

BRITISH TRADE UNIONISM IN THE SIXTIES

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There has been a quickening tempo of change and development in the British trade union movement in the 1960s. It compares strikingly with the relative stagnation of organization, methods, policies and structure in the previous decade and more. To a large extent the changes are the effects of, or a conscious response to, major shifts in the industrial structure and the many elements of crisis that have dogged the economy. Even if some of these shifts in the environment within which the unions work are familiar enough, it is useful to enumerate them briefly.

Long term alterations in the weight of major industries in the economy have been heavily concentrated in the last few years; in many cases these shifts continue at a rapid rate. For instance, employment in coal mining and on the railways, taken together, fell by over a hundred thousand during the 1950s, but in the five years to 1964 it fell by a quarter of a million. The "National Plan" assumes a further fall of 300,000 to 1970; by then there may be less than 700,000 employed in the two industries together. Employment in key sectors of textile production has been falling steadily and by 1970 will be only half the level of twenty years earlier (leaving little more than a quarter of a million employed in spinning and weaving cotton, flax, and man made fibres, and in textile finishing). These industries are among the traditional bulwarks of organized unionism.

On the other hand, one can identify new expanding bases of effective trade unionism. For instance, the total number employed by Local Authorities (excluding the police force) has risen by over a quarter of a million in the last five years, and now totals nearly 1,400,000 full time workers and half a million part timers. This expansion will continue, notably in education and health services. **Employment** in paper and printing, and in certain public utilities (notably, electricity, and postal and telecommunications services), is rising, and these sectors are strongly unionized. The "National Plan" estimates assume a rise of over 300,000 in employment in mechanical and electrical engineering from 1964 to 1970; this is slightly faster than the rate at which employment has been rising in engineering in the last five years.

Nor should we forget the changing composition of the labour force. The numerical increase of women in employment has in recent years been rather faster than that of men: this has in fact had a marked effect on trade union attention to the woman worker. The occupational

structure has been shifting within industries; some idea of the scale of such changes can be gleaned from official estimates of the number of wage earners and of salary earners respectively in manufacturing industry :

Wage and Salary Earners in Manufacturing (in Thousands)

	1954	1959	1964
Estimated Number of wage earners	6,230	6,100	6,200
Number of salary earners	1,420	1,660	1,890

(*Source*: National Income Blue Book 1965)

We must examine later the particular ways in which these changes have affected the unions.

But there are other types of structural change in industry and commerce that have important implications for the future of unions. The long run tendency for employment to become increasingly concentrated into large plants has continued in many sectors of manufacturing. Besides, the "large plant" industries have been growing more rapidly than other manufacturing industries. In 1951 44 per cent of all employees in manufacturing were in plants with 500 or more workers. This figure had risen to 49 per cent by 1961. In vehicles, 60 per cent of all workers were by 1961 in plants employing 2,000 or more, compared with only 45 per cent a decade earlier. The large plants are likely to be the bases of effective unionization in manufacturing—though they also produce specific problems, not least of inter-union relations. The rising proportion of "administrative, technical, and clerical" workers, the increased proportion employed in large plants, and the high proportions of such workers employed in some "large plant" industries (e.g. 30.5 per cent of the total in engineering and electrical goods) have, taken together, created a stronger basis for the unionization of salaried workers.

In terms of wages, the large establishments show significantly higher average earnings but this "high wage" effect is in part due to the fact that the "large plant" industries are high wage industries. The differential in favour of the large plants is clearly important though: these are the wage leaders.

Even more important for the role of the unions is the striking acceleration in recent years of the process of concentration of industrial power into the hands of giant firms. Marxists have been writing about this long term process for so long that they may have failed to recognize the remarkable change of the past decade. The advance of the largest companies is especially notable. In 1954 the 100 largest industrial and commercial companies accounted for 51 per cent of the net assets of all companies over £0.5 million.³ This proportion had risen to 54 per cent by 1960, and to 57 per cent by 1963. In all the decisive sectors of British industry the large firm is dominant; at the end of 1963, firms with assets over £25 million accounted for 90 per cent of

total company assets (as defined above) in chemicals and allied trades : 81 per cent in metal manufacture; 75 per cent in electrical engineering, and also in food, drink and tobacco: 70 per cent in vehicles; and 63 per cent in paper, printing, and publishing.

We can expect the concentration process to continue unabated, as companies are driven along by various pressures in pursuit of economies of larger scale, the search for market stabilization by establishing a dominant monopolistic position, defensive combination by other firms in face of such market domination, and the risk and costliness of major technical and product innovation. The great socializing agency in our mature capitalist economy is the continuing revolution in technology and the urgency of the commercial arguments for giant size.

"Rationalization" comes in the wake of concentration: it involves overhaul of the production range of particular plants, plant closures, new patterns of distribution. This re-inforces the effects of rapidly changing production techniques in creating an industrial environment of organizational upheaval and insecurity. The trade union is confronted by the initiative of the giant firm in developing "positive" industrial relations policies; new links between different plants emerge, new points of comparison and emulation in wages and conditions. These new industrial giants are not tidily confined within recognizable frontiers, and this produces new stresses in union organization and in bargaining procedure and wage policy.

The domination of the economy by giant firms creates another permanent impact on the trade unions. It means that the Socialist argument for extending social control over capital, for extending both social accounting and social accountability, is continually strengthened, continually appears in new forms. To a greater extent than many left wing Socialists recognize, trade unions (albeit in a piecemeal way or only in the fields of direct concern to a particular union) respond to the changing structure of the economy with Socialist proposals or with demands for state action that involve inroads into capitalist power. The present state of this positive response will be analysed later.

These changes in industrial and occupational structure and notably the concentration of industrial and financial capital, naturally affect and influence trade union action, not least in the long run. The other major influence upon union methods and objectives is what can only be described as the "general crisis" of British capitalism. In summary it is the presence of the four to five year cycle of production and demand; the acute differences in regional development which have become so pronounced in the last fifteen years; the persistent inflation of the post-war era; the regressive re-distribution of income under Conservative administrations; the chronic balance of payments problem: all of which have contributed to the total situation within which

the trade union movement has been forced to take its decisions over wages, earnings and conditions of employment. It is this response of the trade union movement to the whole range of economic and political developments to which we must now turn.

The Trade Union Response: Organization

The analysis in this article began with the structural changes in the economy in the past decade or so, and especially was it concerned with the major changes of the first half of the 1960s. The most direct connection here is with trade union membership. The gloomier forecasts of the effect on the trade unions' strength of the trend towards a higher proportion of women workers, and of the service trade and "white collar" occupations, are being disproved in practice. Despite the dwindling of the traditional bastions of organized unionism, total union membership is rising after the stagnation of the 1950s. By the 1965 T.U.C., total affiliated membership in mining, railways, and cotton (Groups 1, 2, and 9) had fallen to less than a million, and accounted for only 11 per cent of T.U.C. membership; their membership stood nearly 300,000 lower than in 1960. But T.U.C. affiliated membership rose 640,000 in the same period 1960 to 1965 (rather more than half of which was due to new affiliations), to 8,771,000. For the five years from the end-1959 to end-1964, Ministry of Labour statistics show a rise of over 440,000 in trade union membership, to a total of 10,065,000³—the first time the ten million mark has been passed.

Significantly, a high proportion of the membership gain has been among women workers. The number of women in trade union membership has risen steadily since 1958. From 1959 to 1964 women members increased by 270,000 to 2,138,000. This 15 per cent increase was considerably greater than the percentage increase in the total number of female employees in the economy (+ 8.5 per cent). Yet, in this period textile unionism was still contracting, and the decline in Co-operative employment held back growth of union membership in distribution. The expansion of women's membership in other sectors is striking; in the five years end-1959 to 1964 it rose by over one-half in insurance and banking, by over one-third in engineering and in local government service, and by over a quarter in the two big general unions.

