

BULLETIN

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EDITORIAL

This issue of the Bulletin is in addition to the May number out shortly. It is prompted by the very serious developments at Cowley which are already having profound repercussions within the WRF.

The first three Bulletins were preoccupied with the WRF's political disorientation, the oscillations that appeared from the moment the miners took up the struggle that culminated in the fall of the Tory Government. They dealt too with the abstention from a serious entry tactic in the Labour Party based on the WRF's nonsensical formulation that 'no section of the working class will ever again look to the Labour Party for leadership'. They examined the false characterisation of the trade union leaders and lefts as 'corporatists', and the red unionism of the ATUA. These developments were traced to the subjective method of the central leadership working through the newly recruited petty bourgeois radicals that staff the Workers Press and who now have a great specific weight within the movement.

Then came the development which confirmed our analysis - at the London Area Conference of the WRF in early May. An opposition emerged in the WRF. The form it took was explosive, unco-ordinated and lacking in clarity. But that is hardly surprising in a movement that, ever since the days of the Behan fight has trampled on its own constitution. For decades the SLL treated minority and factional opinion as if it were a disease and not the right without which Bolshevism dies. Of some twenty speakers in the conference over half expressed concern or opposition to different aspects of the WRF programme and above all to the defeat at Cowley.

On this matter trade union members spoke of 'serious mistakes', retreats by the WF and by Alan Thornett for resigning voluntarily.

Deaf to the concern of the trade union membership, who may themselves be left high and dry by an impotent ATUA should similar attacks be launched by employers in their plant, the leading members in the actors and journalists sections of the WRF were quick to present the Cowley events as an escape from a trap, which was tactically correct to preserve a base for future expansion etc. etc. No-one is questioning the right of middle class elements to make their contribution in the party, but the social basis of the opposition is instructive. It is all very well for those who do not have to carry the can for the WRF's adventurism and false perspectives on the factory floor to lecture the trade union cadre on the need to stand firm but none of their questions were answered.

Why was not Thornett's resignation explained in the WP? Why was it not discussed in the party? Why was the ATUA not mobilised in his defence? How could a gang of well-drilled housewives inflict defeat on the ATUA which has pretensions to revolutionary leadership?

The Cowley affair is dealt with fully in this Bulletin - Cowley marks the opening of the struggle within the WRF for a return to the Transitional Programme.

For the first time in over a decade a genuine discussion is beginning inside the WRF. What lies beneath it are those same objective forces which brought together those who produce this Bulletin.

No demagogy or trampling on the constitution can prevent this discussion from proceeding.

RESOLUTION TO THE TUC PASSED BY CHESWICK 5 AUEW

.....
: 'This branch calls on the General Secretary of the TUC :
: to personally intervene in the disputes with the British :
: Leyland management who are denying two shop stewards :
: employed in that company their rights to pursue their :
: trade union duties. The two men concerned are Bro. Alan :
: Thornett and Bro. John Underwood AUEW. :
:.....

.....
: We note that the General Secretary appears to have time :
: to talk to many of the employers. We now demand that he :
: devote some of his time to defending our fellow trade :
: unionists and restoring their full recognition! :
:.....

The above resolution was moved by Cde. T. Hillier and was voted for by the one WRP member present at the branch, but only after he had tried to force the removal of Er. John Underwood from the resolution.

Cde. Hillier clearly has put into practice his position on uniting the working class against victimisation, irrespective of tendency or political affiliation within the workers' movement.

WHAT IS THE ATUA? - Towards a discussion

'Every defence of basic rights and basic questions now poses the building of revolutionary parties to lead the working class to power. The Transitional Programme which bridges the gap between the unpreparedness of the masses and the maturity of the objective situation is the only programme on which such parties can be constructed'.

from the Announcement of the International Committee of the Fourth International 5th World Congress, pub. WI Sat. 24.11.73.

The party must be based on the Transitional Programme - the party must have the correct relationship with the class for he who desires to construct a bridge to the class must tread warily - the programme warns against certain pitfalls.

'Sectarian attempts to build or preserve small 'revolutionary' unions as a second edition of the Party, signify in actuality the renouncing of the struggle for leadership of the working class. It is necessary to establish this firm rule: self isolation of the capitulationist variety (London May Day 1973?) from mass trade unions, which is tantamount to a betrayal of the revolution, is incompatible with membership in the Fourth International'

'Trade Unions in the Transitional Epoch'
p.18 The Transitional Programme
SLL pamphlet.

Work in the working class has to be carried out in the reformist trade unions, and in order to perform the necessary tasks the SLL launched the All Trades Union Alliance in 1968. SLL trade unionists and supporters of Conferences held mainly in the Automotive industry formed the basis of this, the Industrial arm of the British Trotskyist movement. It is the purpose of this article to examine the ATUA - what it claims to be, and what in practice it has achieved - to try to sort the reality from the myth. It is necessary to trace from the Transitional Programme the theoretical justification for such an industrial arm of the Revolutionary Party. The programme has no time for self-isolation from the mass organizations of the working class nor 'trade union fetishism equally characteristic of trade unionists and syndicalists'. It goes on to say 'Trade Unions do not offer, and in line with their task, composition and manner of recruiting membership, cannot offer a finished revolutionary programme; in consequence, they cannot replace the party. The building of national revolutionary parties as sections of the 4th International is the central task of the transitional epoch'.

(Ibid)

So the Programme rules out those who want a rival to the party subordinated to the limitations of trade unionism or syndicalism, does it therefore frown upon independent organisations attempting to bridge the gap between the unpreparedness of the masses and the maturity of the objective situation? Not in the least. Continuing on p. 19 of the programme one reads ...

'Therefore, the sections of the 4th International should always strive not only to renew the top leadership* of the trade unions, boldly and resolutely in critical moments advancing new militant leaders in place of routine

* Laurie Smith !!

functionaries and careerists, but also to create in all possible instances independent militant organisations corresponding more closely to the tasks of mass struggle against bourgeois society; and if necessary, not flinching even in the face of a direct break with the conservative apparatus of the trade unions. If it be criminal to turn one's back on mass organisations for the sake of fostering sectarian factions, it is no less so passively to tolerate subordination of the revolutionary mass movement to the control of openly reactionary or disguised conservative ('progressive') bureaucratic cliques. Trade unions are not ends in themselves; they are but means along the road to proletarian revolution'

Militant groups independent of the bureaucracy and under the control of the party are not therefore incompatible with the programme of the 4th International. But is the ATUA such an organisation; Can an organisation degenerate into 'a sectarian attempt to build or to preserve small revolutionary unions, as a second edition of the party' if so, under what conditions? It is my view that the party and its 'industrial wing' are isolated from the working class, that this isolation is extremely dangerous - and that it is in this context that one needs to understand how and why despite its daily paper and activity the ATUA is failing to build support for the programme of the 4th International and that this can occur in a period so 'favourable for the building of the revolutionary movement'*

But before the party can set about rectifying its errors it must first admit that they exist - and herein lies the gravamen of the problem - it doesn't. What is the measure of success? Trotsky, drawing on the experience of rank and file organisations (much greater and more influential than the ATUA) gave the following advice,

'the struggle for the party's influence in the trade unions finds its objective verification in whether or not the unions thrive, whether or not the number of their members increases, as well as in their relations with their broadest masses. If the party buys its influence in the trade unions only at the price of a narrowing-down and factionalising of the latter - converting them into auxiliaries of the party for momentary aims and preventing them from becoming genuine mass organisations - then the relations between the party and the class are wrong.' **

Instead of systematic work in the workers' organisations - one finds the intervention of a self appointed 'leadership' coming from the outside - seeming at times to want to weaken the unions - rather than transforming them from organs of class collaboration into organs of class struggle - the party acts as if it had already gained the confidence and mass support of the working class, it would be as well for the leadership to recognise that this is not the case - the results of the General Election should have a sobering effect on those who are in control of the WRF. Some of the features of the pre-war, Stalinist controlled minority movement (a development that needs careful study) have already permeated the party and the ATUA, namely 'the shouting to the workers to come and be led'*** Other 'short cuts' to leadership of the working class have emerged. Trotsky in criticising the Stalinists made a statement which seems as if it were penned yesterday - the Communist Party was showing 'an adolescent tendency to make itself master of the working class in

* Announcement by the Intl. Committee of the 4th Intl.

