

WORKERS' CONTROL AND REVOLUTIONARY THEORY

An Appraisal of the Publications of the Institute for Workers' Control

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THE organizational existence of the Institute for Workers' Control (IWC) dates from the eventful spring of 1968, but a decade has passed since the first of the series of workers' control conferences out of which the IWC was formed. The eighty participants at the inaugural conference, convened in April 1964 by the *Voice of the Unions* newspaper, were mainly socialist journalists and academics, and the discussion concentrated largely on general issues. The two conferences held in 1965 attracted a larger attendance, with significant numbers of rank-and-file trade unionists; seminars were held on specific topics; and the work of local study groups in Sheffield and Hull led to the formulation of concrete plans for workers' control in steel and the docks. The 1966 conference was co-sponsored by *The Week* and the Centre for Socialist Education, and drew 200 participants; the following year numbers rose to 300, about a third of these trade unionists. The sixth conference in March 1968, which established the IWC, had 500 delegates and for the first time a majority of trade unionists. In 1969 and 1970—in many respects a high point of IWC activities—over a thousand attended. The next national conference was not held until March 1973, when there were some 500 participants.

The functions of the IWC, according to one of its leading spokesmen, are "to act as a research and educational body, to co-ordinate discussion and communication between workers' control groups and trade unions, to provide lists of speakers and to publish important materials on the subject of industrial democracy and workers' control".¹ Hence the publications which I have been asked to review may be regarded as a significant element in the work of the Institute. Up to the end of 1973 these consisted of a series of 38 pamphlets;² a bulletin, of which ten issues were published in booklet form between 1968 and 1973,³ and which then appeared in October 1973 in the format of a monthly magazine;⁴ a report on the 1968 conference;⁵ and two symposia entitled *Can the Workers Run Industry?* and *The Debate on Workers' Control*.⁶

It is necessary to indicate four problems which confront the reviewer.

In the first place, the subject-matter of the Institute's output is extremely wide-ranging and heterogeneous, and the level of analysis and argument varies considerably—a point to which I return. It is scarcely possible to identify a common theme or approach: even workers' control, in any clearly defined sense, is far from a universally integrating theme of the pamphlet series. It follows that any survey which attempted to discuss each publication in detail would be disjointed and confusing. For the sake of thematic coherence I therefore focus on a number-of general issues which emerge from a reading of the IWC output as a whole, and do not claim to do justice to each and every item.

The second problem is related to the first. Since the IWC function is defined in part as a forum for discussion, it does not claim to propagate a single and integrated body of doctrine. Thus the debates which have occurred within the Institute are reflected in the varying and even opposing viewpoints expressed in its publications. In order to sharpen the focus of my own analysis, I will be obliged at times to neglect this diversity and to write as if there were a greater uniformity of perspective within the IWC than is actually the case. In defence of this simplification it should be said that one specific group, with a relatively clearly defined common viewpoint, has in fact proved dominant in shaping the policy of the Institute. This group, with Ken Coates as its most prolific publicist, formerly produced *The Week* and now publishes *The S'okesman*; it is also closely involved with the Bertrand Russell Foundation, with which the IWC shares an office and secretary.

Most of those associated with this group were involved with the *Voice* newspapers in the period when the first workers' control conferences were convened. Subsequently a differentiation has occurred. Walter Kendall, the best known of those currently identified with *Voice of the Unions*, shares many of the perspectives of the former group but disagrees with certain of the policies of the IWC—advocating, for example, the pursuit of a wider working-class membership and more agitational oriented publications. Other left-wing groups have participated in the workers' control conferences, but without significant influence on IWC policy. There are others—"broad Left" (i.e. Communist and left Labour) trade unionists, Tribune MPs and "unattached" academics—who have been prominent in the councils of the IWC, but again without a determining role in policy formulation.

Insofar as there exists an "orthodoxy" of the IWC, its principal exponents are unquestionably Ken Coates, Tony Topham and Michael Barratt Brown. No other individual has figured more than twice as author of an IWC pamphlet. Moreover, these three have collaborated extensively in writing on social, economic and political issues, and may be said to have generated a comprehensive common

viewpoint on questions of workers' control. There can be little serious objection to regarding them as the prime exponents of the Institute's position.

A third problem is the absence of any clear principle determining whether or not the writings of the leading members of the Institute appear under its imprint. A number of their important writings have been published elsewhere: for example Coates' *Essays on Industrial Democracy*,⁷ the collection of readings compiled by Coates and Topham,⁸ and more recently their *New Unionism*;⁹ the three volumes of the *Trade Union Register*;¹⁰ and various *Spokesman* pamphlets.¹¹ Since such publications are, so to speak, from the same stable, I will take some account of them in this review.

Finally, I am conscious that this appraisal demands to be fraternal as well as critical. The IWC, and the conferences which preceded its formation, have played an important role in the revival of theoretical debate on the issues involved in workers' control. The vital question of the relationship between workers' current struggles in capitalist industry and possible forms of self-management in a socialist economy has become a subject of discussion within the mass labour movement, even if still only at the margins. The slogan of workers' control was of course one of the demands of a variety of socialist organizations long before the contemporary movement commenced—indeed, it was from the political "fringe" that the early conferences were primarily constituted—but few of these have sought to explore systematically and in detail the meaning of this commitment. Forthright criticism of those aspects of IWC analysis which appear incomplete or inadequate can only benefit the further development of the theory and practice of the workers' control movement. This is a point which Coates and Topham have clearly asserted: "the question of reform in the power structure itself, the issue of control and of extensions of democracy in the industrial field, requires, of all subjects, the most rigorous testing in the light of the belief that most reforms are ambiguous".¹² It is an important element in my argument that in its central perspectives the IWC has failed to transcend this perilous ambiguity. Yet critics of the IWC must surely accept that theoretical defaults on this score are our common responsibility.

Current Struggles and the Problem of Totality

The heterogeneity of IWC publications has already been noted: in particular, the pamphlet series ranges from structural blueprints for individual industries, and discussions of specific and immediate problems confronting trade unionists, to a compilation of speeches at a memorial meeting for Bertrand Russell, and a reprint of some of Gramsci's *Ordine Nuovo* articles of 1919–20.¹³ Within the Institute itself

there has been some criticism of the character of publications. Thus Kendall has argued that "IWC pamphlets are high-priced and of limited interest to working people. Our IWC seems to lack any coherent publishing policy, pamphlets are produced in a great rush, without adequate prior consultation and are not representative of the views of the movement as a whole."¹⁴ More charitably, it might be said that the quality of IWC publications—whether in terms of intellectual calibre or of agitational bite—is uneven. For example, the first two pamphlets—Hugh Scanlon on *The Way Forward for Workers' Control* and Tony Topham on *Productivity Bargaining*—provide careful and thoughtful analyses; while *The Dockers' Next Step* and Brian Nicholson's *UCS Open Letter* make agitational points powerfully and economically. But there are many pamphlets which are less than impressive on either score.

Despite the wide variety of subject matter, a substantial proportion of IWC publications focus on topics of immediate concern to trade unionists: proposed control structures in particular industries; such general issues as unemployment, industrial relations legislation, incomes policy and productivity bargaining; and notable ongoing struggles (the Upper Clyde work-in, in particular, was the subject of four pamphlets). Roughly two thirds of the pamphlets come within these categories; so does much of the content of the Bulletins (including the two issues on the docks and the motor industry which were reprinted as special booklets); while the bulk of the symposium *Can the Workers Run Industry?* has a similar focus. This orientation towards immediate problems, or proposals for individual industries, has characterized most of the seminars which, almost from the outset, have formed an important part of the workers' control conferences; and indeed, many of the IWC publications are reprints of seminar papers. Comments made by Coates and Topham on the work of the seminars also bear, by implication, on the orientation of IWC publications:

"The IWC seminars are composed of dockers, miners, steelmen, grappling with the real problems which confront them. They represent a serious effort to elaborate programmatic solutions to these problems which can become the property of the whole trade union movement. Already the dockers have had a national strike about the issues spelt out by one such seminar, while the campaign for parity in the motor industry took an important step forward at the motor workers' seminars convened by Stan Newens and others for the IWC. All this is working-class democracy in action, uniting members of different political organizations and outlooks in a practical effort to find a common platform upon which to fight."¹⁵

This argument, which neatly encapsulates the dominant IWC perspective, has political implications which deserve close scrutiny.

No serious socialist would dispute the premise that any initiative to transform capitalist society must start from the problems experienced by workers themselves and from the struggles and strategies thrown up

by the organized labour movement. The only alternative is the sterile isolation of the sect, substituting its own revolutionary imagination for the self-activity of the class. But conversely, no serious socialist imagines that the "spontaneous" action of workers engaged in their immediate struggles will lead naturally to workers' control¹⁶ if this is conceived as the positive and comprehensive working-class direction of industry, rather than as merely defensive encroachments on capitalist domination.¹⁷ For otherwise, the *intervention* of socialists and theorists of workers' control in the class struggle would be superfluous. The crucial question is therefore the forms that intervention should take in order to develop the current struggles of the labour movement in a direction that challenges the structure of capitalist society.

Three Strategies

Not all the IWC publications confront this issue: many remain at the level of "pure-and-simple" trade unionism, offering proposals for more vigorous union action, or providing statistical argument to support such action. But the problem of transcending orthodox trade union perspectives is faced in a number of publications, and three main strategies are suggested. The first, the demand to "open the books", has been closely associated with the IWC from the outset, having been advocated at the time of the first workers' control conferences as a suggested response to Labour's incomes policy.¹⁸ In one of the first IWC pamphlets,¹⁹ Michael Barratt Brown suggested areas in which company information should be pursued, and advised on its interpretation and evaluation. The rationale for this strategy was that "every governing class in history has tried to clothe the business of government in mystery. . . . [Most business secrets] have nothing to do with competition but everything to do with confusing the workers." The point is clearly important: real industrial democracy, at the level of the individual enterprise or the whole economy, presupposes extensive sources of information and a sophisticated ability on the part of workers to *use* this information; otherwise the fetishism of the "expert" holds sway. (In this context, Stephen Bodington's discussion of the potential role of computers in collective decision-making in a socialist society provides a valuable contribution to the theory of industrial democracy.)²⁰ One function of the critical scrutiny by workers of the information and decision processes of capitalist industry would evidently be the development of the confidence and expertise essential in any system of self-management.

Yet the great emphasis laid by the IWC on "opening the books" is normally justified in terms of its immediate relevance for the industrial struggle rather than for its long-run self-educative potential. In this respect, the slogan involves some serious dangers. Documentation of

financial, technical and related information is always helpful in adding ideological reinforcement to a trade union demand, yet its role is always subsidiary. Any idea that workers' organizations can win their struggles primarily through the excellence of their statisticians—a notion perhaps fostered in a number of recent negotiations—is a pernicious illusion. It diverts attention from the prime importance of building rank-and-file militancy and solidarity, and can imply the elitist supposition that only those who understand "the books" can properly determine union policy.²¹ Moreover, the emphasis placed on such data can unintentionally reinforce the conventional assumption that management's own economic criteria necessarily set the limits of bargaining over wages and employment. It is certainly true that in some cases, the figures may demonstrate that a particular economic demand can be easily afforded by a company, or that proposed redundancies or closures are readily avoidable; and by exposing such facts it is possible to strengthen workers' determination and self-confidence. But in other cases, "the books" may suggest quite otherwise: union demands "cannot" be met given existing profit levels, redundancies are "essential" and "inevitable". It is for this reason, of course, that managerial sociologists have long stressed the importance of "communications", while enlightened capitalists often consider "opening the books" in no way terrifying.²² Their expectation is that, in the typical situation, making such information available will demonstrate the constraints within which the individual capitalist enterprise or industry operates; and that this will weaken militant aspirations and even prove demoralizing in major conflicts. So long as these constraints are themselves unquestioned, this estimate may well be correct. To combat such a tendency, it is essential to emphasize that the economic position of the individual company is only of secondary importance, and that the irrational criteria of capitalist economic "rationality" represent the key issue.

