

Some reflections on North Tyneside CDP, specifically its work on industry and employment

Bob Davis

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North Tyneside CDP Team¹. Source: Bob Davis

¹ N Tyneside CDP team photo. *Standing, Left to Right:* Gwynne Somerville (Research Asst./Fellow), Muriel Watmuff (Admin./Sec.), Maggie Percy (Admin./Sec. Research), Irene Brown (Admin./Sec), Steve Turner (Research Fellow, Income Maintenance project), Lynne Caffrey (Information/Welfare Rights), Thelma Quince (Research Asst., Income Maintenance project), Dave Byrne (Research Director), Bob Davis (Research Fellow), Kenny Bell (Play Organizer/Community Worker), Keith Hayman (Community Planner). *Squatting Left to Right:* John Foster (Assistant Director), Pam Gorham (Research Asst., Income Maintenance project), Jeremy Gass (Information/Welfare Rights), David Corkey (Director). *Sitting cross-legged on ground:* Penny Remfry (Assistant Director).

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About the Author: Bob Davis was a Research Fellow with North Tyneside CDP Research Team, Newcastle-upon-Tyne Polytechnic between 1973 -1978.

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CDP reports: some of the reports published by North Tyneside CDP and other projects can be purchased from St James' Heritage & Environment Group (see website: <http://stjameschurchnewcastle.wordpress.com>). Some are available in digital form online at <http://ulib.iupui.edu/collections/CDP>

This is a mélange of background material which Bob prepared for his talk at the Imagining North Shields Workshop on April 13th 2016 combined with some of what he actually said on the day, having had to cut it radically for a 5-minute presentation.

I was born and bred in what someone once described as a northern industrial town which had lost its moorings and ended up on the banks of the Thames. Woolwich was home to the giant munitions complex of The Royal Arsenal, and once upon a time of the naval Dockyard where Henry VIII's ship the *Great Harry* and *HMS Beagle* of Darwin fame were built. When I was growing up it was at the centre of an industrial belt of heavy and electrical engineering factories - Siemens, Johnson and Philips, Submarine Cables, George Harvey - stretching along the south bank of the Thames from Deptford down to Erith. For good measure, the Royal Docks were a Woolwich Free-Ferry ride across on the opposite bank. From the mid-sixties into the early seventies, a rash of company relocations and factory closures effectively de-industrialised this part of London - although that particular word was not as current then as it has become now. For good measure, the Royal Docks relocated some dozen miles downstream at Tilbury. I was away studying for most of this period - I took a degree and a masters in Sociology at Sussex, (I was in Tom Bottomore's MA class in 1968 along with Lena Dominelli), followed by further postgraduate studies at Leicester University's Centre for Mass Communication Research with a project on working class consciousness and identity and the role of the media.

Just a few years later I found myself living in another industrial town, this time in the real north rather than a pretend one, on the banks of another famous English river, likewise with its munitions factories, naval and commercial shipyards and heavy engineering factories. I arrived there in time to witness a similar process of de-industrialisation as it began to unfold.

I'd come north to take up a post of Research Fellow in the Rowntree Research Unit of Durham University's Department of Sociology. This was in Philip Abrams's time. In previous years there'd been a tradition of 'community studies' of working class communities, old and new - Peterlee, Newton Aycliffe, Seaham - by Ellis Thorpe, Peter Brannen and Martin Bulmer. Elsewhere in the department Richard Brown and Jim Cousins had been studying the shipbuilding industry at Swan Hunter in Wallsend.

By then I'd become fairly well acquainted with studies of working class communities - Willmott and Young, Dennis Henriques and Slaughter, the late Ronnie Frankenberg, the work of Elizabeth Bott, etc. - and developed an interest in labour history, influenced (like everybody else) by Edward Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* in particular.

At the Rowntree Unit, we deliberately didn't follow the traditional community study path, but we did look at a geographical area - Seaton Valley (just up the road from here) in terms of its historical development, the formation of its local working class institutions, and the changes it was experiencing following the 1960s rationalisation of the SE Northumberland coalfield. **1** (I recall many a long hour spent in Blyth Library reading old bound copies of the *Blyth News*). We also looked at regionalism and the regional institutions and particularly noted how the labour and trade union movement had been incorporated in those regional bodies. **2**

It was with this background that I arrived at the North Tyneside CDP Research team, employed by Newcastle upon Tyne Polytechnic as it then was, in the Department of Behavioural Studies, where formerly more psychology based studies had characterized the department, as its name would suggest. Dave Byrne, as Lecturer in Social Policy a colleague in the Sociology Department at Durham, had already been appointed as Research Director and I started a month or two later, in November 1973, as Research Fellow. We were soon joined by Gwynne Somerville.

It's fair to say that I arrived with some partially formed ideas, perspectives and conceptions from my studies and from my experiences - ideas of class and community and of social processes. It's interesting to note that, in a paper I co-wrote whilst at Durham I quoted the sociologist John H. Goldthorpe, with approval:

“one should note that the perspectives of the ‘classic’ sociologist are far wider than those of sociologists who would define the scope of their subject in terms of modern methods of field research. Because of the limitations of the techniques to which they are wedded, the latter are forced to restrict themselves largely to the study of social milieu (communities, work situations, local associations, etc.) considered statically or over very short-term periods. Without forsaking their techniques, they are thus unable to appreciate or to explain how these social milieux have emerged from, and are conditioned by, the structure of the wider society in which they are set, or how ongoing changes at the level of the milieu are related to changes at a societal level. To do this would entail a shift precisely to the classic mode of sociological analysis. It would mean thinking in terms of societies as developing structures, or, in other words, it would call for the introduction of a historical dimension....As I see it, then, the tradition of historically oriented study must continue to form the core of sociology. If such a view is prejudicial to the scientific status of the discipline, then so much the worse for that”. 3

(Ironically, Goldthorpe and his colleague David Lockwood and other contributors to the *Affluent Worker* studies published in the mid-sixties ran into considerable flak from left wing critics such as Robin Blackburn for seemingly to have shelved this more ‘structural’ approach in their empirical studies of Luton’s car workers).

However, it was in this spirit and frame of mind that I approached the opportunity that research in CDP offered, as one where we could look in depth, sociologically and economically, at an area and the social and economic forces that shaped it; that helped to explain what it was and why. We also had the freedom to be active, to try to intervene in some way, if you like. That’s been talked about elsewhere, and I won’t repeat it here except very generally and then specifically where it related to industry and employment issues.

