

Why we need a Campaign for Social Ownership

Thatcher famously set herself the task of 'rolling back the boundaries of the state' and carried through her programme of privatisations. Thereafter the very idea of nationalisation (or social ownership or public ownership) was considered outdated, uneconomic, inefficient or, a dream which could not be realised in the face of an all powerful neo-liberalism system. Yet the current global crisis has forced governments in the USA and the UK to abandon their opposition to state intervention into "the market" and to come to the rescue of the financial system. The action carried out by the Brown government has been described as nationalisation by some. In fact it has been limited to buying majority or major stakes in banks but refusing to take control of them.

Recently on the Money Programme there was an item which posed the question of why the Halifax was sending out credit card cheques unsolicited (one facet of that "irresponsible lending" which Brown belatedly discovered after ten years of encouraging it) when the government supposedly owns it? A government Minister interviewed said that even though they had taken a majority stake they still wanted it to operate on a commercial basis, so they would not intervene directly. As it happens the government has decided to ban this practice, but it did not want to be seen to directly intervene in this commercial enterprise. Its view from the beginning was that 'nationalisation' was a temporary measure. As soon as possible these organisations would be returned to the private sector. Hence the government has "socialised the losses" only to privatise any gains at a later stage.

'What about our shares'?

However, the fact that such action has been taken, and the ideology of neo-liberalism discredited, has meant that the idea of nationalisation no longer appears to be a throwback to 'statist' days, or an idea of the 'lunatic fringe'. The labour movement, however, has yet to catch up with events and to seize the opportunity created by the crisis. Many of its leaders thought that the neo-liberal system could not be challenged, so it's no surprise that they did not develop an alternative even in outline. This lack of perspective is reflected in the response of UNITE, which organises in the banking and finance sector. It has produced a "social contract" for financial services which fails to pose a fundamental change in the operation and structure of the banking and financial system. It has five points.

- UNITE should be treated as a key "stakeholder". The union is playing its part in "rebuilding a successful and responsible industry". The union should be "recognised" as a key stakeholder.
- UNITE wants to see an end to outsourcing and off-shoring "without proper consideration" of its effect on staff, customer service and international standards.
- To protect and preserve the terms and conditions of employment, including pensions.
- End the remuneration packages of senior executives which reward short-termism and irresponsible risk taking.
- Overhaul the regulatory structures of the financial services sector to include trade union involvement in order to enhance the accountability of finance institutions. The FSA has failed so it should be overhauled and turned into a publicly accountable and independent regulatory body to include trade union involvement. The union wants to see trade union reps on all the regulatory boards.

This is a timid series of proposals. It does not even call for an outright end to outsourcing and off-shoring. We know very well what its effect on staff and service users is. "Stakeholder", of course, is the language of partnership. What difference does it make if a union is recognised as a "stakeholder" if its members' jobs are sacrificed at the altar of profit? Herein lies a root of the problem. The finance sector of UNITE has for a long time been practising 'partnership' with the companies. How deeply this approach is rooted in the union is reflected in the debate in UNITE over nationalisation of banking and finance. In the last issue of the union's magazine you can read some activists opposing nationalisation because they fear it will impact on the value of the shares that they own!

The privatised utilities

Apart from the ongoing campaign for re-nationalisation of the railways by the RMT, there has yet to be

any real campaign elsewhere, especially amongst those unions whose members work in the privatised public utilities. This is despite the fact that there is widespread anger amongst the general populace which feels it has been taken for a ride by these companies. When they were privatised the major unions in these sectors accepted the new markets and collaborated with the new employers in the destruction of jobs in order that these companies could 'compete successfully'. Union organisation bought in to the management's competitive, cost-cutting agenda. For a generation many union reps trained in social partnership have seen their role not as opposing cuts but, at best, mitigating their impact, at worst identifying the interests of their members with those of commercial success of 'their' companies.

Despite the fact that some of these unions have formally broken with partnership, the apparatus of the unions on the ground is often still wedded to it. One example is in Thames Water where full-time convenors support the existing partnership set-up in contradiction with union policy. Changing this situation is like turning the proverbial tanker around, though in this case it is unlikely without changing the (rank and file) officers on the bridge.

So whilst the current crisis offers us the opportunity of popularising and campaigning for social ownership, the unions have yet to develop a coherent strategy for such an aim nor to begin to mobilise their members around it.