Barratt Brown is clearly conscious of this problem. In his pamphlet on the topic he emphasizes the need to take account of those social costs and benefits of company activities which are suppressed in market valuations and conventional capitalist accounting:

"It will be clear from the emphasis on the social implications of company policy that something wider is being proposed here than an improved bargain between workers and management in industry. What is being proposed is the establishment of Workers' Control Groups that would act as social audit groups for their particular factories. The reasoning behind such a proposal is that without bringing in such wider social questions workers' control groups attempting to extend their power will very soon come up against the rigid framework of existing social and economic policies within which firms operate. The corollary of an extension of workers' control into social audit is that individual workers' control groups will need both a centre for exchanging information and a wider political arm for challenging the existing frame-

work. A chain of workers' control groups in many different firms and industries throughout the country could begin to afford to finance a Research and Information Exchange Centre. From this it would be a natural extension to set up National Social Audit Groups, consisting of engineers, scientists, accountants and workers' representatives which could bring pressure to bear on Parliament and Government."¹¹

This perspective has been elaborated in subsequent IWC publications, most notably in endorsing the miners' resistance to pit closures and the struggle of the Upper Clyde workers.

Yet the greater the emphasis placed on the social costs and benefits of industrial policies which are ignored in capitalist book-keeping, the more misleading the original slogan: for the primary goal is not to open the books but to transcend them. In this context, the fundamental task of the workers' control groups proposed by Barratt Brown would appear to be one of enhancing political understanding and awareness. In the abnormal circumstances of an Upper Clyde crisis the agitational yield of the social audit is obvious; but in the more routine context of the day-to-day workplace struggle its immediate relevance is far less apparent. It is thus far from clear that the slogan "open the books" can function as an effective bridge between routine workplace trade unionism and broader and more ambitious aspirations for control.

A second strategy to provide such a bridge is centred around proposals for trade union representation in management decision-making. IWC literature has always emphasized the dangers inherent in such proposals, the typical rationale of which is "participation" rather than workers' control, the collaboration and incorporation of worker representatives within a framework of policy determined by purely capitalist priorities. The classic example is the role allotted to worker representatives in the German system of *Mitbestimmung* ("co-determination"), through the institutions of works councils and worker-directors. Coates and Topham refer to "the well-known fact that . . . workers' representatives at local level have become absorbed in the routines of management and now constitute a privileged and isolated grouping, quite alienated from their constituents. The workers' leaders are in this way incorporated into a structure which remains no less hostile than ever to the interests of the work force as a whole."¹² Yet while insisting that a clear distinction must be made between the perspectives of participation and control, they add that it is necessary to "avoid a purely negative response".¹³ The argument is that "the very ambivalence that employers rejoice in, when they settle for participation schemes, leaves a whole number of questions wide open. . . . The ambiguous element in 'participation' as an employers' strategy can, perhaps, backfire, and help to arouse the very demands it was designed to forestall."¹⁴

The notion that "control" demands may be pressed in a form which exploits the ambiguities of "participation" would seem to underlie the specific structural proposals of the IWC for such industries as steel, the docks, and public transport; such procedures as 50% worker representation on managing boards or veto power over specific managerial decisions may differ only in degree from conventional participatory mechanisms, yet it is suggested that the implications are qualitatively radically different. More generalized blueprints for worker representation which have been warmly received by IWC spokesmen are the Belgian trade union response to the projected extension of co-determination throughout the Common Market countries,¹⁷ and the TUC *Interim Report on Industrial Democracy* of July 1973.¹⁸

Endorsement of such representative machinery involves a nice balance of dangers and potentialities. It would be facile to suggest that any strategy which compromises trade union independence should be eschewed, for compromise is of the essence of trade unionism. (As I argue below, it is characteristic of trade unionism to straddle the shifting and uncertain borderline between "participation" and "control"; historically, all trade unions which have sought to preserve revolutionary integrity by spurning contracts, treaties or agreements with employers have disintegrated or else quietly abandoned their inflexibility.) Yet the pursuit of specific forms of worker representation does give rise to two distinct types of problem which demand more explicit discussion than they have received from the IWC.

The first is the need for a clear assessment of the practical changes in the balance of industrial power to be expected from such representative machinery. At times, Coates and Topham appear to regard their blueprints as classic "transitional demands"—targets ultimately unattainable within the framework of capitalism, but for that very reason a means of enhancing consciousness. Thus they write that "it is a pipe-dream to hope, as some industrialists and politicians appear to be hoping, that the climate in Britain is ripe for 'participatory' reform in which the workers might be coaxed to accept some of the illusions and trappings of authority as a substitute for the powers they have already determined to secure. The appetite will grow with eating, and the demands for real industrial democracy will become all the more insistent with every ruse which is applied in the intention of fending them off."¹⁹ Previously, in responding to the Labour Party Working Party Report on *Industrial Democracy*, Coates and Topham criticized its primary concern with "how things should be changed to extend industrial democracy". "The real problem", they argued, "is that of how people should be stimulated to demand such an extension. The purpose of any proposals for reform will be overborne by the established power-structure, without any real trouble, if this lesson is not learnt."²⁰

Yet simultaneously, the IWC also offers a rather different perspective, regarding far more optimistically the possibility of a stable and significant shift in the balance of power through such representational mechanisms. John Hughes, a member of the Labour Party Working Party, is an active participant in the IWC. Jack Jones, the chairman of the Working Party, is one of the most prominent union leaders associated with the IWC; his writings express the assumption that industrial democracy is attainable by institutional reforms within capitalist industry which extend collective bargaining into forms of "joint control" over traditional managerial prerogatives.³¹ Coates and Topham themselves imply partial endorsement of this view, writing of the possibility of "a major structural reform which can *institutionalize* workers' rights of veto over closures, investment decisions, mergers, takeovers and the like, just as traditional collective bargaining has already institutionalized joint determination, or mutuality, in so many lesser decisions".³²

A third perspective admits the possibility of a real shift in the balance of industrial power through such representative mechanisms, but regards such a shift as inherently unstable: for it trammels capitalist decision-making without transcending it. This is the view of Ernest Mandel, whose theories appear to have exerted a significant influence on the Belgian trade union movement. In his IWC pamphlet he points to the ambiguity inherent in the notion of "structural reforms", a notion taken over by Coates and Topham. "The formula of 'structural reforms' can be interpreted in two diametrically opposite ways: either it can mean a *reform of capitalism whose purpose is to ensure that the economy will function more satisfactorily* or it can mean 'reforms' extorted by the working class struggle, completely incompatible with the normal operation of any kind of capitalist economy. These latter inaugurate a period in which there is a duality of power, whose conclusion must either be a defeat for the working class (in which case the 'reforms' are destroyed) or a defeat for the bourgeoisie (in which case the 'reforms' are consolidated by the conquest of power by the proletariat and the socialization of the means of production, democratically managed by the workers themselves)."³³ (To this it should be added that, as the whole history of the British labour movement demonstrates, reforms achieved only through immense working-class struggle and against bitter bourgeois resistance have proved perfectly compatible with capitalist economic relationships.)

It is surely vital that the workers' control movement should approach the insidious problems of worker representation with clear perspectives: are representational blueprints primarily a means of raising consciousness, the source of a viable extension of workers' control, or the means to provoke a crisis of dual power? Each perspective demands wholly

different strategies; yet within the IWC literature the issue appears fudged and confused. The lack of clarity on this point, it seems to me, reflects a more general ambivalence on the issue of reform and revolution: a topic which I discuss below.

A second, and in some ways related, problem associated with proposals for worker representation in managerial control structures is the danger of "officialization" of the largely informal and spontaneous controls constructed by workers' shop-floor organizations. For the Labour Party Working Party, the principle of a "single channel of representation" was axiomatic: control should be exercised through the orthodox trade union machinery. John Hughes laid great stress on this principle:

"The basis for any extension of industrial democracy in Britain can only be that of the organized workers, that of representation and accountability through the Trade Unions. We argue, very strongly indeed, the need for a single channel of representation, a Trade Union channel of representation, because there is no other way, not only of securing that particular workers are representative and are accountable, but there is no other way also of linking plant level problems with regional, industrial and national problems and the pressures that may need to be exerted to deal with them. So that we are saying, very firmly indeed, that we start out on the basis of the need to strengthen the position of organized workers and we do not want to see the development of forms of so-called participation and industrial democracy which try to by-pass or artificially separate this from the organized workers and their Trade Union organizations."³⁴

In their discussion of the Working Party report, Coates and Topham do indeed criticize this insistence, but their comments are mild and marginal. "The trade unions should certainly be responsible for the election of such councils or representatives. But there is nothing impracticable or unreal in the idea that workers should elect two sets of representatives to carry out two different functions—the traditional defensive role of the trade union bargaining machine, and the new offensive forms of workers' control over management."³⁵

Leaving aside the point that, in many unions, the full-time staff of the union bargaining machine are not elected by the workers, these brief remarks are less than adequate. The principle of the "single channel" raises vital issues which deserve detailed discussion: for its implication, as Coates and Topham hint, is the subordination of potential agencies of self-management to the existing priorities of collective bargaining. This is, in my view, a certain recipe for the emasculation of the workers' control movement. As Gramsci insisted, in a series of articles which are reprinted by the IWC but appear to have exerted little influence on its thinking, workers' management presupposes "a type of organization that is specific to the activity of producers, not wage-earners, the slaves of capital".³⁶ The functions and

composition of the "Factory Councils", he argued, were quite distinct from those of the trade unions; and it would be disastrous to subordinate the former to the latter. What is remarkable in the publications of the IWC is the failure even to consider the question of the "officialization" of worker representation from this perspective. This, as I argue in a later section, appears indicative of a serious theoretical deficiency.

Closely related issues are involved in the third strategy advocated by the IWC: the "control bargain". This notion was originally elaborated by Tony Topham, in one of the first IWC pamphlets, as part of a counter-offensive to managerial "productivity bargaining".

"A major breakthrough could be achieved if the advanced sectors of the shop stewards movement took a leaf out of the tactical book of management, and *reversed the whole process*. Instead of a productivity bargain, why not a 'control bargain'? The first stages would be conducted by the stewards and unions themselves, in a particular firm or plant or industry. Detailed discussion and careful preparations would be conducted, setting the goals and the minimum demands. What aspects of workers' control do we want to advance, what areas of managerial authority do we wish to challenge and acquire for the workers, what reductions in top executive salaries do we seek and what restrictions on information do we wish to challenge? What wage structure and overall wage increase will we settle for? What research into the firm's profits, structure, monopoly links, and alliance with the state, is needed?