Increased success in recruiting women, and increased interest in the industrial demands of women, have coincided. What has been particularly noteworthy has been the emphasis in recent collective bargaining (mainly since 1963) on making steps towards equal pay for men and women in manual work. The last two engineering settlements provided for increases in the women's rate larger than those for men. A number of settlements have provided for equal money increases. But the move is not yet general, for instance major settlements in distribution have not yet provided for equal increases. One

of the most important decisions on equal pay would be the adoption of the principle for manual workers in government service;⁴ it might well be regarded as a touchstone as to the reforming zeal of the Labour Government, and as to the "social justice" to be incorporated in its incomes policy.

The relative success in recruiting new women members to the trade unions is one facet of their response to the changing structure of employment. It is one in which further organizational experiment, and a more vigorous pursuit of industrial demands on behalf of women, may yield not only increased industrial strength but political dividends for the Labour movement too. Thus the lack of positive lead on equal pay by the Labour Government displays not only an absence of principle, but does not even make sense at the level of political expediency.

The shift in relative size of major unions, and the contrasting patterns of expansion and decline, have other implications. Take the "growth" sectors in trade unionism; eleven large unions over the five years 1960-64 increased their membership 10 per cent or more. These unions added 550,000 members to reach a total of 3,820,000 at the end of 1964. If the structure of these unions is analysed, they show how far a simple advocacy of industrial unionism is from current reality. It should be said that the old familiar structural categories of "general", "craft", and "industrial" unionism, are inadequate to describe the nature of many of these large unions. "Growth" unions tend to be "open" in the sense that even if their base is a particular occupation, or industry, this is given a wide interpretation — and recruiting interests extend readily to "allied" occupations or industries. Indeed, these large unions — where not completely general in their industrial coverage — can be said to operate mainly in wide sectors, rather than in narrowly drawn "industries". A term such as "general-sectoral" becomes necessary to identify unions that have been based on a particular sector historically, but may take a wide definition of what that sector is, and readily extend into "allied fields".⁵

Of the "growth" unions, one is "general" (the T.G.W.U.), and two are broadly "occupational" (Clerical and Administrative Workers, and Electrical Trades Union). Three present problems of classification; the A.E.U., which is more than "general-sectoral". N.U.P.E. (Public Employees) and N.A.L.G.O. (National and Local Government Officers' Association)⁶ which organize in a wide range of public services (sectoral), the former primarily recruiting manual workers, the latter non-manual grades. The remaining "growth" unions (but these are all except one in the size range of over 50,000 but under 100,000) are more specifically industrial in their base (Health Service Employees; Bank Employees; Vehicle Builders; Post Office Engineers (industrial — occupational); Printing, Bookbinding, and Paper Workers). But, against this, the main unions caught by declining membership are "industrial", at least in the sense of being restricted mainly to a specific

industry,⁷ for instance the N.U.M., the N.U.R., and the Agricultural Workers.

It does not look, therefore, as if the trade unions with rapidly growing membership demonstrate any natural evolution to industrial unionism. Rather, it is an extension of (overlapping) general unionism, and occupational unionism, that is mainly in evidence. But in the last three years there have been widespread inter-union talks on structure, and some amalgamations; what pattern do these show?

In the main, recent amalgamations have represented two main tendencies. There has been merging of unions operating mainly in particular industries, where the federations (and therefore closer working of unions) have been developing successfully, i.e. building and printing. These mergers have linked up similar occupational groups, in the main. And there have been the formation of multi-craft unions, with separate sections for the different crafts, out of a number of craft unions. But this has occurred where the crafts mainly had a given industrial base, e.g. the Boilermakers, etc., and shipbuilding. The two tendencies in evidence are linked therefore. In printing, the amalgamations have produced two main unions; the National Graphical Association (85,000 members), which represents the amalgamation of the Typographical Association, the London Typographical Society, and smaller unions; secondly, the Society of Graphical and Allied Trades (225,000 members) formed from N.A.T.S.O.P.A. and the Printing, Bookbinding and Paper Workers, which aspires to be an "all-graphical union". In building, seven unions with over 100,000 members are moving towards a single union for the "trowel trades", on the principle that craft identities should continue through trade sections. (The initiative came from the Federation.) But the leading example of the formation of a multicraft union is the 120,000 strong Amalgamated Society of Boilermakers, Shipwrights, Blacksmiths, and Structural Workers. (One can see that the multi-craft approach raises new problems in the naming of unions.)

These developments, and the associated strengthening of federal activities in building and printing,⁸ undoubtedly help to create a more coherent framework of unionism in these sectors, with larger unions able to provide more effective services to their members. But in all these sectors, changing techniques involve difficult problems of demarcation and development for unions whose structures are still primarily occupational.

But, on the present structure, we are left with the conclusion that in many sectors at least *three* large general or "general-sectoral" unions will be operating and overlapping.⁹ And this may occur alongside unionism based on skills/occupations, and with a sprinkling of would-be industrial unions.¹⁰ The major structural problems of British trade unionism persist, along with inadequate arrangements for inter-union co-ordination at plant and industry level. Nor are the **demo-**

cratic structures of some major unions built up from branches based on the workplace. So that the processes of union government, and of initiative in industrial policy making, are all too often clumsy and remote from the workplace. This is particularly in evidence in the dominant "private sector" of the economy.

It is, of course, difficult for trade union structures and inter-union arrangements to match the shifting boundaries of the giant firms in the economy—as take-overs, rationalization, diversification, and technical break-throughs, lead to successive re-shaping. Certainly, the old demand for industrial unionism is inadequate to meet the sweeping changes constantly occurring in the industrial balance and command structure of modern industry. But "combine committees" within unions, and standing joint committees of trade unions, to meet the ramified giant firm, have been developed and must be taken further. Attempts at joint action by shop stewards are eloquent and practical criticism of present inter-union disunity and structural gaps.¹¹

So far the T.U.C. has seemed uncertain as to the arrangements it should foster, the direction in which it should push the amalgamation process and inter-union organization.¹² In 1959 it swept away the sub-structure of industrial committees, under the General Council. These had, in fact, become defunct; but it has not replaced them by any coherent pattern bringing together unions in the main sectors of the economy. Nor has the T.U.C. developed any direct links within its constitution with the federations of trade unions that do exist. The lack of clear perspective as to the structural reform of the trade union movement may well reflect an equal obscurity as to what should be its industrial and political strategy. The future perspective for union structure logically should follow the re-statement of its future role; this theme is therefore taken up later.

But there is one further aspect of the membership growth, and organizational development of the trade unions that requires discussion, before a wider analysis of recent policy changes. It is the vexed question of the likely effect on the movement of the success of "white collar" unions in recent years, particularly—but not only—in the public sector. Many commentators have felt gloomy as to the dilution they felt this implied of the militancy of socialist orientation of the British trade unions.¹³ This seems to be based, fortunately, on a static and falsely schematic sociology. Of course, the term "white collar" is itself defective because unclear in its application; but let us concentrate on administrative, clerical, supervisory, and technical professional workers.

The 1960s have not only seen a major strengthening of unionism among these workers, but also one decisive advance. For a time in the 1960s a serious attempt was made to bring together unions and associations of white collar workers not affiliated to the T.U.C. in a rival national grouping. But C.O.P.P.S.O. (Conference of Professional

and Public Service Organizations) has withered instead of developing; the important decision here was the affiliation of N.A.L.G.O., with its third of a million members, to the T.U.C. Thus the T.U.C. appears as the spokesman for virtually all organized workers except the teachers and higher civil servants (and among these the question of T.U.C. affiliation is repeatedly being raised). The Public Employees Group (No. 15), Civil Servants (No. 16), and Professional, Clerical, and Entertainment Group (No. 17), at the 1960 T.U.C. embraced twenty-seven unions with just over a million members. At the 1965 T.U.C. they contained thirty-two unions with over a million and a half members. Since then a further Civil Service union (Customs and Excise) has affiliated.

