

WORKERS' CONTROL VERSUS "REVOLUTIONARY" THEORY

by Michael Barratt Brown, Ken Coates and Tony Topham

Under the title "Workers' Control and Revolutionary Theory" (*Socialist Register*, 1974) Richard Hyman has written "an appraisal of the publications of the Institute for Workers' Control". The judgment is critical, but Richard Hyman states that he is "conscious that this appraisal demands to be fraternal as well as critical"; and it is in that spirit that this reply is offered. "Forthright criticism of those aspects of the IWC analysis which appear incomplete or inadequate can only benefit the further development of the theory and practice of the workers' control movement":—so writes Hyman at the beginning of his evaluation; and we concur. We are happy to have the opportunity of this reply in *The Socialist Register* to attempt to clarify some of the issues which he has raised.

In evaluating the publications of the Institute for Workers' Control, Richard Hyman recognises that the IWC has been a forum of discussion of different and even opposing views, not "claiming to propagate a single and integrated body of doctrine". Nonetheless he then chooses to review chiefly the pamphlets attributable to Michael Barratt Brown, Ken Coates and Tony Topham as the alleged "prime exponents of the Institute's position". We do not, of course, object to his criticising the theoretical position of this particular group of writers; indeed, we welcome his criticism, which is in line with a valuable tradition in *The Socialist Register*. But to speak of this as the "Institute's position" is to make a revealing but inappropriate transfer to the members of the Institute's Council of the relationship which exists between certain groups of socialist theoreticians and the sects which they establish around them. The Institute is not a sect, as Richard Hyman recognises; and it does not seek to establish a line, but rather to organise conferences, publish materials and aid communication among those interested in workers' control and industrial democracy. To the extent that it has attracted delegates to its conferences and sold its pamphlets and bulletins, it has become a part of the institutional structure of the Labour Movement in Britain. The role of those who have written and spoken for the Institute has been interpretative rather than dogmatic, seeking ways to explore the implications of workers' control in the actual situation that confronts working people rather than preaching a received faith.

In concentrating his criticism upon one group of writers, responsible in fact for only about a quarter of the publications reviewed, Richard Hyman does less than justice to the authors of the other three-quarters. He also does less than justice to our own theoretical position, since this is to be found developed at greater length not in our pamphlets but in our books, to which he makes only the barest reference. This unfortunately limits the usefulness of his criticism, since he neither looks at the IWC as a whole nor at our position as a whole. Nonetheless, what he has to say is interesting, and it makes a certain contribution to that "further development of the theory and practice of the workers' control movement", if not quite in the manner intended. Richard Hyman has raised in his critique what is a crucial question for socialists—the relation between theory and the actual current experience of working people. We wholly agree with his rejection of "the sterile isolation of the sect" and also with his disapproval of simple reliance on spontaneous action by workers as a road likely to lead of itself to a social transformation, but we are not entirely happy about the phrase he uses for the alternative form of behaviour, which he describes as "forms of *intervention* by socialists and theorists of workers' control" (his emphasis).

The role of intellectuals in the struggle for socialism is a subject which some of us have written about at some length from different viewpoints,¹ and we should only wish here to argue that we do not see this role as one of intervention, from outside so to speak, but rather as a participant educational, and self-educational, interpretative and analytic one. A change of major significance in the last hundred years is the spread of educational opportunity and the emergence of large numbers of working class intellectuals, so that Kautsky's view, supported in Lenin's reference in *What is to be Done?* of middle class intellectuals as the only possible vectors of socialist theory now no longer stands valid, whatever use it may have been in the past. Marx already had a different predisposition, which can be understood by anyone who consults his contributions to the discussions of the International Working Men's Association, even before the implementation of the Education Act in Great Britain.² Our commitment is, similarly, basically an educational one, in that it leaves workers to develop their own theoretical apparatus, from what they have learned of past experience; and from what they reject, as well as what they assimilate, from accumulated socialist theory, in their efforts to find solutions for practical problems. This helps to determine our attitude to the "classic arguments on the need for a revolutionary party" which Richard Hyman chides us "for not confronting explicitly". In fact, we have certainly confronted these arguments, quite specifically, and our response, which was stated in the 1973 issue of the *Register*,³ runs as follows: if the object of socialism is to achieve a self-governing society with self-managing industry, in which "the free development of each is the