"After the goals are settled—a process which must involve a thoroughly democratic debate for the whole trade union membership in the firm or industry—the demands should be presented. The initiative rests now with the workers. Their demands must be explained and disseminated throughout the labour movement; they are utterly reasonable, for they begin from a premise of *equality & status* between the contending sides of industry. They aim to achieve, however, a dominance for the *majority* in industry; the workers by hand and by brain. (Attention should be given to the role of the white-collar workers, particularly the draughtsmen and technicians, not only because these are organized in militant unions, but because they normally have access to specialised knowledge of a firm's affairs.) The bargain then proceeds, until or unless the proposals are rejected by the representatives of the **employers**—*i.e.* the representatives of the small, wealthy minority in our society which 'owns' the firm or industry.

"Imagine such a bargain. Imagine what happens if the workers' proposals are rejected. Assuming a real industrial democracy, with complete equality with management, what would the workers do? What do the employers' representatives do in today's circumstances? If the trade union refuses to meet them on their productivity proposals, management responds by predicting and threatening redundancies and dismissals, or reduced wages.

"If the shoe was on the other foot, how many redundancies amongst directors would the workers decide upon? How, indeed, could workers continue to maintain production in the face of such stubborn refusal to co-operate on their **proposals**?"

The notion of a "control bargain" is clearly imaginative; and it stems from a valid appreciation that management attempts to neutralize informal shop-floor restrictions on its authority—to "regain control by sharing it"—cannot be overcome by a purely negative response but require a counter-offensive. In another IWC publication, Ray Collins

has offered an interesting appraisal of this strategy: "there are obvious dangers in this approach but it offers the opportunity of encroachment by mutuality and veto; ultimately it requires linking with political challenges to the power structure, but without activity below there will be none higher up".¹⁹ Yet what are these dangers, so obvious as to necessitate no explicit discussion? On the one hand, there is the risk that the more ambitious control objectives proposed by Topham may represent little more than rhetoric. Within a capitalist political economy, the employer exercises both *de facto* and *de jure* domination; the power wielded by workers' organizations is essentially reactive and defensive. Hence Topham's premise of "equality of status" is essentially unrealistic: a slogan of aspiration, not a recipe for practical action in the context of current workplace struggles.²⁰ Hence the specific responses offered by the IWC to one-man operation on the buses²¹ or measured day work at Chrysler²² do not involve demands for managerial redundancy but are far more modest in their control objectives. And here the second danger is, once again, the problem of "officialization": that the weight of the union's authority is attached to a compromise in a control bargain the parameters of which derive mainly from managerial initiative, and on terms far less advantageous to the workers than those imposed by their own informal shop-floor militancy. Precisely because the "counter-offensive" proposed by Topham lacks immediate relevance, it fails to provide a safeguard against the dangers inherent in productivity bargaining and may even serve to obscure the main issues.

Thus there are serious weaknesses in all three strategies proposed by the IWC to link immediate trade union struggles to the long-run objectives of industrial democracy. In consequence, it is necessary to question the emphasis placed by the IWC on specific short-run issues and the problems and perspectives of individual industries. "Socialism in one industry" is an illusion because each industry is a component of an environing political economy, a structure of political and economic domination. Whatever control structures are attained on a local or sectional level are subject to virtually irresistible pressures to accommodate "realistically" to the coercive demands of market forces or government requirements. Yet the perspectives of trade unionists confronting the problems of their own industry or enterprise do not lead naturally to a focus on the questions of state power or of capitalism as a total system: and a lack of attention to these questions is a characteristic of many of the IWC publications. It is true that Michael Barratt Brown has written important analyses of the structure of British industry and the control of the economy; but these analyses have not generated proposals for working-class action at the level of the whole economy.

Indeed, the space devoted to demands and blueprints for single industries contrasts notably with the dearth of attention in IWC publications to the possible structure and the major problems of a *self-managed economy*. The most explicit attention to this question by Coates and Topham arises from their examination of the Yugoslav experience, and in particular the harmful effects of the subordination of conscious control to the anarchy of the market;⁴³ the lesson repeatedly emphasized is the need to combine comprehensive planning with grass-roots autonomy. Yet how this vital synthesis is to be achieved—perhaps the central *problem* of socialist theory and practice—receives scarcely any detailed attention within IWC publications (the one significant exception is provided by Walter Kendall,⁴⁴ whose views almost certainly diverge from those of other leading IWC members, yet have failed to provoke any *debate*).⁴⁵ The lack of discussion of such *general* problems of workers' control—problems which so clearly transcend the perspectives of day-to-day trade union action—is a notable lacuna in the preoccupations of the IWC.

The Problem of Reformism

The failure to attend systematically to the need to transcend capitalism *as a system* is linked to a reluctance to confront explicitly the question of the limits to reformist adjustment of the industrial control structure and hence the extent to which the ultimate objectives of workers' control are revolutionary in character. The revolutionary perspective is, indeed, at times unambiguously asserted. Thus Coates has castigated the assumption "that an unbroken continuity of democratic advance stretches between the imposition of a Trade Union veto on dismissals and the ultimate overcoming of capitalist property relations. This is a naive view, because it completely ignores the deforming power of these property relations in the generation both of ideology and of social forces beyond democratic control."⁴⁶ To achieve real solutions to the problems generated by capitalism, Coates has argued, "the reforms must not be *within*, but of the power-structure. Its dismantling is the prior necessity, outside which lesser reforms are all too apt to come to grief, or even to aggravate the problems they were designed to solve."⁴⁷ Within this perspective, Coates and Topham have suggested that the extension of workers' control within capitalism leads ultimately to a revolutionary crisis of dual power⁴⁸—the stark choice, in Gramsci's words, between "the conquest of political power by the revolutionary proletariat . . . or a tremendous reaction by the propertied classes and the governmental caste".⁴⁹

Yet on closer examination, the notion of "dual power" employed within the IWC seems somewhat less cataclysmic than in its normal socialist usage. "Nobody", Coates writes, "thinks that unions can

simply encroach all the power in industry until they can run the whole show. Sooner or later, and sooner rather than later, **workers'** control in the trade union sense comes up against the barrier of the private ownership of industry, and that barrier will only be surmounted by political action, by a change in the law, socializing industrial **property**."⁵⁰ Thus while the need is admitted for a political transformation of capitalism to achieve the qualitative leap from workers' control as a negative and defensive process to the positive exercise of **self-management**, this transformation is conceived in essentially reformist terms: as Coates has recently insisted, parliamentary action and the Labour Party should be assigned central strategic significance by the workers' control **movement**.⁵¹

The belief that revolutionary social transformation is attainable through the medium of established political institutions is not a novel doctrine: its classic name is centrism. To apply a label is not, of course, to controvert a thesis; and Coates correctly emphasizes that "it is not at all true that the socialist ideas which are appropriate to defeat late capitalism were all formulated, intact, fifty or a hundred years **ago**".⁵² But if, as Coates implies, the arguments of Marx and Engels or Lenin and Trotsky possessed considerable validity when they were developed, it is surely necessary to analyse systematically in what ways subsequent changes have diminished their relevance. Yet—to take the most obvious example—the Leninist conception of the role of the state and the need for an organizationally distinct revolutionary party (which must not, indeed, eschew parliamentary action but should regard this as no more than a subsidiary tactic) is not merely dismissed as outdated; the analysis on which it rests is simply neglected. Similarly, Coates takes issue with Ralph Miliband's conclusion, in *Parliamentary Socialism*, that the social and institutional pressures on any primarily parliamentary party oblige it to conform to the structural constraints of capitalism; but he gives scant attention to Miliband's detailed argument in that book, and wholly ignores his *State in Capitalist Society*.

The same is not true of Michael Barratt Brown, who includes a brief section on the theory of the state in his *From Labourism to Socialism*. Miliband, he argues, "recognizes only two parts of the state system—the repressive and ideological—and ignores an increasingly important third part. This is made up of institutions which have a *conformative* role, which contain and moderate the conflicts inside capitalist society. Marx and Engels, in more places perhaps than Ralph Miliband concedes, seem clearly to recognize this role." It is possible, he continues, on the basis of the independent strength of the economic organizations of labour, to achieve a duality of power within society such that the state is obliged to detach itself partially from the interests of capital and make significant concessions to the working **class**.⁵³

Such a perspective was, indeed, implicit in some of the writings of Marx and Engels (most notably, perhaps, the *Inaugural* Address of 1864). But any conception of "duality of power" must be employed with great caution; and in particular it is dangerous to assume that such a situation can be achieved merely on the basis of a militant and control-oriented trade union movement backed by a revitalized Labour Party. Because, as I argue below, even militant trade unionism does not put in question the fundamental principles of a capitalist political economy or the power and privileges of those who own and control industry, the latter "are rarely driven to call upon their reserves of power in any overt and public exercise. Only the margins of power are needed to cope with marginal adjustments. . . . Labour often has to **marshall** all its resources to fight on these marginal adjustments; capital can, as it were, fight with one hand behind its back and still achieve in most situations a verdict that it finds tolerable. Only if labour were to challenge an essential prop of the structure would capital need to bring into play anything approaching its full strength."¹⁵⁴ In what does this "full strength" consist? Not only the "special bodies of armed men, etc." (though in the aftermath of Chile the potential centrality of their role should surely not be ignored), but also the "sturdy structure of civil society . . . , a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks" through which the hegemony of bourgeois ideology and culture is *deliberately* inculcated. If labour develops the industrial strength and assertiveness to challenge seriously the economic dominance of capital, without the corresponding capacity to undermine the social, political and cultural dominance of the exploiting class, the appearance of dual power is an illusion.

The classic case for a revolutionary party rests on the recognition that the hegemony of the ruling class derives from a more or less integrated totality of a complex variety of social institutions and processes (among which the coercive role of the state is of considerable but not always supreme importance). To combat effectively, and ultimately to overturn this sophisticated structure of domination demands an organization of similar sophistication, with a clarity of theoretical perspectives and a dedication of membership which alone can enable a conscious, comprehensive and integrated challenge to the multifarious foundations of capitalist society. Such issues appear remote from the concerns of the IWC. The conception of the capitalist enemy who "sooner than lose the things he owns . . . will destroy the whole world" is proclaimed on the cover of the paperback *Workers' Control*, but rarely surfaces within the pages of the Institute's literature. Hence the question "how far can the structure meet our demands?" receives a diffuse response—as in the pamphlet with that title, a summary of one of the main discussions at the 1973 conference. The

main point to emerge from the arguments of Wedgwood Benn (who takes up the bulk of the *space*)⁴⁰ is that Labour's parliamentarism reflects not abstract dogma but a belief in the need "to advance by *persuasion*".⁴¹ What is to happen if the minority who control industry *refuse* to be persuaded to surrender their power is not discussed. Nor is the broader question whether economic domination sets stringent limits to the policy objectives which, both practically and ideologically, are "realistic" within the framework of bourgeois-democratic institutions. More generally, within the literature of the IWC the whole conception of the transition to a self-managed society is extremely hazy. Hugh Scanlon's pamphlet *The Way Forward for Workers' Control*⁴² discusses various current industrial issues and also refers briefly to some problems of self-management, but does not examine the process leading from the former to the latter. "Towards Self-Management", the concluding chapter of the recent book by Coates and Topham,⁴³ is likewise misleadingly entitled: problems of transition are not discussed. This reticence, again, *helps* avoid an explicit choice between the perspectives of reformism and revolution.