In general, then, in terms of action – I think it’s important to firmly state at the outset that we were an anti-poverty project and not an urban regeneration project – the only ever British anti-poverty project. I suppose, if you wanted to crudely summarise what we were about, it is contained in the word ‘rights’ – tenants’ rights, claimants’ and welfare rights, workers’ rights, trade union rights – where possible collectively rather than individually expressed. ‘Collective empowerment’ might not be a wholly inappropriate term.

The core of the action team - David Corkey, Penny Remfry, John Foster and Kenny Bell - was already in post by the time we researchers arrived on the scene. In one way we were two distinct teams, a research team employed by the local polytechnic and an action team employed by the local authority (originally the Conservative controlled Tynemouth County Borough then, following the 1974 local government re-organisation, the new Labour controlled North Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council). While had separate office bases, we were not housed in the Polytechnic but rather in the project area in North Shields - we were in a Northumberland Square attic office a few doors away from North Tyneside's Chief Executive and just along from the local tripe shop, whose elderly lady proprietor was the Tynemouth councillor who chaired the committee responsible for the action team. In practice, we worked together, as one team, on all the issues. For example I worked alongside Kenny Bell with housing action groups in East Howdon and the Triangle area, and we all did shifts in the Information shops, giving advice but referring to our better qualified colleagues where necessary. So as researchers we all had plenty of opportunity to engage with local people and get a feel of what was going on in the area, on the ground.

More specifically, in relation to industry and employment issues - for which I had a specific brief - we'd come to work in what was an industrial town, a working class community, formed by industrial capitalism. As I've already suggested, we were interested as sociologists in the specific detail of how the community was formed, and the changes that had taken and were taking place, the dynamics of capital and how it affected people's lives, and how, if possible, we might intervene. I'll come on to the more analytical research later, so here I will talk about what we did practically on the ground. The project had already co-commissioned, with other projects, the report *Jobs in Jeopardy*, 4 and we broadly knew in which direction we were heading. However, we had to decide how and with whom to work with on this front, on the issues as we identified them and/or as they emerged.

What about the local authority itself? At that time, Economic Development as a local authority function was in its infancy, and usually -as was the case in Tynemouth CBC - the occasional responsibility of a planner and the Town Improvement Committee. It had been the remit, for several decades since the 1920s, of the wider north eastern regional bodies to take initiatives to attract employment 5 The new Metropolitan Boroughs and the Tyne and Wear County Council which came into being in 1974 addressed this function more seriously, but mainly from the point of view of attracting mobile capital to the area to create new jobs. We didn't regard ourselves as being promoters of the area's advantages to potential incoming employers - this, after all, usually involved proclaiming the relative cheapness of labour and its amenability. Rather, we chose to seek a role in relation to the area's workers themselves, via their representative bodies and thus their Labour Movement institutions and organisations, both official and informal.

We sought those organisations with which we could work on issues like conditions of work, impending redundancies, and indeed wider political industrial and employment issues. One such representative organization was the North Tyneside Trades Council, the local official arm of the TUC, which in certain respects, albeit of limited range and depth, represented organized workers in this geographical area. We were able to forge a relationship with its officers, providing support and information and undertaking several collaborative projects. We started with a campaign and library exhibition to encourage trade union membership, launched by Will Lawther, the former President of the National Union of Mineworkers who was living in retirement in the area. This was followed by

work on youth unemployment, resulting in a report prepared by us but published in the name of the Trades Council **6**; and another research project and report on the ownership and control of companies in in North Tyneside, again published in the name of the Trades Council **7**. A useful and constant source of reference for industrial and employment issues was the monthly magazine *Labour Research*, and we were fortunate in being able to engage an experienced ex-*Labour Research* researcher, a specialist in analyzing company reports, to assist us with this latter project.

On another front, through wider contacts labour movement contacts, we managed to create a relationship with the Tyneside shop stewards movement, the unofficial plant/factory based trade union structure, a powerful force in engineering at the time, or at least up to that point in time. There was still a significant manufacturing and engineering industry presence all along the north bank of the Tyne (the South Bank too), including Smiths Docks and Swan Hunters (ship repair and shipbuilding) in North Tyneside through to Parsons in Heaton and Vickers further to the east in Elswick and Scotswood. All these big plants had shop steward structures, particularly in the skilled workers unions such as the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers (AUEW) .We worked very closely with the Benwell CDP on this, Vickers Elswick being in their patch and where the Convenor of Shop Stewards was Jimmy Murray, a well-known figure at the time and an engineering union sponsored Labour Party candidate at both the 1970 and 1974 General Elections.**8** . Largely instigated by Murray, an organisation called the Tyne Conference of Shop Stewards came into being, around the time of the new (1974-) Labour Government's Industry Bill of 1974, when Tony Benn was Secretary of State for Industry and introduced the Bill which proposed greater state intervention in industry through structures like a National Enterprise Board, and Planning Agreements with workers in key industries.

We serviced the TCSS as a sort of secretariat, and provided research, intelligence and practical support. The Industry Bill was much debated, and we contributed to a pamphlet about it, published through the CDP PEC Group.**9** There was a brief instant in time when, in some respects, the shop stewards movement enjoyed a moment of potential strength and influence which it proved unable to fully grasp. Prime Minister Harold Wilson headed it off by moving Tony Benn from the Industry department to Energy, and the impetus really went out of what had had the early makings of a campaign.

At the same time, the Tyne Conference of Shop stewards promoted the idea of forming Combine Committees in large companies – committees of shop stewards in the different parts of a multinational company which would be able to (at least) exchange information and take initiatives together. I contributed a brief article about the nuts and bolts of forming a combine committee to the journal of the Institute of Workers Control, the body largely associated with Ken Coates which facilitated many of these debates and initiatives. **10**

Again, ownership and control issues loomed large, and, building on the earlier work on companies in North Tyneside, we – ourselves and Benwell CDP - undertook a county wide study of the presence of multinationals in Tyne and Wear. Why was ownership and control important? – crudely, and sketchily, because where companies were based elsewhere or abroad it meant that the status of their presence in Tyne and Wear was likely to be that of a 'branch plant' which could be easily closed and relocated elsewhere when the company deemed it more profitable to do so. That is a very crude

simplification, but there's no time or space to go further here. What we discovered in fact was that there were many more multi-nationals or component parts of them in Tyne and Wear than we'd imagined. Our findings came as a surprise to senior planners at Tyne and Wear County Council – we did talk to them on the odd occasion - whose own data didn't include information about ownership and control.

