

Bob Harrison and Walter Kendall

**workers' control
and the
motor industry**

The Institute for Workers' Control

Pamphlet series No. 6 1/6d

THE RELEVANCE OF WORKERS' CONTROL TO THE STATE OF THE MOTOR INDUSTRY

A paper submitted by Bob Harrison.

It would be foolish to claim that any conscious, coherent demand for Workers' Control is coming from the car workers or the Unions which represent them. But there are massive and momentous changes taking place in the organisation of the industry and in the pattern of behaviour of the men and women employed therein. Their reaction to the control or management they experience at the point of production is probably the strongest evidence of the growing need for a new system of management. The present pattern of increasing resistance on the shop floor to the arbitrary decisions of management, is a reflection of the changing structure of the industry and the aggravation of the alienation symptoms experienced by the workers.

Economic forces will enforce continuing change in the structure and organisation of the industry and its relationship to the rest of the economy. Continuing change in the system of control inside the industry is likewise inevitable. It therefore must surely be the intent of both Trade Unionists and Socialists to channel the present workers' activity and organisation into positive demands for a new system of management, one responsible to those who do the work, and not to those who own the capital.

In action, Trade Unionists demand from their employment an increasing share of the income of the firm; improving working conditions (there is no absolute limit at which we will be content to let the matter rest), job-security and job satisfaction. We are at a stage of technological development in which it is possible for these aims to be satisfactorily progressed. They are complementary—and their satisfaction will require changes in ownership, control and management of industry. For the workers involved, their ability to create better jobs, and better lives for themselves will be strongly influenced by their degree of control over management. In a sentence—workers in a publicly owned and controlled industry can still be exploited and pushed around as “units of labour.”

On the assumption that those discussing this matter will be willing to agree within the above terms of reference, this paper will make brief statements on the following topics:—

1. An appraisal of the industry.
2. Labour relations in the industry.
3. The application of Workers' Control.

The State of the Motor Industry

The industry's contribution to the economy is summarised in paragraphs 2 and 3 of the Employers' evidence to the Royal Commission:

2. “The Industry's contribution to the Gross National Product of £28,910 million in 1964 has been estimated at 3 per cent. from a labour force of approximately 485,000, or less than 2 per cent. of the working population. The Industry's exports of £942.7 million in 1964 represented 16.6 per cent. of the United Kingdom total of £4,471 million—by far the largest contribution from any identifiable

industry. We might also add that its involuntary contribution to the Exchequer in the form of motor taxation is formidable—£887 million in 1964-65, or 10.9 per cent. of the total Revenue.”

3. “During the past 10 years the Industry has more than doubled its output to 2½ million vehicles in 1964 (including cars, commercial vehicles and tractors), supported by an average capital investment over the same period of £100 million per year. Of the 1,867,000 cars produced over the last year, 679,000, or 36 per cent. were exported, and in the region of 1,175,000 cars were sold on the home market. With 169,000 commercial vehicles and 157,000 tractors, the export total was over one million vehicles—nearly 60 per cent. higher than ten years earlier. The Country’s vehicle exports now stand at about 22 per cent. of the total world vehicle exports. We can also expect the industry’s production to continue to expand in the future, albeit at a slower pace than during the past five-years. The industry itself estimated in the National Plan that home demand in 1970 will be for 1.6 million cars, based on an annual growth until then of 4.6 per cent. compared with 9.8 per cent. in recent years, whilst exports may increase at the rate of 5 per cent. per year. Thus, annual car output may reach 2.3 million by 1970, with a domestic car population in that year of 12.6 million compared with 8.5 million in 1964.”

Most of the figures relate to the firms submitting the evidence—B.M.C., Ford, Jaguar, Leyland, Pressed Steel, Rootes, Rover, Vauxhall—the assembly firms in fact. But it is important to realise the industry’s export claim includes parts and accessories (including tyres and tubes): £226 million; agricultural tractors: £92 million in 1965, which with the other items left the export of cars and commercial vehicles at £338 million.

