INDUSTRIAL CONFLICT AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY: TRENDS OF THE SIXTIES AND PROSPECTS FOR THE SEVENTIES

Richard Hyman

"THINGS will never be the same again" — the banal verdict has been regularly repeated in the last four years as groups of previously quiescent workers have discarded their industrial virginity and helped swell the strike statistics. Participants and outside commentators alike have rarely found it easy, as the dust has settled, to assess the precise significance of each such dispute; but almost always they agree that the former pacific industrial relations cannot be reconstituted on quite the same basis. The same is true at the level of the political economy as a whole; even if industrial journalists and academic pundits cannot really explain what has become known as the British "strike explosion", at least they too are confident that things will never be the same again.¹

This trite assessment, as far as it goes, is almost certainly correct; and in this article I will explore some of the reasons. I wish in particular to emphasize the complexity of recent trends in the British strike pattern; the contradictory character of the forces underlying these trends; and the unpredictable basis of developments in industrial conflict in the remainder of the 1970s. This will involve only a brief analysis of the statistics of strikes since 1960, for strikes as such are not my central focus.² As the key initiating factor in recent trends I will consider the developments in employer and government strategies in industrial relations, and will give particular attention to the relationship between such developments and the problems of rank-and-file consciousness and trade union leadership. Finally, I will suggest some of the implications of this analysis for socialist strategy in the 1970s.

The Trends of Strikes

The main statistics of strikes since 1960 are tabulated below; in addition, brief details of every dispute involving over 50,000 striker-days (or "working days lost") are given in an appendix.³

Looking back from early 1973, it is clear that not one but several trends are involved. From the end of the war until the late 1960s, the number of recorded strikes each year was close to 2,000. For about a decade, though, this stability masked two opposing tendencies: the
number of disputes in coal-mining (which in the mid-fifties accounted for three-quarters of all recorded stoppages) declined, while there was an increase in most other industries. Then occurred the sudden leap to the 1970 peak, followed by a fall back to just over the 2,000 mark. For this "strike explosion" a surge in stoppages over claims for wage increases was wholly responsible; there was no rise in strikes for other causes. It is significant that this coincided with an unprecedented acceleration in the size of wage increases.  

While the number of recorded strikes fell after 1970, striker-days continued to rise—to almost 24 million in 1972, well above any year since the General Strike. These divergent trends reflected a sharp increase in the average length of strikes—from a few days to over a fortnight. Such an "average" is to some extent a statistical freak: the large, protracted stoppages of postal workers and miners dominated the year's statistics in 1971 and 1972; and unless something similar occurs in 1973, the figure will inevitably decline. Yet in addition to such giant stoppages—unprecedented in post-war Britain—there has been a marked increase in the comparatively large disputes recorded in the appendix; these averaged about five a year in the early 1960s, but numbered about twenty a year by the end of the decade.  

Many writers have commented on the change in the distribution of stoppages. The decline in the number of strikes in mining (attributable to the drastic contraction of the industry and the abolition of piecework) has been compensated by a notable increase in strike-proneness in previously peaceful sectors of the economy. Traditionally militant groups have of course remained prominent in the disputes of recent years; but what has been remarkable has been the spread of industrial conflict to virgin territory. In particular, three groups can be distinguished: public employees, who have traditionally been reluctant to take strike action; sections of workers among whom trade unionism itself is new; and what have been termed the "organized-unorganized"—traditionally unionized workers among whom rank-and-file activism has never previously developed or has been suppressed by a union leadership committed to industrial pacifism.  

Extreme examples of disputes involving newly organized workers were the long struggles at BSR and Centrax in 1969; it is virtually unprecedented for such strikes to be sustained for a comparable length of time, even by seasoned trade unionists, and end in at least partial victory. The stoppages in the public sector in the same year, though conducted by established unions, were similarly unprecedented. In the Post Office, the telegraphists' dispute was, apart from the token action of 1964, the first strike by the Union of Postal Workers since its formation in 1871; while the engineers' stoppage was the first serious dispute in which the Post Office Engineering Union had been involved.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of strikes</th>
<th>Workers involved (000)</th>
<th>Striker days (000)</th>
<th>Averagr length (days)</th>
<th>Strikes known to be official</th>
<th>Strikes for wage increases</th>
<th>Increase in hourly wage earnings (%)</th>
<th>Increase in weekly wage earnings (%)</th>
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<td>814</td>
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<td>1,216</td>
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* Two one-day strikes occurred in the engineering industry in 1962, and another in 1968; it was estimated that these accounted for 3.5 million workers involved and striker-days in 1962, and 1.5 million in 1968. Excluding these disputes from consideration, the average length of strikes in the two years would have been 3.2 and 4.2 days respectively.
in 30 years' existence. Only a few years ago, strike action by teachers—or, more recently, hospital ancillary workers—would have been unthinkable. Other sections of public employees—NALGO and, in 1973, several of the civil service unions—have also abandoned their traditional inhibitions against industrial militancy. The common belief in the passivity of white-collar trade unionists—always a gross oversimplification, as such unions as the Draughtsmen or ASTMS demonstrated—has thus lost its credibility.

But in some ways even more significant is the spread of strikes among sections of manual workers who, despite a long history of trade unionism, have never experienced a serious dispute (except perhaps in the General Strike of 1926). The seamen, for example, whose right to strike has always been narrowly circumscribed by the Merchant Shipping Acts, were kept in almost complete passivity for half a century by a union ready to suppress any hint of militant activity in return for employer co-operation in a closed shop. The production unions in the steel industry have a similar record, making the determined stoppage of the Port Talbot blastfurnacemen in 1969, and the national blastfurnacemen's dispute two years later, similarly noteworthy. Until all the dustmen in Greater London stopped work in 1969, such workers had always been regarded as apathetic, or at most as capable only of small-scale and erratic strike action. In a number of other disputes listed below, there was a similar rupturing of the chains of traditional passivity. The strike at Morganite Carbon—a key supplier of electrical components for the motor industry—in 1968 was the first in 125 years. At the BICC cable factory in Prescot, union organization had existed for almost 60 years, but there had been no important dispute in recent memory. It was 50 years since there had been a strike at International Nickel, Clydach. But perhaps the most dramatic examples of such outbreaks occurred in 1970, in Leeds and St. Helens. The Leeds clothing workers, mainly women, in their revolt against the pay agreement reached between the employers and their union, amazed themselves as much as the other parties to the dispute; and the same was true of the dramatic uprising of the St. Helens workers against the combined tutelage of Pilkingtons and the General and Municipal Workers, and the consequent low wages and atrocious working conditions.

Even in industries with a record of industrial struggle, some of the disputes of recent years broke new ground. Despite the high post-war strike figures in coal-mining, these were predominantly small disputes over piecework prices or working conditions which affected piecework earnings. As has been seen, their numbers fell sharply in the 1960s, partly as a result of the abolition of piecework. The 1969 stoppage, involving nearly half the industry, marked a significant revival of the
large-scale militancy historically associated with the miners. This was in turn the precursor of the even larger stoppage of 1970, and the massive and successful conflict of 1972. The car industry, too, has not had the uniformly high strike record that is often supposed. Since the early sixties it was the Midland factories which supported the industry's reputation for strong and self-assured shop-floor organization, and this fact was closely associated with the predominance of payment by results in Midland engineering. Thus most disputes were small, sectional conflicts related to piecework issues. It is significant that the Midland car factories have not been prominent in the major disputes occurring since the mid-sixties; and where they have been involved, it has often been in connection with managerial attempts to introduce new payment systems. By contrast, one of the features of the last few years has been the re-appearance of militant activity at Fords. Since the smashing of the powerful shop-floor organization by the company in 1962, the first serious struggle to occur was the dispute of the women sewing machinists in 1968. This was followed next year by the "penalty clauses" strike, and in 1971 by the ten-week stoppage.' At Vauxhall, the only car firm with a significant number of non-unionists, management was long able to point with pride to its record of peaceful labour relations; not surprisingly, its Luton factory was popularly known as the "cabbage patch". The stoppage of 1966 was soon followed by others both at Luton and at Ellesmere Port. The latter 1960s saw workers at Ford and Vauxhall (both of which had long operated day-rate systems) beginning to appreciate how far their earnings lagged behind those of the Midlands; the demand for parity, first raised by a few militants, was soon widely adopted. The transformation of industrial relations at both companies was almost certainly affected by the existence of newly-established factories in the traditionally militant Merseyside area; only recently have their stewards succeeded in establishing effective links with their counterparts in the parent plants in the London area. Parity with the Midlands car assembly plants has been an important issue in a number of other disputes. One notable example was the Leyland strike of 1969: the Leyland factories had remained virtually passive for over 40 years; but after the merger with BMC their workers were for the first time prepared to question their low-paid status. A similar broadening of horizons lay behind disputes in formerly peaceful car component firms—most notably GKN-Sankey in 1970.

These two related aspects of many recent disputes—the questioning of levels of pay which were previously taken for granted, and the adoption of new and more ambitious "orbits of coercive comparison"—constitute an important component of the dynamic of the heightening of strike activity. In part this is a natural response to rapid price
inflation, which has the predictable effect of weakening the hold of traditional frames of reference for judging pay. It may also be related to the experience of "incomes policy", which in the 1960s became a major element in government strategy to stabilize British capitalism (a development paralleled in many other countries). For the unintended consequence of the policy was to disrupt a pattern of wage determination which in the post-war period had become accepted as normal. Strongly organized sections set the pace of rising earnings, often through "wage drift" generated at workshop level; these increases were then generalized through the economy by national negotiations for groups with less power at the point of production. In such negotiations, "comparability" with earnings movements in such industries as engineering was accepted by both sides as a "fair" basis for settlement; indeed, the principle of "fair comparisons" was formally institutionalized in many negotiating arrangements, particularly in government employment.

The effect of incomes policy on this structure was uneven. It scarcely affected those groups who could continue to negotiate effectively on the shop floor; pieceworkers in particular were virtually immune from wage control. But national wage negotiations naturally came under close scrutiny; and the Prices and Incomes Board insisted from the outset that comparability should not be considered an acceptable reason for pay increases. One consequence was that the lowest paid—by and large, those with the least effective workshop organization—suffered most.

A second important aspect was the emphasis given to productivity bargaining as a justification for pay increases "above the norm". These led to occasional highly publicized instances of apparently spectacular wage advances; the sacrifices involved in terms of working conditions and shop floor control were not publicized. Productivity bargaining, changes in payment systems, and other developments to be discussed further in the next section, also had the effect of altering patterns of conflict within the companies directly concerned.

Incomes policy obviously altered the role of the government in British industrial relations. Though there had been previous attempts at wage restraint, most post-war governments accepted a fairly passive role in the process of wage determination. The traditional policy was one of conciliation: attempting to avoid major industrial conflict by pressing unions and employers to resolve their (usually narrow) differences. With incomes policy, this "neutral" role was abandoned, with ministers openly urging employers to stand firm against "unjustified" pay claims; while in the public sector, the government could veto such claims directly. This is clearly the primary cause of the upsurge of disputes in the public sector: government
inflexibility, often involving the flouting of long-established principles of pay determination, has left even the most respectable of unions with little alternative but to fight. The role of the government in instituting wage control is merely one aspect of a general transformation of its role in British industrial relations: a process which is considered below.

Finally, incomes policy has had an unexpected ideological consequence. In the past, there existed a surprising degree of agreement as to what represented "fair pay". Trade unionists and employers alike tended to accept with little question that traditional relativities between different industries and occupations, and modest annual increments, were natural and reasonable. But incomes policy—rejecting traditional arrangements as a sufficient justification for given pay levels or relationships—made these matters the subject of wide-ranging debate. It would be surprising if this were not one reason for the growing questioning of long-established inequities, for the widespread voicing of such demands as equal pay for women or parity between car workers in different companies and areas. Equally, by submitting pay to apparently "rational" scrutiny, incomes policy may have helped suggest to workers that their pay demands would be as reasonably expressed in pounds as in shillings.

The last feature of recent strike trends which deserves special emphasis is the developing relationship between official trade unionism and industrial conflict. One of the most quoted statistics in British industrial relations states that over 95% of recorded strikes are unofficial. This is in no way surprising, given that the typical post-war strike has been small and short: as Turner has commented, the large majority "are over before the unions which might have members involved have even heard of them". Since the most important negotiations in the strike-prone industries take place domestically, without the involvement of official union representatives, it is natural that when deadlock occurs the decision to strike should be taken at this level, without awaiting official approval. Official authorization is only important where a stoppage lasts long enough to qualify for dispute benefit—and this is scarcely so generous as to offer a major incentive—and such authorization has in many cases been accorded retrospectively. Up to the middle 1960s, as the accounts in the appendix indicate, union leaders often attempted to play a neutral role in major unofficial stoppages: perhaps formally (in order to placate employers) dissociating themselves from their members' unconstitutional action, but making little serious attempt to get them back to work. While a return to work was often "advised", explicit instructions to this effect were rare; the main exceptions were disputes in the motor industry which threatened to result in multiple lay-offs of other trade union members.
While the bulk of more recent strikes have accorded with this pattern, unions have seemingly been obliged to become officially involved far more often—either in support of their members or in opposition to them. A significant number of the largest disputes have been not merely unofficial but anti-official. The docks strikes of 1967 represent a good example: the Devlin "modernization" proposals to which the Transport and General Workers' Union was enthusiastically committed promised greater security of day-to-day employment for the docker—but at the cost of much of the autonomy and independence traditional in the industry, and with the threat of massive redundancy in the long term. In both Liverpool and London, top union leaders who attempted to persuade their members to return to work had the chastening experience of being shouted down by mass meetings. The same occurred at Port Talbot; at a dozen meetings the insistence of Blastfurnacemen's leaders that the strike should end was unanimously rejected. "The men simply do not trust their union officials to win this fight for them", the press reported. At Pilkingtons, union opposition was even more extreme: officials co-operated with the company in an (eventually successful) attempt to break the strike; as a result, the majority of workers tore up their GMWU cards in disgust. At Vauxhall in 1967, the Vehicle Builders' leaders violently condemned their members' work-to-rule; and when the local official defended their action and accused the company of "a contemptible lock-out", he was dismissed from his post.