But is the stereotype of white collar unions ("prepared to collaborate with employers" . . . "conservative by conditioning" . . . "bureaucratic mentality")¹⁴ as less militant, less politically committed, justified? One meets, in fact, a range of trade union attitudes, just as among the unions of manual workers. The only British trade union that has had a coherent strategy on strike action, and a very successful one,¹⁵ is the Draughtsmen—which occupationally may be considered in the white collar field. N.A.L.G.O. changed its constitution recently to enable it to use the strike weapon, although over most of its field the Whitley Committee system (as elsewhere in the public sector) provides for arbitration. White collar unions which are expanding membership rapidly in the private sector, often facing outright resistance to recognition, frequently use militant bargaining tactics and official strikes. This is true, for instance, of the Association of Supervisory Staffs Executives and Technicians, which evidently finds tough bargaining tactics an aid to growth, for it may well claim to be the fastest growing union (proportionately) in recent years.¹⁶ One might add that for careful preparation of bargaining cases and skill in their presentation some white collar unions would be hard to beat.¹⁷

The stereotyped view of white collar unionism in the political field is also misleading. It hardly prepares one, for instance, for the "left" opposition to current attempts at incomes policy from five technicians' unions.¹⁸ It would be true to say, too, that in white collar unions that are affiliated to the Labour Party there is more consciousness of the need to win members to payment of the political levy, and to support for the political initiatives of the union, than in manual unions where this support is traditional. There is thus an *active* process of political education going on, evidenced for instance by the success of A.S.S.E.T. in rapidly increasing the number of its political levy paying members. It is true that the main civil service and local government unions catering for clerical and administrative grades are not politically affiliated (except for the post office unions);¹⁹ resistance to such affiliation can be expected to continue. But this should not blind us to an important fact. These unions have a clear institutional interest in the

strengthening and extension of the public sector, and a very direct concern with the fair treatment of the public sector. For instance, a further development of municipal services, and of the range of public corporations, not to mention the potential developments of public authorities at regional level, would create most favourable conditions for the further expansion of N.A.L.G.O. and other unions.²⁰ It is, perhaps, symptomatic that the bulk of N.A.L.G.O.'s spending on "public relations" in the last decade has been aimed at improving the image of local authorities and public services in the eyes of the community.²¹ Thus, whereas it can be reasonably argued that the affiliation of Lib-Lab unions to the Labour Party pre-1914 diluted its already dilute Socialism, we are not confronted with the same situation today. Rather, the extension of union membership among women and white collar workers, and the closer association of manual and white collar unions, may help in changing social and political attitudes.

The Trade Union Response: *Industrial Action*

Even before the major innovation of participation in an "incomes policy", British trade unions have themselves initiated important changes in bargaining policy. The most striking change of recent years, and one that has aroused controversy, has been the negotiation of long term contracts.²² The 1960s have seen the rapid development of long term agreements (typically for two, three, or four years) which generally provide for annual increments on specified dates, and have been particularly important in breaking through to reductions in the normal weekly hours and additions to paid holidays. Probably about half of trade union membership is now working under such agreements.²³

Critics of these agreements have argued that they tie the hands of trade unions for long periods ahead, and that the succession of (virtually) annual bargaining encounters had a useful organizational and agitational role. But there are some important gains. First of all, a union preparing to negotiate a long term settlement can think more ambitiously of writing into the agreement major advances of wages and conditions to be secured over the life of the agreement; in practice the earlier system of bargaining led to more limited perspectives. The much criticized engineering "package deal" at least contains some instalments of "social justice", not only in the disproportionate increases in the women's rate already mentioned, but also in "earnings guarantee" giving disproportionate increases to workers with low earnings by establishing minimum earnings levels.²⁴ Secondly, the arguments used in bargaining can become forward looking; they can be related more directly to the likely future pattern of development in the industry concerned. Formal wage bargaining in Britain, so far, has primarily been backward looking (e.g. relating to past cost of living changes, not future provision; past productivity performance,

not **planned** future performance; etc.). In a way this reproduces the pattern of national economic regulation by the state; predominantly in the past this has consisted of "correction" of the economy based on statistics which are subject to time-lags and methods of intervention involving even longer time-lags—all largely unrelated to any long run view of development. Slowly and uncertainly, the regulation of the national economy has to shift to attempts at forward planning based on some notion as to development priorities. Similarly, in negotiating, say, a three year wage or salary settlement, the relation of claims to forward estimates as to the operation of the industry (and, more widely, the economy) becomes possible; and the bargainers can relate this to their (we hope) bolder view of **wage/salary** strategy, priorities, and longer run perspectives,

Thirdly, there are severe limits to the leverage that unions can exert in the normal processes of bargaining. Particularly where the bargaining unit comprises a high proportion of the membership of a union, the possibility of strike action under these circumstances must look prohibitively expensive to unions and to **members**.²⁵ For all the talk of "free" collective bargaining there is little room for **manceuvre**, unless high labour turnover and labour shortage make employers ready to offer a more generous settlement than elsewhere. But the advance in the wage bargain that can be envisaged in a long term agreement obviously can attract membership interest and support, and the bargaining process becomes a more significant test of union skill—and strength. The printing unions—which can be said to have pioneered the long term agreement—had to use official strike action to back their bargaining demands. This was perhaps the high price the innovator pays, rather than the shape of things to come. But the point to make is that the threat of official strike action is more meaningful in relation to long term settlements than to the more familiar wage round. Where major changes in the nature of the wage bargain are being sought (e.g. in the past, the forty hour week; in the future, it may be greater provision for employment security and manpower planning) this may prove significant.

Fourthly, the long term agreement raises in a clear cut way the need for *real wage* guarantees. Negatively, one could put it that unions that enter long term agreements without adequate cost of living provisions are indeed giving hostages to fortune. Positively, that bargaining may shift nearer to dealing in improvements in *real* (purchasing power) wages and **conditions** rather than dealing in nominal wages rapidly eroded by inflation. There are two ways in which cost of living changes have been provided for. One is for periodic revision of the rates in the agreement on a sliding scale basis (this has been used in building, printing, and footwear). The other is to provide for a general re-opening of the agreement if the cost of living rises beyond a given level; this latter method (used in e.g. gas and electricity

supply, and in engineering²³ has the serious drawback that considerable erosion of the purchasing power of the rates negotiated can occur before revision becomes possible. The Conservative Government in evidence to the National Incomes Commission argued that "in-built inflationary features such as escalator clauses should be avoided" in long term agreements. Such is continuity of policy that the same pressure has continued under the Labour Government; the Prices and Incomes Board attacked the sliding-scale used in the printing settlement.²⁴ The building employérs, undoubtedly encouraged by the government, fought to remove the sliding scale from the building agreement in 1965; only rank and file pressure on union negotiators has retained the system for the life of the new agreement (but it is then to expire).

This issue may be extremely important. What Government (Tory and Labour) attitudes fail to consider is that in the absence of adequate guarantees of compensation for cost of living increases, unions may be increasingly reluctant to commit themselves to long term agreements at all. This would be damaging to forward planning of the economy.²⁵ Alternatively, one can expect unions to insist on writing higher rates of increase in money terms into such agreements because of the absence of any cost of living guarantees. The Government wants moderate rates of wage or salary advance, but is hedging on the conditions that makes this acceptable to the unions (including price stability).²⁶ The unions, with perhaps half their membership working under long term agreements, should be seeking more positive measures of price stabilization from the Government, and should also take a stand on the issue of cost of living guarantees built into long term agreements. Instead the T.U.C. General Council has issued no statement of its views, and apparently offered no guidance. Yet long term settlements with purchasing power guarantees written in, operating in an economy where a measure of forward planning and fiscal measures provide further guarantees of real wage advance, still appear a meaningful objective. One wonders if the General Council even knows what it wants from current bargaining, and from its participation in incomes policy.