It's worth recalling what our research practically entailed in those days. Our technology was primitive; we couldn't call things up on our desk tops, as we didn't have any, they didn't exist. We had to send out for company reports from company HQs, having identified companies in the area from other sources, including telephone directories, trade directories and physical observation and intelligence from local workers. Only then could we read and analyze the reports. Finally, we published our research in a large compendium, a detailed analysis of all these companies in Tyne and Wear, in conjunction with the Tyne Conference of Shop Stewards. **11**

Thirdly, we tried to create a labour movement institution. Because we felt the work with trade unions was important, and knowing that the CDP would only last for some five years, we helped to establish an institution which would live for much longer doing the sort of work we were doing. Tom Ellison, who at the time was a Workers Educational Association tutor-organiser in industrial relations, came to us with an idea to set up a library resource for trade unionists. The long and the short of it was that, together with Benwell CDP and with the support of significant actors (certain trades unions, the Adult Education department at Newcastle University) we created what became the Trade Union Studies and Information Unit, TUSIU. I have to give John Foster his due because he ran with this and actively prosecuted it. Each action team, North Tyneside's and Benwell's, funded it for two years and then TUSIU became an independent organisation, with good trade union involvement in its management. I'm glad to say it did last well beyond the end of the project. I remember going to the 25th anniversary meeting in Gateshead Civic Centre in about 1999 or 2000. A whole range of people worked for TUSIU over the years – from Keith Hodgson (later NUPE and Unison official) to Alan Milburn (former MP for Darlington and Secretary of State for Health), Dr. Carol Stephenson of Northumbria University, and Ken Ternant (once a leading shop steward at C.A. Parsons). TUSIU lasted for over 25 years before funding problems overtook it and its work was absorbed into that of the Newcastle Centre against Unemployment in the early noughties.

There were other work activities undertaken towards the end of the project – e.g. on unemployment – we created a pamphlet *Signing on Times* distributed outside the Benefits offices, and another for women entitled *Shieldswoman*. We had occasionally talked about the possibilities for a Claimants Union, and also often discussed the National Unemployed Workers Movement of the 1930s - inspired by Wal Hannington's history of the movement **12** - as a model for work with the unemployed; but we hadn't yet entered the era of jobs slaughter and mass unemployment that came with the 1980s when things like the Centres for (or against) the Unemployed, People's March for Jobs, were parts of the working class response to mass unemployment.

We also did work specifically with women workers, but I'm not going to deal with that because Penny Remfry is here and I'm sure she'll want to talk about that.

By the time the research team was established in North Tyneside, the structural critique (of the pathological approach) was by then already being articulated by several existing and established projects. In fact we arrived just when *Jobs in Jeopardy* – a commissioned piece of work by consultants Nigel Moor and Associates **13**– was reaching completion, and the idea that the fortunes and viability of communities were intrinsically linked to their economic bases became firmly established in the thinking of certain CDP projects, and not exactly difficult for us to subscribe to and run with.

I soon became a member of the Inter-Project Industry and Employment group, along with Judy Green from Benwell and colleagues from three other CDPs – Newham (Canning Town), Batley, and Birmingham. Judy and I worked closely together on the North East material. These were the 5 projects which most closely shared the same perspectives – and it was this combination which was to produce, via the PEC Group, *The Costs of Industrial Change*. **14**.

It wasn't a local history we were trying to write – although incorporating an interpretation of local history – but a kind of illustrated analysis of how towns and cities of industrial capitalism are formed by capital for capital accumulation and exist to further that. A key part of the job was to detail that and to put the flesh on the bones, in a study of localized areas, of this structural analysis. (This was not an altogether new departure – we had a good example of an earlier such account from the North East with Ellen Wilkinson's famous book on Jarrow **15**).

The logic of the system, to grow and create and recreate the conditions for further growth and accumulation. The process is by no means even. For older industrial areas frequently the problem is that they run a particular course – not 'naturally' – and become redundant because the locus of accumulation has shifted elsewhere -anywhere on the globe these days). So you may get wasteland where once was a shipyard. But as I think we've seen here, this is often only temporary – though temporary may be a long time in what is a long game – and what we see here now is the reinvention of many of those sites as retail, entertainment, leisure residential, business or enterprise zones etc. – all of which have taken place here – a variety of new things where the state has actively intervened to facilitate and sponsor, once more, a fresh round of accumulation. And here - certainly here over the past three or four decades - – increasing the rate of profitability and thus accumulation by driving down wages and upping the rate of exploitation – that's why the trade unions have been assailed. If you think that's far-fetched then just ask your postman, your delivery man or your care worker.

That's the kind of perspective we developed – not unique to us, the theorists were at work well before our time but there were a number of influential theorists of our generation digging away at the coal face while we were at work here (e.g. David Harvey, the late Doreen Massey – I was reading her obituary very recently). It was the stuff of many conferences, for example that of the Conference of Socialist Economists, as well as our own national CDP conferences and even those of the more respectable institutions, like the then Social Science Research Council (SSRC). It was much influenced by the revival of Marxism in the social sciences in the 1960s and 1970s as serious tool of analysis and a largely respectable universe of discourse.

This work for *The Costs of Industrial Change* entailed a lot of theoretical, analytical work on capital in North Tyneside. How North Tyneside was formed, the changes, and what its future was likely to be. *The Costs of Industrial Change* is on sale here today.... I should add that I am really glad to say that I