** Communism and Syndicalism, 1929

* Brian Pearce 'Rank & File Movements' Labour Review Apl/May 1959

the briefest time, by means of stage play, inventions, superficial agitation etc., nothing good would come of 'political hysteria which does not take conditions into account, which confuses today with yesterday or with tomorrow' (The Wembley 'experience'? Ed)

Theoretical Organ of the SLL

But the theatre of the class struggle has no respect for one-night stands, and overnight successes are followed by flops. In the workers' movement several tendencies vie for the role of stage director. The stubborn actors despite everything prefer those who have mis-directed and betrayed them for many decades. Only the most patient, painstaking and consistently correct of the new would-be directors of the class struggle need apply and even they at times will find themselves rebuffed - progress is slow and painful.

Many older trade unionists have a suspicion of rank and file movements inherited from past experience, none of the ATUA claims can become reality without a recognition of this unsureness and its source. It is necessary to study rather than to shout down misguided workers. Rather than studying the history of rank and file movements in relation to the requirements of the conditions prevailing in this period, the ATUA appears to be obsessed with out-doing the Stalinists and their King Street controlled 'Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions'. In so doing it has time and time again flopped miserably - all the 'Right to Work' marches, all the enthusiastic Conferences and Rallies, all the stage-shows, pageants and speeches, the elections etc. etc. cannot disguise the fact that it is the Stalinists who can muster mass support for one-day protest strikes and the like and that the Trotskyist movement is forced time and time again to tail-end them.

It is not enough to say that the Stalinists can count on more support in the working class than can the Trotskyists and that this condition expresses itself in crystal clear fashion in the degree to which the major industrial struggles are led by them or their sympathisers. The Stalinists have set down roots in the organised working class for nearly half a century. Their battles, victories and defeats, over the years have earned them respect among militant trade unionists, despite the anti-communist witch hunts of the McCarthy period Deakin, the Black circulars etc. etc. Yet whereas many workers up and down the country would vote for CP members as shop stewards they have persistently failed to vote for them as candidates in elections. The reformist consciousness recognised fighting leadership when it saw it, economic struggles had need of such leadership, but that's as far as it went. The requirements of International Stalinism complimented syndicalism already present in the CPEU, and the adaptation to reformism became the order of the day. The peaceful road to Socialism on an international scale had its corollary. Class collaboration was spiced intermittently with 'limited' acts of militancy and protest. Militants were either syndicalists of the non-political variety or Stalinists. During the 'boom period' several important struggles took place in key industries particularly in the car industry and ancilliary sections. Stalinists led most of these economic struggles which assumed importance in the 'Export or die' period. The harvest of this crop of industrial militants is the positions which they now hold in the major trade unions. The Liaison Committee is a product of this group of Stalinist militants. It is an indictment of the WRP's politics that the rank and file militants accept the counter-revolutionary Stalinist leadership. With the development of the British Trotskyist movement since Khrushchev's speech to the 20th Congress, these leaders should have been exposed and replaced by Trotskyist militants. One part of this strategy has been attempted, the WRP has mercilessly exposed in great details the major

betrayals of the Stalinists - but to whom? Certainly the UCS sell-out led to class-collaboration, broken promises thousands of redundancies and the straight-jacketing of the TU organisation in the shipyards - but where is the Clydeside Trotskyist alternative to the Airlies and the Reids?

The analysis of the 1-day stoppages, (Mill the Mill etc.) led by the Stalinists is incomplete in that it fails to explain how and why they can muster support for such limited actions. Whereas the ATUA, which shares with the Stalinists the distinction of being backed up by a daily paper, is manifestly incapable of calling and receiving support for a one-hour stoppage on a local, let alone a national scale. Each protest proceeds in a predictable fashion - a condemnation of the proposed stoppage, its 'inadequacies' etc. - then a reluctant decision to tail-end it! This of course is presented as 'critical' (very critical) support. After each demonstration comes the 'analysis' - equally predictable. 'Stalinism is bankrupt' - 'dead or dying' - 'losing its grip' etc. A poor turnout 'richly confirms' this analysis - a good turnout developed 'despite the efforts of the Stalinists' etc. etc. Unfortunately the ATUA leadership considers a comprehensive objective analysis of its own activities unnecessary, so the cadres do not benefit and cannot compare the Trotskyist industrial strategy with that of the Stalinists and Revisionists. Broadly it boils down to an acceptance that only the ATUA will fight on principles and the other tendencies will sell out. This line of course has serious implications for the working class, it means that the ATUA must develop on a massive scale if the working class is to avoid serious defeats. There is only one way in which this can be achieved - that is the recognition by important advanced layers of the organised working class that the ATUA is all that it claims to be. Clearly it cannot lead the union members outside of the TU organisations. But such recognition eludes it - time and time again.

Where have all the ATUA Militants gone?

It seems to me that those workers who have had close contact with the ATUA since it emerged in 1968 are the basis of this advanced layer. Yet where are they? Where are all the Pilkington militants who rose at the time of the big struggle in St. Helens in 1970? What of the women textile workers, the Postmen, the Council workers - to say nothing of the Gas men and Miners etc? The ATUA has little to show for its efforts - its interventions in major national or local militant struggles. Why? Even where it has claimed a base for decades, in Liverpool for example (in the Trades Council) it failed to support the CAV Fazackerley occupation of 1972, an occupation that enjoyed daily reporting in the WF, but nevertheless collapsed. This struggle was never analysed. The lessons never learned. A more recent example was the Cowley occupation (British Leyland) which was also led by ATUA members, it too collapsed - WF became extremely reluctant to say anything about the affair. So how do the ATUA militants learn? How can they appreciate the correctness of a principled defeat if the lessons aren't spelled out? The Pilkington dispute came about in a period when the newly elected Tory government was opening up its 'Cash the Unions' campaign - the militants were up against the Government, the Pilkington family plus a right-wing union (the GFWU). The ATUA made an important intervention and attracted the leading militants, it certainly influenced events ... yet the strike was defeated, a breakaway union developed ... and the outstanding leader of the struggle, Gerry Caughey, sought to solve re-instatement problems ... through the Industrial Relations Court! But as far as the ATUA was concerned the whole matter was, from that moment on ... a closed book.

Lenin on Mistakes

Mistakes are important. What is more important is to recognise them in order to avoid future errors, in order to educate the cadres. Lenin has this to say on the subject,

'The attitude of a political party towards its own mistakes is one of the most important and surest ways of judging how earnest the party is and how it in practice fulfills its obligations towards its class and the toiling masses. Frankly admitting a mistake, ascertaining the reasons for it, analysing the circumstances which gave rise to it, and thoroughly discussing the means of correcting it - that is the earmark of a serious party; that is the way it should perform its duties, that is the way it should educate and train the class, and then the masses'.

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Neither should this education be restricted ...

'They (i.e. the opponents of Marxism) gloat and grimace over our controversies, and, of course, they will try to pick isolated passages from my pamphlet, which deals with the defeats and shortcomings of our Party, and use them for their own ends. The Russian Social Democrats are already steeled enough in battle not to be perturbed by these pin pricks and continue, in spite of them, their work of self-criticism and ruthless exposure of their own shortcomings, which will unquestionably and inevitably be overcome as the working-class movement grows'

Vol. VI p. 161
(My emphasis)

It would seem that the growth of the working class movement in Britain alone, without discussion of its mistakes, will result in the ATUA assuming the leadership of the proletariat!

Some Concrete Examples

It is of course one of the advantages to the leadership of this dropping of the Marxist method of self-criticism (this abandonment of discussion of mistakes and analyses) that unless comrades are in possession of all the facts or turn to sources outside of the party, they have to accept that which is presented via the party leadership either verbally or through its press as gospel. However, there are some developments which I consider to be extremely important mistakes and of which I have first-hand knowledge. These I challenge Messrs. Healy, Panda & Co., to refute. In the first example I have no need to do any other than to comment on the WF articles relevant to the event dealt with:

Workers Press, Wednesday 2nd May, 1973

Headlines: 'Hundreds of Thousands join May Day Strike'

'MASSIVE STATE PAY LAW PROTEST'

'Engineering plants, car firms, buses, trains, newspapers, pits, docks and steel were paralysed yesterday as hundreds of thousands of workers struck against the Tory state pay laws and soaring prices'

This main article, continued to outline the various sections of

industry hit by the strike. Another front page article by David Maude reported that,

'Well over 10,000 trade unionists had joined the march organised by the London May Day Committee yesterday afternoon' The march was well supported. 'They marched six and sometimes ten deep to a rally in Hyde Park. As the head of the march reached Oxford Street the tail was still leaving Aldwych'.

Was it a March to be Avoided?

