INFORMAL TRADE UNIONISM:
A STUDY OF UNOFFICIAL STRIKE ACTION AND WORKPLACE REPRESENTATION WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE BRITISH EXPERIENCE BETWEEN 1940 AND 1969

by

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ABSTRACT

The overwhelming majority of all strikes that have taken place in recent years in Britain have been unofficial in the sense that they have not been formally and publicly endorsed by a union executive. Unofficial strikes have come to occupy a special place on the agenda of British political debate. This study argues that unofficial strikes in the recent British experience can best be understood by reference to a general theory of strike action with particular attention paid to the specific pattern of contemporary British industrial relations. The study offers a general perspective for the analysis of strike action in capitalist society. Strike action is seen as being implicit in the free market transaction entered into by employers and workers. The study critically reviews certain current sociological theories of strikes which lay emphasis on such factors as the importance of good communications, the nature of the industrial environment or the influence of technology on workplace relations.

Unofficial strike action is analysed as one technique of informal trade unionism. The latter term refers to those unofficial patterns which wage and salary earners develop to pursue collective action directly at their place of work in order to protect and improve the conditions of their working lives. The study briefly reviews earlier movements in the history of British trade unionism which display similar characteristics. The main emphasis of the thesis is on the period 1940 to 1969.

Two distinct systems of industrial relations are found to operate in Britain during those years. One is the formal system embodied in written agreements negotiated at the national level between permanent and continuous trade union organisations and groups of employers usually organised into associations. The other is the informal system that is actually found to operate at the place of work involving localized bargaining between managers and workplace representatives. The thesis is concerned with selected aspects of this informal system. An appreciation of the significance of unofficial strike action in the period 1940 to 1969 is gained by looking at the trend of strikes over a longer period. The study identifies prominent strike trends over the period since 1911, the first year in which government statistics on strikes were published. Workplace representation made considerable gains after 1940 and came to occupy an important role in the operation of informal trade unionism. Significant features of workplace representation such as the meaning of workplace democracy are discussed.

One of the reasons for focussing on the period since 1940 is because that year marked the beginning of a virtually continuous period of full employment. The study examines the conditions which gave rise to the development of local informal bargaining. Unofficial strikes offer one of the more interesting aspects of informal trade unionism. They have also begun to preoccupy employers and successive government administrations. The study traces the background factors that help to explain this concern. Government attempts to implement incomes policy

and anti-strike legislation are reviewed. The study concludes with an assessment of the limitations and possibilities of informal trade unionism in a hostile political environment.

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THIS STUDY IS DEDICATED
TO THOSE TEACHERS AND STUDENTS WHO TOOK STRIKE
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Economic Environment: 1940-1969

The year 1940 marked the beginning of a general change in the economic environment in which British trade unionism operated. Before 1940, with the exception of the period around the First World War, unemployment was regarded as perfectly normal. The period since 1940 saw a marked change. One of the prominent characteristics of economic life that so clearly distinguishes the post-1940 era from earlier periods has been the declared committment of post-war British governments to a policy of maintaining a certain level of so-called "full employment."

The need to maintain the wartime experience of full employment gained increasing recognition as the Second World War drew to a close. William H. Beveridge published his report, entitled *Full Employment in a Free Society* in 1944 as a sequel to his earlier official wartime research on social insurance.[1] Another report to appear at about the same time was a volume prepared by members of the Oxford Institute of Statistics under the title *The Economics of Full Employment*.[2] The same year also saw the appearance of a White Paper on employment policy which proposed that post-war governments commit themselves to the maintenance of a "high and stable level of employment."[3]

For the purposes of his report Beveridge defined "full employment" as a situation where there would always be "more vacant jobs than

unemployed men, not slightly fewer jobs." Furthermore "full employment" would mean that the jobs "are at fair wages, of such a kind, and so located that the unemployed men can reasonably be expected to take them; it means, by consequence, that the normal lag between losing one job and finding another will be very short."[4] The concept of full employment advanced by Beveridge has never been realised at the same time in all regions of Britain.[5] During the post-war period some sectors of the economy have definitely experienced a labour shortage. But the same period has witnessed the persistence of structural unemployment in certain areas. The official handbook published by the Central Office of Information outlines the overall picture as follows:

> The general unemployment rate in Britain as a whole in the last 20 years has been among the lowest in the world--usually between 1 and 2 per cent--but has been somewhat higher since 1966. It has been particularly low in the south-east and Midlands of England, and consistently higher in those parts of the country which have the greatest dependence on shipbuilding, coal-mining, and certain branches of the heavy engineering and metal manufacturing industries, notably parts of Scotland and Wales, and north-east England and Merseyside.[6]

The extent of regional variation has been considerable. In July 1968 the general unemployment rate in Great Britain was 2.2 per cent. The rate for northern England was 4.4 per cent; Wales had a rate of 3.6 per cent and Scotland had a rate of 3.7 per cent. Thus unemployment has by no means disappeared. But it is fair to say that over the years covered by this study, unemployment has not been generally perceived as the central social problem as was the case in the pre-war period.

The significance of conditions of near full employment for the

operation of trade unionism has been widely acknowledged. Eric Wigham, for instance, argues that ever since 1945 trade unions were "struggling unhappily with problems arising out of full employment."[7] According to Wigham, one such recurring problem was the high incidence of unofficial strikes.

Unofficial Strikes: Why the Interest?

The interest in unofficial strikes in the recent British experience is not entirely original. Around the mid-fifties unofficial strikes became a favourite pre-occupation of the mass media. More recently we may trace the concern over unofficial strikes expressed by leading spokesmen of industry and government. A few examples will help to provide some introduction to the social and political context in which unofficial strikes have occurred in the more recent period.

The term "unofficial strike" will be used in the following pages to refer to _a collective stoppage of work undertaken to bring pressure on employers that is not formally and publicly endorsed by a union executive_. Although it is impossible to assess with any exactitude, all indications appear to suggest that the majority of strikes in Britain have always been unofficial. Figures are available for the more recent period. The _Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations_ reported in 1968 that Ministry of Labour figures for the period 1964-1966 show that over 95 per cent of all recorded strikes in Britain were unofficial by the above definition.[8] There is no reason to believe that the period 1964-1966 was exceptional in any way. Furthermore, the percentage quoted

probably underestimates the actual percentage of unofficial strikes since many strikes of short duration which also happen to be unofficial probably escape the net of government statistics.

The British Trades Union Congress (TUC) has traditionally tended to be rather defensive over the question of strikes. For example, in summing up the developments of the previous year, the TUC General Council's Report for 1960 expressed some concern over the news coverage accorded to strikes.

> The year 1959 was given a particularly bad reputation. A general impression was created by the Press mainly, but also by radio and television that it was a year of strikes on an unprecedented scale.[9]

During 1959 the General Council had conducted a review of strikes that took place in 1958 and 1959. Unofficial strikes were a central interest. The General Council acknowledged that unofficial strikes did often pose a problem for the official trade union leadership. The Council summed up as follows:

> In about half the cases reported to the General Council where strikes began without official sanction, the unions paid dispute benefit.
>
> The other half were less spontaneous and included instances where strike action was taken or prolonged contrary to general policy and specific advice.[10]

The General Council made a proposal for dealing with unofficial strikers of the second sort. Unions were urged to take some form of disciplinary action against members who struck. The sanction of expulsion was specifically mentioned.

Despite the apparent concern over unofficial strikes expressed by

politicians, newspaper editors and more than a few labour relations specialists there were surprisingly few attempts to observe and analyze in any detail actual instances of unofficial stoppages during the early sixties.[11] In 1964 the TUC and the British Employers' Conference agreed to an experimental scheme whereby each side would nominate an investigator to jointly examine twelve strikes: six strikes being nominated by each organisation.[12] The investigation was intended to cover strikes which took place in breach of agreed procedure or where there was no such procedure, at little or no notice. No investigation was to take place until after the dispute had been resolved.

Some discussion of the need to establish a Royal Commission on trade unions had taken place in the late fifties.[13] The last Royal Commission had been appointed back in 1903 with the task of reporting on the relationship of the law to strikes and trade unions.[14] In early 1965 the Labour government appointed a Royal Commission "to consider relations between management and employees and the role of trade unions and employers' associations in promoting the interest of their members and in accelerating the social and economic advance of the nation, with particular reference to the law affecting the activities of these bodies; and to report."[15]

Unofficial strike action provided one of the main subjects which occupied the attention of those giving evidence to the Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations. Evidence on the subject of unofficial strikes was collected over a period during which a succession of proposals and counter proposals for the elimination or containment of

unofficial strike action were given considerable publicity. The advocates of certain proposals made no pretense at concealing their class bias. For instance, the Economist volunteered the following suggestion: "Another weapon against unofficial strikes is that, quite bluntly, blacklegging must become respectable again."[16]

While the Royal Commission proceeded to collect evidence, members of the government continued to stress the harmful effects of unofficial strikes. For instance, early in September of 1965 Prime Minister Harold Wilson called a much publicised meeting of leaders of both sides of the automobile industry to discuss unofficial strikes.[17] The discussions between both sides of the automobile industry led to the decision to establish a mobile fact-finding committee which could investigate any particular strike. The committee, which came to be referred to as the Joint Labour Council, was given authority to visit any place of employment, if necessary before the outbreak of a strike. One of the underlying assumptions behind the proposal was the notion that the committee could itself avert unofficial strikes by uncovering particular areas of information or by helping management, unions or workers to better understand one another.[18] Meanwhile, the campaign against unofficial strikers was given further support on September 19, 1965, when the Prime Minister publicly referred to unofficial strikers as "wreckers" who threatened the industrial well-being of the entire economy.[19]

The final Report of the Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Association appeared in 1968 after three years of deliberations. To the surprise of many commentators and to the acute

dissatisfaction of the Press, the Commission, under the chairmanship of Lord Donovan, failed to recommend explicit anti-strike legislation. It did, however, make several proposals relating to unofficial strikes. Interestingly enough the Report made the recommendation to change the law so as to deny in legal terms what the present thesis attempts to argue sociologically. The Report recommended that the definition of trade unions should be altered to exclude "temporary combinations"[20] of workers and that only registered trade unions should come under the scope of laws which protect combination, including the immunity of strikers from suits for damages brought by employers. The present thesis attempts to show that sociologically "temporary combinations" of workers can and do fulfil the function of trade unionism.

The title to the study offers some indication of the central argument to be developed. The unofficial strike movement that has characterised the post-1940 period is described as the operation of informal trade unionism. The latter term is used to depict _those patterns by which wage and salary earners actually pursue collective action directly at their place of work in order to protect and improve the conditions of their working lives_. The term "informal" is used in the sense employed by the Royal Commission Report to refer to _the predominance of unwritten understanding and of custom and practice in workplace bargaining._[21]

A Framework for the Analysis of Strike Action

In this chapter a theoretical approach is proposed for the analysis

of strike action. The term "strike action" as used in the following pages refers to any collective stoppage of work that is undertaken to bring pressure on the buyers of labour power.[22] The term labour power is understood in the sense employed by Karl Marx to mean capacity for labour.[23]

The analysis of strike action will be extended in the course of the main body of the thesis which pays particular attention to unofficial strikes in the British experience between 1940 and 1969. It is argued that the seemingly intractable nature of strike action, whether official or unofficial, can best be explained in terms of the structural relationship between employees (or more simply, workers) and employers. The more important features of that relationship will be briefly summarized.

By workers is meant all those who depend on the sale of their labour power as the major source for their livelihood. This definition may be applied to all employees, regardless of whether they receive a wage or a salary; whether they are unskilled or skilled or whether they perform productive or non-productive labour. Regardless of what any individual worker feels his or her class position to be, all workers, so defined, occupy a similar class position, as members of the working class. For instance, David Lockwood has pointed to the two most salient characteristics defining the class position of clerks.

> In the case of the clerk the common characteristics in terms of which he may be said to share the same class position as the manual wage earner are two-fold. First, that he is divorced from the ownership and control of the means of production. Secondly, as a consequence, he is obliged to sell his labour-power in order to make a livelihood. He is, like the manual worker, propertyless, contractual labour; in Marxian terminology, 'proletarian'.[24]

The above analysis is not intended to deny that significant differences may tend to separate different groups of workers. Different workers do occupy very different market situations. Incomes, conditions of work and the extent of job security vary considerably. But the essential similarity, in structural terms, is still present. Workers sell their ability to perform human labour in an essentially competitive labour market.

By employers is meant those involved in the purchase of labour power regardless of whether this task is carried on by owners of capital or their functionaries. Generally speaking employers are found to occupy an advantageous position in their relationship with workers. This market superiority was noted by classical British political economists who studied the emergence of industrial capitalism. In The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 Marx draws heavily upon the words of Adam Smith in describing the essential relationship between owners of capital and workers.

> Wages are determined through the antagonistic struggle between capitalist and worker. Victory goes necessarily to the capitalist. The capitalist can live longer without the worker than can the worker without the capitalist. Combination among the capitalists is customary and effective; workers' combination is prohibited and painful in its consequences for them. Besides, the landowner and the capitalist can augment their revenues with the fruits of industry; the worker has neither ground rent nor interest on capital to supplement his industrial income. Hence the intensity of the competition among the workers.[25]

It is true that certain factors may have gone some way towards redressing the imbalance of market forces. The growth of trade unionism signifies an obvious example of such an advance. But the primary economic determinants of the market transaction between employers and workers remains essentially unchanged. The same basic determinants are described by V. L. Allen in a contemporary work:

> The primary determinants stipulate that employees are engaged in a market transaction with employers over the price of labour power and the conditions of its sale. This price covers wages or salaries and any fringe benefits which have a bearing on determining the outcome of the sale. Because employees in the main have to sell their labour power in order to subsist, the price to them is an essential subsistence matter to be preserved at all cost and pushed up if possible. Employers, on the other hand, regard the price of labour power as a cost matter which, because it is a determinant of profits, must as far as possible be kept down. Because of these two conflicting pressures there can never be a permanent agreement over the price.[26]

The strike is one aspect of the market transaction governing the relationship between employer or employers and workers. There is always the possibility that the transaction will not be completed. The occurrence of a strike does not signify any breakdown in the market process. It is the very operation of that process. This point has been made by Robert Dubin: "It is common in the press to characterize a strike as a breakdown in collective bargaining. However, on closer analysis it will be found to be a continuation of collective bargaining."[27] Factors other than economic ones will affect the outcome of the market transaction between employers and workers. In addition to the primary economic determinants it is necessary to consider such secondary determinants as the subjective willingness on the part of workers to pursue certain objectives. Workers and unions are subject to the constant effects of socialization.

From the above analysis it is evident that workers stand to benefit by organizing collectively. This fact appears to have been widely recognised. Trade unionism has emerged in one form or another in every society where a free labour market has been found to operate. The

phenomenon of trade unionism appears to have transcended all manner of barriers such as sex, culture and occupation. The classic definition of trade unionism is generally considered to be that of Sidney and Beatrice Webb who defined it in 1894 in their _History of Trade Unionism_ as _the collective act by wage-earners of protecting and improving the conditions of their working lives._[28] The Webbs referred specifically to wage-earners but there is no reason for not analyzing collective action by salaried non-manual workers as trade unionism.

Historically trade union organisation as it is now known has not always been necessary in order for workers to take strike action. The present study notes how most strikers in the recent British experience have been members of trade unions, although the strikes themselves need not be a product of formal organisation.

Collective bargaining has tended to focus first and foremost on wages with questions pertaining to hours and conditions of work tending to take second place. The amount of the pay packet has tended to remain paramount in institutionalized trade union negotiations. Nevertheless there is no necessary reason why this should always be the case. It should be noted that the Webbs' definition of trade unionism need not exclude the possibility that even the primary focus of collective bargaining could focus on non-wage issues.

It is, of course, true that traditionally most union-management agreements have generally acknowledged the employer's "right to manage." For instance the agreement between the Engineering Employers' Federation and the Trade Unions covering procedure for Manual Workers begins with

the following statement: "The Employers have the right to manage their establishment and the Trade Unions have the right to exercise their functions."[29] However, in the British strike experience there are indications that issues that do not directly pertain to wage questions have featured as an increasingly important factor. These trends are explored more thoroughly in Chapter Four.

Workers' demands that relate to either the price to be paid for the use of their labour-power or the conditions under which it is to be used may be analysed in terms of the Marxist theory of alienation. Although there have been numerous descriptive studies of workers at work the problem of alienation at the point of production can scarcely be said to have preoccupied industrial sociologists.[30] This neglect continues to stand in sharp contrast to the widespread interest in applying various interpretations of the concept of alienation in such fields as literature, social psychology and philosophy. Here, as in sociology all sorts of psychologistic misunderstandings have had the effect of removing most of the meaning from the original Marxian concept.[31] A brief review of the major hypotheses that make up Marx's theory of alienation is therefore in order.

Marx provides the elements for an analysis of alienated labour in a brief section of The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 that is both incomplete and without title. He begins by recapitulating the main principles of classical English political economy with respect to an analysis of wages, profit and rent. In Marx's view the failure of political economy lies in its inability to explain the most basic

economic phenomena. "Political economy starts with the fact of private property, but it does not explain it to us."[32] The greater part of Marx's subsequent intellectual output can be seen as an attempt to correct this deficiency. In the 1844 Manuscripts Marx takes up, among other things, the question of the nature of work in capitalist society. The experience of work is explained in terms of the theory of alienation. The key to understanding the alienation of the labourer or, more generally, the estrangement of labour is to be found at the point of production. On this point Marx's criticism of the political economy of his day remains as valid as ever when applied to the modern disciplines of economics or industrial sociology. "Political economy conceals the estrangement inherent in the nature of labor by not considering the direct relationship between the worker (labor) and production."[33] The latter relationship is examined in terms of capitalist relations of production. Marx firmly rejects any attempt to explain social phenomena in terms of what he calls some "fictitious primordial condition."[34] Rather the analysis must start "from an economic fact of the present."[35]

Marx proceeds to identify three major aspects of alienation, each of which stems directly from the relationship of the worker to production. The first aspect concerns the worker's relationship to the products of his labour.

> The product of labor is labor which has been embodied in an object, which has become material: it is the objectification of labor. . . . The alienation of the worker in his product means not only that his labor becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists outside him, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own confronting him.[36]

The second aspect of alienation refers to the alienation of the worker from his work. Here Marx examines the work process.

> First, the fact that labour is _external_ to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his essential being; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He is at home when he is not working, and when he is working he is not at home. His labour is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is _forced labour_. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a _means_ to satisfy needs external to it.[37]

Marx describes the third aspect of alienation as the process whereby "estranged labor estranges the _species_ from man. It changes for him the _life of the_ species into a means of individual life."[38] This aspect of alienated labour can best be understood by recognising the fundamental distinction between human and non-humans. Marx follows Hegel by recognising the uniqueness of humans in so much as they engage in "conscious life activity"[39] which involves material production of a universal nature, transcending all manner of immediate physical needs. Under conditions of wage labour, work ceases to be a means of self-expression, or of "conscious life activity." Rather it becomes a means to attain a certain goal. The goal is to get money to satisfy basic human needs.

Strike action constitutes one aspect of the bargaining process that generally follows the presentation of a set of demands. The precise circumstances which influence the nature of workers' demands vary. For instance, the state of trade union activity will usually prove important. This point is made by André Gorz when he analyzes wage demands in terms

of the theory of alienation.

> Wage demands are more often motivated by a revolt against the workers' condition itself than by a revolt against the rate of economic exploitation of labor power. These demands translate the desire to be paid as much as possible for the time being lost, the life being wasted, the liberty being alienated in working in such conditions; to be paid as much as possible not because the workers value wages (money and all it can buy) above everything else, but because, at the present stage of union activity, only the price of labor power may be disputed with management, but not control over the conditions and nature of work.[40]

The relationship between employers and workers has been viewed from two perspectives. First, we examined the primary economic determinant of the market transaction that occurs over the price of labour power and the conditions of its sale. Conflict may arise over the price to be paid or the conditions of sale, or, as most often happens, both. This conflict is sometimes viewed as a conflict over the distribution of the proceeds of the economic enterprise. Second, we looked at the nature of the social relationship that the worker enters, regardless of the arrangements made with respect to the conditions for the sale of his labour power. Here we considered Marx's theory of alienation which offers an account of why work performed for a wage or a salary under a certain specific form of social and economic organisation tends to be profoundly unsatisfying. Conflict may also show itself in the form of a revolt against the condition of the worker's life at the place of work.

The Questions to be Answered

The main questions which we shall discuss in the thesis may now be outlined. It is convenient to summarise matters in the order that

they are taken up in the study. We shall primarily be concerned with the British experience, partly because trade unionism in that country had both better opportunities and a longer period in which to develop, than any other industrialised country and partly because unofficial strike action has become such a characteristic aspect of the industrial relations pattern in that country during the period under review.

Any study of strike action needs to consider the basic question: Why do strikes occur? The outlines for a theory of strike action have already been proposed. But since the interpretation of industrial conflict proves so crucial it is helpful to consider some of the counter-theories which are to be found in the literature on strike action. Three theories of strikes are reviewed in Chapter Two. The first theory is associated with the "human relations" or "communications" approach to management-worker relations pioneered by the famous Harvard research studies conducted between the two world wars. A good example of the human relations approach is to be found in a short monograph on the war-time unofficial strikes written by Jerome F. Scott and George C. Homans.[41] The second theory considered rejects the human relations or communications approach to explaining industrial conflict. In their international comparison of strike patterns Clark Kerr and Abraham Siegel[42] find that the human relations approach is unable to explain why workers in different industries show a markedly different propensity to strike. The two authors advance two major hypotheses to help explain the varying propensity to strike of different industries. The first hypothesis concerns the socio-cultural environment in which the worker lives. The

second hypothesis concerns the nature of the work that the worker performs. The validity of these hypotheses is examined in Chapter Two with particular reference to the British strike experience. The third theory of strike action examined is derived from attempts by industrial sociologists to link the state of industrial relations to the kind of technology utilized in the work situation. Some writers have argued that the technological setting in which work is performed can influence the willingness of workers to take strike action.

Certain proposals for developing a sociological approach to the understanding of unofficial action are advanced in Chapter Three. It is argued that unofficial strike action can be better understood if account is taken of the part played by unofficial movements in the history of trade unionism. Examples of earlier movements in the British experience are discussed with particular attention being paid to noting those features which may be common to most unofficial movements. In the examples chosen unofficial action is viewed both historically and sociologically as part of a social movement. In some instances the movement constituted the essence of trade unionism; in other instances unofficial movements appeared to want to transcend the limitations of what is commonly understood to be trade unionism. The meaning of unofficial action in the modern experience is examined in the light of this discussion of earlier movements. Contemporary discussions of the definition of unofficial action are reviewed. It is argued that insofar as the study is concerned with an analysis of strike action the distinction between official and unofficial action is not crucial. However, the

distinction does retain some importance for the overall study. For example, with respect to unofficial strikes it is necessary to ask the question: Why do most strikes take place without being publicly endorsed by a union executive?