condition for the free development of all" (rather than a simple transfer of power between elites, leaving behind market-dominance for bureaucratic arbitrariness) then, we believe, a co-ordinating and information exchange centre could be useful. It could transitionally assume that part of the role classically assigned to a "revolutionary party" which is still tenable in the light of historic experience, given our frequently stated commitment to converting the Labour Party, or some subsequent but organisationally similar inclusive federal alliance embracing the trade unions and all other relevant workers' organisations (including the various political groups) into an instrument for democratic revolutionary social transformation. Naturally, Richard Hyman does not agree with any of this, because he does not like the actual working class out of which his imaginary revolution is supposed to issue. For this reason he needs to subordinate the unions to politically reliable "cadres", and sees no profit in association with them politically, as they are, reflecting the interests and aspirations which are their own.

This is why he suggests that our "centrism" and the "concern of the IWC" are "remote" from the requirements of a "conscious, comprehensive and integrated challenge to the multifarious foundations of capitalist society".

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In response to this indictment, the first point which it is necessary to make is that Richard Hyman is not writing as an outsider, as an uncommitted observer (and nor would we wish him so to do) but as a responsible member of a political group with its own political position on a number of the issues which are in dispute between us. This group, the International Socialists, under the general rubric of a somewhat diffuse species of revisionist Trotskyism,⁴ originally included a number of distinct tendencies representing quite different political positions which co-existed with greater or lesser degrees of comfort in an increasingly centralised framework. Of late these tendencies have been increasingly painfully shaken into a common mould of rather primitive dogma. While Richard Hyman himself prefers to argue rationally with political opponents, this is by no means the standard mode of discourse among his comrades, some of whom conduct their polemics with fellow-socialists in a quite different manner. One of the less scrupulous of these is Duncan Hallas, who writes of the Socialist Register as

a classically centrist publication, neither reformist nor revolutionary, consistent only in its evasiveness, neither fish nor flesh nor fowl nor good red herring.⁵

The use made of Richard Hyman's relatively innocuous and good-hearted piece by such masters of unkind innuendo as Mr. Hallas represents a certain division of labour, which compels us to pay attention to the organisation

involved in this critique as well as its individual advocates.

What does Mr. **Hallas** mean when he writes that the *Register* (and the IWC) are neither reformist nor revolutionary? Is he saying that they violate some particular norm or norms, or is he merely saying that he doesn't like them? There is a very simple Trotskyist criterion for "centrism": it means any organisation or body which pretends to socialism without accepting Lenin's 21 conditions for adhesion to the Comintern. The Comintern is now dead, but the Fourth International still claims to uphold the traditions of its first five years. By this criterion, high on the list of "centrist" organisations is International Socialism itself, which accepts no such conditions. So as one bunch of Centrists to another, what *specifically* are we quarrelling about?

The Bolsheviks, who anathemised a whole series of sins of omission and commission under the general heading of "centrism", did so in the name of theory. Whatever else may be charged against them, they were not lazy about problems of social analysis. Flawed though they now seem, in the light of subsequent evolution, the classic statements of the Leninist canon do have a certain rigour, and did certainly correspond to some of the apparent realities of their day. But since capitalism survived not one, but two world wars, contrary to the plan: and since it then underwent a major renovation of productive capacity, a technological evolution of unsurpassed richness, and further unprecedented concentration, along the lines so presciently foreseen by Marx, and re-sketched by Bukharin, it can hardly surprise us that **Imperialism** will no longer suffice as a text upon which to predicate all future socialist strategy.⁶ Further, since the evolution of Stalinism in the USSR, we can hardly rest content with the optimistic schema contained in *The State and Revolution* as the sole necessary groundplan for the development of socialist democracy.⁷ A new socialist analysis will need to cut the knots which are tied in old socialist perspectives by the growth of transnational companies, and to trace their empirical evolution in relation to the powers of modern nation states. No valuable work has been offered by the International Socialists on any of these questions. While they have produced scholarly work on marginal themes, on fundamental matters they seem to have learned nothing. For them, everything is fixed, as if in amber, and needs only to be brought before the eyes of the masses at the moment when "the objective conditions are ripe", whereupon the trumpets shall sound, and every valley shall be exalted. We have heard it all before.