Campaign for Social Ownership

That is why we believe that there is an urgent need to organise in the labour movement a Campaign for Social Ownership which should:

- Examine the experience and lessons of nationalisation in the post-war period;
- Popularise the idea of social ownership;
- Campaign to build support amongst the workers in those industries which might be targets for social ownership;
- Carry out research and bring forward practical proposals for socialisation, industry by industry.

Nationalisation, social ownership or public ownership, are terms which are commonly used or interchangeable. State ownership can be carried out for a host of reasons. After the Second World War De Gaulle nationalised the French railways since the state was the only institution with the resources to rebuild the network, which had suffered massive destruction during the war. Although the Nationalisations carried out by the Atlee government have often been identified as socialist measures, in reality, with the partial exception of the National Health Service, they were a form of state capitalism. In the case of the British Transport Commission (which included British Rail) it was initially obliged to break even year on year. The government refused union demands for workforce involvement in the management of the network. Also, the industry was saddled with the compensation payments to the old owners, who kicked up a storm when they were told they would receive 2.5% return on each share which the government would give them. It eventually accommodated this pressure and offered 3%, which was above the market rate. So even when the industry achieved an operating surplus the compensation usually wiped that out and prevented the accumulation of any funds for investment in modernisation of the system.

The railways remained providers of a commodity, the price of which largely depended on the level of subsidy which each government saw fit to give. In the case of the NHS, however, nationalisation marked the transformation of health provision into a service rather than a commodity. This was qualitatively different to the other nationalisations because the service was provided "free at the point of need" regardless of the financial circumstances of a patient. There were plenty of problems with the structure that was set up to run the NHS: the domination of the men in white coats, the consultants, being the most widely acknowledged. But it marked a fundamental change from a situation where health care had been a commodity and people who could not afford to pay for a visit to a doctor suffered the consequences, sometimes fatal.

The term nationalisation originates from the form of national state control. In its British form this

tended to be a management Board appointed by a government Minister. The Boards were stuffed full of businessmen or ex-Generals (in the case of the Kent coalfield an ex-Admiral). Whilst nationalisation was an advance on the previous set-up, the fact that it was organised along business lines, with autocratic management, would progressively undermine support for it.

On the railways and the mines, under nationalisation a massive programme of job cuts took place. For instance, in the 30 years from 1950 the rail workforce shrank from 605,000 to 182,000. Whilst modernisation of these industries would inevitably have cut job numbers, e.g. taking the pick work out of mining, and advances in signalling on the railways, job losses were not solely the result of technological change. To the degree that they had to operate like commercial businesses then 'efficiency' tended to be measured by the balance sheet rather than the quality of service provision, and its economic and social benefits to society overall were ignored. This approach led to the Beeching cuts on the railways where the social consequences of line closure were ignored if a particular service was 'losing money'.

Whilst the term re-nationalisation may be used as short-hand, for instance by the RMT in relation to the railways, the term social ownership makes more sense since it has a wider scope which may relate to services supplied at a local or regional level. The key difference between nationalisation as experienced in Britain, and the idea of social ownership is this: that the product of the industry in question should be viewed as a public service, a provider of services in which the profit motive does not operate. Just as Thatcher wanted to "roll back the boundaries of the state" so we must *roll back the boundaries of the market*.

In order for such a perspective to be developed, with deep roots in the unions, we need a cadre of union activists who are opposed both to neo-liberalism and partnership and understand the need to develop a perspective for fundamental social and political change. Campaigning for social ownership is a key aspect of such an approach. But that necessitates a political struggle within the unions for a thorough going democracy – membership control at every level – which prevents the subordination of members' interests to support for or acquiescence with the programme of New Labour, with privatisation and marketisation at its heart. If the unions do not call for and act for a fundamental change of direction, then they will not take seriously the need for social ownership even if they make the occasional speech in favour of it.

Take the example of the NHS. At the last Labour conference a representative of UNISON, without blushing, could say that the NHS was "safe in Labour's hands". Yet their government has introduced a 'health market' which seeks to create a system of independent Foundation Trusts that compete for patients with each other and with private companies. Except the market has been rigged in favour of private companies, even to the extent of paying them for work which they have not carried out, whilst at the same time NHS trusts have been paid less money if they carry out "too much" work.

Whilst UNISON leaders have criticised privatisation or marketisation they have none nothing to practically challenge it, for fear of a break with New Labour. Moreover, the health unions have not even discussed a plan for how they would like the NHS to be organised. How can you be serious about opposing privatisation if you do not develop a set of proposals for reversing the process and how a socialised health service should be organised?