Unofficial strike action in the more recent British experience also needs to be understood in the context of wider strike trends which have developed over a considerable historical period. Three themes of British strike movements since 1911, the first year for which reliable strike statistics were collected, are examined in Chapter Four. The first theme concerns the changing nature of strike action. We examine whether, according to official statistics, there have been any noticeable shifts in the figures measuring the average duration of strikes, the incidence of strikes and the total number of workers involved in strikes. The second theme concerns the changing importance of unofficial action. The third theme concerns the sort of demands that strikers have been raising. We look to see whether there appear to have been any discernible shifts in the central issues at stake in the bargaining process.

Studies in both the United States and England have shown how, for a variety of reasons, bureaucratized formal trade union procedures often tend to lose much of their relevance to rank-and-file workers.[43] In many instances workers' horizons of trade unionism do not appear to extend much beyond the situation at the workplace. In their study Goldthorpe, Lockwood, Bechhofer and Platt note how workers in Luton, England, appeared to develop what the authors term as "instrumental" attitudes towards trade unionism. Goldthorpe and his associates record such

comments as the following:

> The shop steward's election is with regard to the man on the shop floor--you like to know who's doing your business. Unions have got so big that they're no longer in touch with the shop floor at all. At the branch they haven't got their finger on the pulse.[44]

This attitude towards trade unionism reflects the actual state of affairs whereby two distinct levels of industrial relations can be seen to operate in contemporary Britain. Any overall account of contemporary British trade unionism would need to take account of both levels. One of the most important recent contributions to the literature on British industrial relations is the published work of the *Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations*. The final report, published in 1968, drew attention to what it described as "two systems of industrial relations":

> The one is the formal system embodied in the official institutions. The other is the informal system created by the actual behaviour of trade unions and employers' associations, of managers, shop stewards and workers.[45]

Chapter Five examines this informal system as it has developed in the British experience since 1940. The informal system of industrial relations cannot be understood without some reference to the growth of workplace representation. Throughout the study the term "shop steward" refers to *any workplace representative whose representative function involves acting on behalf of, and being directly accountable to a specific group of workers*. The operation of workplace representation is described. The meaning and significance of the striving for democratic

shop-floor trade unionism is considered. At the end of Chapter Five we return to a theme raised earlier in the present chapter concerning the impact of conditions of near full employment on workers' bargaining strength. The study considers the relationship between workplace bargaining and the phenomenon known as "wage drift." The purpose of this brief excursus into the field of wage theory is to demonstrate that in many instances significant gains have been won by means of militant informal bargaining at the place of work.

We have already noted how from the late 1950's employers, Government and the Press expressed increasing concern over the incidence of unofficial strikes in British industrial relations. Some of the factors which help to account for this campaign against unofficial strikes are discussed in Chapter Six. The actual amount of production lost as a result of the strikes would not appear to provide a sufficient explanation. It is argued that the campaign against unofficial strikes can be better understood as part of a wider offensive launched by employers and aided by the State to shift the balance of economic forces away from labour. The attempt to implement an incomes policy provides the most obvious illustration of this strategy. However, the continued operation of informal trade unionism has proved to be a major obstacle to the success of any policy of wage control. It is with such a background that some of the more recent attempts to restrict unofficial strike action are recorded up to the end of 1969.

The concluding chapter offers an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of British informal trade unionism with particular reference

to the late 1960s. The thesis, having discussed the spontaneous nature of much unofficial strike action which may, or may not, find expression through existing informal organisation, attempts to provide some indication as to whether unofficial strike action serves to reinforce or transcend the consciousness that is normally associated with membership in continuous and formal trade union organisations.

FOOTNOTES

[1]William H. Beveridge, Full Employment in a Free Society (London: Allen and Unwin, 1944). This work was intended as a sequel to his Report on Social Insurance and Allied Services which was presented to the government in November of 1942.

[2]Institute of Statistics, The Economics of Full Employment (Oxford: Blackwell, 1944), cited by Beveridge, Full Employment, p. 15.

[3]Forward to White Paper Cmd. 6527, London, H.M.S.O., 1944, cited by Nicholas Davenport in "The Split Society - 2," The Spectator, 15 November 1963, p. 621.

[4]Beveridge, Full Employment, p. 18.

[5]Throughout the study the term Britain refers to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. This usage is the one adopted by the Central Office of Information in the publication Britain: An Official Handbook, London: HMSO, 1969. Care should be taken to note whether statistics cited in the thesis refer to England, to England and Wales (officially considered together for many administrative and other purposes), to Great Britain (comprising England, Wales and Scotland), or to Britain (the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland). Due to the variety of sources used it has not been possible to adopt a common procedure. In most cases, however, this only amounts to a mild inconvenience and is unlikely to affect the central arguments of the study.

[6]Central Office of Information, Britain 1969: An Official Handbook, London, H.M.S.O., 1969, p. 409. For an international comparison see Statistical Office of the United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistical Yearbook 1968, New York, 1969, pp. 106-108. On page 106 the yearbook makes the following point of warning:

> "In using these series, consideration should be given to the source of data. Reference to the descriptions of the individual series in the 1967 Supplement to the United Nations Statistical Yearbook and Monthly Bulletin of Statistics will give some indication as to what degree the total unemployment is likely to be underestimated or overestimated."

[7]Eric L. Wigham, Trade Unions (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 35.

[8]Report of *Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations* 1965-1968 (London: HMSO, 1968), p. 19.

[9]*TUC Report*, p. 124.

[10]*Ibid.*, p. 127.

[11]One study that deserves mention is a M.Sc. thesis accepted by the London School of Economics and Political Science in 1961 from R. A. Shea entitled, *A General Analysis and Case Study of Unofficial Strikes in the Manual Workers' Section of the British Engineering Industry*.

[12]The British Employers' Conference was subsequently re-named the Confederation of British Industry. The study finally involved an investigation of only nine strikes which took place between 1965 and 1966. For the final report see *Investigation of Strikes: Report by Trades Union Congress and Confederation of British Industry, London, 1967*, available from the TUC.

[13]For instance see *The Economist*, London, February 15, 1958, for mention of the possibility of encouraging the government to establish such a commission. However, the following week an editorial in the same newspaper announced that no useful purpose would be served by such an endeavour. See *The Economist* "A Code for Trade Unions," February 22, 1958, p. 640.

[14]This was in response to the famous Taff Vale decision by the House of Lords in 1901. The 1906 report of the Commission made recommendations that led to the Trade Disputes Act of the same year which restored certain rights to the trade unions brought into question by the earlier judgement.

[15]Royal Commission Report, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

[16]September 4, 1965, p. 852.

[17]The Economist, *op. cit.*, Sept. 4, 1965, p. 858.

[18]An important aspect of the Joint Labour Council was its claim to *independence*, in spite of the fact that the chairman was none other than A. J. Scamp, a former executive of the Rover Motor Company. In fitting irony the Council's first assignment involved a visit to the Solihull factory of the Rover Company at the beginning of November 1965.

[19]The much quoted epithet was coined by the Prime Minister while speaking to a political rally in Liverpool on September 19, 1965. See Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

[20]Royal Commission Report, *op. cit.*, p. 273.

[21]Royal Commission Report, op. cit., p. 18.

[22]The study will not be concerned with certain other techniques of trade unionism which, on occasion, take the place of, or accompany, strike action such as the "work-to-rule" or the "sit-in."

[23]"Capacity for labour" includes those "mental and physical capabilities existing in a human being, which he exercises whenever he produces a use-value of any description." See Capital, Volume I (Chicago: Kerr, 1918), p. 186.

[24]The Blackcoated Worker (London: Allen and Unwin, 1966), p. 14.

[25]Karl Marx, The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, edited by Dirk J. Struik (New York: International Publishers, 1964), p. 65 (emphasis by Marx).

[26]V. L. Allen, Militant Trade Unionism (London: Merlin Press, 1966), p. 21.

[27]Robert Dubin, Working Union-Management Relations (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1958), p. 208, quoted by Arthur M. Ross and Paul T. Hartman in Changing Patterns of Industrial Conflict (New York: Wiley, 1960), p. 2.

[28]Allen, Militant Trade Unionism, p. 12.

[29]Section I (General Principles), item (a). The Procedure was adopted June 2, 1922, and amended August 10, 1955. Agreement quoted in Appendix to A General Analysis and Case Study of Unofficial Strikes in the Manual Workers Section of the British Engineering Industry by R. A. Shea, M.Sc. thesis London School of Economics and Political Science, 1961.

[30]Notable exceptions includes the work of George Friedman, especially Anatomy of Work (London: Heinemann, 1961). See also Robert Blauner, Alienation and Freedom (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), and Andre Gorz, Strategy for Labor (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967).

[31]This point is made by Peter Berger and Stanley Pullberg in their article "Reification and the Sociological Critique of Consciousness," in New Left Review, January-February, 1966, p. 61.

[32]Marx, 1844 Manuscripts, p. 106.

[33]Ibid., pp. 109-110 (all emphasis in quotations are to be found in the original manuscript).

[34]Ibid., p. 107.

[35]Marx, 1844 Manuscripts, p. 107.

[36]*Ibid.*, p. 108.

[37]*Ibid.*, p. 111.

[38]*Ibid.*, p. 112.

[39]*Ibid.*, p. 113.

[40]André Gorz, *Strategy for Labor* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), p. 37.

[41]"Reflections on the Wildcat Strikes" in *American Sociological Review*, June 1947.

[42]"The Interindustry Propensity to Strike - An International Comparison," in *Industrial Conflict*, ed. Arthur Kornhauser, Robert Dubin and Arthur M. Ross (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1954).

[43]For one study of American factory workers see Sidney Peck, *The Rank-and-File Leader* (New Haven: College and University Press, 1963). In England a more recent monograph has attempted to give an account of the attitudes and behaviour of a certain sample of industrial workers in Luton. See John H. Goldthorpe, David Lockwood, Frank Bechhofer and Jennifer Platt, *The Affluent Worker: industrial attitudes and behaviour* (Cambridge: University Press, 1968).

[44]Goldthorpe et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 103-104.

[45]Royal Commission Report, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

CHAPTER TWO

AN EXAMINATION OF SOME THEORIES OF STRIKES

This chapter examines three important theories of strike action which feature in the sociological literature on strike theory developed in the period since 1940. The theoretical approaches differ with respect to when each approach was first developed, the underlying assumptions of each theory and the central argument developed. Despite these differences a certain continuity can be demonstrated.

Strikes and Communications

One of the first instances where industrial sociologists or, more correctly, industrial psychologists concerned themselves with what have popularly been labelled "wildcat" strikes, was during World War II. Jerome Scott and George Homans conducted a study of wildcat strikes in Detroit during 1944.[1] Strikes, like such phenomena as high rates of absenteeism or high rates for labour turnover were regarded as problematic for the industrial system. In the case of the famous Harvard research at the Hawthorne plant of Western Electric, management had approached social scientists in order to solve what amounted to a specifically managerial problem of high rates of absenteeism and labour turnover.[2] Scott and Homans' article is strongly indebted to the "human relations" school of industrial sociology pioneered by Elton Mayo and his colleagues at Harvard.

The significance of the article by Scott and Homans is that it

serves to demonstrate a conceptual approach towards industrial conflict in general and strikes in particular. Scott and Homans pose their research problem as being to ascertain why the strikes took place during a period when enormous social pressures operated to prevent such occurrences. They proceed to question many of the contemporary explanations for the wartime wildcats at Detroit. They consider such factors as the wartime migration into the community, the excessively long working weeks resulting in fatigue and the wartime inflationary boom which helped produce conditions conducive to local militancy. Scott and Homans decide that such factors do not offer a sufficient explanation.

Scott and Homans classify the strikes according to cause. They report that "Most of the strikes were protests against discipline, protests against certain company policies, or protests against the discharge of one or more employees."[3] Rather than examining the nature of the protests Scott and Homans proceed to pose the problem in terms of management's failure to enlist the workers' loyalties "in support of the aims of the organisation as a whole."[4] Thus, group loyalty is to be channelled to suit the interests of management.

Scott and Homans do not provide an adequate explanation for the wildcats. One can ask whether they pose the questions in the right area in the first place. They decide that a communications gap is responsible for the organisation's (management's) failure to enlist group loyalties (those of the workers) in order to achieve the aims of the organisation as a whole (undefined but presumably profit). "In the long run" the authors say "a number of strikes seemed to stem from faulty

communications."[5] The argument finds frequent usage. By way of rejoinder one has only to ask whether an improvement of the "channels of communication" does in fact reduce the manifestation of conflict. Often the "channels of communication" would appear to be working only too well! Collective bargaining is supposed to permit each side to clarify its position. A conclusion does not, however, come about as a result of fine debating points. Ultimately, the final position reached will be decided by the relative bargaining power held by either side.

Scott and Homans elaborate on what they mean when they say that faulty communications are one of the causes of the wildcats. In the workers own language one expression of discontent is when workers feel they are receiving the sort of treatment they call the "run around." The authors argue that "the 'run around' is the precursor of the wildcat."[6] As illustration of their argument Scott and Homans present a case history of how 'K', an acting superintendent in a department employing some 300 persons supposedly succeeded in averting a Christmas Eve wildcat strike. Scott and Homans decide that "our industrial society is held together by thousands of men like 'K'."[7]

Those structured causes of industrial conflict which were discussed in the previous chapter are ignored by Scott and Homans. They devote very little attention to the peculiar historical conditions of wartime factory production. The wildcat strikes took place against the official policy of the national union leadership which, along with most unions, with the notable exception of the miners, had given the controversial "no-strike" pledge. The effect of such a pledge was to automatically

render any strike unofficial. The war period saw the strength of rank-and-file action asserting itself without official trade union authorization.[8] In the case of the United Automobile Workers union whose development could usually be taken as an indication of the direction of the Congress of Industrial Organisations as a whole, the prospect of such unofficial action would have had to be faced anyway after the 1939 contract, in which the union agreed with management to outlaw sit-down strikes inside the plants.

The "no-strike" pledge was not very effective. As Scott and Homans note the 4,956 strikes of 1944 "were greater in number if not in duration than any other year of the country's history."[9] A Labour force steeled in the organising experience of the late thirties was swelled by new entrants who were often quickly radicalised. Working class women, Black people, migratory and southern workers all came together in factories of the industrial centres of the North.[10] In a situation where management was operating under the favourable conditions of cost-plus contracts militancy often won an almost unknown control over the production level of the shop floor. The period was not to last long. The 1945-1946 General Motors strike immediately after the war was to herald a new emphasis on economic gains which were often won by giving up the gains that had been previously won on the shop floor.

Industrial Conflict and Technology

In this section we shall review certain developments in management theory that relate to more contemporary attempts to analyse strike action.

The revived concern with technological factors to be found in contemporary management theory may be traced to the human relations school. Nicos Mouzelis, a student of organisation theory has stressed the distinct subschools that have developed within the human relations movement.[11] The first is the orthodox school pioneered by Elton Mayo. The second subschool developed out of the latter's somewhat narrow plant orientation. The school's most representative writer is probably W. F. Warner who was associated with the committee of Human Relations in Industry at the University of Chicago. Mouzelis broadly characterises the third subschool as focusing on the theory of interaction. First elaborated by Chapple and Arensberg at Harvard the interactionist approach has been adopted in part or wholly by such writers as W. F. Whyte, G. Homans and L. Sayles.

Mouzelis readily admits to the somewhat static and artificial nature of the above subdivisions. By way of correction he sketches the general evolution of the human relations school since the Hawthorne studies. His interpretation of more recent trends suggest that management theory has been returning to a more inclusive approach. The focus of attention has been widened to include not only the work group but also the large-scale organisation. More emphasis is paid to the influence exerted by technology on industrial relations. The shift in emphasis is demonstrated in practical application.

> Firstly, in the practical field of management, these theoretical developments are reflected by the displacement of attention from supervisory skills to the problems at the higher levels of management and to the questions of organizational authority and structure.

> It is emphasised more and more that many organisational problems cannot be solved by human relation skills as they do not arise from difficulties in face-to-face relations; rather one should look for their solution in structural changes on the organisational level.[12]

The new emphasis on technology finds expression in the research paper dealing with contemporary trends in industrial sociology prepared for the Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations by Alan Fox.[13] He outlines the problem and his main argument as follows:

> The principal theme pursued here is the general one of why people behave as they do in industry. A number of inquiries are brought forward to show that the way people behave--and therefore the pattern and temper of industrial relations--is considerably affected by the technology with which they work, the way their job is organized and related to others, and various other so-called "structural determinants."[14]

The relationship between industrial conflict and technology has been a central interest in the work of Joan Woodward.[15] In her best known study Woodward distinguishes between three kinds of technological processes employed in different production systems. These are unit or batch production, mass or line production, and process production. Although her study does not arrive at any one set of criteria for measuring industrial conflict the general conclusion is reached that conflict is less in unit and process production than in mass and line production. The argument presented essentially focuses on the productive system within which the worker operates. Conflict is seen as being greatest in mass and line production where work groups are large, where there is a low ratio of supervisors to operators, where operatives often work in stationary positions on the shop floor, where authority is "arbitrary"

and comes from above (rather than from the "process" itself) and where the pressures for labour economy are ever demanding. Woodward reports as follows:

> Pressure on people at all levels of the industrial hierarchy seemed to build up as technology advanced, became heaviest in assembly line production and then relaxed, so reducing personal conflicts. . . . The production system seemed more important in determining the quality of human relations than did the number employed.[16]

It should be noted that Woodward is not implying that technical innovation per se brings about a reduction in industrial conflict. For example, she notes that automation may be introduced without any change whatsoever in the production system. Alternatively, change may take place in the production system without necessarily implying automation. More important to Woodward's thesis is the general trend of technological development. In the industrial area studied she notes that in the future an increasing proportion of the manufacturing firms are likely to be process firms. The scene is thus set for a future where industrial relations are more harmonious. For in her research Woodward noted that in process-type firms "the relationship between supervisor and subordinate was much more like that between a travel agent and his clients than between a foreman and operators in mass production."[17]

One of the more serious limitations of the Woodward report is the lack of any satisfactory provision for assessing the extent of industrial conflict. The relationship between management and labour is not judged on such quantitative data as the incidence of strikes or absenteeism. Rather the general tone of industrial relations is judged by relationships at the shop level between supervisors and production workers.

An important recent study of the British automobile industry has raised some important questions concerning the validity of Woodward's arguments. In their study of all the major British car firms Turner, Clack and Roberts report that the pattern of industrial conflict varied considerably despite the similarity of technological processes in each factory.[18]

Theories of Strike-Proneness

One area of research into strike action that provides some interesting insights has been concerned with attempts to explain the varying propensity to strike found in different occupations, regions, or industries. Knowles, for instance, examines why the "strike-proneness" of different regions and different industries in the United Kingdom shows a market variation.[19] Although it is difficult to make any rigid separation between regional "strike-proneness" and industrial "strike-proneness," Knowles is able to conclude from the available data that regional variations in Britain tend to prove substantially less significant than industrial variations. This is not necessarily true for other national experiences. In the case of Canada, for instance, Stuart Jamieson has noted that regional differences are generally more pronounced than in most comparable industrialized nations.[20] He argues that for the Canadian experience the region probably provides a more fruitful unit for study.

One of the best known theories of strike liability is the international comparison by Clark Kerr and Abraham Siegel.[21] Their theory

merits careful consideration. Kerr and Siegel explain the high propensity to strike in such industries as mining, maritime and longshore and to a lesser degree, lumber and textile, in terms of two major hypotheses. The first is concerned with broad environmental factors and examines the location of the worker in society. The argument poses two contrasting social situations, one where a collectivity of workers form an "isolated mass" and one where the individual worker may be considered as an "integrated individual" or as a member of an "integrated group." The idea of the "isolated mass" develops out of the observation that workers in certain industries, by virtue of geographic or social factors, tend to develop a social cohesion that increases their willingness to take collective strike action. At the other end of the scale, Kerr and Siegel present the situation of the supposedly "integrated individual." The worker's role in industrial society is the determinating factor. Examples of industries where the propensity to strike is low are railroad, agriculture and trade. Such industries, it is argued, provide work which integrates employees into the wider community.

The second major hypothesis advanced by Kerr and Siegel to explain strike-liability focuses on the character of the job and the worker. They suggest that "the inherent nature of the job determines, by selection and conditioning, the kinds of workers employed and their attitudes, and these workers, in turn, cause conflict or peace."[22] Kerr and Siegel note that their second hypothesis is not always supported by the empirical evidence on strike activity. For instance, they cite cases where supposedly "tougher" workers such as teamsters, farm hands,

steelworkers and construction workers show a low frequency to strike. In passing we might add that the recent British experience offers further evidence that brings the hypothesis into question. Workers such as draughtsmen and printers who are engaged in activity that is not generally considered to be physically demanding have shown an increasing willingness to take strike action.

To summarize their main argument, Kerr and Siegel relate strikes to certain general characteristics of certain types of industry, We may clarify matters by making a distinction between so-called "primary" (e.g., mineral extraction, lumber, longshore, ship-building), "secondary" (e.g., manufacturing) and "tertiary" (e.g., service trades, transportation) industry. Kerr and Siegel look at both environment factors and the nature of the job in both "primary" and "tertiary" industry to explain why the propensity to strike is high in the first category and low in the second.

One of the first comments that can be made with respect to the Kerr and Siegel analysis pertains to the initial evidence the authors present. One might wish to express certain reservations as to the comparability of strike statistics on an international basis. Certain reservations are expressed by Kerr and Siegel when they note that "While the data discloses a substantial consistency of behavior, it should be kept in mind that they reflect the experience of only eleven countries over a limited period of time and that the industrial breakdowns are not so numerous nor so comparable from one country to another, or even from one time period to another in the same country, as would be ideally desirable for the purpose of this analysis."[23] Despite these difficulties

the authors still find sufficient similarity of behaviour to justify investigation.

Criticism of the Kerr and Siegel theory may be considered under three main headings. We shall refer in turn to methodological, empirical and other general problems that stem from the Kerr and Siegel analysis.

One methodological problem with the Kerr and Siegel analysis results from the fact that the authors work from the premise that the "significance" of strikes is adequately measured by the number of man-days of production lost. They thereby choose to examine what is generally considered to be the best <u>economic</u> dimension of strike activity. The number of production days lost due to disputes is not, however, the only measurement of the economic significance of strikes. For instance, in certain technologically advanced industries, frequent short strikes, even if they involve only a few workers, may prove just as economically harmful as a protracted stoppage involving considerably more workers in a more traditionally organised industry. Even if we accept that the best measurement of the economic dimension of strike activity is the number of production hours lost it does not follow that the incidence of strikes is unimportant. In the case of the present study the primary concern is unofficial strikes which account for the overwhelming majority of all recorded stoppages and tend, on average, to last for a shorter duration than most official strikes. The standard economic dimension of strike activity may provide a poor indication of unofficial strike activity.