Components Industry

These export figures require a comment on the size and importance of the components section. On June 2nd, 1967, the “Times Business Review” quoted a spokesman for these firms, who claimed a labour force of 350,000 and a gross annual output value £800 million—and who complained bitterly of the Government’s ignorance of this less easily defined area of the motor industry. An extract from the “Times 300” for 1966 (the 300 largest firms ranked in order of capital employed) gives an indication of the relative importance of the two areas.

Rank	Comp.	£000’s Cap. Emp	Net Profit before Int & Tax		£000’s Turnover		Employees	£s. profit per Emp
			£000’s Latest	% of Cap-Emp Latest	Total	Export		
13	Ford	211,068	10,863	5.4	383,000	152,000	61,000	178.08
36	B.M.H.	167,381	23,313	19.7	483,526	146,000	134,239	233.13
39	Leylands	138,476	20,824	21.8	215,000	71,500	68,600	367.92
52	Vauxhall	92,218	18,774	22.6	195,009	79,579	33,022	568.53
83	Rootes	71,593	Loss 413	—	—	—	25,000+	—
For B.M.H. and Leyland a re-classification is now necessary.								
19	Dunlop	190,599	23,623	13.2	340,000	23,750	106,100	222.65
61	Lucas	72,903	9,359	13.4	174,800	—	65,000	143.98
69	Rolls Royce	71,697	8,198	11.7	106,392	39,672	47,141	173.90
150	Smiths	28,732	4,395	17.7	53,300	7,460	23,800	184.66
163	Goodyear	26,126	2,772	12.8	—	—	—	—
204	Birmid	20,552	4,857	24.7	39,319	1,400	12,000	404.75
244	Pirelli	16,614	2,373	16.1	26,516	1,800	5,430	437.02
249	W. Breedon	16,217	1,845	11.8	26,765	1,320	10,200	180.88
256	Auto Lock- heed prods.	15,708	3,459	24.7	35,624	—	—	—
280	Serck	13,216	1,809	18.1	15,698	2,295	5,000	361.81

The figures for the car firms are amended to include recent amalgamations, but the figures for the component firms do not indicate what proportions of capital, work force, profits, etc. are attributable solely to the manufacture of car components. And many smaller firms are excluded—e.g., Rubery Owen, Hardy Spicer and Girling.

Here, then, is a vast and complex industry. What is happening inside it? How well is it “serving the nation”?

Take-Overs—Concentration of Ownership

Ruthless international competition and the scale and cost of investment programmes are providing the motive for rapid concentration. With Fords, Vauxhall and Rootes effectively controlled by American parents, B.M.C. and Leyland have expanded through vertical and horizontal integration: B.M.C. has become B.M.H. with three separate divisions—B.M.C., Pressed Steel-Fisher and Jaguar Cars, and has sold the Pressed-Steel Linwood factory to Rootes for £14.5 million. Leyland have added the Rover-Alvis lines to their Standard Triumph car range. Recently, further talks between B.M.H. and Leyland (ostensibly about co-operative marketing moves) give weight to the belief that a merger is very possible. In the words of the “Times” correspondent Clifford Webb (June 1st, 1967) the Government, in the guise of the Industrial Reorganisation Co-operation, is “waiting eagerly in the background to step in if the going gets rough.” Progress in amalgamation continues throughout the industry. G.K.N. have recently had their attempt to establish a crankshaft supply monopoly, by acquiring Birfields, referred to the Monopolies Commission. Scope for further vertical integration by the car firms is obviously considerable. Some estimate that over 60 per cent. of the finished car is “bought in” from other firms.