went into North Tyneside Library this morning – or the Customer Centre or whatever it’s called these days... to check whether this report was actually still held there. An online check of the catalogue seemed to indicate that it would be, but seeing is believing. Anyway, I inquired, and a nice lady went to search for it and finally, after about 20 minutes, she came back triumphant from somewhere deep in the bowels of the earth clutching a dog-eared copy which, inside, still bore the old sheet on which dates were stamped - for it was an ex-loan copy - and the sheet proved that it had been borrowed about a dozen times in all. So some people round here had read it. In fact, the booklet was a best-seller, running to at least three reprints, with various universities ordering mass copies for their courses and the Open University using it as a set text. I have to say its publishing success was in some measure due to the editing process and the involvement of Kathy Henderson, now a successful children’s author but who, back then, was employed in the (central) CDP Information and Intelligence Unit in London and charged with editing our national reports. In the first place, we presented her with drafts in our kind of quasi-academic text etc. - Judy and I were members of the editorial group and had written chunks of it – perhaps too many “however’s”, “on the other hands”, “notwithstanding this”, “taking all factors into consideration” etc., typical of what you might expect from researchers and academics. Long sentences with lots of sub-clauses. She wanted to cut to the quick, and take a big blue pencil to sections of it. I’m exaggerating somewhat, but you get the picture. In fact, after these initial exchanges, Judy went away (literally –on holiday to France) and worked to produce a final edit, following which she and Kathy spent a full week together at the IIU in London, meticulously going through it line by line, if not word by word, and ending up with a version acceptable to all who’d contributed. And, I suppose, in the process it was tabloid-ised, in the best possible way and, as it happened, to great effect; it was rendered very accessible and readable whilst retaining the essential ideas and the theories that we were trying to express and which we were learning about as we worked in these areas. The success of *The Costs of Industrial Change* came at the end of a lengthy but positive interactive process involving the five contributing projects and the IIU, and the report represented a true co-production based on genuinely collaborative inter-project work.

I developed this work further in concentrating on North Tyneside, and this was to become the final report – *North Shields: Living with Industrial Change* **16**– much of which I wrote in a rather more traditional style. The title owes a lot to other works of the time, especially Theo Nicholls and Huw Beynon’s *Living with Capitalism...***17** to give a sense of process and development. I deliberated over several possible titles, particularly ‘Coping with Industrial Change’, since that seemed to me to what people did with the changes that they encountered – to cope with them, and I don’t mean that necessarily in a passive and accepting way. No more so than women, though I’m not going to develop that except to say that my colleague Gwynne Somerville was responsible for the fascinating and very full chapter on the Fish quay and fishing industry. I should say that she and Penny, working with other women in the area, were responsible for the separate publication on Women’s Work, **18** which I think in retrospect is quite a groundbreaking report, ahead of its time (as indeed you acknowledge in your booklet *Imagining North Shields*), and indeed presaging all sorts of other studies to follow... don’t forget, this was an era well before the rise of Women’s Studies as an integral part of the university syllabuses, if not departments. (One important aspect this research highlighted was the multiple jobs syndrome among women workers – working in several different part-time jobs at

different times of the day to sustain their households - a phenomenon that was only to grow and grow in the subsequent decades).

I'm glad to say that the nice lady in the library this morning was also able to lay her hands on a somewhat worryingly pristine copy of *North Shields: Living With Industrial Change*, which means to say one that's not been read much, if at all. However, this belies the fact that this publication did sell well over a long period of time, and this is a rare copy I am holding here as they are now difficult to find. It includes all aspects of our work on the research side, plus there's a summary of what we actually did – the 'action' work I was talking about earlier (this part I co-wrote with John Foster).

North Shields: Living with Industrial Change was published after the project ended, in the early autumn of 1978, and hopefully its distribution was boosted by a couple of pleasingly good reviews in national publications – one of them in *New Society* by Peter Hall, doyen of the planning world, who – despite his dismissal of its Marxist slant and rhetoric – paid it some due and gave it some credibility. (See Appendices where this and another review article by Chris Couch can be found)

Looking once more at the second part of *Living with Industrial Change*, the write-up of the action work, which I co-wrote with John Foster, I do cringe a bit at some of what we said. Part of it read as if a couple of apparatchiks, sporting bell bottoms and tank tops and longish hair – see the photo of the team – were sent by Central Committee to a far flung province to check on the consciousness of the local workers, only to find them wanting. In some respects, it's not surprising that we may have been met with some mistrust in certain quarters – perhaps even complicated by the fact that we were funded by – the Home Office! However, it's perhaps no coincidence that our sense of mild disappointment, or frustration, at the lack of a more radical response, was about to be very widely discussed, for just a few months after my departure from the CDP came the publication in the magazine *Marxism Today*, of Eric Hobsbawm's essay *The Forward March of Labour Halted* **19** initiating a lively debate and controversy which ran on for many a year.

Less than a year later, everything did begin to change, and the forward march was certainly halted as the first Thatcher government was elected and Norman Tebbit began to introduce anti-trade union legislation. Part of a wider assault on the post-war settlement that had ushered in the welfare state coupled with the big bang which has led to the domination of Finance Capital that we see today.

I was with the Research Team until April 1978 and, with Gwynne Somerville, was one of the last to leave as the project was finally closed down. You might like to know where I disappeared to – well, I stayed in the North East, and after a brief spell as a community worker with the new Walker Resource Centre, I joined Stewart Mackinnon who was in the process of setting up Trade Films, so became one of its founding members. In many ways I took a lot of what I'd learnt, intellectually and experientially, over the previous 10 years into film-making, in terms of subject matter and approach. There's no time to develop that here, but a few brief instances - from the dialogue script for our first feature film *Ends and Means* which in some part drew on CDP material and influences (and which was scripted by Andy McSmith), to films for Channel 4 like *Labouring Against the Law* (1983), about the Tories' anti-trade union legislation, and *Farewell to the Welfare State* (1985) about the attacks on the welfare state, various films on the coalmining and shipbuilding industries, and work in non-

broadcast areas like the production of a quarterly videotape for the labour movement entitled *Northern Newsreel* – there's a certain continuity here. **20**

Finally, I'm supposed to offer you three lessons for the future – from 40 years ago, which I find very difficult. But I'd say this:

If you have to have anything to do with the big consultants be very careful, because in my opinion they form a kind of shadow or unofficial global civil service to global finance capital, as well as being the handmaidens of privatization and the transfer of wealth and assets from the public sphere into the private and unaccountable. The problem is they are everywhere, in every nook and corner of finance and business, government and local government.

And what I would say is: keep asking the right and difficult questions, from first principles. The basic principle is *cui bono* – that's Latin for 'who benefits'. And so – who, what, where and how? Who gains, who loses, in whose interests? Turn over stones, support investigative research, support investigative journalism. Where would we be without the Panama Papers of the last week? That's an almost revolutionary act with real consequences..... However, it's not easy – in fact, it is getting harder as access to information is shut down by powerful interests, if it's not destroyed in the first place. But who is doing this work these days? - that's another problem. For example, who is looking at who owns North Tyneside or? In fact, who *does* own North Tyneside? Who owns its land? Has that given anybody a disproportionate role in how North Tyneside has developed over the past 25 years? There's a project for someone to pick up. I am sure it would throw up some interesting questions and answers about wealth, power and influence in our society.