Yet recent years have also been marked by a revival of the official strike: the proportion "known to be official" has roughly doubled, as the table above shows; and this is reflected in trade union finances, with the General and Municipal Workers, for example, spending well over £700,000 on dispute benefit in 1970 compared with a mere £8,000 four years previously. Part of the explanation is that more strikes now last long enough to qualify for official financial support; but this is certainly not the whole story. What appears to have been occurring is a gradual recognition by union officialdom that attempts to suppress rank-and-file militancy may prove unsuccessful and merely discredit their own position in the eyes of members and employers alike. To keep some form of control over the situation, a degree of endorsement of militant action may well appear the most prudent course.

One way of achieving this is to give official status to disputes which commence unofficially. Again, many examples can be found in the strikes listed below. The Leyland strike of 1969, for instance, was made official after three weeks, while the Ford women sewing machinists had to wait less than a week. In the Ford penalty clauses dispute the Engineers and the Transport and General, having failed at first to
endorse the strike call, gave almost immediate backing once the stoppage began (much to the chagrin of the other unions). In other cases union leaders, embarrassed to give official backing to the "unconstitutional" action of their members, have offered indirect support. Thus in many disputes, unions have paid "hardship" money—often equivalent in amount to strike benefit—to members involved in unofficial action. Tacit support can also be given by official adoption of strikers' pay demands: as when the dustmen's leaders in 1969, in the middle of national negotiations over an 18s. claim, hastily took up their members' demand for £5.

In other disputes, union leaders have taken the lead in recommending strike action. But rather than representing a genuine militant initiative on the part of union leaders, this has typically been part of an exercise in controlled militancy: where the temper of the members suggests that they will not accept the employers' terms without a fight, the officials lead the struggle and hence keep control of its main direction. This explains, for example, why the highly respectable leaders of the Teachers organized strike action at the end of 1969: this seemed the only way to avoid losing control of the situation to an increasingly influential rank-and-file movement. The postal workers' strike of 1971, and the gasworkers' and hospital ancillary staffs' disputes of early 1973, can be explained in the same fashion. As an official of one of the unions involved commented, "we find out what the membership are planning to do anyway, and instruct them to do it". Often, however, the strategy of controlled militancy entails the declaration, to the accompaniment of militant rhetoric, of industrial action considerably less militant than the membership might otherwise have resort to. The one-day token strike, an impressively futile gesture pioneered by the engineering unions in 1962 and 1968, has become increasingly popular to this end. Useless as a weapon of industrial struggle, it can nevertheless serve the purpose of union leaders by allowing their members to "let off steam" in relatively harmless fashion.

In this context it is worth noting that the chastening experience of rank-and-file militancy in protest at officially agreed conditions has often stimulated a more vigorous official posture in subsequent negotiations. The seamen, Fords, the miners, the local authority manual workers, are obvious examples. The trends in political strike action are also significant. In 1969, strikes against the "penal clauses" were deprecated by most union leaders; the first "Kill the Bill" strikes of 1971 met the acquiescence of several union executives, while the second wave had some official support; by 1972 the TUC itself was prepared to back a strike call against the gaoling of the five dockers, and in 1973 a TUC-sponsored strike against government
wage restraint did actually take place. The changing relationship between official union policy and rank-and-file activity, of which the status of strikes is only one aspect, will be considered in more detail later.

At this point, the trends of strikes may be briefly summarized. The pattern of the early 1970s is in several respects distinct from that of a decade earlier: in size, distribution, and official status. Yet their numbers appears to have risen only temporarily. (Though there may well have been an increase in other forms of industrial conflict: slowdowns, overtime bans, working to rule and, of course, sit-ins and occupations.) On the basis of the available statistics it seems that any simple analysis in terms of an explosion of militancy would be somewhat facile: the trends of strikes are too complex to permit so easy an interpretation, attractive as it may be to socialists. In fact, recent developments suggest that the state of industrial militancy is highly volatile: there is no escalating mood of revolt. I will attempt to explore the nature and causes of recent fluctuations in working-class militancy in the discussion below. Lastly, it is important to note that while changing aspirations and objectives on the part of workers have clearly been involved in recent strike trends, these trends are also properly to be viewed as symptomatic and derivative of processes in industrial relations external to trade unionists themselves. These tendencies demand independent analysis.

The Employers’ Offensive—and the State’s

Trade unions are typically defensive and reactive institutions, rarely responsible for major initiatives in British industrial relations. In the 1960s this was particularly apparent: crucial changes were initiated by employers and governments, while the trade union movement gave little indication that it possessed any coherent counter-strategy, or indeed any clear understanding of the challenges which faced it.

What has occurred during the past decade is the growing conversion of employers and the state to the acceptance of the need to restructure industrial relations as they had developed since the war. The prevailing pattern was summarized by the Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations in its 1968 Report, the Donovan Report. In brief, the traditional institutional arrangements of negotiations at national level between unions and associations of employers had ceased to exert a major influence over terms and conditions of employment in many of the key sectors of the economy. Instead, they had been displaced by negotiations between managements and shop stewards which were characterized by their autonomy, informality and fragmentation. In few industries were the activities of domestic bargainers
closely controlled from above: shop-floor union organization had developed to a large degree spontaneously and was subject to little official union regulation, while first-line supervision in most companies could bargain free from the contraints of sophisticated industrial relations policies and controls. Domestic conditions were often set by ad hoc arrangements and understandings, or by custom and practice, leading to often anomalous variations in earnings and work practices. 

Managements had, according to Donovan, lost much of their control over the detail of work arrangements to fragmented work groups; earnings, particularly where piecework operated, "drifted" upwards; yet few employers seemed seriously concerned at this state of affairs. Moreover "voluntarism", the traditional stance of governments, inhibited any prospect of state intervention to change the situation.

Yet Donovan noted some "signs of change": and since the date of its report the pace of change has accelerated. The escalating costs and complexity of capital equipment are one important cause of change; the growing size and interdependence of companies another. Together these create an urgent need for planning; and planning, to be effective, requires predictability and control. Such pressures impinge most powerfully on labour costs and labour utilization: the aspects of companies' economic environment over which they have the greatest direct influence. Hence the last decade has seen a variety of sophisticated strategies designed to reconstruct managerial control within the workplace. One example already mentioned is the comprehensive productivity agreement, pioneered at Esso's Fawley refinery in 1960, and particularly popular towards the end of the decade. Another is the overhaul of "degenerated" (i.e. worker-manipulated) payment systems, with the introduction of greater dependence on work study and in some cases the replacement of payment by results by measured daywork. Also important has been the negotiation of plant or company procedure agreements which, by formalizing the powers of shop stewards and the scope of domestic negotiation, limit the ability of the shop floor to exploit their power where it is greatest—at the point of production. In some sectors of industry the pace of such innovation has been remarkable. In Coventry engineering, for example, long famous for the strength and self-confidence of its shop steward organization and the effectiveness of fragmented bargaining over piecework, virtually every major employer has followed Chrysler in seeking radical changes to their payment systems. Even more notable was the joint action of the Coventry engineering employers in 1971 in abrogating the thirty-year old District Toolroom Agreement, which they held to be a self-maintaining source of earnings drift. Nationally, it seems likely that within a couple of years not one British car manufacturer will still be operating a piecework system. Such developments have
had one significant effect on the strike pattern: the emergence of what has been termed the "post-Donovan" dispute, the often protracted stoppage involving the whole labour force of a company or plant. This trend follows naturally from managerial attempts to limit the scope of sectional bargaining: the focus of dispute has been broadened, and conflicts are less readily resoluble.

Important as these changes have been, they do not go far enough to satisfy the requirements of the capitalist enterprise in the present economic environment. As Glyn and Sutcliffe have demonstrated, the share of profits in the national income has fallen significantly in recent years; whereas British capital, handicapped by decades of low investment, requires a substantially increased share if it is to meet successfully the growing pressures of international competition. The unprecedented level of wage demands and wage settlements in the last five years—quite apparent from the previous table—clearly accentuated this problem. Moreover, workers' readiness to co-operate, through productivity bargaining, in the more intensive exploitation of labour has to a large degree evaporated since the end of the 1960s. To add to employers' problems, as was noted earlier, unions have been tending to give official endorsement to the "unreasonable" positions of their own members.

Hence it is wholly understandable that employers should turn to the State for assistance in combating the recalcitrance of organized workers. Traditionally, of course, government action has rarely exerted a direct and major influence on British industrial relations: "there is, perhaps, no major country in the world in which the law has played a less significant role in the shaping of these relations than in Great Britain. . . . British industrial relations have, in the main, developed by way of industrial autonomy." Historically, "voluntarism" in industrial relations accorded comfortably with the general ideology of laissez faire. But it had an essential practical basis: the recognition by employers that they could handle their relations with trade unions without requiring outside assistance. In other words, unions should lack the power to interfere excessively with managerial objectives; or, if they possessed this power, should refrain from exercising it. This was indeed the general situation in the years when voluntarism was largely unquestioned. Before 1914, union organization covered only a relatively small proportion of the labour force, while between the wars mass unemployment attenuated the economic power of labour. During both world wars, and up until the last decade, though union organization was stronger, its national leadership was on the whole prepared to exercise considerable restraint in bargaining.

The burden of the previous argument is that this practical pre-condition of voluntarism no longer applies. The same, it need hardly
be said, is true of laissez faire ideology in general. In an era of monopoly capitalism, more is required of governments than that they merely stand on the sidelines ready to repel any challenge to the rules of the political economy. John Hughes, writing in the Socialist Register seven years ago, noted that "by the 1960s, large scale capitalist enterprise had in important ways modified its attitude towards state intervention in the economy". The Conservative government before 1964 took such important initiatives as the establishment of the National Economic Development Council; the rapid elaboration of interventionism was a central element in the strategy of the Wilson government, a strategy generally endorsed by industrialists themselves. Yet by what logic should industrial relations be immune from interventionism? Employer evidence to the Donovan Commission in 1966–7 clearly indicated the new mood, with such influential bodies as the Confederation of British Industry, the Engineering Employers' Federation and—in particular—the Motor Manufacturers calling for tough penalties against strikers. Then followed the carefully orchestrated campaign stressing the urgent need for the government to tackle the strike "problem" and to "reform" trade union law—a campaign whose closest historical parallel in this country is the anti-union hysteria of the 1890s.

Government perspectives—whether Conservative or Labour—necessarily accord closely with those of employers, for the success of government economic strategy is closely linked to the welfare of owners of capital. As Blackburn has put it, "if the social process of investment and accumulation is left to private ownership then the fate of society as a whole is inextricably bound up with the fate of the rich . . . So long as productive resources are in private hands, they must be allowed to produce a sufficient reward to maintain growth." With an economy characterized by persistent malaise and recurrent crises, governments have embraced the twin preoccupations of stimulating investment and holding down labour costs, particularly in export industries. Both objectives are most readily attainable through a change in the distribution of the national income in favour of profits. Hence those actions by workers and their unions which threaten managerial goals are a challenge to government economic policy also.

Governments can respond to this challenge by two alternative forms of intervention. The first is founded on an appreciation of what are often termed the "institutional needs" of trade unionism: the pressures on union representatives to pursue policies which do not jeopardize their established institutional relationships with employers and analogous parties. Sophisticated employers have long preferred a collaborative relationship with union officials to one of open conflict, for concern with union security tends to induce the latter to respond in a manner conducive to the continuance of employer goodwill.
In similar fashion, governments—particularly in time of war or economic stringency—have sought to cultivate the goodwill of union leaders. Consultation, representation on a wide range of official committees, "honours" for individual leaders, have been willingly offered in exchange for union "moderation" and "responsibility"—in other words, a refusal to exercise the full potential of union strength, to offer any serious challenge to managerial control, or to contest the existing (grossly unequal) distribution of wealth and income.18

For the Donovan Commission, as for most academic authorities on industrial relations, the approach to industrial relations most likely to prove effective was the intensification of the attempt to "incorporate" trade unionism. As was seen earlier, it diagnosed "anarchy and disorder"—in other words, the undermining of managerial control—at shop floor level as the central problem of British industrial relations; but it believed that this could be resolved by elaborating within the workplace those pressures which had traditionally proved effective at the level of national union leadership. Essentially, the aim was to exploit the ambivalence in the shop steward's position: his desire for a stable relationship with management, his natural tendency to treat disputes as "problems" to be solved, his exposure to precisely the same moderating pressures as operate upon the full-time official. The mechanisms suggested were the formalization of the steward's role within the factory, substituting "joint regulation" for areas of control exercised autonomously by workers (the strategy of productivity bargaining and procedural reform); a greater involvement of full-time officials (in conjunction with higher management) in supervising industrial relations at the point of production; and the closer integration of shop stewards within the official structures of trade unionism. Such a re-integration of "formal" and "informal" systems of industrial relations would permit union-government collaboration at national level to exert a genuine impact on the shop floor, and would in particular permit a viable "incomes policy" to underwrite the existing distribution between wages and profits (or indeed to shift it in favour of capital).

Yet as was suggested above, recent years have seen increasing impatience with the collaborative strategy advocated by Donovan: since it is felt that even if union leaders are willing to co-operate, they are in no position to deliver the acquiescence of their members. This seemed the inescapable lesson of the experience of the post-1964 Labour government, which constructed a panoply of new agencies designed to co-opt union leadership in the attempt to restrain wage increases and reduce strikes. Despite the traditional links between the unions and the Labour Party, the Wilson government resorted in 1966–7 to statutory powers to enforce its incomes policy; while in
1969 it sought to include sanctions against strikers in industrial relations legislation which in most other respects followed closely the Donovan recommendations. The present Conservative government, suffering no such inhibitions, has initiated a far more overtly coercive strategy involving attacks on trade unionism at three distinct but related points. The Industrial Relations Act of 1971 attempts to weaken union organization through its prohibition of the closed shop and interference with internal union rules and relationships. The same legislation seeks to emasculate union action by hedging industrial militancy of every kind with an array of restrictions and prohibitions. Union objectives are trammelled by compulsory controls on wages. (In addition, proposals are apparently being considered to undermine the trade union defence of workers against arbitrary managerial control by the outlawing of so-called "restrictive practices".) The deliberate creation of mass unemployment in order to weaken union bargaining power—a policy commenced by Wilson and carried further by Heath—also forms part of the "hard" approach.

