ALTERNATIVE PLANNING

The Lucas Combine Committee

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Fifty years ago, G.D.H. Cole, the theoretician of the British guild socialist tradition was to reflect upon the militant factory-based struggles which he had been involved in around the time of the First World War. These struggles - built around the "First shop steward movement" - ended in failure as economic recession preceded the great lock out of 1926. This collapse, wrote Cole, had much to do with the movement's failure to shift its attention from the shop floor and toward "the higher reaches of control...especially the control over investment."[1] While the parallels between now and then are rather complex, this one observation retains its force for, if anything, this particular vulnerability of shop floor organisation to the flexibility of capital is heightened in the modern context. A shop steward at Hastie Brothers on Clydeside echoed the man at Speke when he said this:

> I think it is crucial that we should know of their investment plans and have alternative plans of our own to fight for. We need to be much more prepared for their decisions. At the moment we just react, and its usually too late. I think we should be hammering for alternative plans at every outlet available. It has to be the combine committee that will force our national executive into demanding them!

Views like this one have led some shop steward committees and their combine organisations to question the established limits of their relationship with the companies. The combine committee at Lucas Aerospace is the clearest example of this. Its "workers plan" for the company has been seen by many to provide the basis of a strategy <u>for</u> labour which combats those being developed by the corporations and the government. This, chapter of the report, outlines the development of this strategy within the Lucas combine committee and examines its general relevance to other committees and groups of workers. In doing this - i.e. locating the factors which generated this "new strategy" - it will be necessary to go beyond the confines of the Lucas company and examine the broader social - political climate of the 1970's.

The nineteen sixties were the boom years during which militant bargaining on the shop floor enabled many sections of the working class to advance their living standards. It was in such conditions that the early combine committees were formed. But the boom - although the longest and most remarkable one in memory - did not last; and the recession served to emphasise the growing vulnerability of British companies in the global market place. The nineteen seventies have, as a result (and in stark contrast to the earlier decade) been years when redundancy, plant closure and rationalisation have emerged as the main problems faced by workers and their organisations. We have seen how this operated in the case of Vickers, and how it was presented to the workers as an inevitable law, a consequence of "the hard facts of economic life". Generally, these "facts" have been enforced by statutory wage controls and arguments which stressed the common interests we all have in solving the crisis. In these circumstances attempts to regain lost bargaining strength, to resist the controls and talk of "free collective bargaining" and of the need to fight closures, have been met with argument about profitability, inflation the nature of "the crisis", the constraint of the market and so on.

A system that works tolerably well and manages to satisfy many of the needs of the people, can avoid such self examination; its members are generally spared the exhortations of people at the top, justifying things and demanding more commitment, more sacrifice...An economic crisis however - particularly one which spills millions of people out of work - makes ideological and political debate inevitable. For those on the receiving end, those who make the sacrifice, the logic of a system which doesn't work is difficult to accept. Mike Cooley of the Lucas Aerospace combine committee put it like this:

> We have a level of technological sophistication such that we can design and produce Concorde, yet in the same society we cannot provide enough simple heating systems to protect old age pensioners from hypothermia. In the winter of 1975-76, 980 died of the cold in the London area alone..
> Added to this is: the tragic wastage (which) our society makes of its most precious asset - that is skill, ingenuity, energy, creativity and enthusiasm of its ordinary people. We now have in Britain 1.6 million people out of work. There are thousands of engineers suffering the degradation of the dole queue when we urgently need cheap, effective and safe transport systems for our cities. There are thousands of electricians robbed by society of the right to work when we urgently need economic urban heating systems. We have, I believe, 180,000 building workers out of a job when by the government's own statistics it is admitted that about 7 million people live in semi-slums in this country. In the London area we have about 20 per cent of the schools without an indoor toilet, when the people who could be making these things are rotting away in the dole queue.[2]