We can only indicate the size and nature of the structural problem. The Employers’ Evidence puts it this way:—

“As far as the organisation of the Industry is concerned, the technique of mass production is widely used, designed to secure maximum benefit from the economies of large-scale manufacture. The flow line of production extends from the steel mills to the docks, with a vulnerability to disruption proportional to the delicacy of its balance. In the vehicle assembly areas particularly, the process depends on the maintenance of an adequately trained and highly interdependent labour force, serviced by a flow of parts and materials mostly by conveyor systems. Because of the manual assembly work involved, the quality of relationships engendered by the supervision is all-important. Motor manufacture also relies on very close integration with other Companies supplying components and services and the transport of finished products, so that loss of output at any stage, whether within motor manufacturing firms or supplying companies, can have very widespread repercussions. When we consider also the seasonal nature of motor car sales, the rapidity of technological change in the industry’s methods and materials and the pressure of international competition, the work situation calls for the utmost co-operation on all sides. The proper observance of Procedure Agreements for resolving disputes is therefore at a high premium.”

Performance: Is It Serving The Nation Well?

Output and export performance of the industry can only be gauged by comparison with the motor industries of other countries:—

Country	Date	Cars	Exp. %	Comm. Vehicles	Exp. %	Total	Exp. %
U.K.	1965	1722045	36	455216	36	2177261	36
	1960	1352728	42	457972	32	1810700	40
Canada	1965	710711	11	144765	8	855476	10
	1960	325752	5	70569	5	396321	5
France	1965	1423078	34	218218	17	1641296	32
	1960	1175301	42	193909	33	1369210	41
W. Germany	1965	2733732	52	242745	45	2976477	51
	1960	1816779	48	238370	49	2055149	48
Japan	1965	696176	14	1179438	8	1875614	10
	1960	165094	4	316457	4	481551	4
Italy	1965	1134444	27	71616	27	1206060	27
	1960	595907	33	48710	12	644617	32
Sweden	1965	181755	46	23818	58	205573	48
	1960	108302	45	20145	57	128527	47
U.S.A.	1965	930556	1*	1751805	4*	11057366	2*
	1960	6674796	2	1194475	17	7819271	4

* Figures not comparable

These figures indicate that the industry has not expanded rapidly enough, either in terms of total output or in contribution to exports. British vehicles are losing ground in the world export markets. These facts are the more disturbing in that they apply to the key growth industry—and to an industry in which Britain has not suffered the disadvantage of an “early start”—the technological handicap arising from the burden of outdated capital equipment.

Here, then, is a key industry which is not serving the nation well. It is in danger of American domination. It needs considerable Government assistance to solve its problems. It tries to do too many things (sell too many models) and it has grave structural weakness.

Rapid Rationalisation Required

Car manufacture is oligopolistic: it is controlled by five large firms, between which collusion is a very practical possibility. Efficiency and costs would seem to dictate further concentration; presumably with the blessing of the Industrial Reorganisation Corporation. Foreign control of 50 per cent. of the industry would still be a reality, and the key significance of the industry to the national economy is not likely to diminish in the near future. All things considered, here would appear to be the top priority subject for nationalisation.

The case for public ownership is greatly enhanced by the great difficulty the private industry has had in co-ordinating the components sector with the assembly process. Vertical integration has progressed only slowly. Although there are outstanding cases in the integration of Briggs, Fisher & Ludlow, S.U. Carburettors, Pressed Steel, etc., the long and vulnerable lines of supply need to be shortened and strengthened. This appears economically viable only on a national scale.

Technological Change

Despite the claims of the employers, technological change would not seem to be a major problem for the industry. Apart from increased mechanisation in the handling of materials and the increased use of power tools, there has been little change in the methods of assembly in the last

decade. Automation did revolutionise the machining of engines, and increasingly effective mechanisation has changed the nature of some types of pressing, forging and casting.

Vehicle production is still highly dependent on intensively organised groups of workers. The co-operation of these workers is therefore vital to efficient production—and the opportunity to exercise that co-operation is a basic human right. This leads directly to a consideration of industrial relations in the motor industry.