Yet a strategy of coercion contains no guarantee of success. Labour's pay freeze of 1966 was effective in the short run, but may well have contributed to subsequent union disillusion with the whole policy and its rapid disintegration. The projected "penal clauses" of 1969 were a fiasco: union hostility to these few clauses prevented the implementation of the whole package set out in the White Paper "In Place of Strife"; and while official union opposition was purely verbal, the mood of confrontation helped encourage the extensive unofficial strike action against the government's Bill. The Conservative Bill carried confrontation a stage further, with official support for protest strikes from a minority of unions. Again, official union resistance has been predominantly passive; but it has had two very important consequences. First, it has made the Industrial Relations Act to a large degree unworkable. Second, the overt opposition which union leaders were obliged to present to government policy—while not in itself a source of serious peril—added a veneer of legitimacy to more vigorous resistance led by shop-floor militants, and undermined still further the ability of officialdom to exercise its traditional restraining influence in disputes over wages and conditions.

The limitations of simple coercion are manifest in the "change of heart" displayed by the Heath government. Initially scorning the notion of collaboration with union leaders (or, in large measure, with industrialists either), the government was obliged to re-establish many of the traditional relationships in the change of course signalled by the tripartite Chequers talks of the summer of 1972. This is an extreme example of the oscillation in government policy which has been evident for over a decade: the alternation of collaborative and
coercive strategies as policies based on one or other appear to fail; and at times the attempt to combine both of these mutually inconsistent approaches. Yet whether government strategy towards trade unionism is "hard" or "soft", its basic logic—dictated by the constraints of contemporary capitalism—remains consistent: to curb the influence of independent shop-floor organization. The variations and inconsistencies are essentially tactical: whether to enlist the aid of trade union leaderships in pursuing this objective, to act without their assistance and even in the face of their opposition, or to coerce their co-operation through punitive sanctions (as in those sections of the Industrial Relations Act which allow union funds to be milked for damages if shop stewards are not prevented from committing outlawed practices).

The Role of Trade Union Leadership

The reaction of trade union leaders to these developments—as to the trends in industrial conflict with which they are associated—has been essentially ambivalent; and this has been equally true of those with "left-wing" and "right-wing" reputations. To appreciate why this has been so it is necessary to consider the general question of the role of trade union officialdom in modern capitalism.

The analysis which the Webbs and Michels developed at the turn of the century remains a valuable starting point for this purpose. The Webbs emphasized the special expertise acquired by the full-time official: in administration, in negotiation, and not least in the internal politics of the union. One consequence was that union leaders were virtually irremovable—-even though in theory subject to regular re-election or dismissal by an executive committee. They became detached from the milieu of their rank-and-file members, mixing regularly with members of the employing class, and social isolation led easily to ideological isolation from the membership; and in any consequent conflict over policy, it was easy for the wishes of the leaders to prevail.

Michels developed these arguments into his famous "iron law of oligarchy". Unlike the Webbs, he insisted that democratic control of trade unions was in principle impossible: a vicious circle of autocratic leadership and rank-and-file apathy was unavoidable. So was the pursuit of conservative policies. "The leaders lose all true sense of solidarity with the class from which they have sprung . . . What interest for them has now the dogma of the social revolution? Their own social revolution has already been effected." Organizational pressures tended in the same direction: "the . . . doctrines are, whenever requisite, attenuated and deformed in accordance with the external needs of the organization". Hence aggressive action which might
jeopardize union security, stability or financial solvency was strenuously resisted.

The notion of an iron law is a gross oversimplification of the highly complex interrelationship of union membership and leadership. Recent years have clearly indicated the qualifications which must be made to the classic analyses of the Webbs and Michels. For example, even if most members are in no position to determine policy directly and take little interest in internal union affairs, they can on occasion apply such urgent pressure to "deliver the goods" that the leaders are forced to pursue a militant line. This, as was argued earlier, has been a key factor underlying the recent growth in official strike action. The development of shop-floor organization provides in many unions a vital mediating factor between membership and leadership: a focus of trade union activity yet only marginally integrated into the formal union structure; a power base which is far more open to rank-and-file influence than the official union hierarchy and which may potentially be mobilized against the leadership. Particular union constitutions and traditions—as, for example, in the Engineering Workers—can further inhibit the tendencies towards oligarchic control. So too can the professed commitments of leaders of left-wing reputation like Scanlon, Jones or Daly: not so much in determining their own actions (which appear to derive far more from situational constraints which operate regardless of the ideological orientation of particular union leaders) as in encouraging rank-and-file members to pursue greater union democracy and more ambitious industrial objectives. Yet necessary as such qualifications are, the classic statements of the role of the union bureaucracy hold a core of truth which remains valid today; they pinpoint pressures and tendencies towards oligarchic control and conservative policy which, although open to countervailing pressures, are rarely absent from trade union action.

Part of the explanation lies in the nature of trade union action itself. For normal trade unionism centres around negotiation over the terms and conditions of workers' employment: negotiation that presupposes as unproblematic the existence of capitalist employment relations. Even a union representative who questioned the very institution of wage-labour, the subordination of employee to employer, would have to operate in his routine activities as if capitalism were permanent; would have to "fight the battles for improvement and reform according to the nature of the terrain, which is that of 'realistic' calculation in a capitalist economy and a capitalist state". A salient factor in such "realistic calculation" is almost inevitably the maintenance of the goodwill—or at least the acquiescence—of those with economic and political power; whatever the political objectives to which a union (or its leaders) may be nominally committed, if it is to be effective
as a union it will in practice be drawn inexorably towards policies which are acceptable to these significant others. This is the factor mentioned earlier which forms the premiss of collaborative managerial or governmental strategies towards trade unionism.

Such practical considerations are reinforced by ideological ones. For union leaders, by virtue of their role, are typically the very embodiment of "trade union consciousness". Union activity, Lenin argued in What Is To Be Done? could not produce a spontaneous awareness of "the irreconcilable antagonism of [workers'] interests to the whole of the modern political and social system"; precisely because it failed to transcend the perspective of sectional struggle within the framework of capitalism, "trade unionism means the ideological enslavement of the workers by the bourgeoisie". Parkin has recently elaborated this thesis in his notion of a "subordinate value system":

"In so far as men combine in the attempt to improve their material situation they could not be said to have a purely fatalistic outlook; commitment to trade unionism implies a belief that conditions should and can be improved... However, the fact that unionism is closely geared to the moral framework of the subordinate value system is reflected in the movement's aims regarding the distribution of rewards. Collective bargaining and its attendant strategies imply a general acceptance of the rules governing distribution. Organised labour directs its main efforts towards winning a greater share of resources for its members—not by challenging the existing framework of rules but by working within this framework. In this respect it is reasonable to regard trade unionism and instrumental collectivism generally as an accommodative response to inequality. Collective bargaining does not call into question the values underlying the existing reward structure, nor does it pose any threat to the institutions which support this structure. Trade unionism could in fact be said to stabilize the modern capitalist order by legitimizing further the rules and procedures which govern the allocation of resources. At least, the fact that many modern capitalist states give legal protection to trade unions, and social honours to their leaders, suggests that the strategies of collective bargaining do not cause serious inroads to be made into the privileges of the dominant class... Trade union consciousness, as one of the emergent properties of the subordinate value system, exemplifies what is perhaps the defining characteristic of this meaning-system; namely its uneasy compromise between rejection and full endorsement of the dominant order."25

This captures neatly the ambivalence inherent in the trade union function and the ideology which it generates. The very existence and everyday activities of unions articulate the radical conflict of class interest which is fundamental to capitalist society, and thus provide a practical contradiction to the ideological mystification that there exists some over-arching "national interest" uniting rich and poor, exploited and exploiting. On rare occasions the point may be explicitly stated that "the argument from the national interest is but one of a rich repertoire employed by those whose interests are different to those of trade unionists". Yet far more commonly, trade union
spokesmen endorse the ideological vocabulary of capitalism: "this Movement is as conscious of the national interest as the Government is and much more so than most of our critics"." Feather's comments at the time of the debate over Labour's "penal clauses" are typical: the assumption that it is meaningful to use such concepts as "national interest" or "the country's problems" is uncriticized, and the fundamental ideological argument is thus lost by default.

The refusal—or the inability—to make explicit the contradiction between workers' interests and capitalist economic strategy was particularly evident in the long debate in the 1960s over incomes policy. In 1961 the Trades Union Congress deplored the Conservative government's pay pause, insisting that it rejected the notion of wage restraint. This attitude was reiterated at subsequent Congresses, and the TUC therefore refused to co-operate with the National Incomes Commission. Yet at the same time TUC spokesmen insisted that their attitude was not merely negative: the main tenor of objections at Congress was to restraint on wages and salaries alone, and to restraint in the context of deflationary economic strategy. Hence the majority reaction in 1962 was to welcome the decision to create the National Economic Development Council—a decision which appeared to mark the government's conversion to economic planning and expansion. The main reservation was that the General Council "would not agree to joining if the NEDC was to be responsible for administering a policy of wage restraint to which it would be committed". The government obliged by hiving off the administration of incomes policy to a separate body, the NIC. Yet institutional separation did not alter the fact that the two bodies were elements in a single economic strategy. This was made explicit by the NEDC in one of its first reports: it envisaged an annual increase of 3½% in output per head, and went on to argue that "money incomes per head would have to rise at approximately this rate... There will thus be a need for policies to ensure that money incomes (wages, salaries, profits) as a whole rise substantially less rapidly than in the past". In the absence of any suggestion to the contrary, the implication of the report (endorsed by the TUC representatives on the NEDC) was that wage restraint would indeed be accepted as part of a general policy of restraint, without any provision for redistribution of incomes.

The equivocal nature of the TUC position was further demonstrated when the Labour Party made economic planning the centrepiece of its election strategy and specified as part of this programme "an incomes policy to include salaries, wages, dividends, and profits". Endorsing these proposals, Cousins insisted that they involved "a planned growth of wages, not wage restraint". Yet a policy of tying general movements in wage and salary levels to the rate of increase...
in national production guaranteed a "planned growth of incomes" only if economic expansion was indeed achieved. And even then, such a policy implied restraint on any aspirations for a more equitable distribution of national income. Only a year previously a highly respectable economic writer had considered this point, arguing as follows:

"The main problem of nearly all the varieties of 'wage policy' that have been advanced is that they say increases in wages must not, over the whole field of industry, exceed the rate of growth of output per head. . . . If wages are to rise only by the same proportion as output, the share in the value of output which they represent must remain unchanged. No trade union leader in his senses would publicly commit himself to support what is, in effect, a proposal to maintain the existing national income distribution and to abandon the claim for a redistribution in favour of labour."32

Yet by the 1964 election most trade union leaders had come close to endorsing just such a proposal; and this commitment was formalized with the TUC endorsement of the "Joint Statement of Intent" on Labour's election to office.

The TUC did, it is true, repeatedly declare that its support presupposed the control of prices and profits as well as wages and salaries, and that the policy was regarded as a basis for economic expansion and rising real incomes, and for special attention to the low-paid as part of a strategy for "social justice". But in practice, support was not conditional on these latter points. According to Woodcock, "I am prepared to say that an incomes policy would be justifiable to the trade union Movement if it were concerned only to avoid price increases and to avoid British industries being priced out of export markets by increased costs".33 Hence the principle of incomes policy was accepted on simple grounds of government economic strategy (grounds basically the same as those underlying the Conservative policy of 1961–2); the social objectives were in effect pressed as adjustments of detail to a structure in itself acceptable. In 1966, when the government imposed its standstill, the General Council "reached the conclusion that the interests both of trade unionists and of the nation as a whole in the current critical situation compelled them to acquiesce in the Government's proposal".34 Even when the logic of the economic criteria underlying the policy was reflected in a decline in the real net earnings of many workers, and particular discrimination against the low-paid, the withdrawal of TUC support was gradual, tentative and partial. In particular, opposition and criticism focussed on questions of machinery and detail (whether the policy should be voluntary or legally enforced, how rigid or flexible should be the criteria for increases), rather than on the principle of incomes policy and the analysis underlying its introduction.
In consequence, the TUC largely underwrote the dominant assumption that restraint on wage increases was in the "national interest" and represented an inevitable response to "economic needs". Little serious attention was paid to the argument that radically different economic priorities and economic relations might better serve the interests of trade unionists and the majority of the population.

The ideological limitations of trade union leadership are most clearly revealed when the issue of state power is inescapably implicated in trade union action. Miliband has eloquently expressed the fervent commitment of the British labour movement to the myths of bourgeois democracy: its reverence for constitutional proprieties, the historic rationale of which has been the political support of a capitalist social system. "The leaders of the Labour Party have always rejected any kind of political action (such as industrial action for political purposes) which fell, or which appeared to them to fall, outside the framework and conventions of the parliamentary system . . . And in this respect, there is no distinction to be made between Labour's political and its industrial leaders. Both have been equally determined that the Labour Party should not stray from the narrow path of parliamentary politics."36 Trade union leaders have traditionally been as afraid of a successful confrontation with the government as an unsuccessful one; in the immortal words of J. H. Thomas, right-wing leader of the Railwaymen at the time of the General Strike: "I have never disguised that in a challenge to the Constitution, God help us unless the Government won".37 One of the most dramatic examples of the consequences of this ideological orientation towards the legitimacy of State power occurred in 1919, when the trade union movement was probably in its most aggressive disposition of any time. Bevan's memoirs repeat the account given by Smillie, one of the main leaders of the Triple Alliance of miners, railwaymen and transport workers, of a confrontation with Prime Minister Lloyd George.

