The present set-up is really indefensible, except on the grounds that it defies reform. There are still over 600 independent unions, each of which has its own General Secretary and governing council. Over half of these have a membership of less than a thousand. Fortunately there are at least some signs, for example in the building industry, that the consequences of overlapping and waste are beginning to be realised.¹ Another T.U.C. study of the problems at this time might do much to stimulate further mergers—particularly if it recommended a campaign to change the law governing amalgamations. The present Act stipulates a poll of all members. Fifty per cent of the membership must vote, and votes in favour must exceed those against by 20 per cent. In practice it is difficult to secure such majorities, and recently several desirable amalgamations fell through because of this.²

¹ The Amalgamation Committee set up by the twenty odd unions in the building trade has recently proposed a plan for the eventual merging of building unions into three broad sections; building, metal trades and woodworkers.

² For example in Printing. Of course if a union wishes to achieve some of the effects of amalgamation without the need to fulfil all the conditions of the Amalgamation Act, it can agree to 'transfer its engagements' to another union. This often means that in effect it ceases to exist in all but name, all its obligations and functions being taken over by the other union. The advantage of this procedure is that it is not necessary to hold a ballot in the union which takes over the engagements—although it is normally necessary to secure the consent of two thirds of the transferor union, and this may be impossible to obtain.

If the law was changed so that all that was required was the approval of 51 per cent of members voting, necessary mergers would be much easier to achieve.

The Problem of Recognition

The problem facing clerical workers, and others denied the right to bargain, is more difficult. How are they to force employers to recognise the union?

Before the Tories abolished the Industrial Disputes Tribunal, in 1958, several clerical unions had developed a technique for using this body to obtain recognition. Under the terms of the Order setting up the Tribunal, unions with members in a particular firm could refer claims on their behalf to the Tribunal, who made an award which effectively bound employers. Faced with a threat of being taken before the Tribunal, many employers agreed to settle with the union, and in the end to accord it recognition and full bargaining rights.

When the Tribunal was abolished, unions like the Engineers' Surveyors, who had made considerable use of the arbitration facilities it provided, criticised the T.U.C. for putting up only a 'token resistance'¹ to save it. Naturally these charges were denied, but the truth seems to be that the bulk of the General Council, who are not overmuch worried about the problem of recognition, were not particularly concerned to salvage this aspect of its work.² When it is appreciated how far the Tribunal procedure had been developed by white collar unions as an aid to recognition, it seems obvious that more fuss should have been made about its abolition. Certainly the T.U.C. should see that the Labour Party gives an unequivocal undertaking that when it is returned to power it will establish similar machinery.

Meanwhile two other suggestions can be made. First, unions should disinter one of the oldest weapons for putting pressure on employers—the black list. The names of employers who have refused to recognise unions should be publicised—particularly within their local area. This is a practice which has tended to be forgotten now that trade unionism is respectable. If, as is often the case, the employer in question has recognised the right of manual workers to bargain, this should be stressed.

The T.U.C. could also give more publicity to flagrant examples of employer intransigence—like the refusal of the Chairman of the National Provincial Bank to meet the Bank Employees Union to discuss plans for improving the safety and security of their members involved in hold-ups. Despite the deterioration of the public image of unions, it is still easy to put an employer who refuses to recognise a union representing his employees in a bad light.

¹ Mr. A. Prestwich, quoted in the T.U.C. Annual Report, 1961, p. 343.

² It must be remembered that the Tories, via the 1959 Terms and Conditions of Employment Act, re-enacted the 'issues procedure' of the I.D.T. This allows unions to take employers to the Industrial Court if they refuse to pay generally accepted union rates—e.g. the nationally negotiated rate for the industry as a whole. But it is no longer possible to put in a claim for more than this, or to lodge a specific grievance, and then threaten employers with compulsory arbitration unless they meet the union. By paying the basic rates, employers can avoid the effect of existing legislation.

To mobilise opinion effectively the unions would have to revolutionise their attitude towards publicity—but this subject is discussed at length below.

Secondly, white collar unions struggling for recognition must be more prepared to take strike action. The Clerical and Administrative Workers have shown a growing militancy which is much to be welcomed. Other unions could profitably follow their example and, to help them, the T.U.C. should set up a Recognition Fighting Fund Committee. Its job would be to raise money for distribution to unions who found it difficult to finance properly authorised strikes where the main object was the advancement of bargaining rights.

The experience of unions organising non-manual workers in Britain and elsewhere indicates that once recognition can be obtained, there are no exceptional difficulties involved in recruiting and retaining members.¹ Given encouragement and assistance, white collar unions would be able to achieve a level of unionisation at least as high as that now existing among manual workers.

Conclusions

The conclusions in this section derive from a refusal to accept that nothing can be done about the declining rate of membership growth. Almost all unions could raise the proportion of workers organised in the grades they recruit by at least ten per cent in the course of the next decade. In some cases this could be done by negotiating a check off, or obtaining a closed shop; in other cases it requires amalgamations, or joint action to raise subscriptions so that special recruitment officers can be appointed, or other devices tried. If the movement will accept its common responsibility to raise the level of union membership, the problem is not insoluble.

At the moment about 46 per cent of wage and salary earners are organised. There is no good reason why, in ten years time, the figure should not rise to more than 50 per cent—there is also no reason why, eventually, Britain should not be as well organised as Sweden—where about two thirds of the workers are in unions. Workers in the new expanding trades, and in clerical employment, are nowadays just as good trade union material as those working in the older centres of strength. They may face different problems from those of the miner, or the docker; they may be more interested in questions of promotion, or pensions, but there is a growing realisation that they too require protection, security, and a defence against unfair and arbitrary decisions. Workers do not need a union less in a large chemical plant, or a vast office block.

The problem facing the unions is one of organisation and imagination, not obsolescence. It is their structure that is out of date, not their social function.

¹ Differences in the degree of employer resistance towards demands for recognition go far to explain variations in the level of union organisation among white collar workers. In private industry in Britain, for example, management has usually been extremely reluctant to grant recognition, while in the public services recognition and the right to bargain were granted after the first world war. Similarly, American employers have generally resisted the unionisation of the staff, while employers in Sweden have encouraged the process.

3. The Problem of Membership Communication and Control

BUT a mere growth in membership will not in itself lead to a rise in power and prestige. To grow in influence and respect a union must command the obedience of its members; it needs more than mere numbers, it requires loyalty, and a sense of solidarity.

During the last ten years such qualities have seemed to be at a discount. The T.U.C. admitted this when they agreed to investigate the origins of recent unofficial strikes, and their relationship to shop stewards. In their report to the 1960 Congress,¹ the General Council accepted that a minority of stewards led 'needless strikes', acted 'contrary to policy' and were apt to 'misuse their position'. Recommending this report to Congress, Harry Douglass of the steelworkers warned of the danger of allowing power to slip into the hands of

'young men coming into the movement who view with some envy the power of the industrial machine which we control, and who think they would like to get their hands on the steering wheel.'²

Unless the authority of the national leadership could be re-established, he continued, the unions would end by destroying 'not only the people against whom we are fighting, but the very Movement itself'.

No doubt the majority of his fellow trade unionists on the General Council would agree that Harry Douglass may exaggerate, but the dangers he fears do exist. Essentially the problem arises as a result of the rapid growth in workplace bargaining which has developed since the war. This has been pioneered, in industries like engineering, by shop stewards who have taken advantage of local differences in union strength, the demand for labour, the profitability of particular firms and the desire of employers to settle matters inside the works, to negotiate a wide range of payments and benefits far in advance of those national officials can obtain from the employers as a whole by industry-wide bargaining.

In general such developments are a healthy sign, reflecting the growing strength of the unions at the workplace. Taken in conjunction with national bargaining, they enable workers to enjoy the best of both worlds. What the unions obtain nationally becomes accepted as a minimum below which earnings cannot fall, irrespective of the local bargaining situation. Where they are locally in a strong position, stewards can improve conditions and force up earnings to levels far above those that can be obtained by national negotiations.