The mining and automobile manufacturing industries have, at different periods, accounted for a large proportion of unofficial strikes in the British experience. These two industries can serve to illustrate some of the problems of an empirical nature that brings the Kerr and Siegel hypothesis into question.

Mining disputes prior to 1957 accounted for that industry being rated as one of the most strike-prone in Britain. Since that year there has been a sharp decrease in both the number of strikes and in the number of man-days lost as a result of strikes. The overall decrease in the number of stoppages in coal mining in Britain is shown in Table I. This decrease may be attributed to two major factors. Firstly, there is the general decline of the industry, accelerated by government closure of unprofitable pits. Secondly, in such circumstances labour militancy is severely hampered and strike action is approached with more caution. So-called "rationalization" either takes the form of closing down whole operations, or it involves the introduction of mechanized or cybernated techniques that may reduce the labour force at the old location of work. The short-term effects may be an actual increase in labour militancy as workers at the local level mobilize around defensive struggles to keep a particular concern in operation. But the longer-term effects are more likely to spell a decline in the propensity to strike in that industry.

Kerr and Siegel do not make specific reference to the automobile industry. According to their schema, it should, presumably, be grouped with "metal and engineering industries" where the propensity to strike is classified as "medium." Recently the British automobile industry has

TABLE I

NUMBER OF STOPPAGES RECORDED IN BRITISH COAL MINING, 1957-1967

Year	Number of stoppages
1957	2224
1958	1963
1959	1307
1960	1666
1961	1458
1962	1203
1963	987
1964	1058
1965	740
1966	553
1967 (Provisional)	391

Source: Ministry of Labour figures quoted in _Report of Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations 1965-1968_, London: HMSO, 1968, p. 96.

seen a considerable increase in both the number of strikes and the number of working days lost. In their important study of the British automobile industry H. A. Turner, G. Clack and E. Roberts note that during the 1960's car workers became "at least as dispute liable as such traditionally strike-prone groups as miners, shipbuilders and dockers."[24] The authors use the same sort of measurement as Kerr and Siegel by comparing the ratio of production days lost to the total number of employees. According to this measure, the strike incidence of the car firms rose from about twice the national average in the early post-World War II years, to about six times the national average during the 1960s. Some appreciation of the trend may be gained from Table II.

Kerr and Siegel's first hypothesis that the location of the worker in society determines his propensity to strike is too general to invite vigorous testing. Kerr and Siegel do provide a series of qualifications. They emphasize that they are dealing with complex phenomena that involves multiple causation and that other explanation may be required in certain situations. However, if we simply look at one aspect of their first hypothesis and examine the proposition that strike-proneness is linked to <u>geographical</u> isolation then the British automobile industry again presents problems. Turner and his associates report that:

> . . . there seems nothing in the motor industry's case to support the view that a high strike-proneness is likely to be linked with geographical isolation: if anything, the more isolated plants seem to have been less strike-prone.[25]

Any discussion of Kerr and Siegel's theory would be incomplete without some consideration of their prognosis for future strike trends.

TABLE II

INDUSTRIAL DISPUTES IN THE BRITISH AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY, 1947-1964

Annual averages of 3-year period	Number of separate strikes traced	Workers "directly and indirectly involved"	Number of "working days lost"
1947-1949	10	9,000	25,000
1950-1952	14	25,000	131,000
1953-1955	14	42,000	137,000
1956-1958	31	82,000	322,000
1959-1961	75	116,000	307,000
1962-1964	86	141,000	321,000

Source: H. A. Turner, G. Clack and E. Roberts, <u>Labour Relations in the Motor Industry</u>, London: Allen and Unwin, 1967, p. 23. Figures those of authors, compiled in accordance with the methodology employed by the Ministry of Labour.

"Integration" they note "is growing with the introduction of the automobile, the radio, and the television, the decaulalization of work on the waterfront and in the logging camp, the increasing acceptance of trade unions by employers, by government, and by the community at large, and the spread of popular education."[26] Kerr and Siegel's theory appears unable to take account of changing trends in the labour force. For example, one development that has been most noticeable in Britain since 1950 is the continuing organization of white-collar workers. During the period 1950 to 1964 the major non-manual unions made significant gains, as is shown in Table III.

Despite impressive growth rates the overall percentage of white-collar workers organized in Britain is still low compared to most advanced industrial countries, with the notable exception of the United States and Canada.[27] There is, therefore, every indication that the spread of white-collar unionism is likely to continue.

It is pertinent to ask how prepared such unions have been to take up strike action. Some indication may be gained from the following observation of Clive Jenkins, the General Secretary of the Association of Supervisory Staffs, Executives and Technicians (A.S.S.E.T.). "In my own union we estimate we will have four or five recognizable strikes and dozens of other forms of dispute action." Jenkins goes on to describe the policy of the Draughtsmens and Allied Trades Association (D.A.T.A.):

> D.A.T.A. actually spent £250,000 in strike pay in selected disputes aimed at setting the standard of a three weeks holiday after five years' service. . . . In fact, the new feature of these disputes is that they are getting longer. The draughtsmen had a strike of more

TABLE III

INCREASE IN MEMBERSHIP OF MAJOR BRITISH WHITE COLLAR UNIONS, 1950-1964

	Total Membership at end of 1950	Total Membership at end of 1964	Percentage Increase
National and Local Government Officers' Association	197,056	338,322	71.7
Draughtsmen's and Allied Technicians' Association	45,039	65,893	46.3
Clerical and Administrative Workers' Union	33,150	79,177	138.9
National Unions of Bank Employees	29,622	56,224	89.8
Association of Supervisory Staffs, Executives and Technicians	11,723	35,588	203.6

Source: V. L. Allen, Militant Trade Unionism, London: Merlin, 1966, pp. 14-15.

> than six months at a Scarborough plant. A.S.S.E.T. had one of twenty-one weeks in a Scottish factory, and more and more, the difference between the negotiating tactics of the newer unions and those of an early vintage are becoming less and less visible.[28]

A trend towards greater militancy on the part of the white-collar workers presents problems for any continued application of the hypotheses advanced by Kerr and Siegel. Most of the evidence considered by the two authors covers strike patterns prior to 1950. A more contemporary re-appraisal of the evidence would probably show that certain white-collar groups demonstrate at least as high a propensity to strike as certain categories of manual workers. In 1964 the British Employers' Confederation warned of precisely such a development.

> It is recognized that staff unions, because of the type of worker they represent, are generally more articulate, more militant and more effective than the manual workers' unions and that any development of staff unionism on a major scale will present serious problems for employers.[29]

The rather crude distinction drawn by Kerr and Siegel between the "isolated mass" and the "integrated individual" begins to lose its meaning as the nature of white-collar work itself changes. Such changes result from movements in industry towards monopoly, oligopoly, takeover and rationalization. The "small-scale employing units" mentioned by Kerr and Siegel are giving way to the large modern office where the layout of desks comes to resemble machinery on the shop-floor. The changes affect every facet of the employee situation.

> Questions of pay, promotion and fringe benefits, once within the personal prerogative of the works manager to negotiate, are now

> snatched from him to a central department in London. . . . With this comes a realization that there is, for want of a better description an affluent proletarianization of technicians, supervisors and clerks . . .[30]

It was earlier argued that the hypotheses advanced by Kerr and Siegel suffered from several weaknesses from the outset. The unfolding of trends during the post-war period has brought the theory further into question, at least insofar as its applicability to the British experience is concerned. The main contribution that Kerr and Siegel have made is that they have stressed the importance of environmental factors. By so doing their work serves as an excellent corrective to the narrow scope of much earlier research. Kerr and Siegel can be considered as critics of the micro-level approach so characteristic to many human relations studies. Their macro-approach is a good example of the sort of framework that has been advocated elsewhere by John T. Dunlop. Such a framework "involves the interaction and accommodation of union and management organisation in an economic, technological and social context."[31]

Kerr and Siegel end their short study with a general prescription for either reducing or heightening industrial conflict. In order to reduce the intensity of industrial conflict, the authors recommend that both the worker and the employer be integrated as fully as possible into the general society. If the converse is desired, namely if one wished to increase industrial conflict, then the appropriate course of action would entail some mechanism whereby workers were socially isolated so they could evolve segregated organisation. The problem with proposals of this sort is that they start from the initial premise that industrial

conflict is amenable to manipulation. The present study differs from many studies in industrial sociology insofar as we make no preliminary assumption that strike action or trade unionism is open to manipulation or control.

An examination of the substance of Kerr and Siegel's prescription raises further questions. The authors lay themselves open to attack for engaging in a rather vulgar type of environmental determinism. Many factors which help to engender group or class consciousness cannot be directly attributed to the industrial environment. Consciousness may take a considerable period to develop. Even if it were a feasible project, (which it is not), a social programme whereby workers were isolated and left to develop their own form of organisation would not necessarily yield either group consciousness or industrial militancy.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Jerome F. Scott and George C. Homans, "Reflections on the Wildcat Strikes," _American Sociological Review_, Vol. 12 (June 1947), p. 280.

[2]See F. J. Roethlisberger and William J. Dickson, _Management and the Worker_ (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964).

[3]Scott and Homans, _loc. cit._

[4]_Ibid._, pp. 280-281.

[5]_Ibid._, p. 281.

[6]_Ibid._, p. 285.

[7]_Ibid._, p. 287.

[8]See James Boggs, _The American Revolution_, pages from a Negro Worker's Notebook (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1963), pp. 1722. Boggs writes from his own experience as an automobile worker in Detroit during the period Scott and Homans studied.

[9]Scott and Homans, _op. cit._, p. 278.

[10]See John C. Leggett, _Class Race and Labour_ (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), for observations of how "uprootedness" was an important factor in influencing working class consciousness in Detroit.

[11]Nicos P. Mouzelis, _Organisation and Bureaucracy: An Analysis of Modern Theories_ (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), p. 108.

[12]_Ibid._, pp. 111-112.

[13]_Industrial Sociology and Industrial Relations_, Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations, Research Paper 3 (London: HMSO, 1966).

[14]_Ibid._, p. 1.

[15]Joan Woodward, _Management and Technology_, Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, Problems of Progress in Industry No. 3 (London: HMSO, 1958).

[16]Woodward, p. 18.

[17]Ibid., p. 40.

[18]H. A. Turner, Garfield Clack and Geoffrey Roberts, Labour Relations in the Motor Industry (London: Allen and Unwin, 1967), p. 327.

[19]K. G. J. C. Knowles, Strikes: A Study in Industrial Conflict (Oxford: Blackwell, 1952), pp. 185-209. See also Knowles' article on "strike-proneness" to be found in Labor and Trade Unionism: an interdisciplinary reader, ed. Walter Galenson and Seymour Martin Lipset (New York: Wiley and Sons, 1960).

[20]"Regional Factors in Industrial Conflict: The Case of British Columbia," Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science, August 1962, p. 405.

[21]"The Inter-Industry Propensity to Strike: An International Comparison" in Industrial Conflict, edited by Arthur Kornhauser, Robert Dubin and Arthur M. Ross (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1954).

[22]Ibid., p. 195.

[23]Ibid., p. 189.

[24]Turner, Clack and Roberts, op. cit., p. 24.

[25]Ibid., p. 328.

[26]Kerr and Siegel, op. cit., p. 204.

[27]See White-Collar Trade Unions: Contemporary Developments in Industrialized Societies, edited by Adolf Sturmthal (Urbana, Chicago and London: University of Illinois Press, 1967). This volume includes a useful chapter on the United Kingdom written by Guy Routh.

[28]"Tiger in a White Collar," Penguin Survey of Business and Industry 1965, edited by Rex Malik (Harmondsworth: Middlesex: Penguin, 1965), pp. 69-70.

[29]Confidential report circulated internally by the British Employers Confederation in June 1964. Reprinted in The Times, October 26, 1964. Cited by Jenkins, op. cit., pp. 55-56.

[30]Jenkins, op. cit., p. 62.

[31]John T. Dunlop and William Foote Whyte, "Framework for the Analysis of Industrial Relations: Two Views," Industrial and Labor Relations Review, (1950).

CHAPTER THREE

THE ANALYSIS OF UNOFFICIAL ACTION

Unofficial Action and the History of Trade Unionism

This chapter will attempt to sharpen our appreciation of the terms "unofficial" and "informal" as they are used in the present study. It is helpful to start by reviewing some past examples of unofficial movements in the history of British trade unionism. The endeavour is rendered more difficult by the fact that historians of the British labour movement have tended to dwell almost exclusively on the evolution of permanent and established trade union organisations.

The work of Sidney and Beatrice Webb has exerted a strong and lasting influence on the historical interpretation of British trade unionism. As V. L. Allen rather bluntly notes, "there was, in a sense, no trade union history until they wrote it."[1] The Webbs are best known for their classic study entitled The History of Trade Unionism first published in 1902 and subsequently revised and up-dated for a 1920 edition.[2] Less attention is generally paid to the Webbs' earlier and more theoretical work Industrial Democracy[3] which offers an analysis of the structure, function and methods of trade unionism in Britain as it developed in the nineteenth century. The historical and sociological interpretation of British trade unionism developed by the Webbs has since never been seriously challenged. In part this may be due to the lack of any study that addresses itself to the problems raised by the

Webbs. H. A. Turner has noted that since the Webbs, "nobody has attempted (or at least, succeeded in) an emulation of their classic study of trade unionism's history and character at large."[4]

The influence of the Webbs' work is partly responsible for a neglect of those informal or unofficial aspects of trade union behaviour that have characterised the British historical experience. The Webbs' approach to the study of trade unionism was primarily orientated towards formal organisational development. It is possible to detect in their work a consequent neglect of the appearance and disappearance of informal movements. This argument is developed by V. L. Allen. With reference to The History of Trade Unionism he argues that, rather than being concerned with what the title suggests, the Webbs in fact focus almost exclusively on the history of "formal, continuously operating trade union organisations" --a preoccupation which leads the Webbs "to neglect ephemeral bodies or to dismiss their existence as being of no historical significance."[5] Allen also suggests that the Webbs seriously neglected the early history of trade unionism in the eighteenth century.

The Webbs' treatment of the machine-wrecking that took place in the early period of British industrialization is a good illustration of their general approach towards movements lacking "continuous organisation." They refer briefly to the "Luddite" upheavals of 1811 and 1812 when

> riotous mobs of manual workers, acting under some sort of organisation, went about destroying textile machinery and sometimes wrecking factories. To what extent this had any direct connection with the Trade Union Movement seems to us, pending more penetrating investigation of the unpublished evidence, somewhat uncertain.[6]

The Webbs offer no explanation for Luddism other than to cite selected reports by local dignatories of the period. For instance, in 1812 a certain General Maitland wrote to the Home Secretary to convey the interpretation that the movement was a desperate last attempt "to do that by force which they had not succeeded in carrying into effect as they usually did by other means."[7] From these reports the reader is given an impression of the movement that the Webbs appear to share. Such a viewpoint sees the machine-breaking as a futile act of desperation. Throughout their writings the two foremost founders of Fabianism maintained the assumption that direct action was bound to be less effective than peaceful negotiation.

E. J. Hobsbawm's short essay on the machine breakers[8] offers some further insights and serves to correct some of the misconceptions partly attributable to the writings of the Webbs. For example, although Luddism is generally associated with the incidents of machine-breaking that occurred between 1811 and 1813, outbreaks of machine-breaking were not restricted to those years. Hobsbawm suggests that the phenomenon probably originated in the seventeenth century or even earlier and continued until around 1830. Hobsbawm distinguishes two types of machine-breaking. The first type implies no particular hostility to machines as such, but sees the action as one means of exerting pressure on employers. The second type implies a concrete expression of hostility to the introduction of new machines, especially where labour interests are to be affected in some way. There are several variants of the first type

of wrecking. Hobsbawm refers to the prevalence of what he calls "collective bargaining by riot."[9] Rather than interpreting any destruction involved as wanton acts aimed at the machines, Hobsbawm sees wrecking as "simply a technique of trade unionism in the period before, and during the early phases of, the Industrial Revolution."[10] The technique had certain advantages over a simple absention from work. This was especially so in the case of domestic industry where a collective withdrawal of labour was not always easily organised. The ethic of solidarity took time to learn. It is also quite probable that machine-wrecking was seen as a way to insure against the use of strike-breakers.

Hobsbawm suggests that in the final analysis the tactic of machine-breaking needs be appraised in terms of its effectiveness. While the Webbs are correct in pointing out the rapid defeat of Luddism between 1811 and 1812, Hobsbawm argues that it would be a mistake to conclude that machine-breaking in general never succeeded.[11] He argues that the technique was well-adapted to the conditions of early industrialism. There appears to be insufficient evidence that other forms of pressure would have been more effective.

The responsibility for the misconceptions over the Luddite movement cannot be entirely attributed to the Webbs who did, after all, note that their research on the question was inadequate. To a greater degree responsibility ought to rest with those subsequent historians who have uncritically accepted the Webbs' interpretation, in spite of the Webbs' own reservations. In fact, only recently have historians of trade

unionism begun to seriously challenge details of the Webbs' interpretation of the history of English trade unionism.

Allen argues that the reason for the Webbs' neglect of such informal social movements is to be found in their conception of historical research. In the preface to their work they outline their understanding of historical research. "History" they contend "must, if it is to be history at all, follow the course of continuous organisations."[12] However, as Allen correctly points out, an organisation can operate continuously for a long period or an extremely short period. It is the historian who must make a judgment as to the significance of any particular organisation. Despite their claim to have written a value-free history of trade unionism the Webbs' work is inevitably influenced by their own judgments of the relative importance of certain movements. A further explanation might be found in the political philosophy of the Webbs. Although the Webbs always maintained that their scholarly work was totally neutral, it is evident that their emphasis on formally organised trade union organisation did suit their political predilections. As the leading theoreticians of English Fabianism, the Webbs stood in total opposition to such unofficial rank-and-file movements as the Shop Stewards' movement. Much later, following the defeat of the 1926 general strike, Beatrice Webb could hardly conceal her glee. Writing in her diary she registered the opinion that subsequent historians would regard the strike "as the death gasp of that pernicious doctrine of 'workers' control' of public affairs through the trade unions and by

the method of direct action."[13] In the same entry she went on to describe the doctrine of workers' control as "a proletarian distemper."

A further reappraisal of some of the Webbs' historical work is to be found in H. A. Turner's study of the development of the cotton unions in Britain.[14] Turner argues that trade unionism came into play in the cotton industry at a much earlier point in time than has commonly been acknowledged. He attributes this neglect of the early trade unionism in the industry by labour historians to an over-emphasis on continuous formal trade union organisation. He also makes the observation that some interesting historical parallels may be drawn. For instance:

> In many ways, in fact, the early cotton unions resembled the 'unofficial movements' which have so frequently embarrassed official British union leaderships in modern times.[15]

A third, and most well known example of an unofficial movement is the shop stewards' movement which reached its greatest strength during and immediately following, World War I. The rise and decline of the movement in the engineering industry has been excellently chronicled by Branko Pribićević in a work entitled The Shop Stewards' Movement and the Demand for Workers' Control, 1910-1924.[16] Workers' control is defined by Pribićević to mean "the replacement of the capitalist industrial system by a new industrial order in which the industries of the country will be controlled (partly or completely) by associations of the workers employed in those industries."[17] Pribićević attempts to delineate some of the conditions which help to account for both the success and the failure of the movement between 1910 and 1924. A

combination of economic and political conditions gave an altogether new urgency to the demand for shop-floor control in the factory. The theoretical weakness of the formal trade union leadership aided the rapid rise of a militant rank-and-file leadership which developed demands which were addressed to both the short and the long-term difficulties facing ordinary workers. Some of the same questions that are considered by Pribićević with respect to the early shop stewards' movement might be asked of subsequent unofficial trade union movements which have appeared.

One of the first questions that may be asked of any unofficial movement is why and how it emerged in the first place. One answer might be found in terms of some perceived failure on the part of the official organisation. Daniel Bell makes such a point:

> Historically, the trade-union has been a restrictive and protective organization, acting to defend workers' interests. Where the union has become an instrument to "control" the workers, in the interests of national unity or for the state, workers have formed substitute bodies. This was the history of the shop-stewards' movement in Britain during World War I and of the workers' councils in Poland in October, 1956.[18]

Pribićević offers a similar argument to provide a partial explanation for the emergence of the shop stewards' movement in Britain between 1910 and 1924. At the same time he emphasizes the need to appreciate the existence of broader objective and subjective conditions which helped foster the unofficial movement. The present thesis develops a somewhat similar argument. Certain failures of the official trade union movement have

resulted in the emergence of substitute bodies which have been able to operate with considerable effectiveness in conditions of relatively full employment.

The second question concerns the impact that unofficial movements exert on official trade union organisation and policy. In his study Pribićević points to some of the long term effects of the Shop Stewards and Workers' Committee Movement in the engineering industry.

> First, it made an important contribution to the official amalgamation of the engineering unions in 1920. It created a spirit of unity in the industry which overcame the deep-seated craft prejudices and sectional exclusiveness. Second, and perhaps more important, it helped to win for the workshop organisation a permanent place in the trade union structure. The great impact of the SS and WCM on the whole labour movement was largely responsible for the general acceptance of workshop organization as a permanent institution. Official recognition cost it a good deal of its power, but this was compensated for by the stability which recognition gave it.[19]

The extent to which "workshop organisation as a permanent institution" has become formalized is considered in Chapters Five and Seven. The possibility that such organisations are becoming the object of increasing attack from employers and the state is discussed in Chapter Six.

The third problem concerns the consciousness that accompanies unofficial trade union movements. One approach to the problem involves reference to one of the standard concepts which Marxists have used to explain certain trends in labour movements - the concept of "spontaneity." Lenin's application of this concept in What Is To Be Done?[20] is reviewed briefly in the concluding chapter. Although certain objections can be

raised with respect to aspects of Lenin's theory his central distinction between "trade union consciousness" and "socialist consciousness" can prove helpful in examining the consciousness that develops out of unofficial strike action and participation in informal patterns of trade unionism.