Labour Relations

Disputes in the car industry show the same trend and pattern as those exhibited by the engineering sector, and by most sectors of the economy, with the significant exception of the declining industries, e.g., coal and textiles. Vehicles appear to lead rather than follow the trend of the last decade towards more strikes, and more days lost. Lord Devlin's report on the Port Transport Industry (Cmnd. 2734) gave the following table:—

MAN-DAYS LOST IN SEVEN MAJOR INDUSTRIES

	Annual average number of Man-days lost through disputes			Average number of Man-days lost yearly in disputes per thousand insured persons		
	1930/38	1947/55	1956/64	1930/38	1947/55	1956/64
Docks	39800	344400	169100	285	3134	1091
Shipbuilding and Shiprepairing	54200	194100	514600	328	890	2349
Coalmining	1002600	616100	444000	1034	778	627
Engineering and Vehicles	88000	441700	1290300	80	162	411
Construction	71600	87900	172000	60	69	110
Textiles	1504000	21000	27100	1311	22	30
Food, Drink & Tobacco	5400	12000	22400	10	15	27

The theme is elaborated by Prof. Turner as quoted by Cliff & Barker¹

“As one expert Professor Turner has noted:

‘If one takes . . . the five year period up to 1961 one finds that the number of workers reported to have been involved in strikes is comparable with that in the five years of unrest up to and including 1926—the year of the General Strike itself; and that the number of separate strikes reported is very much higher than for any comparable period since figures first began to be systematically collected, in the 1890s.’”

And furthermore

“If one puts mining aside as the special case it is, the frequency of strikes for all other industries over the past few years immediately shows a very different aspect. And this is so marked that it is worth detailing. For ten years up to 1956 the reported annual number of stoppages fluctuated around 500 (which was also pretty similar to the rate for the immediate pre-war years). In 1956 itself, it was 570; but the number then rose:

In 1957 to 640, in 1958 to 670, in 1959 to 780, in 1960 to 1,180, and in 1961 to 1,220.² Continuing these figures from the point at which Turner left off we find: 1962—1,244, 1963—1,082, 1964—1,456, 1965—1,496

In other words from 1956 to 1965 the number of strikes recorded by the Ministry of Labour nearly trebled.”

"Downers"

Even figures such as these fail to give the full details of what is happening. They do not take into account the hundreds of "downers" which occur in the car industry each year, but which are too short in duration to be compiled in the official statistics. They are none-the-less a very important fact of life for the car worker and the industry.

Statistics which are available do confirm the motor industry to be the most strike-prone in the manufacturing sector.

Inside the industry, no clear pattern emerges. No seasonal pattern, no geographical pattern, no group pattern. Sometimes it is the Paint Shop, sometimes the Inspectors, then it's a track group and then the delivery drivers. Stacker trucks and stores, trim and rectification, very few groups have not "had a go." Vauxhalls in Luton was for a long time the exception, and it may have been the isolation and dominance of the firm in Luton which explained the exclusion from the pattern—or it may have been the operation of the elected Management Advisory Council.

This pattern of strike activity seems peculiar to the British car industry. Some enquiry into cause is necessary. A detailed analysis of the causes in the motor industry has been made by Turner, Clack and Roberts in *Labour Relations in the Motor Industry*, pages 76 and 334. (Publisher Allen & Unwin.)

CAUSATION OF CAR FIRM DISPUTES, 1921-64			LABOUR RELATIONS IN THE MOTOR INDUSTRY		
Percentage	% of all of striker-days		Table XI/1—Car firms striker-days by cause (for the establishments involved) 000's		
	strikes	days	(to nearest 50,000)	Inter-war (1921-39)	Post-war (1946-64)
Straight wage demands, or wage reductions	11	15	Straight wage increase demands or reductions	100	400
Wage Structure and workloads ...	44	35	Wage Structure and Workloads ...	150	900
Working hours and conditions ...	7	2	Trade Union Relations, etc.	600	600
Individual dismissals	9	7	Redundancy, Short Time	50	600
Redundancy, short time etc. ...	10	16	Individual Dismissals, etc.	250	200
Management questions	6	6	Management questions	...	100
Trade Union Relations	13	19	Working hours and conditions	100
	100	100	TOTALS	300	3000

Comparison of vehicles with other main industry groups, confirms the motor industry as being the most strike-prone, taking into account the size of the labour force. Such a comparison, detailed in Appendix XIX p. 74 of the Ministry of Labour's evidence to the Royal Commission, also indicates a somewhat higher proportion of strikes, in the motor industry, arising out of "wage disputes," "employment and discharge" and "working arrangements, rules and discipline."