But although the increases obtained by the national leaders are usually added to the structure of local workplace rates, so that *all* members of the

¹ T.U.C. Report, 1960, p. 129.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 351.

union actually benefit by the same amount as a result of national negotiations, this is not always appreciated by the members themselves. They come to regard all improvements as the consequence of local action, and in any case the various domestic struggles of their own stewards are much more immediately present in their minds. They develop a sense of identification with their stewards which is far stronger than that felt for the upper levels of the union hierarchy. The result is that if the stewards decide to defy the orders of these higher authorities, the members are likely to follow them.

Making the Stewards Obey the Rules

In any factory two different sorts of rules are supposed to govern the behaviour of stewards. They are: (1) the rules of their own union; (2) the rules agreed to by the unions and the employers, for dealing with grievances and claims made on behalf of the workers by the unions. These latter rules are usually embodied in what is termed the 'Procedure Agreement'. The orthodox solution to the problem of membership communication and control is that stewards must be made to respect both types of rule. If they will not do so, they must be punished.

There are two objections to this simple solution. First, it is impractical. Occasionally the executive of a union, plagued with stewards persistently in revolt against its authority, decides to expel some of their number. The result is rarely encouraging. Since it is impossible to punish everybody associated with the acts of rebellion, action of this sort is apt to look unfair, and is immediately labelled 'victimisation'. In any case the widespread use of the threat of expulsion is unlikely to assist in re-establishing lost loyalties among the rank and file. It more often results in a more fanatical loyalty being shown to the leaders who have escaped punishment.

Secondly, it is doubtful whether it is in the interests of the members to insist that *all* the stewards should obey *all* the rules *all* the time. It is questionable whether stewards can exploit their local bargaining advantages to the full unless they are prepared, at least sometimes, to ignore the rules.

To some extent the T.U.C.'s own report admits this. For example it says: 'Procedure agreements are often narrow in scope and one-sided in operation'. If the first is the case there may be no way of raising issues like redundancy and victimisation 'through procedure'. In such situations, says the T.U.C., 'a strike may be the only way of widening recognition'. But since the agreements complained of were often negotiated between all the unions in the industry and the employers' association, unless most unions are prepared to back a demand that they shall be changed, if necessary with a threat of strike action, there may be nothing that can be done to improve the position by 'constitutional' means. The only alternative open to the stewards will be a threat of an unconstitutional stoppage to force the employer to negotiate despite the provisions of the procedure agreement.

If an agreement is 'one-sided', what is usually meant is that, as in the engineering industry, an order from management which adversely affects union members must be carried out even if the stewards object; all they can do is to raise the issue in a way provided for in the procedure agreement, and hope that management will change its mind. On the other hand, if the

members demand a change and management objects, nothing can be done until the procedure has been used in this case also. A more equitable situation, which operates without trouble in many industries, is that in which the *status quo* is upheld if either side objects to a change proposed by the other until the matter has been raised 'in procedure'.

The fact that in practice this unfair rule is ignored is largely due to pressure at shop floor level. Management knows that the workers will strike if changes adversely affecting them are introduced without prior discussion and agreement. Nevertheless, so long as employers continue to resist attempts to introduce a more equitable arrangement, it is unfair and unwise to try to discipline stewards who rely on the 'unconstitutional' weapon of the strike threat to secure fair treatment.

Employers' Attitudes

But stewards are not merely forced to ignore procedural rules to take full advantage of their local bargaining position; they also often cannot afford to await instruction from the higher levels of the union hierarchy and observe all its rules. One reason for this is the attitude of employers, who usually prefer to settle matters immediately with the stewards, rather than bring in the full-time officials.

Employers' attitudes in this matter were well brought out in a recent study which asked a cross-section of personnel officers, drawn from different industries, whether they preferred to deal with full-time officials or their own shop stewards, if they had the choice. Shop stewards were preferred by 69 per cent of the sample, full-time officials by only 17 per cent, and 14 per cent gave no classifiable answer.¹ The reasons given were instructive. By far the most important reason for choosing stewards was their 'intimate knowledge of the circumstances of the case', which was expressed by half of those who gave this answer. Preference for keeping issues in the factory, quick decisions, the better contact of stewards with members (or control over them), and the beneficial results on relationships within the factory, were all mentioned by about a fifth of those who preferred stewards.

This, too, is in many ways a welcome development. It is not at all certain that the unions would benefit if full-time officials took over more of this work, as they do, for example, in the United States. Management in Britain is more prepared to make concessions to their own stewards, who they know, particularly if this can be done informally, without giving rise to precedents, and without the need to inform the local employers' association, or even the employer next door. In any case the present staff of full-time officials in British unions could not undertake a tenth of the local negotiations performed by stewards, even if they had the time to master the complexities of individual wage structures, works rules and informal procedures.

Nevertheless the development of what often amounts to a conspiracy between employers and the stewards to keep out union officials is a source of trouble. The officials grow to resent the power of the stewards, who in turn come to feel that the official has no knowledge of their problems.

¹ Clegg, Killick and Adams, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

More and more the steward tends to rely on the loyalty of his members, and the solidarity of fellow stewards. This is in itself a source of further difficulty. The crucial weakness of the steward's position in so many firms today is that although he appears to be secure, and management is usually prepared to tolerate his 'unconstitutional behaviour', he has very few formal rights. For example, the amount of time he is permitted to spend away from his work on union business is often very vaguely defined, although in practice he may be allowed considerable freedom. It may not be agreed that he has the right to call a shop floor meeting for the purpose of consulting his members. It may not be accepted that the leading stewards can demand to see top management at short notice. In practice these things will be done, and most of the time management acts as though it agrees that it is in its interests that they should be allowed to continue; nevertheless, such departures from the rules are viewed as privileges rather than rights, which can be suddenly withdrawn if, in the opinion of management, it is necessary to 'stand up to the stewards', or 'cut them down to size'.

Shop Steward Committees

A realisation of this possibility underlies the growth of many unofficial shop steward committees, bringing together leading stewards in firms like the British Motor Corporation, or Smiths Electric. These bodies perform certain essential functions from the stewards' point of view.

By attending the B.M.C. Joint Shop Stewards' Committee in Birmingham, for example, stewards from the B.M.C. plant in Oxford can learn of recent changes in earnings and conditions in other parts of the B.M.C. empire. This information is of considerable use to them in their efforts to force similar concessions from their own management. Now that so many firms are organised on a multi-plant basis it is necessary to pool information of this sort on the union side, if those responsible for workplace bargaining are to build up a coherent picture of managerial policy and agree on a common response. As organised at present the constitutional channels cannot provide the stewards with such facilities.

Even more important to the stewards is the additional sense of security which they obtain from the existence of these committees. Above all they are a way in which they can stand by each other. If management attempts to break a strike in one plant by transferring work to another, the joint shop stewards' committee for the whole group immediately declares the work black. If it is sent out to a non-unionist sub-contractor, no worker will handle it on its return. Moreover, most well-established committees run money-raising schemes such as raffles and sweepstakes. In this way they raise considerable sums, sometimes running into thousands of pounds a year. In part these funds are required to pay out-of-pocket expenses to stewards themselves, but they are also used to support 'deserving causes', and a strike to secure the reinstatement of a shop steward sacked for leading an unofficial strike is the most deserving cause of all.

Nevertheless the development of committees of this kind tends both to stimulate further rule-breaking and to produce an atmosphere of increasing extremism. Workers are encouraged more and more to use the strike threat

rather than the rules, even where the rules might work. Eventually management comes to feel that it is time it took a stand, while the higher levels of the union leadership become increasingly reluctant to help the stewards out if they should run into trouble. Thus, although the gap between the higher and lower levels of union authority cannot be bridged simply by demanding that stewards should from now on obey the rules, the present situation is not a satisfactory one, either from the union's or the stewards' point of view. During the next ten years the unions should try to discover more practical solutions.