In other directions, developments in the collective bargaining system have occurred in recent years. "Productivity bargaining", that is bargaining for a more flexible deployment of labour over-riding previous job demarcations, has been one new element making possible accelerated increases in earnings and reductions in actual hours worked. By the end of 1964, 30 per cent of manual workers were on agreements providing for the introduction of the 40 hour week. In electricity supply the first "status" agreement creating for manual workers the "staff status" previously enjoyed only by non-manual grades has been negotiated.²⁷

But on job security and redundancy provision there has been a

striking contrast between public and private sectors. In the public sector comprehensive agreements covering manual workers (and more recently staff employees) have been negotiated. But in the private sector there have been major shortcomings. A Ministry of Labour survey at the beginning of 1963 reported only 371 companies (accounting for only one-sixth of manufacturing employment, and very little at all beyond manufacturing) with redundancy policies. Of these only eighteen were embodied in formal signed agreements with the unions! Since then there have been a number of agreements." But the totally inadequate inroads made into the question of job security in the private sector by the unions made legislation to secure minimum standards of severance pay urgent. Even now there is no statutory provision, laying down minimum standards of behaviour so far as the handling of redundancy by employers is concerned (i.e. as to forward manpower planning; advance notice of intentions; consultations; appeals systems) nor has negotiation in the private sector provided more than a small minority of workers with adequate safeguards. To some extent, e.g. in the A.E.U., this stems from the "left" policy of demanding "no redundancy". But it is surely strange to argue that instead of using union strength at a favourable moment to negotiate as comprehensive a protection as can be devised and one that **mini-**mises (e.g. by requiring forward manpower planning) actual unemployment, better results can be obtained by absence of agreement and strike action precisely when market forces (or technical change) put the workers concerned in a weak position. Not only is there the hardship caused through unsuccessful action in such circumstances but also a legacy of disillusionment.

It would not be possible to omit from a discussion of recent developments in union bargaining some mention of the *rôle* of strike action. This is less because of any significant developments in union strike strategy, than because of the re-emergence in this period of judge-made law restricting the lawfulness of strike action (and picketing). The courts have re-interpreted the extent of the immunity conferred on unions and their officers in trade disputes by statute (particularly the 1906 Trades Disputes Act), partly by arguing the element of breach of contract involved in trade disputes, partly by developing new "torts" (e.g. civil "intimidation"), partly by re-interpreting the term "trade dispute". Professor K. W. Wedderburn in *The Worker and the Law* argues that the 1965 Trades Disputes Act can be "fairly described as the narrowest measure that could honour the pledge" of Labour to provide protection for union members and officials **against** the liabilities for "intimidation" developed in the *Rookes v. Barnard* judgment. But, it leaves "unprotected many new areas of liability that were opened up by the judgements of 1964. At the best this means a period of uncertainty; at the worst renewed litigation". For instance, Wedderburn considers that strikers breaking their contract of **employ-**

men in combination may lay themselves open to an action on grounds of civil conspiracy. Even the Ministry of Labour is moved to say that "there is a case for considering an alteration in the law so that striking does not break the contract of *employment*".²²

It should not go unnoticed that it was D.A.T.A., the union which more than any other in Britain can be said to have had a consistent strike strategy used as an adjunct to its bargaining, which found itself caught up in litigation. D.A.T.A's use of strikes was connected with the fact that its wage bargaining was conducted at the level of the firm rather than that of the industry; thus it could support from its funds even prolonged strikes at individual firms. Its success has now led the employers to accept the need for industry-wide bargaining in engineering and *shipbuilding*.²³ Thus D.A.T.A may well join the ranks of other British unions in being very disinclined to use the strike to back industry-wide bargaining, because of its heavy expense. But this does not mean that the issue of the legality of strikes is unimportant. Over a wide range of conditions at work, especially those involving "rights" (not least over recognition, or the treatment of union representatives) the ability to strike remains crucial. In particular, major new advances especially those that encroach on managerial "prerogatives" can seldom be secured without the ability to strike if necessary. The law has two faces; the unions can use "legislative enactment" to create positive rights in industry (redundancy provision has been discussed in this context; union recognition would be a further example, so would legislation on equal pay); but they have to defend their ability to use the strike weapon if necessary, 'whether this is challenged by legal judgment or hostile statute.

Trade Union Response: National Economic Policy

By the 1960s, large scale capitalist enterprise in Britain had in important ways modified its attitude towards state intervention in the economy. The Federation of British Industries, before it merged with the other national federations of monopoly capitalism, pressed for more ambitious programmes for regional development, and for extensive state participation in and further aid to research and development. It was the Conservatives who, as part of this trend, made a partial reform of the financial position of the nationalized industries, introduced a major (and, in principle, socialist) measure on industrial training, and established that primitive first step in national planning, the N.E.D.C. One could add to the list.

None of this adds up to an adequate reform of the structure and control mechanisms of the economy. And all of it involved the risk, at some stage, of the progressive use of the state machine to extend social control over the process of planning and business **decision-taking**. But the many-sided nature of the crisis of the economy; the failure of limited and orthodox techniques of fiscal and monetary

control (even if Mr. Callaghan does go down in history as the last Chancellor who actually believed in them); the changed relation between giant firms and the national economy at the end of sweeping processes of concentration; above all the pressure imposed by technical advance and its sheer cost: all of these have created the need for radical change in the economic structure. And, potentially, in the power relations and the behaviour of the main classes and their representatives.

This context could not but shake the trade unions loose from their "traditional" preoccupation with limited sectional bargaining over money wages—with only a hazy conception of the relation of their activities to the performance of the national economy. It reintroduced in a new historical context opportunities of "workers' participation" (so far mainly through the trade union bureaucracy) in industrial and economic decision making. It generated new possibilities of encroaching social control over capital; though the unions are relatively unused to such ideas. How far have the trade unions moved towards grasping the initiative, particularly in the politically favourable context of a Labour Government?

The T.U.C. did, of course, decide to participate in the National Economic Development Council. But its participation has shown minimal initiative. For instance, when the staff of the N.E.D.C. was first built up the T.U.C. only managed to think of one person for secondment to it! The establishment of industry level N.E.D.C.'s has, of course, required new appointments in trade union specialist departments (so-called "research") of people with the necessary training to brief and service the trade union representatives on these committees. But there has been all along such totally inadequate staffing of its research and production functions by the T.U.C. that the advantages of union participation in such planning bodies have not been fully realized. Quite inadequate attention has been paid also to systematic education and training of the trade union representatives themselves; the trade union movement seems to believe more in training its "lower" echelons (to conform), than in training its most senior officers. But a process has been started in the trade unions. This is neatly symbolised by the advertisements from the T.G.W.U. appearing late in 1965 for graduate and non-graduate staff to man its newly formed Production and Research Department. Britain's largest union only now expanding its research work! Of course, it should have happened long ago, but the important thing is that it is happening.

The more evident weakness of involvement so far in planning agencies is, however, its general remoteness from the lay democracy of the unions, from the workers at plant level, from any basis of broader participation. The unions' further deficiencies in internal communications, in educational work, represent further obstacles. Incomes policy may serve as a case in point. Here above all the unions need

to make their main social objectives clear and communicate them. The major issues of principle and practice need discussion throughout the movement. But very little happens, and little more than cloudy generalities get through.

Necessarily too, the weaknesses of trade union structure at industry level (particularly in the private sector) further hamper the development of any independent trade union challenge as to economic development and its means. Many industrial N.E.D.C.'s operate where the unions lack adequate departments and services directed to the problems specifically of that industry. Even if they begin to develop them, the problem of communicating (which should be a ~~two~~ two way process) with the workers in that industry is complex; there may be a number of pockets of union membership, but in different unions. But once again, one must argue that the *involvement* is likely to push the trade unions—and their structure and inter-union relations—in the right direction.