Trade Unionism and Organization

In 1966, 42 per cent of the estimated total number of employees working in the United Kingdom were organised into unions or associations which negotiated with employers on questions relating to conditions of employment.[21] Significantly, in Britain, a country with one of the highest unionized workforces in the western capitalist world, the situation is still one whereby the majority of employees remain unorganised. Not surprisingly, the available evidence suggests that, although not unknown, strikes by non-unionized workers are relatively rare. Unorganised workers do, on occasion, take strike action, but little information is available. The statistics supplied by the Department of Employment and Productivity group together strikes by unorganised workers along with lock-outs. In the period 1964 to 1967 the Department recorded an average of 24 such stoppages each year. The stoppages involved 3,200 workers and resulted in the loss of 24,000 working days. When they do occur strikes by unorganised workers often take up the question of union recognition.[22]

The present study is primarily concerned with the organised sector of the workforce. That sector includes all the major areas of

British industry. The non-unionized sector generally covers those aspects of work which, for a variety of reasons, have proved difficult to organise. Those in the workforce who are non-unionized constitute a changing mosaic of occupations. The fate of unorganised workers is closely linked to the fortunes or misfortunes of the organised labour movement. Thus William H. Miernyk argues that one of the reasons why trade unionism has failed to make serious inroads amongst American white-collar workers is because these unorganised workers have been the beneficiaries of "tandem" gains won by organised labour.[23] Although most strikers are organised into some form of trade union organisations it is not a necessary condition for the occurrence of strike action.[24]

The Meaning of Unofficial Action

Earlier in the study the unofficial strike was defined as a collective stoppage of work undertaken to bring pressure on employers that is not formally and publicly endorsed by a union executive. This definition is very similar to the definition of an unofficial strike provided by K.C.J.C. Knowles. In his book on strikes Knowles defines an unofficial strike as one "which is not recognized by the Executive Committee of a Union."[25] We may now suggest certain elaborations to this definition. One such attempt has been made by Alvin Gouldner in his book Wildcat Strike,[26] a study of an unofficial strike that took place in a small rural community in the northern United States. Gouldner's analysis of the strike was part of a broader investigation into a gypsum mining

and processing operation. The strike which Gouldner studied took place in the surface factory processing operation and involved about 150 workers from various departments. The strike was an unofficial strike in the sense that it was not endorsed by the union executive. Gouldner refers to the strike as a "wildcat" strike adopting the conventional North American term for an unofficial strike.

Certain considerations should be borne in mind when discussing Gouldner's study. First, the work situation investigated could scarcely be described as typical. Gouldner points out that the strike took place in a community which "was still very far from being maturely urbanized."[27] A second consideration is the broader question of how much the sociologist can generalize from any one study of a particular event or experience. Gouldner apparently believes that his observations, which are often quite insightful, provide sufficient basis for a more generalised theory of social behaviour. At the end of the study Gouldner formulates a theory of "group tensions."

Considerations such as these do not, however, affect the basic specifications that Gouldner develops for understanding some of the different types of wildcat strike. Gouldner argues that there are two distinct types of wildcat strike. The first type is the "pseudo-wildcat" which is defined as "a strike in which the formal union leaders pretend to have little control over the situation but actually exert concealed influence on its course."[28] The second type of wildcat is "one in which the formal union leaders have actually lost control and the strike is

led by individuals whose position in the formal structure does not prescribe such a role for them."[29] In such circumstances Gouldner suggests the term "genuine wildcat." Gouldner thus introduces the possibility of some sort of covert support coming from the union executive.

The same year as the publication of Gouldner's book, a short analysis of the 1951 New York wildcat dock strike appeared.[30] The author, Robert Lamson, attempts to explain the strike in terms of the peculiar structure of the International Longshoremen's Association. He views the strike as a rational means of attaining certain ends. Lamson examines three propositions to account for particular uses that any wildcat strike may have for particular individuals.

> First, it can be a means by which union leaders may gain their personal and union ends without the responsibility of formally calling a strike....Second, it can be a means by which individuals and groups outside the system may gain control of the union....Third, a wildcat strike can be a means by which individuals and groups within the system may gain control of the union.[31]

The first proposition corresponds to Gouldner's "pseudo-wildcat." Lamson and Gouldner both point out that the pseudo-wildcat strike may be led by certain union leaders who thereby find a means of enhancing their position in the eyes of the rank-and-file. Such an observation can really do no more than explain the part played by individual union officers. As an explanation of any wildcat it would seem to be a most unsatisfactory explanation. Strikes would not usually appear to be explicable merely in terms of the personal motivation of certain individuals.

A basic distinction between the "pseudo-unofficial" and the

"genuine-unofficial" strike would appear to be applicable to the British unofficial strike experience. H. A. Clegg, for instance notes how trade union officials have been known to hint to shop stewards that some sort of demonstration of the members' willingness to take strike action would be helpful to the union negotiators' bargaining position.[32]

The unofficial strike is sometimes interpreted as a direct challenge to the authority of union leaders. This need not necessarily be the case. Union leaders may not be able to support an unofficial strike due to the very nature of the union rules. An example is given by H. A. Turner who reports on the difficulty of declaring a strike official in the case of the National Union of Vehicle Builders. The General Secretary of the union explained the problem:

> ...under the relevant rule of the Union a strike by <u>any</u> section of the membership could only be authorised by a general ballot in which two-thirds of <u>all</u> the Union's members voted and two-thirds of those voting supported this action. He had never found any difficulty in getting two-thirds of the <u>voters</u> to approve an Executive proposal on these matters. But it was impossible to get two-thirds of the members to vote.[33]

Strikes in Britain often begin without official support but later gain such support. The difficulty encountered by the strikers in contacting a union official who has some knowledge of the nature of the dispute may be one reason. The regular channels may involve going through protracted procedures whereby a decision could only be reached when all is past history. To some extent the need for flexibility is reflected in the approach of many Unions Executives who do recognise the

need for some sort of retrospective ratification. In 1960 the TUC Report estimated that "in about half the cases reported to the General Council where strikes began without official sanction, the unions paid dispute benefit."[34] Whether such support is forthcoming often revolves around the kind of issues involved in the unofficial strike. Union executives might hold perceptions different from those of the rank-and-file on the subject of just what does constitute a "legitimate" trade union issue. In this regard one can expect varying behaviour from different unions. One view has been forthrightly expressed by Ted Hill, General Secretary of the Boilermakers Society, when he said that "if a strike is on a question of wages we have got to support it. Sometimes it has got to be unofficial but if it is for the purpose for which unions were formed I can always find a way to justify it."[35]

Knowles cites a former Clydeside shop steward, W. Gallacher, who draws attention to what he calls "spontaneous" strikes where the choice for the strikers is "submitting or fighting."[36] Eldridge and Cameron take up the same point, suggesting the idea of "perishable disputes" where

> speed of action is placed at a premium by the strikers. They might arise in circumstances where it is either impossible to contact the union official, or where it is felt that by the time the issue has gone through the negotiating procedure that battle will have been lost.[37]

It is helpful to consider the efficacy of making too rigid a distinction between official and unofficial strikes. Such a point was made

in the report to the Trades Union Congress of 1960.

> It may be formally correct to define an unofficial strike as one which takes place contrary to union rules and contrary to agreed procedures. But such a definition is not helpful. The strikers are automatically put in the wrong and the problem is therefore shown as one of 'how to persuade them to conform, or to force them to conform'. This leads to the proposal of 'simple' remedies: for instance, the employers should stand firm, the union should discipline their members, the government should legislate. The definition ignores the provocation and does not help the search for better relations.[38]

But while it may be difficult and even misleading to make too hard and fast a distinction between official and unofficial strikes, it is important to remember that the government, the employers and the trade union leadership tend to attach considerable importance to the distinction. Furthermore, the question of whether a strike is considered to be official or unofficial will generally prove important in attempting to understand a particular dispute. The distinction will be kept in mind by employers deciding how to best move against a strike. The attitude of the union executive will also be an important factor that is taken into consideration by management. The distinction between official and unofficial strikes may also prove important in attempting to understand the overall strategies developed by employers and the state regarding trade unionism in general. These questions are taken up in more detail in Chapter Six when we consider the part played by the government in industrial relations in Britain between 1940 and 1969.

FOOTNOTES

[1]"Valuations and Historical Interpretation: A Case Study," British Journal of Sociology, Vol. 14, No. 1, March 1963, p. 51.

[2]Sidney and Beatrice Webb, The History of Trade Unionism, (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1935).

[3]Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Industrial Democracy, copyright 1897, (New York: Kelly, 1965).

[4]Trade Union Growth, Structure and Policy: A Comparative Study of the Cotton Unions (London: Allen and Unwin, 1962), p. 13.

[5]Allen, op. cit., p. 51.

[6]Webbs, History, pp. 87-88.

[7]From Home Office Papers quoted by the Webbs, History, pp. 88-89.

[8]"The Machine Breakers," in E. J. Hobsbawm, Labouring Men (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964).

[9]Ibid., p. 8.

[10]Loc. cit.

[11]Although it is well to remember that it took 12,000 troops to defeat Luddism. See Hobsbawm, op. cit., p. 6.

[12]Webbs, History, p. viii.

[13]Beatrice Webb, Diaries 1924-1932, edited by Margaret Cole (Longmans, Green and Co. Entry for May 4, 1926), pp. 92-93, cited in Industrial Democracy in Great Britain: A Book of Readings and Witnesses for Workers' Control, edited by Ken Coates and Anthony Topham (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1968), p. 138.

[14]Turner, Trade Union Growth.

[15]Ibid., p. 85.

[16]Branko Pribićević (Oxford: Blackwell, 1959).

[17]*Ibid*., p. 1.

[18]"Two Roads from Marx: The Themes of Alienation and Exploitation and Workers' Control in Socialist Thought," *The End of Ideology* (New York: The Free Press, 1960), p. 389.

[19]Pribićević, *op. cit*., pp. 108-109.

[20]*What Is To Be Done?* (1902) (New York: International Publishers, 1943).

[21]Figure arrived at by comparing union membership with total estimated number of employees in the United Kingdom. Central Statistical Office, *Annual Abstract of Statistics* (London: HMSO, 1968). See Table 130 on p. 115 and Table 146 on p. 133.

[22]The experience of one such attempt to organise a small factory in the south of England has been written up by Mike Taylor. See the "Machine-Minder" in *Work: Volume 2*, edited by Ronald Fraser (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books in association with New Left Review, 1969), pp. 87-106.

[23]Trade Unions in the Age of Affluence (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 32.

[24]It is interesting to note that most general strikes have broadened their support to include vast numbers of unorganised workers, e.g., Russia in 1905; France in 1936 and again in 1968.

[25]K.G.J.C. Knowles, *Strikes: A Study in Industrial Conflict* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1952), p. 30.

[26]Alvin W. Gouldner, *Wildcat Strike* (1954) (New York: Harper Torchbook edition, 1965).

[27]*Ibid*., p. 13.

[28]*Ibid*., p. 92.

[29]*Ibid*., p. 93.

[30]Robert Lamson, "The 1951 New York Wildcat Dock Strike: Some Consequences of Union Structure for Management-Labour Relations" in the *Southwestern Social Science Quarterly*, Vol. 34, March 1954.

[31]*Ibid*., p. 30.

[32] H. A. Clegg, _The General Union_, 1954, p. 133, quoted by J.E.T. Eldridge and G.C. Cameron "Unofficial Strikes: Some Objections Considered," _British Journal of Sociology_, March, 1964, p. 20.

[33] H. A. Turner, _The Trend of Strikes_ (Leeds: Leeds University Press, 1963). (Emphasis in original).

[34] _TUC Report_, 1960, p. 127.

[35] Quoted by Eldridge and Cameron, _op. cit._, p. 19.

[36] Knowles, _op. cit._, p. 31.

[37] Eldridge and Cameron, _op. cit._, p. 21.

[38] _TUC Report_, 1960, p. 126.

[39] _Ibid._, p. 127.

[40] _Report of Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations_ (London: HMSO, 1968), p. 97.

CHAPTER FOUR

AN OVERVIEW OF STRIKE TRENDS IN BRITAIN: 1919-1969

The Persistence of Strike Action

The comparative work of Arthur M. Ross and Paul T. Hartman provides an interesting starting point from which to examine strike trends in Britain between 1919 and 1969. In their study Changing Patterns of Industrial Conflict,[1] Ross and Hartman argue that the strike is "withering away" in the Northern European countries of Denmark, the Netherlands, Germany, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Other European countries, such as France and Italy, are assigned to what Ross and Hartman refer to as the "Mediterranean-Asian Pattern," where they claim the strike is "no longer a sustained test of economic strength but a brief demonstration of protest."[2] Two preliminary points should be made with respect to the Ross and Hartman study. First, the work is primarily an international comparison. The discussion in this chapter will be restricted to an examination of the particular experience of the United Kingdom. A wider critique of the Ross and Hartman study would need to examine national experiences in addition to that of Britain. Not all the countries that fall into the "Northern European" pattern experience identical patterns of behaviour. Thus, a United Nations comparison for the number of "man-days of idleness" attributable to industrial disputes between 1948 and 1958 revealed that in the United Kingdom the rate per thousand industrial employees was two or three times the rate for West Germany,

Scandinavia and the Netherlands.[3] The second point is that the Ross and Hartman study only extends up to the year 1956. In the British case, significant trends have developed in the period since 1956. Some of these trends are discussed in the course of the present chapter.

(a) The duration of strikes.

We may start by examining Ross and Hartman's contention that in the United Kingdom "the duration of stoppages has been so brief that we are justified in saying that strikes have been largely eliminated in that country."[4] Important to the authors' analysis is the assumption that "the duration of strikes is one of the most significant measures of industrial conflict from a behaviouristic as well as an economic standpoint."[5] Certain limitations of this approach were considered earlier in Chapter Two when we considered the Kerr and Siegel theory of the inter-industry propensity to strike.[6]

The decline in the average duration of the strike can best be understood by reviewing the changing historical conditions under which strike action has occurred in the last half century. The general period since 1919 will be examined. The period 1919 to 1969 can be conveniently divided into four main periods.[7] The first period runs from 1919 to the General Strike of 1926. During this period employers tended to be on the offensive, determined to regain those areas of control at the shop-floor level that had been lost in the wartime period. Although workers were on the defensive, they put up considerable opposition. Strikes

tended to be of long duration. Workers had gained sufficient confidence in the wartime period to enable them to withstand a succession of serious defeats up to the General Strike of 1926. That major defeat marked the beginning of a new period characterised by demoralisation and increasing unemployment. The second period from 1927 to 1938, included years of severe unemployment. Strikes tended to be both fewer in number, and shorter in length. Workers were very much on the defensive. The third period includes the wartime period of 1939 to 1945 and the post-war years up to 1951. During the greater part of this period there were severe restrictions on the right to strike. Since most strikers were both unofficial and illegal they tended to be of very short duration. Despite these restrictions the economic environment was much more conducive towards militancy. Conditions of full employment continued in the fourth period, which covers the remaining year 1952-1969.

Some indication of the changing pattern of strikes may be gained from Table IV which compares the average annual number of working days lost per strikes for four selected periods since 1919. The period 1939 to 1951 has not been included for comparative purposes, due to the peculiarly truncated system of industrial relations that resulted from restrictions on the right to strike.

TABLE IV

NUMBER OF WORKING DAYS LOST PER STRIKER:
SELECTED PERIODS BETWEEN 1919 AND 1964

Years (inclusive)	Average annual number of working days lost per striker
1919 - 1926*	38.6
1927 - 1938	10.2
1952 - 1956	4.2
1957 - 1964	4.5

*up to, but not including, the General Strike of 1926.

Source: Figures calculated from Ministry of Labour statistics. Statistics for the period 1919 to 1969 are reprinted in Table IX at the end of the chapter.

(b) Worker involvement in strikes.

In further support of their thesis of the "withering away of the strike" Ross and Hartman introduce a second main statistical measure which they term the "membership involvement ratio." This ratio measures the sum of all workers involved in all strikes recorded during any year divided by the number of union members for that year. Ross and Hartman plot the changes in this ratio for the years 1911 through to 1955. Between those years the total union membership increased from 3,139,000 to 9,662,000.[8] In order for the membership involvement ratio to remain constant, the number of workers involved in strikes would, therefore, have had to increase threefold. Since this has not taken place, Ross and Hartman argue that the decline in the ratio supports their thesis that the strike is disappearing. This argument neglects the fact that more strikes may be expected in the early development of any labour movement. There is no reason why, when overall membership is increased threefold, the number of those members engaged in strike activity should also be expected to triple. A review of the figures for the United Kingdom up to 1956 reveals that the "membership involvement ratio" has in fact fluctuated rather than significantly declined.

(c) Frequency of strikes.

Ross and Hartman tend to neglect the incidence of strikes as an index of strike activity. The experience since the mid-fifties has

shown some interesting developments.

The relative stability for Britain's strike incidence prior to the mid-fifties may be ascertained from Table IX, located at the end of this chapter. In the mid-fifties the number of strikes began to show a significant increase. This increase has, to some extent, been obscured by developments in the mining industry. For the greater part of the twentieth century the collieries have continued to dominate the history of industrial conflict in Britain.[9] The number of disputes in the coal industry fell in the first year or two after nationalization, and then began to rise steadily, reaching a peak in 1957. Since then the number of strikes in mining has fallen. This may largely be attributed to the declining nature of the industry. The effect has been to obscure the real national trend in the incidence of strikes. Table V compares the number of disputes in coal mining to those taking place in other industries between 1957 and 1967. The frequency of strikes outside of mining has increased considerably, with the 1967 level being over two and a half times as high as that for 1957.

TABLE V

NUMBER OF STOPPAGES DUE TO INDUSTRIAL DISPUTES IN COAL MINING AND THE REST OF THE ECONOMY, 1957-1967

Year	Stoppages in Coal Mining	Stoppages in the rest of the economy	All Stoppages
1957	2224	635	2859
1958	1963	666	2629
1959	1307	786	2093
1960	1666	1166	2832
1961	1458	1228	2686
1962	1203	1246	2449
1963	987	1081	2068
1964	1058	1466	2524
1965	740	1614	2354
1966	553	1384	1037
1967*	391	1694	2085

*Provisional Figures for 1967.

Source: Ministry of Labour figures quoted in Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations 1965-1968, (London: HMSO, 1968), p. 96.

Unofficial Strikes: 1940-1969

Unofficial strikes are not a new development. Knowles remarks that "unofficial strikes are almost as old as trade unions."[10] The history of strike action in the twentieth century has been very much the history of unofficial activity.

The years preceeding 1914 saw widespread unofficial action. Almost all strikes during World War I were unofficial.[11] The year 1919 was especially marked by unofficial strikes. After the slump of 1921 the strike movement largely consisted of "unofficial, local sporadic struggles, carried on at best with the passive approval of the National Union, and often in the face of active Union opposition."[12] In 1927 the number of all strikes started to fall. Nevertheless, unofficial strikes still occurred in 1927 and 1928, the most notable being those linked to the Minority Movement in the clothing and mining industries.[13]

During the early years of the Second World War the number of working days lost as a result of strikes fell considerably. This was probably due more to the fact that strikes tended to be shorter, than to their being fewer. The strike statistics for the war years are included in Table IX. The statistics for 1944 indicate a clear increase for the number of strikes, the number of workers involved and the number of working days lost. The overwhelming majority of all strikes were unofficial. Henry Pelling writes that

> In early 1944 the chief industrial problem was not so much the wage level as the separate though related issue of unofficial strikes.

> Things had changed since 1940; for in 1944 the loss of working days was in excess of any year since 1932.[14]

The miners featured prominently in the statistics for 1944. Out of the 3.7 million working days lost due to strike in that year they alone accounted for the loss of 2.5 million working days.[15]

Between 1945 and 1950 there was a drop in the number of strikes, in the number of workers involved and in the number of strike days. The existence of a Labour administration may provide a partial explanation. Knowles illustrates this point by quoting a speaker at the 1948 Trades Union Congress who insisted that in order for the Labour Party to win the forthcoming election industrial peace was essential.[16]

An increase in the number of strikes was recorded for 1951. There was also an increase in the number of strikers involved and in the number of working days lost. The year 1951 marked the beginning of a period in which the number of strikes remained about steady at first and then slowly climbed to a peak in 1957. The importance of the mining industry has already been stressed. If we exclude mining from our consideration we see that the annual number of strikes showed a marked increase after 1957. In 1957 the total number of recorded stoppages for all industries other than mining was 635. By 1967 the number of stoppages had increased to 1694.[17]

Only in the very recent period has there been any attempt to start publishing systematic data on the prevalence of unofficial strikes. Statistics collected prior to 1960 do not generally distinguish between

official and unofficial strikes.[18] Nevertheless there is some evidence to suggest a decline in the proportion of strikes which were officially recognised by the trade union executives since around the mid-thirties. Knowles reports that about one out of every two strikes known to have taken place between 1935 and 1936 was thought to be unofficial.[19] More recently, the Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations estimated that in the period between 1964 and 1966 the proportion of strikes officially recognised was one in twenty.[20] It would appear that there has been a significant increase in the number of strikes which are unofficial since the mid-thirties.

The increase in the number of unofficial strikes provided the main focus of concern in both the Royal Commission report of 1968 and the Government White Paper of the following year.[21] The Commission report attempted to show that, although Britain was losing fewer working days through strikes than many other comparable countries with stricter provisions for anti-strike legislation, it had more frequent small and unofficial stoppages.

Both of the above mentioned reports make the similar general assumption that the United Kingdom has experienced a very high incidence of industrial conflict. One of the few writers to challenge this assumption is H. A. Turner.

> The suggestion that the United Kingdom is unique in having a majority of its strikes occur as unofficial or 'unconstitutional' ones is largely unsupported. And the supposedly peculiar costs of the British pattern of industrial conflict have not been satisfactorily

> demonstrated by those who allege them. . . .One can perhaps add that what seems currently a widespread public assumption that Britain is notably strike-prone appears to have little justification.[22]

Turner bases his argument on his contention that international statistics are virtually worthless for comparative purposes. As an example he refers to the very different criteria employed by the United States and the United Kingdom. With respect to the actual cost of strikes Turner notes that no systematic statistics are available beyond the record of working days lost.

Unofficial strike action in the period 1940-1969 has not been evenly distributed throughout the organised workforce. The more militant sectors have included engineering workers, miners, dockworkers, busmen and building workers. In most cases it is precisely these strike-prone groups of workers who have developed their own forms of rank-and-file organisation.

The reversal in the downward trend in strike activity that occurred during the early fifties was discussed earlier. The main points may be restated. First, there was an increase in the average number of working days lost per year. Second, there was a rise in the number of individual workers involved in strike activity. Third, there was a rise in the number of strikes occurring each year. But government statistics for the number of official strikes do not show any consistent tendency to increase between 1960-1967. Unofficial strikes have accounted for the general increase in the number of strikes. The general

picture of strike activity at the end of the period covered by the present study has been described as "one of an unprecedented number of strikes, involving a very large number of workers, but lasting, in contrast to the pre-war years, a relatively short time."[23]

Two factors which partly help to explain this trend deserve consideration. The first is the general economic environment. Conditions of full employment are generally considered to enhance the bargaining strength of workers. The wider relationship between strikes and economic conditions is discussed by Knowles who confirms that economic conditions do affect the incidence of strikes. He points out that the size and duration of strikes is also dependent on such factors as the influence of trade union policy or the political atmosphere prevalent at the time.[24] The relation between full employment and aggressive workshop bargaining is examined in greater detail in the next chapter.