Finally, be prepared if you can to play a long game if you've got the stamina – it's not easy, but what goes round can come round..

I think some of the research we did had a real action element at the heart of it, integral to it. Ask yourself why, in every repressive regime in the world, among the first people the goons come for are academics, researchers and journalists. Scores of the latter are killed each year in different parts of the world for just daring to focus their attention on something. So let's not create too false a dichotomy between 'action' and 'research'.

That's about it, I think. I'm going to end by reading a little quote. I'm not jaundiced or embittered or anything about the last 35 years....well, maybe a tiny bit. We were working in a period of change, and while hoping for positive changes I think we did foresee some of the things that were likely to come, but not the extent and depth of them after 1979. And whenever Cameron says 'we' are going to finish the job 'we' were elected to do, apparently referring to his election in 2010, you think 'yes OK, you were elected in 2010, but what you *really* mean is that 'we' are going to finish the job that 'we' were elected to do back in 1979 with the election of Thatcher- that is, the rolling back of the frontiers of the state, the dismantling of the welfare state and all the rest of it....

I won't go any further down this road because I don't want to start making a political speech. So what I am going to read aren't the words of a politician, either. I stand here before you as a relic from a past age that has been taken out of a cupboard and dusted down, and so I'm going to quote

another old relic, who not so long ago, delivered this eloquent address - in fact it was a sermon - with which I fully empathise. This is the playwright Alan Bennett:

“Unlike today’s ideologues, whom I would call single-minded if mind came into it at all, I have no fear of the state. I was educated at the expense of the state both at school and university. My father’s life was saved by the state as on one occasion was my own. This would be the nanny state, a sneering appellation that gets short shrift with me. Without the state I would not be standing here today. I have no time for the ideology masquerading as pragmatism that would strip the state of its benevolent functions and make them occasions for profit. And why roll back the state only to be rolled over by the corporate entities that have been allowed, nay encouraged, to take its place? And these days no institution is immune. In my last play the Church of England is planning to sell off Winchester Cathedral. ‘Why not?’ says a character. ‘The school is private, why shouldn’t the cathedral be also?’ And it’s a joke but it’s no longer far-fetched.

With ideology masquerading as pragmatism, profit is now the sole yardstick against which all our institutions must be measured, a policy that comes not from experience but from assumptions – false assumptions – about human nature, with greed and self-interest taken to be its only reliable attributes. In pursuit of profit, the state and all that goes with it is sold from under us who are its rightful owners and with a frenzy and dedication that call up memories of an earlier iconoclasm.

It would be unsurprising if you were to discount these forthright opinions as the rantings of an old man. I am now eighty, an age that entitles one to be listened to though not necessarily heeded. I had never been much concerned with politics until the 1980s when they became difficult to avoid. Without ever having been particularly left-wing I am happy never to have trod that dreary safari from left to right which generally comes with age, a trip writers in particular seem drawn to, Amis, Osborne, Larkin, Iris Murdoch all ending up at the spectrum’s crusty and clichéd end.

*If I haven’t, it’s partly due to circumstances: there has been so little that has happened to England since the 1980s that I have been happy about or felt able to endorse. One has only had to stand still to become a radical..... **21***

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APPENDICES

Reviews of 'Living with Industrial Change', 1978, an article from the *Morning Star*, 1979, & articles from the *Workers Control Bulletin* of the Institute for Workers Control, Nov 1976

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shutting out litigants in person. But delay is the inevitable result. A particular problem is that tribunals have not readily accepted this situation. It is rare for them to allot more than three days for a hearing, so that adjournments of several months often occur.

The possible solutions are: legal aid for applicants; stricter control by tribunals; and, maybe, some kind of interlocutory stage where obviously hopeless cases should be given a prompt *quietus*.

Planning

Urban decline

PETER HALL writes: So orthodox now is the standard marxist analysis of our industrial woes—at any rate among geographers and planners—that the final report of the North Tyneside CDP may seem almost banal. But this would be unfair: *North Shields: living with industrial change* (£1.80 from Home Office, Room 1373, Queen Anne's Gate, SW1) supports its structuralist theses with a wealth of empirical data, making this almost a textbook in economic and social history from the Industrial Revolution to the demise of 5 per cent.

It uses this story to argue that, in effect, a Labour government has performed a massive policy somersault that has left areas like North Tyneside doomed to the role of peripheral low-wage regions. The industrial strategy, it asserts, is concerned to support big industry to rationalise and modernise—thus shedding labour.

Particularly, the government is concerned to woo multinational firms—which, the report calculates, now to employ over 28 per cent of those in manufacturing. But these, in several notable recent cases, are exceptionally prone to removing smaller and less economic units—which are likely to be in places like North Shields.

The official government answer is to build up new small industry. But this, the CDP team argues, is likely to mean low wages, poor working conditions, and unstable employment—since it will only be able to perform the functions that big business is unwilling to undertake. Areas like North Tyneside, therefore, would form part of a low wage periphery that might embrace large parts of Britain.

The thesis is beguilingly all-embracing; it fits local phenomena into a gigantic global framework. How far you buy it must depend finally on your judgment of the resilience of the capitalist system. If the multi-nationals have truly destroyed the competitive power of new industrial entrants, then the future not merely of North Tyneside, but of industrial Britain, is bleak. But if small entrepreneurs can make an inroad in new and growing industrial areas, to become the IBMs of tomorrow, then a policy of encouraging them could still make sense.

Here, past trends may provide no real guide to future possibilities. The fate of an industrial area in the past has depended mainly on its entrepreneurial climate. Places like North Shields went down because their industrialists could not adapt to changing circumstances. But just as their fortunes changed for the worse then, so they could change for the better in future—unless the underlying dynamic of capitalism has not sealed that escape route. And on that fundamental point, the verdict is surely still not proven.

Herbivore

Marginal note

I participated in the making of a television programme recently and the experience has scarred my psyche. It's amazing how, as soon as the TV cameras appear, people take leave of their senses and confess the most intimate details of their lives to complete strangers.

A TV crew, chronically pestered by telly age kids dying to get on the box, has (seems) open access to the roughest of pub and to every private grief. "How did you feel after the fire/your husband jumped off the Post Office Tower?" asks the eager reporter, mike in hand. Instead of telling him to eff off, the interviewee responds: bursts into tears, and the lads in the control room rub their hands with glee ("Great television").