A decade ago, Tony Topham wrote in this Register that incomes policy proposals drafted by John Hughes and Ken Alexander were "over-optimistic concerning the institutional prospects for their *reforms*".⁴⁴ Insofar as it adopts a clear position, the same is true of the IWC today. There is no serious examination of the possibility that the acts and omissions by Labour governments which are castigated as "errors" and "betrayals" are in fact a natural outcome of the logic of reformism; and that this logic is inherently antipathetic to working-class mobilization, the aggressive extension of workers' control, and the ultimate attainment of industrial democracy. The faith that it is possible "to reclaim the Labour Party for socialist policies"⁴⁵ writes off, without serious consideration, the argument that such a logic exists. Similarly, the aspiration to create under the umbrella of the Labour Party a band of "*socialist* activists in Parliament to work in concert with other socialist activists in factories, trade unions and neighbourhoods"⁴⁶ ignores the possibility that undemocratic practices within the Party may be structurally *generated*.⁴⁷ How, for example, would such parliamentary "activists" avoid subordination to the authoritarian discipline of the reformist party? (Historically, precisely this problem drove the Independent Labour Party—the last significant example in this country of a political group adopting the strategy today advocated by the leaders of the IWC—to secede from the Labour Party. The parent body will expel, isolate or absorb individual dissidents, and will not tolerate an organized party within a party.)

The main consequence of the approach current within the IWC is to encourage illusions on parliamentarism and social-democracy. The

comments of Michael Barratt Brown and Ken Coates on the relevance of legislation to workers' control are significant in this context: "a fully-fledged system of self-management, of truly co-operative association, cannot be legislated overnight. Indeed, it cannot be *legislated* at all. What can be done legislatively is to open the doors, to advance new standards and ideals, and to legitimize and encourage that truly social initiative which is so ruthlessly suppressed in our working people today."⁸³ The implication is surely that demands for legislative reforms should be subsidiary to and derivative from rank-and-file organization and pressure. Moreover, it could be added, it is precisely the balance of forces *outside* Parliament which principally determines how far any government (Labour or otherwise) accedes to demands for fundamental structural reforms. All this is to suggest that the classic revolutionary perspectives still possess a large measure of *prima facie* validity, which propagandists of the IWC have barely attempted to overturn by reasoned analysis. To argue thus, it must be added, is not to suggest that parliamentary action is irrelevant, that socialists should ignore the Labour Party, or that the pursuit of reforms within capitalism is pointless or undesirable (though IWC spokesmen often imply that their critics are victims of precisely these well-known infantile disorders). There is an alternative to infantile sectarianism on the one hand, and reformism on the other: the tactical use of parliamentary action, while simultaneously seeking to reduce popular mystification by parliamentary institutions; involvement in the Labour Party because this is the major party of the working class, while simultaneously seeking to destroy working-class illusions in Labour; participation in the struggle for reforms, because these dominate workers' present perspectives and because victories help create a stronger and more confident working class, while simultaneously seeking to expose the limits to reformism. Such strategies derive from a revolutionary tradition which most of those who write for the IWC do not appear to share yet do not confront explicitly or directly. To evade the implicit theoretical debate is no service to the workers' control movement.

The Problem of Trade Unionism

The problem of reformism impinges in different form in the context of the attitude of the IWC towards trade unionism: the second main gap in its theoretical foundations. This general question may usefully be approached by pursuing in more detail a specific issue on which I have already touched: the "officialization" of workers' control into formal trade union channels.

The source of the problem lies in the essential ambivalence of trade unionism: on the one hand a protest and defence against the economic and human deprivations imposed on workers by their role in capitalist

industry; on the other a means of accommodation to the political economy of capitalist industry. This in turn reflects the contradictory pressures inherent in trade union organization and collective bargaining activity: on the one hand the expression of the basic conflict of interest between employers and employees on matters of pay, conditions and control; on the other the development of a stable and compatible bargaining relationship. Hence the curious phenomenon of "antagonistic co-operation" discerned by many students of industrial relations: the constant interpenetration of conflictual and collaborative aspects of trade unionism.⁶⁴

This ambivalence can be highlighted by raising the question: how can trade union negotiations and agreements be categorized within the definitions of participation (a collaborative and subaltern role of worker representatives vis-A-vis management) and workers' control (an independent and oppositional role)?⁶⁵ The answer must be that neither the concept of workers' control nor that of participation can be applied without qualification. The fact that collective bargaining institutionalizes industrial conflict, generating rules, conditions and procedures which are mutually agreed, entails that the oppositional and negative quality which is intrinsic to the notion of workers' control is in large measure sublimated. But the organizational separateness of the union, and the possibility that disagreement may be articulated through overt conflict, entail that analysis in terms of participation is not wholly appropriate. It is precisely this contradictory character of trade union action which gives rise to extensive academic debate on the nature of collective bargaining and the proper categories for its **theoretical analysis**.⁶⁶ Some writers (especially in the United States) have laid overwhelming emphasis on the participatory aspects of industrial relations, conceiving collective bargaining as a form of joint **management**.⁶⁷ Such an approach involves an illegitimate generalization (embraced by many theorists of "mature" industrial relations) from the highly collaborative disposition of American trade unionism in a particular phase of post-war history. The function of management is to attempt the accommodation of a variety of conflicting interests, and the satisfaction of employee aspirations is far from its primary responsibility; hence a trade union can become a partner in "co-management" only through the abdication of its own primary function of representing its members' interests. This is of course an unstable basis for trade unionism.

By the same token, to view collective bargaining as a basis for industrial democracy—the position of the Webbs in their classic study, and more recently associated with Hugh Clegg—is to exploit to the limits the imprecision inherent in the latter **concept**.⁶⁸ For within a capitalist political economy, employees can at best achieve marginal

adjustments to (or at worst acquiesce in) decisions which reflect a structure of power and interests hostile to their own. The currently popular concept of "joint regulation", though indicating that union-employer negotiations focus on the detailed application of rules rather than the fundamental direction of company policy, also diverts attention from the one-sided societal power structure within which the formally equal and possibly collaborative bargaining relationship takes place.

It would be absurd to dismiss the importance of trade union achievements in collective bargaining. Hence I am not attempting to suggest that "trade unions are a millstone round the neck of the working class", a view that Ernie Roberts somewhat unfairly attributes to Perry Anderson in criticizing the latter's slightly mechanical elaboration of the theories of Lenin and Gramsci.⁶⁹ It is of vital significance for the working class that unions win material improvements for their members and impose limits on the arbitrary powers of employers. Yet while ameliorating the *terms* of workers' subordination to managerial control, they do not and cannot contest the *fact* of this subordination: for to do so would be to challenge the very social order from which trade unions derive their function. And conversely, collective bargaining forms a means whereby sophisticated employers can qualify and contain workers' own *autonomous* exercise of control so as to render the problems of labour management more tractable. Wright Mills' familiar description of the trade union function as the "management of discontent" indicates this ability of collective representation to domesticate the dangerous (to employers) potential of employees to impose unilateral controls on managerial prerogative.⁷⁰

The exercise of control *over* employees through the very process by which unions win improvements *for* them was one of the key insights of Gramsci in the articles which the IWC has reprinted. The essence of trade union achievement, Gramsci argued, is the establishment of a form of "industrial legality" which guarantees certain concessions by capitalists to employee interests. This achievement, however, though "a great victory for the **working** class", nevertheless represents the continuing preponderance of employer power over that of employees and their organizations. "Industrial legality has improved the working class's material living conditions, but it is no more than a compromise—a compromise which had to be made and which must be supported until the balance of forces favours the **working** class."⁷¹ The development of cohesive and self-confident workplace organization, able to apply pressure directly at the point of production, is a key factor in shifting the balance of forces and permitting further inroads into the prerogatives of capital. By contrast, from the perspective of official trade unionism the established relationships and the established balance

of power are a basis of order and stability; and the negotiation and re-negotiation of order and stability are central to the trade union function. Gramsci's description of the Italian scene half a century ago has a familiar ring: "the union bureaucrat conceives industrial legality as a permanent state of affairs. He too often defends it from the same viewpoint as the proprietor. . . . He does not perceive the worker's act of rebellion against capitalist discipline as a rebellion; he perceives only the physical act, which may in itself and for itself be trivial."⁷³ Such a disposition on the part of union officials is not to be explained primarily in terms of their corruption by soft living (though this doubtless occurs at times). Nor is the main reason the fact that on elevation out of the workplace the full-time official becomes socially and in consequence ideologically isolated from those he represents (though this is a tendency that has long been recognized).⁷⁴ By and large, the average trade union representative (lay or full-time) tends to be more progressive in his outlook than those he represents. The basic problem is one of *function*. The ordinary employee, perpetually subject to the oppressive and exploitative relations of capitalist wage-labour, is always liable to overturn some aspect of the existing "industrial legality". The union representative, however, has an additional concern: to "keep the faith" with those with whom he negotiates, to regard each conflict as a "problem" to be resolved within the framework of possibility defined by the prevailing political economy. It is precisely at the point when existing structures of capitalist domination are under pressure, when the frontier of control is being forced forward, that the potentially conservative role of official trade unionism as the defender of industrial legality is a most serious danger.

The specific implications of this argument for the debate on workers' control are threefold. In the first place, it suggests the possibility that the formalization of a "control bargain" may actually *reduce* the effectiveness of worker control over the dehumanizing consequences of capitalist production, where informal work-group controls are extensive. The oppositional exercise of control, it might be argued, is inseparable from the emergence and development of employee organization which is autonomous both of the employer and of external agencies with close commitments to the employer. To a large extent, such control is rooted in the employer's dependence—despite the imposing scope of his formal authority and prerogatives—on workers' active co-operation, ingenuity and initiative; seriously disaffected employees can effectively sabotage the objectives of organizational managers.⁷⁵ There is much evidence that the relatively informal and spontaneous forms of employee organization limit managerial autonomy most effectively. The range of employee controls documented by Goodrich in his classic study were primarily of this character.⁷⁶ More recent industrial relations analysis

has of course placed special emphasis on the significance of informal shop-floor trade unionism and the influence of "custom and practice": it is the activities of the unofficial organization, rather than of official trade unionism, which because of their *de facto* erosion of managerial control have been shrilly identified as the central industrial relations "problem".⁷⁶

The role of the official institutions of trade unionism in the application of control is often more ambivalent: for union organization tends to lose some of its autonomy, to absorb some of the dimensions of "participation", the more formalized its collective bargaining relations. The enthusiasm for productivity bargaining and the "reform" of procedures, the subject of so many industrial relations homilies and textbooks in the 1960s, reflects in part an appreciation that managements can blunt the disruptive edge of employee controls over such issues as manning, job allocation and work standards by making them the explicit subject of collective bargaining. Richard Herding's detailed study of industrial relations in the United States offers important lessons.⁷⁷ He shows how union achievements in negotiating contract clauses on "control" issues relate primarily to the "rationalization" of personnel administration or to the containment of certain forms of inter-worker competition. In both these contexts, the interests of employers and workers run, if not in parallel, then not fundamentally in opposition. But in the context of the organization of production—where the employers' interest in maximum exploitation of labour conflicts frontally with workers' interest in humane working conditions—the achievements of control bargaining have been minimal. Indeed, the formal involvement of unions in negotiations on such issues has been associated with an actual *decline* in the real ability of shop-floor trade unionism to control the dehumanizing effects of company production decisions.