Those who preach this gospel are woefully handicapped for two basic reasons. First, the goal at which they aim, of a centralised but democratic socialist state controlling the means of production, distribution and exchange, could only really be assured in a revolution which represented a convergence of different working-class interests and organisations, none of which had the power to suppress the others. Such an event is unlikely **unless** it is prepared over a long period of relatively peaceful development:

but we can have no reason to expect that any short-order arrival at "power" by a tightly-knit revolutionary group or party will presage anything other than arbitrary rule and widespread repression. If West European capitalism really could not be overthrown without liquidating all the positive gains of bourgeois democracy, it would be better even for its most exploited victims to allow it to continue: and it is the conviction that socialism and democracy *are* not only compatible, but inseparable, which gives us confidence that the real task, which is the systematic dismantling of relations of power rather than simply the "conquest of power", can be undertaken. In a self-managing industry and society, the State will have the powers which are freely and temporarily conceded it by the voluntary consent of the producer-citizens, rather than the powers which it can monopolise by virtue of **creating** and controlling a machinery of censorship and repression.

Second, the preachers lack any solid criteria by which they can evaluate "objective conditions" of any kind, leave alone those which are "ripe". In a word they are forced to opt for a purely propaganda function, wearily reiterating the message, which, in the modern jargon, they call "consciousness", although a better word for it might be "oblivion", until the rotation of the earth in its orbit shall bring the stars into an appropriate conjunction for their own translation into a higher state. If "centrism" is a term with any meaning at all in 1975, it might **well** be applied to those who, since they remain completely unconcerned with practical politics, can only neutralise their own supporters, detaching them from the actual lines of any real battle which may be going on.

When we leave the domain of sectarian malediction, and come to scrutinise the differences between ourselves and Richard Hyman on the proper attitude to the existing institutions of the Labour Movement, we find it is here that he challenges us most sharply,

For reasons that are not made clear, he states that groups of workers' control supporters "may be conceived as educational circles. . ." or "as centres of ongoing struggle against existing authority. . . in practice one or other of these two perspectives must be assigned primacy." This may well be true at particular times, but it does not make the two into "alternative models of development", as he suggests. We would argue that the two roles are essentially interlocked, and cannot see why we should be asked to separate them. Richard Hyman claims that it is just our preparedness to work within the established institutions of the Labour Movement, even "cultivating influential leaders" that "fosters illusions of Parliamentaryism and social democracy" and "inhibits grass roots activity". He accuses us of "stacking the cards", by posing an "infantile sectarianism" as the only alternative to our "reformism", when there exists a "revolutionary tradition", which we "do not appear to share, yet do not confront explicitly or directly". The strategies that derive from this tradition he categorises as

follows:

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 of reformism.

The question is, *what* "mystification", *which* "illusions", what "limits"? We are opponents of all mystification, illusions, and limits on the democratic process whatsoever: but we cannot fail to observe that the International Socialists themselves indulge in notable mystification about the agencies for change, are full of illusions about who is, and who is not, in favour of change, and have often pronounced that the limits of reform have already been reached, so that no beneficial change is conceivable without the prior advent of the **Revolution**.⁸ Thus, the prime targets of the *Socialist Worker* are never Frank Chapple or Dennis Healey, but always Hugh Scanlon and Tony Benn. To seek a "fundamental and irreversible change in the balance of wealth and power" is, in the eyes of those who edit the I.S. publications, precisely to gratify "illusions", and consequently, to earn strident denunciation by all true believers. That Tony Benn has done more to arouse rational discussion of the scope and limits of Parliamentary action than any other politician of this century, and that he has combined Parliamentary and trade union actions in a manner unprecedented in our constitutional history, simply makes him the greater villain. For us, on the other hand, the limits of reform have *not yet* been reached, whatever Trotsky may have said in **1938**. As they come into view, so the pressure for *structural* reform will mount, as it has been mounting throughout the past decade. To turn one's back on the struggles which are developing on these issues is not simply a mistake: it is a defection, rather similar to that chronicled by Bernard Shaw in his little story about *The Death of an old Revolutionary Hero*.⁹ Shaw went along for the *Clarion*, it will be remembered, to interview Joe Budgett, who had been in his death-bed since he was 75, and was finally buried at **90**. Apprehensive, Shaw sat down by the great man's bedside to record his story.