Neither was it in any sense 'an artificial march' for, 'on the march were the banners of the AUEW, Region 1 of the T&GWU - most of the T&GWU sections building workers, dockers, electricians and a massive and colourful contingent of print workers. Among the latter were NATSOFA members from Deeko's, locked out for ten weeks' A large demonstration but what of its quality? Let David Maude continue ... 'Despite their unions equivocal attitude to the strike, railwaymen were strongly represented and there were a number of PUR banners' nor were the railwaymen the only militant section defying the TU bureaucracy ... 'UPW members were also prominent on the march, despite their union leaders' instructions not to join the strike. There were big contingents of immigrant workers' Maude adds more information about the nature of the support this demonstration attracted. 'But there was a noticeable lack of British trade union leaders' So it was a large demonstration, with plenty of TU banners with supporters from unions who were opposed to the strike and only a few of the bureaucrats attended.

The Contradictory Role of the SLL

It is only when the next day's WF is read that one can learn of the SLL and ATUA policy relating to the demonstration. For despite the glowing description of the London march by David Maude - the SLL and ATUA in fact, like the bureaucrats, did not join the 'ten thousand trade unionists' who participated!

Instead the London contingents held a separate demonstration after the trade unionists had gone home! John Spencer wrote under the title 'IMPRESSIVE MAY DAY MARCH' (WF, Thursday, 3rd May, 1973) 'Over 1000 London members and supporters of the Socialist Labour League marched on May Day against the trade union leaders capitulation to the Tory government. Led by 40 members of the YS carrying red flags and with two magnificently decorated floats, the march hammered home the demand for a General Strike to force the Tory Government to resign.' Unfortunately the message was hammered out to streets in the West End which were largely empty - except of course for home-going office staff and the usual tourist's and pigeons - nowhere does the piece inform the readers that the SLL, YS and ATUA marched separately - that it marched in the evening - that it could not boast of a single TU banner!

'Contingents of Trade Unionists joined the march from Decca, Battersea factory, Lankester's Engineering, Kington, and members of the Transport and General Workers Union from the Arndale Centre Site'. The usual small hall was booked in order to give the impression of a packed meeting and the usual speeches were made and a colour film of the Wembley Rally 'Road to Workers' Power' was shown. The SLL, YS and ATUA spoke to itself and impressed and influenced ... nobody!

A Consistent and Principled Approach?

Apparently the decision to march separately from the main demonstration was based on the fact that the strike was a 'left cover' for the trade union leaders who had capitulated to the Tory government Fay laws. The Stalinists and revisionists (IS, IMG etc.) were assisting in this whitewash job: at least the SLL, YS & ATUA would show the labour movement that they were not a party to such a fraud on the working class - these words aren't mine, they came from the lips of Comrade Mike Banda. So the SLL and its 'industrial and youth sections' marched alone. But somewhere along the road the analysis went astray, elsewhere in the British Isles a quite different, dare one say, 'inconsistent' policy emerged. Whereas the London contingent had its independent march in the evening, provincial SLL, YS and ATUA members joined in the local marches together with Stalinists and Revisionists! Whereas in London they had made no effort to influence 10,000 trade unionists, in the provinces their General Strike banners were in evidence amid the Reformist slogans.

A round-up of SLL and YS activities appeared on Page 12 of WF (Thurs. 3rd May, '73) (the ATUA hardly figures in this) '200-strong Socialist Labour League-Young Socialist contingent on the Birmingham march was the largest identifiable political group there', again - 'Strong SLL-YS contingents also participated in the Liverpool, Leeds and Jarrow marches. In Leeds the SLL-YS section was 200 strong in a march of about 1000 people'. But the London tactic was followed in Merthyr Tydfil where 'the Socialist Labour League and Young Socialists organised their own march headed by a girls' band ... in Scotland the tactic followed the English provinces - 'In Glasgow the SLL-YS mobilised 150 demonstrators whom the Stalinists sought unsuccessfully to relegate to the end of the march. A league and YS contingent also participated in the Bull march'. Whatever the leadership might claim the fact remains that where it had sufficient forces the movement marched separately, where its numbers were thin on the ground it decided to join in the local May Day marches. It even got support from a member of the IS in Cambridge when the 'Stalinists exclude SLL speaker on May Day Platform' (Ibid) It didn't try to get on to the platform in London where 10,000 marched! The numbers game meant abandoning thousands of militants to the influence of the Stalinists and Revisionists.

Absent Leadership

The 'What we Think' article (Ibid) on page 3, exposed the manoeuvres of the reformists and Stalinists etc. and claimed 'the Socialist Labour League supported (?) the May Day Strike and brought out large contingents on demonstrations. But from the very beginning we warned that a one-day protest was not enough, that it laid the working class open to grave dangers'

Good, but not good enough! later in the same piece one reads 'it will not become enough until the central question of revolutionary leadership is resolved' Quite correctly this piece bore the title 'A day of determination ... and of shame!'

The TU bureaucracy and Stalinists diverted the class from struggle and the SLL allowed them to get away with it, to the movement's shame. If all the SLL-YS and ATUA members had marched separately the charge would have been sectarianism, abandoning thousands of trade union militants - and they were militants remember - to the tender mercies of the reformist, Stalinist and revisionist tendencies. This would have been a major error implemented on a national scale.

But the SLL and YS managed to abandon the Merthyr, Hull and London marches but joined in elsewhere. Clearly it was numbers that concerned the leadership: above all the movement mustn't appear to be what it really is - i.e. small. Look at the League's biggest turnout (London) only Decca, Lankester's Engineering and workers from the Arndale building site supported the SLL march. What a performance after all the paper sales at factory gates over the years and the thousands of trade unionists taken to ATUA Conferences. Outside of London the ATUA is hardly in evidence judging by the WRF reports. Surely the message must be that the party's relation to the working class is wrong. This year's march should reveal whether anything has been learned. Let comrades read the Workers Press of 2nd and 3rd May 1973 and think about the points outlined.

But the ATUA has over the years managed to recruit numbers of experienced trade unionists, from the ranks of counter-revolutionary Stalinism - they come and go - the Penningtons, the Behans etc., the ATUA sadly lacked an industrial organiser, someone with some standing in the labour and trade union movement; someone who knew what he was doing. Laurie Smith, AUEW shop steward, Convenor of Stewards at Sovez, Brith (Kent), broke with the Stalinist CP and joined the SLL. It wasn't long before he became a leading member of the ATUA and a member of the SLL's Central Committee - a meteoric rise in fact considering that the AUEW is not an area in which the SLL has carried out consistent and systematic work (it has no bulletin such as that which Minors and Actors enjoy). The SLL has never challenged the Stalinist domination of the London (north) District Committee for example. In Laurie Smith the ATUA found a principled fighter, an antagonist to Productivity Deals, the leader of a fight against speed-up which lasted over three months. But they also captured a Centrist and were unable to do anything other than welcome him to the movement, warts and all. They made him a leader of a handful of trade unionists whose shortage in numbers would be made up at ATUA Conferences by any Tom, Dick or Harry that could be cajoled into attending. A leader of a ghost outfit in fact. His was the task of building the ATUA.

Banda's Analysis of AUEW Election Fiasco

The ATUA decided to support a Welsh comrade Bro. A. J. Ewan in the election for National Organiser of the AUEW - I repeat: he was the official ATUA candidate. Laurie Smith apparently had other ideas - he entered the lists and no-one said a thing about it until I raised the matter with Mike Banda - who treated me to a gem of Marxist methodology - it was, he said 'A Cock-Up'. You see there are so few AUEW members in the ATUA in London that young comrades in the branches didn't know which way to vote - the National Organiser's post could only be held by one person but two ATUA members were standing! Of course there was Ewan who after all was the official candidate supported by the ATUA and WRF ... but then again Laurie Smith was of higher rank, a CC member in fact. A perplexing situation. Gerry Healy said of Smith 'he's soft on Scanlon*', but who was soft on Smith? One young comrade told me the other day - 'Smith is a Centrist, he was brought into the movement in order to fight centrism'. The mind boggles - the very idea of opening leading positions in the Trotskyist Party to tendencies opposed, mortally opposed, to everything the movement stands for, is an affront to Marxism - but that the young comrade concerned could accept it without raising an eyebrow is appalling. Since 'Stalinism' is according to Cliff

*Meeting at the Centre 5th March '74.

Slaughter 'the main counter-revolutionary force in the world today' no doubt lesser counter-revolutionary tendencies such as the National Front will be persuaded to join the Central Committee in order to ... fight Fascism!

Despite the wishes of the leadership the 'Smith Affair' must not be a subject which the conscious membership permit to pass over without discussion.

