one, but in some way, it is inevitably going to be disappointing.

The Church must set about making this world a better place to live in, in the same way as Christ set about creating the world anew: the Church must lose the prestige attached to her divine origin, she must humanize herself, exist for men, become a servant of men, and eventually accept crucifixion. And we would do well to remember that the hope the Church can offer is the promise of a world which is not immediately attainable—and which, ultimately, it is not in man's power to bring about. What the Church holds out as the better world men should be looking forward to, is a world renewed by the Spirit of God, in which God will be all in all, a better convenant, made universal and everlasting by the Spirit of God, and no longer subject to the vicissitudes of the spirit of men.

Lest the hope of ever realizing this final covenant be regarded as futile, lest we be brought to despair, considering the contradictions that beset our present world and the divisions that persist among men, we have been given a pledge that such a covenant is possible, that, assuredly, it is the goal of our history, that—in spite of all appearances—it is already in the making.

This pledge is the marvellous deed God wrought in our history in his Son Jesus, the greatest of the missionaries ever to have appeared among us, Jesus, who existed in our world as a living communion between God and men, the prelude to the Covenant we are waiting for, and which will be finalized when he shall be our God and we shall exist as his people.

Workers' Control
by Ken Fleet

'In the past workmen have thought that if they could secure higher wages and better conditions they would be content. Employers have thought that if they granted these things the workers ought to be contented. Wages and conditions have improved, but the discontent and unrest have not disappeared. Many good people have come to the conclusion that working people are so unreasonable that it is useless to try to satisfy them. The fact is that the unrest is deeper than pounds, shillings and pence, necessary as they are. The root of the matter is the straining of the spirit of man to be free.'—William Straker (Northumberland miner), in evidence before the Sankey Commission, 1919.

Workers' Control is about the struggle for a genuine system of industrial democracy. It is based on the premise, and contradiction, that while we live in a political democracy, however weak and limited that democracy may be, we certainly do not have any real economic democracy. And, furthermore, that without a swift development of democracy in industry we are not very likely to maintain much of our existing political democracy, which has already been seriously undermined by the rapid growth of huge economic empires accountable to no-one. On the other hand if we *can* create genuine democratic institutions in the industrial sphere we shall have a substantial base from which to attack the weaknesses of the present political framework and to make it much more responsive to human needs and aspirations.

Of course it is true that, while industrialists have in theory and by legal sanction, unfettered control over their industries with the right to determine what is produced, by whom and for whom, in what conditions and by what methods, in practice the growth of trade union strength has placed considerable restriction on managerial powers and put many areas of decision-making under the constraints of negotiation. Indeed, some writers like Hugh Clegg and J. K. Galbraith have seen these trade union powers as the reality of industrial democracy itself with the management as, in effect, the 'Government' and the trade unions as the 'Opposition'. But we may fairly ask, what kind of democracy is it where the opposition's right is only to oppose and never to have the opportunity to form an alternative government? The trade unionist's position *is* rather like that of a member of a permanent parliamentary opposition: he can object in the strongest language, he can obstruct and delay, but all the time he is responding to the initiatives of management. Trade unionists do not have any executive powers themselves; they cannot initiate, they are at the permanent disadvantage of always having to react to another's decisions, their role is, in the last analysis, essentially a negative one.

None of this is to argue that a strong trade union movement is not of any real value or importance apart from its defensive function; on the contrary, it is a strong, an indispensable weapon and the essential base for the development of demands for wider control and power by working people over their own lives. All the evidence shows that it is only when workers join trade unions that they start to become aware of their mutual interdependence and common interests and to develop real solidarity amongst themselves, the pre-condition of social consciousness and action. This applies as much to 'white-collar' workers as to their 'blue-collar' brethren—and they are organizing fast with the impact of the sub-division and routinization of clerical tasks and the redundancy threats resulting from mergers and rationalization. It is for this reason that at least half the energy of the workers' control movement has been taken up

with defending the rights that trade unions have already won against the efforts of management to take back these controls by such devices as productivity bargaining and by means of repressive legislation such as the present Industrial Relations Act.