The moral is that what may appear, on paper, as notable advances in workers' control may represent in fact an erosion and diminution, a reinforcement of the hand of management—"regaining control by sharing it". Coates and Topham have paid some attention to the dangers, at national level, of the "incorporation" of trade unions through their relationships with governments and employers; the same danger at the level of plant or company has been less extensively discussed.⁷⁸

A second implication bears on the attitudes of trade union officials to workers' control. There would seem to exist a powerful tendency to favour "institutionalized" mechanisms which are consistent both with the prevailing authority structure within the unions and also with stable bargaining relationships with employers and the state. A preference for the "single channel of representation" is no accident, for

this principle reinforces the status and authority of the union, whereas the elaboration of workplace-based structures not formally integrated into the official union may weaken them. Just as it is natural for Labour politicians to interpret socialization of industry in terms of state control, so it is natural for union officials to conceive industrial democracy in terms of trade union control. In both cases, such conceptions match the organizational preoccupations of their bearers; but those who believe that industrial democracy must be based on **grass-roots** self-activity are bound to enquire: who will control the controllers themselves? "No man is good enough to be another man's master," is a phrase of William Morris often quoted by Ken Coates. Quite apart from the objections already raised against the "single channel" of representation, it is therefore necessary to emphasize that the question of industrial democracy must extend to include that of trade union democracy. The latter is in part an issue of the formal structure of representation, election and decision-making within trade unions, and the impact of the rules on the "civil liberties" of the members; but it also involves the *de facto* distribution of influence, expertise, involvement and control over organizational resources, factors which are themselves profoundly affected by the structure and character of **union-management** relations. Attention to these problems within the publications of the **IWC** is surprisingly limited. In one pamphlet there is a useful discussion of demands which should be made in respect of formal union **structures**; ⁷⁹ but the problems of low membership involvement, of oligarchic concentration of control, even *despite* formally democratic constitutions (problems which have exercised not only the latter-day epigones of Lenin and **Trotsky**, but also a weighty tradition of academic enquiry dating back to the Webbs and Michels), seem barely recognized as of relevance to the movement for workers' control.

Just as the "officialization" of control is commonly preferred by union officials because of its congruence with existing authority relations within the organization, so it is also favoured as a form of "democratization" which does not jeopardise the established external relations of the union. The problem of reform and revolution, on which the **IWC** appears to equivocate, is unambiguously treated in several official union formulations: "workers' control" can be established through institutional mechanisms which involve no fundamental challenge to capitalist relations of production or to those who benefit from them. On this point the Labour Party Working Party was uncompromising:

"We believe that the extension of industrial democracy is important both because of its likely beneficial effects on the well-being of individual workers and because of the contribution it can make to the overall efficiency of industry by removing many of

the existing obstacles to a genuine collective effort in industry by both management and workers. Both factors urge us in the same direction, and we do not choose between them. They are of equal weight."⁸⁰

Yet the question inevitably arises: if, as Coates and Topham at times suggest, the development of workers' control will lead eventually to a crisis of "dual power", what will be the reaction of those who conceive of "workers' control" in essentially collaborative terms? Surely it is less than certain that they will remain allies of the IWC. Ominous evidence is provided by the pamphlet *Plant Level Bargaining*, produced by the Transport and General Workers' Union in 1970 (drafted, one suspects, by some radical in the research department without close vetting by the union leadership), which was forthright in its support of workplace militancy and its condemnation of capitalist wage relationships. This pamphlet, Coates and Topham report, "produced a howl of protest from the press and employers"; and a second edition was printed with significant deletions and bowdlerizations.⁸¹ Coates and Topham merely comment that "it seems a great pity" that these changes were made. Similarly, in their muted criticisms of Jack Jones' collaborative conception of industrial democracy they suggest that "perhaps here his tongue is in his cheek".⁸² Likewise, in the general appraisals of the Labour Party and TUC statements on industrial democracy, a fundamental issue is evaded: that the structural situation of trade union officialdom leads logically to an effort to contain the movement for workers' control within channels which do not threaten the stable role of trade unionism as the permanent mediator between wage-labour and capital. The publications of the IWC devote scant attention to this possibility, let alone to proposals to overcome it.

This points to a third and more general implication: that when stable industrial relations are threatened, union officials may be expected to react in ways which *restrict* rank-and-file self-activity. The strength of such tendencies does of course vary situationally. In the post-war period, suspicion and hostility towards rank-and-file initiative and unofficial organization was a built-in reflex for many union leaders; recent years have seen the emergence of leaders who insist that the membership has a right to direct involvement in union decision-making, and who are prepared to associate themselves openly with the idea of workers' control. This is an important development with significant consequences for the internal life of trade unionism; in particular, more ambitious and militant aspirations on the part of union members receive valuable practical and moral reinforcement. Yet even in such favourable circumstances, the relationship between union leaderships and membership militancy retains elements of the older, more authoritarian pattern. Huw Beynon, in his study of the Ford plants at Halewood, documents the intervention of Jack Jones

and Hugh Scanlon to settle the 1971 strike—an intervention over the heads of the shop steward organization and the representative negotiating machinery, which virtually shattered the delicately constructed basis of a sophisticated, militant and responsive system of shop-floor representation. In 1973, at Chrysler in Coventry, the sensitive relationship between militant shop stewards and their constituents was similarly devastated when the same union leaders advised their members to cross the picket lines of electricians on strike in defiance of Tory pay policy, and to work on machinery maintained by blackleg labour. In coal-mining, during the extensive unofficial strikes of 1969, Lawrence Daly, newly elected General Secretary on a left-wing platform, joined with Lord Robens in calling on the men to return to work. Jim Oldham and a group of miners responded bitterly: "if you don't support the very actions you've encouraged, then you've said it, 'we become ineffective and discredited as a union'. Over 100,000 men on unofficial strike understood what you meant. Did you?"⁸³ A final example: following the judgements of the Industrial Relations Court in 1972, the TGWU printed on its shop stewards' cards the warning that "shop stewards are not authorized to initiate or continue industrial action on behalf of the Union". As *Voice of the Unions* commented, "without any fanfare, the union quietly but effectively seems to have gone a long way towards meeting the requirements of the Industrial Relations Act".⁸⁴

It is unnecessary to accumulate further instances of actions by union leaders associated with the IWC which in fact contradict the Institute's own objectives and perspectives; and not all such actions can be explained by the fact that individual leaders may be tied by executive or conference decisions of which they personally disapprove. Occasionally such actions are noted with regret in the Institute's own publications; and Coates and Topham disclaim any intention of implying that "the new leaders have been beyond criticism".⁸⁵ Yet criticism presented in any but the most muted and apologetic fashion is liable to be denounced as sectarian, as character-assassination or as an attack on the very institution of trade unionism. No doubt some critics do display these traits. Yet without impugning the sincerity or goodwill of such leaders as Jack Jones, Hugh Scanlon or Lawrence Daly—whose advocacy of workers' control can only be welcomed—it remains possible to insist that any defaults by progressive union officials on the principles of workers' control should be carefully studied, not merely dismissed as embarrassing accidents. It is essential to seek *structural* causes. As Moss Evans is reported to have said in relation to the 1971 Ford settlement, "once you've been a full-time official you realize that certain things are part of an agreement which the Executive have committed the union to and you are empowered to carry out.

You're obliged to follow it. It's out of your hands as it were. You know, it's the system I suppose. The system we work to. It's like everything else, you've got to give some order to it.¹¹⁰⁰

"The system we work to": the words of a radical union official, sympathetic to the goal of workers' control, capture succinctly the point I have been trying to argue. The contradictions inherent in the reformist practice of trade unionism, in the commitment to "industrial legality", entail that official trade unionism is *necessarily* an ambiguous ally for the cause of workers' control. At certain points, and particularly at times of rank-and-file offensive, even the best and most honest official by his very function will typically feel constrained to *suppress* forms of self-activity which from the perspectives of workers' control are healthy and desirable, and indeed an essential part of the forward movement. Appreciation of this fact cannot but affect the relationship which the workers' control movement adopts towards official union leadership.

Implications for IWC Practice

The argument developed above is one which spokesmen of the IWC display an extreme reluctance to confront; as I have already noted, discussion of these issues is almost wholly absent from IWC literature. Nor is this altogether surprising, for from the outset a major objective of the IWC has been the cultivation of left-wing leaders as vice-presidents of the Institute, speakers at its conferences, and authors of its pamphlets. In itself this aim is perfectly reasonable: such influential leaders can powerfully aid the propagation of workers' control ideas within the labour movement, and add legitimacy to arguments which might otherwise be unthinkingly dismissed. Yet identification with specific union leaders is desirable only insofar as this does not cut across more fundamental aims of workers' control. In three distinct respects, the IWC risks subordinating its primary goals to the tactical requirements of the goodwill of influential labour leaders.

In the first place, these tactical requirements encourage the conception of the propagation of workers' control ideas as an essentially *intellectual* process. It is possible to envisage two alternative models of the development of socialist consciousness, of the transition from partial and sporadic revolts against specific aspects of capitalist domination to the articulate pursuit of self-management. The process may be conceived as one of primarily individual conversion and education through exposure to speeches, pamphlets and conferences; or as one of collective learning through self-activity and struggle. Workers' control groups may be conceived as educational circles engaged in more or less abstract and future-oriented discussion; or as centres of ongoing struggle against existing authority (including, at times, official trade union

authority). These two perspectives are not, indeed, mutually exclusive: but in practice one or other must be assigned primacy. It has always been central to the Marxist epistemological tradition, as against bourgeois-rationalist theories of knowledge, that the development of consciousness is a collective and active process; and this implies that aspirations for self-management must develop through collective struggle. This has, indeed, been explicitly asserted by many of those associated with the IWC; yet in practice, the cultivation of influential leaders has tended to inhibit the encouragement of grass-roots self-activity, whenever this has risked offending-these leaders. In the early days of the IWC, Michael Barratt Brown argued that "the challenge to Trade Union bureaucracy as well as to employers' authority . . . is not going to make the movement for Workers' Control a popular one in those quarters whose authority and bureaucratic ways are challenged".⁸⁷ But in fact, the IWC seems to have gone to considerable lengths to avoid the unpopularity of its eminent patrons.