'I served my apprenticeship to the revolution', he said, 'in the struggle against the Reform Bill of **1832**.'

'Against it!' I cried.

'Aye, against it,' he said. 'Old as I am, my blood still boils when I think of the way in which a capitalist tailor named Place—one of the half-hearted Radical vermin—worked that infamous conspiracy to enfranchise the middle classes and deny the vote to working men. I spoke against it on

every platform in England. The Duke of Wellington himself said to me that he disapproved of revolutionists in general, but that he wished there were a few more in the country of my kidney. Then came **Chartism** with its five points to fool the people and keep them from going to the root of the matter by abolishing kings, priests and private property. I shewed up its leaders, and had the satisfaction of seeing them all go to prison and come out without a single follower left to them. Next came those black spots on our Statute Books, the Factory Acts, which recognised and regulated and legalised the accursed exploitation of the wives and children of the poor in the factory hells. Why, when I took the field against them, the very employers themselves said I was right. . . Then came. . . the Education Act to drive all our children into their prisons of schools, and drill them into submission, and teach them to be more efficient slaves. . . I left the International because it would not support me against the school Bastilles. And it was high time I did; for the International was a rotten compromise itself—half mere trade-unionism, and the other half the private game of a rare old dodger named Marx. . . a compromise between a German and Jew, he was: neither one thing nor the other. Then came the Commune of Paris, that did nothing but get the people slaughtered like mad dogs, because, as I pointed out at the time, it was too local, and stood for a city instead of for all the world.'

Joe Budgett lives, and Richard Hyman knows him well. But Hyman is slightly modest about the acquaintance, and gives the impression of holding an intermediary (centrist?) position between purity à la Budgett and the sullied activities of the IWC.

We can have our cake and eat it, apparently:

"It is possible" he says, "both to work within the sphere of official trade unionism, and to seek to construct independent rank and file organisation", but he does not explain how, without creating splits and break-away groups, such as those that followed from the advice of the former Socialist Labour League to the rank and file movements in the Liverpool and Hull docks during 1954-5, or during the strike at Pilkingtons. What is difficult to understand is how Richard Hyman can reconcile his own "revolutionary" strategies concerning the unions and the Labour Party with International Socialism's rejection of "parliamentarism" and of "involvement in the Labour Party". It is a rather odd aspect of Hyman's paper that he at no point indicates clearly his own position, from which he seeks to **criticise** that of the IWC and ourselves. Accordingly, the difference between his revolutionary tradition and ours often seems to lie in the mood in which it is expressed. Thus, in relation to our concept of dual power, he speaks of it as "somewhat less cataclysmic 'than in its normal socialist usage"; in relation to the "goal of industrial democracy" we do not assert "un-ambiguously" its revolutionary character; and in the end we are asked to

be in Edward Thompson's phrase, "more knobby—all knees and elbows of susceptibility and refusal."¹⁰ This difference becomes clearest in his criticism of our "cultivation of trade union leaders," which he says is "perfectly reasonable" to "aid the propagation of workers' control ideas within the Labour Movement," but "risks subordinating its (the IWC's) primary goals to tactical requirements." Of course, it does; we know it only too well, and as proof we may offer the fact that Hyman takes examples of the risks of relying too heavily on leaders from *our own* publications, the Yorkshire miners' criticism of Lawrence Daly in 1969 and the story of the revisions made in the more radical sections of a TGWU pamphlet on *Plant Level Bargaining* in 1970. But we are chided for not making more of these derelictions.

Indeed much of Richard Hyman's critique is concerned with the alleged failure of the IWC and ourselves to emphasise strongly enough the need for democratising the unions themselves. This really is grossly unfair, and the more so since Hyman himself cites pamphlets of ours on this subject. Our own longer works have long sections on union democracy.

In addition to the discussion of the distribution of power within unions as they are currently established, on which we have published at least as much material as the International Socialists, we have also continually raised questions about the inadequacy of present structures, calling for an extension of General Unions to the point at which we may achieve the revival of the perspective of "One Big Union". On this matter, as on many others, the *Socialist Worker* has remained completely silent, content to follow behind the initiatives and pay claims of workers operating within the present limited framework. The International Socialists have never dared to publish any writing on union democracy half as radical as that by Richard Fletcher, and for cause: it would be difficult to advocate really democratic criteria for the government of unions, and at the same time accept the degree of Central Committee autocracy which has become "normal" in the IS organisation itself.