Moreover activists in the workers' control movement are deeply suspicious of such arrangements as those embodied in the West German system of 'Mitbisstimung' where workers have 'representatives' on the Board of Directors (in certain industries up to one-third of the total and even, in some cases, 50 per cent) because these arrangements exist in the absence of strong trade unions. This suspicion is strengthened by the absence of election and recall arrangements for worker-directors by their alleged constituents, or any regular reporting back to them, and by the accumulating evidence that these directors tend to become absorbed into the managerial ethos and to lose touch with the outlook and problems of their former work-mates. It is significant that when worker-directors of a similar character without independent powers were proposed for the new Steel Corporation in this country, *The Director* applauded the proposals on the grounds that they might make it easier to implement smoothly large-scale redundancies in the industry.

'Participation' is a very fashionable notion and, in some sense, to adapt a famous phrase, 'we are all industrial democrats now', but for this very reason it is necessary to be cautious about what people actually have in their mind when they advocate greater participation. Its significance is likely to be quite different for a trade union activist seeking more real power for his members, and for the average Personnel Manager looking for a quieter life. The struggle of those on the shop floor for a far greater degree of worker control is based on the implicit belief that, in the words of Jack Jones of the Transport Workers' Union, 'a man who has invested the whole of his life in an industry has an equal, or greater, right to a say than he who has merely invested his cash'. The implications for social change of this sort of conviction are much more far-reaching than can be contained in the average joint consultation scheme or of co-partnership arrangements, which aim to satisfy the worker's aspirations by making him one of a remote body of shareholders and awarding a *property right* instead of acknowledging his *natural rights* as worker.

In fact the workers' control movement is an integral part of the labour and socialist movement itself and sees property rights and human rights as ultimately irreconcilable in a modern industrial society. In one form or another workers' control aspirations have constantly reappeared throughout the history of the labour movement from its earliest days, notably in the Co-operative Pioneers (the Co-operative movement was originally a movement of *producers* essentially), the Shop Stewards' Movement around the period of the Great War and in the ideas of the Guild Socialists. Its perspective

is an ambitious one: the achievement of a truly human society, where the social activities of man are determined by the mutual consent of all, with the key issues and choices, together with their implications, fully exposed to the light of day and subject to genuine democratic debate and decision and with no arbitrary or irresponsible authority in any sphere. It looks forward to the end of the division of labour where only a minority of men perform creative and rewarding work with the majority tied to wearing, tedious and repetitive tasks, and with a steadily growing number forced to live in idleness, unemployed and unwanted.

The movement for workers' control came to life again in Britain in the early sixties. Several currents converged to feed this revival. In the first place there was the disillusionment of socialist activists and trade unionists with the results of conventional nationalization measures enacted by the post-war Labour Government: they had failed to give workers in nationalized concerns any real say in the running of their industries or in their working lives and, far from sparking off a transformation of capitalist society, these industries had found themselves subjected to the profit-making priorities of the private sector. Disenchantment with 'revolution from above' had been reinforced by the unveiling of the oppressive and suffocatingly bureaucratic nature of Soviet society, especially through the revelations of Khrushchev at the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, and the brutal repression of the Hungarian uprising in 1956. To many of the most honest and dedicated members of the Communist Party these experiences were traumatic and they tore up their party cards. Some of these activists played a central role in the development of the New Left for which workers' control became a crucial issue.

It was at about the same time that we began to become aware in the West of the imaginative and exciting experiments that had been developing in Yugoslavia for a number of years. The Yugoslavs were progressively devolving economic decisions from a centralized bureaucracy, which was responsible for stultification, frustration and inefficiency in the economic and social life of that country, as in other Eastern European economies. This new policy entailed more and more decisions being taken at the industry, enterprise, workshop and departmental level; social ownership was maintained but the whole structure became an elaborate system of institutions representing workers at every level. The key unit in the system was the workers' council of the enterprise, which included representatives of the national and local community; these councils had very real and increasing powers over such fundamental matters as investment and employment policies; they appointed the director of the concern and determined the disposal of the trading surplus. The TUC sent out a delegation to observe these experiments at first hand and as a result

the Fabian Society published a pamphlet which helped to stimulate interest in Britain.[1]

These developments were given substance by the upsurge of working-class militancy and determination throughout the 1940s and '50s. With a buoyant fully-employed economy, workers were able to make steady gains in their wages and general standard of living. Beyond that, they strengthened their control of working conditions at the shop floor level and their grass roots representatives, the shop stewards, increased rapidly in number and powers. Instead of fuller bellies leading to contentment and euphoria, as crude materialists had expected, they freed men to turn their attention from the struggle for wages alone to the questioning of work conditions and speeds, managerial authority and the structure of industry itself. The impulse portrayed by William Staker in 1919 was still very much alive in 1963.