The second danger follows directly from this. In their anthology of readings on workers' control, Coates and Topham quote part of the 1912 unofficial manifesto *The Miners' Next Step*. "Leadership implies power held by the leader. . . . This power of initiative, this sense of responsibility, the self respect which comes from expressed manhood, is taken from the men. and consolidated in the leader. The sum of their initiative, their responsibility, their self respect becomes his. The order and system he maintains, is based upon the suppression of the men. . . ."⁸⁸ The syndicalism of which this manifesto was an expression exaggerated its cask: purely spontaneous collective action is an illusion, leadership of a kind is essential within the labour movement. Yet the syndicalists were correct to recognize a "bad side of leadership": the persistent tendency for the mass of members to abdicate, or the leaders to usurp, collective rank-and-file involvement which is a prerequisite of effective control from below. Loyalty to leaders, in some respects the natural concomitant of solidarity and pride in the union, can (as Michels so devastatingly demonstrated) easily degenerate into virtual hero-worship.⁸⁹ Any trace of sycophancy towards leaders must therefore be combated as a necessary part of the process of encouraging the self-confidence and self-respect of the rank and file. This is an inherent part of the objective of workers' control; and in addition, if encroachments of control are seen as leading ultimately to a crisis of dual power, it is vital to prepare the basis for the active mobilization of the mass of the class when the crisis arises.

Yet the attitude of the IWC itself towards some of the left-wing union leaders verges on the sycophantic. Hugh Scanlon's speech to the 1968 conference, published as the first IWC pamphlet, receives a eulogy from Ken Coates which reads like a bid for canonization.⁹⁰ Jack Jones

is the subject of several pages of *The New Unionism* which are little short of **obsequious**.⁹¹ The persistent name-dropping of union leaders in the pages of IWC publications is no service to a movement of industrial democrats, in which the humblest should deserve no less respect than the greatest. The words of Jack Murphy might be well recalled: "real democratic practice demands that every member of an organization shall participate actively in the conduct of the business of the society. We need, therefore, to reverse the present situation, and instead of leaders and officials being in the forefront of our thoughts the questions of the day which have to be answered should occupy that **position**."⁹²

The third danger stems clearly from what has already been said: that in presenting prominent union officials as allies of workers' control, without any serious suggestion that their support is (or in critical situations may prove to be) ambivalent, is to underwrite illusions. The parallel is uncomfortably close with the stance of the National Minority Movement which the Communist Party launched exactly half a century ago. It is a familiar story that the Minority Movement encouraged reliance on left-wing union leaders whose revolutionary rhetoric accorded less than completely with their actual practice within their own unions; as a result, the militants were ill prepared for the collapse of the General Strike when their champions joined the rest of the General Council in abject surrender. This is not to suggest that another 1926 is round the corner in which the trade union patrons of the IWC will assume the roles of Hicks, Purcell and Swales: history does not repeat itself so neatly. But a theoretical analysis of the role of trade union-officialdom, such as I have tried to **develop** above, implies that the endorsement of and reliance on any union leader, however progressive, should always be highly qualified. A balanced approach demands that praise or support must be coupled with a warning of the limitations inherent in the very function of union leadership, an encouragement of the development of *independent* organization and initiative on the part of the rank and file, and a readiness (should the need arise) to offer unsectarian but forthright criticism of erstwhile allies and to applaud action which bypasses or even opposes their leadership.

Those with most influence in the IWC are indeed aware that their position has been criticized along lines similar to those above; and Coates and **Topham** have offered a reply. In 1970, they write,

"at the Birmingham Conference, some comrades put forward the rather extraordinary view that 'bureaucracy begins with the shop stewards'. The implications of such a view are that trade unions themselves corrupt the workers. Few would subscribe to it in this extreme form, but there are many more whose programme and whose analysis of trade union bureaucracy make sense only as part of a separatist strategy. They are implying, whether they recognize it or not, that the shop stewards

should organize outside the unions—which is of course where isolated and abstract intellectuals would like them, more easily accessible to the *a priori* reasoning of detached moralists and the freemasonry of the socialist groups. This is a path trodden by many sectarian groups in the history of the socialist movement in Britain. The most interesting and instructive parallel is with the 1910–14 period, during which two rival strategies for trade union radicalization emerged. One was led by Tom Mann, who taught consistently that the workers must operate on the institutions which were to hand, and transform them from within, and by amalgamation. His efforts and inspiration were directly or indirectly responsible for the creation of the NUR, the T & GWU and the AEU, which between them led the battles of the twenties, and which took the TUC to a position of militant socialism. There were defections, there was Jimmy Thomas, there was the heavy hand of Bevin's authoritarianism—there was indeed a period during which Mann himself was General Secretary of the Engineers, and so presumably in sectarian terms rendered himself indistinguishable from any other bureaucrat. That is, to put the matter in more rational terms, there was *contradiction*. Strength, unity, and the authority to weld masses of workers into a fighting force, require large organizations, and that carries with it the danger of bureaucratization. But any sane comparison between the achievements of Tom Mann, and the arid and ineffectual products of the school of the Socialist Labour Party—insofar as the latter influenced trade union structure at all—must recognize the futility of a policy which asks the stewards and militants to break away and start all over again. Of course the industrial unionist movement and the SLP produced some fine and influential individual militants, just as the groups do today. But it produced no structures in which those militants could operate effectively—in order to make their full contribution, they had to break with the 'pure', that is the abstract, half true, doctrine in which they were trained.⁹³

In this passage (as elsewhere in their writings) Coates and Topham stack the cards by presenting a false dichotomy. The choice is not *either* to work within the official trade union machine *or* to work outside it (any more than that the same stark alternatives apply to parliamentary action or working within the Labour Party). It is possible *both* to work within the sphere of official trade unionism, and to seek to construct independent rank-and-file organization.

In this respect, their historical example is singularly ill-chosen. Tom Mann was a remarkable revolutionary trade unionist, perhaps the greatest militant the British labour movement has ever produced, and any criticism must be made with *humility*.⁹⁴ But if one considers the whole decade 1910–20 it is far from obvious that Mann was of more importance than the "sectarians" of the SLP. His main involvement in the pre-war years, the industrial syndicalist movement, struck terror into the breasts of the bourgeoisie and established labour statesmen alike, but collapsed as suddenly as it had arisen; syndicalism lacked any coherent theoretical foundation and represented a fleeting mood as much as any solid organizational basis. During the wartime industrial crisis, Mann's role was strangely obscure; he spent most of the period as a full-time union official, for some of the time assisting the arch-patriot Havelock Wilson. There is little evidence of his active involve-

ment in the key wartime struggles against militarism, against conscription, against the Munitions Act, against deteriorating working-class living standards. Tom Mann was indeed more prominent in the Amalgamation Committee movement, which deserves much of the credit for the formation of the AEU in 1920.⁹⁰ But the new amalgamated union, like the old Amalgamated Society of Engineers, was dominated by the orthodox and "responsible" J. T. Brownlie; Mann's brief interlude as General Secretary left ^{no} lasting consequence of any significance, perhaps because his election was unrelated to any basis in independent workshop *organization*. In his last years as an active trade unionist, Mann did indeed work closely within the official structures of trade unionism; so closely that he was effectively absorbed.

By contrast, it is grotesque to write off the significance of the SLP. In the pre-war period it was indeed, because of the sectarian inflexibility of its theoretical purism, an ineffectual and self-isolated grouplet. But its critique of union bureaucracy, absurdly one-sided in its immature formulation, was to play a vital role when the Clydeside SLPers found themselves at the head of a spontaneously generated wartime shop stewards' movement. When trade union officialdom abdicated the defence of their members' living standards and established working conditions, the analysis of the SLP was applied to make the crisis comprehensible and to provide guidelines for action: and the central lesson was the need to work within the official union structures, but to do so from a base of independent rank-and-file organization. Those who, like Mann, worked merely for amalgamation of the official union structures found themselves on the sidelines of the main wartime struggles of the class; and Murphy's comment was telling. Such schemes, he wrote, "sought for a fusion of officialdom as a means to the fusion of the rank and file. We propose to reverse this *procedure*."⁹¹ The *primacy* of the rank-and-file organization, as the only basis for working within the official institutions without being absorbed or suppressed, was the keynote of the inaugural manifesto of the Clyde Workers' Committee:

"We will support the officials just so long as they rightly represent the workers, but we will act independently immediately they misrepresent them. Being composed of Delegates from every shop and untrammelled by obsolete rule or law, we claim to represent the true feeling of the workers. We can act immediately according to the merits of the case and the desire of the rank and file."

This principle—a critical and independent, but not abstentionist, attitude towards the official institutions of trade unionism—was the vital contribution of the SLP to the theory of revolutionary activity in industry, and to the practice of the highest point (to date) of socialist militancy in Britain.⁹² It is a lesson which, it is clear, must be learned anew.

Forward

My final task is not to draw conclusions so much as to consider the way forward. Stephen Bodington has summarized his own conception of the role of the IWC in setting out a plea for

"more people to give a higher priority to developing the movement for workers' control, to giving it a more tangible organized existence. This means making a clear political commitment to it. It does not mean seeing it as an alternative to other organizations such as Trades Councils, political parties, Women's Lib. Workshops, Trade Unions, Community Action groups of various kinds and so forth. On the contrary, what is needed is an organization that links people in different jobs, engaged in different activities, involved in different socialist organizations and so forth. It is an attempt to reduce dependence on centralized organization through charismatic leaders and to substitute a multiplicity of brains and a multiplicity of experiences discovering alternatives close to the feelings of the people and developing **co-ordination** that turns a multiplicity of socialist actions into a political **force**."⁹⁹

This is an appeal which demands a positive response from all socialists; it is impossible to contest Bodington's emphasis on "the importance of clearing ideas and developing consciousness". Similarly, Coates and Topham's notion of "mental policemen" captures succinctly the profoundly debilitating influence on the labour movement of the hegemony of bourgeois conceptions of industrial normality. Yet when the Shrewsbury pickets languish in gaol it is difficult to accept without qualification the argument that "it is a mental police force, first and foremost, which holds the trade unions in a subject **role**".¹⁰⁰ From such a proposition stems an unwarrantably **voluntaristic** conception of the labour movement which pervades the publications of the IWC. Thus Mandel asserts that "it is above all the subjective factor which plays the key role in deciding whether or not the **workers'** movement makes use of the opportunity which neo-capitalism provides for an anti-capitalist strategic offensive".¹⁰⁰

The familiar "problem of consciousness" cannot be properly discussed in the space available. Suffice it to say that in reacting against the mechanical determinism of some of the crasser distortions of Marxism, such voluntarism commits the error of the opposite extreme. It is not necessary, for example, to accept **Kautsky's** argument that socialist theory must be brought to the workers by the bourgeois intelligentsia in order to question the following assertion of Ernie Roberts:

"it is primarily through *their own practical everyday experiences* that the workers will learn about the nature of the capitalist state, and how to consolidate and extend their control over various aspects of their working lives. As a result of their experiences, they will evolve a theory and practice which will lead to the complete overthrow of the existing order and its substitution by a worker-controlled **state**."¹⁰¹

It is interesting that, as if to underwrite such a faith in the spontaneous

development of revolutionary consciousness, the one section of the Gramsci pamphlet reprinted in another IWC publication is the passage in which he writes that "the actual unfolding of the revolutionary process takes place subterraneously, in the darkness of the factory and in the obscurity of the consciousness of the countless multitudes that capitalism subjects to its laws".¹⁰² But the Gramsci of 1919–20 clearly exaggerated the potential of spontaneity; and one consequence was the defeat of the Italian revolution and Gramsci's own years in Mussolini's dungeons, spelling out the key importance of state power and of the very tangible institutions and processes which sustain bourgeois hegemony. Moreover, even in his *Ordine Nuovo* period he insisted that developing working-class consciousness must be given coherence and direction by independent workplace-based organization — "proletarian institutions of a new type: representative in basis and industrial in arena";¹⁰³ and he also stressed the vital role of the revolutionary party, "in a position to give real leadership to the movement as a whole and impress on the masses the conviction that there is order immanent in the present disorder, an order that will systematically regenerate human society".¹⁰⁴

Why this emphasis on independent organization and the revolutionary party? Because the forces which lead to an accommodation between the labour movement and capitalist forms of industrial organization are material as well as ideological. Because, in other words, "consciousness-raising" must go hand-in-hand with the organization and articulation of a *physical* challenge to capitalist domination: neither can succeed in establishing socialism without the other. The argument that I have developed is that trade unionism as such, because of its very function of negotiation and accommodation within industry as it exists, cannot be revolutionary. Hence trade unionism itself—necessary as it indeed is to the working class—is in practice (whatever the rhetoric of the conference platform) one of the agencies which help maintain a belief in the *normality* of capitalist industry. Hence *independent* industrial organization and a revolutionary party both have an essential role in the development of the conscious aspiration for self-management: the one in co-ordinating militancy against the often constraining intervention of the official union hierarchy; the other in maintaining permanently a perspective which transcends what is immediately possible within capitalism, and in consciously organizing for working-class self-emancipation.