Whilst not by any means the most arbitrary of the groupuscules in its internal regulation, IS has been anything but kid-gloved with its dissidents. Large-scale expulsions and splits are not uncommon, and there is a certain vindictiveness in the manner in which critics like the former editorial staff of *Socialist Worker* have been deprived of their jobs, in spite of their impressive efforts on its behalf. Had they been similarly dismissed, for narrow political reasons, from the staffs of the TGWU *Record*, or the AUEW *Journal*, considerable adverse comment might have been expected, not least from the leaders of International Socialism.

We are constantly warned by Richard Hyman of the dangers of "officialisation" of workers' control into trade union control and asked "explicitly to confront" the ambiguities of trade unionism in a capitalist framework. We have in fact done this repeatedly and can cite many of the

quotations that Hyman himself makes to this effect from our writings. Where we differ from him is in having given active support to those who have fought to extend union democracy, instead of simply talking about it. Among these, beyond any question, whatever one thinks of this or that feature of their politics, Jack Jones and Hugh Scanlon are to be included. In our turn we would ask Richard Hyman to "confront explicitly" the limitations of the pursuit of rank and file movements outside the main body of institutions of the trade unions and Labour Party. He himself quite clearly recognises that historically trade unions which have spurned agreements with employers have quite simply disintegrated; so have break-away unions. The pseudo-soviets formed by Richard Hyman's colleagues during the fight against the Industrial Relations Act have all withered away, as has the All Trade Unions Alliance, and the more genteel **extra-parliamentary** opposition formed by Tariq Ali and his friends. Those who remain in all these groups are compelled to argue, and split, about the developments which are taking place in the Labour Movement, which, like Tennyson's brook, "goes on forever", while groups may come, and groups may go, and usually, it may be added, do.

He asks us continually to take the argument for industrial democracy beyond the level of the plant and enterprise; but he quotes none of our writings which have tried explicitly to do this. It is, of course, here at the national level that one meets the national officials and parliamentarians, and moves furthest from the healthy roots of the rank and file movement. We shall turn in a moment to the important question of "proposals for working class action at the level of the whole economy", which Hyman says we have failed to generate and of the problems of combining comprehensive planning with grass-roots autonomy, about which we would claim that we have done a good deal of thinking and writing. At this point, we must deal with a real difference that appears to exist between our analysis and his in relation to grass-roots activity.

In discussing the strategies which we and other IWC writers have put forward, derived from the experience of workers in extending control over their working lives, Hyman distinguishes three—Opening the Books, the Control Bargain and participation in decision making. He believes that in each case the results are "less advantageous to the workers than those imposed by their own informal **shop-floor** militancy" and asks how any one of them leads to a situation where the demand is made for transcending the capitalist framework within which they are held. He does not tell us how his own preferred strategy of informal shop-floor militancy would lead to such a situation. We may assume that he would answer that the "intervention" of socialists would fuse in the creation of a revolutionary party. It is not enough, however, that we should frankly question the way in which this might be expected to happen. We have ourselves to explain how we see the three strategies which Hyman has distinguished. He has

himself suggested three ways in which at least one of these **strategies**—participation in decision-making—might be developed and we may apply the argument almost equally to the other two. The result might be no shift in capitalist power, and indeed the incorporation of the attempt at workers' control; it might be a stable shift; or it might be an unstable shift, which, it seems to us, any system of dual power would be bound to imply. And one could look at these separate results from the point of view either of their direct effect or of their effect on the development of socialist consciousness. The real difference between us probably lies in this—that Richard Hyman in a fairly traditional Marxist way sees the capitalist state and society as a totality, with which we would agree; but sees its transformation in terms of its overturn, as it were from outside, in what he himself calls a cataclysm, while we see the possibility of the disintegration of its baneful power-structure by encroaching control from within. Whether a "cataclysm" will prove necessary or not must remain an open question, dependent on the contemporary circumstances. The better they are, the more painless the transition can be. In our perspective each of the existing institutions of the Labour Movement has to be altered through the extension of democracy (peoples' power); in his perspective they have all to be destroyed, and replaced. The strategies for grass-roots movements will be to that extent quite different. On *Opening the Books*, we see this demand arising naturally as workers extend their challenge to managerial prerogatives. To the extent that the challenge is effective the demand becomes both immediately self-educational and potentially damaging to capitalist power. Hyman accepts the first point, but rejects the second on two grounds: first, that if the demand can be contained within the framework of capitalist accounting, it is not the "excellence of the statistics", but the "strength of rank and file militancy and solidarity" that wins industrial struggles, and too much concern for the books may divert attention from this central fact; secondly, that, if the demand leads outside the framework of capitalist accounting into the area where the IWC has developed the concept of the Social **Audit**, this so far transcends the capabilities of the capitalist system that it loses both "agitational yield" and "relevance for day-to-day workplace struggle" and cannot therefore "function as a transitional demand or. . . create a bridge between routine trade unionism and more ambitious aspirations for control."