Given all this it is perhaps surprising that things have been as quiet as they have been; that there haven't been more strikes, more factory occupations, more marches in London. Perhaps the surprising thing is the extent to which redundancy (via the provisions of the Redundancy Payments Act) has been accepted by so many workers and their organisations. Many things are involved here, but one of them surely is that working class people, while recognising these contradictions, and agreeing that so much in our society is not as it should be (if not completely around the bend) feel powerless to do anything about it. They can see no alternative. For example in January, 1975 Panorama ran a programme based on the crisis facing Chrysler's operations in Britain. David Dimbleby talked with a group of car workers in a pub in Coventry. During the discussion they revealed a deep antipathy toward the company and the way they had been treated. In his final penetrating question Dimbleby asked, "How do you save jobs if you can't sell the cars?" The reply came slowly: "That's a good question which I cannot answer."

At Lucas (and Vickers) members of the combine committee felt that it was important to come up with an answer. Through their experience of run down, and many long discussions, they have come to realise that the corporate economy was not going to provide them and their children with a secure future. To quote one shop steward at Vickers:

> That's what I'm doing all this for. Not necessarily for me but for my children and my grandchildren. It's important that we provide some sort of future for them; a future that is better than what we've had. As far as I can see at the moment there's going to be no future at all - because there's going to be no bloody jobs. That's how I look at it.

With the collapse of the boom, shop steward committees throughout British industry found that they were often, perhaps unintentionally, challenging more than their particular management. Increasingly they found themselves in arguments which involved questioning, to differing degrees, the market as an adequate measure of need, the necessity of investment decisions based on profit criteria, the constraints of the government and of the financial institutions. In many respects their discussions touch upon the need for an alternative future.

Historically, British trade unionism has, through its alliance with the Labour Party (the so called 'industrial' and 'political' wings of the movement) attempted to solve the problem of an alternative strategy through a reliance upon parliamentary action. During the thirties - the last major economic crisis in Britain - the search for a means of organising production to meet the social needs of the people focussed on a programme for the nationalisation of the major industries. Political control over the state machine, would allow the Labour Party to take the major industries into social ownership. From this commanding position, production could be planned according to the needs of working people, either as workers or as consumers. However things haven't worked out quite like this.

One man, who now works for Vickers at Elswick, and used to be a pitman remembers the high expectations of the mining communities:

> I can remember standing at the pit with the banners, celebrating, with my father and his friends. They thought, this was it. What a surprise they were going to get. They thought nationalisation would bring everything they'd fought for. But within a very short space of time they found out that they'd swapped one boss for another. The first boss we got under nationalisation was a major from the Indian Army, six months later followed by a Captain Nicholson... later we had a banker!

A shop steward at South Marston worked on the railways and was similarly disillusioned:

> we really believed it would make a difference. We really thought it was the beginning of socialism, you know, almost time to hoist the red flag. I thought we'd be working for ourselves, that we'd be in control. But in fact the supervision and

> bureaucratic administration became a hundred times worse. You'd get 10 foreman where before you only had one; you'd have to use 10 pieces of paper where before you'd only have one. You'd always have to go through many more channels to get anything done. That approach killed nationalisation. A lot of us felt really frustrated. Mind, I still think nationalisation is the only way, but next time it will have to be very different.

Looking back, many trade union activists now see that these experiences are not altogether surprising. Nationalisation has produced no real alteration in the balance of power within the work place or in society as a whole; neither has it altered the dominant logic which governs the "success" and "failure" of a particular company. Nationalisation has not affected the dominant logic of profit; if anything it has been the basis for sustaining that logic within British industry generally. Even Vickers, a medium sized corporation (operating still with the government as its major market) has managed to call all the shots in its dealings with the British state. For people on the shop floor it seems that the labour cabinet and parliamentary party are pretty much the prisoners - often willingly so - of the existing relations of industrial and social power.[3] This disillusionment, heightened during the last years of the Wilson government, fostered - during the early 1970's - the feeling that Clause Four was not enough; new policies would have to be tried.