On the eve of the formation of the IWC, Tony Topham warned that attempts would be made "to institutionalize workers' representation in both private and public industry, in ways which may confuse, mystify and head-off the drive for independent workers' control".¹⁰⁵ Contemporary socialists operate, as Edward Thompson has so eloquently

argued, in an "infinitely assimilative culture"; in consequence, he insists, "one must make one's sensibility all knobbly—all knees and elbows of susceptibility and refusal—if one is not to be pressed through the grid into the universal mish-mash of the received assumptions of the intellectual culture".¹⁰⁶ The IWC is clearly right to refuse to pose as a revolutionary party; but in apparently denying the *need* for revolutionary organization, it facilitates the incorporating embrace at which Topham hinted. By confronting explicitly and in detail the classic arguments of the need for a revolutionary party, by asserting unambiguously the revolutionary character of the goal of industrial democracy, and by cultivating scepticism of all existing authority—in these ways the IWC could develop its "knees and elbows", and ensure the vigorous independence essential for the movement's success.

NOTES

1. Ken Coates, Pamphlet 14. See also Constitution of the IWC, Bulletin 1, pp. 104–105.
2. The pamphlet series comprises the following:
 - 1 Hugh Scanlon, *The Way Forward for Workers' Control*, 1968
 - 2 Tony Topham, *Productivity Bargaining and Workers' Control*, 1968
 - 3 Michael Barratt Brown, *Labour and Sterling*, 1968
 - 4 Michael Barratt Brown, *Opening the Books*, 1968
 - 5 Ken Coates and Tony Topham, *The Labour Party's Plans for Industrial Democracy*, 1968
 - 6 Bob Harrison and Walter Kendall, *Workers' Control and the Motor Industry*, 1968
 - 7 Sheffield Steel Workers' Group, *The Steel Workers' Next Step*, 1968
 - 8 *Industrial Democracy and the National Fuel Policy*, 1968
 - 9 Tom Fawthrop, *Student Power*, 1968
 - 10 Ernest Mandel, *A Socialist Strategy for Western Europe*, 1969
 - 11 Antonio Gramsci, *Soviets in Italy*, 1969
 - 12 Hull and London Port Workers' Control Groups, *The Dockers' Next Step*, 1969
 - 13 Jack Ashwell, *Four Steps for Progress (Workers' Control and the Buses)* 1969
 - 14 Michael Barratt Brown and Ken Coates, *The "Big Flame" and What is the IWC?*, 1969
 - 15 Ken Coates and Tony Topham, *The Law versus the Unions*, 1969
 - 16 Ray Collins, *Job Evaluation and Workers' Control*, 1969
 - 17 GEC-EE Workers' Takeover, 1969
 - 18 John Hughes, *A Hope for the Miners?*, 1969
 - 19 Ken Coates, Lawrence Daly, Bill Jones, Bob Smillie, *Bertrand Russell and Industrial Democracy*, 1970
 - 20 Nick Hillier, *Farmworkers' Control*, 1970
 - 21 Richard Fletcher, *Problems of Trade Union Democracy*, 1970
 - 22 Hugh Scanlon, *Workers' Control and the Transnational Company*, 1970
 - 23 Scunthorpe Group, *The Threat to Steel Workers*, 1971
 - 24 *Trade Unions and Rising Prices*, 1971
 - 25 John Eaton, John Hughes, Ken Coates, *UCS—Workers' Control: the Real Defence against Unemployment is Attack*, 1971

- 26 UCS: *the Social Audit*, 1971
- 27 Brian Nicholson, *UCS: an Open Letter*, 1971
- 28 Ken Fleet, *Whatever Happened at UCS?*, 1971
- 29 Michael Barratt Brown, *Public Enterprise Defended*, 1971
- 30 Ernie Roberts, *The Fight against Unemployment*, 1972
- 31 Michael Barratt Brown, *What Really Happened to the Coal Industry?*, 1972
- 32 Brian Nicholson and Walt Greendale, *Docks 111: a National Strategy*, 1972
- 33 John Eaton, *The New Society: Planning and Workers' Control*, 1972
- 34 Paul Derrick, *The Incomes Problem*, 1972
- 35 Walter Kendall, *State Ownership, Workers' Control and Socialism*, 1973
- 36 Tony Benn, Walt Greendale and others, *Workers' Control: How Far Can the Structure Meet Our Demands?*, 1973
- 37 Ken Coates and Tony Topham, *Catching Up with the Times: How Far the TUC Got the Message about Workers' Control*, 1973
- 38 Michael Barratt Brown and Stuart Holland, *Public Ownership and Democracy*, 1973.

The original Bulletin was nominally a quarterly, though it appeared somewhat less frequently. Two issues were republished as special booklets: *Democracy in the Docks* and *Democracy in the Motor Industry*.

4. At the time of writing (early 1974) it is unclear whether this monthly basis is to continue.
5. Ken Coates and Wyn Williams (eds.), *How and Why Industry Must Be Democratised*, 1969.
6. Ken Coates (ed.), *Can the Workers Run Industry?*, Sphere, 1968; Bert Ramelson, Ken Coates, Tony Topham, Charlie Swain and Bill Jones, *The Debate on Workers' Control*, 1970 (reprinted from *Marxism Today*).
7. Ken Coates, *Essays on Industrial Democracy*, Spokesman Books, 1971 (essays previously published in 1965 and 1967).
8. Ken Coates and Tony Topham (eds.), *Workers' Control*, Panther, 1970 (previously published as *Industrial Democracy in Great Britain*, MacGibbon and Kee, 1968).
9. Ken Coates and Tony Topham, *The New Unionism*, Peter Owen, 1972.
10. Ken Coates, Tony Topham and Michael Barratt Brown (eds.), *Trade Union Register*, Merlin Press, 1969 and 1970; Michael Barratt Brown and Ken Coates (eds.), *Trade Union Register 3*, Spokesman Books, 1973.
11. For example, Michael Barratt Brown and Ken Coates, *Workers' Control in the Nationalised Industries*, Pamphlet 26, 1972; Ken Coates, *The Quality of Life and Workers' Control*, Pamphlet 27, 1972. Other relevant Spokesman publications include Ken Coates, *The Crisis of British Socialism*, 1971 and Michael Baxratt Brown, *From Labourism to Socialism*, 1972.
12. "Participation or Control?" in *Can the Workers' Run Industry?*, p. 227.
13. The latter had previously appeared in *New Left Review* in 1968.
14. Walter Kendall, *Voice of the Unions*, April 1973. For a rejoinder see Bill Jones and Ken Fleet, May 1973.
15. "A Reply to Some Critics", Bulletin 8, p. 32.
16. Faith in the spontaneously revolutionary character of working-class struggle is confined to such anarcho-syndicalist groups as *Solidarity*—though elements of such an assumption appear in the writings of some of those associated with the IWC.
17. It is true that Coates and Topham have often insisted, following continental usage, that the concept "workers' control" should be applied solely to negative restraints on capitalist power, whereas working-class decision-making within socialized industry should be termed "workers' (self-) management". While this distinction is of vital importance, the use of "workers' control" as a label for both

processes is embedded in the traditional terminology of the British labour movement; and the title of the IWC itself, as well as the usage in many of its publications, indicates this duality.

18. See for example Ken Coates, "Incomes Policy: a Strategy for the Unions", *Socialist Register*, 1965.
19. No. 4.
20. E.g. "Socialism, Democracy and the Computer" in *Can the Workers Run Industry?*
21. On these grounds an orthodox American academic long ago insisted that "trade union wage policy is inevitably a leadership function. The reason is not that the leadership has wrested dictatorial power from the rank and file, but that it alone is in possession of the necessary knowledge, experience and skill to perform the function adequately" (Arthur M. Ross, *Trade Union Wage Policy*, California University Press, 1948, p. 39). While the IWC aim may indeed be the development of a *mass* capacity to handle what are currently specialist tasks, in the short run it is only a small minority who are likely to attempt to master the tasks of information gathering and interpretation listed by Barratt Brown in his pamphlet.
22. Hence, for example, the proposal in Labour's notorious White Paper *In Place of Strife* for the "disclosure of management information to trade union representatives"; and also the legislation on this question in the Common Market.
23. Pamphlet 4.
24. "Participation or Control?" in *Can the Workers Run Industry?*, p. 232.
25. P. 235.
26. *The New Unionism*, pp. 208–9.
27. See Ken Coates (ed.), *A Trade Union Strategy in the Common Market*, Spokesman Books, 1971; and *The New Unionism*, pp. 209–13.
28. Pamphlet 37.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
30. Pamphlet 5. Unless otherwise specified, **all** emphasis in quotations is in the original.
31. See for example *The Right to Participate: Key to Industrial Progress*, TGWU, 1970, gently criticized in *The New Unionism*; and "No Top Hats for Shop Stewards", published without critical comment in IWC Bulletin, October 1973.
32. Pamphlet 37, p. 10.
33. Pamphlet 10, p. 8.
34. 1967 Conference Report, p. 28.
35. Pamphlet 5.
36. Pamphlet 11, p. 11.
37. Pamphlet 2.
38. Allan Flanders, *Collective Bargaining: Prescription for Change*, Faber, 1967, p. 32. Flanders' much-quoted phrase has obvious implications for my arguments on the "officialization" of workers' control: in the context of formalized agreements, those with whom managements share control are not the same, and do not have the same interests and perspectives, as those from whom they regain control.
39. Ray Collins, "Productivity Bargaining after Aubrey Jones", Bulletin 8, p. 49.
40. Moreover—as is perhaps hinted in Collins' remarks—Topham's **prescription** appears to echo some of the illusions of "encroaching control" propagated by the Guild Socialists over half a century ago. The whole question of state power is ignored in Pamphlet 2: remarkably in view of the impetus which the productivity bargaining offensive received from government policy during the 1960s.
41. Pamphlet 13.
42. *Democracy in the Motor Industry* (Bulletin 3).
43. See in particular *The New Unionism*, pp. 224–30.
44. In particular "Workers' Control and the Theory of Socialism", 1968 **Con-**

ference Report, and Pamphlet 35. The title of Pamphlet 33, which implies a focus on problems of this order, is misleading; the pamphlet is almost exclusively concerned with current struggles.