Richard Hyman's first argument almost implies that it would be better for the workers to struggle blind; and in his fear of the elitist implications of "understanding the books" he quite fails to recognise the possibility that large numbers of workers have indeed come to understand the books. The history of industrial relations at Fords shows this very clearly, as also do the successful struggles to found worker co-operatives in Liverpool, Meriden and Glasgow. His second argument seems to us to be totally misconceived. The demand for a social audit arose out of the closure of

pits, where indeed on strict capitalist accounting the books showed losses. The demand was part of the claim to the right to work and for capital investment on criteria of social need rather than of private profit. This was the essence not only of the miners' struggles but of the struggle at UCS and in the many other subsequent "work-in" and "sit-in" actions. The effect was not only generally educational, but educational precisely on the crucial point for capitalism, that its production is not for use but for profit. But such actions can be shown to have more than an educative effect; to the extent that they require the introduction of state capital to maintain employment, the right to work is put before capitalist rationalisation. All concessions won by Labour from capital from the Ten Hour Bill to the latest Health and Safety Bill can be seen as "making capitalism work"; but, if they increase the knowledge and power of the workers and reduce the arbitrary power of capital, then increasingly capitalism is "working" on the workers' terms. Such a situation of "dual power" is we believe inherently unstable and after whatever length of time and fierceness of struggle would have to be resolved in the hegemony of the workers. The emphasis which we put upon the demand for opening the books and the corollary of the social audit is in any case not to be comprehended by neat distinctions between the educative and power reinforcing effect; the two interact and most strongly just here where the veil of money is drawn aside and the nature of capitalist relations most clearly seen.

On the vexed question of *workers participating in decision-making*, we recognise and have written at length about all the dangers and ambiguities involved in sharing responsibility without adequate power, to which Richard Hyman refers, and equally the dangers of trade union officialisation of such power as workers have established at the work-place, dangers which he says we have failed even to consider. Our absolute insistence on nomination through the union at the work-place and on the principle of report back and recall has been spelled out in all our writings in this area. The key question, of course, is the question of power. What we have argued is that in circumstances where a union like the NUM in a nationalised industry can combine with a left-moving Labour government to set the conditions for the industry's investment and employment policy, there the workers should in effect take over the running of the industry, with management subject to their authority at every level according to whatever constitutional structure seems to them to be best. Beyond this, in privately owned industry, we have supported the TUC's proposal that workers through their elected union representatives should claim half the places on supervisory boards, with powers of veto over the appointment of the chairman and managers and over the decisions of the shareholders meeting. This is manifestly a direct challenge to the power of the owners of private capital to do what they will with their own. It is only meaningful in the context of a general advance to a position of dual power. Richard Hyman

suggests that we are fudging the issue, because we do not make clear whether the demand for worker representation is "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". It does not seem to us that these are mutually incompatible perspectives, but we accept the need for clarity on the last point. Richard Hyman quotes from an IWC pamphlet by Ernest Mandel the judgment that such "structural reforms" must either "help capitalism to function more efficiently" or appear "completely incompatible with the normal operation of any kind of capitalist economy." (E. Mandel, *A Socialist Strategy for Western Europe, 1969*, IWC pamphlet No. 10), and Hyman adds in a bracket that reforms achieved through bitter struggle by the British working class have "proved perfectly compatible with capitalist economic relationships". This seems to us both to miss Mandel's point about the changing norms of capitalist relationships and in so doing to neglect completely the crucial changes in the balance of power between labour and capital. We are being asked to believe that there can be no change in the power balance, or only marginal changes, until the day of revolution. It seems to us that there have to be very considerable changes in the balance of power, including a possibly extended, if unstable, situation of dual power, before any revolutionary social transformation comes onto the agenda. Extensions of workers' control from wages and conditions to employment and investment policies are all aspects of that changing balance; and while they raise consciousness, they do also have a certain viability before they are sufficiently widespread to provoke a crisis of dual power. The encroachment of workers' control is not regarded by ourselves as a gradualist recipe which can avoid violent resistance at some stage; but this is just because each new encroachment is seen as moving towards a real abrogation of the power of capital.

