

INSTITUTE FOR WORKERS' CONTROL.

Memorandum for Action Committee, GEC/EE, regarding the Occupation.

Members of IWC have discussed the situation which arose last week (17th-19th September) at the three factories, and would like to make the following observations, on the loss of support for the proposed occupation, amongst the workers. It goes without saying that this comment is offered because we hope it might be helpful to the Committee, and not as a 'knocking' of the efforts so far made, which have won our admiration and support.

1. In order to lead up to occupation, (which requires a widespread loss of 'respect' for orthodox managerial authority) it would have been useful to hold meetings inside the factories. A series of 'seminars', conducted shop by shop, or group by group, would have challenged managerial authority far more than a meeting at the gate.
2. In line with this, a progressive erosion of authority might have been commenced by techniques such as boycotts or sending to Coventry of particular sectors of lower management; this would accustom workers to realization of an alternative to normal authority.
3. No publication - newspaper or newsheet - was commenced on a scale big enough or frequent enough to consolidate the decision taken at the mass meeting, on which the Committee's mandate rested.
4. Above all, loomed the problem of the attitudes of the 'link-men', i.e. the shop stewards, who could have been engaged in a series of sessions on a smaller scale than the 'all Liverpool' rallies.
5. The specific problems raised by stewards and workers at meetings:
  - a) how would our wages be paid?

The answer here was a Solidarity Appeal to the labour movement. Some such appeal was launched, but not on a scale big enough to show workers that funds would be available. Action Committee should have perhaps asked all labour movement papers to take big, free advert, appealing for funds, with a target figure (e.g. £12,000 a day needed to pay Netherton and Napier alone).
  - b) legality?

IWC has asked for a document to be prepared on this aspect, but the main point seems to be the distinction between "illegal" and "unlawful". Trespass and breach of contract are involved, but it is doubtful whether the law could be invoked against thousands. After all, every strike that ever was is a breach of contract, but employers do not take action on that account. We hope to send you a longer document about all this.
  - c) insurance against accidents?

This worried the workers because of the pledge that the factories would be worked. There would have been no problem if a straight-forward sit-in had been proposed. But this is not ~~it~~ to be taken as a decisive argument against working the factories; it is not a real problem. Could you have taken out insurance for a short period of time? Could you have started with a series of short sit-ins?

d) Redundancy pay?

our view on this is that the Government would have been very very reluctant to cut off rights to redundancy pay, since the political implications would have been enormous. The Redundancy Payments scheme is designed to encourage workers and trade unions to accept redundancy and mobility of labour. If they had used it as a weapon against an industrial action - even of the unorthodox kind that you were proposing, - it would have been discredited amongst the trade unions and the workers.

Returning to the wider question, (sit-in or a working occupation) we see advantages in both methods. The straight sit-in may have more chance of immediate success, as a training ground, as a build-up, rather like guerilla strike tactics. It could be used to support the straight demand for shopsteward veto rights against firing, for the opening of the books and for public accountability of firms like GEC - particularly those which receive government subsidy.

On the other hand, if you go on to a working occupation, you do compel everyone to look at a whole range of wider questions - e.g. markets and supplies, - and this undoubtedly helps to stimulate the widest criticism of government and company, for their combined failure to plan production in the interests of full employment. It was certainly your announcement that you intended to run the factories, which stimulated such widespread discussion throughout the country, on workers' control, the problems of self-management, etc.

Whatever form your action takes, we believe it is very important to stage as much activity as possible, (including preliminary activity) inside the factories. Thus, your daily paper should be run off inside, you might operate a local radio-transmitter for the Liverpool area from inside, Action Committee should hold daily general assemblies inside, at which regular re-elections of strike leadership should take place, meetings with shop stewards from other industries should take place inside, etc., etc.

A key question remains that of the books. What is needed is access to the records of the three plants concerned, which are of course, secret. (They are probably more securely kept now, after your threat to occupy!) Could you appeal to the bank employees who keep the local plants accounts? You need a full file of all financial dealings over the past two years. These should be examined to show whether or not the company was moving out of Liverpool not to avoid losses, but to maximise profits by going elsewhere. Such a conclusion would greatly help to win public opinion in Liverpool.

If the company comes forward with offers of big redundancy payments, you should insist upon the effects on the regional economy of Merseyside - that it is not a question of saving individual workers' incomes, but of maintaining the level of employment, and expectations, for the whole region - this particularly affects the youth

We are sure these points have mostly been looked into very carefully; the main thing is to issue statements to press, TV, etc., on every turn of events, so that they are not allowed to assume that you have gone out of business.