"He was quite frank with us from the outset. . . . He said to us: "Gentlemen, you have fashioned, in the Triple Alliance of the unions represented by you, a most powerful instrument. I feel bound to tell you that in our opinion we are at your mercy. The Army is disaffected and cannot be relied upon. Trouble has occurred already in a number of camps. We have just emerged from a great war and the people are eager for the reward of their sacrifices, and we are in no position to satisfy them. In these circumstances, if you carry out your threat and strike, then you will defeat us. But if you do so," went on Mr. Lloyd George, "have you weighed the consequences? The strike will be in defiance of the Government of the country and by its very success will precipitate a constitutional crisis of the first importance. For, if a force arises in the State which is stronger than the State itself, then it must be ready to take on the functions of the State, or withdraw and accept the authority of the State. Gentlemen," asked the Prime Minister quietly, "have you considered, and if you have, are you ready?" 'From that moment on,' said Robert Smillie, 'we were beaten and we knew we were.' After this the General Strike of 1926
was really an anticlimax. The essential argument had been deployed in 1919. But the leaders in 1926 were in no better theoretical position to face it.38

Nor are those in the 1970s. For the TUC leaders of today, even more unambiguously than half a century ago, a central *raison d'etre* is to engage in a dialogue with the Government of the day; any serious confrontation is barely tolerable. Nothing is more alien to them than the hegemonic aspiration to challenge and displace the "constitutional" agencies of political control; they are committed, in Gramsci's term, to a corporate consciousness which accepts as an inevitable fact of life the subordinate role of the unions within the political economy.39 The logic of this position was clearly expressed by Woodcock, in urging the TUC to support the Labour incomes policy.

"We cannot remain, whether we like it or not, in these days at arm's length from Governments.... We expect Governments to accept tremendous responsibilities in the field of economics and social justice. It is not our exclusive concern that ordinary people are treated fairly. We share with Governments the responsibility for the welfare of working people. At one time it was our exclusive concern. Now it is a task we share with Governments. We cannot keep them at arm's length. If we are not prepared to work with Governments to make it possible—or at least not to make it impossible—for them to fulfil their obligations, then they have two choices: either they will renege on their obligations and they will no longer accept the obligation to maintain full employment. ... Or, alternatively, they will not renege. They will say: 'we are not going to be put on one side by the trade union Movement,' and they will proceed to surround us with restrictions.... It is, I believe, the essence of modern trade unionism to get to grips with Government and to be bargainers. To be bargainers you have got to have something to give."40

There could be no clearer admission that the role of trade union leadership is to come to terms with Government economic priorities—even though these priorities reflect the essentially capitalist (and anti-trade unionist) rationale of enhanced profitability and more intensive exploitation of labour.

Fear of confrontation with government has been a constant factor in recent British industrial relations. This has entailed that where government policies have threatened working-class interests, union leaders have either acquiesced or, if opposing, have denied the political significance of their opposition and have narrowly confined the form of its expression—thus inhibiting the mobilization of rank-and-file action which alone could make opposition effective. This was the case with union attitudes to Labour's incomes policy, already considered, and also to Labour's proposals for trade union and strike legislation. In both contexts the TUC agreed to institute its own machinery to achieve the aim of restraining wage claims and controlling strikes; in neither case was any serious effort made to contest the government's basic perspective of treating strikes and wage claims as serious economic
problems which must in the "national interest" be contained. More recently, the TUC has striven to square its opposition to the Industrial Relations Act with constitutional proprieties, refusing to raise the key political issue of the need for class action to defeat class legislation. This endorsement of the legitimacy of state power, this unwillingness to expose—or inability to comprehend—its class character, can alone explain the warmth of the TUC's response to Heath's reversal of tactics in the summer of 1972. The miners had won their decisive victory; the railwaymen's ballot had utterly discredited the government's use of the "national emergency" provisions of the Industrial Relations Act; tortuous machinations (including the discovery of that Gilbertian character, the Official Solicitor) had been necessary to defuse the explosion that threatened when the National Industrial Relations Court gaoled the picketing dockers; and a national docks strike was in the offing. The government's grip was precarious: the *Times* published two panic leading articles in the course of a week, while the customary pique of the *Economist* overflowed all hounds. Yet for the TUC to bring down a government was clearly unthinkable; and to avoid so terrifying an eventuality its representatives engaged in the tripartite talks on economic strategy and incomes policy between July and November 1972. The immediate effect was to help salvage the government's reputation and deflate the political crisis. In the slightly longer term, the talks gave ideological strength to the government's incomes policy proposals. The *Times* clearly recognized the significance of this fact.

"Unless the policy commands public support as being necessary and fair, the only effect of relying upon the law to enforce it will be to weaken respect for the law and the courts, as the experience of the Industrial Relations Act has vividly demonstrated. The agreement of the CBI and the TUC to an effective pay and prices policy... is important because it will greatly enhance the Government's authority and credibility in asking for public support for the policy."42

In the end, of course, the TUC withheld its agreement; but by then this was of minor importance. For in participating in the talks the TUC helped bolster the argument, assiduously fostered by the government and the media, that "irresponsible" pay claims were a major threat to "the economy", and that some form of restraint would benefit both the low-paid and the "national interest". Having gone this far, it mattered little that the TUC finally rejected the specific proposals which the government devised to this end; as TUC representatives themselves claimed, the talks had broken down on matters of detail rather than of principle.43

To summarize: there are both practical and ideological forces constraining the militancy of trade union leadership. Taking the three
main unions with “left-wing” leadership, for example, it is significant that the Engineering Workers’ opposition to the Industrial Relations Act—the most forthright of any union—has been at root passive and abstentionist; no attempt has been made to mobilize rank-and-file action against the Act in general or its use against the union’s own funds in particular. The Transport and General Workers have been even more concerned to shrink from confrontation over the Act; and it is interesting that their own guidance to shop stewards has been altered in the aftermath of the NIRC’s insistence that the union is responsible for their actions. As for the Mineworkers, it is clear that efforts were made in 1973 to avoid a repeat of the previous years’ struggle; submission of their claim was delayed to avoid a confrontation during phase 1 of the government’s policy; the major part of the Coal Board’s offer, framed within the limits of phase 2, was accepted; and while a strike ballot was called over the outstanding issue of holiday arrangements, no effort was made to mobilize rank-and-file support for industrial action—thus virtually guaranteeing that a strike would be rejected. The Heath government’s efforts to curb pay increases in a period of rapid price inflation have indeed revealed particularly clearly the conflicting pressures on union leadership, and the means adopted to evade the conflict. While the normal concern to achieve compromise and accommodation with employers and government exerts a powerful influence, union leaders cannot acquiesce too readily when their members are eager to resist what is in effect an attempt to cut their real wages. Hence it is not surprising that various forms of “controlled militancy” have become increasingly popular; and that many unions have had recourse to the mechanism of the ballot—a tactic whereby the officials can appear to avoid personal responsibility for the union’s decision, even though through its form, presentation and timing they can exert a crucial influence.

Yet in the present conjuncture, how effectively can union officialdom bridge the conflicting expectations of their members on the one hand and employers and the state on the other: can a confrontation with one or the other be avoided? And if not, can the implications of this confrontation be damped down once more, as happened in 1972? If the economic constraints on the government do indeed require, not simply a reduction in the relative share of the national income going to wages and salaries, but an absolute decline in the living standards of many workers, a repeat of the explosion of 1968–70—in a very different political climate—is clearly an outcome which union leaders, however anxious to keep the situation under control, may be unable to prevent. Yet whether or not this occurs will depend, not simply on the policies of the state and the union officials, but on the consciousness and objectives of union members themselves.
The Problem of Rank-and-File Consciousness

The argument so far may in part be summarized as follows: trade unionists have in recent years been raising unusually ambitious demands and pursuing these with unwontedly militant methods, at the very moment when the predicament of British capitalism makes even the traditionally limited patterns of union action increasingly intolerable. This situation patently contradicts the analysis offered by most orthodox industrial relations analysts and by some socialists, that trade unionism tends naturally to become comfortably integrated within the framework of capitalism. It demonstrates on the contrary that collective action represents a reaction against the economic exploitation and deprivation of control inherent in the institution of wage-labour, and possesses a dimension of revolt which can never be wholly suppressed.

Yet a central feature of the present situation is the gap which exists between activity and consciousness. For if the cumulative effect of the demands and struggles of rank-and-file trade unionists is to create a dangerous instability for the political economy within which unions operate, this consequence is wholly unintended. In almost every case, workers' particular conflicts with specific aspects of the political economy are unrelated to any general questioning of its basic character. This was of course the central point of Lenin's own critique of the limitations of even militant trade unionism; and in this respect the factors cited in the previous discussion of the ideology of trade union leadership apply even more markedly in the case of most rank-and-file members. If there has been an upsurge in militancy, it has in the main been militancy of a restricted and sectional kind. While the size of wage demands in the last few years seems, by previous standards, remarkably ambitious, they appear far more modest when set against such factors as the rise in the cost of living (and in particular food prices), the effects of "fiscal drag", and the "poverty trap". As Turner and Wilkinson conclude, "only by insisting on wage increases which are necessarily inflationary can wage-earners secure a 'moderate' gain in real living standards". Moreover, the focus in wage disputes is still the relative pay of different sections of workers—rather than the process of exploitation which affects all workers. Or again, many of the major struggles of recent years may be seen as a response to initiatives of employers in seeking tighter control of labour costs, or governments in seeking to curb public sector pay, rather than as a reflection of an autonomous eruption of worker militancy. And even the recent developments in the methods of industrial conflict—the wave of sit-ins, flying pickets, occasional mass solidarity action—need by no means imply that the traditionally restricted aims of trade unionists in conflict have been significantly transcended.
The contradictions inherent in trade union consciousness are plainly revealed in the responses of workers to opinion surveys—which for all their distortions and oversimplifications cannot be dismissed altogether. The majority are often willing to criticize the unions for economic difficulties, blame workers for most strikes—which they regard as a major "problem", support legal restrictions on the right to strike, and approve government curbs on pay increases. In this respect, the views of most trade union members would not appear to differ radically from those of other sectors of the population. Such findings follow naturally from the purely sectional perspectives of most organized workers in respect of their normal trade union activities: they are ready to accept the virtually universal condemnation, by press and politicians, of other workers' disputes. Of course they do not endorse the dominant ideology in relation to their own industrial activity; but this activity is itself often transient, rarely resulting in any enduring revision of consciousness. There is very little evidence to support the romantic belief that participation in a major industrial struggle naturally generates an "explosion of consciousness" with lasting consequences.

Recent sociological analysis of working-class consciousness is relevant here. A wide range of studies have clearly documented the inconsistencies inherent in most workers' social attitudes. Typically, they do not question the dominant ideology when formulated in abstract and general form; it is precisely at the level of the overall political economy that the class which is the ruling material force of society is most manifestly also its ruling intellectual force. Yet in respect of their concrete and specific experience they fail to endorse the full implications of the dominant ideology, adopting cynical attitudes towards those in positions of authority and engaging in actions (in the present context, going on strike) unacceptable to those who are wholeheartedly committed to the prevailing ideological perspective.

This is sufficient to indicate (as Lenin himself often argued) that trade union consciousness is no simple replication of bourgeois ideology. Parkin has made this point in his discussion of the "subordinate value system".

"Members of the underclass are continually exposed to the influence of dominant values by way of the educational system, newspapers, radio and television, and the like. By virtue of the powerful institutional backing they receive these values are not readily negated by those lacking other sources of knowledge and information. However, since such values are the moral representation of the interests and opportunities of more privileged groups, their 'appropriateness' as far as the less privileged are concerned is problematic. The tendency among the under-privileged is not to reject these values, and thus create an entirely different normative system, but to negotiate or modify them in the light of their own existential conditions."
This entails that it is wrong to assume the existence of a positive moral commitment to the social order on the part of the working class. Indeed, as Harris has pointed out, "even the term 'accept' is suspect, since most men do not consider government one of the factors they can change. It is rather like the weather, and one can neither accept nor reject it for it is not subject to our wills".49 A particular system of society can appear natural, inevitable, hence legitimate, simply because it is there. Lukács captured this fact succinctly when he wrote "every system of state and law, and the capitalist system above all, exists in the last analysis because its survival, and the validity of its statutes, are simply accepted as unproblematic".50

The predominantly passive nature of working-class commitment to the social order has the contradictory consequences that workers often act in ways damaging to social and economic stability while intending no explicit or co-ordinated challenge. There can be little doubt that the resultant ideological confusion imposes a serious handicap on effective trade union action. As Engels wrote, "indifference towards all theory . . . is one of the main reasons why the English working-class movement crawls along so slowly in spite of the splendid organization of the individual unions"51 or in Lukács' words, "if the proletariat finds the economic inhumanity to which it is subjected easier to understand than the political, and the political easier than the cultural, then all these separations point to the extent of the still unconquered power of capitalist forms of life in the proletariat itself".52 One reason for the failure to make the connections between immediate experiences and the broader contexts of the political economy is the fact that class and power relations, mediated by a market structure and "democratic" political institutions, are relatively opaque.53 To grasp their nature does require a somewhat abstracted, artificial analytical perspective; this does not occur spontaneously.

The discontinuities and inconsistencies in working-class consciousness give current industrial relations their curious instability. Few of the most dramatic struggles of recent years could have been predicted in advance, even though they may be open to retrospective explanation. The volatility of rank-and-file attitudes and aspirations has been starkly revealed: accommodation to Labour's freeze in 1966 and early 1967; the explosion of militancy which reached its peak in 1970; the demoralization of 1971, with the defeats of the power workers and the postal workers, and the apparent success of the governments "n minus 1" formula; the euphoria of 1972 with the miners victorious and the government discredited; the collapse of militancy in early 1973, with the hospital workers' defeat and the decision not to fight the government's policy by such previously militant groups as the Ford workers, miners and railwaymen. It is plausible to assume that
accumulated discontent with the effects of the government's policy will lead to a new outbreak of militancy, as after 1967; but this cannot be predicted with any certainty.