During the years of opposition, a "new strategy" was developed within the Labour Party which gave form to the manifesto with which it fought the 1973 General Election. It consisted of proposals to nationalise key companies in each manufacturing sector in order, from this base, to set standards of "social responsibility" for the other companies to follow. This would be backed up by making "planning agreements" with the remaining companies, thereby bringing them into line with social priorities. Also by establishment of a National Enterprise Board which would give financial assistance and establish public enterprises according to these priorities.

Labour Party leaders like Tony Benn, helped by the Institute for Workers Control, argued the need to back their proposals with detailed contacts with the shop steward committees in the corporate sector who had a direct interest in the proposals and the industrial strength to exert pressure in support of them. The shop stewards of the Vickers combine committee were involved in those contacts and on Tyneside they initiated the "Tyne Shop Stewards Conference" as part of an attempt to build a rank and file alliance. This conference (which attracted over eighty representatives from shop stewards committees in the multinational corporations on Tyneside) organised regular monthly meetings based around the specific policies outlined in the 1973 Labour Party Manifesto. At these meetings workers expressed the feelings that the policies could provide a basis for a strategy to control the power of the corporations.

After the election, as Minister of Industry, Benn continued these contacts. He met representatives of the Lucas Aerospace combine committee:

> Wedgewood Benn listened to us. We gave him details of the combine committee and of Lucas Aerospace. Benn said it was a unique meeting. He thought we needed to draw up a strategy for Lucas Aerospace. Benn implied that management should get involved. I opposed that. We have an expertise and knowledge and this must find a sounding board on the higher levels of control.

An important difference opinion, and one which became more acute some months later when Benn was shifted out of the Department of Industry, the Industry Bill was emasculated and planning agreements were made voluntary. As we have already seen, the N.E.B. was transformed into an instrument for carrying out rationalisations which private capital did not have the strength to impose. With this, the Tyneside Conference lost its impetus. It was to be the same as before. The "Social Contract" reaffirmed the old industrial and political alliance of the labour movement. The policies of Tony Benn and the new Labour Left seemed to have foundered on rocks which had an all too familiar look about them.

For all the problems, and weaknesses of the 1973 proposals they did represent an attempt to deal with the question of corporate power in a recession. Their failure emphasised to many people the need for strategies which could go beyond the traditional separation of "trade union" and "political" action. Combine committees, like the one at Lucas, were thrown back on their own resources. They were left with the feeling that they would need to develop plans of their own; organised "from below". It is in this context that there has been discussion (particularly by the Lucas stewards) of the idea of workers plans and alternative production.

The alternative corporate plan drawn up by Lucas Aerospace shop stewards combine committee evolved out of that "unique meeting" was produced initially in the period of the "rank and file" alliance as a response to problems which were similar, in some respects, to those facing workers in Vickers.

> Benn did promise that if Lucas came to him for money he'd come to us and discuss what we thought. This is quite a possibility. What have we then got to say. We've got to have some plan in our minds. Look at what happened to the last lot of money from the government? It led to redundancies as a result of the takeover of the aerospace bit of English Electric. Nationalisation will mean the same thing unless we have a plan of our own.

Lucas Aerospace had followed a policy of rationalisation, which had seen the reduction of a workforce of 18,000 in 1970 to 13,000 in 1974 with the prospect of further cuts to come. At the same time the company was producing, in very small numbers and at extremely high prices, kidney machines for which (if the number of pub collections is anything to go by) there was and is an urgent need. This contradiction appeared as a glaring one to the Lucas Committee: the plant and the workforce exist - why not stop the sackings and make more machines? The "alternative" plan grew out of this. It was this which led the Lucas workers to go beyond demanding "the right to work" and to argue

for a plan which demonstrated that products - for which there was a real, social need - could be produced in the Lucas plants. In moving in this direction the Lucas workers raised issues of fundamental political importance. Lets look in a bit more detail at the background to this development.