It was in that year, and in the climate I have described, that a group of some 80 people, predominantly socialist journalists and academics, came together in Nottingham for a National Conference on Workers' Control and Industrial Democracy. It was here that the new movement for workers' control was born. At that time, with the Conservative Government stagnating after twelve years in office and beginning to be faced for almost the first time with severe crises in the economy, the prospects of the return of a Labour Government seemed bright. It looked to workers' control advocates as if a genuine government of the Left might be a real possibility under the leadership of Harold Wilson. They were as disappointed, as were many other socialists, when Wilson's rhetoric was shown to be hollow as soon as he was faced with the need to make hard choices under intense economic pressure. Much of the Labour leader's appeal had been in the devastating manner with which he had demolished the Tories' 'stop-go' policy. Faced with similar problems himself, however, he used exactly the same methods of deflation and wage-freeze (though they were given more polite names) to 'defend the £', because he had hoped to solve Britain's fundamental problems by a general consensus of business, financial and trade union interests; when this proved to be an impossibility he was left with no alternative but to prop up the established order and use the same remedies as his predecessors, even though they represented an attack on the fundamental interests of the Labour Government's own supporters.

In these circumstances activists found that far from making progress in the establishment of workers' control in industry and throughout the economy they were driven back to defending existing controls and traditional trade union rights in opposition to the so-

[1]Since that time, throughout the 1960s, the Yugoslavs have virtually abandoned any overall central planning to the irrational forces of the market and, as a consequence, are passing through a deep economic crisis, but this is not really relevant to our present analysis and it suffices to say that now we have as much to learn from their subsequent failures as their earlier successes.

called incomes policy, to productivity bargaining (the only way in which many workers could obtain wage rises under the statutory wage freeze, but one which involved selling-out most of traditional shop floor controls) and, above all, to the proposals embodied in *In Place of Strife*. But it was in these struggles that workers' control was able to make a vital connection with workers' immediate problems and at the same time to pose a perspective that led beyond them and gave a context without which they could not finally hope to be resolved.

As a consequence the numbers participating in successive annual conferences on workers' control and industrial democracy grew rapidly in size and representativeness—more and more of the delegates were active trade unionists—and at the conference in Sheffield in 1969 reached a total of 1,000 people. The participants came to represent every conceivable shade of opinion in the left, from stolid Labour Party and Communist Party stalwarts to young, and not so young, Trotskyists and Anarcho-Syndicalists, and even included quite a number of Liberals. All this showed that workers' control was a broad-based, open movement without hard doctrinaire lines and with no bans or proscriptions. It was not a narrow, sectarian faction that was being built, but a meeting place where men and women learnt from each other's problems and experiences and, through this exchange, developed a common sense of purpose.

During these conferences, and as a result of them, groups of workers in different industries not only met together to develop a common understanding and purpose but to work on detailed plans for the democratic reconstruction of their own industries. This was especially relevant where these industries were in the public sector or were soon to be nationalized like the Steel Industry and the Docks. In the event, the Steel Corporation embodied very few of the plans for the Steel Workers' Control group, but at least the Minister was forced to appoint some worker-directors to the Board of the Corporation and, however unsatisfactory their role, representativeness and accountability, their advent has helped to open debate and to make people aware of the whole question of industrial democracy. Indeed, a number of highly critical reports have been published recently on the operation of the worker-directors' scheme based on close observation and research. As far as the docks were concerned, the Labour Government's nationalization plans fell far short of the dockers' aspirations; as a consequence there was a great rumpus on the docks before the whole scheme was killed by the 1970 General Election and Labour's defeat. It was this kind of action, and the consciousness that it developed, that strengthened the dockers' determination to resist the injustice of the current Industrial Relations Act.

The propaganda of the movement certainly seems to have found some fertile ground in the established organisation of labour.