Indeed, the present conjuncture admits of two diametrically opposing outcomes. On the one hand, the present strategy of government and employers, if necessary intensified, may prove (at least temporarily) successful. Despite the considerable strength of shop-floor union organization in many industries, its fundamental weakness is its fragmentation. It is by no means uncommon for each sectional group within a workplace to pursue its own interests and fight its own battles with little regard for those of other sections, and even at cross purposes with them. Where companies could afford piecemeal concessions on the shop floor, were vulnerable to small stoppages which could disrupt an integrated production process, and had no co-ordinated industrial relations policy to cope with such problems, sectional action by workers proved highly effective. But sectionalism may constitute a fatal weakness where managements and government intervene in industrial relations with a relatively co-ordinated strategy. Thus the current situation contains the possibility that organized workers, meeting an increasingly concerted offensive in a fragmented manner, might sustain a series of sectional defeats which could transform self-confidence into demoralization. This may be all the more likely where a physical attack on shop-floor union organization is combined with an ideological offensive aimed at persuading workers to accept the particular implications of the generalized capitalist value system. Such notions as "fairness", "efficiency", etc., interpreted in a manner hostile to workers' interests, may be used to restrain the specific goals pursued by trade unionists; so may particular interpretations of what constitute "realistic" and "unrealistic" aspirations. In particularizing the dominant ideology in this manner, union officialdom may well play a key role.

Yet such a process is by no means inevitable. If governments and employers are impelled to adopt an abnormally coercive policy towards trade unionism, the transparency of class and power relations is likely to increase. This would open the possibility of workers' concrete and immediate "deviance" extending to their more general images of the society. The consequence could be the cumulative devaluation of the influence of the dominant ideology in the context of the broader structure of economic and political control. In such a situation, industrial militancy might well come to assume the aspect of an explicit challenge to the structure of control in industry and society. In the process, workers through their objectives and activities would be redefining trade unionism itself. Such a development would however meet the opposition not only of those in positions of social
and economic dominance, but also of those in the trade union hierarchy committed to their existing status and functions.

Tasks for Socialists

The very openness and unpredictability of the current industrial situation offers enormous opportunities and at the same time involves grave responsibilities for socialists. Anything but the most temporary of success in resisting the growing attacks on effective union organization requires a clarity of purpose and firmness of action which would derive only from a thorough-going hegemonic class consciousness. Such consciousness, as Mann has recently indicated, involves four main elements.

"Firstly, we can separate class identity—the definition of oneself as working-class, as playing a distinctive role in common with other workers in the productive process. Secondly comes class opposition—the perception that the capitalist and his agents constitute an enduring opponent to oneself. These two elements interact dialectically; that is to say opposition itself serves to reinforce identity, and vice versa. Thirdly is class totality—the acceptance of the two previous elements as the defining characteristics of (a) one’s total social situation and (b) the whole society in which one lives. Finally comes the conception of an alternative society, a goal toward which one moves through the struggle with the opponent. True revolutionary consciousness is the combination of all four."^45

The current level of class consciousness in Britain comprises little but the first two elements—and even these not without qualification; the latter apply only in the most vestigial sense. Nor can it seriously be proposed that a radical heightening of consciousness can occur naturally or spontaneously. This must be constructed, indeed fought for, in a continuous struggle against the grip of bourgeois ideology: a struggle which is only possible because existing working-class consciousness does contain contradictions, and because workers' taken-for-granted assumptions about the nature of their society do come into constant conflict with their immediate experiences and activities.

At this point it is useful to recall the arguments of perhaps the most original theoretician British shop-floor unionism has produced, J. T. Murphy, half a century ago at another pivotal phase of working-class history. "We need plans of immediate organized action, definitely related to the existing organized forces of the proletariat, the application of which will force them into action. For it is by action that situations are produced which offer the opportunities necessary for a revolutionary change of leadership." In this respect, he charged, the newly-formed Communist Party had been notably lacking. There had recently been two important crises, respectively the peak of self-assertiveness and the nadir of demoralization of the post-war labour
movement: the official creation of Councils of Action in 1920 to prevent British military aggression against Soviet Russia; and the collapse of the Triple Alliance on "Black Friday" 1921, which left the miners to be defeated by the owners. In the first case, communists had participated but had no strategy for escalating working-class action and wresting control of the struggle from the official leadership. In the second, the Party had indeed warned in advance that the Triple Alliance would fail—but "had not, to any great extent, considered or advised the masses what they could do in such an eventuality". They had merely reacted to events; and Murphy warned against the possibility that "the next crisis will find us unprepared in a situation akin to its predecessors".

The parallels with the present are uncomfortably close. Effective intervention in the current industrial struggle necessitates an adequate general theory of capitalism and the transition to socialism; a theoretical analysis of the present disposition of the class struggle—the objectives of the ruling class, the role of the unions, and the state of working-class consciousness; and a set of strategies and tactics, of immediate and transitional demands, which are internally coherent and are explicitly related to the first two elements. In addition, organizational resources and ability are essential for the integration of theory and practice. It cannot be credibly suggested that these prerequisites of effective intervention are at this moment to hand, though partially both theory and organization do indeed already exist. Yet the elaboration and refinement of both represent an urgent task which must form part of the intervention in the broader struggle itself.

Within this broader struggle, the essential immediate task is threefold. Firstly, building on the existing oppositional elements in working-class consciousness, it is necessary to expose the class nature of contemporary attacks on trade unionism and the need for class action to overcome it. This involves generalizing a clear recognition that such developments as industrial legislation or the pay freeze, and at company level changes in procedures and pay systems, are an attack on working-class interests; that they are rooted in the internal dynamics of modern monopoly capitalism; and that the determination of employers and governments to "bash the unions" (or at least their real basis of strength at rank-and-file level) cannot be overcome by conference resolutions, but requires the mobilization of the rank and file. Secondly, this extension of consciousness must include an understanding of the need for a counter-offensive, for increased working-class power both industrially and politically. In recent years the favourite response of union leaders, "left" MPs, and the Communist Party has been the slogan "Hands Off the Unions". Yet it is clear that such a negative
and defensive reaction is doomed to failure by the current requirements of British capitalism; the power of trade unionism must escalate if it is not to be eroded. The third task is the development of rank-and-file organization beyond its present restricted boundaries, to articulate and integrate the aspirations and self-activity of workers on the shop and office floor. Currently, the parochialism of domestic unionism is only too evident: effective combine committees operate in very few multi-plant companies; where such bodies nominally exist they are often obstructed by sectional jealousies, intrigue, or simple lack of interest on the part of the stewards and convenors involved. At local level, similar factors prevented the formation of Councils of Action during the struggle against the Industrial Relations Bill. This task is clearly related to the others: effective multi-plant (and, more ambitiously, multi-company and multi-industry) bodies of rank-and-file representatives can be established only as rank-and-file trade unionists recognize why such organizations are required and how they can relate to their own immediate struggles.

These tasks must be pursued at two levels. On the shop floor, socialists must relate the workers' particular and sectional objectives to the general problems of the class as a whole, must illuminate the link between their fragmented grievances and the capitalist structure which generates them. They must demonstrate, therefore, the relevance of socialist analysis and perspectives to the immediate struggle in the factories. Such a process of "political education" cannot be conducted from outside the area of conflict: socialists must contribute to enhanced consciousness by their participation in a common movement of industrial struggle. Nor can the process be purely intellectual: the role of socialists is that of catalysts in a process of self-education through experience in action.

But to transcend mere syndicalism a further dimension is necessary. The national trade union constitutes the direct link between workers in the individual factories and as members of a class; in addition, it possesses considerable influence over the attitudes of the rank and file on many issues, and has traditional claims on their loyalty. For both reasons it cannot be ignored; the struggle for rank and file control of the trade unions must be a natural extension of the shop-floor struggle. (This does not mean that the campaign for control of the union can be regarded—as has often been the case—as a substitute for rank and file self-activity.) But more than this: the socialist organization itself must aim to constitute the basis of an expanding network of politically conscious militants—in order to counteract the pressures towards isolation and fragmentation, to politicize the industrial struggle, and finally to make possible a direct and co-ordinated confrontation with the capitalist relations of production.
Current trends in British industrial relations therefore present socialists with a considerable opportunity and a major challenge. Failure will almost certainly involve a massive defeat and demoralization for the whole working class. Success could achieve, for the first time in half a century, the genuine potential of a transition to socialism.

Appendix: Principal Stoppages, 1960–1971

This appendix provides brief details of every dispute in the period 1960 to 1971 which involved over 50,000 striker-days, as listed in the official records. Details for 1972 were not available at the time of writing.

1960

Bakery Workers, Northern Ireland: 21 March to 13 April: 108,200 striker-days. 1,200 workers at various firms struck in support of a claim for £1 increase, rejecting an offer of 8s. After 4,000 other workers had been laid off, a Committee of Investigation was set up. An increase of 9s. was finally agreed.

Engineering apprentices: 20 April to 15 May: 347,200 days. Some 35,000 engineering trade apprentices in engineering and shipbuilding firms throughout Britain struck in support of a pay demand.

Merseyside dockers: 20 to 29 June: 74,800 days. Workers banned night-shift work in support of a pay claim, and management responded by stopping the attendance money of those who refused night-work. 11,000 struck in protest but returned to work pending national negotiations.

Seamen: 10 August to 26 September: 85,000 days. This protest against the new national agreement began on Merseyside (where a smaller strike took place in June) and spread to other ports; the National Seamen's Reform Movement was formed during the struggle. Its leaders were denounced as "subversives" by union and employers alike, and several were gaoled for disobeying injunctions under the Merchant Shipping Acts. Though the strike collapsed, it made clear the strength of previously suppressed opposition to the union leadership.

Shipwrights and Burners, Port Glasgow and Greenock: 15 September to 18 November: 136,000 days. 550 workers at various firms struck in support of a pay claim. Agreement was eventually reached after 2,800 lay-offs.

London and Tilbury tally clerks: 20 September to 15 October: 210,300 days. 1,600 tally clerks struck in protest at the transfer of a number of dockers and checkers to the clerks' register. The stoppage was condemned by the Dock Labour Board, the TGWU, and by an official Committee of Inquiry,
1961

Merseyside ship-repairing: 16 January to 5 May: 242,500 days. Engineering trade workers at various firms demanded a special 22s. lieu bonus. The dispute ended with an agreed increase.

Yorkshire coal-miners: 15 February to 11 March: 379,000 days. 70,000 miners throughout Yorkshire struck in support of a demand for a 10% increase in contract prices and a guaranteed shift rate.

Pressed Steel, Swindon: 6 April to 12 May: 57,000 days. This was the first of three major disputes in the motor industry in which managements took the opportunity to dismiss leading militants in what were previously strongly organized factories; all followed closely on an agreement between employers and unions in the industry, encouraged by the government, to ensure that "constitutional" procedures were protected. At Pressed Steel, 1,200 skilled workers struck in support of a claim for an extra 9d. an hour. They were supported by the AEU District Committee, but the national Executive ordered them to return. After a month, with some 10,000 workers laid off, management announced that workers who remained on strike would be sacked; there followed a drift back to work, with the victimization of many militants.

London dockers: 22 April to 3 May: 90,000 days. 15,000 men struck in protest against permission given to an employer to use unregistered labour for occasional unloading work.

Cammell Laird, Birkenhead: 23 May to 25 August: 64,000 days. 260 shipwrights objected to the employment of boilermakers on certain work. They returned pending further negotiations.

Ford: 27 to 30 June: 111,000 days. This was a protest against management's refusal (on grounds of government pay policy) to negotiate until September on a claim submitted in May.

British Light Steel Pressings, Acton: 30 August to 29 November: 51,000 days. The Rootes combine committee (of which BLSP was part) believed that redundancies were contemplated at Acton; the strike took place when management refused to discuss the matter. The AEU Executive ordered a return to work, despite the protests of the District Committee. By October, car production at Rootes was virtually halted. A drift back began after management threatened dismissals; production was resumed, and the combine committee failed to black the work produced. The strike committee finally recommended a return; most were sacked.

Steel Company of Wales, Port Talbot: 13 September to 28 October: 200,000 days. Three bricklayers who refused to do certain work after management unilaterally altered the pay system were suspended. Management used staff to perform the bricklayers' duties, and the remaining maintenance workers refused to work with them, leading
to the closure of the works. A return was finally agreed pending further negotiations.

Building workers, various districts: 2 October to 7 November: 58,000 days. A series of stoppages took place over the interpretation of the "refreshment break" clause in the national agreement. Various settlements were negotiated locally.

1962

Engineering: 5 February and 5 March: 3,500,000 days. These 1-day strikes were called by the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions after the employers had rejected a claim for a substantial pay increase and shorter hours. A national ballot then showed a 3–2 majority against an indefinite strike; this was followed by agreement on a 3% increase. This was the last annual national pay claim: in November the AEU National Committee narrowly approved the principle of long-term agreements.

Merseyside dockers: 23 to 31 March: 53,000 days. 10,000 TGWU members struck against the employment of members of the "blue" union, the Stevedores and Dockers. The employers then agreed to a TGWU closed shop; but when a card check was held to enforce this, it was prevented by the refusal of many TGWU members to co-operate and show their cards.

Austin, Longbridge: 2 to 9 April: 70,000 days. Various groups employed on time-rates claimed a 36s. increase in bonus. Work was resumed pending negotiations on a new production-linked bonus system.

Railwaymen: 3 October: 285,000 days. This one-day strike was a protest against the closure of 12 railway workshops and the contraction of others; it was called by the NUR, without the support of the other rail unions. Subsequently talks were held on redundancy terms, and the NUR Executive voted narrowly against further strike action.