Conference Frenzy and Hysteria

But if the ATUA has its 'cock-ups' it also has its 'great moments' and of course no article on this organization could fail to look at the Conferences and Rallies. One can always tell when a Conference is coming up, the branches become even more active than before - 'contacts' must be seen, tickets must be sold or deposits taken - definite commitments must be extracted from the 'delegates'. Of course where possible union branch support is welcomed, but it is most vital that people attend - at all costs a half-empty Conference Hall must be avoided. Fighting in one's Union Branch for support for such a Conference can be difficult or easy - but support is the measure of the ATUA's relationship with the class, 'delegates' without this support are phoney. They are not pledged to do anything about fighting for Conference resolutions since they are in attendance in a purely individual capacity. The Conferences themselves are equally phoney. Even the Stalinists insist that Liaison Committee delegates are bona-fide delegates. This 'padding out' of Conferences has become a shameful farce but it explains how the ATUA Conferences can show no real progress in the TU movement.

Attending the so-called ATUA 'Engineers faction' was another illustration of the weakness of the party's industrial base, a mere handful of workers, for the main part young inexperienced layers, totally ignorant of AUEW rules and procedure with a leadership equally incapable of knowing which political tendency controls which district committee. No wonder the Stalinists continue (despite their bankruptcy) to rule the roost in the London and Manchester District Committees! The ATUA has had many AUEW militants. It has let them go and never stopped to consider why they left. The ATUA has two policies in relation to militants - it either works them to death or it sucks up to them, avoiding conflict like the plague, lest they depart. The first tactic succeeds in wearing the militant down - depending on his strength he either drops out or degenerates into a robot echoing slogans like a parrot. The other tactic leaves the Centrist to his Centristism and the result is the kind of development that is characterized by the 'Smith affair'. Then the leadership in despair starts attacking its loyal comrades for weaknesses which it is mainly responsible for. A crisis of leadership indeed!

Froth without Substance

The Conferences and Rallies however well organised (and colourful they certainly are) are nothing unless gains are made in membership and levelling-up of political consciousness - add up all the 'new faces' at each Conference and look for them next year - a great many have gone. But never mind the 'next Conference will be different'. The loss rate is simply staggering. The ATUA, SLL and YS have had thousands upon thousands pass through their ranks and what has been the result of all this - the Trotskyist movement now begins to lose its base in the working class!

Never has it been so out of touch - so isolated from the militants and broad masses of the proletariat. Did it require a General Election and nine candidates to push this message home? Has it in fact been driven home? Let me spell it out in every day working class language - all the play acting and colourful scenery are meaningless - at best propaganda ploys - it is the fighting capacity of the troops that matters, not their scarlet uniforms and brass buttons. It is the fighting leadership that is decisive not the film shows and TV cameras. For too long the ATUA has continued with a programme suited to an earlier period. Middle-class Radicalism is rampant.

Before readers start to get annoyed let them think about the next few lines which appeared in the SLL's British Perspectives 1972 (27/28/29 May)

- (18) 'It is necessary to examine critically the work of the SLL because it is only in the League that the gap between the objective requirements of the working class and the lag in its political consciousness will be overcome. And unless* this lag is overcome, the working class faces all the blows of counter-revolution. This is the content of the struggle within the League: Unless a correct revolutionary practice* is continuously produced by the League through grappling both with the objective situation and with its internal problems, then the ruling class wins the time it needs for counter-revolutionary attack' ***

The document then goes on to say ...

'Today, routinist and propagandist resistance to the programme and work of the League is the fruit of long and bitter resistance to this drive for theoretical clarity and for the unity of theory and practice. Just as Centrism today plays a reactionary role, so the persistent resistance to centralised party work, now creating confusion before the Tory attack and capitulating to centrism***, can quickly turn League members into forces for reaction'

The significance of these warnings grew as the SLL advanced towards the change from a League to the Workers Revolutionary Party. The document outlined the tasks concretely,

- (20) 'Will the SLL confront the developing revolutionary situation as a divided force, held back by the weight of middle-class propagandà and its syndicalist counterpart in the trade unions? Or will the SLL successfully effect the political transition to the revolutionary party?'

Well the WRP does exist but what difference has it made? Routinism still continues - ATUA rallies replace Conferences - resolutions have to be amended in order to remind people that where no WRP candidate is standing they should vote Labour - Centrists' are permitted the 'autonomy' to scribble their left TU election addresses in opposition to an official ATUA-WRP candidate and everything continues as before. The name's been changed by deed poll but the status remains the same. The radical middle-class element dominates the ATUA and WRP, syndicalism is a secondary matter since the number of leading trade unionists in the ATUA is so small as to make little difference one way or the other. The Party was launched

* original emphasis

***my emphasis

before this problem was resolved - WRP makes it abundantly clear that the middle-class elements have triumphed.

The basis upon which the ATUA (and of course the SLL and YS) drew up its perspectives was the 'theory' of the transition to 'onapartism'. The main weapon of the bourgeoisie was the MRC. 'At one stroke the most basic rights won by the working class are put completely in jeopardy. Those very rights through which the workers constitute themselves a class are taken away'. Really? Just like that. What confidence in the working class that short sentence reveals! Let the Political Committee continue ... 'There are no reformist solutions for such a situation. Wages are settled by court decree' What about the Miners' strike - was that a revolutionary struggle? Can Messrs. Gormley and Daly assisted by McGahey manage without the SLL and ATUA! 'Like every other decision of state, the decisions are backed and enforced by the bodies of armed men - police, jailers, army - which constitute the state. The same forces and methods brought into action to defend Unionism and attack the workers of Ulster stand immediately behind the National Industrial Relations Court.' Nonetheless troops so far have not been in action against militant groups of workers. We have that to come. What held them back? Certainly not the fear of the WRP and the 'mass support' for the ATUA!

More and More

Despite the 'capitulation of the TUC' in relation to the Tory onslaught on the Trade Unions - the pressure of the working class forced it to put up (in public at least) a resistance to the MRC and it was likewise forced to expel certain Unions. So much for the theory that the TUC is already corporatist i.e. Fascist. 1972 ATUA perspectives: 'Corporatism is the essence of Fascism' (well worth reading). What is true of the TUC is true of the Labour Party. According to the SLL,

'The TUC capitulates more and more thoroughly the more the Tory offensive accelerates, and they will do this more and more. Their equivalents in the Labour Party leadership are in no way different. Many of them will go over and serve the bourgeoisie (not all mark you) directly, in forms of coalition government. Jenkins and his right-wing associates' treachery on the Common Market, sanctioned by the opportunism of Wilson, Castle, Callaghan, and the rest, was a definite and conscious blow against the working class'. Absolutely correct.

But of course if Reformism didn't do precisely what was complained of it wouldn't be Reformism - neither, I might add, would there be the need of the revolutionary party. Hundreds of thousands of workers still have no strong feelings either way about Roy Jenkins' support of the Tories on the Common Market issue - some even admire his stand on principles! It is the masses we must convince, it is not nearly so cut and dried as the SLL thinks. Labour supporters voting for Roy Jenkins in the General Election weren't just middle-class elements. But the SLL is correct in its analysis of Centrism - all the more reason for it to have fought Laurie Smith and his brand of centrism! It is the ATUA and the WRP that daily expose ... not the Reformists ... but their own particular brand of illusion in Reformism. Let the workers see the broken promises that Labour has made - reformists are bad enough without blaming them for not carrying out the WRP's programme!

The central task was, in 1972: 'the mobilisation of the working class to force the Tories (Govt.) to resign and to elect a Labour government pledged to Socialist policies'. It was supposedly also abundantly clear that the SLL had to transform itself into 'the party' or the 'corporatist' Labour Government if it ever came about, would be confronted by no viable Trotskyist alternative. Readers will no doubt recall that in 1972 the founding conference of the Party was to follow the Annual Conference. In fact the founding Conference took place more than a year later.

Since the founding of the WRF, the ATUA has practically disappeared off the face of the earth. Caught hopping in January by an occupation led by Alan Thornett (Cowley, BLMC) it was told 'to form Councils of Action to get support for occupations' (ATUA Car Workers Conference, Cowley Social Centre, Oxford). Before this programme got really under way the occupation collapsed. Other ATUA fiascos in Cowley followed the January 'stunt'. Although the ATUA has a reputation for putting on a 'good show', some of the theatrical gloss is wearing a little thin. Either one builds a firm base in the class or the membership (aided of course by the Employer) will clip one's wings in no uncertain fashion.