Trade union leaders like Hugh Scanlon and Jack Jones have appeared on its platforms and contributed to its publications. These two men have given a very good example by encouraging the democratization of their own unions and shifting considerable power from the trade union bureaucracy to the shop floor members. Trade unions have re-discovered ancient clauses in their rule books, which pledge the union to fight for popular control over the administration of industry but which have tended to be forgotten in the day-to-day struggle over wages, and subjected them to lively debate. The Labour Party itself has been reminded that the famous Clause IV is not to be regarded as obsolete doctrine or a pious aspiration but a real guide to policy and action. It was impelled to set up a working party on industrial democracy, whose recommendations, however imperfect, have moved the debate to the centre of the political scene.

This debate in the Party really came to life at the Annual Conference in Brighton last year when delegates from the UCS work-in were rapturously received and were fêted by the normally staid and cautious platform. The UCS struggle, of course, represented a tremendous break-through for workers' control but, although it took everybody by surprise, it did not arise out of nothing: it was the fruit of years of debate, propaganda and action by the workers' control movement. It had been preceded in 1969 by a similar plan to fight large-scale redundancies in the GEC plants in Merseyside, but this was aborted at the last minute by the fears of workers over their redundancy pay and insurance cover, by divisions between the different factories and trade unions, by clever propaganda by the management and by some mistaken tactics by the Shop Stewards' Action Committee. Although this ambitious scheme had not come to fruition it had brought the possibility nearer to reality and both the aspirations and analyses of the failure had been widely publicised by the Institute for Workers' Control, a body which had been created by the Sixth National Conference on Workers' Control and Industrial Democracy to give the movement a more permanent focus and impetus.

The conditions on Clydeside were much more favourable to such a bold and imaginative move. The local unemployment figures showed that one man in ten was out of a job, the shipyards were a key component in the Glasgow and Scottish economy and, after years of mismanagement and uncertainty, they had at least appeared to be on a sound and potentially viable footing. Finally, the workers were led by an imaginative and sophisticated body of shop stewards who, by adroit publicity, were able to swing the whole of the Labour and Trade Union movement and a large proportion of Scottish opinion behind, not only their cause, but their challenging work-in tactic. That in the end they have forced the Government to climb down and wholly reverse its 'lame-duck' policy while achieving

the main substance of their demands[1] is both a credit to the skill with which the battle was fought and a mighty encouragement to others, in the fight against summary dismissal as well as other arbitrary acts of management.

The UCS example very quickly inspired others to similar unconventional action, even before it was known whether the shipyard workers would be ultimately successful. The men of Plesseys, Alexandria, when the company proposed to close the works, asserted their dignity and their rights by refusing their employer's instruction to 'collect their cards and file out of the factory in an orderly way' (and down to the Labour Exchange yet again, for many had experienced redundancy several times although they were often still quite young men.) Instead they chose to occupy the factory and to impound the valuable machinery, that Plesseys had bought from the Government at a knock-down price, until alternative work was brought to the area. The workers at the British Steel Corporation Works on the River Don at Sheffield prevented several thousand redundancies by an astute combination of work-in, work-sharing, a closely worked alternative investment plan and the lobbying of suppliers and M.P.s. Allis Chalmers factory in rural Wales was occupied as was the plant of Fisher-Bendix on Merseyside (home of the GEC workers who had set this ball rolling in the first place). All these struggles led to major concessions by the employers or Government. In June, 1972, Briant Colour Printers occupied their plant in London's Old Kent Road and are working-in, an important development because this action seemed to belie the notion that many of us held that it was only in construction type industries that a work-in is really possible. Important, moreover, because the workers-in at Briant's are located in the capital city and not in an area of high unemployment; many could easily obtain alternative employment but nevertheless are challenging the right of an employer, and the system in which he operates, to break-up and disperse an established organism overnight, by the stroke of a pen.