Cause of Strikes

Turner, Clack and Roberts have contributed a very valuable analysis of this subject in their book "Labour Relations in the Motor Industry." In seeking any factors which might have a causal connection with the unique incidence and pattern of strikes in the British motor industry, they eliminate most of the commonly supported reasons by showing these factors to have equal bearing on other industries, and other motor industries, without producing similar results. All the theories are examined—the nature of track

work, green labour, lack of Union control, complexity of payments systems, lack of devolution of managerial authority, group piece-work, high labour turnover, etc.—and found wanting in some respects. Two factors are found to stand out as being of peculiar significance in the situation: (a) The large and frequent fluctuations in levels of earnings (related to the systems of payment) and (b) the insecurity arising from (i) seasonal fluctuations in demand, and (ii) Governmental manipulation of demand. With this one real exception, by no means experienced only in the car industry, the general conclusion is there are no factors in the situation which, by themselves, determine the level of strike activity. From this the deduction is that car workers decide to strike for any one of a number of reasons which seem sufficiently urgent to warrant the stoppage.

This book is of great interest and value. It may be that too little emphasis is given to two other direct influences upon the industry's labour relations:—

1. Inefficient authoritarian management—unskilled in its ability to cope with conflict situations.
2. The maturity of the labour force in organisation and bargaining—the high built-in level of expectations and the quality of resistance to arbitrary decision-making. In itself this is a form of workers control.

Application of Workers Control

Groups throughout the industry have secured a measure of Workers' Control in their own situations. Good organisation has achieved part control in such areas as manning, track speeds, movement of labour, work loads, job evaluation, and even in the management citadel of "hiring and firing." There is no wish here to overstate the case, but in certain sections of the industry works committees and shop stewards' bodies have, through continuous bargaining, built up a deep understanding of the internal organisation of the firm, and the external problems of the industry as a whole.

At the rank and file level, the workers have through hard experience come to be familiar with the internal and external problems influencing their jobs and income. The thousands of meetings to thrash out sectional or group policies on all management attitudes—these have an educational by-product in the awareness of the complexity of organisation and the conflicting interests involved.

Given the "ripeness" of the industry and the work-force for a system of Workers' Control, what control structure would be appropriate?

With the comparatively few large units involved the system of government could be simple. The area of government would depend on the amount of the components industry brought into a publicly owned motor industry.

A National Council for the Motor Industry composed of delegates elected from National Product Councils—i.e., National Councils for Cars, Buses, Commercial Vehicles, Bodies, Engines, Instruments, Tyres and other product electorates. Members of these N.P.Cs. would be delegated from the Works Councils of the factories which are principally concerned with the particular product. Problems of demarcation would not be insurmountable.

Car works at least are reasonably conveniently sectionalised to form constituencies for the election of Works' Councils. Tool rooms, body shops, maintenance groups, track sections, stores, cleaners, transport groups, clerical workers, draughtsmen, etc., would all be represented through "weighted" proportional representation. Workers Councils may normally meet weekly, while the Executive Board elected from its members may need to be full-time.

Whereas a National Council would represent the whole industry in relations with the government and the rest of the economy, and have responsibility for the national investment programme, research and development, manpower and training, the export organisation, and the co-ordination of the Product Groups, the N.P.C.s would represent the difficulties, the requirements and the grievances of their members to the co-ordinating body.

Workers' Councils would retain control of the organisation of production and systems of work, systems of payment and incentives, disbursement of the works surplus, some research and training, and relations with regional planning organisations, etc.