The problem is of course the old one of syndicalism - workers see revolutionary militants as shop stewards simply to win wage struggles and better conditions and so on. But as soon as the question of political organisation is posed, those who have paid lip service to Trotskyism, attended ATUA meetings and conferences etc. will slide away. Such is the uneven development of consciousness, and the disjointed organisation of the class. Such is the anarchistic nature of Capitalism - workers can become quite hostile to their Marxist representatives. Such a base is flimsy, thin ice through which one can all too easily be plunged. The intellectual can almost always be welcomed back into the bourgeois fold, but the militant once he's down is finished. Thus the ATUA militant has to be of a special type - an advanced, intelligent proletarian armed with the most advanced theory of Scientific Socialism, well trained, a good speaker - someone who can give leadership. It is this kind of comrade the ATUA should be seeking and training - instead it dashes about concerning itself with 'colourful floats' and 'girl bands' - Gilding the Lil, but ignoring the root of the matter. This at best is a propagandist evasion, a radical diversion from preparing and developing in practice - the fighting capacity of the working class. Behind the militants there is absolutely ... nothing but paper support.

This is why it is possible for young WRF comrades to work in a factory (M.O. Valves Ltd., Hammersmith) as non trade unionists, in an organised factory !! This explains the ignorance of certain Acton comrades who wanted to 'get some credentials' in order to attend a Quarterly meeting of the London (North) District Committee of the AUEW - the credentials they would need of course would be shop stewards credentials! This isn't the advanced layer of workers - this is the radical middle class and the ignorant lumpens. I could fill pages with the ridiculous antics of these people, these so-called Marxist revolutionaries - one young comrade permitted a reporter from the 'News of the World' to carry out paper sales - he had a field day at the SLL's expense - needless to say the whole episode was passed off as 'one of those things'. No doubt she was ostracised but that was that. Public meetings, as far as CAV's is concerned have, with the exception of one where Mike Banda spoke, been absolute flops. Generally the loud hailer breaks down. Workers' confidence in their would-be leadership is difficult to raise under such unfortunate circumstances, somehow they seem to find it

incredible that the Revolutionary Party and the ATUA can't organise a proper public meeting, let alone run the British state machinery!

Arrogance won't win the working class to Trotskyism. The ATUA, the advanced layer of political militants has been decidedly ill-trained. There is only one other possible explanation, that is that the working class is too far gone, too corrupted by reformism to take up it's historic task. If this is the case, Marxism is as dead as the Dodo. The ATUA is not in the position to judge - it is merely the messenger - the leadership has to resolve this perplexing problem. The Labour government comes on the stage of history in crisis, the logic of Capitalism's needs demands attacks upon working class living standards - whereas the same government was placed in power by workers who look to it to solve their problems - the conditions for revolutionary development could not be better but the Party is not by any stretch of the most vivid imagination, prepared for that which it has stubbornly predicted for a decade and a half! A split in social democracy is possible - a number of prospects are possible but the ATUA will be paralysed if the WRE continues to be controlled by the middle-class radicals, the professional actors, the technicians and Fleet Street hack journalists. The party of Lenin and Trotsky is being incorporated into idealistic reactionary radicalism. The incorporation of the Trades Unions into the Capitalist state is inconceivable without a mortal struggle, but the WRE and ATUA do not have the same problem - the workers are hardly discernable. Only the most determined fight against the turn to middle class radical elements can resolve the crisis of British Trotskyism - a fight based on the Programme of the 4th International. ATUA members must demand a conference - a bona fide conference to hammer out this basic question - before it is too late.

APPENDIX (i)

Gerry Healy wrote a pamphlet on 'Problems of the Fourth International'* In this he analysed the various tendencies calling themselves Trotskyist. Dealing with the SWF he reproduced a description of the SLL from the Spring 1960 International Socialist Review**

'In Britain during the last two years a major group of highly qualified intellectuals and workers in the mass movement broke away from the Communist Party.. The break was programmatic, entailing a thorough review and study of the 'Stalin-Trotsky' dispute which Cochran and his collaborators put in the same category as the Dempsey-Turney fight. Among those in Britain who have broken definitively with Stalinism there has been impressive ideological ferment. A significant group having studied the programmatic issues to the end, turned towards fusion with the British Trotskyists.'

Of course Healy wanted to illustrate that the SWF had a difficult task in attacking the SLL whom it had, as the extract from IS Review shows, described in such terms of approval. But for the ATUA members this should have a quite different significance. It shows, does it not, that there existed before the formation of the SLL (in 1959) ... 'British Trotskyists'. But although the pamphlet purports to deal with 'Problems of the Fourth International' we are led to believe that as far as Britain was concerned these began with the launching of the Socialist Labour League. But this is not so ... what of the 'British Trotskyists' to whom the 'significant group' of intellectuals 'turned'? Who were they? Healy doesn't say - why not?

What of the Revolutionary Communist Party? Did it carry out 'theoretical clarification' exclusive of industrial work? What was Healy's role, where did he come from? These questions are important. There has been (other than Robert Black's 'Stalinism in Britain') no attempt made by the 'highly qualified intellectuals' to deal with the history of the Trotskyist movement. It has been said of the Stalinists that they dare not permit Klugman to continue his history of the CPGB - he has produced so far two volumes - the third would have to deal with the 'Third Period'. But the WRF have no moral grounds for sneering at the discomfort of the Stalinists, since the first volume of their own record has yet to see the light of day! Is this not a curious state of affairs? Mistakes have to be traced to their source - their class basis - the ATUA is the heir to a whole period of Trotskyist intervention in militant industrial struggles - but again this is a closed book.

Further reading

- 'Strategy and Tactics in the Imperialist Epoch' by Leon Trotsky
New Park Publications.
- 'Some Rank & File Movements' article by Brian Pearce Labour Review
Apr/May 1959. Vol.4.No.1.
- 'Where is Britain Going?' Leon Trotsky, 1926
- 'Problems of the Fourth International' G. Healy, Newsletter pamphlet
- 'Stalinism in Britain' Robert Black.

* A Newsletter pamphlet

** Magazine of SWF

APPENDIX (ii)Strikes in which the ATUA has Intervened

Railwaymen, 1972
 Liners, 1969, 1972, 1973
 Pilkington Glass, 1970
 Textiles, 1970
 Council Workers, Dustmen etc., 1970
 Hospital Workers, 1972
 British-Leyland, Cowley
 Fords (Dagenham, Halewood etc.) 1969
 CAV (Acton) CAV (Sudbury) - Telecontrol - 'Goad Affair' Lucas-CAV
 (Pazakerley) 1972
 Vauxhall (Gt.)
 Postmen, 1971
 Hlessey (Alexandra Works) Occupation
 Docks, 1972
 UCS Shipyards, 1972

These are the major struggles in which the ATUA and Workers Press have made a presence. It is of interest to note that despite this level of activity - the results in terms of recruitment to the ATUA has been extremely poor - a mere handful of militants remain members of the ATUA, out of all these struggles. Thus it has only 'delegations' from three work areas on the 1973 May Day march, namely Decca, Lankesters Engineering and the Arndale Centre Site! (WF 3.5.73) and these without doubt attended in a personal, individual capacity.

Perhaps this year the actors will don the flat caps and overalls they wore at Wembley to ensure 'a good turnout' - certainly there is no shortage of Equity members!

As regards the youth - what remains of all the youth contacted during the 'Right to Work' marches of two years ago? What became of the 10,000 people who attended the 'Wembley Show'? Is this of no concern to all who worked so diligently for that campaign, or have they gone too ... left the movement?

THE ATUA AND THE DEFENCE OF ALAN THORNETT

'While the frenzied red-baiters and anti-trade unionists try to intimidate the stewards and the drivers, the official trade union support is strengthening. Thornett's case is supported by -

- * The Transport and General Workers' Union 5/55 branch committee representing 7,500 Cowley car workers.
- * T&GWU shop stewards at Cowley.
- * T&GWU Region No.5 covering 330,000 union members from Oxford and the Midlands.
- * The British-Leyland combine committee, representing 160,000 Leyland workers.
- * T&GWU officials at local and national level.
- * AUEW Margam 71st branch has voted to send a letter to T&GWU 5/55 branch 'in support of Brother Alan Thornett and the fight against his victimization by the management of British-Leyland.'

This powerful support for Thornett is a testimony to the strength of the union case to fight against Thornett's victimization.

It utterly devastates the tiny minority of political extremists who are working hand-in-glove with the management to attack trade unionism at Cowley'.

Workers Press 26.4.74.

On presenting defeats as victories, WRF National Secretary, G. Healy had this to say at the 1973 YC Conference ,

'Now today they (the Stalinists) are making defeats into victories. UCS is a victory, we hear after thousands of jobs have been lost and basic rights abandoned'

Keep Left 21.4.73.

At a London aggregate meeting on 23rd April, 1974, Alan Thornett told those present that at Oxford the 'question of power was posed' and that 'a revolutionary situation' was in the offing. The Cowley workers were said to have 'lined up on class lines' i.e. with the WRF and Thornett - while other workers' organisations (TU, LP, CP, IS, IMG) were said to be with the employers. 'Only the Party (the WRF) lined up with the working class'. However it was admitted that Oxford Radio broadcasts hostile to Thornett had created a mood in the workers that made 'a mass meeting to discuss the victimisation a recipe for disaster'.