The leading stewards at UCS, Jimmy Airlie and Jimmy Reid asserted on more than one occasion that the work-in at the yards did not represent genuine workers' control, which could only exist in a fully socialist society, and that they were not fighting to introduce workers' control on Clydeside but merely for the right to work. This can be explained partly by Reid and Airlie's desire to present an image of moderation and respectability, and not to allow supporters to be frightened away by a red bogy (Reid and Airlie are both Communist Party members), and partly by the rigid and uninspiring way the Communist Party imagines socialism being brought about. But it does also represent a genuine confusion between workers'

[1]That the workers were forced to accept the takeover of the Clydebank yard by an American Corporation for building oil rigs, and to sign a 'no-strike' agreement does, however, demonstrate the inherent limitation of local struggles.

control, which the UCS workers maintained in a high degree (they effectively vetoed the company's right to sack thousands and close three out of four yards), and full democratic self-management, only to be achieved, most supporters of the movement would agree, with full social ownership. At least, the ladies at the occupied shoe factory at Fakenham and the workers at Briant's were clear that their work-in meant real workers' control because both displayed a banner from the outset announcing that the factory was 'Under Workers' Control'.

The Fakenham women have since managed to raise funds to enable them to run the factory on a permanent basis of co-operative ownership by the workers, but it is doubtful if this kind of resolution is possible in larger-scale industries such as UCS or even Briant's. In any case, the workers in most enterprises realize that they, like the Co-operative Producers Societies in earlier times, will be subject to all the constraints of the capitalist market system and do not feel able to take responsibility for the enterprise when they do not have any control over the system as a whole.

It is apparent, then, that it is impossible for society to be transformed factory by factory in isolation, and that the inter-locking holdings and operations of the multi-national giants together with the close involvement of the State in economic affairs make general political changes imperative. The current upsurge of militancy will only have a lasting effect if it feeds and shifts the political process radically. Clearly this is not going to be a short, sharp process but rather a long-drawn-out struggle, but if it is not to remain limited and defensive it requires positive encouragement by a genuine Government of the Left, which legislates in favour of expanded trade union rights, democratization of the Nationalized Industries, new State Industries under Workers' Control, discriminates in favour of commonly-owned concerns, and which at the same time severely limits the freedom of owners of industrial capital and sharply attacks and reduces the extremes of wealth and poverty in our society.

That a long struggle is involved should not dismay us; it is only when people have to fight for their freedom that it is cherished and it is in the process of struggle that men and women learn to work together and respect each other. It is only by such means that a society of genuine self-management can be created where the use of our limited resources can be socially planned by democratic consent rather than by the arbitrary fiat of remote experts.

The foundations of such a society must be laid at the work-place where men learn to relate to their fellows and the world about them, where they expend most of their working time, energy and commitment. When these foundations *have* been laid we shall not suddenly arrive at Utopia but we will be in a position where we can approach the complex problems of an advanced technological society in a

way that enables us to place man and his needs and aspirations at the centre of our decision-making. We shall be able to start breaking down the division of labour which makes work a joy for the minority even when it is a curse for the large majority of us. We shall be in a position where it is no longer possible for a worker to describe his working experience in the following bitter terms:

> 'I work in a factory. For eight hours a day, five days a week, I'm the exception to the rule that life can't exist in a vacuum. Work to me is a void, and I begrudge every precious minute of my time it takes. When writing about work I become bitter, bloody-minded and self-pitying, and I find difficulty in being objective. I can't tell you very much about my job because I think it would be misleading to try to make something out of nothing; but as I write I am acutely aware of the effect that my working environment has upon my attitude towards work and leisure and life in general.'[1]

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Note

It has only been possible to give a very brief description of the history and ideas of the Workers' Control movement in the compass of a short article. Probably the best single book to read to obtain a wider knowledge and understanding is: *Workers' Control*, edited by Ken Coates and Tony Topham, published by Panther Modern Society at 50p.

In addition the Institute for Workers' Control publishes a whole range of books and pamphlets; details are available from the IWC, 45 Gamble Street, Forest Road West, Nottingham, NG7 4ET.

The End of Her Latin?

by Edward Quinn

When Hans Küng attacked infallibility as it has been understood in Roman theology until recently, he was accused by no less a theologian than Karl Rahner of being in effect a liberal Protestant. But the majority of friendly critics were more inclined to ask what all the fuss was about. Nobody took this theory of infallibility seriously any longer. There were undoubtedly situations where Church and Pope had to take a stand and, if the promises of the Church's endurance were to mean anything, this must mean infallibility in

[1]'Factory Time', by Dennis Johnson (Nottingham tobacco worker), in *Work*, Ed Ronald Fraser, Penguin Books, 1968.