The militant "left" see perils in this involvement of the trade unions in a range of planning agencies. But this is to stress the weakness and confusion of the trade unions, and to treat it as permanent and inescapable. It is more to the point to see this as an opportunity for a strengthening and development of union services so that they can (in the not too distant future) seriously scrutinize and challenge the imperfect forward planning and faulty priorities of our mixed economy.

Not that the would-be socialist critic of trade union activity should be either complacent about the "inevitable" emergence of an independent and socialist orientated challenge by the unions within the agencies of manpower and industrial planning, or prepared to see the current inadequacies of trade union services continue for a protracted period. It is deplorable that the T.U.C. managed to make no effective criticisms of the Conservative perspective for economic development that led Britain into major crisis in 1964. It is astonishing that although Labour has made important and positive improvements in the departmental machinery for national economic planning, it has been under no trade union pressure to develop the industrial N.E.D.C.'s beyond the original tentative "voluntary" basis they assumed under Conservative administration; this is a major opportunity missed. Nor has there yet been any independent and critical comment from the trade unions on the "National Plan" presented in the autumn of 1965. Is it the rule that the trade unions must never campaign for measures that the Labour government chooses to resist? But how then can it offset in a progressive way the persistent pressures of the industrial lobbies?

The T.U.C. and individual unions deserve better marks in one important direction. A number of committees have been set to work to scrutinise important and defective sectors of the economy. The stand-

ard of T.U.C. evidence to these committees, and that of other unions, has been high. Take, for instance, some of the main activities reported in the Economic Policy section of the General Council's report to the 1965 T.U.C. (much of the initiative stemming from resolutions of Congress in earlier years). The General Council has published a detailed study of Transport Policy, which is certainly considerably better than anything that has gone before, and represents the considerable achievement of a measure of common purpose between road and rail unions in support of a co-ordinated transport system. There was excellent evidence submitted to the **Plowden** Committee on the aircraft industry, concluding with the proposal that the air-frame firms should be unified under public ownership. There were representations to Ministers on the manufacturing powers of nationalised industries and on public ownership and control of North Sea mineral resources. And there were repeated but unsuccessful attempts to get the Government to establish a wide ranging inquiry into the drug industry, and to secure trade union representation on the investigating committee.³³ Clearly the T.U.C.'s all too modest investment in trained personnel is producing results.

But the most testing area of trade union involvement in national economic policy so far is that of incomes policy. Here one can identify two largely opposed possibilities. On the one hand it may be argued that current measures to establish an incomes policy (or, by extension, all likely measures stemming from state initiative in our "mixed economy") represent basically the continuation of wage restraint policies as developed by successive Conservative Governments, and must be resisted as such. The problem with this approach is that in practice it pushes the trade unions back to sectional business unionism within a predominantly "market" economy;³⁴ I have attempted earlier in this article to indicate how little "freedom" there is in such a situation. It establishes no effective linkage between trade union sectional action and the extension of socially influenced forward planning of the economy. It invites the political isolation of the Labour movement, and the prospect of the strengthening of reactionary forces and the return of a reactionary administration. This is where the policies of Callaghan (deflation and stagnation of real wages), and the **negative-left**, would appear to lead.

The alternative possibility that can be argued is that of an alliance of trade unions and a reforming government. This requires a considerable measure of agreement as to the rate of advance of earned incomes in *real* terms; that is, it must rest on a meaningful and expansionist process of forward planning, using the strength and influence of the public sector. Thus it must connect with more effective national, regional, and industrial planning agencies (and more union initiative within them than we have seen). It must necessarily challenge the existing distribution of income bequeathed by thirteen years

of Conservative regressive re-distribution—that is, it must be accompanied by significant steps of tax reform and progressive re-distribution.

The other necessary aspect of any workable alliance on incomes policy must be direct intervention on prices, including short term measures of price stabilization by government action (fiscal, etc.), and longer term measures of social accountability directed at business price-fixing. Only on such a basis does a moderate rate of money **wage/salary** increase become acceptable to the unions (because it offers a more rapid real advance).

On the evidence of 1965, Labour Government incomes policy has oscillated uncomfortably between the two positions. No coherent initiative, or sense of strategy, has come from the T.U.C. (either General Council or Congress itself); the trade unions do not yet seem to have learnt what demands to put forward, what guarantees to seek.

The Labour White Papers are demonstrably hybrids. The crucial one, "Prices and Incomes Policy", sets out the criteria which are to guide "all concerned with prices and incomes." It must be stressed that the White Paper was accepted by the T.U.C. and the C.B.I.; that is, for the first time, incomes policy emerges not as a unilateral statement by the Government but as an agreement. The White Paper breaks new ground in establishing (paragraphs 9 and 10) criteria for price behaviour (and, of course, a process of scrutiny by the Prices and Incomes Board). These are, on paper, comprehensive and significant, but the actual achievement by the P.I.B. falls very far short of this. Considerations included are: potential reductions in **non-labour** costs per unit of output, as well as labour costs (and therefore the whole field of "efficiency"), and "the return sought on investment" and price reductions "if profits are based on excessive market power" (hence the whole field of profit margins). Yet the criteria on "employment incomes" are largely a re-phrasing of the 1962 Selwyn Lloyd White Paper.

The only additions to the Selwyn Lloyd approach made by the Labour Government's White Paper, so far as incomes are concerned, are two important (but very indefinitely phrased) additional criteria for exceptional treatment, namely:

- "(iii) where there is general recognition that existing wage and salary levels are too low to maintain a reasonable standard of living;
- (iv) where there is widespread recognition that the pay of a certain group of workers has fallen seriously out of line with the level of remuneration for similar work and needs in the national interest to be improved." (White Paper, Para. 15.)

One is not making a merely rhetorical criticism of the White Paper in stressing the incorporation in it of the 1962 Selwyn Lloyd approach which the trade unions at that time rejected. The most important

point is that this meant reproducing anew the confusion over the relation between *real* wage "norms" and money wage "norms". The statement that "less weight" should be given to "changes in the cost of living" has, as we have seen, already been interpreted by the Prices and Incomes Board as the basis for an attack on cost of living sliding scales. The notion of linking the acceptance of moderate rates of money wage increase with clear guarantees as to the nature and extent of government initiative to secure price stabilization has not been pressed by the T.U.C. The trade union movement is thrown into confusion (for adjustment to rising prices has always in the post-war period been the minimum wage rate adjustment acceptable—even in adverse circumstances). The supporters of a short run real wage "pause" (or fall) use the 3 to 34 per cent money norm as their **criterion.**¹⁷

The White Paper is equally confusing in another direction, which vitally affects public sector **wage/salary** determination. "Less weight" than hitherto is to be given to "comparisons with levels or trends of income". Yet (see point (iv) quoted above) pay that is "seriously out of line" merits "exceptional" increases. What do such contradictions mean, particularly for the use of "fair comparisons" in determination of pay in the public sector? Are railwaymen who once secured a fair comparisons settlement (Guillebaud) to have the principle denied them? Are health service employees who have not had the benefit of a "fair comparisons" review, but ought to have had (and have been asking for it for some time), to be treated as an "exception" and given it?

No socialist can ignore the importance of establishing a system of social accountability over the price-fixing process. Moreover, at the same time, in the 1965 Monopolies and Mergers Act, the statutory power to impose price fixing in monopoly situations has been **taken.**¹⁸ But this does not mean that an extraordinary confusion over the principles that are to operate in fixing earned incomes is an acceptable, or necessary, price to pay. Similarly, with the proposed establishment of an "early warning" system. What is needed is for price fixing—for the first time—to be subject to the same process of delay, public scrutiny, and agreement, as is wage-fixing *already*. But the Government now appears anxious to use the system to introduce a further period of delay in the already protracted process of national wage settlement.