The late 60's and early 70's are remembered best by shop stewards in the electrical engineering industry Weinstock era. Weinstock symbolised a new threat for which traditional forms of trade union defence proved inadequate. It was in fear that the tactics of Weinstock would become the tactics of central management in throughout the corporate sector and at Lucas in particular which led the Lucas stewards to form a combine committee. As one of the founders of the combine committee, from the Willesden plant put it:

> Between 1968 and 1971 Weinstock axed 60,000 jobs. The profits went up during the same period by £18m. to over £110m. This tactic was to concentrate production in certain areas, introduce increasingly automated works process and make the remaining workforce work faster and harder. G.E.C. was the first large combine in Britain to use these tactics. The unions there fought as well as they could. But they didn't have much experience to draw on. We learnt from their bitter experience. Lucas Aerospace had already begun to axe thousands of jobs. But we decided we could prevent them, by building up a strong combine committee.

This they did. The first meeting of the combine committee was in December 1969, when Weinstock's rationalisations policy was at its height. It was a small but enthusiastic beginning, 5 out the 22 Lucas Aerospace sites were represented. By July, 1972 all 22 were affiliated and the combine produced its own newspaper Combine News: Management could no longer ignore these developments and agreed tentatively to recognise its existence. The first issue of the newspaper reports on this first eighteen months of the combine committee.

> Painstakingly, the combine committee has been built and developed to its present size and stature. Initially the company tried to ignore it, and presumably hoped it would go away. Well its here to stay, and will continue to grow in strength and importance because it reflects the needs of all Lucas Aerospace employees to prevent the company playing off one group against the other. It has begun to demonstrate its strength, by solidarity actions at a number of sites, the blacking of products and the transfer of work to protect the jobs of those under attack.
> Last December, Mr. Clifton Hogg (the personnel) met the combine committee for the first time. On that occasion the company made 'a bit of a scare' about some of the staff representatives and complained that it did not represent all unions. However, since then it has been demonstrated that this is not so and the company have had to admit that the combine now represents 90 per cent of all organised labour throughout the Aerospace combine. This is a force which no sophisticated management can

> pretend to ignore, and the Lucas Industrial Relations set up is sophisticated, if nothing else. A further meeting took place with Mr. Clifton Hogg and other company representatives on 9th May at which management agreed to Ernie Scarbrow participating as combine secretary.

The first major test of this confident assessment of the combine's strength came later in 1972. The "parity" demand had been raised and the workers at Burnley were locked out by management when they refused to accept a wage offer which they consider " derisory". Financi l was the first vital form of support which the Burnley workers required and by the end of the strike (which they won) £11,000 had been collected throughout the combine. Mass meetings had been held at every site at which the members agreed to levy themselves 50p. per week. Furthermore the combine organised an effective blacking of all work which management tried to transfer from Burnley. This national solidarity was so cohesive and effective that it attracted a lot of local and national publicity. It also seriously ruffled the company. As one company spokesman perceptively remarked to the Financial Times:

> It revealed a very serious situation with national implications. The situation became serious enough for the company to concede the poverty of earnings which Burnley was demanding and for the Burnley workforce to win, as the combine newspaper put it 'a resounding victory'

Since that dispute, the Burnley plant has been perhaps the strongest site as far as the combine committee is concerned. It is the most united and one of the ones which gives consistent support to combine committee initiatives.

> Before the strike the lads on the shop floor weren't at all sure what the combine committee was, they used to get it muddled up with the plant shop stewards committee. But afterwards you could get them to support anything the combine did. It really gave us cohesion and an understanding of things. Once you've been at that sort of level of militancy it's difficult keeping things up mind. Especially with the membership changing new people coming in, others leaving. Now we don't have a work force which has been through a major struggle together. And the difference is really big. Things are more difficult now.