In the discussion which follows the programme, it's the experts and the professional types who have the most say; the ordinary people, who the programme was about anyway, can't get a word in edgewise. They've dolled themselves up, travelled miles, but haven't learned that when you speak on the box you have to be both hyperbolic and quick as a flash—or somebody will get in before you. They go home disappointed, not having made their points. Sadly, they'll probably never get another chance.

Community, or access, television must have a professional component: you can't make a good programme, using ordinary people, seeing what's going on in the community, unless you have a first-rate crew and a first-rate producer. I hope that not only second-raters will go into this promising field.

People, say the smart-Alecs, won't watch serious television. Won't they? The programme we did was serious in a regional

Review of *Living with Industrial Change*, North Tyneside CDP, by Peter Hall*, in *New Society*, 19th October 1978.

*Sir Peter Geoffrey Hall, FBA (19 March 1932 – 30 July 2014) was an English town planner, urbanist and geographer. He was the Bartlett Professor of Planning and Regeneration at The Bartlett, University College London and President of both the Town and Country Planning Association and the Regional Studies Association. He was internationally renowned for his studies and writings on the economic, demographic, cultural and management issues that face cities around the globe. Hall was for many years a planning and regeneration adviser to successive UK governments.

Will the boats come in on the Tyne?

IN North Shields, at the mouth of the River Tyne, there is a big overlap between where people live and work. Job opportunities provided by local industry are of prime importance for the mainly manual working-class population.

But these are contracting. Excluding school leavers, there are more than 1,500 men and over 400 women wholly unemployed, double the 1970 figures. Since 1970, the number of local jobs has shrunk by more than 3,000, including over 2,000 in manufacturing.

To anyone only vaguely acquainted with the North-East, the easy explanation would be the "decline" of the "traditional" industries. But this is only part of the story.

North Shields was founded on fishing, mining, the coal export and general port trade, and shipbuilding and ship repair. Today, several different generations of industry can be identified, both by their nature and their location. The remnants of the "traditional" industries — fishing, ship repair, the fish trade, dockwork and sea transport still together employ significant numbers along the riverside. Their modern origins lie in the mid-19th century.

Depression

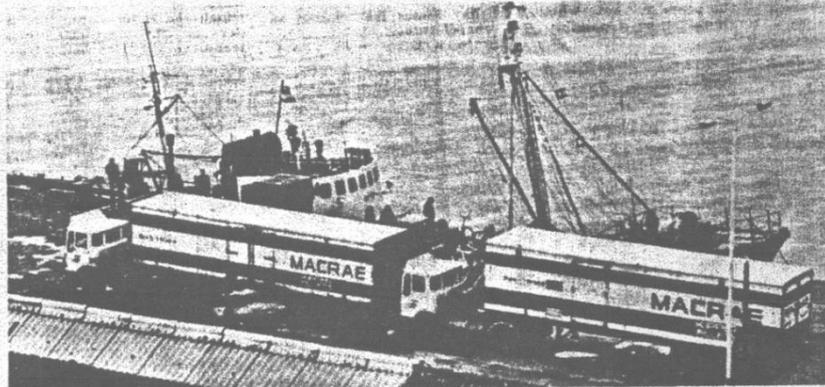
Then there are the mainly post-war light manufacturing industries, located on the West Chirton Industrial Estate and surrounding area, away from the river. The estate was established in the late 1930s, part of the state's belated response to the depression.

Thirdly there are the low-employing storage, distribution and service depots, mainly to be found on the privately owned Tyneside Tunnel Trading Estate. The estate is sited away from the river by the region's trunk road and motorway network. It was developed in the late 1960s.

Workers in the "traditional" industries in North Shields still face severe employment problems. Smiths Dock — the local ship repair yard — was the largest repair yard in the world in 1900. Despite recent big reductions in the size of the workforce, it is still in danger of closing.

Now called Smiths' Shiprepairers Ltd, the yard is still privately owned by the Swan Hunter Group. The group sold

Closures and the threat of closures loom over the already decimated industrial landscape of the North-East. BOB DAVIS reports from Tyneside on the problems facing North Shields.



"A place like North Shields is often little more than a depot or storage point within an international network." Photo: Ken Grint.

its other Tyneside repair yards to the state when the building yards were nationalised in 1977.

The bulk of the Tyneside ship repair industry is in fact now publicly owned. It has yet, however, to undergo a major rationalisation. Whether Smiths can survive at a time when the whole repair industry restructures remains to be seen.

Over the past decade, too, many dockers' and port workers' jobs have been lost, despite a recent upturn in the port's trade. The local coal export trade ceased to exist in 1974, and the variety of new cargo-handling techniques, especially containerisation, has reduced manning levels in the rest of the port.

The new post-war sectors of industry, however, have not been the panaceas for unemployment they were once hailed as. Jobs were created in them in the post-war years, and the area's industrial base became more diversified.

But that coincided with a period of capitalist expansion when cheap labour — "sold" by regional development agencies to potential investors — was at a premium. So growing firms did come to North Shields. Many sought cheap female labour; today some 43 per cent of the total local workforce and 36 per cent of the manufacturing workforce is female. Over 50 per cent of the workers on the West Chirton Estate and in its neighbouring factories are women.

The build-up of the West Chirton Estate after the war was quite rapid. By 1961, 5,000 workers were employed manufacturing plastic laminates, furniture, confectionery, clothing, and so on. Firms included Formica Ltd., AEI Ltd., and Ronson Corporation — familiar names.

The then Tynemouth Council regarded the attraction of Thomas De La Rue's Formica

factory in 1947 as one of its outstanding achievements. It became one of the two top employers in the town, along with Smiths Dock.

In 1966 employment on the estate peaked at around 6,000. Since then it has declined and is now around 5,000 again. Some new state-funded factories have been built but jobs gained have been offset by losses in other factories.

Over the whole post-war period, the ownership and control of the estate's firms has become more concentrated. Today over 50 per cent are parts of larger national and/or multinational companies. As the larger groups have rationalised — particularly during the current crisis — local plants have been hit.

The De La Rue Group (itself a multinational) sold its Formica subsidiary to the giant American Cyanamid in 1977. This company in turn sold off

the industrial laminates division of Formica to Bakelite UK Ltd. — also part of an American multinational. About 200 North Shields workers lost their jobs.