Training the Stewards to Make Use of the Rules

One suggestion receiving increasing attention is that stewards should be taught more about the rules, and how to make the most efficient use of them. It is assumed that one reason for the growing disregard of the rules is the appointment of stewards who have little idea of how their union works and assume too readily that the national procedure agreement is there simply to frustrate them. X
✓

One industry which is taking joint action to improve the level of shop steward training is the motor trade. In 1961, representatives of both sides of industry agreed to sponsor a series of day-release classes organised, for the most part, through the Workers' Educational Association. They did this because, in the words of a leading employer who took part, they believed that one of the sources of trouble had been that:

'At any given moment, there must be many newcomers (and probably far too many of the older hands too!) who have only the haziest idea of what "the procedure" really is, and of how it is applied to their own practical problems.'¹

Even more encouraging, from the viewpoint of the unions as a whole, was the decision of the 1961 T.U.C. to reorganise its own educational facilities. As a result, in 1962, the General Council has asked Congress to spend about £100,000 a year on a new co-ordinated education programme. The money is being used to provide correspondence courses for shop stewards and others, and also to establish a small staff of regional organisers, who will encourage the development of evening classes and weekend schools.

But useful though both these developments are, they do not deal with the crucial difficulties which must be faced and overcome if there is to be any substantial increase in the scope of shop steward training. This problem was diagnosed in the report on Trade Union Education which Hugh Clegg and Rex Adams wrote for the Workers' Educational Association in 1958. Asked to consider the adequacy of existing facilities, these authors stressed the critical shortage of what they termed 'the right kind of tutors and materials'. Before shop stewards and others could be effectively informed about their own industrial relations arrangements, said Clegg and Adams, there must be considerable research into the 'practices and procedures' of various industries,

¹ Labour Relations in the Motor Industry, by J. R. Edwards, Managing Director of the Pressed Steel Company in *Picture Press*, No. 2, Vol. 1, Journal of the Pressed Steel Company, 1961.

presented in a way 'designed to engage the interest and attention of trade unionists'. Since most of the existing material published on the subject was unsuitable for this purpose, specially commissioned books, pamphlets and other training documents would have to be provided. To undertake this task they recommended the establishment of a small, but highly specialised, Trade Union College, whose staff would conduct the research, write the teaching material, and train existing W.E.A. and other tutors in the necessary techniques.

✓ The proposed re-organisation of the T.U.C.'s educational facilities provides an admirable opportunity to implement this plan. If the T.U.C. were prepared to spend twice as much as is proposed on its educational scheme it would have more than enough to establish a first-class Trade Union College along the lines suggested. If it were willing to make a grant to an existing institution, such as Ruskin College, to enable it to take on the necessary additional staff to do this work, it would be possible to provide what is required for a fraction of this cost.

Changing the Rules to Fit the Stewards

✓ But shop steward training is only a palliative so long as it is necessary for stewards to break the rules in order to do the job. In some ways it is the rules, not the stewards, which are most in need of reform.

It is sometimes said that the unions should advocate some kind of Shop Stewards' Charter—formalising their position in relation to the realities of the workplace situation. This would entail a reform of most existing procedure agreements so that they guaranteed the stewards certain constitutional rights; the right to consult their members, to approach top management, to demand information and bargain over issues like short-time working and victimisation, to move freely around the firm and so on. Provision might also be made for any loss of earnings incurred by the stewards and for protection against sudden dismissal.

There is much to be said for action along these lines. The more the rules help the stewards the more likely it is that they will come to respect them. However, at the present time there is no sign that many national employers' associations would be willing to accept such a change. The attitude of one of the most important, the Engineering Employers' Federation, is significant here. In the last ten years two separate Courts of Inquiry set up to consider disputes in the industry have suggested ways of improving the engineering procedure agreement. The unions would undoubtedly have accepted these proposals, for they are similar to those that they themselves have advocated since 1945. Nevertheless the Employers' Federation still refuses to admit that there is anything wrong with the present procedure.

In these circumstances perhaps the best immediate course would be for the unions to approach individual employers, in an attempt to persuade them to accept additional agreements designed to legitimise the steward's position in their particular factory. It might also be a good idea to approach the nationalised industries. Already they have procedures which are in some ways an advance on many private trades, although it is doubtful if they give adequate recognition to shop stewards. If some sort of stewards' charter were

negotiated in industries like gas and electricity, and with leading firms in the private sector, they might serve as an example of what is desired.

When considering suggestions for the reform of union rules, to make it easier for stewards to work within them, different difficulties arise. Wherever possible branches should be based on a particular place of work. Such branches are places where the problems of the factory can be discussed and decided by members and shop stewards who are themselves branch officers. Full-time officials can make regular visits and keep in touch with what is going on. One reason why the printing unions have been able to combine advanced forms of workplace bargaining with regular contact with officials, and the maintenance of national solidarity and loyalty, is that they have insisted on basing their 'chapels' on particular places of work and integrating them into the formal structure of the union.

But the printing unions have also been helped by the fact that there are clear lines of demarcation between them, and an absence of inter-union competition for members. Each chapel in a branch functions as a self-contained unit, determining the bargaining policy of its particular grade of workers. In other industries, such as engineering, or building, this is not the case. Not only are there more unions but, much more important, the lines of demarcation between them are more hazily drawn, and over large sections of the semi-skilled there are two or more unions openly competing for members. In these trades effective workplace bargaining is a multi-union affair. Inter-union rivalry and hostility are sources of weakness. It is only where stewards from different unions can work together in an atmosphere of tolerance and co-operation that local bargaining opportunities are fully exploited.

One of the most valuable features of the present growth of unofficial shop steward committees is that they provide a forum where stewards of all unions can come together precisely in order to solve common workplace problems. No single union could provide such facilities. The danger is that if they tried to do so, although they might increase their own influence over their own stewards, they would tend to do this at the cost of weakening the factory-wide solidarity created by shop steward committees. Thus, the solution that works well in printing cannot be generally applied in industries like engineering and building. There the loyalties built up by the joint shop stewards' committees must be preserved.

But this does not mean that the committees themselves could not be brought more within the ambit of official union influence. It does mean that this is a job which cannot be done by individual unions. It is essentially a multi-union task, and as such must be undertaken by bodies like the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions, or the Federation of Building Trade Operatives. But as organised at present, these associations are ill-equipped for such a task. Their functions are to conduct national wage negotiations. They are not an active force in the workplace, or even, in most places, at district level.

Although the Engineering Confederation has District Committees their work is mainly consultative. They convene meetings of leading stewards but these are often badly attended. This is mainly because in a diverse industry like engineering, stewards from one geographical area have little in common.

They are concerned with what happens in other factories belonging to the same firm in other parts of the country, or with similar firms making products in competition with their owner. This is the sort of information they can get from existing unofficial committees.

A re-organised and re-vitalised Confederation could provide facilities for meetings of this kind, and ensure that appropriate full-time officials were in attendance. But it would require a larger budget and, most important of all, a revolution in union attitudes. At the moment most unions would oppose such a plan, partly because it could undermine their own autonomy, and partly because they still formally deny the need for stewards from different factories to meet in this way at all.

Conclusions

There are no easy solutions for the problems posed in this section, although if the amount of rule breaking is not to rise as the degree and scope of workplace bargaining widens during the next decade, the unions must find ways of improving communications and strengthening rank and file loyalties. A lot more could be done to teach stewards how to use the rules, but it is even more important to face and overcome the difficulties involved in changing them. One thing is clear: the extent to which stewards are now encouraged to ignore union authority and break established rules is dangerous and indefensible.

4. The Problem of Bargaining Priorities

IF declining membership trends are reversed and communications between the leadership and the rank and file improve, the unions will have dealt with the major deficiencies in their internal organisation which prevent them from advancing towards increasing industrial power. But at the moment any significant addition to union power would only add to their unpopularity, and might lead to demands that action should be taken to restrict their legal freedom.