This last point by the AEUW convenor at Burnley of the occasional difficulties in winning support for combine committee initiatives is indicative of a more general problem which the combine had to overcome. On the one hand for the committee to be effective it needed to be able to call national action throughout the sites. On the other hand the combine committee could not impose any discipline on affiliated sites. That would be to invite the antagonism of the official leadership as well as probably to 'frighten off' a number of possible affiliations. To overcome this problem the combine

committee agreed on a carefully balanced constitution. Majority decisions of the combine committee are binding, in the sense that if the majority agrees every representative should then take the decision back to each shop stewards committee and campaign for its acceptance. The decision however only has the status of a recommendation. In this way the autonomy and rights of each affiliated committee is protected. While at the same time every effort is made to achieve national action or pressure. The logic of this was explained in the combine newspaper, after management had been spreading word around that the combine committee will take away the individual bargaining rights of local shop stewards committees.

> The combine committee in no way seeks to intefere with the authority of local shop stewards committees. Indeed one of its central aims is to increase their authority by gaining support throughout the combine for steps they are taking on behalf of their members. .....At its meetings, it discusses in depth all the problems throughout the combine and then arrives at a common policy. This common policy is then RECOMMENDED to each shop stewards committee which in turn will put it to all the workers in the site where it operates. In this way the company will not be able to do "an Arnold Weinstock on us" by carving up groups of workers one at a time.

In spite of the care with which the formal constitution was drawn up, divisions and antagonisms did develop within the combine. The committee overcame the problems which faced other combines such as the problem of geographical spread, but after six years or so of fairly effective campaigning they faced major divisions between groups within the combine committee. The final split came in April 1977 when the "hourly paid" workers split away. Important sections of these workers remained - in particular those at Burnley whose convenor Mick Cooney is chairman of the combine - but by December 78 with considerable management encouragement, (management gave recognition to a separate hourly paid combine) the majority of hourly paid sections of sites had split from the combine. The leadership of the manual group which brought about the split was based upon the Liverpool plant; they claimed that the works and that the combine was over concentrating on staff issues. They drew attention to the campaign to abolish clocking in, a campaign for indexed wages and the corporate plan as examples of this. The defenders of the combine said this was inconsistent with the facts: these campaigns were initiated by the combine committee as a whole, and the combine committee had on it a majority of the hourly paid.

Recent developments in the struggle against redundancies have gone some way to heal these divisions.

The later stages of a prolonged struggle against redundancies has considerably strengthened the unity of the workforce. Though this has not (yet) been reflected in a strengthening of the combine committee. Instead it has centred around a lay committee elected by a conference of delegates from all the sites for the purpose of negotiating with the officials of the Confed. and the company on the redundancies. In order to understand these recent developments it is important to go back to the beginning of the campaign

Since 1976 the combine committee, seeing the trends towards massive structural unemployment (between 1970-74 6,000 jobs were lost in Lucas Aerospace) had started to work on such an alternative. In drawing up their alternative from the ideas and experiences of their members the Lucas shop stewards were not concerned only with defending jobs. They felt that this defensive aim could only be permanently won through fighting for socially useful work; work on products which met the needs of other working people and their families. They rejected the accounting criteria of managing director, Blyth, and his team; a criteria which put profit first and accepted existing markets as an adequate expression of need. Instead the shop stewards started directly from the criteria of social need; on the one hand the need for work, for satisfying work, work with a social purpose and work which develops the workers' potential to the full; on the other hand the community needs for non-polluting transport, cheap heating, medical equipment and so on, the sort of needs which tend not to be adequately expressed on the market because they are not backed by sufficient resources.

The question of social usefulness was raised, quite dramatically in a company which produced a few kidney machines but massive amounts of equipment for warfare, and this raised the further question of how technological advance is related to human needs. At Lucas, for example the company had developed sophisticated aids to allow pilots to land 'blind'; aids which contrast graphically with the white sticks blind people rely upon. Many other examples came to mind. The combine committee became particularly interested in the possibility of developing a hybrid electric-petrol vehicle which would reduce fuel consumption and pollution, and also a light-weight rubber-wheeled vehicle, capable of running on roads or rails. These were examples of products which had never been fully developed either because of the threat they posed to powerful vested interests or because the rate of profit on the sale of the product did not fit with Lucas' objectives.