Earlier, in 1975, GEC closed the West Chirton Telecommunications factory (formerly AEI), with the loss of 300 (mainly women's) jobs. In all, an estimated 1,000 jobs have been lost from the estate since 1970.

Capital restructuring, into fewer manufacturing units in central locations, or the export of plant and investment to low-wage-cost areas, has prompted the development of the third generation of industry. The Tyneside Tunnel Estate houses the distribution and service depots of many large multinationals.

The warehouses are usually highly mechanised, employ few workers, and fit into each company's countrywide distribution networks.

The laws of capitalist development are no respecters of the age or nature of firms or industries. The concentration of industry into large world-wide groupings poses obvious problems of control for workers and their trade unions, and local, regional and central state agencies.

Restructuring

However, present central policy — as typified by the "Industrial Strategy" — encourages the restructuring of capital at the expense of labour, and is

pro big business. This is often at odds with the desires of local and regional agencies to retain jobs.

Government sops — job creation, small firms, inner city policies — will not even begin to do this. Moreover, they all stress the importance of the entrepreneur and private enterprise in combating unemployment.

Direct economic control is excluded; but private enterprise is trusted yet again to solve the problems of the private enterprise system. In the post-war period, great reliance was placed upon a new generation of private industry to provide a last-minute solution to the problems created by the loss of jobs from existing industries, especially in the "regions."

But we have seen how that contained the seeds of its own subsequent failures. So too will the reliance on the present strategies.

The prospects of widespread permanent unemployment and an increasingly rigid "low wage periphery" in the UK economy have never been greater. Only the outcome of the continuing class struggle will in any way change that.

Power lies at the point of production:
The case for Combine Committees

TYNE CONFERENCE OF SHOP STEWARDS WORKING PARTY

In his paper, "The Two-Tier World Economy – A System of Double Standards", Charles Levinson has set out how multi-national companies are dominating the economy of the Western World to the detriment of many national economies and to the detriment of workers generally. The present economic situation he suggests, "is a crisis of labour rather than a crisis of capitalism" and "without the new dimension of socialism which seeks to socialise the global enterprise, the prospects for socialism in the global system are not brilliant". Whether or not you accept his assessment of the situation, the immense power wielded by the multi-nationals must militate against the interests of workers and is an immense obstacle to the demands for the extension of industrial democracy and workers control. The first priority for workers in a multi-national must be to build organisational forms of comparable power to that of their employers, if they are to have any hope of socialising the company.

The first question to pose is, is any national body either of Government or Trade Union capable of, or actively engaged in, curtailing the global operation of these companies which operate against the interests of the people they represent? Government normally welcomes the activities of the large companies because of the benefits they bring in terms of jobs, often in areas of high unemployment. If we examine, too, the individuals active in management of the global enterprises, they are themselves working in politics. Possibly the prime example would be, Robert McNamara, formerly chief executive of General Motors, then Secretary of State for Defence in the US, currently directing the operations of the International Monetary Fund. The fact is we can't really expect national Governments to intervene in the multi-nationals, unless there are glaring excesses, because in the main they are committed to the existing global system.

What then of the national Trade Unions in Britain, and their strategy of containing the transnational conglomerates? The simple answer is they do not have a strategy. While we have a continuing debate in the movement and at annual conferences on the subject, while Government are urged on occasions to curb the rampant power of the large companies, we in the Trade Unions are without a coherent strategy to tackle the leviathans. International links are sporadic and contacts on an ad hoc basis (e.g. Ford Motor Company strikes), or the "visiting fireman" kind. Initiatives at national level to promote contacts between plant unions

in the multi-nationals are non-existent and many national officers are strongly opposed to the formation of shop stewards combine committees, as they see these diluting their own power and authority. While the TUC in the report on 'Industrial Democracy', adopted by the 1974 Congress, welcomed shop stewards operating at Combine level, more effort in frustrating the devolution of trade union powers to combines is spent, than is spent in building them.

With the growth of large companies we are seeing the increasing centralisation of the decision-making process inside them and local management having severely limited powers to agree any major items. This development in contemporary capitalism must be matched by a central decision-making body of shop stewards in these companies. Closing of factories and sackings in one part of the firm while expansion takes place in another, without regard to the social consequences, can only be defeated by a trade union policy for the whole company. The Tyne Shop Stewards working party have set out their ideas for the promotion and formation of combines within the framework of some 10 or 12 regional committees of shop stewards from the multi nationals in regular contact with each other and fostering contacts between shop stewards in companies where a combine is non-existent. (See 'Combine Committees; What you'll need to know to form one'.)

In the 1974 Election Manifesto's the Labour Party did initiate a new approach to the multi-nationals in the industrial policy statement. Planning agreements, provisions on disclosure of information, new areas of collective bargaining encroaching on management prerogatives, all these proposals demand a unified policy by the trade unions within a single company. The only way to achieve this unity of approach is with a Shop Stewards Combine Committee. The only way to progress towards Industrial Democracy is with a Shop Stewards' Combine Committee.

The obstacles to our task are numerous and powerful. The alternative to taking on that task is to leave the control of our lives in the hands of, "a technocratic, hierarchical structure based upon militaristic models of command and authority in decision-making and economic power which is intrinsically authoritarian". We must start to build organisations of the grass roots trade union members, initially at national, then international level, which can commence the emancipation of the working class.

This particular article was, I believe, written by Jimmy Murray, Convenor of Vickers Elswick Shop Stewards

Combine Committees

What you'll need to know to form one

by Bob Davis

Eventually, the operations of multinational organisations will require international organisation on the part of workers. However, we will duck that question, and concentrate on ways and means of identifying and organising in the UK. We assume we are dealing with fairly large concerns with many plants and locations in the UK; in which most plants will have some degree of organisation. (This is obviously a preliminary requirement; unorganised plants have the prior task of getting organised!)

It should not be assumed that shop stewards organisations in large concerns will automatically know 100% about their employer, nor the range of firms (often with individual names) in the group.

1. Who is your Employer?

A first step, then, is to *identify* the employer. Your main local library is of immense importance here. The best source for this initially is *Who Owns Whom* (in two Volumes: 1975/76). In Volume 2 is a list of 'subsidiaries'; look up the name of your firm, and in the column opposite you will find the name of the parent company.

Then look up the parent company in the Volume 1 and listed beneath it you will find all its UK subsidiaries (and international subsidiaries, too).