It is therefore also essential that the unions come to grips with the causes of their deteriorating public image. Both this section, and the one that follows, are largely concerned with this question.

One of the main reasons for the growing criticism of unions is the suspicion that they have become exclusively concerned with the scramble for higher wages. Allan Flanders recently analysed this type of criticism, and linked the declining public approval of trade unions with what he termed their declining 'sense of social purpose'. He wrote:

'Trade unions have always had two faces, sword of justice and vested interest. But it is the second, rather than the first, that is now turned most frequently to public view. More than that, it has become accepted as their normal, natural image by the unions themselves.'¹

¹ Trade Unions in the Sixties, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

In the thirties, he continued, the primary social purposes of the unions were to establish their position in industry on a firm foundation and to gain a consultative relationship with government on an equal footing with employers. These aims could be justifiably presented as demands for elementary social justice; for a recognition of the legitimate rights of organised working men.

Both purposes appeared to have been secured by the end of the 1940's. The unions then needed to raise their sights; 'New social purposes, appropriate to the changed situation, had to be formulated and pressed for'. Instead they seemed to be mainly concerned with exploiting their new position in a spirit of narrow materialism and sectional advantage; as a result they projected an image of trade unionism as a business rather than as a cause. They came to look less and less like a sword of justice and more and more like a vested interest.

Flanders has emphasised one of the most important problems facing the unions at the present time. Essentially it is a problem of bargaining priorities. How far, at national and local level, are the next ten years to repeat the pattern of the fifties, with unions continuing to direct their energies almost exclusively to a struggle for higher pay? How far, instead, will they attempt to broaden their approach, concentrating on less immediate and materialistic issues—on reducing hours and raising minimum wages, as well as on security and status on the job?

Reducing Maximum Hours and Raising Minimum Wages

The nature of the choice can be seen most clearly in the issue of the shorter working week. The introduction of an eight hour day has been a trade union objective since the 1880's. The results so far are that the majority of manual workers now have a standard working week of 42 hours. Yet in terms of hours worked, the 40 hour week is as far off as ever. Despite the reduction in *standard* hours the *average* hours actually worked by adult males are substantially what they were in 1938—about 48 a week. The difference has been made up by overtime. Each reduction in the standard working week has been met by a roughly equivalent extension of overtime. Systematic overtime has come to be accepted as a normal feature of many manual workers' lives.

The usual reason advanced for this is full employment. Labour has been short, so overtime has been necessary to raise output and meet the needs of economic expansion. The main difficulty with this explanation is that overtime has not risen to the same extent abroad, even in countries with full employment and a more rapid rate of growth. Only France needs as much overtime as we do. In most other European countries average hours are much lower than in Britain. In Germany they work, on average, a 43 hour week—in Italy an hour less.

Moreover, if overtime was a response to labour shortages it would be at its highest where earnings are already high, in an effort to attract labour. Yet the reverse is the case. Official figures show that the longer the hours of overtime, the lower the average earnings. Industries where average hours exceed 50 a week have below average hourly earnings; those with above average hourly earnings work below average hours.

Facts of this sort have led to the suggestion that overtime is used in Britain more to supplement the wage packet than to raise production, particularly in the lower paid trades.¹ Workers develop a notion of what is a reasonable wage packet. Sometimes the weekly wage rate is sufficient to yield this, but this is often not the case. In some instances incentive systems may be used to fill the gap, but if they are not available, overtime is the only alternative. This is realised by many managements. Where basic pay is low, they allow 'guaranteed' overtime to act as a substitute for higher pay.²

From the employer's viewpoint the main disadvantage of this system is the waste. Excessive overtime involves unnecessary overheads. But from the union's viewpoint there are disadvantages too. The system makes a mockery of arguments in favour of a further reduction in the standard week. The T.U.C. may advocate this as a means of increasing leisure, but nobody believes it.³ A campaign for the 40 hour week ending in another two hours overtime is regarded as a prime example of union hypocrisy. It is felt that if the unions really wanted to see a reduction in hours they would tackle the problem of overtime.

All the signs are that this could be done without any loss of production. As one employer told a team of investigators: 'It has been our experience that reducing overtime in stages has not reduced our production'.⁴ What is involved is detailed negotiation industry by industry and firm by firm, and priority must be given to lower paid workers already working a 50 hour week. Since these groups cannot be expected both to give up their overtime, and to work more consistently for a shorter period unless they can be guaranteed the same money as before, priority must also be given to raising their standard weekly wages. It is here that the problem of bargaining priorities and the need to choose between social justice and vested interests re-emerges most sharply.

Improving the position of the lowest paid is not simply a matter of securing advances for workers in depressed trades like laundry work, jute manufacture, or retail bespoke tailoring. The 10 per cent of adult workers taking home £10 a week or less come from a variety of trades and the eight million or more earning £12 or under work in a wide range of industries. In a recent study of the engineering industry, for example, Hill and Knowles discovered that although some workers were poorly paid, some groups earned 'half as much again or even twice as much as other groups, though they were doing identical work'.⁵ They concluded that variations of this size were unjustifiable, either on economic grounds or on grounds of equity.

To reduce such anomalies they recommended *pro tanto* agreements similar to those concluded in the industry in 1943 and 1950. These broke with the

¹ See H. A. Clegg, *The Implications of the Shorter Working Week for Management*, B.I.M. pamphlet, 1962.

² See *Work and Leisure*, Summary of an Investigation by the Study Groups based on the Duke of Edinburgh's Study Conference, 1961.

³ See the Gallup Poll on Trade Unions, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁴ *Work and Leisure*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁵ The Variability of Engineering Earnings. Hill and Knowles, *Oxford Institute of Statistics Bulletin*, May 1956, p. 129.

tradition of 'flat rate' increases, which award the same sum to all workers in a particular grade, and substituted graduated increases inversely related to individual earnings. Thus when an increase of 6s. was awarded in 1943, the only workers who received this in full were those receiving no more than the district minimum. Those whose earnings were sufficiently far above the minimum got nothing at all.

These agreements were unpopular at the time, largely because they awarded no increase at all to the majority of workers. Nevertheless it must be faced that even a modified *pro tanto* agreement, which included something for everybody, however small, would be resented by some sections of the highly paid — for example car workers. It would of course be open to them to take action at workshop level to improve on their nationally awarded increases, but even if they were completely successful this need not cause them to take a better view of the actions of their national leaders. It must therefore be realised that there is implied in the use of *pro tanto* agreements a potential threat to union solidarity. In changing bargaining priorities in this way one may make the problem of membership communication and control more difficult. Nevertheless I would argue that so long as action is taken along the lines outlined in the previous section to deal with this problem, there is a case for using national negotiations in the next few years as a means of raising minimum standards. This means that unions cannot totally reject the notion of *pro tanto* agreements. An attempt to put the worse-off sections of the working class first is not only a worthwhile social objective, it would also help to dispel their image as the mere guardians of the sectional interests of the most powerful.

Security and 'Fair Treatment'

Unions could also give more thought to questions of security and status. This problem goes beyond the argument that manual workers should be given the status and privileges of 'staff' employees. Even the better-off staff worker in private industry today has little security, and in many ways he is still regarded as a 'hired hand'. Outside the public sector, workers can still be dismissed after thirty years' service for trivial offences. Their chances of promotion are still blocked by unfair supervisors or partisan office managers.

In the case of manual workers, who are subject to seasonal discharge, one of the main deficiencies is that there are practically no formal agreements covering redundancy. The main obstacle to progress here is the unions themselves. The A.E.U. insists that redundancy in any form must be opposed. This means that its officials cannot raise the problem of job security in all its aspects until an employer is threatening members with the sack. Then, in a period of falling trade and rising unemployment when they are at their weakest, the A.E.U. demands work-sharing and no redundancies.