In our society the market determines what is produced. And it is the market place which has always provided the main source of justification for capitalism. The market, it is argued, satisfies people's needs, it offers choice, it ensures that goods are only produced if they are wanted and thereby makes the closure of plants producing "unwanted" lines inevitable. But one of the real problems of the market lies in the fact that only certain "demands" are registered. "Demand" depends upon "money" and in a society where money is distributed extremely unequally, the market reflects this distortion. This has always been the case.

Under the monopoly control of the corporation, however, other distortions have emerged. As the companies developed the technique of mass production, so did they realise that as people obtained what they needed, cheaply, markets became saturated. So the markets were regulated. New "brands" were established and "saturation" was avoided by built-in obsolescence and the yearly round of the "new model". Today, "competition on the High Street" most usually involves a choice between a range of similarly priced brands of similar quality. Often these commodities are produced by two or three mammoth companies, and it is not exceptional for "competition" to be between the brands of the same company. Unilever, for example, produces over a thousand products, in seven main manufacturing areas. It hardly ever trades under the name of 'Unilever' yet hundreds of brands which have become household names (Lux, Persil, Omo, Vim, Harmony, Close-Up, Signal, Blue Band, Stork, Crisp n' Dry, Birds Eye, Vesta, Walls, Unox, etc., etc.) - are produced in factories which it owns.

The monopoly power exercised by the corporations also gives them control over advanced technology, its form, the way it is introduced and the products which it produces. And this has consequences inside the factory as well as in the market place. Technological development is a 'management function'. At Lucas (as well as Vickers, BL and the rest) that management is in a position to develop techniques which will secure - or extend - its control over the factory floor: deskilling of work and the routinisation of the work process are clear examples of this. The Lucas committee drawing attention to this, made clear that their plan for the company, extended well beyond a "suggestion scheme" for alternative products. It was a plan which asked fundamental questions about "corporate planning" and the nature of an alternative way of organising society. Its fundamental strength was that it showed in practical terms that there is no need for redundancies; there are real social needs which now go unmet unnecessarily, because people and machinery that are considered redundant could, if things were organised differently, meet those needs.

On the basis of these principles the combine committee drew up, from the wealth of ideas which came from the different sites, an alternative corporate plan. The plan illustrated the needed products which supposedly 'surplus' 'unwanted' workers could creatively and usefully produce in the Lucas Aerospace factories and elsewhere. The plan included demands for greater quantities of existing products that met a clear social need, such as kidney machines and demands for using existing skills and resources to produce new products, such as a roadrail vehicle, a hobcart for children suffering from Spina Bifida and many others.

The strength of these arguments appear to have made a real difference to the combine committee's ability to block the new phase of redundancies. At Burnley, where 300 jobs were due to be axed, Terry Moran, an AEUW shop steward at that time, tells how:

> it made our job as shop steward trying to save those jobs much easier when people could see that there should be a future in their jobs; and, very important, a future which they felt would be worth having a fight over. Heat pumps was the main demand at Burnley. My members knew from their own experience of how old people suffer in the winter, that heat pumps were needed, as a form of low cost heating. With this sort of campaign we had none of the usual bother, men running after the big redundancy carrot. We saved all the jobs.

Against this background the combine committee began to campaign on a wider front. Their demands were political as well as industrial. They needed to win concessions from government as well as from management. So they began to put pressure on M.P's and ministers; lobbies were organised and meetings set up. The radical promise in the 74 manifesto for a government which would exert social control over the policies of the multinationals, was wearing a bit thin given the unemployment figures, but, with a strong extraparliamentary base and a clear alternative policy, there did seem to be some chance of building up pressure through political channels. Sections of the Labour Party

had already expressed enthusiastic support for the combine committee. For example the 76 Labour programme referred to it approvingly in a section on 'Creating Alternative Employment'. And there was a growing number of sympathetic M.P's.