2. Where are your Employer's Plants?

The next task is to *locate* these subsidiaries; note that *Who Owns Whom* only supplies *names* of subsidiaries, not addresses. And of course each subsidiary company may have any number of plant locations. To identify these, it will help to check first the parent company's Annual Report for the most recent year (by now Annual Reports should be available for the financial year 1975-6. Write to the Company Secretary at Head Office asking for one.). Annual Reports vary however. Some will only list names of subsidiaries, and not the location of plants, whilst others will specify all the subsidiaries and the addresses of plants. In the latter case, you have been lucky. In the former, there is still a long way to go. However, by further reference to UK Trade Directories you can begin to piece together the jigsaw. These include *Kompass* (1975) (in 2 volumes); *Kelly's Manufacturers and Merchants Director* (1975); *KBE: Guide to Key British Enterprises* (2 volumes); and sometimes regional directories, or 'Buyers Guides' (like that produced by the North of England Development Council called "North East Buyer's Guide").

Once these steps are complete, you should now be equipped with at least a fairly full picture of your companies UK operations — at least, geographically. In addition, the *Kompass Register* sometimes notes the number of workers in particular plants, so that you can tell whether its just a depot with a few workers or a sizeable factory; this is not so in all cases, however.

So far, although this seems straightforward, it is in fact a fairly time-consuming and tedious task. If you have difficulties in access to the necessary libraries, etc., try using locally available academies, students, resource centre workers, Trade Unions Studies Units, etc. — you may often find willing volunteers.

3. What is your Company doing?

Having discovered where your firm's plants are, it is clearly useful to form a picture of what the company is doing with them — i.e. its *policies*. It is clear that many British and foreign-owned multinationals are *rationalising* their activities, *diversifying* into different products and investing abroad in countries where the labour is cheap and poorly organised. You need to pull together what information is available on these processes in order to begin to combat them by means of Combine Committees. There are three main sources for such information:-

- Rumour and local knowledge. Shop stewards and workers in individual plants frequently get wind of company plans in various ways. Such information should not be despised; pooled it can provide useful clues on company policies.
- Company Annual Reports. Read the Chairman's statement and the review of activities. These are designed to convince shareholders and the City that the company is pursuing policies designed to maximise their profits. Reading both the lines and in between them, you can see where the company is concentrating its activities and from this make good guesses on the implications for workers in plants in Britain.
- The Press. The *Financial Times* gives up-to-date information on company results, often together with background comment. Both it and the *Sunday Times Business News* contain useful background articles which provide clues on the directions companies are going. Do not despise them because they are right-wing. The Left Papers are very useful; also the Labour Research Department's *Fact Sheets and Bulletins*.

4. Contact with other Workers

The next stage is perhaps the most difficult — contacting the workers organisations in other plants. Many obstacles can rear their heads here — including management harassment (refusal to let phones be used, pass on letters addressed to the "Senior Shop Stewards", etc., suspicion on the part of official district organisers (if you try going through the formal channels), etc. You should, of course, try these channels, but a bit more detection work may well be needed. Here, things such as Trade Union directories may be of assistance. If your union has such a thing (the AUEW has), it may well list the names and

addresses of branch secretaries throughout the land. If so, you may be able to identify the name of a branch secretary living in the near vicinity of a particular plant you wish to contact. If so, try writing/phoning to say you'd like to contact the convenor or Shop Stewards representative at such and such a plant . . . etc., (this has payed off on occasions in our experience). The name and address of a contact in the plant is far better than a letter addressed to the Shop Stewards Committee at a plant, as it may well not arrive.

Having done all this, you then have a picture of the geographical locale of each plant in the group, plus a contact. (Obviously, the scheme presented here is a bit mechanical and difficulties arise in trying to construct it; also, of course, one does not do this *in isolation*; you obviously have a reason for trying to get a Combine off the ground . . .)

Formation

If the initial soundings prove favourable to the idea, (obviously nothing like 100% response will occur at first), and convenors/shop stewards committees have the support of the workers in going ahead, a meeting in a centrally accessible place will be needed, to discuss further the issues of concern common to all, the general exchange of information, and the means of constructing a Combine Committee capable of taking up some of the issues. Here, constitutions, membership fees, travel allowance (which often need to be pooled as stewards will travel varying distances and incur greater or lesser expenses) will need to be sorted out. Relationships with the official side of the movement, too, will need to be worked out. And of course, strategies and policies.

Further works of relevance

See Labour Research Department: *How to get the facts about Profits and Prices*, also Christopher Hird – *Your Employer's Profits* (Pluto Press)

IWC and the National Energy Conference

At the National Energy Conference, held on 22nd June 1976, Jack Dunn, leader of the Kent Miners, presented a paper on behalf of IWC.

The paper began by outlining the reasons for the failure of previous attempts to secure a coherent energy policy and then set out the conditions for success in future. These ranged over the need for economic growth, sustained by a framework of planning agreements; the special attention required by the coal industry; long-term conservation plus research into energy-saving; and workers' self management within the energy industries.

It is hoped that this conference, a major assault on the bastions of secrecy within which Whitehall normally prepares its plans, will be the first of many such exercises in open government, not just for energy, but across the whole range of policy-making. Tony Benn is to be congratulated on his major initiative towards this end.

TURNING POINT

All-day Meeting, 10am to 10pm
Saturday 27th November 1976
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square,
London WC1

Employment, Energy and the Economy – Should we change our thinking about work and jobs? Should we go for a low-energy future – no more nukes? What would a steady state economy be like, and how could we get to it? How do these ideas link up? How do they fit in with the turning point (in lifestyles, in religion and values, in science and technology, in the roles of the sexes, and in the development of political and economic institutions) which we discussed at last year's Turning Point meeting? And what can each one of us do about them?

Programme and Speakers

Chairman will be COLIN HUTCHINSON (former Chairman, Conservation Society)

Platform Speakers will include:

PETER CHAPMAN (Director, Energy Research Group, Open University and author of *Fuel's Paradise*) on **ENERGY OPTIONS**

MIKE COOLEY (Lucas Aerospace Combine Shop Stewards Committee) on **SOCIALLY USEFUL WORK: A BASIC RIGHT**

JAMES ROBERTS (author of *Profit or People?* and *Power, Money and Sex*) on **A STEADY STATE ECONOMY**

VAL STEVENS (Chairwoman of the Green Ban Action Committee) on **ALTERNATIVE LIFESTYLES AND WORK**

For more details and application form write to:

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or phone:

Peter Cadogan: 01-242 8032