The second factor that deserves consideration concerns the impact of technological change. The period since 1940 has seen a general trend towards the growing integration by large-scale capital of both plant and productive processes. This has often resulted in a situation whereby a strike by quite a small number of workers may be sufficient to halt an entire production process. In industries such as steel, chemicals and, to a lesser extent, automobile manufacture, the very threat of strike action may have been all that was required to obtain concessions from management. The bargaining power of a particular

group of workers may be strengthened by the fact that production further down the line is dependent on the completion of a particular task. This point may be demonstrated by reference to the automobile industry. Table VI compiled by the staff of the Economist, offers some indication of the bargaining strength of relatively small groups of workers in the industry. With respect to technical change in the automobile industry the Economist made the following assessment: "The cumulative effects of bloody-minded stoppages grows yearly as the industry - to its own technical benefit - becomes increasingly dependent on a relatively small number of specialised plants."[25] Simple technical solutions are not always open to management. For example, in the automobile manufacture industry the practice of stockpiling components does not provide a viable solution due to the high costs involved, the constant change in design and the limitation on storage space.

TABLE VI

SELECTED STOPPAGES IN THE BRITISH AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY, JANUARY TO AUGUST 1965

	Factory	Strikers	Men Laid Off	Lost Output
January 17	Morris, Cowley	19	6,000 for 11 days by BMC	. . .
February 24	British Road Services	200 drivers	1,000 by BMC	. . .
April	Pressed Steel	not known	6,400 off for 2½ weeks by Rootes	8,750 cars - £4½ million £2 million
May 28	Austin, Longbridge	300	5,000 by BMC	. . .
June 15	Nuffield Bodies Coventry	16 Transport drivers	1,000 by BMC	
August	ICT	Computer maintenance men	2,000 by Rootes for 2 weeks	4,000 cars
August	Birmingham Aluminium Castings	--80 die-casters	21,000 by BMC	8 million None:
August	Halewood--Sidgwick & Collings	300 Delivery Drivers	5,000 by Ford	short time was imminent

Source: The Economist, (London, September 4, 1965), p. 896.

Patterns of Strike Causation

In Chapter One we proposed a general framework for the analysis of strike action. We argued that strike action can best be understood in terms of the structural relationship entered into between employers and workers. We also noted that strike action may develop over the question of the price to be paid for the use of the worker's labour-power, or the conditions under which the worker agrees to work. We suggested that Marx's theory of alienation could prove helpful in understanding certain dimensions of strike activity. As an example of this sort of approach we referred to the work of André Gorz who argues that many strikes represent a revolt against the alienated nature of work performed for wages in contemporary capitalism.

The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to exploring the sort of demands that were raised by strikers over the general period 1914 to 1969. We may start by asking whether it is fruitful to make any sort of distinction as to the nature of demands raised in the course of industrial disputes. An obvious distinction that is usually made concerns the differentiation of wage issues from non-wage issues. One of the problems with such a distinction arises from the observation that non-wage grievances may be channeled into wage demands. This point is central to Gouldner's analysis of the wildcat strike at the gypsum processing operation. Gouldner observes how a wage demand became what he terms a "punitive retaliation."[26] He quotes a worker who explained

that the purpose of the wage demand was to "hit the company where it hurt - in the pocketbook."[27] Gouldner concludes that the factors of discipline and increased supervision were the real issues at stake in the strike. He lists eight factors which tended to inhibit the articulation of non-wage grievances. These factors may be summarized as follows:

(1) There were contractual restraints against opening labor contracts for issues other than wages.

(2) Workers themselves held certain doubts about the legitimacy of non-wage issues.

(3) Whilst non-wage grievances varied from one section of the plant to another it was thought that a wage issue could unify workers throughout the plant.

(4) It was thought that people outside the plant would be more likely to understand and support a wage demand.

(5) A wage strike offered the possibility of eventually recovering the losses incurred during the strike. This was considered important to families and bill collectors.

(6) The new regional representative to the local union leadership was unfamiliar with some of the non-wage grievances, although he felt quite confident in raising the matter of wages.

(7) In this respect he was assisted by the national union office which could provide documentation on such topics as company profits.

(8) Wage struggles were not viewed by the company as a threat to managerial prerogatives.[28]

These factors considered by Gouldner might be pertinent to unofficial strike action in general. A variety of factors appear to help channel worker grievances into the form of wage demands. For the remainder of this chapter we shall consider some of the available data on the recorded reasons given by workers to account for their taking strike action.

(a) Some comments on strike causation statistics.

Caution needs to be exercised when looking at any statistics on strike causation. Such figures are, however, available and can offer some guidance in understanding the trend of strikes. The strike causation statistics considered in this chapter include, first of all the "official" statistics, by which is meant those figures published by the Ministry of Labour. Later in the chapter we consider the results of questionnaire research conducted by the TUC between 1959 and 1960. This is followed by a consideration of more recently published material on one highly strike-prone industry, the British motor industry, where a team of authors have compiled their own statistics.

Some preliminary comments are in order here to avoid any misapprehensions concerning the validity of strike causation statistics. A clear understanding of the nature of such statistics is necessary. A possible argument against any serious consideration of strike causation statistics might be based on the supposition that explicit causes of strikes are somehow unimportant. It is sometimes argued that any strike

"cause" is merely the precipitating factor that touched off the strike.

The classification used by the Ministry of Labour does not provide an _explanation_ for why strikes take place. As William McCarthy has observed:

> In fact the list is wrongly named. It is not an objectively compiled list of the principal causes of industrial unrest . . . . It is a classification of strike statistics according to the main or "principal" reasons most frequently cited by those involved at the time.[29]

The statistics are compiled by officers of the Ministry of Labour and derived from all available data. The most obvious sources of data at the time of any strike are the speeches and writings of those involved. Difficulties may arise as to the correct category for a particular dispute where two or more grievances are articulated. In such cases the officers decide which, in their opinion, is the principal concern. All recorded strikes must ultimately be fitted into one of the seven classifications.

(b) The official statistics.

Prior to 1914 strike causes were broken down in detail by the Board of Trade in its publication, _Reports on Strikes and Lockouts_.[30] In the 1913 Report, characteristic examples of a variety of issues falling under nine main headings were given. These headings were subsequently adopted and are as follows: (1) wage increase questions, (2) wage decrease questions, (3) other wage questions, (4) hours of labour,

(5) employment of particular classes of persons, (6) other working arrangements, rules and discipline, (7) trade union principle, (8) sympathetic action and, (9) miscellaneous. These nine causes of the Ministry of Labour's classification have been employed for sufficiently long a period to justify useful historical comparison. Knowles makes such an attempt for the period up to 1947. He suggests the nine categories may be simplified to fall under three major headings as follows: (1) "basic" causes, covering all questions of wages and hours, (2) "frictional" causes, covering the categories of "employment of certain classes of persons" and "other working arrangements, rules and discipline," (3) "solidarity" causes accounting for strikes on trade union principle and sympathetic strikes.[31]

On the basis of his revised classification Knowles shows how there has been a decline in the relative importance of strikes on "basic" questions, while there has been a corresponding increase in strikes on "frictional" issues. Knowles takes the year 1926 as a watershed as is demonstrated in Table VII.

Knowles puts forward two reasons to help explain the decline in the significance of strikes occurring over issues of wages and hours in the period 1911 to 1947. First, he notes how, towards the end of the period, wage increases were more likely to be negotiated at the _national_ level.[32] Knowles argues that reliance on national bargaining may reduce the likelihood of strike action. The attempt to negotiate national wage rates gained greatest momentum during the 1930's in a period of acute

TABLE VII

CAUSES OF STRIKES, 1911-1947

	Basic	Frictional	Solidarity	All
Number of strikes (per year)				
1911-1925	617(69%)	198(22%)	83(9%)	898(100%)
1927-1947	543(54%)	395(39%)	66(7%)	1004(100%)
Thousands of workers directly involved (per year)				
1911-1925	618(76%)	114(13%)	89(11%)	851(100%)
1927-1947	188(60%)	86(27%)	41(13%)	316(100%)
Workers directly involved per strike (per year)				
1911-1925	1050	580	1070	950
1927-1947	350	220	630	310

Source: K.G.J.C. Knowles, Strikes: A Study in Industrial Conflict (New York: Philosophical Library, 1952), p. 234.

unemployment. Once won, national wage negotiation was maintained as a central tenet of formal trade unionism in Britain. But this insistence on national bargaining has become increasingly irrelevant for many important sectors of industry. Chapter Five describes the operation of the sort of localized informal patterns of bargaining that has become increasingly important in the period 1940 to 1969. Strike action has, therefore, continued to take place over issues of wages at the local level. This development has been particularly pronounced in the period since Knowles published his important work.

The second factor introduced by Knowles refers to the peculiar circumstances that prevailed under the wartime period between 1940 and 1945 in Britain, when wage strikes were not only branded as "unpatriotic" (or even interpreted as acts of "sabotage"), but were also illegal and ran contrary to TUC war-time policy.[33] The post-war period up to 1951 saw the continuation of somewhat similar conditions. Knowles suggests that in these circumstances unrest over question of wages and hours may tend to have appeared in disguise as other questions.

These factors provide no more than a partial explanation. The emphasis on issues that are not connected with wages or hours can also be viewed as a consequence of the severe dislocations caused by war-time conditions. In World War I it was the threat that "dilution" posed to the living standards of engineering workers that helped foster rank-and-file militancy on issues of control. Workers were protecting their immediate standards as well as acting defensively in anticipation against

the consequences of "dilution" at the end of the war. A slump in war production combined with the return of men from the armed services did not offer too optimistic a future. In such circumstances, it is not surprising that struggles on the shop floor did not solely take the form of wage demands. Other factors that might help to explain the absence of wage demands in wartime would include the reduction in the presence of consumer goods in time of war-time, combined with the relatively high earnings resulting from extensive overtime work. The emphasis by strikers on issues other than wages can also be said to represent an urge on the part of workers to challenge management on the question of who controls production. Qualitative questions concerned with the nature of human labour can be as important as the price that is to be paid for the use of that labour power.

(c) Other reports

The TUC has collected and published some helpful data on the reasons given for strike action. An undertaking to research strikes was made at the 1959 meeting of Congress. The General Council of the TUC undertook to report "on the broad problem of dispute, workshop representation and related matters."[34] Questionnaires were subsequently sent to unions. Information regarding the cause of both official and unofficial strikes was requested for the years 1958 and 1959. The report chiefly reviewed local disputes. The replies were broken down in the report to Congress to read as follows:

> 32 percent - Money. Two-thirds concerned wage rates and one-third concerned bonus payments. These strikes included cases where workers claimed higher amounts and cases where they resisted employers' attempts to impose reduction.
> 29 percent - Dismissals (20 percent being dismissals of stewards or of members on disciplinary charges and 9 percent arising from disputes over redundancy arrangements).
> About 6 percent each - Recognition; non-unionism; breaking of agreements or awards by employers; changes of work systems; and demarcation or dilution.
> Of the remainder (33 percent) about a half were caused by complaints about conditions in which work was expected to be carried on - and by complaints about supervisors.[35]

The majority of disputes were not concerned with what were strictly money issues. This conclusion was given further support by the unions' reports on the "underlying causes" where these were perceived as being different from the "stated causes." The TUC report states that "when account is taken of these underlying causes the proportion of strikes due to disputes about money is even less pronounced."[36]

A continuing decline in the proportion of strikes over purely wage issues has marked the period since 1947. In a 1963 lecture on British strike trends H. A. Turner drew attention to an increase in the proportion of strikes about "wage questions other than demands for increases" and especially "working arrangements, rules and discipline" between 1940 and 1960 of from one-third of all stoppages to three-quarters.[37] Turner has subsequently elaborated on this observation with reference to one particular industry. In collaboration with Clack and Roberts, Turner has made full use of the several available sources to collect information on strikes in the British motor vehicle

industry. In considering the statistics for the causation of car firm disputes between 1921 and 1964, Turner et al. develop a new method of classification. The purpose here is not to challenge the general validity of the official method of classification but rather to provide a classification that is better suited to the particular circumstances of the motor industry. The authors point out that the three major causes of car strikes that emerge -- namely, the industry's wage-structure, redundancy in the industry, and trade union relations -- would be either understated or almost concealed under the official classification. One of the most significant observations made by Turner and his associates for the period since 1945 is the sharp increase in the strike-liability attributable to issues other than those major causes referred to above; namely wage-structure, redundancy and trade union relations. They go on to point out that this increase has been most noticeable in the 1960's,

> when the strike-liability on account of these secondary sources of dispute has risen quite disproportionately - so that whereas before 1960 they accounted for 25 to 30 per cent of striker-days and stoppages, in more recent years they have contributed from 40 to 45 per cent. In effect, the causation of car firm striker has also shown a marked recent tendency to become more dispersed, and to involve a wider network of grievances. . . .[39]

The authors proceed to explore this movement further and make the following observations: (1) Disputes involving trade union relationships and "straight" wage demands appear to account for a steady annual number of "man-days of idleness." (2) Disputes arising from redundancy have tended to fluctuate according to economic conditions of relative full employment

or recession. (3) Disputes about working hours or conditions of work have increased sharply, but it should be noted that such disputes contribute very little to the total of "working days lost." (4) The number of strikes protesting the dismissal or suspension of individual workers has also increased, having doubled or more than doubled in frequency. (5) In addition such strikes have been increasing in duration. Such observations lead Turner et al. to conclude that: "The most recent strike-movement in other words, is treading very closely into the area of traditional 'management functions'."[40] They also note that such a movement is in no way developing at the expense of the struggle over wage-structure and related matters. On the contrary; such quarrels have continued to increase.

(d) Conclusion: The urge to control

We have considered the importance of wage demands in relation to other sorts of demands raised in disputes occurring over the general period 1919 to 1969. The main interest has focused on the reasons actually given for striking by the strikers involved. Reference to official government statistics and other research suggested that strikes appear to have increasingly been concerned with grievances that implicitly or explicitly pertain to the question of control at the workplace.

TABLE VIII

OFFICIAL, UNOFFICIAL AND OTHER STOPPAGES OF WORK DUE TO INDUSTRIAL DISPUTES: Average annual figures for stoppages, 1964-1966(a)

Type of stoppage	Number of stoppages	Number of workers involved(b)	Number of working days lost
Official strikes	74	101,000	733,000
Partly-official strikes(c)	2	600	7,000
Unofficial strikes	2,171	653,400	1,697,000
Others, e.g. lock-outs or strikes by unorganised workers, unclassified	25	2,700	15,000
All	2,272	757,800	2,452,000

Notes:

(a) The figures relate to stoppages beginning in the years covered and the total number of working days lost due to them.

(b) Including workers thrown out of work at establishments where stoppages occurred, although not themselves parties to the dispute.

(c) I.e., a strike involving more than one union and recognised as official by at least one but not all the unions concerned.

Source: Ministry of Labour Statistics, quoted in Report of Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations (London: HMSO, 1968), p. 97.

TABLE IX

STRIKES IN ALL INDUSTRIES IN THE UNITED KINGDOM
1919-1969

Year	Number of stoppages beginning in year	Number of workers directly and indirectly involved 000's	Aggregate number of working days lost 000's
1919	1,352	2,591	34,330
1920	1,607	1,932	28,858
1921	736	1,801	82,269
1922	576	552	19,850
1923	628	405	10,949
1924	710	613	8,361
1925	603	441	8,907
1926	322	1,154	146,298
1927	308	108	867
1928	302	124	1,390
1929	431	533	8,287
1930	422	307	4,453
1931	420	490	7,013
1932	389	379	6,435
1933	357	136	1,024
1934	471	134	1,061
1935	553	271	1,951
1936	818	316	2,008
1937	1,129	597	3,136
1938	875	274	1,332
1939	940	337	1,354
1940	922	299	941

Year	Number of stop-pages beginning in year	Number of workers directly and in-directly involved 000's	Aggregate number of working days lost 000's
1941	1,251	360	1,077
1942	1,303	456	1,530
1943	1,785	557	1,832
1944	2,194	821	3,696
1945	2,293	531	2,847
1946	2,205	526	2,182
1947	1,721	623	2,398
1948	1,759	424	1,935
1949	1,426	433	1,805
1950	1,339	302	1,375
1951	1,719	379	1,687
1952	1,714	415	1,769
1953	1,746	1,360	2,157
1954	1,989	448	2,441
1955	2,419	659	3,741
1956	2,648	507	2,036
1957	2,859	1,356	8,398
1958	2,629	523	3,416
1959	2,093	645	5,257
1960	2,832	814	3,001
1961	2,686	771	2,998
1962	2,449	4,420	5,757
1963	2,068	590	1,731
1964	2,524	872	2,011
1965	2,354	868	2,906
1966	1,937	530	2,372
1967	2,116	732	2,765
1968	2,378	2,256	4,672
1969	3,116	1,656	6,799

Source: The figure for the years 1919 to 1964 were taken from Militant Trade Unionism by V. L. Allen (London: Merlin Press, 1966), pp. 106-107 and those for the remaining years up to 1969 were taken from the Employment and Productivity Gazette, May, 1970, p. 406.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Arthur M. Ross and Paul T. Hartman, Changing Patterns of Industrial Conflict (New York: Wiley, 1960).

[2]Ross and Hartman, op. cit., p. 6.

[3]H. A. Turner, The Trend of Strikes (Leeds: Leeds University Press, 1963), p. 9.

[4]Ross and Hartman, op. cit., p. 19.

[5]Ross and Hartman, op. cit., p. 24.

[6]Infra. p. 36.

[7]Analysis of the period in such general terms is subject to criticism. The approach adopted is similar to that employed by T. Cliff and C. Barker in their pamphlet Incomes Policy, Legislation and Shop Stewards (London: London Industrial Shop Stewards' Defence Committee, 1966).

[8]Ross and Hartman, op. cit., pp. 200-201.

[9]One of the more graphic illustrations of this point is the General Strike of 1926, which developed out of the struggle of the miners who faced reduced wages and increased working hours. See Julian Symons, The General Strike (London: Cresset Press, 1957).

[10]K.G.J.C. Knowles, Strikes: A Study in Industrial Conflict (New York: Philosophical Library, 1952), p. 32.

[11]One exception was when the South Wales Miners' Federation called an official strike which resulted in the Minister of Munitions, Lloyd George, travelling to Cardiff to make concessions. See R. Page Arnot, The Miners' Years of Struggle, pp. 164-170, cited by V. L. Allen in Militant Trade Unionism (London: Merlin Press, 1966).

[12]Labour Monthly, February 1924, p. 91, quoted by Knowles, op. cit., p. 32.

[13]The National Minority Movement had been launched in 1924 with Tom Mann as its president and Harry Pollitt, a leading member of the Communist Party, as secretary. The Movement had earlier taken root in the coalfields, a Miners' Minority Movement having been organised in 1923. The Minority Movement stood for the formation of factory committees, industrial unionism and workers' control of industry. See Allen Hutt, British Trade Unionism: A Short History (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1952).

[14]Henry Pelling, A History of British Trade Unionism (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 217.

[15]Seymour Papert, "The Strike Movement" in A Socialist Review (London: International Socialism, 1965), p. 118.

[16]The speaker was a Mr. T. Eccles of the N.U.G. & M.U. The proceedings of the debate are to be found in the TUC Report for 1948, p. 338. Cited by Knowles, op. cit., p. 96.

[17]According to the provisional figures published by the Report of the Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations (London: HMSO, 1968), p. 96.

[18]It was not until 1960 that the Ministry of Labour began to keep records separating official from unofficial strikes. Even then, they were not published, because, it was argued, they were considered liable to be inaccurate. One source of error that found specific mention was the possibility that a strike might be made official by a union after it was recorded by the Ministry. Although it is not clear to what extent such problems were overcome, the Ministry informed the Royal Commission that the figures could be considered as "broadly accurate" and a table showing the pattern for the years 1964-1966 appeared in the final report. More recently the government White Paper In Place of Strife, A Policy for Industrial Relations, Cmnd. 3888 (London: HMSO, January 1969) up-dated the figures to 1967. A table showing the statistics for official, unofficial and other stoppages of work between 1964 and 1967 is provided in Table IX.

[19]The actual proportion of strikes which were official was probably considerably less than available statistics would appear to suggest. Knowles consults the report of the Ministry of Labour for 1936 (Cmnd. 5431) and statements made by the Minister in the Commons. Knowles reports as follows:

> Mr. Ernest Brown stated on November 12th, 1936 (Hansard, vol. 317, col. 1026) that from January 1935 to September 1936 at least 530 strikes out of 1,101 recorded disputes had been unofficial. On July 1st, 1937 (Hansard, vol. 325, col. 2167)

he gave the figure, for 1936 alone, of at least 435 unofficial strikes out of a total of 818. (These strikes involved 210,000 workers, out of some 316,000; and 900,000 days lost out of 1,829,000). In 1936 there were, in addition, 115 strikes about which no information could be had on this point; and a further 89 were strikes of unorganised workers. Thus no more than 189 strikes - less than one-quarter - were known to be officially supported.

Knowles, op. cit., p. 33 footnote.

[20]Royal Commission Report, op. cit., p. 97.

[21]White Paper, In Place of Strife: A Policy for Industrial Relations, Cmnd. 3888 (London: HMSO, 1969).

[22]H. A. Turner, Is Britain Really Strike-Prone? A Review of the Incidence, Character and Costs of Industrial Conflict (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Department of Applied Economics Occasional Papers: 20, 1969), cited by Eric Wigham in a review article "Are We really Strike-Prone?" The Times (London, May 15, 1969), p. 25.

[23]Hinton, Unions and Strikes (London: Sheed and Ward, 1969), p. 52.

[24]Knowles, op. cit., p. 144.

[25]Economist (London), September 4, 1965, p. 896.

[26]Alvin W. Gouldner, Wildcat Strike (Yellow Springs: Antioch, 1954), p. 33.

[27]Loc. cit.

[28]Ibid, pp. 34-36.

[29]William McCarthy, "The Reasons given for Striking" Oxford University Institute of Economics and Strike Bulletin, Volume XXI, February, 1959, pp. 17-18.

[30]Knowles, op. cit., p. 230.

[31]Ibid., p. 234.

[32]Ibid., p. 235.

[33]Ibid., p. 237.

[34] TUC Report, 1960, p. 124.

[35] Ibid., p. 125.

[36] Ibid., p. 126.

[37] H. A. Turner, The Trend of Strikes (Leeds: Leeds University Press, 1963), p. 18.

[38] H. A. Turner, Garfield Clack and Geoffrey Roberts, Labour Relations in the Motor Industry (London: Allen and Unwin, 1967).

[39] Ibid., p. 67.

[40] Ibid., p. 68.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION OF WORKPLACE REPRESENTATION IN BRITAIN: 1940-1969

The Growth of Workplace Representation

The term "shop steward" is used throughout the present study to refer to workplace representatives in general. The term is by far the most common in British industry although other terms are employed in certain unions or trades.[1] Whatever their particular title, such workplace representatives perform broadly similar functions. Central to their work is the representative function which involves acting on behalf of, and being directly accountable to, a group of employees working at a certain location.

One of the earliest and most significant advances in shop steward organisation took place in engineering during and immediately after the World War I. The period saw the emergence of a shop stewards' movement which gained considerable support in demanding the reorganisation of the engineering industry on the lines of workers' control.[2] But, by 1922, the movement had all but disintegrated and the further development of shop steward organisation was held back while organised labour fought bitter defensive struggles. In addition to the hostility that could be expected from employers, any attempts to further workshop organisation faced the disinterest of most union leadership.