When the combine committee approached the Labour government in the form of the Department of Industry, there was an entirely different response. The views of the party and of M.P's carried little weight when practical responses were required. On the practical issue of whether or not the *government* would intervene in Lucas to initiate negotiations on the alternative plan, it was management's view which was - unquestioningly, so it seems - accepted. The minister, Gerald Kaufman, replied to the combine committee:

> I have been firmly of the view that the proper place for the examination of your ideas must be, at least initially, within Lucas Aerospace. I understand that appropriate discussions are taking place within the normal machinery.

Yet the combine committee had written to him after the company had refused to negotiate on the plan. All that the management had suggested was informal, site by site discussions, enabling them to pick and choose from the plan and diffuse the campaign to save jobs. The shop stewards firmly rejected this approach. They insisted on negotiations. This was made clear to Kaufman. Not much sign of the D of I being attentive to the views and information from the shop stewards concerned, here. The combine wrote again assuring Kaufman that discussions on the plan were not taking place. The minister's reply was little different from before:

> for some time the company and its employees have been examining a number of suggestions in your plan within the normal consultative machinery.

That may have been what the company wanted, but it was not what was actually happening. All this confirmed the views of combine members who were wary of getting too caught up in the maze of political lobbying. But through sympathetic M.P's, they kept up the pressure. And this parliamentary pressure in turn focused public attention on the issue and helped to widen industrial and community support for workers plans.

Late in 1977 the message was clearly getting home to the Department of Industry that they could not any more get away with simply repeating managements' view. The combine committee was not going to go away. The persistant stream of letters from Ernie Scarbrow the combine secretary, would not stop. Nor would the parliamentary questions. Nor the publicity which highlighted the irresponsibility of management in contrast to the social concern and practical creativity of the stewards. Kaufman and Les Huckfield changed their tack. They no longer argued that the company was dealing adequately with the problem. They admitted that there was a problem with the company, but denied that they could directly intervene. It must be solved through the proper channels. The proper channel, the ordained body, was the Confederation of Ship Building and Engineering Unions.

Under pressure from the combine though, the Confed. did not have complete control over the negotiations. Lay representatives were involved to an unprecedented extent. These lay representatives made up a 14 man committee elected at by delegates from the plants. Formally it was responsible to Confed. executive. But the Confed. officials could hardly ignore the views of the Confed. called delegate conference, to which the 14 man committee reported back. The brief of the 14 man committee was to evaluate management's proposals and to draw up alternatives which would retain jobs in their existing geographical locations.

The 14 man committee was made up of a majority of combine committee supporters. But it also contained several of the leading members of the split among hourly paid committee. Together the 14 man committee visited every site and interviewed over 80 production managers, staff members and shop floor representatives. From this they drew up a comprehensive report after two months almost full time investigate work. This report served as the basis of tripartite negotiations between the company, the government and the unions.

We shall see later that the combine committee activists were not entirely satisfied with the outcome of these negotiations. Six hundred and fifty out of the original 2,000 redundancies, were still to take place. Nevertheless, the experience of "investigating the company" and putting forward practical alternatives to redundancy was seen to have had some success. Jobs were saved and this has gone some way to heal the split between the combine committee and the "hourly paid" workers committee. But this has not led to a reunification of the committees. There are a number of reasons for this. There is a clear reluctance for people who have made a stand, and a decision to break away, to revert to the original committee. This is made the more unlikely when the joint committee is "unofficial" unrecognised and resented by the company and the union officials. And even more so when the company have agreed to the "hourly paid" committee negotiating over wages and conditions. To put it this way, it too provokes the suggestion that there's a more fundamental difference at work here than simply a staff/managerial split. Also incurred are different conceptions of trade unionism and trade union organisation. ~~This leads on to the final part of the report.~~

Footnotes "An Alternative Future"

1. G.D.H. Cole Foreword to B. Pribicevic, The Shop Stewards' Movement and Workers' Control 1910-1922. Blackwell, Oxford, 1959, p.vii.

2. M. Cooley, "Lucas: The Right to Useful Work", Workers' Control Bulletin, 1978, No. 3 p.3.