Ford, Dagenham: 17 to 29 October: 70,000 days. Five days after a pay agreement in which union officials agreed to improve efficiency and curb unofficial strikes, management sacked a leading steward, Bill Francis, for holding a meeting during the lunch break. 1,400 workers walked out, but were told to return by their unions while the dismissal was challenged through the grievance machinery. After the strikers voted to return, the company sent out a letter stating that only workers who agreed to obey its rules would be accepted back, and 70 "trouble-makers and wreckers" were victimized. Over the next months the unions involved vacillated, first threatening a strike and then calling it off for "further discussions". By May, after the number dismissed had been reduced to 17, and a Court of Inquiry had criticized the detail but not the principle of the sackings, all union opposition evaporated. Within a year, Ford had taken advantage of the new power
relationship on the shop floor by introducing 3-shift working. After two years, over half the victimized men were still reportedly out of work.

1963

Building workers: 19 to 24 August: 300,000 days. The National Federation of Building Trades Operatives called a selective one-week strike, particularly effective on Merseyside, in support of a pay and hours claim. Agreement was subsequently reached on increased wages and shorter hours over a three-year period.

SCOW, Port Talbot: 23 December to 2 February 1964: 310,000 days. In two overlapping disputes, the AEU gave notice of strike action from 2 January over a claim for £5 increase to reduce maintenance craftsmen's differential below process workers; while all 7 craft unions, demanding 3 weeks annual holiday, announced they would stop a week over Christmas rather than the official 3 days. The works closed, with 10,000 lay-offs. The AEU rejected arbitration, since a national claim on craftsmen's pay in the steel industry had been turned down by the Industrial Court in 1961. After TUC intervention, work was resumed with a joint working party investigation into the relative worth of maintenance and process work. The pay dispute was finally resolved with a productivity agreement.

1964

Raleigh, Nottingham: 14 January to 8 April: 61,000 days. 300 toolroom workers struck against proposed redundancies, demanding work-sharing instead. A redundancy agreement was finally accepted.

Cammell Laird, Birkenhead: 16 March to 5 June: 54,000 days. 150 shipwrights claimed an extra 1s. an hour, rejecting an offer of 2d. Their strike brought 1,000 lay-offs. Finally they accepted the 2d., with an extra 1d. for work on hull construction.

Postal workers: 10 to 16 July: 115,000 days. In January the UPW claimed a "substantial" pay increase, arguing that over 8 years earnings had fallen 20% out of line with industry; the Post Office replied that the maximum it could offer under government pay policy was 4%. The UPW conference authorized strike action, and a proposed reference to the Civil Service Arbitration Tribunal was rejected. Subsequent negotiations narrowed the difference between the two sides but failed to achieve agreement. A 1-day token strike was called on 16 July, and unofficial action took place throughout the week at many sorting offices. After the threat of an indefinite strike, agreement was reached on a 6½% increase.

1965

Company busmen: 16 January to 15 May: 124,400 days. Breakdown
in a national pay and conditions claim in the company-owned sector of the bus industry led to a wave of 1-day unofficial strikes and overtime bans, beginning in the Midlands and spreading to other areas. An official strike call was rescinded after a Committee of Inquiry was set up. Its report recommended a 15s. increase and a 40-hour week.

Massey-Ferguson, Coventry: 8 February to 4 March: 80,000 days. Clerical workers demanded an increase to maintain their traditional differential over other local firms, and rejected a company proposal to expedite salary negotiations in all its local factories. Agreement was finally reached for an increase in all factories with an additional 5s. in Coventry.

BMC, Longbridge: 1 to 12 March: 173,000 days. Maintenance fitters' mates claimed an increase in their percentage of the craft rate, claiming that a bonus system for skilled workers had widened differentials; the claim had been pursued through procedure a year previously and temporarily allowed to drop. The strike of 300 mates resulted in 18,000 lay-offs. It was finally agreed that the review of day-workers' pay would be advanced from October to June.

Pressed Steel, Oxford: 29 March to 14 April: 68,300 days. 750 toolroom workers, supported by the AEU District Committee, submitted a claim for a "substantial" increase. The company refused to make an offer, since by plant agreement all unions negotiated jointly, but proposed to advance its general pay review by a-month. Workers rejected this and at several meetings voted to maintain their strike, despite instructions from the AEU Executive to return; they finally agreed to "suspend" their action. Partly because of opposition from other unions, no differential increase was given in the subsequent pay review.

South Wales collieries: 19 May to 2 June: 244,000. 3,000 under-officials at various pits struck in protest at the transfer of an under-official following an altercation with a miner. Work was resumed pending an official inquiry.

Motor industry, Birmingham and Coventry: 9 July to 22 October: 136,000 days. The engineering "package deal" of December 1964, which introduced the 40-hour week, provided that on night-work this should continue to be worked over 5 shifts. Shop-floor demands in the Midland motor industry had been for 4 10-hour night-shifts, to allow a long weekend, and at many plants workers refused to attend the required Friday night short shift. In October a national agreement was reached permitting the 4-night week.

1966

BMC Engines, Coventry: 25 April to 13 June: 70,000 days. 230 machinists were involved in a series of short stoppages over a demand
for improved piece-rates for work on a new engine; on two occasions, 7,500 other workers were laid off.

National seamen's strike: 16 May to 1 July; 850,000 days. The National Union of Seamen demanded a reduction of the standard working week from 56 to 40 hours without loss of pay. The shipowners, enthusiastically supported by the Labour government, resisted this "inflationary" demand and made a "final offer" which was rejected out of hand. The strike (in which seamen could take part only after their existing voyages were completed) involved by the finish about 30,000 workers, less than half the NUS membership. A Committee of Inquiry appointed by the government eventually recommended terms about half way between the union's demands and the employers' offer. These were at first rejected by the union, but agreement was finally reached on fairly similar terms.58

1967

Shipbuilding draughtsmen: 7 March to 12 May; 64,500 days. Two weeks after DATA members at a Tyneside shipyard had begun a strike for higher pay, the Shipbuilding Employers' Association began a lock-out of all DATA members in the industry (about 1,400). After two months the employers abandoned the lock-out, and the original strike was settled by a pay increase slightly higher than the previous management offer.

Vauxhall Motors: 25 to 29 September; 62,000 days. Workers angry at the company's reply to the unions' pay demand imposed an overtime ban and work-to-rule; within two weeks Vauxhall responded by laying off 16,000 workers. A formula for a resumption of work was subsequently agreed, and negotiations brought an improved pay offer.

Liverpool and London dockers: 18 September to 27 November; 544,000 days. These strikes, though separate, both arose from the reorganization of dock labour resulting from the Devlin Report. The dockers demanded improved piece rates and a higher guaranteed minimum: the strike ended on 20 November with the bulk of the men's demands achieved. Strike action in London when the Devlin changes were introduced on 18 September quickly collapsed; but a new strike movement began on 3 October after the transfer of dockers between employers under the new "continuity rule". The strike ended on 27 November after achieving little more than paper concessions to the men's demands.59

Municipal busmen: 21 October to 23 December; 86,800 days. A "Busmen's Charter", involving pay increases of £1, was drawn up by the TGWU; after a breakdown in negotiations the union withdrew from the national negotiating machinery and pressed the claim at local level. In many areas the busmen banned overtime
and worked to rule, and strikes occurred in five towns. The dispute was finally settled by a national agreement for the £1 increase. (The increase was then frozen by the government under the prices and incomes legislation; it was finally paid, backdated a year, in December 1968.)

1968

British Steel Corporation, Shotton: 11 February to 2 March; 93,700 days. About 1,700 maintenance craftsmen banned overtime and worked to rule in support of a claim for improved weekend payments, and were suspended by management. 7,000 production workers were laid off as a result. A formula was finally agreed for a return to work and negotiations on the craftsmen's grievance.

Liverpool busmen: 11 March to 25 May; 184,700. 3,200 busmen stopped work when a local agreement for a 23s. increase was frozen pending investigation by the Prices and Incomes Board. The Board finally approved the increase and the men returned to work.

Liverpool lorry drivers: 18 March to 5 April; 96,800 days. About 7,000 drivers stopped work in support of a local claim for a £16 basic wage, following the breakdown of national negotiations. After informal discussions the men agreed to return while negotiations took place with individual employers.

Rootes, Linwood: 13 May to 7 June; 79,000 days. 200 press shop and maintenance workers, members of the AEU, struck against the imposition of a productivity deal which had been accepted by the TGWU and NUVB; another 550 who refused to work the new conditions were locked out; 4,000 workers were subsequently laid off. After a Court of Inquiry was set up, work was resumed after the company agreed to minor changes in the agreement.

Engineering: 15 May: 1,500,000 days. A national claim for an all-round increase of £2, an immediate increase in the skilled minimum to £15 and to £20 after three years, and various fringe benefits, was submitted by the unions. This one-day strike was their response to complete deadlock. An indefinite strike, arranged for October, was first postponed and then called off as part of an agreement for smaller pay increases in return for a union pledge that future advances in pay would be based on local "productivity" concessions.

Ford sewing machinists: 7 to 28 June; 56,700 days. A new "job evaluation" structure at Ford created five grades; but women were classed only in the bottom three grades, and earned only 85 per cent of the male rate for each grade. Women sewing machinists, after pressing for nearly a year to be raised from the fourth to the third grade, took strike action which resulted in the lay-off of 9,000 other workers. It was eventually agreed to raise all women to 92 per cent
of the male rate for their grade, while a special review was made of the grading claim.

Vickers shipyard, Barrow: 3 July to 17 January 1969; 190,000 days. This was a demarcation dispute centring on whether fitters or plumbers should perform certain pipe-testing work in a new production shop. The dispute (exacerbated by management's handling of the issue:) was settled after a Court of Inquiry had been held.

Morganite Carbon, London: 19 September to 13 November; 65,650 days. The stoppage began after nearly a year of negotiations for a 6d. an hour increase for 1,700 workers; management insisted that workers should give up their tea breaks in return for an increase. The company finally dropped this demand and work was resumed.

1969

Perkins Diesel Engines, Peterborough: 13 to 31 January; 59,600 days. A shop steward was suspended for refusing to work while being time-studied, since the previous pay agreement which permitted work study had expired. 5,000 assembly workers stopped work in support. A settlement was finally reached, providing that work study should not be introduced into any new areas.

Post Office overseas telegraph operators: 20 to 31 January; 102,800 days. 4,000 operators, members of the Union of Post Office Workers (UPW) stopped work in support of a pay claim; all other UPW members banned overtime and Sunday work, and a one-day strike on 30 January in most major towns was called in support. Agreement was then reached for an increase of 5%, with a further 2% tied to productivity.

British Insulated and Callenders Cables, Prescot: 12 February to 10 March; 55,800 days. 3,300 production workers at this cable factory struck against a productivity deal negotiated by the TGWU. Management finally conceded their demands for further improvements in pay.

Ford penalty clauses: 21 February to 19 March; 561,000 days. In national negotiations covering all Ford plants, the company offered a 5% increase together with guaranteed lay-off pay and increased holiday pay which would be received only by workers who had not taken part in any "unconstitutional" action over a period of 6 months. This was accepted by the majority of union representatives on the Negotiating Committee, but rejected by shop stewards, who demanded an increase of £2 without strings. Workers at Halewood, near Liverpool, came out on strike on 21 February, and the dispute spread to Dagenham and other Ford factories. Ford took legal action, unsuccessfully, against the AEF and TGWU after both unions (which represented the majority of Ford workers) had made the strike official. Agreement was finally reached for the wage increase originally offered,
and for a modification of the penalty clauses (which were removed from lay-off pay)—a small achievement for a three-week strike.\textsuperscript{63}

Opposition to anti-strike legislation: 27 February and 1 May; 65,000 and 90,000 days. These one-day strikes were staged as a token demonstration against the government's proposed restrictions on the right to strike, published \textit{in} its white paper "In Place of Strife". The first stoppage coincided with a special TUC conference; the May Day strike involved the shutdown of all national newspapers. In June the government agreed to drop its legislation, as \textit{part} of a deal with the TUC.

British Leyland, Lancashire: 19 May to 20 June; 204,000 days. 8,500 workers at the Leyland heavy vehicle factories of BLMC stopped work after the failure of domestic negotiations for improved piece rates and other increases. There was a return to work after a month following an agreement to increase bonus rates; but further sanctions were necessary before this was interpreted as the workers intended.

Aberdeen trawlermen: 16 June to 21 August; 61,000 days. Trawlermen struck in support of a demand for an increase of 17s. 9d. a day to \£3, and other improvements. After several employer offers were rejected, agreement was finally reached for the \£3 in return for productivity concessions.

British Steel Corporation, Port Talbot: 27 June to 23 August; 220,000 days. A national agreement between the BSC and the National Union of Blastfurnacemen provided for \£1 increase for the lowest-paid blastfurnacemen. Because of local peculiarities, the 140 eligible workers at Port Talbot did not receive the increase; after six months of negotiations all 1,300 NUB members stopped work. After 10,000 production workers were laid off, and the fruitless intervention of NUB leaders and the TUC \textbf{Secretary}, a Court of Inquiry achieved an agreement by management to pay the \£1 increase.

Post Office Engineering Union: 14 July; 84,300 days. The POEU submitted a claim for a 10% pay increase; the Post Office offered only 3\%\%, or a productivity deal worth even less. This was rejected out of hand, as was an improved offer. A one-day strike was called, and further strikes were threatened without notice. The Post Office then agreed to pay 10% in two instalments.

BSR, East Kilbride: 13 August to 21 November; 67,800 days. BSR, the main British producer of gramophone record-changers, \textbf{was} a violently anti-union firm. After the AEF had carried out a recruiting drive at the company's Scottish factory at East Kilbride, 21 women who were pressing a pay claim were dismissed. About 1,000 workers, half the factory's largely female labour force, struck in protest. The dispute was extremely bitter and prolonged, with clashes between pickets and the police (who were defending \textbf{blacklegs}). Eventually,
following merger talks between BSR and Plessey, and considerable government pressure—including an investigation by the Commission on Industrial Relations—an agreement was reached for the recognition of the AEF by the company.