There is no desire here to avoid the implications of public ownership without which Workers' Control is not a likely starter. Public ownership means that the state will have the authority to determine the place of the industry in the national economy, and to determine how much of its surplus the industry will retain for investment, research and as income for its workers. Workers Control on the other hand will ensure that the industry and its workers have their interests constantly promoted in the working out of national economic policy—and that the "bargaining position" is maintained and improved.

It may be that to "sell" widespread public ownership to the nation's workers, it must be nationalisation **WITH** Workers' Control. Other forms of nationalisation have not given the workers the new relationship with management, the security and the job satisfaction which we hoped would develop.

No "pie in the sky" image should come from this paper. It is just an attempt to fit the workers' control debate into the conditions prevailing in one industry and to indicate the relationship between Workers Control and the function of the trade unions. At present, the most important task is to keep alive the consciousness of the real problem of control through the organised militancy of the car workers.

With any system of control there will still be conflict between groups and the state, between groups in the economy and in the industry. There will still be alienation. There is no quick and easy path out of a jungle of attitudes which has grown in centuries of capitalist development. The path will be hacked in untidy fashion—so long as we don't go in a circle—but the prospects outside the jungle look good, and anyway, we have to keep moving or be eaten.

Incomes Policy, Legislation, and Shop Stewards. p. 81.

MOTOR CONTROL NEEDED

A paper submitted by Walter Kendall.

Just prior to the 1964 contract negotiations several large Detroit locals of the United Automobile Workers of America initiated a unique bumper sticker campaign. In all cities across the country where U.A.W. plants were

located, the bumpers of auto workers' cars carried the slogan "Humanise Working Conditions." Lacking the support of official union leaders, the workers were attempting to inform the public that their chief contract objective would be to improve the conditions of factory life rather than wages. In the 1967 contract negotiations which are to begin shortly, production workers will have a similar objective in mind. The signs suggest that the 70 per cent. of locals which went out on wildcat strikes following the 1955 contract, may well be approached again in 1967.

The preoccupation with production workers' problems is a real one and is emphasised by many active militants and shop stewards here in the world motor capital of Detroit. The preoccupation is too, an international one, as is very ably documented by the recently published and most valuable British study "Labour Relations in the Motor Industry."¹

At the end of their highly competent study of labour relations in motors the authors conclude what most of us as trade unionists know already: "We are driven to the conclusion that strikes in the motor industry have been caused mainly by the kind of pressures that strikers themselves give as reasons for striking—car firm strikes have had their roots in a pattern or complex of conscious grievances (in) which one can see that they might very well, applied to oneself, for instance, be an adequate motive for action." Such a statement from a profession hitherto noted only for its activity as ideologists for the ruling class is highly noteworthy. Its authors ought to be commended. Its text should be hung ten feet high across the plant buildings of B.M.C., Ford, Vauxhall, S.T.I., Jaguar and the other firms involved.

Strikes in British Motors have increased as follows:—

1921-1930	1931-39	1940-44	1945-49	1950-54	1955-59	1960-64
84,000	226,000	276,000	302,000	684,000	821,000	1,161,000*
(striker days)						

TOTAL: 1921-1964: 3,733,000

(*Still less than 2 hours per employee per year. Capitalist press, please note)

Contrary to the still surviving adherents of Butskellism and defeatism in our movement, industrial unrest has mounted precisely as living standards have improved. Strikes are, in an era of full employment, less about simple wage issues, more about citizen rights, human dignity and decent treatment on the job. British car workers, like those in Detroit, are lining up under the slogan "Humanise Working Conditions." The following table of strike causes illustrates the point:—

Car Firm Striker Days	1921-39	1946-64
Wage Increase or Decrease ...	100	400
Wage Structure, Work Loads	150	900
T.U. Relations, etc.		600
Redundancy, Short time, etc.		600
Individual Dismissals	50	250
Management Questions		200
Working Hours & Conditions		100
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	300	3000
	<hr/>	<hr/>

The major portion of motor industry disputes, as this table indicates, are caused by shop floor initiatives seeking encroachment on managerial prerogative. What these figures express is a spontaneous determination to transfer an important range of decisions out of the dictatorial hands of arbitrary management into the firm grip of the organised working class.