Similar confusion reigns as to the economic environment within which income determination is to operate. That most orthodox of Chancellors has not only checked the growth of the economy for a protracted period, but has also used budgetary and monetary policy in ways which pushed up retail prices. What in that case have trade union executives to show to their members as the fruits of participation in incomes policy? Fiscal re-distribution has begun with the

long overdue capital gains tax; but the increase in national insurance contribution (and in beer and baccy tax) is clearly regressive. Nothing has yet been done to stop income tax biting into lower and lower real incomes; nothing has yet been done to tax capital itself progressively (death duties are a voluntary tax borne only by suspicious parents and those who die prematurely).

At the same time, the "National Plan" projects the growth of the economy and of real incomes (though patently defective as a plan). But there appears no nexus between its projections and the prolonged stagnation of the economy, which is helping to reproduce the next stop-go cycle. George Brown has to rush around holding back nationalized industry price increases to avoid the worst consequences of Callaghan. Some of the right measures are taken or projected; reduction of nationalized industry debt, improved subsidies for council house building to eliminate the cost (and rent) raising effects of high interest rates, local rates rebates for low income households. It is like the curate's egg, "good in parts".

In the midst of this confusion the T.U.C. General Council sits apparently benumbed, or becalmed. Yet it should be obvious what danger is involved in the stress placed by the Government on incomes policy as an adjunct to a deflationary, short-run, orthodox policy to meet the overseas payment crisis, that is as a (*real*) wage stop. For this increasingly jeopardises the basis (above all in mass support) for a progressive alliance on real income advance, planning, and the extension of social control. 1966 looks like being a testing year.

Trade Union Response: The Wherewithal

In one sense the British trade unions are significantly more powerful than a decade ago, and in a stronger position to serve the interests of their members. There has been a radical improvement in the state of union finances. One can measure this in various ways, and the latest published figures available do not show the full extent of the change, since there have been dramatic increases in the contribution rates of both big general unions since 1964 (N.U.G.M.W.) and 1965 (T.G.W.U.). The combined income of the trade unions was £23 million in 1956, £37 million in 1964 and will be over £40 million in 1966 (probably £42 million).³⁹ Trade Union reserve funds have risen to about £120 million, and have recently been increasing at about £5 million a year. Successive increases in contributions have now created some elbow room for rapid development of trade union services.⁴⁰

The same cannot be said for the T.U.C. whose affiliation income of little over half a million a year is only a little over 1 per cent of total union income. The increase in T.U.C. income in recent years is more apparent than real, since it has taken over a range of educational work previously financed by trade union contributions to the N.C.L.C. and W.E.T.U.C. Inadequate staffing, an inadequate range of services,

inadequate salary scales, and inadequate income are both cause and effect of inadequate influence and initiative. At present T.U.C. organization is woefully inadequate to meet the needs pressing upon it.

Slowly, all too slowly, the unions are improving the range of specialist services needed if they are to match the initiative of State and giant firms. The research effort of the unions is still largely derisory, but more adequate departments are being built up in some unions. Even now the unions spend on membership (and officer) training less than a tenth of the amount they put to reserve each year (yet would not ~~investment~~ investment yield more to them than property investment?); only one union could be said to have even a rudimentary system of full-time officer training under development." Although it has often been advocated there is as yet no central development fund to assist unions engaged in the (often) expensive process of pushing forward the frontier of unionism. And, last but not least, the strengthening of internal democracy in the unions—e.g. through delegate conferences of particular industries, or firms, and improved servicing (training, communications) at shop-floor level—has far to go.

Perspectives

At least, the giant stirs. There is more ferment in the trade unions, more change, more development, more discussion, and more experiment, than for many a long year. Inevitably, one falls back on Marx's illuminating phrases. The trouble with the trade unions, he argued, was that they were always dealing with effects, rather than with the *causes* of these effects. Clearly, this remains true in large measure, and particularly while union horizons are sectional, limited in time, and largely confined to the range of bargaining opportunities possible to structurally confused unions in an economy dominated by giant firms. Hence the importance of the issues that emerge, and can only be tackled, at national level, at the level of the initiative of the trade union *movement*, of state power, of the control over the economy. For here the unions can reach out to "causes", to a critique of the economy, to demands for new forms of social intervention, to collective control over our economic and social development. More than any other modern period, the 1960s have been pushing trade union action in these directions. Of course, the understanding of the economic system attained by some trade unionists and their leaders will be confused by the "false consciousness" of economic orthodoxy. But this is more likely to be the result of the short-comings of contemporary Socialist analysis than anything else.

Secondly, let us take Marx's characterization of the 10 Hours Act (a major step in factory legislation) as a "victory for the political economy of the working class". The emphasis here was on curbing, limiting, the exercise of capitalist managerial power, by establishing a statutory code enforced by publicly appointed inspectors. **Con-**

fronted by the insecurity stemming from the combination of capitalist markets and sweeping technical change, a radical extension of legislative checks on the autonomy of capitalist enterprise, and extension of the rights of working people is urgently needed.⁴² We have already noted the importance of extending social control over the exercise of monopoly power, and over pricing. We stand in need of a considerable extension of public sector influence over investment effort, its timing, location, and technical-economic efficiency.

Thirdly, argued Marx, the trade unions "must look carefully after the interests of the worst paid trades. . . . They must convince the world at large that their efforts, far from being narrow and selfish, aim at the emancipation of the down-trodden millions." In contemporary terms, we are back to the question of the recognition of social priorities in incomes policy. Townsend and Abel-Smith in their recent study of poverty in this country have demonstrated the widening extent of poverty in recent years. The position of millions of men and women on low wages is an urgent social problem, one which cannot be met by money wage militancy and the continuation of the inflationary process. Here again, the progressive use of state power is involved, but above all the definition of social priorities in the name of the trade union movement to direct and stimulate the use of that power. The advantage of advocacy of a progressive incomes policy is that it can put such issues in the centre of the picture instead of leaving them permanently unresolved.⁴³ The Socialist should be deeply interested when the wages issue becomes political, and when the whole pattern of income and wealth distribution is put at issue.

The trade unions, and Socialist pressure within them, should persistently aim at the further socialization and democratization of our system. Socialization has a number of aspects:

- (i) extension of public enterprise, and of the role of the public sector in influencing and controlling the behaviour of the private sector;
- (ii) extension of social need as the basis for demand (and therefore pattern of output and use of resources) in place of ability to pay based on the existing maldistribution of wealth;
- (iii) the introduction of social costs and benefits into the accounts and therefore, the economic calculations of firms (so that pursuit of profit does not maldistribute resources).⁴⁴

But without the extension of democratic participation in and control over economic institutions and decisions, such extensions of socialization are still incomplete. This has important implications for the internal democracy of trade unions. But let us look at crucial areas that need democratic development: (a) *plant*, and firm. Since the question of revision of company law is coming forward, at least "public companies" should be put under the same obligation to recognize unions, and to establish consultative arrangements (at *all*

levels), that nationalized industries are under. This is besides the extension of the information required from such companies. In the case of companies which are recognizably monopolies (or some of whose products are monopolies) further extensions of statutory powers are needed, including that of appointing public directors, and more extensive divulging of key information. Legislation should extend workplace rights dramatically, including not only the measures earlier advocated, but also "workers' inspectors" (as in the pits) in the safety field (to combat the rising trend of accidents).

(b) *Industry*. The present voluntary N.E.D.C.'s and the ad hoc Industrial Training Boards should be combined into statutory development councils based on amendment and strengthening of the 1948 Development Councils Act. (These councils under the Act were tripartite, i.e. including state nominees as well as trade union and industrialists, and had levy raising powers).

(c) *Regional*. We need the early development of regional development agencies, with considerable funds and powers of initiative, and based on representative democratic control.

So far, the trade unions have thought little about such a democratization of the planning and development process. For instance no one seemed interested in following up Harold Wilson's suggestion of the revival of plant based production committees. This idea might look slightly less old-fashioned if either regionally or industrially operational research units could be set up to be called in by plant production committees who wanted expert advice (and not necessarily the alleged expertise of the manager) as to potential re-organization and development of the plant.