General Electric Company, Coventry: 15 August to 8 September; 104,000 days. A claim for 2s. an hour increase for 300 storemen at GEC factories in Coventry was processed through the lengthy engineering disputes procedure and finally referred back to the factories. Two separate groups took strike action, resulting in 8,500 production workers being laid off. The strikers eventually returned and a smaller increase was agreed.

Standard-Triumph, Liverpool: 27 August to 10 November; 69,300 days. Following the rejection of a demand for guaranteed lay-off pay, and delays in negotiating improved bonus payments, workers at the Liverpool car body plant of Standard-Triumph voted to strike. For two months all peace moves failed, since the company refused to give indication of its reply to the bonus claim while the strike continued. A Court of Inquiry was appointed to investigate the dispute, and held unofficial talks with management and the strike committee; a formula for a return to work was then agreed and a pay increase of 30s. was conceded.

Vauxhall, Ellesmere Port: 22 September to 21 October; 191,400 days. 400 press operators imposed a work-to-rule during a dispute over payment for setting. Vauxhall laid off 3,000 production workers, then insisted that the press operators must work normally, and a strike began. The issue then broadened, as employees still at work began to work to rule in protest at management proposals made in national pay negotiations; eventually about 15,000 Vauxhall men were laid off at Ellesmere Port and at the main works at Luton. Despite resistance at Ellesmere Port, the company's proposals were eventually accepted, and all sections returned to work.

International Nickel, Clydach: 19 September to 24 January 1970; 78,000 days. 800 production workers (TGWU members) struck against the imposition by management of conditions contained in a productivity deal accepted by 5 unions of maintenance craftsmen; the union objected to the level of pay offered, the attempt by management to decide production standards unilaterally, and a "no strike" clause. The company appears to have provoked the strike because of a world nickel shortage resulting from an 18-week strike of Canadian miners. Agreement was finally reached for a 25% increase in pay and the removal of the no-strike clause.

Dustmen: 23 September to 18 November; 150,000 days. National negotiations on union claims for an 18s. increase for local authority manual workers broke down when the employers offered only 10s.
Dustmen in Hackney then stopped work, demanding a minimum wage of £20 (an increase of nearly £5). After two weeks nearly all London dustmen were on strike, as well as some other grades of council workmen; the dispute also spread to several provincial towns. National officials hastily negotiated an increase of £2 10s., which was finally accepted with reluctance by the strikers.63

Coal-miners: 13 to 24 October; 980,000 days. The National Union of Mineworkers submitted a claim for increased wages, and a 40 hour week: it also asked that all workers should be allowed 20 minutes a day for meal breaks without loss of pay (this already applied to all underground and many surface workers). The Coal Board agreed to all the demands except this last one. A strike movement spread rapidly from Yorkshire to Scotland, South Wales and several other districts, involving 120,000 of the country's 300,000 miners. The strikers eventually agreed to return, but organized opposition to the Coal Board's offer; they achieved a small majority at a delegate conference of the NUM, but a national ballot accepted the terms offered.64

Centrax. Newton Abbot: 7 November to 20 March 1970; 89,000 days. 800 workers at this heavy engineering works—the largest factory in South Devon, one of the lowest-paid areas in the country—stopped work in support of a claim for a substantial wage increase. After several minor improvements in the company's offer, terms were finally obtained which were acceptable to the strikers.

National schoolteachers' dispute: 11 November to 2 March 1970; 180,000 days. The National Union of Teachers (NUT) launched a claim for an interim salary increase of £135. After negotiations brought an offer of only £50, a series of half- and one-day strikes was called in major towns. A new offer of up to £100 was also rejected, and two-week strikes took place at selected schools. Finally an offer of £120 was accepted.65

British Road Services: 12 November to 9 December; 72,000 days. Drivers and loaders at BRS parcels depots struck in support of a demand for £4 pay increase; eventually 7,000 workers were involved and most depots closed. The employers, having originally offered 15s., finally conceded £1 with a further £2 tied to productivity.

Hoover, Merthyr Tydfil: 20 November to 16 January 1970; 72,000 days. 1,800 production workers at this washing machine factory stopped work, demanding a long-service bonus of up to 50s. which was already paid to skilled workers. The strikers finally agreed to return while negotiations took place on the claim.

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Scottish busmen: 6 January to 26 March; 144,300 days. Some 5,000 drivers and conductors, mainly in Fife, struck initially in support of an
official claim for equal pay for women. Subsequently a further 5,000 workers throughout Scotland began a campaign of disruption demanding specified hours of work and overtime pay for weekend work. These demands were eventually conceded, while it was agreed to pay equal rates to conductresses after three years service.

Leeds clothing workers: 2 to 27 February; 132,200 days. 14,570 workers at 45 factories stopped work in protest against a national agreement for 5% increases, backdated to 1 January, reached between the employers and the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers. The rank-and-file strike committee demanded equal pay for women, a higher minimum wage, and opposed productivity strings in the agreement. Despite considerable opposition it was agreed to return to work on the understanding that union officials would re-open negotiations and report back within a fortnight. Agreement was reached for increases of 8d. per hour for men and 10d. for women (in addition to the previous increases of 5d. and 4d.), to be paid in two stages in April and September. Despite considerable pressure for immediate payment of the whole increase, this was accepted.66

Vauxhall Motors, Ellesmere Port: 10 March to 3 April; 84,300 days. Following the company's payment of an 8d. hour increase to batch viewers whose work was considered specially responsible, an additional 110 viewers struck for the same payment. Lay-offs at Luton and Dunstable, as well as Ellesmere Port, totalled 16,000 by the end of the strike—resolved when management agreed to pay the increase but specified higher standards of work and responsibility.

Doxford and Sunderland shipyards: 13 March to 10 July; 202,300. Millwrights and fitters (AUEW) and plumbers and electricians (EPTU) struck against a productivity agreement accepted by the Boilermakers, objecting in particular to inter-craft flexibility. The yards were closed, involving 3,000 lay-offs, until the EPTU members returned to work on 3 June. The AUEW members finally accepted a modified agreement.

British Domestic Appliances, Fazakerley: 31 March to 1 June; 61,800 days. 1,090 workers at this subsidiary of English Electric near Liverpool struck for a basic wage of £22. Work was resumed after a slight improvement in the company's previous offer.

Pilkingtons, St. Helens: 3 April to 21 May; 345,700. A small stoppage over an error in workers' pay packets escalated into a stoppage of over 10,600 workers at all the company's plants, including the six main works at St. Helens, for an increase of £10 a week. A confrontation quickly developed between the Rank and File Strike Committee and the GMWU, which ordered a return to work. On 20 April union officials negotiated a £3 increase, but this was overwhelmingly rejected by mass meetings. As some strikers returned to work violent incidents
occurred between police and pickets. After intervention by the TUC, and the appointment of a Court of Inquiry, a ballot showed a narrow majority to end the strike. This decision was at first reversed at a mass meeting, but it was later agreed to return to work. On 4 July a further £1 increase was negotiated. An attempt by many of the rank-and-file leaders to form a breakaway union collapsed after the company refused recognition and dismissed a number of leading members.

Renold Ltd., Manchester: 27 April to 26 June; 87,900 days. Workers struck in support of a claim for £5 increase (argued on grounds of parity with the firm's Coventry plant) after an offer of only £1 for men and 90p for women. Agreement was finally reached on £3.75 for skilled operatives and £2,625 for all others.

Dunlop Co., Fort Dunlop, Birmingham: 4 May to 15 June; 181,900 days. 1,700 maintenance workers struck in support of a claim for £5 increase, argued on grounds of parity with production workers and district earnings for maintenance workers. Some 10,000 lay-offs resulted within the Dunlop group and about 15,000 in other firms in the car industry. Agreement was finally reached for an increase of £4, with a further £1 within a month tied to productivity improvements.

Joseph Lucas, Birmingham: 4 June to 7 July; 107,800 days. 650 workers making diecast and plastics components demanded £9 increase; after an offer of £2–£3 they stopped work. 8,000 lay-offs occurred within the plant and 6,000 in other factories. Intervention by the TUC and the Motor Industry Joint Labour Council failed to resolve the dispute. Eventually the strikers accepted an offer of £4, to be paid to all Lucas workers.

Newspaper publishing, London and Manchester: 9 to 14 June; 101,500 days. At the end of April two of the three main print unions, SOGAT and SLADE, submitted a claim for 25% increases in advance of further advances when the existing agreement terminated in September. An offer of 5% from July, and no further increase for a year, was dismissed as "derisory". TUC intervention failed to prevent strike action; but talks continued, resulting in an increase of 5% on earnings or 10 per cent on basic pay, whichever was the greater, and an extra week's holiday. The unions agreed that future negotiations would be on a combined national level.

Co-operative Insurance Society agents: 11 June to 6 August; 266,500 days. 6,500 agents, members of USDAW, struck for expense allowances of £3 a week. The Society insisted that the agents' commission was intended to cover expenses, and threatened to end the strikers' contracts. After TUC intervention a formula was agreed for arbitration on the claim, and a provision that membership of a TUC-affiliated union should be a condition of employment. (An initially more militant breakaway union, which had not however supported
the strike, had been refused affiliation to the TUC.) This formula was accepted by a small majority of the strikers.

British Steel Corporation, Corby: 16 June to 10 July; 127,900 days. Maintenance craftsmen and mates, demanding a tonnage bonus of £6.50 without productivity strings, worked to rule from 9 June and then stopped work. 4,700 workers were laid off. A revised wage structure was finally accepted giving a system of bonuses ranging from £5.40 for craftsmen down to £2.05.

Shell Chemicals, Carrington, near Manchester: 19 June to 6 November; 56,600 days. 700 maintenance craftsmen demanding 25% on basic rates and other improvements, were involved in this protracted strike. Agreement was eventually reached for an increase of 61%, with a further 31% tied to concessions on flexibility and the elimination of overtime. The increase was also offset against reductions in overtime and shift premia.

Rolls-Royce, Coventry: 7 July to 13 October; 62,300 days. DATA demanded parity with salaries at other Midland factories for its draughtsmen, and various sanctions were applied. The company, which had offered 7% for draughtsmen at all its factories, locked out those in the Coventry works. It was finally agreed to pay 12% (averaging £4.25 a week) at Coventry, on the understanding that DATA would accept the lower figure at all other factories.

Dock workers, all ports in UK: 13 to 31 July; 502,000 days. In January 1969 the TGWU had submitted a claim to the port employers for the basic time rate to be raised from £1 1s. 9d. to £20. This was not pressed pending negotiations over Phase 2 of the Devlin changes; but the union resumed the demand in 1970, since earnings in ports where no productivity deals had been negotiated were falling behind those where new agreements applied. After strike notice had been given, the employers offered to raise the minimum earnings guarantee by £4 to £20 (£21 in London), but this was rejected. After the strike had commenced a Court of Inquiry was appointed. It endorsed the employers' offer, but proposed an additional 6d. per hour modernization payment and various fringe improvements. This was accepted by a delegate committee.

Shell Chemicals, Carrington and Shell and Burmah Oil, Ellesmere Port: 13 July to 14 September; 86,900 days. This strike involving 1,930 construction workers began after talks on a claim for an increase of 3s. 6d. an hour broke down. There was considerable police violence, and 45 pickets were arrested on 20 July. An offer of 1s. 6d. increase on the base rate for craftsmen and 1s. 3d. for mates, with a minimum bonus guarantee of 2s. 10d., was accepted at Ellesmere Port at the beginning of September. The same terms were agreed by a narrow majority at Carrington a week later.
GKN–Sankey, Wellington: 10 August to 18 September; 141,000 days. In July, workers at this Shropshire plant claimed increases of 45%, arguing parity with Coventry and Birmingham. An offer of 20% tied to productivity concessions was rejected, and 1,000 employees went on unofficial strike. Subsequent offers of a minimum of £2, with up to £7 for some skilled workers, were also unacceptable. On 11 September, after top-level negotiations had failed to achieve a settlement, the unions (principally the AUEW) gave official backing. Despite widespread lay-offs in the car industry the government refused to intervene, claiming that the company proposals were "fair". After eight weeks the workers agreed to accept the original management offer.

Alcoa Ltd., Waunarlwydd, near Swansea; 10 August to 30 October; 53,900 days. A pay dispute involving 8 storekeepers escalated when 200 other AUEW members struck in sympathy and 700 workers were laid off. The union claimed that the storemen were entitled to an increase under an old agreement; the company argued that this agreement had been superseded by a recent productivity deal. Eventually an increase of 1s. 9½d. an hour (about 20%) was agreed.

British Leyland, Cowley: 28 August to 12 October; 111,700 days. 150 workers from the Minor assembly line struck after being transferred to the new Maxi line; they objected to being paid a "learning rate" lower than their normal earnings. Management's action was also seen as an attempt to force the issue of abolition of piecework. A week later a further 1,000 assembly workers joined the strike; and there were 3,000 lay-offs at Cowley and repercussions at other British Leyland plants. It was finally agreed that recruitment to work the model should be on a plant-wide basis, and that discussions on payment should commence once work was resumed. (The final outcome was the introduction of measured day work at Cowley, despite substantial resistance.)

Municipal and Provincial Busmen: 5 September to 21 November; 98,400 days. The TGWU demanded a national cost-of-living increase of £4 3s. 8d., although the existing wage agreement did not expire until March 1971. When the employers refused any concessions a policy of non-co-operation and a ban on overtime was introduced, while frequent 24-hour strikes took place at many garages. In October an increase of 10% (£1 13s. Od.) was agreed for municipal busmen, to be paid from the end of the year. After union threats to withdraw from the national negotiating machinery, the provincial employers agreed to pay similar increases from March 1971, and to consider local productivity negotiations.

British Steel Corporation, Moriston: 23 September to 6 November; 59,700 days. Long-standing negotiations on a 25% claim for engin-
eering craftsmen and mates at two tinplate works, reached deadlock over productivity conditions. A strike of 410 AUEW members after two fitters were alleged to have disobeyed an order led to the lay-off of 3,000 production workers; meanwhile a demand emerged for £3 increase before any productivity deal. After an offer of £2, the strikers agreed to return pending further negotiations.