'External' costs

One of the criticisms of nationalised industry in Britain was that it was loss-making and inefficient. However, governments, both Labour and Tory, vacillated between accepting the need for social provision and operating on a commercial basis, with the latter usually winning out. Whilst the cost of building the road and motorway network was borne by public taxation, the railways had to cover the costs of their own infrastructure, rigging the 'competition' between these different forms of transport. The 'external' costs of road transport – pollution, accidents and the costs which the NHS faced as a result – were never measured. To these costs we can today add the environmental costs.

Investment in roads was viewed as just that, investment (a positive thing), whereas investment in the

railways was denounced as the dreaded 'subsidy'. After the credit crunch and the global crisis the argument against subsidy hardly holds water in the face of the massive subsidies which have been thrown at the financial institutions in order to prevent a systemic collapse.

Whilst the label we use – nationalisation, social or public ownership – is not a critical question, the principle, which needs to be our starting point, is that of *production for social need and a progressive move away from commodity production, where profit creation is the driving force*. Whilst this appears more feasible in the public sector (who would expect schools to make a profit save for the odd free market lunatic?) the depth of the current crisis poses questions about production in sectors more normally identified with commodity markets. The bursting of the credit bubble has led to a significant retrenchment in consumer spending on the scale that people were used to at the top of the housing price rise and credit card bonanza. Hence the unprecedented global crisis in the car industry, and the wider recession.

The right to work?

For the trades unions facing the recession, the question of jobs must surely take centre stage today. Whether unemployment in Britain reaches 3 million remains to be seen. But the struggle to defend jobs and to create new ones, demands a shift of perspective for the unions. Take the case of the car industry. UNITE is demanding the government subsidise car companies to keep them afloat. This can only be a stop gap measure however, because unless markets revive to the pre-crash levels, private companies will 'shake out' their workforce. How does this connect with a campaign for social ownership? Clearly capitalist companies cannot survive if they cannot sell their products. So long as the trades unions consider their job to be purely (or mostly) bargaining over the price of their members' labour, rather than trying to connect the defence of their members' interests with a *fundamental reshaping of the economy*, then their members will suffer the consequences of the irrationality of the market.

So could the unions here not develop ideas for alternative production in these factories – such as electric vehicles, public service vehicles, and wind turbines? Perhaps it's time to dust off the Lucas Aerospace Plan which put forward a practical plan for socially useful goods in place of armaments; something only people 50 or above know about.

In the public sector the government is seeking to cut jobs across the board, except in the case of the DWP where they have been forced to introduce new staff because of the weight of work as the recession deepens.

From the point of view of social needs, there is plenty of scope for job creation in a range of industries. The NHS operates under intolerable stress owing to cuts in bed numbers and staff. In the last 3 years alone there has been a 10% cut in emergency beds. Efficiency measured by the balance sheet creates all manner of inefficiencies in terms of the service provided, e.g. increased numbers of people readmitted to hospital because they have been sent home too early. Readmissions within a day of discharge have increased by a third in less than ten years. From the point of view of improving health outcomes, there is a need, for instance, for more nursing staff, more cleaning staff (cut by the private companies).

Campaigning for social ownership can be linked to the slogan of 'the right to work' because one of the purposes of social ownership is to create socially useful jobs, and socially useful products and services.

Democracy and control

We live in a society which purports to be democratic, but it's a very limited democracy. We have the right to vote out of office a government every five years. After that the incumbents can do whatever they want, or at least whatever they can get away with. It is a system which contains the danger of 'elective dictatorship' which even a Tory like Quintin Hogg could recognise.

Yet the workplace is an arena in which there is not even the semblance of democracy. We have a

dictatorship - "the right to manage" - the power of which is only limited by the counter-power of trades unions. Historically the struggle between employers and workers has been not only over the wages and conditions of employment but for control of the work process. This is where the power (existing or potential) of the organised working class is in the first instance based. Workers' wider power depends on the degree of organisation at the industrial and political level. Given the level of defeat which the unions in Britain have suffered in many work places since 1979 the balance of power in the workplace has shifted overwhelmingly towards the employer. This has been facilitated by 'social partnership' whereby trades unions have abandoned their independence and identified the interests of their membership with those of the management; "winning in the market place".

As a consequence there has been no discussion of 'workers control' in the labour movement for more than a quarter of a century. When discussing it today this fact has to be born in mind. Here we briefly look at a discussion which took place in relation to the 1948 nationalisation of the rail industry.