Motor industry stewards and militants have embarked on the road towards industrial democracy without yet fully realising the fact.

To quote our "neutral" academics, "In the interwar period . . . work place organisations were mainly preoccupied with the struggle to maintain wages—and labour standards—in the face of persistent mass unemployment. With memories of the interwar period diminished . . . the horizon of labour expectations lifted." "This change in expectations seems best expressed in two ideas or beliefs, the idea that wages should be "fair" in competitive terms; and the idea that performance of a job establishes property rights in it."

Translated out of the jargon, what does this mean? Firstly it is a statement that about wages the shop stewards have been more often right than the bosses. Management as a whole have no clear conception of why they are paying, what they are paying for, and what they get. As a result massive irrationalities and inequalities in wage structure exist both within individual firms, especially B.M.C., and between company units in the whole. Shop steward wages demands, in short, have been directed to teaching incompetent labour management its own job. Secondly, to the extent that shop stewards and workers insist on "fair wages" where time work is involved, particularly "on the line," they are directly challenging management-claimed prerogative to allocate work loads dictatorially and as it pleases. In one field therefore shop stewards pressure is designed to introduce equity and rationality into an irrational and inequitable wages structure, thus disputing management competence and prerogative indirectly, whilst in the other it does so head on.

As to "job rights," let the university gentlemen explain for themselves, which they do very well. "The concept of 'job property rights' has far reaching implications—it extends not merely to the sense that operatives should not be turned off en masse ('lay-offs' to you, K.) when it is no longer profitable to employ them, or that the individual worker should not be deprived of his property rights established by service without appeal—it also includes the idea of rights to a particular job at a particular place, and may extend to the right to consultation in anything which may affect the future value of his 'property' . . . In effect, the pursuit of 'fair wages' in detail and the protection and elaboration of 'job property rights' have become, even though these principles are rarely consciously expressed as principles of its operation, the central business of union work shop negotiations and the emotional basis of its strength."

The significance of all this to those of us, workers and intellectuals, attending this workers' control conference ought to be self evident. Down there below, in those irredeemable depths of ignorance, and spontaneity, regularly condemned by both "revolutionary" sectarians and petty bourgeois socialists, the workers already have the idea and are putting it into practice although not yet at a theoretically clarified level. At the present time the real bargaining table is that at which sit the shop stewards in the factory not that at which sit union and employers' leaders at York. That being so, it should be one of the foremost aims of our conference to examine ways and means of bringing a higher rationality into the existing spontaneous motor workers' demands for encroaching control. Motor workers represented at Coventry should most seriously consider producing a leaflet or pamphlet which can be circulated in thousands inside the plants, developing, amplifying and illustrating the points made herein. Such a pamphlet would find as ready a market in Detroit as in Cowley and Birmingham. A shop stewards' movement for industrial democracy in motors can, and should be, put on foot.

All the evidence suggests that the time is ripe for action on both tactical and strategical scales. Tactical, by formulating explicit worked-out demands which can be incorporated in day-to-day industrial bargaining. Strategically, by motor workers themselves formulating specific proposals for industrial democracy, workers self-management of the plants and of the industry as a whole. Motor workers are at present working for, organising for, striking for an extension of industrial democracy into the work place without realising fully what it is. Is it too much to expect that our conference will take practical and positive steps to make this implicit demand explicit, to transfer it from the realm of a half understood longing to a fully worked out, rational, negotiable and achievable, political demand?

¹ *Labour Relations in the Motor Industry.* Turner, Clack and Roberts. Allen & Unwin 55/-.

REPORT ON MOTOR INDUSTRY SEMINAR

By Tony Topham.