Writing in 1939, G.D.H. Cole, a veteran of the guild socialist

movement that formed part of the movement for workers' control earlier in the century, could detect certain significant stirrings of renewed worker militancy:

> The shop-stewards' movement was killed for the time being in Great Britain by the post war depression and the scaling-down of the industries which had been expanded to meet war needs; but it will come again whenever the workers are ready to take a real step forward against the capitalist system.[3]

The Hawker strikes of 1935, the London Busmen's "Coronation" strike of 1937 and struggles against company unionism in the mining industry, such as those at Harworth in Nottinghamshire, gave some indications of the renewed militancy amongst rank-and-file workers.

Although the pre-war unemployment figures for Britain remained at around one million the re-armament boom of 1938-39 did open some new possibilities for the re-emergence of militant trade unionism. Ken Coates and Anthony Topham describe the developments:

> Re-armament had created small islands of security in the general economic wen, and the old agitators of the Communist Party . . . began to work towards the recreation of an effective shop-stewards' movement.[4]

The opening years of the war up to 1941 saw some modest achievements in this direction. Shop stewards in the aircraft industry started to publish a monthly journal called the <u>New Propeller</u> which subsequently expanded its scope and was re-named the <u>Metalworker</u>. It was in the engineering and allied trades that the shop stewards were by far the

best organised. In April 1940 a national conference of shop steward from the industry was held in Birmingham.[5]

After 1941 Communist Party militants re-directed their energies towards actually promoting productivity. The German invasion of the Soviet Union had led to an about turn in party position. The call went up for the formation of Joint Production Committees in every enterprise. The actual extent to which the Communist Party was able to dampen industrial conflict is debatable. Knowles examines the strike statistics for the metal, engineering and shipbuilding trades where Communist strength was greatest and reports that, if anything, the number of strikes may even have increased. But he adds that this does not preclude the claim that the number of potential strikes may still have been reduced, especially when the experience in other key war industries is taken into account.[6] The effect of the Joint Production Committees always remained somewhat ambiguous. Whilst it is true that the committees did serve to blunt and deflect well defined class demands that would have seriously challenged management, it is also true that workplace representation was considerably extended during the war years. Trade union membership also increased from 6,053,000 in 1939 (including 4,669,000 affiliated to the TUC) to 7,803,000 in 1945 (6,671,000 affiliated).[7]

The return of a Labour Government in 1945 tended to delay any break with the policy of labour-management co-operation pursued by many of the workplace committees during the war. The language that made reference to "production drives" remained. In 1947 the Communist Party

was still calling for the revival of the old Joint Production Committees.[8] Indeed in so far as the Communist Party was concerned it was the outbreak of the Cold War which, more than any other development, probably forced some change in attitude.

Various estimates have been made of the total number of shop stewards in British industry in the post-war period. In 1959 Clegg, Killick and Adams estimated, on the basis of their own sample survey, that there might be about 90,000 stewards, though they saw this as "no better than a guess."[9] The TUC Report of 1960 gave the much higher figure of "at least 200,000 stewards" although it was stressed that "no census has been taken."[10] Marsh and Coker, writing in 1963, arrived at a figure for the total number of stewards as being between 100,000 and 120,000 - a number which was also confirmed by H. A. Clegg.[11] More recently, in evidence to the Donovan Commission, the TUC exceeded its 1960 figure by estimating that the total number of shop stewards was in the order of 250,000.[12]

The exact number of shop stewards remains in doubt. One of the problems in this regard is that any precise census would have to require the articulation of a set of fairly explicit criteria as to who is a shop steward. Thus, it should be noted that Marsh and Coker see their estimate of between 100,000 and 120,000 as "a reasonable bracket in which to consider total numbers of formally appointed stewards" but go on to add that "there may be many workers who act in a representative capacity when required, but who have never asked for or received formal

credentials as shop stewards."[13] One could reasonably expect to find the least formalized type of representation in smaller establishments or where shop steward organisation is new in developing.

The lack of adequate data makes it very difficult to accurately assess the changing scope of workplace representation. The Amalgamated Engineering Union (A.E.U.) is one of the few unions to keep estimates of the numbers of shop stewards and even then records only go back to 1947. Apart from a possible decline in some industries following the run-down of war production immediately following the war all indications suggest that the overall number of shop stewards in British industry has been growing apace since 1940. W.E.J. McCarthy considers it quite probable that the number has been rising faster than union membership.[14] He refers to the study by Marsh and Coker, who demonstrate how the total number of stewards in the A.E.U. rose by 56 per cent between 1947 and 1961 while A.E.U. membership rose by only 30 per cent.[15]

The mid-1950's usually seem to have opened the way to the most rapid expansion of shop steward organisation. In engineering the number of shop stewards was increasing twice to three times as fast as membership in the late fifties and early sixties.[16] Shop steward organisation quickly took root in the newer industries. Writing in the mid-fifties B. C. Roberts reported that

> in Civil Air Transport, the shop stewards of the fifteen unions which have members at the London Airport have formed their own unofficial organization for the purpose of promoting wage movements and have made contact with stewards at other airports. Similar developments have occurred elsewhere.[17]

In their study of the motor car industry, Turner, Clack and Roberts note that the development of shop steward organisation was particularly fast from the mid-1950's in that particular industry. They estimate that by 1967 there were approximately 5,000 accredited shop stewards in the automobile industry who represented some 200,000 manual workers in the car firms.[18]

After examining the rules of two unions, the Building and the Electrical Trades Unions, B. C. Roberts describes four main sets of tasks expected of a shop stewards by the union:

> (1) He is concerned with recruitment to the union and stimulation of union organization and membership. (2) He is responsible for seeing that members pay their contributions regularly, and may undertake the job of collecting and paying them over to the branch secretary. (3) He is charged with the task of ensuring the carrying out of existing agreements, working practices, customs and habits within a shop. (4) He has the duty of representing the members' interests, and of negotiating on their behalf, in any matters of difficulty or dispute which may arise, with the foreman or management in his shop.[19]

However, as W.E.J. McCarthy points out after a more recent survey of the information on the subject: "Union rule books are not always an accurate reflection of the workplace situation as it affects shop stewards."[20] An example from the automobile industry serves to illustrate this point. In most British car plants two types of ordinary stewards have emerged. The first is the more widespread type of steward who represents only members of one particular union. The second type of steward represents members of two or more unions. This type of representation may be

partly explained by the nature of the work process in automobile production where very small sections of workers often work together. A further explanation may also be sought in the peculiar history of trade unionism in each firm. At Ford plants, for example, Turner, Clack and Roberts report that this form of "geographical" constituency is the norm.[21]

Workshop representation usually implies much more than simply the election of a shop steward. Michael Hardy Spicer describes the situation as being one where "the real seat of power on the shop floor does not rest merely with each individual shop steward but with the joint shop steward committees."[22] The joint shop stewards' committee usually consists of all the shop stewards from the different unions in one place of work. The TUC Report of 1960 noted the extensive coverage of this informal system: "No census has been taken but instances of joint activities between stewards of different unions are, in some industries almost as widespread as workshop representation itself."[23] The extent to which joint shop stewards' committees have gained recognition from management has varied considerably. During the World War I the National Council of Shop Stewards campaigned for the recognition of shop stewards in the munitions industry. Government intervention in negotiations between the Engineering Employers' Federation and the engineering unions led to collective agreements which granted some of the recognition sought, and made provision for the optional establishment of works committees in the engineering industry.

In a brief but informative article, Shirley Lerner and John Bescoby provide a helpful descriptive overview of the nature of shop steward organisation at the level of the industry and the individual company in the British engineering industry.[24] Lerner and Bescoby first consider the industry-wide combine committee which comprises stewards from the major companies in an industry group. They refer to the major attempts to build combine committees in engineering. The first such effort was the National Council of Shop Stewards which operated in the munitions industries during World War I. The second was the Shop Stewards' National Council which started just prior to 1939 in the London aircraft industry and later broadened its base to include all engineering workers on a national scale. The third and more recent example is the Motor-Industry Combine Committee which included stewards from the "Big Six"[25] Motor companies and was notably active in the early fifties up to the major strikes at the British Motor Corporation and Ford in 1956 and 1957. An added feature of this kind of combine that is not mentioned by Lerner and Bescoby is the attempt to build a national centre encompassing representatives from all shop stewards in the country, regardless of industry. The 1960 TUC Report makes reference to two such attempts: firstly, "the abortive conference in December 1959 convened in the name of the Firth Brown stewards" and secondly, "the organisation which goes under the name of the Engineering and Allies Trades Shop Stewards National Council."[26]

The second main kind of shop steward organisation considered by

Lerner and Bescoby is the company-wide combine committee. Such committees are composed of shop stewards who are employed in different works of the same firm. For analytical purposes the authors choose to consider the development of company combine committees in four stages.

The first stage, the formation of informal committees of correspondence between joint shop stewards' committees in different works, usually results from the need for further information about earnings, conditions and the general bargaining situation in other factories. Joint *ad hoc* meetings may take place.

These committees of correspondence quite often evolve into a regular organisation which Lerner and Bescoby term the "formal unrecognised committee."

> The most prevalent type of Combine is the formal unrecognised committee which holds regular meetings, keeps minutes and has executive officers; sometimes it may also have a written constitution. However, it is not recognized either by management or the trade unions and this absence of recognition not only places limitations on its functions and objectives but also helps to fashion the way in which it pursues its goals.[27]

The third category considered by Lerner and Bescoby is distinguished from the second, not by organisation, but rather by its behaviour.

> The third type of company Combine comes into existence when a formally unrecognised Combine behaves like a union within a union, creating problems between the rank-and-file union members and union officials.[28]

The distinction between the second and third category of company combine committee is not particularly helpful. The authors only cite one example.

This writer prefers to remain cautious of "generalizing" such an experience into a certain type of combine committee. Furthermore one is never quite clear where to draw the line between the two types of Combine Committees. Essentially, the authors base their distinction according to whether or not the union and the combine committee appear to be in conflict over how matters are to be handled in a particular plant. This relationship will, of course, vary according to circumstances. In a strike situation any combine committee may well give the appearance of operating as a "union within a union."

In their fourth type of combine committee Lerner and Bescoby discuss the matter of management recognition. They cite instances in the British engineering industry where management has recognised a particular Combine in some consultative or other capacity.[29]

The Meaning of Shop-Floor Democracy

Union rules often neglect to mention some of the more important matters dealing with workplace representation. This is demonstrated by considering the related questions of how the shop steward is selected and to whom he remains responsible. McCarthy reports that

> Most stewards are elected by a "show of hands" in the workplace. But many rule books do not specifically prescribe for this, and often simply state baldly that they "shall be appointed." Others say nothing about how the election is to be conducted, or how often it is to take place. Most rule books specify the body under whose "jurisdiction" shop stewards operate, but it is sometimes unclear who has the power to deprive them of their credentials and for what reason.[30]

The shop steward system provides an interesting application of the principle of direct democracy at the place of work. The shop steward is elected by his workmates in the shop or on the site.[31] Sometimes the vote will be a mere formality such as when the position is not opposed and the steward is acclaimed to the position for a further period. At other times the election may be contested. Roberts notes the occasional occurrence of "fierce contests for the position of steward - in which ballot votes may even be arranged."[32]

It is sometimes argued that the steward's position is not particularly democratic since the chances are that the candidate will not have to actively compete against any rival contestants for the position. The argument deserves scrutiny. First of all, it is helpful to have some accurate information as to the nature of shop steward elections. A survey conducted for the Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations of over a thousand shop stewards from six major unions revealed that

> about two thirds of stewards either went through no form of election or were the only candidate for the job. For the most part those who gave up being a steward did so because they moved to another job; hardly any were defeated in election.[33]

The absence of formalised contests for the office of shop steward is partly explained by the fact that relatively few members appear to want the position. The same survey revealed that only eight per cent of ordinary members interviewed wanted to be shop stewards.[34] But such

surveys remain of limited value as they only gauge the attitude of workers at a particular given time. Many workers may only seriously consider themselves as potential candidates for the position of shop steward when the present holder of the office is clearly shown to be inadequate.

Academic writers on industrial relations have generally tended to be rather skeptical as to the existence of any real process of workplace democracy.[35] In part this might be interpreted as a correct assessment, given the obvious limitations imposed by capitalist relations of production. But the general skepticism more often stems from an overemphasis on liberal models of representative political democracy. The main argument that can be presented in favour of workshop democracy, even as it presently operates, is that it appears to offer some sort of alternative to some of the shortcomings of liberal political democracy.

To develop this argument it is necessary to make a brief excursus to consider some of the different theories of democracy. In his work _Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy_, Joseph A. Schumpeter makes an important distinction between what he calls "the classical doctrine," representing the eighteenth-century philosophy of democracy,[36] and a revised theory which he offers as an interpretation of the realities of the democratic process in most capitalist societies. He defines the democratic method, as it really presents itself, as "that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of competitive struggle for the people's vote."[37]

Schumpeter proceeds to set forth a series of conditions which he considers to be essential to the realization of his definition of democracy. Consideration of these conditions serves to deepen one's understanding of the limitations of liberal democracy. For example, under his fourth set of conditions, which he considers under the heading "Democratic Self-control," Schumpeter writes as follows:

> The voters outside of parliament must respect the division of labor between themselves and the politicians they elect. They must not withdraw confidence too easily between elections and they must refrain from instructing him about what he is to do - a principle that has indeed been universally recognized by constitutions and political theory ever since Edmund Burke's time.[38]

By contrast, the principle that a representative is accountable for so long as he holds office, can be broadly said to operate at the level of the informal shop meeting in British industry. It is not difficult to argue that a far greater degree of democracy can be said to operate at the level of the shop floor than in the realms of parliamentary politics. Any formal exercise of the right to recall shop stewards is probably quite rare in British industry. More important in practice is the fact that stewards are accountable in the most direct day-to-day meaning of the term. McCarthy and Parker recognise this when they note that stewards are "open to daily influence and contact, working without effective sanctions."[39]

The work group electing a shop steward varies in size but is seldom so large as to seriously inhibit close and on-going communication between the steward and the individual shop worker. B. C. Roberts

estimates that in 1948 there was an average of one steward for every 37 members in the Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers.[40] More recently Turner and his associates have found that the ratio of stewards to membership in the car firms ranges from 1:35 in the N.U.V.B. and 1:40 in the A.E.U. to 1:60 in the case of the T. and G.W.U.[41] The results of a national survey of workshop relations conducted by the Government Social Survey for the Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations in 1966 showed that the average ordinary steward represented about 60 members.[42]

A central feature of workplace democracy is the shop floor meeting, which scarcely finds any mention in union rule books. The meeting may take place in actual working time or during a regular break.[43] The shop floor meeting helps to ensure that the steward remains fully accountable to the workers on the shop floor who, in the last instance, would usually maintain that they have the right to recall any particular representative. The meeting itself is seen as the key decision making body.

The danger that the workshop representative will become estranged from those he or she represents is further reduced by the fact that the shop steward is a lay representative who will usually continue working on the shop floor. In a sample survey of shop stewards, the returns of which tended to be weighted in favour of senior-stewards and white-collar representatives, Clegg, Killick and Adams found that respondents spent an average of six hours of working time per week on union business, while further time was spent outside of working hours. Six per cent of the

respondents spent over 30 hours of working time per week on union business, and only four per cent devoted all their working time to shop steward duties.[44]

The means by which stewards are compensated for any loss in earnings resulting from the performance of duties associated with the position varies considerably. McCarthy reports that, with the exception of the N.U.G.M.W., it is quite rare for shop stewards to receive money from union funds other than the small commission usually received for collecting union dues.[45] In his study of the engineering industry, A. I. Marsh found that the union national procedure agreement made no provision for the compensation of stewards for working time lost in carrying out their duties.[46] Although the Engineering Employers' Federation does not appear anxious to encourage its members to formally recognise conveners or senior shop stewards it is nevertheless the experience that informal arrangements are often arranged to cover the shop steward's expenses. In the automobile industry it has become customary for some companies to pay the chief shop stewards or, conveners, as they are more generally known, the factory average earnings, while they are engaged in negotiations. This payment is sometimes supplemented by shop collections in order to bring an individual convener's earnings up to the average of the section of workers with whom he is associated.[47]

The extent of workplace democracy inevitably varies from one shop to another. Some academic observers such as Roberts have tended to stress the formal aspects of the position of shop steward. He refers

to the rules of certain unions which make specific provisions for interference in the process of shop-floor democracy.

> Because of the danger of the wrong kind of persons thus becoming stewards and misusing the position for their own purposes, and with the lessons of the first world war in mind, many unions provide that branch, distinct or national committees shall have the right to veto the appointment of any shop steward if it is thought that he is an unsuitable choice. In the Amalgamated Engineering Union, for example, after a shop steward has been elected he must be approved by the district committee before he may undertake any duties.[48]

But, in point of fact, as Roberts notes in the next sentence, this procedure is not particularly effective, for it provides "only a limited check on the quality of union shop stewards."

Workplace Bargaining and Wage-Drift

The growth of workplace organisation under economic conditions of labour scarcity produced new patterns of bargaining. One of the most prominent features of wage movements in Britain since 1940 has become known as "wage-drift." The term describes that part of the rise in pay that is arranged largely informally at the place of work rather than at the national bargaining headquarters. The precise measurement of wage-drift is difficult, but there is little doubt that the gains have often accounted for a substantial part of the worker's take-home pay. Unlike the formally negotiated awards and collective agreement, these gains have taken place free from any form of central union control. Apart from the British case wage-drift has been conspicuous in those western

countries with predominantly industry-wide settlements such as Scandinavia, the Netherlands and Australia.[49]

Wage-drift needs to be understood in a dynamic sense. It may be defined as the percentage increase in the earnings-gap from any one given point of time to another.[50] The earnings-gap is therefore static and represents the percentage by which earnings exceed wage rates at any given point of time. Wage-drift may be distinguished from earnings-drift by adjusting the earnings series so that overtime earnings are excluded. Any attempt to measure wage-drift would require a comparison of "the actual movement of earnings with the rise that would have come about, at the actual level of activity, from the scheduled provisions alone."[51]

Some of the actual mechanisms of wage-drift in the British experience are described by Phelps-Brown in the following account:

> The employer may simply agree with an individual workman or a group a higher rate than that scheduled; or where the scheduled rate is sacrosanct he may still raise the effective rate by contriving overtime, loosening standards of grading and payment by results, and providing various kinds of bonus and benefit. Advances for particular men or tasks may be claimed and conceded at the place of work. An important instance of this is the negotiation of piece-rates; but payment by results will in any case generally yield higher pay per unit labour input as time goes on, solely through gradual improvement in materials, equipment and organisation which enable the job to be done more easily than when it was first timed.[52]

Various explanations for wage-drift have been advanced. Some of the main arguments are critically appraised by H. A. Turner in an important article in the Manchester School.[53]

One argument suggests that employers are more willing to make concessions over and above the nationally agreed wage-rate when profits are high. But Turner points to a Swedish study which found no connection between "excess profits" and wage-drift.[54]

Another popular argument points to the importance of conditions of manpower surplus or scarcity. On this point there are conflicting reports for different countries but at least one British study has found no relationship between different degrees of wage-drift and varying levels of labour surplus or scarcity.[55]

The seeds of a further argument are to be found in the quotation by Phelps-Brown (cited earlier) where the point was made that rising productivity may have the effect of boosting piece-workers' earnings. The problem with this argument is the fact that proportionately more women industrial operatives than men work on piece-work but women's earnings have increased little more than the agreed wage-rates.[56]

In order to explain wage-drift Turner makes a distinction between short and long-term wage-drift. The former refers to fluctuations in the wage-drift from one year to another while the latter refers to the tendency for wage-drift to increase over the long-term. In the case of manufacturing industry Turner sees two sets of factors in operation:

> There is a short-term wage-drift, due to pieceworkers' earnings rising with productivity, but which is periodically offset by standard wage-advances that bring timeworkers' earnings into line. And there is a long-term wage-drift associated with the upgrading of operatives entailed by technological progress.[57]

In an earlier paper which dealt with the findings of a study of British wage movements from 1938 to 1954 Turner showed how the wage-systems in some industries provided opportunities for workers in a strong bargaining position to win wage-agreements at the workplace.[58] In his subsequent paper Turner again acknowledges the importance of local bargaining in affecting wage-drift. He notes that increased productivity need not necessarily result in the resetting of piece-rates if operatives show a willingness to assert their bargaining strength. Considerable leverage may be exerted by informal workplace groups in a whole variety of ways. The actual boundaries defining negotiable issues may even be extended in the course of such informal collective bargaining.

An important feature of wage-drift is its cumulative effect. As a result of their studies in the engineering industry Lerner and Marquand reported

> that workshop bargaining over piece-rates tends to act as catalyst in the engineering wage-drift. It appears that skilled male payment-by-result workers are in the strongest position in the workshop; the increases which they receive set in motion factory wage claims for other workers.[59]

Shop stewards have played an important role in negotiating new wage structures. The same authors came to the conclusion that "the greatest part of the wage-drift . . . for male timeworkers in the 45 firms examined arose out of workshop bargaining between shop stewards and management."[60]

Wage-drift affects the official trade union leadership who feel obliged to respond to the initiative and challenge of successful workshop

bargaining. One outcome may be higher official wage claims.[61]

Our general conclusion is that the bargaining relationship between employers and workers at the place of work has proved very important in affecting wage-drift. It is now helpful to consider this phenomenon of workplace bargaining in a broader historical context. Turner makes a useful distinction between the present bargaining relationship between employers and workers and their historical bargaining strength.[62] This distinction is helpful in answering some of the problems posed earlier with reference to different national experiences. Denmark has experienced a high rate of wage-drift in spite of a high unemployment rate because of the historical strength of trade unionism in that country. New rates may tend to be negotiated at a disadvantage to labour but the effects will usually take some time to be felt. The opposite conditions have prevailed in the case of Western Germany where the organised labour movement was smashed in the early thirties. Consequently, despite relatively full employment, wage-drift in Western Germany was negligible in the fifties while such other "full" employment economies as Britain and Sweden experienced a significant degree of wage-drift.

FOOTNOTES

[1]W.E.J. McCarthy provides some examples of alternative titles:

> In printing they (shop stewards) are called "fathers" or "mothers" of the chapel; in the Draughtsmen's union "corresponding members;" in the Iron and Steel and Kindred Trades Association "Works representatives," and in the Clerical and Administration Workers' "staff representatives."

See Role of Shop Stewards, Research Paper 1, Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations (London: HMSO, 1966), p. 4.

[2]See Branko Pribićević, The Shop Stewards' Movement and Workers' Control 1910-1922 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1959).

[3]G.D.H. Cole, British Trade Unionism Today, (1939) (London: Menthuen, 1945), p. 167-172, quoted by Ken Coates and Anthony Topham, Industrial Democracy in Great Britain (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1968), p. 148.

[4]Coates and Topham, op. cit., p. 139.