On the third strategy which we have identified, that of the *control bargain* as a counter-offensive to "productivity bargaining", Richard Hyman raises questions of the same sort and develops these questions into a general critique of "trade unionism". His fears of "officialisation" and preference for "informal shop-floor militancy" have been discussed earlier in this reply; but his statement that "There is much evidence that the relatively informal and spontaneous forms of employee organisation limit managerial autonomy most effectively," demands comment on three counts: first, there is the unanswered question as to who is to link together all these informal and spontaneous actions if the official trade unions and the Labour Party are abhorred? It is to be assumed that this is the self-appointed role of the International Socialists? Secondly, the evidence Hyman offers is Goodrich's *The Frontier of Control*, dated 1920, and the Donovan Report of 1968, which certainly sought to bring shop-floor militancy under official union control. Since then the whole trend of industrial relations has been for rank and file pressure to be exercised

through the national trade union organisation, and in terms of national strikes with evident success; but, thirdly, there is the implication that management autonomy *can* after all be effectively limited. Hyman argues, however, that these limits, "while ameliorating the *terms* of workers' subordination to managerial control... do not and cannot contest the *fact* of this subordination, for to do so would be to challenge the very social order from which the trade unions derive their function."

We believe that this is altogether too glib. The *terms* and the *fact* depend on relations of power, and the role of trade unions could well be *derived* from one social order and applied to another. Richard Hyman's quotations from Gramsci's essays which the IWC reprinted concerning the need for "independent workplace based organisation" "not specific to the activities of wage earners" do not seem to us to be a recipe for the absolutely different conditions of the trade union movement in Britain today. We have already challenged Hyman to say how he sees the possibility, as he puts it, "*both* to work within the sphere of official trade unionism and to seek to construct independent rank-and-file organisation." He quotes us saying that "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", and argues that the result would be to "emasculate the workers' control movement" in the "subordination of potential agencies of self-management to the existing priorities of collective bargaining." But the whole point at issue is precisely the changing of those priorities; and the fact is that they are being changed. More and more they challenge managerial prerogatives not just in the bargain over wages but in the whole area of employment and investment policy. Many examples can be given, like the claims of the Dunlop-Pirelli workers and the increasing use that the unions are making of the Ruskin College Trade Union Research Unit.

On all these three strategies that we have drawn from the experience of current workers' struggles to indicate a workers' control objective, Richard Hyman draws the conclusion that we have placed too much "emphasis on specific short-run issues and the problems and perspectives of individual industries" which "do not lead naturally to a focus on the questions of state power or of capitalism as a total system." Even when he recognises our "analyses of the structure of British industry and the control of the economy", he complains that these "have not generated proposals for working class action at the level of the whole economy." This is of course a matter of judgment; but there must have been some connection between our *writings* on fuel policy and the NUM's demands. What is particularly ungenerous is the complaint that Hyman makes of the "dearth of attention in IWC publications to the possible structure and the major problems of a *self-managed economy*." All three of us have written at

length on the Yugoslav experience, and this is studied also in Robin Murray's *Anatomy of Bankruptcy*. Our longer books have lengthy sections devoted to the self-managed economy and one of the IWC's most prolific writers, Stephen Bodington, has written the only book which to our knowledge is concerned exclusively with the very question to which Hyman says we have devoted "scarcely any detailed attention. . ." "a notable lacuna" etc., viz., "the need to combine comprehensive planning with **grass-roots** autonomy." For the benefit of readers of the *Socialist Register*, the book is entitled *Computers and Socialism* and was published in 1972 by Spokesman Books.