The way out of this difficulty is for unions like the T. & G.W.U., who are not saddled with such a short-sighted policy, to take the lead where they can and negotiate the best agreements possible during booms. This involves recognising that even if labour requirements are planned in advance, and work-sharing is accepted as a short term expedient, there comes a time during a recession when management can insist on discharging workers and

the unions are unable to stop them. All they can do is ensure that the employer gives adequate notice and reasonable severance pay.¹

What is required for dismissals is the negotiation of simple and fair disciplinary rules giving unions the right to make representations on behalf of members under notice. In a few instances these already exist. They specify the offences for which dismissal is justified, and ensure that for most misdemeanours, a man cannot be dismissed for a first offence.

For promotion opportunities, the main safeguard unions usually insist on is that senior men shall not be passed over unless they are incapable of doing the work. This does not mean that the seniority principle is relied on blindly. For some jobs it is reasonable to allow for other factors—such as competitive examination. But promotions and transfers ought not to be entirely at management's discretion. In most workers' experience systems of promotion relying exclusively on 'merit' as defined by management, lead a few to curry favour with supervisors, and open the way to favouritism and arbitrary selection under the guise of measuring ability.

Behind suggestions of this sort is the belief that it is time British unions moved beyond the limited framework of rights that have been their main concern since the war. The longer a man works for an employer the more his life becomes invested in that employment. His friends, his habits, his entire physical and emotional well-being and the future of his family may be greatly affected by his job. Increasingly he needs to feel secure, surrounded by a framework of rights he knows and understands.

The fight to widen workers' rights is, as Allan Flanders has written, one which must be conducted 'at works level'. Nevertheless, he continues,

'. . . it is a struggle which the trade unions have to lead nationally, even if it is fought locally. These are issues on which they need to develop their policy and give guidance and support, not least in terms of training and education to their workplace representatives.'²

A campaign to raise security and advance workshop rights would also provide an additional opportunity for union leaders, at all levels, to strengthen their contacts with stewards, and, through them, with the rank and file.

Conclusions

It has been argued in this section that unions should change their bargaining priorities. They should place less emphasis on an annual scramble for equal increases for all, and more on raising minimum standards, improving job security, and extending workers' rights. This would not only help to dispel the public image of unions as apostles of materialism and sectional advantage; it would also provide them with worthwhile social objectives for the 1960s.

¹ A forthcoming Fabian pamphlet by Geoffrey Goodman deals with this subject in more detail.

² Flanders, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

5. The Problem of Trade Union Relations with Government and Public

SO FAR this pamphlet has been mainly concerned with the internal affairs of unions; with maintaining membership, preserving unity, and developing adequate social objectives. It has been necessary to consider the policies unions ought to adopt towards employers in general, but this has not involved any detailed discussion of external relationships between unions and the Government, or between the movement as a whole and the public generally. This section considers these matters in a more direct and comprehensive way.

When considering internal problems it is obvious that the main impetus for reform must come from inside individual unions — although the T.U.C. can help by providing additional facilities. The reverse is the case with the problems to be considered now. Here the role of the T.U.C. is vital and it is necessary to begin with an analysis of its existing functions in the field of union-government relations.

The T.U.C. and the Government

Although it was founded in 1868, it was only in 1921 that the T.U.C. set up a permanent executive, known as the General Council, to review industrial and economic developments affecting unions and to formulate a policy for dealing with them. Although almost all issues of concern to the Council involved Government action, it was not until the second world war that it secured the right to be consulted on all aspects of Government policy. However, after Bevin became Minister of Labour, the Council began to feel that it was exerting a real and decisive influence in the fields of industrial and economic policy. War-time contacts were retained when Labour took office in 1945, and when the Tories returned in 1951 the Minister of Labour seemed friendly and the Council looked forward to a continuation of its influence.

The years that followed saw a progressive decline in the effectiveness of the system created by Bevin. Since 1956 there has been a marked worsening of relations and the influence of the General Council has steadily declined. The formal machinery of consultation has been retained, but the Government has become less willing to give the T.U.C. advance notice of its intentions and more reluctant to act on its advice.

The growing frustration experienced by the Council can be seen from a study of the reports which its specialist committees make to Congress. Here one can read of the failure of the Economic Committee to influence Budgetary policy; the Production Committee records its criticisms of Government plans for high-unemployment areas, and the Education Committee reports its unsuccessful attempts to secure the implementation of the Crowther Report. But the decline in influence can be seen at its most tragic in the field of Social Insurance and Industrial Welfare; topics of

great concern to the unions, where the General Council's past achievements have been considerable. The main objective of the T.U.C. in these fields is to secure improvements in the facilities for dealing with industrial accidents and diseases — for their prevention and treatment, as well as the provision of adequate compensation.

Thus it has been concerned about the recent rise in factory accidents and has argued that it is related to the Government's refusal to provide for a sufficient increase in the number of Factory Inspectors. It has pointed out that there are now not enough inspectors to implement the 1926 recommendation of the I.L.O., that each factory should be inspected annually. Despite these facts, the Government has refused to expand the Inspectorate to the level required.

To tackle the problem of preventing industrial diseases, and provide more effective forms of treatment for diseases and accidents, the T.U.C. has long advocated an Occupational Health Service. Its representatives have stressed the increasing volume of dangerous substances in everyday industrial use, emphasising that most factories have only a first aid box and a half trained volunteer to deal with emergencies. It has drawn attention to the growth in radiation risks, and the rise in the incidence of industrial bronchitis. The Government has continued to reply that an industrial health service should be developed on a 'voluntary basis' and has refused to take action to force employers to provide more adequate facilities.

But Government parsimony and obstinacy is shown most clearly in questions of compensation and redress.

For years the T.U.C. has demanded improvements in the arrangements for medical assessment and diagnosis under the Industrial Injuries Scheme. It has attempted to extend the scope of the Industrial Injuries Act to cover injuries sustained during short breaks of employment. It has urged that complaints like industrial bronchitis, or bricklayers' elbow, or injuries to hearing caused by occupational noise, should be scheduled as industrial diseases. It has tried to extend payment of special hardship allowances beyond the existing thirteen week limit, and attempted to get injured workers who attend hospital their out-of-pocket expenses. The Government has refused to grant any concessions in all these cases.

But the two most flagrant examples of Government meanness affect the very old and the totally incapacitated. The first concerns the plight of the 30,000 older workers who receive benefits under the old Workmen's Compensation Act for injuries suffered before 1948. The most that can be paid the totally incapacitated under this Act is 50/- a week. In 1956, following renewed submissions, the T.U.C. obtained one of its last important concessions, when this group was given a supplement of 17/- a week. This ensured that they were, for a short time, no worse off than workers covered by the improved industrial injuries scheme introduced by the Labour Government. Since that date, although disablement payments under the new scheme have been twice increased, nothing has been done for the old cases. This means a worker crippled before 1948 receives 30/- a week less than one disabled after that date.

The second case also concerns the incapacitated, but the anomaly here

has nothing to do with age. Labour's National Health Act gave the Minister power to provide appliances for the disabled. Consequently motor-tricycles were provided for those whose disability involved a loss of both legs. During the last few years specially adapted small cars have been designed for the use of the disabled, and they have been supplied, under the National Health Service, to the war-disabled. Yet successive Tory Ministers have refused to extend this provision to the industrially disabled. The T.U.C. has pointed out that tricycles are less reliable than cars, and in cases of breakdown disabled men have been stranded for long periods. They have stressed that most tricycles are single-seaters, so that a disabled person cannot be accompanied by a relative or friend.

Despite the injustice and hardship caused by both these cases, and the trifling cost involved, the representations of the T.U.C. have had no effect. There could not be clearer proof of the grave weakening of the established techniques for affecting Government policy.

The Decline in Influence

There are two main reasons for this decline in influence. First, the longer the Tories remained in office the longer were the periods of economic stringency, and the less likely it has been that they would agree to any extension of the provisions of the Welfare State. Second, and even more important, is the refusal of the T.U.C. to co-operate in the implementation of Government policies of wage restraint. It was obvious that sooner or later the day-to-day relations between the specialist committees of the General Council and individual Government Departments must be affected by this. Essentially the war-time system established by Bevin was based on the honouring of a bargain; in exchange for a share in national decision-taking, a system of arbitration that encouraged union recognition, and a great deal of power over the hire and fire of labour, the unions agreed, for the duration of the war, to give up the legal right to strike and their claims to preserve skill monopolies. The object of the bargain was to ensure that the unions played their part in achieving the common victory.