[5]The conference was attended by 283 delegates from 93 factories. The representatives came from various occupations which included shipbuilding, ship repair, motors, radio, electrical equipment and arms manufacture. Approximately 217,000 workers were said to be represented. See Coates and Topham, op. cit., p. 157.

[6]K.G.J.C. Knowles, Strikes (Oxford: Blackwell, 1952), pp. 55-56.

[7]Henry Pelling, A History of British Trade Unionism (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), p. 218.

[8]See the Communist Party pamphlet Britain's Plan for Prosperity, 1947, pp. 110-112, reprinted in part by Coates and Topham, op. cit., pp. 194-196.

[9]H. A. Clegg, A. J. Killick and Rex Adams, Trade Union Officers (Oxford: Blackwell, 1961), p. 153.

[10]TUC Report, 1960, p. 128.

[11]A. I. Marsh and E. E. Coker, "Shop Steward Organisation in the Engineering Industry," British Journal of Industrial Relations, June 1963, p. 189.

[12]Trade Unionism, Evidence of the TUC to the Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations (London: HMSO, 1966), p. 145.

[13]Marsh and Coker, op. cit., p. 190.

[14]W.E.J. McCarthy, The Role of Shop Stewards in British Industrial Relations, Research Paper 1, Royal Commission (London: HMSO, 1967).

[15]Marsh and Coker, op. cit., p. 177.

[16]Loc. cit.

[17]B. C. Roberts, Trade Union Government and Administration in Great Britain (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), pp. 73-74.

[18]H. A. Turner, Garfield Clack and Geoffrey Roberts, Labour Relations in the Motor Industry (London: Allen and Unwin), p. 207.

[19]Roberts, op. cit., pp. 68-69.

[20]McCarthy, Role of Shop Stewards, p. 6.

[21]Turner, Clack and Roberts, op. cit., p. 208.

[22]Michael Hardy Spicer, "Implementing an Incomes Policy: (1) - The Importance of the Shop Steward." Statist, December 25, 1964.

[23]TUC Report, 1960, p. 129.

[24]Shirley W. Lerner and John Bescoby, "Shop Steward Combine Committees in the British Engineering Industry," British Journal of Industrial Relations, July 1966, pp. 154-164.

[25]The "Big Six" included the British Motor Corporation, Ford, Rootes, Rover, Standard and Vauxhall Motors.

[26]TUC Report, 1960, p. 129.

[27]Lerner and Bescoby, op. cit., p. 158.

[28]Ibid., p. 161.

[29]*Ibid.*, p. 162.

[30]McCarthy, *Role of Shop Stewards*, p. 6.

[31]The present study will follow the convention established by writers in industrial relations who refer to the place of work as the "shop" regardless of the particular designation applied in special situations such as the "site" in construction, the "office" in white collar occupations or the "garage" (or "depot") in transportation.

[32]Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

[33]W.E.J. McCarthy and S. R. Parker, *Shop Stewards and Workshop Relations*, Research Paper 10, Royal Commission (London: HMSO, 1968), p. 58.

[34]*Loc. cit.*

[35]Thus in *Trade Union Government* Roberts reveals a tendency to regard shop floor workers as mere pawns who are unaware of the political forces affecting union matters. This attitude towards workers and their democratic process results in a general apprehension over "the wrong kind of persons thus becoming stewards and misusing the position for their own purposes." See p. 67.

[36]Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (1942) (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), pp. 250-268.

[37]*Ibid.*, p. 269.

[38]*Ibid.*, p. 295.

[39]McCarthy and Parker, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

[40]Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

[41]Turner, Clack and Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

[42]The sample included representatives from the National Union of Railwaymen who have a larger constituency than most unions. The survey gave an average figure of 200 members per steward in the NUR. If this union was excluded the average for the remaining five unions in the sample would be 45 members per steward. See McCarthy and Parker, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

[43]During a period spent in the role of participant-observer as a worker in an automobile plant Garfield Clack notes that diner-break meetings had a habit of running over-time. He remarks that, strictly speaking, such events constitute a work stoppage, although he himself chooses not to classify them as such. See Turner, Clack and Roberts, *op. cit.*

[44]Clegg, Killick and Adams, _op. cit._

[45]McCarthy, _Role of Shop Stewards_, p. 10.

[46]A. I. Marsh, _Industrial Relations in Engineering_ (Oxford: Pergammon Press), pp. 81-82, cited by McCarthy, _Role of Shop Stewards_, p. 8.

[47]Turner, Clack and Roberts, _op. cit._, p. 209.

[48]Roberts, _op. cit._, p. 67.

[49]E. H. Phelps Brown, "Wage Drift," _Economica_, November 1962, p. 339.

[50]These definitions are offered by S. W. Lerner and J. Marquand in their article entitled "Workshop Bargaining, Wage Drift and Productivity in the British Engineering Industry" published in _Manchester School of Economics and Social Studies_, January 1962. See p. 16.

[51]Phelps Brown, op. cit., pp. 340-341.

[52]_Ibid._, p. 340.

[53]H. A. Turner, "Wages, Productivity and the Level of Employment: More on the 'Wage Drift', _Manchester School of Economics and Social Studies_, January 1960.

[54]B. Hansen and G. Rehn, "On Wage Drift," _Economic Essays in Honour of Eric Lindahl_, Stockholm, 1956, cited by Turner, _Manchester School_, 1960, p. 96.

[55]L. A. Dicks-Mireaux, "Wage-Earnings and Wage Rates, 1954-57" _London and Cambridge Economic Bulletin_, September 1958, cited by Turner, _Manchester School_, 1960, p. 96.

[56]Turner, _Manchester School_, 1960, pp. 96-97.

[57]_Ibid._, p. 108.

[58]H. A. Turner, "Wages: Industry Rates, Workplace Rates and the Wage-Drift" in the _Manchester School of Economics and Social Studies_, May 1956.

[59]Lerner and Marquand, _op. cit._, p. 53.

[60]_Loc. cit._

[61] This is difficult to document. One is never sure whether union officials are pushed to take more militant stands on wages as a result of wage-drift or whether national wage claims reflect an assessment of what can be won given the union's bargaining strength. At least one author has argued that a centrally negotiated increase in rates merely follows and consolidates previous gains in earnings won at the plant level. See F. W. Paish, "Inflation in the United Kingdom, 1948-57," Economica, May 1958.

[62] Turner, Manchester School, 1960, p. 112.

CHAPTER SIX

UNOFFICIAL STRIKES AND GOVERNMENT POLICY: 1940-1969

This chapter will be devoted to providing a description and analysis of the principle means by which informal trade unionism has been challenged between 1940 and 1969. Two main features of this challenge will be considered. The first is the attempt by successive governments to introduce wage restraint. The second feature relates to legislative attempts to curb unofficial strikes. It is argued that each of these developments represents part of a more generalised attempt to weaken informal trade unionism in contemporary Britain. Similar trends can be detected in other Western-type economies, with such common features emerging as the attempt by the state to engage the support of the official trade union leadership to control the autonomous drive from below.[1]

Incomes Policy

Reference has sometimes been made to the term "wage restraint" while at other times the expression "incomes policy" has been adopted. Nevertheless, governments have rarely had much success in concealing the fact that the latter term represents little more than a euphemism for a policy whose primary purpose is to restrain wage increases. The relative success of unofficial action since 1940 does not, by itself, offer a sufficient explanation for the attempt to introduce wage restraint in post-war Britain. The wider explanation needs to be sought

in the economic, social and political changes that have affected British society since the Second World War. Since these changes have been considered elsewhere[2] it is not necessary to elaborate in any great detail. Only the most salient background factors need be mentioned in order for us to trace the main steps towards the attempted implementation of wage restraint.

It should be noted at the outset that Britain was not the first country to introduce some sort of incomes policy. A general movement towards the introduction of some manner of state control of wage increases developed in one way or another in most Western-type economies during the post-war period. The pressure for such control proved especially hard for a country like Holland which was highly vulnerable to external economic forces. Britain, in turn, experienced similar difficulties and strove to implement similar sorts of policies.

Nicholas Davenport has noted that the commitment to high employment, made towards the end of the Second World War, implied some sort of acceptance of the principle that has subsequently become known as "wages policy."[3] For instance, the 1944 White Paper noted that if the government was to maintain a high and stable level of employment, it was "essential that employers and workers should exercise moderation in wages matters."[4] The White Paper went on to state that "The principle of stability does mean that increases in the general level of wage rates must be related to increased productivity due to increased efficiency and effort."[5]

One indication of the dilemma facing post-war British capitalism

that has gained widespread attention has been the relatively slow growth rate of the economy compared to that of other western capitalist economies.

> As the gross national product slowly rose, and with it domestic demand, the proportion of the national product allocated to exports declined. The resulting failure year after year to earn enough on the current account led to chronic balance of payments crises, which were of course aggravated by the rising level of domestic costs and prices. Moreover the development of exports, of costs, and of prices relative to those of Britain's major competitors in world markets was even more adverse.[6]

Incomes policy in Britain cannot be understood solely as a response to the slow rate of post-war economic growth. Economic planning became an increasingly dominant theme of the domestic policies of most Western capitalist countries in the early 1960s. In Britain, the "stop-go" policy of periodically checking production by means of restrictive monetary and fiscal measures, in order to discourage imports, hold down wages, and stimulate exports, was widely recognised as a totally inadequate solution. Nicholas Davenport, an ardent critic of much post-war economic policy, has argued that the application of "stop-go" policy was partly responsible for the extra slow growth of the British economy in the twelve years since 1951.

> The theory behind the "stop" - the sudden application of the deflationary brakes - is that it reduces imports and stimulates exports, so that the balance of payments is restored to surplus. But cutting down the home trade does not necessarily stimulate exports in the least. What it does do of a certainty is to reduce output, raise costs and worsen our competitive position abroad....And it certainly does not stop the worker asking for higher wages.[7]

It is interesting to note that over the course of a decade, the same Conservative Government which had been elected to office in 1951 on a fierce market ideology programme, changed to accepting economic planning as the new theme of its domestic policy.[8] The decisive steps towards an incomes policy may now be traced.

When the idea of wage control was first mooted after the outbreak of the Second World War the TUC accepted compulsory arbitration, rather than face direct wage intervention by the government. After the war, appeals for wage restraint could be heard from the Minister of Labour and the Prime Minister of the Labour administration. By the second half of the year 1950 it became clear that wage restraint was not being accepted. The TUC Congress of that year defeated a General Council resolution for a wage freeze.

The 1950s saw no national co-ordinated attempt at governmental control of wages. Some indication of future trends could, however, be detected in the first report of the Cohen Council on Prices, Productivity and Incomes, which advocated "moderation" in wage claims.[9] According to at least one commentator the reports issued by the Cohen Council between 1958 and 1961 really represented little more than attempts "to bring moral pressure to bear on the trade unions by public propaganda."[10] The form that such propaganda takes has been described elsewhere by V. L. Allen:

> Each time there has been an economic crisis trade unions have been singled out for special public and political attention, as if in them lay the reasons for the country's economic malaise. On each occasion it has been pointed out by one Minister or another, that

> trade unions exert an upward, inflationary pressure on prices through excessive wage demands; that they exert a downward pressure on productivity through restrictive practices; that they have depressing effects upon total production through strikes, overtime bans or ca'canny's.[11]

In 1961 the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Selwyn Lloyd, ushered in the Conservative Government's first "pay pause." It provided the clearest signal for the introduction of national incomes policy. The government sought to restrain wage increases in the public sector and appealed to labour and management to do likewise in the private sector. The next year the government issued an important White Paper entitled Incomes Policy, The Next Step which proposed that increases in wages and salaries be kept within a "guiding light" of two and a half per cent. Such developments towards wage-restraint were accompanied by the establishment of various councils. Mention has already been made of the Cohen Council. A more ambitious project was the National Economic Development Council (N.E.D.C.) which was supposed to have representatives from employers, trade unionists and government. Like the Cohen Council it had no powers of compulsion. Alongside the N.E.D.C. the government established the National Incomes Commission (N.I.C.) which was supposed to inquire into wage claims that were considered particularly important. The operating principle was to keep increases in wages and salaries within the limits set by the level of productivity increases. The attempts to establish a national prices and incomes policy based upon a guide post approach was continued into 1964. The so-called "Joint Declaration of Intent on Productivity, Prices and Incomes" was signed by government, management

and the TUC. A National Board for Prices and Incomes was set up to investigate and report on cases referred to it by the government.[12]

The policies so far described were not particularly successful in controlling either wage or price increases. The TUC accepted the idea of setting up a voluntary wage-vetting committee but its degree of control remained minimal. For the employers' part the Confederation of British Industry was not even able to establish a committee to check on price increases let alone exert any influence over its member organisations.[13]

The argument that the labour movement should resolutely oppose all attempts to implement an incomes policy was slow in gaining noticeable support. At first such a stance was widely dismissed as being unnecessarily negative. It was further criticised for its supposed failure to take into account the orientation that such an incomes policy could take under a Labour administration. Davenport notes how "Frank Cousins was able to say without contradiction at the Trades Union Congress in September, 1963, that Labour would never agree to a wage restraint policy under a Conservative Government."[14] A Labour Government was viewed in a different light. It is not possible to focus on the different postures adopted in the face of the threat of an incomes policy. Most of the arguments in defence of incomes policy, such as those raised earlier by Allen, are open to challenge.

For trade unionism, the implications of any long-term acceptance of incomes policy by organised labour would be far reaching. Andrew

Shonfield notes the real significance of incomes policy in the following passage:

> ...what a fully fledged "incomes policy" really implies is the equivalent of a new Social Contract: it presupposes a society in which the different interest groups have marked out a sufficient area of agreement about the present distribution of wealth to deny themselves the right to try, in the future, to obtain certain advantages at each other's expense.[15]

The weaknesses of a policy based on voluntary agreement were evident from the outset. Even if trade unions and employers did agree to a certain ceiling to wage increases, there was never any assurance that such a policy could be implemented. The TUC has never been able to exert much centralized authority over its constituent unions. Certain features of the development of British industrial relations in the post-1940 period present special problems for any policy of wage control. The growing strength of informal trade unionism at the level of the plant or workshop poses special difficulties which did not pass unnoticed by commentators at the time of the signing of the "Statement of Intent" in 1964.[16]

It was not until September 1965 that the government announced its intention of introducing legislation to back its prices and incomes policy. The interim period saw the operation of a voluntary "early warning system," whereby the TUC was supposed to be notified of pay claims and settlements. Meanwhile the government had the right to refer any case to the Prices and Incomes Board, and could demand a temporary standstill while the Board reported. In July 1966 the volun-

tary basis to wage restraint was formally abandoned by the announcement of a twelve month stand-still on prices and incomes during which time, according to the Central Office of Information, "productivity would be allowed to catch up with the excessive increases in incomes which had been taking place."[17] A further Prices and Incomes Act in 1967 extended Part II of the 1966 Act for a further twelve months. This required the continued notification of any changes in prices, incomes or terms and conditions of employment. 1968 saw a further extension of the Act to run up to the end of 1969. Policy was laid down in the White Paper, Productivity, Prices and Incomes Policy in 1968 and 1969 which stressed the need for a "ceiling" on pay increases of three and a half per cent unless an agreement could be shown to increase productivity and efficiency.

The growing opposition to incomes policy has found expression in the annual proceedings of the TUC. The 1968 conference passed a motion urging the repeal of the Prices and Incomes Act by an overwhelming majority. A motion in support of the TUC incomes vetting scheme only just managed to gain acceptance.[18] It was not until the following year that the TUC conference finally voted against any form of incomes policy. The conference voted against the advice of the General Council. With the backing of the giant engineering and transport unions the September meeting of Congress narrowly carried a motion demanding the total repeal of the 1966 Prices and Incomes Act and called upon the General Council to lead affiliated unions in opposition, organising "all forms of appropriate action until we achieve this aim."[19]

The vote by Congress took place after it had become apparent that the government was not attaching the same importance to incomes policy. In June of 1969 an editorial in the Economist made the following claim:

> The message that international financiers thought they had got this year was that the Wilson Government was going to be weak about incomes policy, but at least it was going to compensate by passing legislation to tackle what a spokesman for the Bank of International Settlements has called the "tinge of anarchy" in Britain's industrial relations.[20]

At the time of writing[21] it is still premature to attempt any final assessment of incomes policy in the British experience. Attempts by government to secure the voluntary acceptance of wage restraint by unions characterised the earlier period. The eventual adoption of some measure of compulsion was viewed as being in part a logical outcome of the failure to secure labour's active co-operation, and in part, as one further step towards the broader acceptance of the concept of what economists refer to as an "active manpower policy." Incomes policy has been primarily analyzed as part of an attempt to shift the balance of economic power away from organised labour. If the attempt has not been an unqualified success it has nonetheless served in the effort to try to isolate trade unionism as one of the causes of Britain's economic difficulties. Despite the theoretical weakness of such a claim it is an argument that is frequently presented. It is also to be found in the debates on anti-strike legislation. The remainder of the chapter looks at government attempts to introduce legislation that restricts the right to strike.

Anti-Strike Legislation

During both world wars, strikes were not only usually unofficial, they were also, for the most part, totally illegal. The experience was somewhat similar during both periods. The Munition of War Act of 1915 made arbitration compulsory for those engaged on munitions work, thus effectively making strikes illegal in those industries. The following year the act was extended to include other industries. It remained in force until after the war. The Second World War resulted in the introduction of the rather similar Conditions of Employment and National Arbitration Order (S.R.O. 1305) in 1940. This order remained in force until August 14, 1951.

A glance at the number of industrial disputes recorded for both war periods shows that the legislation appeared to have little effect. In fact, in the vast majority of cases, the state chose not to try to enforce its ruling against strikers. It is questionable whether the state could have made provisions for the hundreds of thousands who went on strike at one time or another during the course of both wars.[22] Allen estimates that approximately one and a half million workers engaged in some form of strike action in the period between the introduction of the Order in 1940 and January of 1944. Of these strikers only 5,000 were prosecuted, and less than 2,000 were actually convicted.[23]

The evidence would therefore suggest that legislation proved largely ineffective in curtailing strikes. In 1951 the wartime National Arbitration Order came to an end. Proposals for the intro-

duction of anti-strike legislation do not appear to have featured high on the agenda of either employers of government during the next few years. There were, nevertheless, a number of court decisions which affected the right to strike. One writer sums up the experience as follows:

> With increasing vigour the Courts have, since the war, been attacking well-established trade union rights and particularly the right to strike. In so doing they have re-written the law as it had been universally understood and applied for a generation.[24]

We may now examine explicit legislative proposals to curb strikes. Unofficial strikes have been the main subject of government concern.

The Prices and Incomes Act of 1966 laid its major emphasis on the principle of voluntary agreement between all parties. Nevertheless, provision was made to grant the government the necessary statutory powers to enforce its rulings. The most controversial was Part IV of the act which contained the provisions for a compulsory prices and wages freeze. This was supposed to be for a temporary period. The enforcement clause was intended to cover not only national wage claims but also all local claims for improved pay or conditions of employment. It stipulated that:

> If any trade union or other person takes, or threatens to take, any action, and in particular any action by way of taking part, or persuading others to take part, in a strike, with a view to compel, induce or influence any employer to implement an award or settlement in respect of employment at a time when the implementation of that award or settlement is forbidden under the foregoing provisions of this Part of this Act, he shall be liable-

(a) on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding one hundred pounds, and
(b) on conviction or indictment to a fine which, if the offender is not a body corporate, shall not exceed five hundred pounds.[25]

In 1965 the Labour Government set up the Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations. In the course of three years work much of the Commission's time was engaged in collecting evidence on trade union legislation. The proposition that unofficial strikes should be rendered illegal was examined. The writers of the Report made a fairly sophisticated assessment of the implications of anti-strike legislation. In arriving at its decision the writers were influenced by both foreign and home experience. The proposals that the Report did make largely pertained to the challenge of wage-drift and the concern over the lack of managerial control in workshop affairs. In part the Report was concerned with why the wage freeze had failed.

One response to the publication of the Royal Commission was predictable. The Report was attacked by various advocates of anti-strike legislation. Within a matter of months it seemed as though concessions were to be granted to such elements. In January of 1969 the Secretary for Employment and Productivity, Barbara Castle, published a White Paper entitled _In Place of Strife_ which made a series of proposals for what was called "trade union reform."[26] The White Paper proposed legislation which would have given the government the power to order those involved in an unofficial strike to desist for up to 28 days, while an authorised procedure for settling disputes was to

be used, or a court of inquiry looked into the matter. Two further proposals deserve mention. The first would have given the minister for Employment and Productivity the power to issue an order requiring a secret ballot before an official strike could be called. The second proposal would have given the minister the power to make an order that employers should, or should not, recognise particular unions after a court of inquiry had been duly authorised by the recently established Commission on Industrial Relations. It was argued that if such a proposal were to be implemented it would help achieve a reduction in the number of inter-union disputes.

The proposed legislation was abruptly abandoned in the middle of 1969 in the face of mounting trade union opposition. The extent of that opposition surprised many commentators. For example, after the draft proposals had been leaked to the press, David Wood of The Times saw little possibility of anything more than token opposition from the left wing of the parliamentary Labour Party. Wood maintained that

> ...whatever their leaders or backbenchers say, a majority of rank and file trade unionists support anti-strike measures. The battle is lost before the first early-day motion has been drafted.[27]

The experience over the following few months proved otherwise.

The first significant mobilisation of workers in opposition to the anti-strike proposals developed out of the call by the Scottish miners for a one day strike on February 27, 1969. Some support was mobilised in England, particularly in the Northern industrial regions of

Merseyside and Clydeside. One sympathetic report cites estimates of 50,000 strikers in dock and building employment on Merseyside and about 45,000 strikers on Clydeside.[28] A one day strike of greater significance took place on May 1, 1969. The Economist reported that around 200,000 failed to show for work.[29] In its editorial, the weekly newspaper observed that the strike did represent "the first real industrial action for unashamedly political purposes since the general strike of 1926 - and it was against a Labour government."[30] Although the General Council of the TUC refused to endorse the strike, support was not always of an unofficial nature. Two unions, the Watermen, Lightermen and Tugmen's union and the Stevedores and Dockers' union, officially backed the strike. On Merseyside the strike had the support of the Liverpool Trades Council. In London the local branch of the Society of Graphical and Allied Trades endorsed strike action.

The General Council of the TUC agreed to call a special congress in June of 1969. The first special congress of the TUC to take place in fifty years restricted itself to casting votes against the government's proposed industrial reforms, and endorsing what the TUC called its alternative "Programme for Action." This amounted to a proposal whereby the General Council would undertake to deal with unofficial strikes and inter-union disputes on a voluntary basis. In the face of opposition in both the trade union movement, and in his own party, the Prime Minister finally abandoned the legislation and announced that, in its place, the TUC General Council had made a "solemn and binding" agreement to attempt

to curb unofficial strikes. It was widely considered that the terms of the actual agreement amounted to very little indeed. The real significance of the agreement lay in the fact that the TUC General Council was, for the first time, and at the public request of the government, seriously considering intervention against unofficial strikes.