As early as 1914 the NUR AGM had declared:

"No system of state ownership will be acceptable to organised railwaymen which does not guarantee to them their full political and social rights, allow them a due measure of control and responsibility in the safe and efficient working of the railway system, and ensure them a fair and equitable participation in the increased benefits likely to accrue from a more economical and scientific administration."

However, the railways and other nationalised industries had autocratic management structures just like private companies. In the run up to nationalisation the NUR proposals for the involvement of staff in the running of the nationalised railways were rejected by the government. The reasons were various, but included "no experience of management".

There had been little consideration of how rail nationalisation would be implemented, and how the industry was to be managed. Within the NUR there developed a discussion around 'workers control' or 'participation' in management. There was a sense, to begin with, that the industry once nationalised would be 'ours'. Yet the expectations on 'vesting day' would quickly prove to be illusory.

As a result of this discussion the 1946 NUR AGM whilst welcoming the Bill to nationalise the rail network stated:

"In any scheme effecting nationalisation, provision shall be made for the establishment of national, local and area boards of management with representatives of His Majesty's government and transport workers constituting the personnel. We are definitely of the opinion that an efficient transport system is an imperative necessity for the restoration of Britain's economic life and that workers' participation in management is an indispensable precondition for this."

Yet the government appointed only one member from the unions (John Benstead) onto the Board of the BTC, and *he was accountable to the Minister, not under the control of the union.*

The union executive committee met the Transport Minister in September 1946, pressing him for the opportunity of nominating union candidates for the BTC board. Barnes rejected this. He later told an NUR conference that "nowhere in the world had economic democracy in the fullest sense functioned successfully". Stafford Cripps summed up their attitude by saying:

"There is not yet a very large number of workers in Britain capable of taking over large enterprises....until there have been more workers on the managerial side of industry, I think it would be almost impossible to have worker controlled industry in Britain, even if it were on the whole desirable."

This attitude was backed up by none other than John Benstead, NUR President, who furnished the ultimate proof at a 1946 pre-conference rally: "the trades unions did not control the railways in Russia. The control was placed entirely in the hands of the management itself". Obviously 'workers control' was out of the question.

The union's 1947 AGM regretted the government's refusal to "incorporate within the proposed scheme

workers' representation on the proposed national, area and local boards".

"...we reiterate our previous views and emphasise in our opinion the full benefits of a nationalised transport system will not be conveyed to the community without the cultivation of the knowledge, goodwill and experience of the workers in the industry being sought and an opportunity given to them to obtain a voice in the highest management office."

Likewise the 1948 AGM unanimously reaffirmed its belief in workers participation in the control of the industry at all levels, as being "a prerequisite for the success of the undertaking". It demanded that union representatives have 'equal rights' with managers. The May 1948 Labour Party conference supported this viewpoint calling for the implementation of "workers participation through their trades unions in the direction and management of nationalised industry at all levels".

This concern at the make up of the various Boards increased with the practical experience of the nationalised industry. The 1949 AGM carried by 72 votes to 2 a resolution demanding 50% worker representation at all levels.

The government, however, would not be persuaded, sticking to its 'Morrisonian' model, based on the setting up of the publicly owned London Transport Authority in 1933.

By 1950 there was a great deal of disillusionment with the nationalised industry. Government wage restraint meant that wages on the railways were falling behind other industries. This was reflected in the massive level of staff turn-over, estimated at 20% a year; an incredible level when you consider the workforce was more than half a million.

The hopes of 1948 were dashed by the practical experience of railways run as if they were any other business. The elitist Labour leaders dismissed the knowledge and experience of the workforce and imposed a bureaucratic managerial system in which the methods of private industry were maintained. Under such a system the potential benefits of nationalisation were allowed to wither on the vine.

Workers Control?

Various socialist organisations have had their critiques of the form in which nationalisation was implemented by the Atlee government. They have generally counter-posed 'workers control' or 'workers management' to Labour style nationalisation. Sometimes, as in the case of the old 'Militant' slogan they have been combined: "nationalise the 250 monopolies under workers control and management". Control and management have often been conflated. The only practical proposal that this demand was given, that I am aware of, was that of nationalised industries run by Boards comprised of one third management, one third unions, one third government.