The seminar consisted of over twenty workers from the car industry, mostly A.E.U. members, who represented a very wide cross-section of different firms in both the assembly and components sections.

Two papers were discussed—one from Bob Harrison, who spent three years in the industry as a shop steward, and the other from Walter Kendall of "Union Voice" who is at present in the American car centre of Detroit.

Both papers stressed the need to develop a workers' control movement in the industry which was based on the actual problems facing car workers—the threats to security and wages posed by rationalisation, takeovers and the declining position of the British industry in a competitive international market.

The potential for a workers' control movement is clearly revealed in the statistics of strikes, which show a rising proportion to be about matters of managerial action. The findings of academic experts have recently confirmed that car workers strike about real issues, about their objections to managerial authority, and about their need to control the job situation more effectively. The drives towards new methods of wage payment, such as "measured day work" were now threatening the controls which had been established by the shop-stewards in recent years.

They now faced a situation similar to that of 1956 when the struggle against redundancies had presented an opportunity (which had been missed then) to establish the demand for workers' control. However, it was generally agreed that the much more political nature of the struggle in 1967, with the workers' control demand springing up in many industries and the labour movement itself, provided much more fruitful ground.

The principal obstacle to be overcome was the fragmented character of the car workers' militancy, but it was felt that the very nature of the workers' control demand promoted unity, since it raised a demand which was not confined to a particular factory or section. In this way the

dominant sectionalism of the industry's workers could be overcome. In its turn, such a unity would link up with the struggles now impending in the docks, steel, transport and aircraft industries.

The ripeness of the industry, and of the work-force, for a system of workers' control, was therefore fully accepted by the seminar. The question therefore arose as to how this was to be expressed. It was agreed that, as Walter Kendall had written: "the workers already have the idea and are putting it into practice although not yet at a theoretically clarified level . . . that being so it should be one of the foremost aims of the conference to examine ways and means of bringing a high rationality into the existing spontaneous motor workers' demands for encroaching control." Or, as Bob Harrison says: "Groups throughout the industry have secured a measure of workers' control in their own situations. Good organisation has achieved part-control in such areas as manning, track speeds, movement of labour, work loads, job evaluation, and even in the management citadel of 'hiring and firing.'"

The next task was to make these controls firm: to insist on them as a political right, and to grow from this towards a plan for full workers' control, which would naturally raise the question of public ownership. The latter would then have to be based on a democratic system of workers' councils

To this end, it was agreed that a pamphlet on workers' control in the industry should be produced, and to ask the C.S.E. to assist in its publication.

In plenary discussion later, the question of a car workers' conference was also raised. The movement has made firm beginnings at Coventry. As Bob Harrison concluded his paper:

"There is no quick and easy path out of a jungle of attitudes which has grown in centuries of capitalist development. The path will be hacked in untidy fashion—so long as we don't go in a circle—but the prospects outside the jungle look good, and anyway, we have to keep moving or be eaten."

The Bulletin of the Institute for Workers' Control
contributors include Michael Barratt-Brown, Stephen Bodington,
Ken Coates, Royden Harrison, John Hughes, Bill Jones, Walter
Kendall, Ian Mikardo, M.P., Ernie Roberts, Alan Rooney, Hugh
Scanlon, Tony Topham and many others.

Quarterly, 96 pp. Single issues 8/-, Annual Subscription 30/-
from 91 Goldsmith Street, Nottingham.

PUBLICATIONS OF THE
INSTITUTE FOR WORKERS' CONTROL
from 91 Goldsmith Street, Nottingham.

The Way Forward for Workers' Control	Hugh Scanlon	1/6
Productivity Bargaining	Tony Topham	1/6
Labour and Sterling	M. Barratt-Brown	1/6
Opening the Books	M. Barratt-Brown	1/6
The Labour Party's Plan for Industrial Democracy	Ken Coates & Tony Topham	1/6

ARCHIVE SERIES

Student Power	Bertrand Russell	6d.
Workers' Control & Revolution	Antonio Gramsci	1/-