The 1969 proposals to curb unofficial strikes may be partly seen as symbolic. The real significance of the White Paper proposals was ideological. From the perspective of the government, it was important to foster the belief that unofficial strikes were responsible for Britain's economic difficulties. The actual details of the proposals were seldom treated as being particularly important. The importance of the proposals thus lay in the fact that, once adopted, the way would be clear for more determined onslaughts against informal trade unionism in the future. For this reason, and in spite of its own criticisms of the proposals, the Economist supported the proposals contained in In Place of Strife as the "thin end of an eventually sensible wedge."[31] Even though the proposals were not adopted, the government could justifiably claim that, despite the vagueness of its announcements, the TUC General Council had formally agreed to take on the job of intervening in the event of unofficial strikes. Increasingly the pressure could be expected to fall on such strikes. This was made clear in a speech given by the Prime Minister in November, 1969. "In the field of industrial relations," Harold Wilson told the Lord Mayor's banquet,

...we face great challenges in the months ahead. We face the problem of an assertion of the power of the factory floor, a problem which is not a British monopoly, but which is growing throughout Europe, and is rife today in damaging strikes in North America. A problem to which, whatever its pattern of legislation about industrial relations, no country has found the answer.[32]

FOOTNOTES

[1]See Marcel Deneckere, *et al*., "The Campaign against the Right to Strike," *International Socialist Journal*, January-February 1964.

[2]For example, see Murray Edelman and R. W. Fleming, *The Politics of Wage-Price Decisions: A Four-Country Analysis*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), especially Chapter 4.

[3]"The Split Society-2," *Spectator*, November 15, 1963, p. 62.

[4]*White Paper*, Cmnd. 6527 (London: HMSO, 1944), quoted by Davenport, *op. cit*., p. 62.

[5]*Loc. cit*.

[6]*Ibid*., p. 147.

[7]"The Split Society-3 Cynicism under the Tories," *Spectator*, (London), November 22, 1963, p. 661.

[8]This transition is traced by Andrew Shonfield in *Modern Capitalism: The Changing Balance of Public and Private Power* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1965).

[9]The Cohen Council gained its name from its chairman, Lord Cohen. The Council was established in 1957 under the following terms of reference:

> Having regard to the desirability of full employment and increasing standards of life based on expanding production and reasonable stability of prices, to keep under review changes in prices, productivity and the level of incomes....

Quoted by V. L. Allen in *Militant Trade Unionism* (London: Merlin Press, 1966), p. 43.

[10]Davenport, *Spectator* (London), November 22, 1963, p. 661.

[11]Allen, *op. cit*., p. 55.

[12]The terms of reference for the Board are set forth in the White Paper, *Prices and Incomes Policy*, Cmnd. 2639 (London: HMSO, April 1965).

[13]Derek Robinson, "National Wage and Incomes Policies and Trade Unions: Issues and Experiences" in International Labor, edited by Solomon Barkin, et. al. (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 229. The Confederation achieved little up to July 1966 by which time any measure would have been rendered irrelevant due to the introduction that month of the "prices and incomes freeze."

[14]Davenport, Spectator (London), November 22, 1963, p. 593.

[15]Andrew Shonfield, Modern Capitalism: The Changing Balance of Public and Private Power (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 219.

[16]For example see Michael Hardy Spicer, "Implementing an Incomes Policy: (1) - The Importance of the Shop Steward," Statist (London), December 25, 1964.

[17]Britain: An Official Handbook (London: HMSO, 1967).

[18]Trade Union Register, edited by Ken Coates, Tony Topham and Michael Barratt Brown (London: Merlin Press, 1969), p. 319.

[19]The Trades Union Congress 1969: The Guardian Report (London: Guardian Newspapers, 1969), pp. 22-27.

[20]Economist (London), June 21, 1969, p. 13.

[21]December, 1969.

[22]The unsuccessful attempt to prosecute the Kentish miners, who took strike action in December 1941, is related in detail by Sir Harold Emmerson as written evidence submitted to the Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations. See appendix 6 in the Report (London: HMSO, 1968), pp. 340-341.

[23]Allen, op. cit., pp. 110-111.

[24]O. H. Parsons, Strikes and Trade Unions: Government White Paper Explained (London: Labour Research Department, 1969), p. 5. The case of Rookes versus Barnard and Others is reviewed briefly by Ken Coates in "The Right to Strike," New Left Review, March-April 1964, pp. 58-61. For a further discussion of this case and others see K. W. Wedderburn The Worker and the Law (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965).

[25]Prices and Incomes Act, 1966, Part II, Section 16, Paragraph 4. Reprinted in Prices and Wages Freeze: A Narrative Guide to the Prices and Incomes Act, 1966, together with the Text of the Act, Winsley Sergeant and E. Roydhouse (London: Butterworth & Co., 1966), p. 26.

[26] The relevant provisions are to be found in Appendix 1 entitled "Proposals for an Industrial Relations Act" of the White Paper, In Place of Strife, Cmnd. 3888 (London: HMSO, January 1969), pp. 36-37.

[27] The Times (London), January 6, 1969, p. 8.

[28] Socialist Worker (London), March 8, 1969, p. 4.

[29] The newspaper went on to argue that it considered such an estimate to be an exaggeration of the actual number of strikers who supported the political aims of the strike. See the Economist, May 3, 1969, p. 21.

[30] Ibid., p. 16.

[31] Economist, June 7, 1969, p. 15.

[32] Economist, November 22, 1969, p. 17.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION: AN APPRAISAL OF BRITISH INFORMAL TRADE UNIONISM AT THE END OF THE PERIOD 1940-1969

The Limitations of Trade Unionism

All indications appear to suggest that trade unionism alone is unable to transcend certain fairly narrow limitations imposed by capitalist society. The British experience serves as a case in point. The rise of a national trade union movement has not resulted in any fundamental re-distribution of the national income. E. H. Phelps-Brown and E. P. Hart estimate that between 1870 and 1950 the share of wages in the British national income was never less than 36.6 per cent and never exceeded 42.6 per cent.[1] Studies showing the movements of different types of pay reveal a remarkably static pattern over long periods. In a study published by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research, G. Routh shows the rigidity of the pattern of pay differentials separating different occupational groups in Britain between 1913 and 1960.[2]

Statistics such as these will, of course, tend to obscure the short term gains that may be won by particular groups of workers who pursue militant collective action in a bargaining situation. However, the overall situation would appear to have been that trade unionism has had to fight to maintain that share of the national income that goes to workers.

It is, of course, quite impossible to estimate the share of the national income that would have gone to wages if trade unionism had not been an active force. There has, however, been an almost universal recognition by employees as to the need for some form of collective action to protect their interests as sellers of labour power. The concept of the "spontaneity" of labour movements is one of the standard concepts used by Marxists to describe this process. A classical presentation of the theory of the spontaneity of labour movements is to be found in V. I. Lenin's work _What Is To Be Done?_[3] where Lenin distinguishes between the limited trade union consciousness which labour movements develop spontaneously and "social democratic consciousness" which they do not. Trade union consciousness is viewed as a natural and almost universal response to the worker's condition. It usually involves a willingness to organise and take strike action. "Social democratic consciousness" is what contemporary writers would refer to as socialist or revolutionary consciousness. At the time Lenin wrote _What Is To Be Done?_ Social-Democracy represented the dominant Marxist tendency in Russia. According to Lenin, revolutionary consciousness does not necessarily develop out of participation in the day-to-day struggle of labour movements. Lenin argues as follows:

> We said that _there could not yet be_ Social-Democratic consciousness among the workers. This consciousness could only be brought to them from without. The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade-union consciousness, i.e., it may itself realise the necessity for combining in unions, to fight against the employers and to strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc.[4]

Lenin appears to have based his theory to a large extent on a critical reading of the Webbs' defence of the "spontaneous" British trade union movement.[5] The thesis of the spontaneity of working class movements has rarely been seriously challenged. Sidney Peck makes the interesting observation that there is even a marked similarity between the thesis of working class ideology advanced by Selig Perlman and other members of the Wisconsin School, and that advanced by Lenin.[6] Despite possible reservations over certain details of Lenin's analysis we can agree with E. J. Hobsbawm[7] that the importance of Lenin's distinction would appear to be fundamental. Hobsbawm suggests that the distinction be elaborated and rephrased to read as follows:

> The 'spontaneous' experience of the working class leads it to develop two things: on the one hand a set of immediate demands (e.g., for higher wages) and of institutions, modes of behaviour, etc., designed to achieve them; on the other - but in a much vaguer form and not invariably - a general discontent with the existing system, a general aspiration after a more satisfactory one, and a general outline (co-operative against competitive, socialist against individualist) of alternative social arrangements.[8]

According to Hobsbawm such a reinterpretation is able to accommodate such objections that might be raised with respect to certain details of Lenin's theory. The concept of "spontaneity" as reformulated by Hobsbawm does provide a helpful perspective from which to analyse informal trade unionism in the recent British experience. This can be illustrated by considering some of the problems facing workers who take unofficial strike action.

The Problems and Possibilities of Informal Trade Unionism

The study has examined selected aspects of the British industrial relations experience in a period characterised by conditions of near full employment. Informal aspects of that experience have been stressed with particular reference to unofficial strike action. The central argument of the thesis has been that unofficial strike action can best be understood as the operation of informal trade unionism. Two distinct levels of trade unionism have been identified. The first involves the national bargaining that occurs between established trade union organisations and groups of employers usually organised into associations. Formal written agreements are the characteristic outcome of such negotiations. The second level of trade unionism has provided the main focus of inquiry for the present study. In contrast to the process of formal national bargaining, the study has drawn attention to the informal patterns of trade unionism that actually operate at the level of the individual firm, and frequently at the level of a particular department or workshop.

The study would not be complete without some consideration of the underlying problems facing informal trade unionism in the recent British experience. We may distinguish between problems of an immediate nature and those problems of a more fundamental kind which labour movements in general must face. Immediate problems include those difficulties which workers experience at the level of workplace trade unionism.

One of the foremost problems facing informal trade unionism has been the factor of isolation. Thus while a particular unofficial strike may command total support from those workers directly involved, workers indirectly affected who either work elsewhere in the same plant or who are affected due to the fact that their work is dependent on supplies may be somewhat cooler towards the strike. In the immediate sense, support from other groups of workers may not always be that crucial. Most unofficial strikes are of so short a duration that other workers learn little of the dispute. But in the case of many disputes solidarity may need to extend beyond the immediate work milieu. This has been most obvious in situations where a dispute has proved to be more protracted than anticipated.

The absence of solidarity on a wide level will, of course, serve to lessen the effectiveness of any form of trade unionism be it official or unofficial. The main point that needs to be made with respect to informal trade unionism, however, is that the organisational apparatus that could provide the framework for broadening support is often lacking. In Chapter Five we reviewed certain attempts to build national or industrial movements of shop stewards.

The fragmented nature of so many working class struggles in post-1940 Britain can best be explained by looking at the historical development of informal trade unionism. Ever since full employment became a serious possibility after 1938 and a reality after 1940 the official trade union movements in Britain demonstrated its unwillingness to

adapt to the new possibilities that were opening up. Briefly, the possibilities entailed militant bargaining in circumstances of full employment with the aim of maximising gains on a local basis and then seeking to spread the gain to the rest of the industry.[9] Instead, trade union leaderships have tended to defend national bargaining as a first priority. While this may be inevitable in certain industries where one employer controls the wages throughout the organisation (e.g. railways), it is not necessary in those industries where decentralised bargaining had assumed major importance (e.g. engineering).

Certain attempts to build a national movement of workers through national conferences of shop stewards were discussed in Chapter Five. Mention might also be made of other attempts that have been made over the period 1940-1969. Certain attempts have demonstrated a commitment to the principle of building a movement around the demand for workers' control. One attempt took place towards the end of 1948 with the formation of the short-lived London League for Workers' Control. A subsequent attempt that was no more successful took place in January 1961 when delegates from five small left-wing groups, including the London Anarchist Group and the Syndicalist Workers' Federation, attempted to establish a new National Rank and File Movement.[10] A more modest project launched three years later proved more lasting. The first of an annual series of conferences on the issue of workers' control took place at Nottingham in April, 1964.[11]

The basic similarity of these movements has been the conviction

that trade unionism needs to fight not only for a better living, but also for a better life. One of the strongest contemporary advocates of a strategy for workers' control that challenges the very nature of the production process under capitalism is André Gorz to whom we have already made reference. According to Gorz:

> Pure wage claims should be seen as deflections and mystification of much deep claims - worse than that, as a <u>dead</u> <u>end</u> into which the workers' movement has plunged. For they run in the same direction as the employers want them to: they abandon to the employers the power to organise the production process as they please.[12]

We use the term "workers' control" in the sense used by Pribićević and defined in Chapter Three of this study. The political perspectives of the participants varies. For example the term "workers' control" has sometimes been identified with the rather vague demand for "workers' participation" which generally seems to imply the suggestion that certain workers should be promoted to leading managerial positions in firms that may be either privately or publicly owned. The fundamental question of whether such reforms require the abolition of capitalism is not always considered. Even where it is emphasized that such schemes pre-suppose nationalization, the role of workshop organisations in management is often entirely ignored. The demand for workers' control has been interpreted by one commentator as "an intermittent, unofficial, semi-utopian slogan, current among stewards, Trades Council delegates, and branch and district activists."[13] Very rarely does one hear of any reference to the idea in official trade union positions.[14]

Any assessment of the problems besetting informal trade unionism needs to take careful account of the current policy of the state towards trade union activity. The study has argued that over the period 1940 to 1969 British employers and the state have increasingly perceived unofficial strike action and shop-floor organisation to be an obstacle in any attempt to shift the overall balance of bargaining power in favour of employers. The desire to effect such a shift has grown with the continuing problems of post-World War II British capitalism. In Chapter Six we investigated the campaign against shop-floor organisation and the right to take unofficial action. We saw no reason to assume that the overall aims of employers or subsequent governments would change in this respect. It is quite possible that new tactics will be developed in the future. Indeed, towards the end of 1969 there was every indication that the assault on unofficial activity might increasingly take the form of a generalised attempt to make collective bargaining agreements legally binding on both parties. If enacted, this would have the effect of rendering those participating in unofficial action liable to legal proceedings for civil damages, to be initiated by the employer. This was essentially the position advanced in the Conservative Party policy proposals for changes in trade union law at the 1966 election.[15]

Court action could pose a considerable threat to the continued existence of those trade unions which persisted in engaging in militant action. But the structural simplicity of unofficial organisation could often assure some of degree of continuity of both programme and associa-

tion. An interesting historical reference is made by H. A. Turner in his study of the early cotton unions. He argues that a structural simplicity characterized the early English cotton union. The informal nature of organisation both reflected and facilitated the continuity of association so important to early trade unionism. He describes the sort of threats that early organising attempts had to face.

> The formal disbanding of a society, even the seizure of its committee, funds and records, could of itself make only a temporary impact on its members' organizational capacity. The essential workplace units survived informally (as did the background resource of 'friendly' association), and could maintain their links with each other; the re-erection of an open organization was an easy matter.[16]

Any thorough consideration of the consciousness of workers who have continued to support unofficial strike action in Britain towards the end of the period 1940 to 1969 would need to take into account many further factors of an historical and sociological nature. Two themes that emerge out of the present study might prove helpful to such a study. The first concerns the nature of the trade union experience for most workers. The importance of localized informal bargaining has been stressed throughout the study. One accompanying feature of this development has been a strengthening of what may be described as "sectional" rather than "class" consciousness. In part this consciousness represents a continuous re-assertion of the "spontaneous" trade union consciousness noted by Lenin. Elsewhere H. A. Turner has referred to similar developments in the history of trade unionism as the assertion

of "natural" trade unionism.[17] The second theme concerns the possibility that events may produce a situation conducive to the transcendence of "sectional" consciousness. The events referred to arise out of attempts by the state to shift the balance of bargaining power in the favour of employers. In Chapter Six we referred to certain significant stirrings of a political character that mobilized around opposition to legislation aimed at restricting unofficial strikes.

Some Concluding Remarks

The study has advanced certain propositions for the analysis of unofficial strike action in the recent British experience. The writer makes no claim to have offered a comprehensive analysis of every aspect of unofficial action that may have characterised the British experience between 1940 and 1969. Some of the areas of concern that have not been afforded full consideration deserve mention. In certain areas some research has already been conducted. Such research is often open to reinterpretation. In other areas the field is wide open for research.

The study has generally relied on the sort of secondary sources and periodicals that are readily available from any large library. Although various reports of particular strikes were consulted during the research, specific reference to individual disputes has generally been avoided for the main reason that one is never sure whether any given set of circumstances should be considered as typical. Any detailed reference to particular disputes would also have had the effect of un-

necessarily extending the manuscript. The purpose of the study was only to provide a framework for the analysis of unofficial strike action.

The study has restricted itself to a consideration of certain questions surrounding unofficial strike action. Other forms of unofficial "job action" would appear to be equally deserving of scrutiny. However, the investigation of such phenomena would pose certain problems. The present study has been able to make use of various official statistics, inadequate though they may be. Even less official information is available on the subject of other types of job action. In passing one might consider the hypothesis that the general analysis presented in the preceeding pages could apply equally to such other forms of job action as the "go-slow" or the "work-to-rule." Such forms of action could often be expected to preceed unofficial strike action.

Unofficial action has been defined in fairly broad terms. Further research might take into account the distinctions that can be made between different forms of unofficial action. The definition of unofficial action initially proposed in Chapter One and expanded further in Chapter Three was mainly concerned with the relationship of the official union hierarchy to unofficial action. Although the main features of informal workplace representation were described in Chapter Five it has not been possible to offer a thorough analysis of the relationship of informal organisation to unofficial action. This problem would appear to be particularly deserving of future attention. One dimension to the problem could be explored by considering the relationship of senior shop

stewards to unofficial action. The functions performed by senior shop stewards in the engineering industry, for instance, differ considerably from those performed by more junior stewards who have far fewer administrative duties to fulfil and are closer to the rank-and-file. To some degree the senior shop steward is actually integrated into the formal apparatus of national engineering "procedure." This procedure was virtually forced upon the engineering unions after the engineering lock-out of 1922. It was formulated in the famous York Memorandum which made formal provisions for dealing with disputes. As we noted in Chapter Three, such procedural provisions are often ignored at the shop-floor level. In one of his reports on industrial relations in the motor industry A. J. Scamp noted how, in the first six months of 1966, out of 142 known stoppages, 128 took place before the senior shop steward had even had a chance to act at all.[18] More detailed research of industrial relations in the British motor vehicle industry indicates that the relationship between unofficial action and informal and semi-formal organisation might provide a particularly fruitful field of inquiry. In their study of the industry, Turner and his associates note that the relatively recent phenomenon of the "unofficial-unofficial" strike "appears to be becoming the norm."[19] The distinguishing feature of this sort of dispute is that it is not approved by either the official union leadership or the elected shop stewards. The same authors note that the shop stewards often play a moderating influence and are able to cool the desire to take strike action. On occasion the steward

may be concerned over the timing of a stoppage, to assure maximum effectiveness. But it is also possible that the shop steward may tend to act as a brake on militancy from below. This tendency has been most pronounced in certain North American unions, such as the United Automobile Workers, where the union recognised shop stewards have become effectively integrated into the trade union apparatus. This institutionalization does not, however, deny the possibility for the emergence of alternative rank-and-file leaders who may unofficially perform representative functions.[20]

FOOTNOTES

[1]"The Share of Wages in the National Income," Economic Journal, Volume LXII (1952), quoted by Robin Blackburn "The Unequal Society" The Incompatibles, edited by Robin Blackburn and Alexander Cockburn (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967), p. 25.

[2]Occupation and Pay in Great Britain, 1906-60 (London: 1965). See especially the table on p. 152 reprinted in Blackburn, op. cit., p. 27.

[3]V. J. Lenin, What Is To Be Done? (1902)(New York: International Publishers, 1943).

[4]Ibid., pp. 32-33.

[5]Lenin and N. Krupskaya translated the Webbs', Industrial Democracy during 1898 in Siberia.

[6]The Rank and File Leader (New Haven: College and University Press, 1963), p. 36.

[7]"Trends in the British Labour Movement since 1850" Labouring Men (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), p. 334.

[8]Loc. cit.

[9]A notable exception has been the Draughtsmen's and Allied Technicians' Association (D.A.T.A.), a white-collar union which has energetically pursued the strategy of winning demands at one work location and then attempting to spread the gain across the industry.

[10]These two attempts are given brief mention by Geoffrey Ostergaard in his article "Workers' Control: An Idea on the Wing" Anarchy 80, Volume 7, Number 10 (October, 1967), p. 293.

[11]The conference was convened by the journal Voice of the Unions over the period April 25-26, 1964.

[12]"Trade Unionism on the Attack," International Socialist Journal, Volume 1, Number 2 (March-April, 1964), p. 133.

[13] Peter Sedgewick, "The Fight for Workers' Control," International Socialism, Winter 1960-1961, p. 19.

[14] Certain exceptions may be found in the positions taken by individual members of executive committees of certain unions. One example of the successful election of a left-wing candidate took place in 1967, when Hugh Scanlon gained a record poll to the Presidency of the Amalgamated Engineering Union. Scanlon identified himself with the idea of workers' control both before and after his election. His record in office has not, however, passed without criticism from the rank-and-file level of the union on the union executive's handling of particular strikes. And his critics from the left have been quick to point to the fact that the principles of workers' remain far from being operationalized control in the internal decision making process of the AEU. Some useful insights can be obtained from an interview which Hugh Scanlon gave the New Left Review for the edition of November-December, 1967.

[15] The pertinent sections of Conservative Party policy read as follows:

> Procedure agreements, or clauses dealing with disputes procedure in comprehensive agreements, would become enforceable at law . . . .Proceedings could be taken against employers' associations, trade unions and/or their officials, unofficial strike ring leaders, and individual employers and employees . . . .Employees covered by the agreement -- whether unionists or non-unionists -- would be liable because an undertaking to observe the disputes procedure would be written into each individual contract of employment.

Stephen Abbott, Industrial Relations: Conservative Policy, Conservative Political Centre, n.d. (1966).

[16] H. A. Turner, Trade Union Growth, Structure and Policy (London: Allen and Unwin, 1962), p. 85.

[17] Ibid., pp. 85-89.

[18] A. J. Scamp, Report on the activities of the Motor Industry Joint Industrial Council (London: November 1966), paragraph 24 quoted by Colin Barker "The British Labour Movement: Aspects of Current Experience" International Socialism, Spring, 1967, p. 15.

[19] H. A. Turner, Garfield Clack and Geoffrey Roberts, Labour Relations in the Motor Industry (London: Allen and Unwin, 1967), p. 223.

[20]See Stanley Weir, A New Era of Labor Revolt: On the Job Versus Official Unions, (New York: The Independent Socialist Clubs of America, 1966).

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