There isn't space here to consider the question of 'workers control' and 'workers management' in detail. Here are some brief comments. Too often the call for nationalisation or public ownership has been a demand directed at Labour, neglecting any organisation of a campaign to build a movement of workers in favour of it. It has remained a 'demand' on paper. Social ownership is not a technical proscription. Consideration of structure must be combined with its purpose and method of functioning. For workers to have a central involvement in the running of an industry they have to be well organised and see social ownership as something which expresses their needs and the wider social needs of the working class. In any case the radicalisation of the unions depends upon the building of workplace power, the struggle for workers' independent interests; the growth of their power to impose their will on management. Social ownership, if it is to go beyond nationalisation as experienced in Britain, requires an advance from union consciousness which recognises the conflict of interest between workers and management, to a recognition of the wider social needs of the working class and oppressed. It requires an interest in what is produced and how it might be a social product instead of a commodity with a price determined by the laws of supply and demand.

If the purpose of socialisation is to produce a product or service for wider social interests then a means of running them must be found which excludes the profit motive and serves communal interests rather than merely the interests of those workers directly employed. So the involvement of

service users is necessary as well as as the workforce.

How we might move from an economy dominated by commodity production to one in which production for social need dominates is a matter of speculation. However, the development of a practical perspective pointing in such a direction is the key question. And for that the labour movement needs to develop *concrete plans and proposals* rather than to make abstract appeals for social ownership.

What sort of campaign?

Whilst there is plenty of room for debate of these issues, the basis of a Campaign for Social Ownership, in which discussion could be developed, and practical activity organised, centres on the idea of production for social need. Whilst intellectuals and academics can play a role, practical perspectives and plans can only be developed with the full involvement of workers in industries which might be targeted for social ownership. Without their involvement and their struggle, then even the most brilliant of plans will remain as ideas on paper. So the involvement of union activists is necessary, to draw on their knowledge and expertise of the organisation of these industries, and the consequences of privatisation.

A campaign would therefore need to draw on their experience and explain the irrationality of existing structures, how it impacts on workers and service users, and to develop a discussion on how a socialised industry might function.

The organisation of a conference to explore this idea would be a first step. How far it could develop would depend upon the breadth of support, including amongst those unions for whom social ownership connects with the interests of their members as well as the wider interests of the working class overall.

Martin Wicks

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Appendix

This is an extract from a Pamphlet written for the Thames Valley District Council of the RMT in the run-up to privatisation.

Running A Railway

You can often learn more about life and labour from men at the bottom of the social ladder than you can from men at the top. Executives, Civil Servants, managers, or even trade union secretaries have a wider knowledge of life, but it is often second hand or statistical knowledge, while the men at the bottom give you real facts at first hand. True they are small, marginalised facts, but they are invaluable as raw material with which to build something larger.

(F.Zweig, *The British Worker*, Penguin 1952.)

In their particular anxiety to exact the last ounce from the workmen in the matter of their labour, the managers overlook multitudes of important details connected with their own administration but which the worker sees as plainly as the nose on his face. They often spend pounds to effect the saving of a few pence. They lavish vast sums on experiments that the most ordinary man perceives have no possible chance of being successful or even useful if they succeed. Mens' opinions as a point are rarely solicited; if offered they are belittled and rejected.

(Alfred Williams, *Life In A Railway Factory*. 1915)

Rail workers, no less than others, have long complained about the fact that management has generally never drawn on their knowledge of the work and the industry. Many a hair-brained scheme has been implemented despite the protests of the workforce, based on their intimate knowledge of the work they do. Stories of schemes introduced and later ditched in favour of what the workforce had suggested in the first place, are legion. My own experience is the same. In Reading where they were building a new station, we raised a host of problems with the management proposals, both from the standpoint of having to do the job and from that of the service to the customers. Our objections to the

design features proposed by consultants who introduced 'a new concept in retailing' were passed over.

When the new station complex was built, most of the problems we had pointed to began to emerge. Eventually the management introduced changes in line with our original proposals, needless to say, at extra cost, and after a period of frustration for the staff and the customers.

The 'Empowerment' Fraud

On the railways over the past few years, in line with other industries, management has introduced what is usually labelled 'new management techniques', which are supposed to be aimed at consulting the staff; 'empowering' them no less. In reality this is a sham, directed at undermining the trades unions, through a direct relationship with individual workers, through 'team briefings' and the like. Whilst management is quite prepared to take on individual proposals from workers where, for instance, money will be saved, the whole process is designed at inveigling them into helping to resolve management problems. 'Empowerment' is a fraud because decision making powers are still entirely in the hands of the management. It's usual content is 'which way would you like us to make cuts'.