Local Authority Manual Workers, England and Wales: 29 September to 13 November; 1,216,400 days. In April the unions submitted a claim to the National Joint Council for increases of £2.75 for 770,000 manual workers, with other fringe improvements. An offer of £1.75 and a formula for a minimum earnings level were rejected, and the unions gave notice of strike action. A joint approach to the Department of Employment for conciliation was refused, except on the understanding that the settlement would not exceed 14%. After three weeks of selective strike action negotiations were resumed, and both sides subsequently agreed to submit the dispute to an "unofficial" committee of inquiry. The outcome was the Scamp Report, which recommended increases of £2.50 (about 15%); this was accepted by both parties.

Coal-miners: 26 October to 20 November; 1,049,800 days. The NUM claimed increases of £5 on the basic rate (about 33%); the Coal Board offered only 10%, described as "final". A ballot showed a majority of members in favour of strike action, but less than the two-thirds constitutionally required. New negotiations brought an offer of 1236 (£2.375 to £3); by 13 to 11 the NUM executive recommended acceptance. Protest strikes began in Yorkshire and Scotland, and spread a week later to Wales and then to other parts of the country. The strike ended after a ballot showed a 2–1 majority to accept the offer.

Scottish bakeries: 12 November to 8 January 1971; 152,700 days. Over 1,000 van drivers and delivery men stopped work progressively in support of a claim for £4 on basic rates to achieve parity with England and Wales. After a week a return to work began in the East of Scotland, with settlements at individual bakeries; but the strike remained solid in the West, and there were 4,000 lay-offs. The strikers eventually accepted the increases of £2.20 to £2.50 originally offered, given an agreement by the employers to negotiate on a range of other outstanding matters.

Birds Eye, Grimsby: 24 November to 22 January 1971; 73,800 days. 120 maintenance engineers and a similar number of production workers who were members of the AUEW stopped work after management had given ASTMS negotiating rights for supervisors. The strike caused the closure of the factory, affecting 2,800 workers. Management finally agreed to reverse its decision and to negotiate with the AUEW on recognition for engineering supervisors.
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Rolls-Royce, Hillingdon: 11 to 29 January; 114,400 days. 400 tool-room workers walked out accusing the company of "lethargy" in dealing with a pay claim: it had offered £1 with negotiations on further increases tied to productivity concessions, to apply to all workers at its Scottish factories, in reply to a claim for £5. Management refused to continue negotiations while the strike continued, and began lay-offs. A call by the works committee for an immediate strike against lay-offs (denounced as "industrial blackmail") was rejected. When 6,000 out of a labour force of 8,000 had been laid off, the strikers accepted a union call to return to work so that negotiations could resume. A month later the Rolls-Royce bankruptcy was announced, and the unions suspended the £5 claim. This did not prevent the company announcing 1,655 redundancies at its Scottish factories.

Opposition to Industrial Relations Bill: 12 January; 180,000 days. Protest action called by rank-and-file militants against the Conservative proposals, published a month previously, attracted greater support than generally anticipated.

GEC, Coventry: 13 January to 1 March; 139,500 days. 1,400 clerical workers, organized by the CAUW and TGWU, demanded an increase of £6 and were offered £2 (about 10%). After a 3–1 vote at a mass meeting rejected this offer, a rolling strike of key sections was commenced. After national officials had stated their willingness to settle for £3, the company refused to improve its offer, and the strike was made official. Though after six weeks almost all 8,500 production workers at the seven GEC factories in Coventry were laid off, the most the company would offer was a further 50p to be paid from the end of the year. This was accepted on the recommendation of union officials.

Post Office: 20 January to 6 March; 6,299,100 days. In October 1970 the UPW submitted a claim for 15% increase, with a major restructuring of pay scales. The Post Office replied on 8 January with an offer of 7%. The union executive rejected this and gave notice of possible strike action. A slightly improved offer of 8% was likewise rejected and the strike began. Though this was universally recognized as a major test case of the government's attempt to reduce the level of pay settlements in the economy generally, the UPW received only limited support from other unions. In particular, the STD telephone system (the profitable part of Post Office operations) continued uninterrupted. When talks were resumed on 14 February, the Post Office merely offered an additional 1% with stringent productivity strings; the union's plea for independent arbitration or mediation was rejected. Although the UPW was not paying strike benefit, hardship payments rapidly drained its funds; and after six weeks its
executive recommended a return to work while the dispute was submitted to a committee of inquiry with terms of reference very unfavourable to the union. Predictably, the outcome (the Hardnian Report, announced at the beginning of May) differed little from the Post Office offer: rises of 9%, with certain minor improvements.

Ford: Dagenham, Halewood, Swansea and other plants: 29 January to 7 April; 2,053,300 days. This, the biggest stoppage affecting a single private employer in the history of British industrial relations, stemmed from Ford workers' growing demand for parity with pay in other car firms. In 1970, mass meetings had accepted a £4 offer against the advice of shop stewards. But in 1971, with the parity claim backed by detailed union analysis, walkouts began as soon as Ford announced an offer of only £2. After 3 weeks negotiations re-opened, and the offer was raised by stages to £3.20; but this was still rejected. Henry Ford II visited Britain and threatened to divert investment to the continent. Finally the chairman of Ford Europe held secret talks with Jones and Scanlon (neither of whom were members of the Ford Negotiating Committee); they agreed to put slightly improved terms to a secret ballot and recommend acceptance. Amid considerable recrimination on the union side, a majority of over 2 to 1 approved the settlement.

Scott Lithgow, Lower Clyde: 15 February to 5 April: 174,100 days. 2,000 boilermakers struck over a pay claim, demanding parity with fitting trades. Over 2,000 other workers were laid off. After the intervention of McGarvey, a formula was agreed giving slightly higher increases than management's previous offer.

Industrial Relations Bill: 1 and 18 March: 3,000,000 days. These further protests against the Bill attracted even greater support than previously, with some official union backing. Particularly affected were engineering, newspapers, and the docks.

Swan Hunter, Tyneside: 8 March to 18 June: 113,000 days. This dispute of engineering trades at various Swan Hunter yards involved a claim for parity with boilermakers, who had just received an increase. After a protracted stoppage, involving 2,000 lay-offs, the claim was conceded. The boilermakers immediately pressed for the restoration of their differential.

Triumph, Coventry: 22 April to 3 May: 67,500 days. This strike was a protest against lay-offs in the trim shop following an unofficial strike at Triumph's Liverpool factory.

Burroughs Machines, Cumbernauld: 30 April to 20 August: 173,200. A claim for a £3 increase was processed through the engineering procedure without agreement, and 2,500 AEU members went on official strike. After four months management conceded the demand and withdrew the conditions on which it had previously insisted.
Blastfurnacemen: 1 to 4 June: 86,300 days. The NUB submitted a claim for £5 increase in December 1970, but the BSC temporized, and in May suggested further delays in negotiations. The stoppage—the first national strike in steel since 1926—was in protest against this refusal to negotiate. After TUC intervention, the BSC agreed to talk as soon as work was resumed. An agreement was eventually reached in August.

Upper Clyde Shipbuilders protest: 23 June and 18 August: 200,000. These two protest strikes and demonstrations followed the announcement on June 14 of the UCS liquidation and the threat of yard closures. The demonstrations were the largest on the Clyde since the hunger marches.\textsuperscript{11}

Swan Hunter, Tyneside: 2 to 13 August: 108,400 days. 3,000 ancillary workers claimed an immediate pay increase on grounds of cost-of-living increases and comparison with pay in ship-repairing. Mass meetings voted a strike despite the recommendation of GMWU officials to accept an offer of £1.10 and immediate negotiations on a new pay deal. After a week a new formula was unanimously approved by the shop stewards but narrowly rejected by the strikers. Further increases were then offered, and the GMWU announced it would not make the strike official. The terms were then accepted.

Lucas, Birmingham: 23 August to 15 September: 222,100 days. 300 maintenance engineers (mainly AUEW members) struck for improved holiday pay, and 9 Lucas factories were closed, threatening production throughout the motor industry. Agreement was eventually reached on a £40 holiday bonus (compared with a claim of £48 and an initial company offer of £10).

Coventry engineering: 6 September to 24 November: 379,000 days. In May the Coventry Engineering Employers gave notice that they would terminate in July the 1941 District Toolroom Agreement, under which skilled toolroom and related workers received the average of the earnings of skilled production workers in the district. In June the AUEW agreed to ban overtime and operate a policy of non-co-operation at all local factories, and set up a local fighting fund. After two extensions the employers terminated the agreement in September, and the union began a series of Monday strikes to demand its reinstatement. In October the employers retaliated with Tuesday lock-outs. An all-out strike proposed by shop stewards was narrowly endorsed in a district ballot and commenced on 22 November. A formula was quickly agreed in which the employers made minor concessions to the union.

Triumph, Coventry: 7 to 17 September: 52,300 days. A protracted dispute over piecework prices on the engine for the new Triumph Dolomite finally resulted in strike action by engine assemblers, with
immediate repercussions throughout the factory. After a week the strikers' accepted their convenors' recommendation to give the price offered a fortnight's trial.

British Aircraft Corporation, Bristol: 10 September to 31 December: 279,300 days. Workers on engine production held a series of $\frac{1}{2}$-day lightning stoppages in support of a 15% pay claim, with the backing of 6 unions. Eventually an offer of £1.50 was accepted.

BLMC, Longbridge: 30 September to 19 November: 58,200 days. Assemblers working on the 1800 engines struck in support of earnings parity with other assembly grades; production was soon affected at 4 other plants. Eventually they accepted a slight improvement in management's earlier offer.

Unemployment Protest: 24 November: 85,000 days. The TUC held a national demonstration and lobby of Parliament in protest against the level of unemployment. Strikes took place in various parts of the country, in particular Scotland, the North-West, and London.

NOTES
1. For a journalistic assessment see P. Ferris, The New Militants: Crisis in the Trade Unions, 1972; and for an academic one J. W. Durcan and W. E. J. McCarthy, "What is Happening to Strikes?", New Society, 2 November 1972. The latter conclude: "what is really happening to strikes will remain something of a mystery, whatever happens to strike statistics".
2. I have considered a variety of aspects of strikes in my book Strikes, Fontana-Collins, 1972.
3. The main source is the monthly Department of Employment Gazette. However, as well as ignoring the smallest stoppages, the official statistics also exclude those which are considered "political". They also tend to give somewhat conservative estimates of involvement in some disputes.
4. The relationship between strikes and pay increases is of course far from simple. Some of the connections are considered later in this article. For another analysis see D. Jackson, H. A. Turner and F. Wilkinson, Do Trade Unions Cause Inflation? 1972.
5. For a detailed account see P. Foot, "The Seamen's Struggle", in R. Blackburn and A. Cockburn, eds., The Incompatibles: Trade Union Militancy and the Consensus, 1967.
15. R. Blackburn, "The Unequal Society", in *The Incompatibles*, pp. 19, 37.
17. The notion of "responsible" trade unionism is of course profoundly ideological. For a critique see V. L. Allen, *Militant Trade Unionism*, 1966.
18. For a detailed discussion of such pressures and their effects on union leaders see V. L. Allen, *Trade Unions and the Government*, 1960.
22. p. 369.
23. I have considered Michels' theories critically in more detail in *Marxism and the Sociology of Trade Unionism*.
35. For a detailed discussion of this discriminatory effect see Turner and Wilkinson in Jackson et al., pp. 76–81, 89–95.
37. Quoted in Miliband, p. 134. Though a notorious right-winger, in this case Thomas merely articulated the attitudes implicit in the actions of all union leaders.
38. A. Bevan, *In Place of Fear*, 1952, pp. 21–2. Lloyd George was of course bluffing: he was quite prepared to fight the Triple Alliance if need be. But the important point is that he expected this bluff to succeed, and that it did.
40. Conference of Executive Committees, 30 April 1965. Ironically, despite whole-hearted TUC co-operation in government economic policy, within little more than a year the Labour government had both imposed legal restrictions on collective bargaining and created levels of unemployment rising towards a post-war record.

It might be doubted whether the government was ever seriously concerned to obtain TUC agreement to the actual details of its policy. The story has indeed been put around that the breakdown of talks in November 1972 was due merely to misunderstanding. But the government must have known that the TUC would have been in a position to justify its agreement to the policy only if it obtained concessions which were not forthcoming. It was in any case aware that the formal assent of the TUC would not commit rank-and-file trade unionists to observe a voluntary pay policy.

In Jackson et al., p. 98.

I have criticized the use of opinion polls on industrial relations questions in Strikes, pp. 146–8.

For a critique of the "explosion of consciousness" thesis see M. Mann, Consciousness and Action Among the Western Working Class, 1973, Ch. 6.

A number of studies have been surveyed by M. Mann, "The Social Cohesion of Liberal Democracy", American Sociological Review, 1970.

F. Parkin, p. 92.

N. Harris, Beliefs in Society, 1971 edn., p. 230.

G. Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, 1971 edn., p. 260. A similar analysis underlies Mann's point that "normative acceptance" of a social order must be distinguished from "pragmatic acceptance, where the individual complies because he perceives no realistic alternative" ("Social Cohesion", p. 425).


Lukács, pp. 76–7.

Parkin, pp. 160–3.

Mann, Consciousness and Action, p. 13.

"On Leading the Masses", Communist Review, February 1922.

Further details of this dispute are given in Foot, "The Seamen's Struggle". (The remaining footnotes all amplify disputes listed.)


Foot, "The Seamen's Strike".


P. Smith, "The Engineering Settlement", Trade Union Register, 1969.


M. Taylor, "The Revolt Against Low Pay in the Public Services", Trade Union Register, 1970.


C. Barker, Pilkington Strike; Lane and Roberts, Strike at Pilkingtons.

Wilson, Dockers.


Mathews, Ford Strike; Beynon, Working for Ford.