45. Kendall, whose analysis would seem to derive from Schachtman's theory of "bureaucratic collectivism", reacts particularly negatively not only to current East European structures of industrial control but also to the whole Soviet and Communist tradition. This leads him to assert that a "socialist market" should be the centrepiece of a self-managed economy, that the anarchy associated with capitalist commodity production is separable from market institutions. This issue **deserves** detailed critical attention, which I intend to put forward in a forthcoming publication; but precisely because Kendall's analysis on this score appears unrepresentative of most IWC writers, I do not pursue this here.
46. *Essays on Industrial Democracy*, p. 9.
47. "Introduction", *Can the Workers Run Industry?*, p. 14.
48. *The Debate on Workers' Control*, pp. 34–5; *The New Unionism*, p. 56. See also Ernest Mandel, Pamphlet 10, cited above.
49. Pamphlet 11, p. 31.
50. "Introductory Review", *Trade Union Register* 3, p. 27.
51. Ibid. and "Socialists and the Labour Party", *Socialist Register*, 1973.
52. *Socialist Register*, 1973, p. 160.
53. *From Labourism to Socialism*, pp. 67–71. There is also a brief discussion of the question of the state in Ernie Roberts, *Workers' Control*, George Allen and Unwin, 1973; Roberts' involvement with the IWC is probably the most intimate of any full-time union official.
54. Alan Fox, "Industrial Relations: a Social Critique of Pluralist Ideology" in John Child (ed.), *Man and Organization*, George Allen and Unwin, 1973, p. 211.
55. Indeed the pamphlet reads rather like a public relations exercise for Benn, whose enthusiasm for workers' control formed part of the cultivation of a left-wing image from 1971. The stalwart of the workers fighting redundancy at Upper Clyde Shipbuilders and Rolls Royce was the same **Wedgwood Benn** who as minister in the 1964–70 government pursued policies of capitalist "rationalization" which helped contribute to the subsequent crises in those **firms**. See Ernie Roberts, *The Solution is Workers' Control*, Spokesman Pamphlet 19, 1971, and *Workers' Control*; Roberts also points out that Benn's subsequent conversion to workers' control has been less than unqualified.
56. Pamphlet 36, p. 15.
57. Pamphlet 1.
58. *The New Unionism*, Ch. 15.
59. "Incomes Policy: Background to the **Argument**", *Socialist Register*, 1965, p. 168.
60. Ken Coates, *Trade Union Register* 3, p. 42.
61. *The New Unionism*, p. 185.
62. For details of such practices see, for example, Ernie Roberts, *Workers' Control*, Ch. 11.
63. *Workers' Control in the Nationalized Industries*, p. 3. See also Ian **Mikardo**, "The Scope and Limits of Legislation" in *Can the Workers Run Industry?*
64. I have developed these points at length in *Marxism and Sociology of Trade Unionism*, Pluto Press, 1971.
65. For these definitions see Coates and **Topham**, "Workers' Control as a Strategy of Socialist Advance" in *The Debate on Workers' Control*.
66. For a sophisticated example of this genre see **Allan Flanders**, "Collective Bargaining: a Theoretical Analysis", *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 1968.
67. See for example Neil W. Chamberlain, *Collective Bargaining*, McGraw-Hill, 1951.
68. Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *Industrial Democracy*, Longmans, 1897; Hugh A. Clegg, *Industrial Democracy and Nationalization*, Blackwell, 1951 and *A New*

Approach to Industrial Democracy, Blackwell, 1963. For a critique of the latter see Paul Blumberg, *Industrial Democracy: the Sociology of Participation*, Constable, 1968.

69. *Workers' Control*, p. 214. Roberts is criticizing Anderson's article "The Limits and Possibilities of Trade Union Action" in Robin Blackburn and Perry Anderson (eds.), *The Incompatibles: Trade Union Militancy and the Consensus*, Penguin, 1967.
70. C. Wright Mills, *The New Men of Power*, Harcourt Brace, 1948.
71. Pamphlet 11, p. 15.
72. P. 17.
73. Even in the last century the Webbs noted (*The History of Trade Unionism*, Longmans, 1920 edn, p. 469) that once an official left the shop floor "the former vivid sense of the privations and subjection of the artisan's life gradually fades from his mind; and he begins more and more to regard all complaints as perverse and unreasonable". In *The Workers' Committee* (1917; reprinted Pluto Press, 1972, pp. 13-14), J. T. Murphy pointed out that "a man in the workshop . . . feels every change; the workshop atmosphere is his atmosphere; the conditions under which he labours are primary; his trade union constitution is secondary, and sometimes even more remote. But let the same man get into office. Those things which were once primary are now secondary. He becomes buried in the constitution, and of necessity looks from a new point of view on those things which he has ceased to feel acutely."
74. Many recent sociologists have stressed that those in charge of a wide variety of hierarchical institutions are in practice dependent on some degree of voluntary co-operation from subordinates or inmates, even though the latter may be in theory absolutely powerless. The functioning of any complex organization requires some measure of co-operation and initiative from even the most menial participants. Nowhere is this more true than in industry. Thus Reinhard Bendix (*Work and Authority in Industry*, Harper and Row, 1963, p. 204) cites a study of inmates in Nazi concentration camps, forced to perform wartime factory work, who "sabotaged the production effort by consistently asking for detailed instructions on what to do next". In more typical industrial situations, of course, the scope for sabotage by employees is immensely greater.
75. Carter L. Goodrich, *The Frontier of Control*, Bell, 1920.
76. See for example the Report of the Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations (the *Donovan Report*), HMSO, 1968, with its notion of the "two systems" of British industrial relations.
77. Richard Herding, *Job Control and Union Structure*, Rotterdam University Press, 1972.
78. The dangers of incorporation at national level are discussed, for example, in "Participation or Control?" in *Can the Workers' Run Industry?* Not all leading members of the IWC share this caution; in the same volume, John Hughes ("Democracy and Planning: Britain, 1968") advocates a system of "tripartite bargaining" the collaborative implications of which have been all too clearly revealed in the Heath-TUC-CBI talks of 1972 and the "social contract" of 1974. Probably the most detailed discussion of the problem of incorporation at workplace level is provided by Tony Topham in "New Types of Bargaining" in *The Incompatibles*: he warns (p. 137) that at this level the working class is "at a point where the levels of class and political consciousness of its different sections and tiers are so unevenly developed, and so often in conflict with each other, that the outcome could still be a new accommodation between capital and organized labour". Yet his discussion of the aftermath of the 1960 Esso productivity agreement (he writes that "the role of the stewards at Fawley has been enhanced, and in a most interesting way") fails to confront adequately the danger that the formal involvement of shop stewards in negotiations over conditions and control

may in some circumstances intensify the contradictions experienced by stewards as "honest brokers" between shop-floor and management, and may serve to contain the autonomous forms of workers' control at the point of production. Similarly Topham seems over-optimistic in writing (p. 152) that "the intensification of work—speed-up—cannot but lead to an intensification of class struggle—even in the relative backwater of Fawley". As Huw Beynon has sensitively demonstrated (*Working for Ford*, Penguin, 1973), the struggle against intensification of work—even when led by a militant shop steward organization, responsive to the experiences of the rank and file—generates *in itself* no more than a "factory consciousness", not class consciousness and class struggle. "Tied up in the perpetual negotiations with the superintendents of capital on the factory floor", compromise and accommodation over control issues is inevitable.

79. Richard Fletcher, Pamphlet 21; see also his article "Trade Union Democracy: the Case of the AUEW Rulebook", *Trade Union Register* 3. Ernie Roberts discusses similar questions in *Workers' Control*, Ch. 10. By contrast, the most prolific writers of the IWC (Coates, Topham and Barratt Brown) almost wholly ignore problems of union democracy.
80. P. 17. A similar collaborative perspective pervades a recent Fabian discussion: "managers in many enterprises who recognize the value of good union organization should be able to work more constructively with the unions over a wider range of issues under the TUC proposals" (Jeremy Bray and Nicholas Falk, *Towards a Worker Managed Economy*, Fabian Society, 1974, p. 5). This comment in turn indicates the ambivalence of the TUC proposals themselves.
81. *The New Unionism*, pp. 79–80. One example is the comment in the original pamphlet on the slogan "a fair day's pay for a fair day's work": "this paternalistic concept is the very opposite of all the union's objectives. There can never be anything fair about a master and servant relationship. All that any agreement ever achieves is a 'temporarily acceptable day's pay for a temporarily acceptable day's work'. Both are always re-negotiable". The revised version reads: "this generalized slogan can confuse the practical situation at work".
82. P. 202.
83. "The Miners' Strike", Bulletin 4 and *Trade Union Register*, 1970.
84. "TGWU — Troubled Giant", *Voice of the Unions*, June 1973.
85. *The New Unionism*, p. 178.
86. *Working for Ford*, p. 300.
87. Pamphlet 14.
88. Unofficial Reform Committee, *The Miners' Next Step* (1912), Pluto Press, 1973, p. 19.
89. See Robert Michels, *Political Parties*, Hearst, 1915.
90. 1968 Conference Report. Coates devotes three pages of his brief introduction to praising Scanlon, while in winding up the conference he declares that Scanlon's speech "was one of the most revealing, one of the most far-sighted statements to come from any trade union leader for 50 years; for 50 years!" (p. 218). Despite the merits of the speech, such language is surely **extravagant**.
91. Pp. 177, 198–202.
92. *The Workers' Committee*, p. 14.
93. "A Reply to Some Critics", Bulletin 8, p. 30.
94. I have attempted a brief assessment of Mann's career in an introduction to his pamphlet *What a Compulsory 8 Hour Working Day Means to the Workers* (1886), Pluto Press, 1972.
95. Though Coates and Topham exaggerate in suggesting that the formation of the NUR and TGWU are in any significant respect attributable to Mann's efforts; in both cases, pressure for amalgamation of the competing sectional unions dated back to the period when Mann was still in Australia, and was approved by many

who were in no way syndicalists (including, of course, the leaders of the new amalgamated unions). Moreover, even the creation of the AEU perhaps involved a less momentous transformation than **Coates** and **Topham** imply: it took its basic structure, and over two-thirds of its membership, directly from the old Amalgamated Society of Engineers.

96. *The Workers' Committee*, p. 18.

97. For this interpretation of the significance of the SLP I am wholly indebted to **James Hinton**; for a detailed analysis see his *The First Shop Stewards' Movement*, George Allen and Unwin, 1973.

98. "Workers' Control as a Movement", Bulletin 10, p. 66.

99. *The New Unionism*, p. 217.

100. Pamphlet 10, p. 11.

101. *Workers' Control*, p. 59.

102. Pamphlet 11, p. 6; Bulletin 1, p. 81.

103. P. 7.

104. P. 31.

105. Introduction to 1967 Conference Report, p. 9.

106. E. P. Thompson, "An Open Letter to **Leszek Kolakowski**", *Socialist Register*, 1973, p. 91.