Of course, very much more work needs to be done and much more thought given to the problems of the transition from encroaching workers' control to developed workers' self-management, and we should be both churlish and stupid if we were not to welcome Richard Hyman's interest in these problems and readiness to engage in discussion of them. This is the more welcome, because the tendency of International Socialism has been not only to reject work within the Labour Party and within the official trade union movement, but also to eschew any detailed consideration of the forms of social and economic organisation that might characterise a new social order and that might agitate and sign-post the struggles of working people to achieve that transformation.

At the end of this "reply" it is worth repeating that the IWC is not a sect; it is primarily an organiser of discussion and a movement of ideas. Our own ideas, to which Richard Hyman has devoted so much attention, are but one part of that movement. They are but a conscious distilling of the experience of working class struggle; their test must always be how far they "take" and are found to be useful in that struggle. The working people alone can be the arbiters of this; and the fraternal exchange and clarification of ideas, which Richard Hyman's appraisal of the IWC has inaugurated, can only be of real use if it can be widely and freely disseminated. This exchange in the *Socialist Register* will, therefore, we should hope, serve only as a beginning of a much more extended discussion.

NOTES

1. See the last chapter of Michael Barratt Brown: *From Labourism to Socialism*, Spokesman Books, 1973 and the final section of Ken Coates: *Essays on Industrial Democracy*, Spokesman Books, 1971.
2. It will be remembered that Marx' criticism on Owenite and other utopian schemes was pithily summarised in the commentary on Ludwig Feuerbach: "the educator must himself be educated". Cadre-organisations built on neo-Leninist lines have the regrettable tendency to inhibit this process, by inducing contempt for the views of "backward" workers. But unless socialists listen to the workers all the time, they will "educate" themselves into total political irrelevance. Things will always be other than they should. The

problem is always how to grasp the possibilities for change, and how then to take the *next* step to accomplish it. No line of march, however beautiful it may seem on the map, will ever signify anything real if ordinary workers cannot see how they can *begin* to stride out toward their objectives. We all want to be good. How do we *start*? The miscalled 'strategy' of the International Socialists is exactly like the classic country saw, concerning a villager who had been asked the way to the town of X. "Oh", he said: "if I was going *there*, I wouldn't start from here in the first place!"

3. See *Socialists and the Labour Party* by Ken Coates, in *Socialist Register* 1973.
4. The piety, and the dogmatic banality, of this group's founding convictions is excellently captured in *The Origins of the International Socialists*, republished by Pluto Press in 1974. Some of the worst features of mechanical marxist apologetics are to be found in its pages, which set forth the thesis that the Soviet Union and its associated states are simply 'State Capitalist' societies, different from private capitalism only in that they have centralised all capital into one concern, known as the State. In the more outrageous writings of this group, which were modestly withheld from the reprinted version, it was held that Stalinism was the inevitable political superstructure of this economic base. Subsequently, the Khrushchev "liberalisation" produced a new discovery, that "Welfare State Capitalism" had arrived. The resurgence of neo-Stalinist forces has, it seems, moderated this view. Eclectic to a degree, this diagnosis answers no basic questions about the soviet social structure, and remains always one or two steps behind the conventional Western opinion-formers who interpret the USSR to their constituents, including of course, Tony Cliff. For accurate and nuanced understanding of present-day Soviet realities, it is essential to read the works of the brothers Medvedev, which provide the basic data upon which any new analytic efforts must found themselves.
5. *International Socialism*, 73, 1975.
6. For a balanced discussion of this text, see Lelio Basso's essay in *Spheres of Influence in the Age of Imperialism*, Spokesman Books, 1973. The most important recent discussion on the problems of socialist democracy to have come to our attention is the paper which is to be presented at a New York Philosophic Conference by Mihailo Markovic, in mid-1975. It is hoped to publish this as a *Spokesman* pamphlet.
8. See, in particular, the earlier tough evaluations of the IWC by Raymond Challinor in *International Socialism* during 1971.
9. Published in the Penguin 90th birthday edition of *The Black Girl in Search of God*, 1946.
10. From "Open Letter to Leszek Kolakowski" in *Socialist Register*, 1973. One of the nice things about Edward Thompson is that he is just as knobly towards left-wing philistines as he is to Establishment ones. But we don't think that's what Richard Hyman means.