When Labour was returned in 1945 the terms of the bargain changed; but it was accepted that in exchange for the continuance of their new influence, unions would act 'responsibly', and promote the agreed ends they shared with the Government. Thus they gave their blessing to the productivity drive, and supported the introduction of wage restraint. On the whole the bargain worked, and when the Tories returned, the more far-sighted hoped that the General Council might be persuaded to perform similar services on their behalf. But there was insufficient agreement on overall objectives for this to work. By 1956 the T.U.C. regarded the difficulties of the Government as the consequence of a misguided and doctrinaire Tory policy of abandoning all controls. It passed a resolution denouncing 'proposals to recover control by wage restraint'.

It is this development which must be remembered when considering the T.U.C.'s reaction to the Government's decision to set up the National Economic Development Council. The General Council decided, after some hesitation, to co-operate in the work of Neddy, but this was not a sign

that the breach between the unions and the Government had narrowed. It agreed to serve on Neddy for three quite different reasons. First, it knew that the N.E.D.C. would concentrate at least at first, on ways of raising the rate of economic growth rather than on the best method of holding down wages. Second, the General Council realised that this was its last chance of restoring some of its lost influence. Finally, it felt that an outright refusal would increase trade unions' general unpopularity with the public.

There can be little doubt that in the circumstances the General Council was right to decide as it did — but this does not mean that the Government will allow Neddy to have the influence the Council would wish.

The T.U.C. and Neddy

The full-time staff of Neddy were told to consider how Britain could raise its rate of growth to 4% per annum and they will present a comprehensive report on the obstacles to greater growth by the end of 1962. What the T.U.C. says it would like to see then is a period of hard bargaining where assistance demanded from the unions can be exchanged for binding concessions from the Government or employers.

This may not be how things work out. The Government may not let the Council influence anything. They may prefer it to degenerate into another form of window dressing — like its predecessor the Cohen Council — a facade, intended to demonstrate that the Tories are not entirely unconcerned with the rate of growth, and intend, some time in the future, to work out a policy for dealing with it. The distinguished staff of the Council will continue to circulate papers and point to problems but economic policy will remain the province of the Chancellor and his traditional advisers at the Treasury.

In this case the T.U.C.'s representatives on Neddy must denounce it as a fraud and be prepared to resign in a body. If they fail to do this, or bungle their resignation so that the electorate fails to understand why they left, they may find they have unwittingly played their part in ensuring another Tory victory without in any way increasing their own influence.

But if the Government does take the Council seriously the danger will then be that they will raise their growth target in an insufficiently controlled and selective way, which will end in the way the last Tory boom ended in 1960 — with a balance of payments crisis and an attempt to impose another wage freeze. If this seems likely, the trade union members of the Council will have to make a public case for a more controlled and selective programme of expansion. In fact the General Council has suggested a whole series of measures designed to do just this in the past.¹ What it has failed to do is bring these ideas together as part of a coherent and well-publicised trade union contribution to the problem of economic growth. If the Government embarks on a programme of insufficiently controlled expansion Neddy will provide the unions with an ideal platform from

¹ They include the idea of differential investment and depreciation allowances, increased public investment, greater control over the location of industry, the use of taxation to discourage unnecessary imports and encourage exports, and so on.

which to criticise; but only if their representatives are prepared to seize their opportunities to the full.

Yet the T.U.C. leaders will face their most critical challenge only if the Government is shrewd enough to avoid both courses outlined; this will arise precisely if things work out in the way they say they hope.

Suppose the Government actually increases the rate of growth and accepts the need for some of the controls advocated by the T.U.C. Suppose it also makes a number of concessions in the field of Social Insurance and Industrial Welfare. It would then be in a position to demand real co-operation from the unions. Such demands would concern two potentially explosive questions; union attitudes towards increased production and technical change, and the vital issue of wages.

In the case of production questions there can be little doubt that more will be required than formal support for another 'productivity drive'. Neddy's staff are bound to stress the way the economy runs up against shortages of skilled labour at an early stage of the expansion process, and to point to bottlenecks which are the fault of the unions. They will also produce detailed reports of a number of industries, some of which are notorious for their labour restrictions and opposition to technical change. If the unions are not to be blamed for sabotaging expansion they must be prepared to make real concessions, or at least be ready to explain why what is suggested is impractical.

On the wages front the Government will undoubtedly make use of its newly established National Incomes Commission to put pressure on the unions. This body of so called 'independent experts' will be encouraged to pronounce on the justifiability of important wage claims from the viewpoint of their effect on the national economy. The T.U.C. denies that such a body can perform any useful functions, and George Woodcock has denounced the idea of 'independent experts' pronouncing on wages as 'arrogant, conceited and foolish'. It is understandable that the unions should take this attitude, but unless they are prepared to maintain that wages are the one sector of the economy that can never be subjected to any sort of planning or set of priorities they will not be able to maintain a completely negative view on the subject.

In fact they have already admitted that in the interests of higher growth it might be necessary to adopt a policy of wage restraint. In January this year the T.U.C. said:

'It is possible that a concerted move to a higher level of economic activity could generate an increase in personal incomes which could not be matched immediately by an increase in the resources available for personal consumption. In such circumstances pressure might have to be relieved not only by higher taxation but by temporary limiting increases in income.'

It may be that if it was satisfied that a 4% growth rate was going to be achieved, the General Council might be prepared to discuss such an idea — while reserving the right to argue over the size of the figure itself and the need for it to be accompanied by limitations on profits and capital gains.

Unfortunately it is doubtful if the Government would now be satisfied with this. The increases announced since they tried to impose their own 'guiding light' in April, 1962, show that such a published maximum tends to become an actual minimum, in the absence of an agreed policy on how it should be distributed. Workers in the Civil Service, and others with no industrial strength, get either the minimum, or little more than the minimum, while more militant groups obtain increases roughly proportionate to their industrial strength. (Meanwhile workers whose stewards can take advantage of local bargaining opportunities to drive up piece rates and increase overtime and other local payments can avoid the effect of the pause altogether.)

This is not a wages policy at all, and it will not become one simply by getting T.U.C. support for a meaningless overall 'guiding light'. If the Government is serious about the implications of planning in other directions they will demand more from the T.U.C. than this.

The T.U.C. and Wages

What they have in mind, and what they may wish to use the National Incomes Commission as a step towards, is T.U.C. co-operation in a policy for wages which prescribes not merely the size of the guiding light, but how it should be distributed. One can get some idea of what this would involve from the recent White Paper on incomes policy.

In effect the White Paper claimed to distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' arguments for wage increases from the viewpoint of the public interest — much as the National Incomes Commission is intended to do. In fact all demands were rejected as unjustified unless they would (1) attract workers to undermanned industries or (2) cause them to work harder. No doubt this list is too short, but it must be admitted that every successful attempt at economic planning abroad has recognised that all wage claims cannot be treated as equally valid if inflation is to be avoided in a country trying to raise its rate of growth.

George Woodcock may be right to say that 'it is not possible for independent people, however eminent, responsible and experienced' to draw up such a list; but he and his fellow members on the General Council cannot evade their own responsibility in this matter so easily.¹

In a pamphlet of this sort it is impossible to lay down in advance either the criteria the T.U.C. should agree to, or say how far they would be wise to go in co-operating with the Government over the implementation of such criteria.² All one can do is indicate the factors which would have to be considered and ought to be discussed now.

¹ See 'Desperate, Disastrous and Futile', by George Woodcock, *Sunday Pictorial*, July 29th, 1962.