Tom Wright embellished the line that the other tendencies at the Plant were colluding with the management (IMG workers were said to have been given jobs at Cowley by management to attack Thornett) He alleged that the 'IS and the IMG and the Special Branch were trying to set up Thornett.'

WRF members are seriously requested to study the account of the Thornett case presented in this article. The reader should also remember that the Oxford WRF-SLL branch was the special preserve of G. Healy, who for years made a weekly pilgrimage to the branch to take its meetings. He, more than any other leader or militant of the party, is responsible for the shambles that is the ATUA and WRF in Cowley today. No amount of fingering of 'extremists' and screaming about the collusion of rival political tendencies with the bosses and the Special Branch must be allowed to divert comrades away from a merciless settlement of accounts with the Healy-Landa brand of left-opportunism.

After years of fighting against Management's attacks on trade unionism at British Leyland's Cowley plant (Oxford) the ATUA has suffered a serious defeat. When the crunch came the organisation succumbed to the combined efforts of British Leyland management, the Tory Press witch-hunt and an army of backward housewives led by Mrs. Carol Miller. The current crisis arises out of a series of disputes over speed-up which involved the arbitrary introduction of 'industrial engineers', workers were laid off and fights for lay-off money were waged. Management broke long standing agreements which stipulated that results of studies can be implemented only after the shop stewards have agreed. This 'mutuality' clause ensured increases for the men concerned. But British Leyland like all capitalist enterprises is faced with increased costs of materials, inflation, and severe competition from other automobile manufacturers - it is the sole British car and lorry company in the Big League. Moreover it has just recently announced a first half pre-tax loss of £16.6m. The Workers Press wants it to be nationalised - under workers control with no compensation.

T&GWU Steward Strategically Positioned

Alan Thornett, a veteran ATUA member is a Transport and General Workers Union shop steward representing 150 drivers at the Cowley plant; his members are in a strong position since the delivery of components and raw materials necessary for Marina production is in their hands. Thornett has fought against MDW (Measured Day Work) and speed up for many years, he became prominent in the work of his branch (No. 5/55) and became deputy senior steward, recently he became the Chairman of the plant's Joint Shop Stewards Committee. Important as these posts are, it is of course the leadership of a strategic area that concerns the British Leyland management. Having lost an estimated £30m. as a result of the three-day week (when 100,000 vehicles weren't produced) they had decided to attack the work force. In order to do this the power of the trade union organisation had to be weakened - Thornett and the other shop stewards had to be soundly defeated. 'Management by the consent of the Shop Stewards Committee' was a luxury the stricken British Leyland bosses could no longer tolerate. - war was declared.

Workers Resist - Leaders Hesitate

Job sheets produced by the work study 'industrial engineers' were turned down by the shop stewards, this resistance weakened and management moved in, several agreements were broken and workers began to fight back. The assembly lines joined in the fight and the management hesitated, then, sensing that the leadership were unsure about the possibility of organising the entire labour force they struck again. This time industrial engineers would be used as and when required'. Still the plant's TU leadership hesitated. The

Pabloite IEG distributed leaflets urging the Leadership to take action - the fact that they could attempt to inform Cowley workers of developments indicates the self-imposed isolation of the leadership. The efforts of the IEG were rewarded by both the management and the WF which labelled them 'extremists'. Sections refused to accept Work Study findings and whole departments struck work. A willingness to fight back against the management was certainly in evidence, it is also clear that the leadership vacillated. Sectionalism, a divisive tendency was strengthened.

Drivers Agreement Broken

Eight years ago an agreement was made whereby transport workers would not be 'laid-off' whilst any of the production lines were running - this was broken by the Company on 4th April, when twenty drivers were shut out. A mass meeting of drivers took place the next day, and the men were addressed by the stewards (Thornett was not present at this mass meeting) and the men voted to walk out en masse. They decided to meet again on 9th April*. Disputes on QT block had precipitated the management's decision to send the drivers home without pay; when the men met again on Tuesday, 9th April, the QT section had resumed work. Since the Company had clearly broken the agreement with the transport dept. The drivers saw no reason to go back to work, the members wanted the agreement firmly recognized and implemented. Senior management was approached but no advance was made. A deadlock had developed - senior stewards, as per procedure were called in, they met the Departmental Manager and he stated that the problem was now the concern of the Industrial Relations Dept. The Industrial Relations Manager arrived and he soon made it abundantly clear that there would be 'no re-statement of the agreement.'

Thornett's Credentials in Jeopardy

Thornett was criticized by management for failing to intervene at the 5th April meeting. According to them he should have attempted to secure a resumption of work, furthermore his statement of 9th April where he said that there would be no return to work until the agreement was honoured was also a cause for the bosses' concern. Thornett of course was merely expressing the opinion of the members who were defending their agreement. All the usual talk about 'promoting harmony' was levelled at him. E. Leyland decided to refuse to recognize Alan Thornett's shop steward's credentials on 10th April. The TGWU members met on 16th April and withdrew their labour until the Company restored to him his facilities to act as their elected representative. On Wednesday, 17th April, the management met National Officials of the Automotive section of the TGWU and refused to change their decision.

A Clear Case of Victimization

It is nothing new for shop stewards to be victimized, for leaders who fight against the breaking of agreements to be accused of 'being out of procedure'. Neither is it a novel development to see the Tory gutter press witch-hunting militants, indeed even the so-called 'Fed-up Cowley wives' demonstration has been tried before at Fords Dagenham. Quite clearly Thornett was a thorn in E. Leyland's flesh - he had to go and all the stops were pulled out to this end. Banners calling upon the management to 'Sack Thornett' were prominent

*This time Alan Thornett was present and addressed the men.

on Carol Miller's housewives march. The capitalist press howled for blood, even Thornett's ex-wife was pilloried. Suddenly all the problems of B. Leyland's Cowley plant were laid at his door.

Tinkering with the MDW System (The IS Line)

But how was it possible for the Management to unleash such an attack on the Chairman of the Joint Shop Stewards Committee? After the acceptance of MDW three years ago - the committee had led the men in a struggle to extract 'safe-guards'* within this system, these safe-guards related to,

1. Industrial Engineers (work study) An agreement on mutuality
2. Agreed manning levels.

These established points had robbed Management of the full fruits of MDW up to the present time. Marina assembly workers resisted the breaking of these agreements - a strike lasting two and a half weeks ended on 8th April, with the men concerned resuming work on the Company's terms. This decision was made despite the fact that the Joint Shop Stewards Committee had warned the men of the dangers of such a return at a mass meeting - the QA workers had received an ultimatum from the Plant Manager, Mr. J. R. Symonds. The Committee was turned over. The 1600 Marina assembly workers, by a substantial majority rejected the steward's advice and voted to return on the Company's terms. It was only a question of time before Management took advantage of this defeat of the Committee.

What Was the Alternative?

Here we find one section whose members had been out on strike for nearly three weeks in defence of 'safeguards', agreements that shackled the full implementation of Measured Day Work - this strike moreover had 'caused 6000 lay offs' (WF Tues. 9.4.74) It is interesting to note that the entire labour force hadn't been mustered to defend these agreements - one section had struck, the rest were 'laid-off'. Surely the 'safeguards' imposed by the Joint Shop Stewards Committee were of vital importance to all the Cowley workers? Was it hoped that the halting of Marina production alone would tame the Management's need to increase output per worker under conditions of severe financial crisis? If this was the view of the shop stewards it was incorrect - the 'Boom' had long passed. The concessions permitted to militant sections in the past have gone for good, but as a tactic it had in my view disastrous implications in relation to unity of the membership. There is a world of difference between workers being brought together in mobilisation against Management's attacks upon them and sections being sent home separately being informed that it is the fault of another group elsewhere in the plant. Disorientation develops. To return to the Marina assembly workers decision to go back to work, what policy did the Stewards offer them as an alternative? True they pointed out the dangers of such a move - the recommendation was to stay out until the following Wednesday morning - there was no meaningful policy - it would appear that the workers were disillusioned after 2½ weeks on strike (following of course the 3-day week period) and the fact that 6000 people were laid off must also have had some bearing on their decision. WF could however glimpse that all was not to management's advantage: 'Many workers who voted to return told WF that they would resist any interference with the working conditions they have established in recent years' (WF Tues. 9.4.74) There was no call for united factory-wide action!