But it is even more important to link this need for democratization to the reform of trade union structures. The limited progress that has so far been made towards re-organization has already been described. "Blue prints" for a future structure are an idle exercise. But some useful trends have appeared and can develop further. Internally, many unions (most large ones) are multi-occupational and/or multi-industrial in their membership coverage. What is needed is internal grouping of members into relevant industrial and/or occupational groups, as well as the historically well established pattern of district/regional committees. Some unions have proceeded on these lines, in others the development is negligible. For instance the T.G.W.U. has industrial groups (although the system needs further development),⁴⁴ but the N.U.G.M.W. has only seen embryonic development of such a sub-structure. Unions such as U.S.D.A.W., the Civil Service Clerical Association, and N.A.L.G.O., have developed varying systems of delegate meetings confined to the problems of a particular department or industry. Some unions have clearly developed craft or occupational sections; others (for instance, the Miners) have suffered from neglect of such occupational representation within their con-

stitutions. Really, what is needed is three way representation: regionally, industrially, occupationally (where this carries distinctive problems and needs).

The direction in which the established district/regional structure of trade unionism needs development is in connection with regional planning and development. At the moment this rests on regional meetings of full-time officers, with the exception of Scotland where historical accident has retained a regional T.U.C. (delegate conference). Probably what is needed is the development of regional T.U.C.s (delegate conferences), which should have some permanent and expert staffing, and a regional general council.

To say that industrial grouping of trade union members needs strengthening, and servicing specifically directed at problems of the industry with it, is to raise far-reaching questions. This emphasis clearly is associated with the use of "place of work" as the general basis for branch organization rather than *locality*.⁴⁵ Major unions such as the A.E.U. have yet to make this transition to a "place of work" basis (with its more direct linkage with shop stewards). But the main need that should be apparent is for closer links between unions in the same industry, and where possible the reduction in the number of unions operating in a specific industry. To some extent this can be achieved by further amalgamations (e.g. during the last seven years the number of unions in printing has been reduced from 16 to 7). To some extent it can be achieved by inter-union agreements as to "spheres of influence", and even some rationalization by transfers of groups of members (though this is difficult to take very far). To some extent, again, special arrangements can be made such as the one that enables the Power Workers Group to appear as a constituent element of both the T.G.W.U. and the Mineworkers.

But the main obstacle remains the number of large general unions organizing and overlapping in so many industries. It is difficult to judge whether the moment will ever come when the T.G.W.U., N.U.G.M.W., and A.E.U., might seriously consider amalgamation. If they did it would profoundly affect the future course of trade union development. But equally it could be an administrative nightmare, unless the subsequent organizational structure of the giant union that would result were rationally *planned*.⁴⁶

Short of such a sweeping change, what is needed is a further development of industrial joint-committees towards federations, and an extension of federation functions and services. For instance the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions operates minimal services on a vestigial budget, and has developed no adequate joint machinery for specific industries (e.g. motors) and barely impinges at plant level. This joint action of unions would be strengthened if the General Council of the T.U.C. were to devise a sub-structure of "sectoral" committees with their own specialist services. This would imply

the direct connection of the main Federations with the committee structure of the T.U.C.; hardly an impossible task. (At the moment the T.U.C. comes among the unions preaching closer unity, but itself having no appropriate linkages within its structure to the main Federations.)

Ten years' ago it would have been a brave man who would have forecast even such amalgamations, and widespread discussions on structure and closer unity, as have occurred. There is far more willingness to discuss structural change, and more flexibility, now. Thus the structural changes of recent years need not come to a halt with the main problems unresolved. Similarly, it would have been a bold man who five years ago had forecast how far, and in how many directions, British trade unions would find themselves involved in an extending process of planning in the mixed economy. Any analysis of the trade unions now must try to interpret them in process of change and development. As Hegel said somewhat pessimistically about this, "The owl of Minerva flies only at the dusk". But we have to try to get him airborne somewhat earlier in the day if we can. The more trade unionists succeed in understanding the direction that the change is taking, the more they may hope to control the process, and the future not only of the unions but of British society.

NOTES

1. This estimate of the proportion of salary earners corresponds closely to the proportion of "administrative, technical and clerical" workers in 1964 in manufacturing (24 per cent) calculated from a Ministry of Labour occupational analysis.
2. The omission of companies with smaller assets hardly affects the estimates, since such companies only account for 2 per cent of the total assets.
3. The Ministry of Labour figures somewhat exaggerate the number of workers in the U.K. who are in trade unions. 138,000 of the total are in branches outside the U.K. Besides, there is some duplication where workers are members of more than one union, and some retired workers maintain union membership.
4. Equal pay for women in administrative, professional, and technical grades, in the civil service, local government, and public utilities, was completed in 1961 (after a lengthy transition period). Organizational and policy questions concerning women workers are discussed at more length on pp. 7 to 10 of my Fabian pamphlet, *Change in the Trade Unions*.
5. For instance, the Union of Shop, Distributive, and Allied Workers, who have followed the "vertical" links of major distributive firms and extend into consumer goods manufacturing industries (e.g. chemicals, soap, milling, et~.).
6. "Occupational-sectoral" would be my coinage for this union; there are other important unions in this structural category, e.g. the Transport Salaried Staffs' Association.
7. Frustrated "industrial" in the sense of a union aspiring to organize all workers in a specific industry. Typically such a union remains largely confined to manual grades (e.g. the N.U.R.).

8. In printing ten unions successfully combined in negotiation of important long term agreements in 1959 and 1962. The Building Federation strengthened its organization in 1964 to provide for a central council with plenary powers meeting quarterly.
9. For instance, besides the T.G.W.U. and the N.U.G.M.W. which operate in all the following sectors, the Shop Workers operate in food, drink, and chemicals, the A.E.U. in engineering, the Public Employees in the local government and public service field.
10. e.g. The Chemical Workers' Union. In this case amalgamation with the N.U.G.M.W. on terms that would have created a chemical workers section with its own research staff within the N.U.G.M.W. was turned down by the annual conference of the Chemical Workers'.
11. For a negative attitude towards such joint initiative by shop stewards, combined with totally unjustified complacency as to the adequacy of "established arrangements", the 1960 T.U.C. Report on the subject is hard to beat (Paragraphs 56 to 64).
12. It has reported in obscure terms to Congress, and called together unions in sectors where joint arrangements are inadequate. But merely advancing arguments for amalgamation (and "larger unions") *per se* does little to overcome the *major* structural problems of the movement. Was a process of "tidying up", particularly by finding suitable unions to absorb smaller brethren, all that the General Council could agree on?
13. See for instance V. Allen on "Trade Unions in Contemporary Capitalism" in *Socialist Register*, 1964, especially p. 173.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 173.
15. According to the D.A.T.A. evidence to the Royal Commission "complete or partial victory" is achieved in about 90 per cent of all its strikes; this evidence is being published as a booklet by the union and should be read by all students of trade union affairs.
16. A.S.S.E.T membership end-1959, 21,500; end-1964 35,600.
17. On this, again, see D.A.T.A.'s evidence to the Royal Commission. D.A.T.A. carries out a detailed wage census of its members each year, involving over 50,000 returns, and also records and tabulates at head office conditions in 4,000 offices in which it has members. The effectiveness of such material in bargaining about wage relativities does not need emphasis.
18. A.S.S.E.T., D.A.T.A., Scientific Workers, Cinematograph Technicians, and Technical Civil Servants (mainly civil service draughtsmen); see their "Declaration of Dissent", etc. Their opposition is couched in terms of "left" demands for more effective planning, re-distribution of wealth, reduction in military spending. But it is also, obviously, a result of the importance of "money wage militancy" in their industrial bargaining and membership recruitment appeal (*cf.* A.S.S.E.T.).
19. The Post Office Engineering Union reaffiliated to the Labour Party in 1965; its first contribution to L.P. Conference debate was advocacy of the extension of post office telecommunications activities to the actual manufacture of equipment (*i.e.* an extension of public ownership).
20. And also for a general improvement in the degree of unionization. It should not be forgotten that the public sector by providing for recognition of trade unions, and adequate consultative and bargaining provision, for all types of workers—"staff and managerial as well as manual—creates exceptionally favourable opportunities for unionisation of administrative and technical grades. Even without use of the "closed shop" the proportion of employees unionised has been raised to 80 per cent or even 90 per cent.