² It is important to remember here that the T.U.C. has very limited powers over member unions in matters of this sort. They cannot give an undertaking that only certain kinds of wage demands will be made; they cannot even guarantee that unions will only use certain sorts of arguments. What they could do would be to give their 'moral' support to a Government White Paper which listed certain priorities and principles which ought to be followed in making wage settlements.

For example, the White Paper said all wage claims based on changes in the 'cost of living or from trends of profits or productivity' must be largely disregarded. The T.U.C. could not accept this, but might be prepared to admit that not all arguments based on such movements are equally justifiable. It is arguable, for instance, that wage increases are only justified on cost of living grounds if there has been a substantial change in the retail price index, or if profits have been distributed rather than invested.

Similarly, it does not necessarily follow that wages in the expanding trades should *always* rise in line with increases in productivity; this may make it more difficult for lower paid workers in industries where productivity is not rising to obtain a living wage.

Then, again, although unions must reject the White Paper's view that the notion of 'comparability' must be largely ignored, they might distinguish between the two senses in which the term is used. If 'comparability' simply means that any group is entitled to the same size of increase as any other group, then the principle is difficult to defend because it justifies spreading every rise, granted for whatever reason, over the entire economy. More justifiable are the detailed 'comparisons' made between workers in the public sector and those doing similar work outside. These ensure that public employees (whose wages cannot be settled by a competitive market) get fair treatment.

Finally, if the unions were to accept the policy of giving priority, in national bargaining, to the lower paid, as suggested in the previous section, they might also consider the case for holding back on national wage increases for groups who can evade the effects of periods of wage restraint by driving up piece rates and other local supplements.

It is not suggested that the General Council should review arguments of this sort so as to develop hard and fast rules by which any given proposal for a wage increase could be judged. It is not even maintained that they need make their views on the subject public before they know more than they do now about the Government's intentions, particularly on such matters as the control of profits and capital gains. What is suggested is that the General Council must get over its fear of even discussing the subject of income distribution.

The Dangers

The next year is a crucial one for the T.U.C. Its response to the challenge of Neddy will affect much more than its relationship with the present Government; it will largely determine its future standing with the community, and may settle the fate of the Labour Party as well. It is extremely likely that one of the decisive pre-election battles between the parties will be fought over the Government's handling of Neddy, and the unions' role within it. If the unions can maintain the initiative, show that they are prepared to face the problems of planning growth, and make the necessary concessions then the Labour Party has nothing to fear from this battle — whether the T.U.C. eventually decides to strike a bargain with the present Government or not.

The danger for the Labour Party, and the public image of the unions,

will only arise if their representatives on Neddy make a bad showing; if they appear to be on the defensive, unready to discuss certain topics, unwilling to make concessions, evasive and disunited. Worst of all would be a situation where it was felt that they were imprisoned by their own vested interests, and the narrow pursuit of rank and file demands, to the exclusion of the general economic and social interests of the country. If this picture of the unions were reinforced by the behaviour of their representatives on Neddy, it would not only be the unions' image that suffered but the Labour Party's as well.

Unfortunately, although the more far-sighted members are aware of these dangers, the attitude of the General Council to most of the problems involved is still very ill-defined. In part this is because the Council consists of overworked union leaders meeting every few weeks to deal with papers put before them by their full-time staff. At the moment the staff is committed to servicing existing committees and discharging their daily duties. With their present resources they are incapable of providing the long term analysis that the Council needs if it is to define its attitude to the problems raised by Neddy and maintain the initiative.

To enable this service to be provided, the T.U.C.'s research staff should be increased, and some of them should be organised in a long-term research and planning department, whose sole function it is to review long range trends. Even before the challenge represented by Neddy the T.U.C. needed such a department. The implications of a rising level of growth should only be the first item on its agenda. It could also consider some of the problems discussed in earlier sections of this pamphlet — the effect of changes in the labour force on recruitment, or the impact of workshop bargaining on union structure. The future relationship between the T.U.C. and its counterparts abroad might also be made the subject of a full-scale review.¹ If the General Council created such a department and defined its priorities they would be much more prepared to meet the challenge of the next decade. There is no shortage of problems; only an absence of facilities and the will to increase them.

Trade Unions and Public Relations

But it will be little use for the General Council to face up to its long-term responsibilities, and overhaul its policy-making machinery, unless it also revolutionises the facilities for communicating information about union attitudes and activities. During the next few years, the unions must make many crucial decisions, and some of them will be controversial; the reasons

¹ A body of this sort would also be invaluable in developing a policy towards the institutions of the Common Market, if Britain goes in. These matters are not considered in this pamphlet, since they have been subjected to a comprehensive and thorough survey by Mr. Colin Beever in his P.E.P. Broadsheet, *Trade Unions and the Common Market*. The present writer is in broad agreement with Mr. Beever's conclusions. As he puts it, if Britain joins, the unions 'will have to get used to the idea of concentrating their particular and positive efforts for the betterment of their members at public authority level as well as at the collective bargaining level'. This means that the role of the T.U.C. will be even more important, and the need for long term thinking still more vital.

for them should be understood, both by the public and within the movement. At the moment there are virtually no facilities for publicising even the day to day decisions of the General Council. Unlike other sections of the T.U.C.'s 300 page report, the two pages devoted to 'Press and Publications' do not record the activities of an influential and important department. They are mainly concerned with relatively unimportant domestic matters — such as the circulation of the T.U.C.'s monthly magazine.

The sole references to the practice of 'Public Relations' proper are an entry concerning the monthly General Council Press Conference, and the traditional statement that 'regular and frequent' contact has been maintained with Industrial Correspondents. Most members of the Council undoubtedly believe this is all the T.U.C. needs to do. If this was ever the case it is no longer. Mass-communications is a professional business, and the unions cannot afford to adopt an amateur approach.

Part of the trouble is that many union leaders retain, at base, an over-simple and unsophisticated belief that, in the end, 'truth must out', coupled with a vague conviction that the public must still be, in some sense, on their side. Others are the victims of their own propaganda; convinced that they have been misrepresented in the past by the professional Public Relations experts employed by the 'Tory Press', they feel it would be wrong for them to engage in such dishonest tactics themselves.

Yet the fact is that an ability to make the most of modern techniques of mass-communication is neither good nor bad in itself. When such techniques are used, as they have been with great success, to awaken the public conscience about the plight of refugees, or the state of Westminster Abbey, we naturally applaud. When they are used to defend Apartheid, or white-wash Welensky, we do not. In itself Public Relations is nothing more than a deliberate, planned and sustained effort to arouse interest in an organisation's activities and objectives, both among its members and the public. If members of the General Council believe in the activities of the T.U.C. and the trade union movement, they should be eager to use every technique at their disposal to interest others in their work.

How could this best be done? Let us begin with the Council's monthly Press Conference. As run at present, it is only 50% effective. It provides a forum for the General Secretary, enabling him to amplify the excessively formal statements issued after each Council meeting, but it is at once too general in approach and too isolated in impact. It should be preceded by more detailed advance information, specifically designed to be of use to particular sections of the press and other types of mass media. The key to effective coverage today lies in providing information designed to appeal to the individual interests of particular media. This is not simply a matter of realising that what makes the front page of the *Guardian* will have little news value to the B.B.C.'s *Tonight* team, or the London evening papers. It involves appreciating how items can be angled to appeal to the many different types of communication. At the moment the T.U.C. relies too much on specialist correspondents to sort out what is of interest to them, and consequently confines information to a limited public.

This sort of attitude is becoming more and more out of date. Press men today cannot expect to be specialists in all the activities of interest

to their readers. They, and their editors, are accustomed to dealing with specially prepared material, designed with them in mind by communications experts. As many public and private organisations with an effective public relations staff have discovered, this provides them with an opportunity. The organisation that can deliver a regular supply of suitable information about its activities, prepared in a way fitting the style and character of different communications outlets, can expect to have the public better informed of its affairs.