*Something which Leonard Frank's pamphlet 'MDW and Productivity Deal Swindle' specifically rules out. ATUA pamphlet

The Role of the Workers Press

But the Management's success was 'shortlived' - according to WF. On 10th April one reads that E. Leyland Management's claims of victory following the return to work of 1600 Marina assembly workers at the Cowley, Oxford factory on Monday have proved shortlived'. Did this mean that the shop stewards' warning had sunk home? that the dangers inherent in such a step had been recognized? had the entire labour force been assembled and agreed to walk out shutting down the Cowley plant? This was clearly not the case, the Marina assembly workers had a dispute over mutuality - the Nazi line was still running - despite this transport drivers were laid off although they had an agreement stipulating that so long as any production line was operating they would not be laid off. The drivers decided to strike in defence of their agreement. WF was able to claim 'Their decision means that only hours after Management had begun forcing individual track workers to work at company-imposed speeds, the whole Cowley complex has been shut down. This strike means a stop to production of Marinas, Mazis and 1100's and involved the lay-off of 10,000 to 15,000 men'

(WF. Wed. 10.4.74)

It is again interesting to note that there is no reference of a mass meeting to involve the entire membership (even the 6000 5/55 TGWU members) in the defence of such an agreement. Neither does the daily organ of the WRE call upon the Joint Shop Stewards Committee to call such a meeting. Instead there appears to be a little game afoot - Management victorious on 8th April - downright beaten on 9th April. But what permeates the minds of the Cowley workers? Do they not begin to become somewhat left out of things - is this not the kind of conditions under which they can easily become alienated from their leadership? The ACTUA was formed among other reasons to 'unite rank and file trade unionists' but in this particular struggle division became the decisive factor.

Thornett under Attack

On 10th April, the E. Leyland management announced that they would no longer recognize Alan Thornett's rights to act as a shop steward representing the transport drivers. On Tuesday 16th April Workers Press ran an article on this issue 'Stewards at British Leyland's assembly plant at Cowley, Oxford will decide today what action to take to defend the trade union rights of Joint Shop Stewards Committee Chairman, Alan Thornett'. Thornett, the article continued was 'deputy convenor of 6000 Transport and General Workers Union'; later the piece illustrates the importance of that particular day's events. The 150 drivers who were still on strike would meet that day to decide whether or not to continue their strike which has brought production to a standstill - the Management decided to call in all Cowley workers in what WF described as 'an attempt to whip up the intimidation of the transport men and a witchhunt against Thornett'. Quite so - but who prepared the conditions whereby this was possible?

Workers Press Again

The result of the TGWU drivers meeting of 16th April was plastered across the front page of WF, Wed. 17th April 'COWLEY AT A STANDSTILL' 'Workers demand Stewards Reinstatement'. Readers could be forgiven if they assumed that Thornett's 6000 members plus the other Union members on the plant had downed tools in defence of Alan Thornett their Chairman. But no, it was the transport men alone who remained loyal to their shop steward. The Management had succeeded in getting 5000 workers into the plant but had been forced to send many

of them home. Still there appeared no reference to a mass meeting to outline the case of the Management's victimization of Alan Thornett. WF made no reference to a campaign by the ATUA to defend the Cowley Shop Steward who, after all, was one of its leading members. Worse still in a style reminiscent of the 'Morning Star' it quoted workers saying such things as 'Alan Thornett is a bloody good Steward regardless of his political view'. By placing no demands on the Joint Shop Stewards Committee at Cowley - by being a party to the leadership's alienation from the membership, WF helped to prepare for what was yet to come. They displayed no confidence in the majority of the Cowley workers. They were 'written off', it was reliance on the officials full stop.

The 'Line' Continues Unchanged

On Friday 19th April, the Workers Press headlines were 'NO VICTIMIZATION SAY LEYLAND STEWARDS'; alongside a photograph of Alan Thornett was the claim 'Representatives of 160,000 workers* Behind Oxford Steward Alan Thornett'. So it appeared that a campaign organised by the ATUA was completely unnecessary, the TGWU steward could rely on 'the fullest possible support was given to victimized Cowley shop steward, Alan Thornett, by the powerful British-Leyland Combine Committee in Birmingham yesterday'. But despite Chairman Eddie McGarry's assurances and £500 for the drivers, no action was called for by either the Cowley shop stewards or the Workers Press. It meant precisely nothing!

The Housewives take to the Streets

But if the ATUA were reluctant to launch a campaign throughout the Labour and Trade Union movement and the WF was unable to put demands for action on the entire B. Leyland membership - the Gutter Press showed no hesitancy - a cluster of women, the wives, or so we're told of Cowley car workers organized themselves (or were organized) into a body which demanded that their husbands went back to work. This was meat and drink to the capitalist press hounds, who normally wouldn't be seen dead in a council house front room. Mrs. Carol Miller became a star turn overnight - apparently she had made her claim to fame as an opponent to the licence of the local Social Club but this was something else. National newspapers quoted her snide remarks and she got full TV coverage. Someone must have organised shopping and baby-sitting services while the famous 'Sack Thornett' marches took place. Eventually this expert on industrial relations who has no doubt enjoyed spending wages earned by her husband, but made possible by trade union action, met top level management at the Cowley plant. The scene was set - the Management would call in its work force and by 'popular demand' would encourage Blacklegging.

'Leyland Goes Strike-Breaking'

Alex Mitchell reported that 'British Leyland produced an explosive situation at its Cowley complex yesterday by mounting a strike-breaking offensive' (WF 25.4.72) He continued, 'With the crucial transport section still on strike management began partial production on both Marina and Maxi models using scab labour' (my emphasis) What happened to turn Cowley into a Blackleg plant? Hadn't WF been sold there ever since it first appeared? Before that the Newsletter? Hadn't the ATUA held a conference last January in the Cowley Community Centre to discuss setting up 'Councils of Action' in

*On 25th April WF claimed representatives 'of 330,000 supported Thornett!

support of an occupation at these very same works? This issue of WF however gave the game away when it mentioned (for the first time) a mass meeting. 'A MANAGEMENT INSPIRED attempt was made to get Oxford union officials to call a factory-wide meeting to remove Thornett from his posts'. Now this is a key question if management had inspired elements to call for such a meeting they must have had excellent grounds for believing that they had a good chance of achieving their objectives. Once again the Workers Press dodges the issue - of alienation of the rank and file - once again this weak spot is penetrated by the class enemy - suddenly something to be feared - a mass meeting - is something to be desired. Control and full control of the Cowley plant is within their grasp. The press, the scabs, and Mrs. Miller's performing housewives all helped considerably the cause of Donald Stokes' men - but the obvious reluctance of the Joint Shop Stewards Committee in Cowley and later the union officials, to call the membership to a mass meeting spelled the message out loud and clear - the majority of Cowley workers would not fight for the defence of Alan Thornett, a shop steward for over 13 years. Attempts to hold meetings when it was known long beforehand that a massive turnout had been organised by right-wing elements exacerbated the situation still further, the vital leadership had been lost - only a handful of militants held on.

A Defeat for Trotskyism (1)

On Friday, 3rd May, representatives of 171,000 employees met the Executive Board of British Leyland - these representatives apparently had no qualms in listening to their boss Lord Stokes outlining the Company's problems - there is no record of a single shop steward standing up and making all present aware that the victimization of TGWU shop steward Alan Thornett would not be tolerated. Are we to assume from this that all Trotskyist E. Leyland shop stewards boycotted this meeting 'on principle'? That they attended and remained silent? Or is it the case that the ATUA hasn't any more E. Leyland shop stewards? after decades of work, or even any supporters among E. Leyland stewards? What about McGarry, Chairman of the E. Leyland Combine?

Avoiding the Rank & File and Relying on the Officials

By Friday 3rd May WF became slightly mixed up - its front page was dated 'Saturday 4th May No. 1371'* and the Thornett story had slipped from the lead to p.12, where it was presented as 'confrontation cars' below a piece on the Port Talbot steelmen's strike. The Cowley story was accompanied by no less than three photographs. Much emphasis was placed on the officials in the TGWU in particular Moss Evens, National Organizer. Clearly the ATUA is hoping that the TGWU will declare the drivers dispute official. But this contrasts with the opinion of the TGWU policy expressed by WF of Tues. 30th April, where one reads 'The implication of this (a statement by Bill Thompson TGWU district organiser) defence is that the TGWU is prepared to use the hysteria whipped up by the Tory Press to isolate the transport drivers' Somehow WF can't make up its mind about the role of the reformist TU leaders.

*Was this a mistake or could it be that the editorial board had a disagreement about handling the news (published in the Capitalist Press the previous day) that Thornett had given up 2 important TU positions?