21. Take for instance N.A.L.G.O.'s "Accolade for Enterprise" competition for the best example of enterprise by a public authority, open to all public services in which the union has members.
22. It begins to look as if the Labour Government sees its "early warning" system quite as much as a device for further lengthening the time interval between wage settlements (or their implementation), as for developing a novel (for Britain) system of price scrutiny.
23. By the end of 1963 the Ministry of Labour estimate was that 2½ million workers were covered by long term agreements. No subsequent official estimate has been made. But since then engineering has become subject to long term agreement, and so have many other industries including cotton, silk, textile dyeing and finishing, building (Scotland), tobacco, matches, glass containers, etc.
24. These minimum levels rise at six monthly intervals. From 1st January 1968 the new minimum earnings levels will become the new national minimum time-rates (eliminating district differentials), and a new minimum piece-work standard 15 per cent above the new time rates will operate. At this point it seems that a sharp increase in wage costs in engineering will be suddenly injected. No provision is made during the agreement for smaller "earnings guarantee" increases to workers only slightly above the guarantee level. Unless it is then renegotiated, at 1 January 1968 an "earnings guarantee" higher than the minimum time rate will cease to exist. It all appears clumsily handled. Did the negotiators even have wage census information to judge how many workers would be affected by the "earnings guarantee"? And has the scale of the sudden jump in wage costs at the beginning of 1968 been calculated?
25. This is obviously true of Confederation bargaining. In 1962 a ballot of members of C.S.E.U. unions failed to produce a majority in favour of backing a claim by an official strike threat.
26. The extreme example of lack of protection is the engineering agreement (1965 to 1968). Only a 5 point rise in the Retail Price Index sustained for three months *within the calendar year* releases the unions from the restriction on pursuing a general claim before 1968.
27. Prices and Incomes Board Report No. 2, p 18. Consider the following gems: "If . . . earnings continue to be related to rising living costs, then the cost of living will never be stabilized. We interpret . . . the White Paper on Prices and Incomes as meaning that it is . . . desirable to lessen the relationship between earnings and the cost of living. We recommend for the next wage negotiations . . . elimination" (of the cost of living bonus). Yet in their third report (on Bread and Flour) the Board, noting increasing costs falling on bakers due to tax changes, argued "the industry would be justified in seeking to recover these increases from the consumer" (3rd Report, p. 15). What even handed justice!
28. For instance, long term agreements in building made more widely possible the offer of fixed prices contracts.
29. In 1964 I wrote (in "Change in the Trade Unions"), "The Conservative government expects higher prices, creates them (e.g. through the 1964 Budget), and yet expects trade unions both to keep the rate of money wage and salary increases low and to enter long-term agreements without any security as to the purchasing power of the pay". I mistakenly thought then that a future Labour government might provide a contrast.
30. This is, at any rate, the first agreement providing staff status for all manual workers. Previously, the technique had been used by individual firms in relation to certain types of skilled workers.
31. An example may show the motives at work. In April 1962 many workers

were declared redundant by Rolls Royce at Derby, with short notice and very limited severance pay. The dismissals made the staff unions affected conscious of the need to provide negotiated protection. The firm itself became willing to enter into a comprehensive agreement—doubtless because it did not want a sense of insecurity to lead to a high wastage rate among its technicians, etc. The agreement, which covers inter alia preliminary action (including stopping recruitment, sub-contracting, and overtime), selection, general and individual warning, assistance during unemployment (including removal allowances), appeals, and retraining, is printed in the May 1964 issue of *The Draughtsman*.

32. Written evidence of the Ministry of Labour to the Royal Commission on Trade Unions, p. 77.
33. The advantage D.A.T.A. gains is both a levelling up of conditions in the more backward offices, and the ability to use the Terms and Conditions of Employment Act 1959 to bring any recalcitrant employers up to the wages and conditions established in each industry through industry-wide bargaining.
34. An outstanding example is the refusal of the government to accept the repeated proposals of the General Council for "a full-scale inquiry into industrial and financial concentration". How an allegedly reforming Labour government can resist the logic of the case for such an inquiry is difficult to understand. In reality it would be the counterpart of the Royal Commission investigation into Trade Unions. Yet the General Council do not appear to have pressed their demands beyond contact with the President of the Board of Trade nor have they stimulated the unions to campaign for this key demand.
35. See paragraphs 320–322 of the General Council's Report to the 1965 T.U.C. The negative and indeed reactionary behaviour of the Minister of Health is startling. But why was this not publicized?
36. "Free men in a free society" was the rhetoric that Clive Jenkins used when speaking at the 1965 T.U.C. against incomes policy. The "left" opposition may argue that "business unionism" is not what they intend. But Rowthorne (Incomes Policy, *New Left Review*, December 1965) for instance succeeds only in constant repetition of the word "militancy". If this *is* "left" criticism of incomes policy, the onus is surely upon him, and similar critics, to explain (which he does not) what is the bridge between (undefined) "militancy" and a socialist political and industrial perspective for our generation. All that is clear is that he repudiates (without **analysing**) the perspective developed for instance by Ken Alexander and myself in, successively, *A Socialist Wages Plan* (New Left, 1959) and *Plan for Incomes* (Fabian 1965). He also apparently (N.L.R., p. 10) opposes the creation of industrial unions. All we are told, finally, is that it is "the real task of the British working class to mount an aggressive counter-attack and place the historical responsibility for the crisis firmly where it belongs". But against whom, how, and with what objectives?
37. Retail prices rose 5 per cent during 1965. I calculate that from mid-1964 to mid-1965 the purchasing power of average earnings as a result of rising prices and higher taxes fell about 1 per cent. Over that period a 3½ per cent increase in money earnings would have represented a 3f per cent **fall** in real disposable income!
38. But the approach to monopoly investigation is still grossly inadequate and haphazard. On the current legislation there must be many monopoly situations that will never be investigated in this century.
39. These figures relate to "registered" trade unions only. There were, besides, nearly one and a half million members in unregistered trade unions (such

as the National Union of Teachers) with an income of perhaps £4 million a year by 1964.

40. The big increase in contributions has been accompanied by a substantial improvement in union benefits and their range. The reasoning seems to be that the more valuable benefits are, the more members will be induced to remain "in compliance". Very high rates of membership turnover trouble all these unions (e.g. U.S.D.A.W. has to recruit 100,000 members a year to maintain its membership of just over 350,000).
41. Rather than name the union, I prefer to suggest that readers should find out whether it happens to be theirs; the enquiries might stir some interest in the subject.
42. It is little short of ludicrous to have responsibility and restraint, participation in planning and concern for the national economy, preached to workers many of whom still lack elementary rights of trade union recognition, and far more any rights of consultation over redundancy, or independent appeal on dismissal.
43. Throughout the post war years the agricultural labourer has only had two-thirds of the hourly earnings of the average worker in manufacturing, and his "normal" and actual working week has been some four hours longer. The Wage Council system here and elsewhere has not been protecting workers in a weak bargaining position.
44. The Metals and Engineering group has over a quarter of a million members. So has the General Workers Group which takes under its wing members in food manufacturing, paint, breweries, rubber, clay, cement, soap, etc.
45. Or grouping of places of work into an "industrial" branch, e.g. "private trade" branches in U.S.D.A.W.
46. This implies clear industrial groupings with specialist servicing, industrial conferences, and considerable executive autonomy at industry level.