Last year the right wing leader of the AEEU, Bill Jordan (now gone to rest in European pastures), commented that it was romantic nonsense, or words to that effect, to suggest that workers could run industry. There are of course, specific skills involved in managing large enterprises. It is true that under capitalism workers, because they are not involved in any discussion relating to the broader aspects of the industry or firm in which they work, do not for the most part take any interest beyond their immediate job, and the wage packet at the end of the week or the month. Yet, as Zweig says above, they have real knowledge because they do the work everyday. Very rarely is this knowledge called upon. Why should they take an interest in resolving management problems when they are treated as nothing more than expendable units of labour?

Yet there is no fundamental reason why workers could not run industry. There is no automatic equation between formal education and intelligence. The stupidity of many British Rail managers has long since proved that.

At the RMT AGM (1994), in the debate on renationalisation of the rail network, Jimmy Knapp agreed that the form of nationalisation which was instituted by the Labour government elected in 1945 might not be appropriate today. The 'Morrisonian' form of nationalisation, as we saw earlier, was opposed by the NUR. It was based on the model of the London Passenger Transport Board set up in the '30s. In his autobiography Morrison recounts the opposition expressed by the unions to this form of organisation. The Labour Party executive dismissed it in these terms:

"The proposed constitution of the Board raises a question around which there has been some controversy: for there is still a body of opinion which maintains that such a board should be representative of particular interests....labour in the industry, labour generally, local authorities etc. There are two main arguments from a Labour point of view against the representative idea. The first is that a Board appointed on grounds of ability is likely to be far more efficient, and socialists, above all, must keep the communal interest to the fore. *Members appointed by particular interests would naturally tend to concentrate primarily on pleasing those interests, rather than to be concerned, without fear or favour, with the general efficiency of the undertaking:* their control or influence by such interest might be injurious to a proper corporate spirit and would diminish the very necessary responsibility to the public as a whole. Nor does the appointment of members selected in a representative capacity, and not primarily or mainly for their personal ability, appear likely to result in the most efficient Board for a task which is complex and highly responsible: *for it is vital to socialism that national ownership should show itself superior to private enterprise in all round efficiency.* To nobody is this more vital than to the workers in the industry: for the operative grades have already suffered enough for inefficiency at the top. (Emphasis in original)"

This argument was certainly more subtle than the one of Stafford Cripps (Chapter 2) that workers had no managerial experience. However, the first question is what criteria is the industry in question to be run on? When the railways were nationalised they were supposed to break even, "year on year". Whilst later governments, both Tory and Labour, to one degree or another recognised the need for subsidy based on social need, a financial, balance sheet approach was always dominant. Hence the

driving force so far as 'efficiency' was concerned led to a long term decline in employment in order to cut 'losses'. The drive for efficiency motivated by competition with other forms of transport completely ignores the social aspects of rail transport, as a public service. Efficiency should be measured in the service provided not in simple financial terms.

So far as the 'communal interest' is concerned certainly the users of the railways should have a voice in the running and development of the industry, but of course, they were never given this under the nationalised industry. The 'communal interest' - social needs, especially those of the poor - are not served by a managerial regime in which dictates are handed down on the basis of a balance sheet approach. Businessmen appointed by a government Minister to head a Board inevitably have a business approach to the running of the railways. The democratisation of the industry can only come about as a result of a fundamental change whereby it is operated as a public service in the context where social needs are not subordinated to the profit motive. This would mean a move away from managers, who dictate to the workforce, to administrators who are involved in collective decisions. In place of a Board should be a Council on which were represented administrators, trades unions and service users.

A Socialised Railway

A move towards control of the industry by those who work in it and those who use its services is only liable to come about by the strengthening of the trades unions to the extent that existing management does not have the power to impose its will over the workforce. We are of course, a long way off such a situation. But in any case a *socialised* rail industry will not be the gift of parliamentarians from on high to a passive workforce which has no other role than to put its cross on a ballot paper. It will be the end product of the struggles of working people to take charge of their own lives. Real democracy does not add up to a ten second act every five years. Real democracy requires social equality and social control of our own lives, including in the workplace.

There are no simple blueprints for how such a system would operate. However, I feel sure that workers who were involved of the running of their own industry would be able to utilise their vast experience in order to further the collective interests of workers and users. The potential of working people often lies dormant until talents emerge, often in struggles, of which they were not even aware. A socialised rail industry would draw on the wealth of experience and ability which lies dormant and is never called upon in a system where managers have power and the workforce is there to do as it is told.