Double Exposure

One bright spark informed me on May Day, that the demand for Jack Jones to personally intervene in the victimization case at Cowley was not to help Thornett ... but to expose Jones! Thornett one imagines is dispensable! It is the bankruptcy of the ATUA that is being exposed in this situation.

A Defeat for Trotskyism (2)

It is correct to demand of the Trade Union leadership, the Moss Evans' and Jack Jones' etc., that they personally intervene - but you do not make that your sole line of defence - you must mobilize the membership take up the challenge - force a mass meeting - demand to be heard - let the members decide - tell them the truth - the truth, as Leon Trotsky said, is always concrete. But instead of the truth there appears to have been manipulation and manoeuvring. B. Leyland was approached by Moss Evans TGWU National Organiser in order to do a deal whereby Alan Thornett would give up his posts as Chairman of the Joint Shop Stewards Committee and Deputy Senior Shop Steward. He would however retain his position as shop steward for the transport drivers. No mention of this in Workers Press.

Of course a mass meeting of his branch members would have the power to relieve him of these two positions, his shop stewards position derives out of the support of his members in his area of employment. It would appear that Thornett decided not to place confidence in his ability to outline his case to a largely hostile crowd and was no doubt wishing to avoid being 'turned out' publicly. Moss Evans was piling on the pressure. That leaves Thornett, a shop steward - not recognised by the Management. The TGWU is left with a very hot potato if it does what it should, i.e. call an official strike on this issue, it could very well become publicly rebuffed. The ATUA and the WRF have been exposed as utterly incapable of assisting Thornett, and were forced to appeal to Jack Jones for help. (Jack Jones, General Secretary of the TGWU was described in WF, 30th April, as 'entirely in favour of class collaboration ... He is now a fully fledged corporatist')* But with correct principled leadership why should Thornett be incapable of winning the support of his fellow members? Only he and the ATUA-WRF leadership can answer that particular question. It is up to the membership to extract it. It is clear that Thornett has the loyalty of the drivers he was elected to represent - but this is no more than any other shop steward could expect. One doesn't have to join the ATUA to win the support of one's members! Indeed Liverpool docks came to a standstill on 18th April over the suspension of Alan English. That is also abundantly clear is that Thornett and the ATUA had established no real base in the Cowley rank and file. WF will have to explain the statement made to the Daily Mirror on 23rd April by 'BRITISH LEYLAND SHOP STEWARD MR. REG. PARSONS' He said 'I TAKE MY HAT OFF TO THESE WOMEN. THERE'S A LOT OF SUPPORT FOR THEM AMONG THE MEN, AND I'M QUITE SURE IT'S GOING TO INCREASE. IT'S TAKEN THEM TO SHOW US WHAT CAN BE DONE - NOW IT'S UP TO THE MEN TO CARRY ON THE GOOD WORK'.

Wasn't this man one of the leading militants ... one of the founding members of the ... ATUA? What explanation is there for such degeneration ... was this the nature ... the true nature of the Cowley ATUA? For decades the Trotskyist movement has exposed the Stalinists and militants have heeded these exposures - it is not often that such militants can see for themselves Trotskyists in

*ATUA Conference Statement 1972 'Corporatism is the essence of Fascism'

action. When it does happen they not unnaturally expect to see a principled fight - where class consciousness will be raised. But this whole affair stinks of manoeuvring and manipulating workers without educating them. For example the return of the Marina assembly workers was short-lived - not because they had changed their minds but because the drivers came out on strike because their agreement had been broken. When the assembly men decided to go back on the Company's terms everyone's agreement was endangered! All the more reason for a united plant-wide fight on this issue - but it would appear that there has been fights-a-plenty in the past in the Cowley plant but, and here again is the possible source of disunity and the failure by the majority to support the fight against Thornett's victimization .. his own immediate members are not known to be militants ... hard to believe?

We're Good Lads with a Good Record!

'Transport department is a section in which strike action is extremely rare. The total amount of days lost through strikes within the department amounts to considerably less than one day per year for the entire period Bro. Thornett has been a steward'

No, this is not a figment of anyone's imagination, it is an extract from the TGVU 5/55 Branch Committee Statement (British Leyland, Cowley) 'VICTIMIZATION OF BROTHER A. THORNETT' - So it takes a strike, a witchhunt and victimization to discover that the great conference orator, industrial militant par excellence ... has one of the best behaved departments in British industry'. The WT also made a virtue of Thornett's well-behaved membership. One man said 'They call us trouble makers, but we have not had a strike in this section for eight years' (JF. Friday 26.4.74).

Difference between Theory and Practice ATUA

A myth surrounds the ATUA and its militants. Young and impressionable comrades inevitably see the militants as the cream of the British proletariat, quite unlike the wretched reformists and treacherous Stalinists. Whereas in fact they are in the main syndicalists with a fine gloss* of Marxism. Thornett was a good conference speaker but who can now claim that he has achieved anything substantial or significant at Cowley? In fact certain features require close examination, fact needs to be separated from carefully worded fiction. The proof of every pudding, comrades, is in the eating.

Here we have an outstanding industrial militant, a Trotskyist, a leader of the Workers' Revolutionary Party and the All Trades Union Alliance, who cannot face a mass meeting of his own fellow trade unionists at Cowley. Here we have a Marxist joining in a manoeuvre with the national officials of the TVWU whereby he drops two important positions rather than face the risk of having them stripped from him in public! Here we see the militant whose own section had a record every Personnel Manager would hold up as an example of good industrial relations! It is quite clear that it was the IS (Tony Cliff) line that dominated the acceptance of PDW three years ago - 'total opposition' became acceptance plus 'safeguards'. It is these agreements that are being ripped away by the Management who are driven into an all-out war with the workers because of the desperate economic situation and the particular crisis of British Leyland.

*In fact wafer thin!

The rebuffing of this attack is a political question - it is at this juncture that the fight to explain and lead the rank and file at Cowley is abandoned and the manoeuvring takes over. Against individual attacks upon sections there is the need for a united stand not a strategy of sectionalism which leads to disillusionment and defeat.

The agreement whereby drivers would not be laid off whilst any section of the assembly continued to work seems on the face of it a splendid one but some consideration must be given to it in order to arrive at an assessment of the nature and cause of the disunity at Cowley which manifested itself in the lack of support for Alan Thornett. I believe it to be a major factor. Such an agreement gives to the group concerned a privileged position especially in the context of a dispute - for unless each assembly line has ceased production - the drivers will not be laid off. This of course would hardly create an atmosphere of unity within the Cowley Plant, for all but one assembly line could be on strike and according to the agreement, the drivers wouldn't be affected! Judging by the record quoted previously (p.25) it would appear that Thornett's members have continued working when other groups have been in dispute. Thus one can see that as Deputy Senior Steward Thornett on occasions must have advised workers to take action whilst his own members, who of course were strategically capable of bringing the entire plant to a halt, would continue to perform their normal duties. Thornett was in a precarious position by encouraging sectionalism. When the Marina workers resumed work on 8th April, the Senior Stewards hadn't promised to call for a Plant-wide mass meeting in order to fight the B. Leyland Management in defence of all agreements - but as soon as the drivers' agreement was attacked - action which closed the plant was immediately taken. This must be a factor which assisted the general disorientation of thousands of B. Leyland workers. Conscious support for a principled objective - yes, workers 'laid off' - no.

Conclusion

The WRF and its so-called 'industrial arm' the ATUA have suffered a serious defeat - the ATUA 'super militants' myth has been exploded forever. The lack of serious study on the industrial front, i.e. the party's relationship with the class, has produced the crisis whereby its 'base' in Cowley has collapsed. No doubt the Pabloites and Stalinists, to say nothing of 'fully fledged corporatists' like Jack Jones will be blamed for the affair! But the leadership of the WRF will not be able to avoid the inevitable questions that serious comrades will be forced to raise in relation to this issue. Forward to the discussion. Forward to the comparison between the practice of the WRF-ATUA and the programme of the Fourth International - The Transitional Programme!

On Wednesday 1st May, WI outlined the opinion of the WRF in relation to the Thornett victimization issue in 'What we Think' under the title 'Fight for principles win support'. We read, 'Alan Thornett, the victimized shop steward has been given a massive vote of confidence by trade unionists', it continues 'At a meeting of his union branch, the right-wing, who have sung the management tune throughout the 3½-week drivers' strike, were utterly crushed'. The voting was 12 out of 220 on a motion to oust Thornett as Chairman. 'the overwhelming majority backed Thornett and the way he and the shop stewards have fought for trade union principles in the B. Leyland plant at Cowley' EXCELLENT! But what was the real situation? Thornett's members disgusted at their union's failure to declare