But the proper handling of Press Conferences is only a beginning. A public relations department must be allowed to influence the timing of statements, and even have a say in what is publicised. They must appreciate that there are days of the week when statements will receive wider coverage than others; they must not compete with Royal Weddings or the Cup Final. They must be aware of the different deadlines of London and provincial papers and must be able to stop spokesmen of the General Council making important pronouncements on the wrong day, and too late to catch the Scottish editions.

Even more important is what is to be publicised. Bureaucracies develop a taste for secrecy—even where publicity would do the organisation good. The most obviously under-publicised activities of the T.U.C. concern its constant battle to secure improvements in social insurance and industrial welfare. Curiously enough it never seems to occur to it to publicise this side of its activities; both its successes and failures remain unheralded and unknown to the public at large, and even to most trade unionists.

One reason for this is that, operating as a back-stairs pressure group, the unions have been encouraged, by successive Ministers since Bevin, to believe that all rebuffs are temporary; meanwhile it is bad form to embarrass Government departments by making capital out of individual concessions and refusals. This is a fallacy. Successful pressure group activity, as the N.F.U. and the B.M.A. have shown, does not depend on proceeding by stealth.

Take, for example, the refusal to grant totally disabled workmen injured before 1948 a supplement, or the refusal to supply invalid cars to the industrially disabled. Nothing is gained by burying these issues in the pages of the T.U.C.'s Report. The 'human interest' stories behind them are excellent material for the right kind of public relations campaign, resulting in additional pressure on the Government.

A systematic and sustained attempt to present a comprehensive view of the T.U.C.'s activities would do much to correct the image of unions as the outposts of vested interest. Much of its work is in the interests of all classes; it can be presented as the watchdog of politicians and bureaucrats of all kinds, particularly in the social insurance and industrial welfare field.

But to undertake this task a Public Relations Department would have to use all the techniques of modern communications—specially designed pamphlets, exhibitions and films, as well as press and other forms of advertising. Apart from advertising in mass-circulation papers and on television, neither of which would be very effective for the T.U.C.'s purposes, the cost of making an impact through media of this sort would

not be large, although there would doubtless be opposition to the use of union funds for such purposes.

One very relevant argument the General Council could employ in favour of such a scheme is that its effects would not be confined to non-unionists. As has been said, one of the aims of Public Relations is to raise the level of communication and information *inside* an organisation. If, for example, the T.U.C. took a stand at the Motor Show to tell people about the men who make British cars, and the work of their unions, this would not only be seen by non-unionists. A campaign of the sort suggested would be worth it, if it only led to a greater degree of communication and knowledge among the mass of rank and file union members.

But so far we have only considered what the use of Public Relations techniques could do to inform people about the existing activities of the T.U.C. Sooner or later an effective public relations staff begins to suggest new things which the organisation could do to improve its standing or the level of communication with its members. In a document of this sort it is impossible to say what suggestions a yet unborn department might advance, but it might be useful to suggest one idea to be considered.

It is high time the T.U.C. published another comprehensive Report on the future prospects facing trade unions, similar in scope to the historic 'Interim Report on Post-War Reconstruction' published in 1944. This is not the place to list the things that should be in it; in effect the whole of this pamphlet is concerned with the subject. What needs to be stressed is that the publicising of such a report cannot be left to the present Press and Publications Department. If it is to help project an image of unions as an up-to-date and progressive force, eager to face up to their responsibilities and opportunities, it must be supervised and very largely written by Public Relations experts.

Individual Unions' Publicity

But it may not be enough for the T.U.C. to put its own house in order. There may be little that can be done to improve the unions' image while so many individual unions adopt an off-hand attitude in their daily dealings with the organs of mass-communication when involved in disputes. Fortunately what is required in respect of individual unions is not so costly or ambitious.

Most unions make three simple mistakes in dealing with correspondents. First, communications are either the responsibility of no one in particular or the exclusive province of the overworked general secretary. Second, information is only supplied when he considers it opportune. Third, statements of the union's case come some time after the employers have given their views, and are inadequate and poorly worded. Consequently correspondents rely far more than is necessary on rumours and 'leaks' to get the union case, and fit this into a background already provided by employers. The remedy in each case is simple, and several larger unions have discovered it. An official must be appointed as full-time press and communications officer. His duties should include answering all enquiries and keeping correspondents informed of changes in union policy. During disputes he

would provide a flow of comment and background information. The work of the N.U.R.'s Press Officer shows that this can be done, and an analysis of the union's disputes with the B.T.C. over the last few years demonstrates that by getting in first with a statement, and making it persuasive and convincing, it is possible to secure better coverage and a more sympathetic response.

Conclusions

This section concerned union relations with the Government and the public. It argued that the system of T.U.C.-Government consultation pioneered by Bevin only worked while the two sides shared certain objectives and got something out of it. Essentially the unions entered Neddy to see if they could re-establish such a relationship. They were right to do this, but it is doubtful if they are facing up to the problems involved. They ought to be thinking out their attitude towards things like job-demarkations, output restrictions, and opposition to technical change. Above all they should be getting ready for the day when wages appear on Neddy's agenda. To assist them in this work they need a long-term research and planning department in the T.U.C.

But it is little use improving policy-making provisions unless steps are taken to revolutionise the facilities for disseminating information about the policies and activities of the movement. On their present form the unions appear to know less about the techniques of modern communication than the average seller of soap flakes.

6. Summary

THIS pamphlet has tried to account for the decline in the power, prestige and influence of trade unions during the 1950's, and to see what could be done to reverse such trends.

The future of the unions is uncertain, impossible to predict, and potentially disastrous, but it depends, above all, on the unions' own ability to face and overcome four different but related problems.

The first concerns the rate of membership growth. Unless they can solve this problem unions will become the representatives of a dwindling section of the total labour force. To this end they should:

1. Make more use of the closed shop and the check off.
2. Recruit more full-time organisers.
3. Double subscriptions in three years.
4. Prepare another Report on union structure and organisation.
5. Attempt to get the law regarding amalgamations changed.
6. Try to get the I.D.T. re-established.
7. Make more use of blacklists.
8. Set up a T.U.C. recognition fund.

The second problem concerns the low level of membership communication and control. Unless something is done to improve this the next ten years will witness a growth in internal disunity and bitterness. To help deal with the problem the unions should:

1. Extend steward training and found a trade union college.
2. Negotiate the removal of one-sided procedures.
3. Negotiate 'model' procedures with leading employers in public and private industry embodying a 'shop stewards' charter'.
4. Provide facilities for stewards from different factories and unions to meet to discuss common problems within the official union organisation.

The third problem is that of bargaining priorities. Unions today are rightly regarded as without adequate social purpose, too much concerned with the vested interests of the better paid and highly organised. To help alter this view of them they must change their bargaining priorities. This means more emphasis on:

1. Reducing unnecessary overtime.
2. Raising minimum wages by *pro-tanto* agreements.
3. Negotiating redundancy agreements.
4. Expanding workers' rights in matters like promotion and discipline.

The final problem facing the unions concerns their relations with the Government and the public. During the 1950's they have grown less and less popular, while their influence on Government policy has almost disappeared. Going into Neddy was a bid to reverse this trend. It could be disastrous unless the unions are prepared to:

1. Resign and explain their reasons if the Government does not take Neddy seriously.
2. Campaign for a controlled, selective programme of expansion both inside and outside the Council.
3. Think out their attitude to issues like technical change and the role of wages policy in a programme for growth.
4. Set up a long term research and planning department to help in this task.
5. Revolutionise their attitude to public relations, both within the T.U.C. and in individual unions.

The present generation of trade union leaders is aware of the question mark that hangs over their movement. But at the moment they seem to be too busy emptying their own in-trays to take time off to think, while some of them are too steeped in their traditional philosophy of empiricist opportunism to try.

But although the present leaders may not be responsible for much that is now wrong, this does not entitle them to do nothing about it. The movement they lead, with all its faults, has the right to expect more from them than that. There is the opportunity, and the responsibility too.

A resort to recrimination is no substitute for a plan.

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