

SPONTANEOUS UNITY AND ACTION BY WORKERS ON ADELAIDE STREETS

A subjective report by Chris White.

About 10 a.m. last Friday, builder's labourers, carpenters, plasterers and painters working on the University's building sites spontaneously supported their Union leaders' decision to stop work for the day and hold meetings in protest against the failure of contractors to grant payment of holiday pay. The firms involved on Adelaide construction sites were Hansen and Yunken, Dillinghams, Watts and Fricker Bros.

It was expressed that the reason for this was the union leadership and not the rank and file. Those workers remaining on the sites were either bricklayers' labourers or others who were getting paid their deserved holiday pay by the contractors.

The meeting closed just as the police and the press arrived. The News reporter immediately found an unnamed Chamber spokesman to describe the "bad scare" as the workers entered the building.

Because a number of workers were unable to participate in the vote upstairs it was decided to march to Parliament House so that all could participate in the strike decision. The marchers thus joined the Draft Resisters Union on the steps. The motions put at the Chamber of Manufacturers were again overwhelmingly passed.

The directors at the building construction site on the corner of Gawler Place and Grenfell street had decided to continue pouring concrete. Two workers were aiding this activity, so to ensure the effectiveness of the collective decision it was decided to force all work to halt at that site. A hundred workers blocked off an access ramp leading into the site. This prevented trucks from coming or going. The management was thus forced to halt work for the day. Everybody dispersed without the intervention of the police.

STUDENTS . . .

The education received at the university is largely aimed at training technologists and a managerial elite, uncritical of the workings of society. Corporate interests obviously gain much benefit from an education designed to produce a particular type of labour. The role the future student is to play has already been decided. There may be no other choice but to work for a corporation - probably American. And possibly a construction contractor like Hansen and Yunken, or Fricker Brothers or Dillingham or Watts. Construction firms which refuse to pay their workers holiday pay.

So given the role most students are to play, and keeping in mind that working class people at University are a small minority, it was perhaps not surprising to see the attitudes of students when the workers on the university construction sites decided to strike for holiday pay. There was considerable amusement, little interest in showing signs of support and two buckets of water poured derisively from the walkway.

Perhaps the striking workers should not have been so surprised. The type of education received also precludes any signs of human respect or compassion towards those less fortunate.



At the new University Library complex architectural and engineering students showed great amusement when they poured water down from the walkway onto the people below. Many workmen seemed surprised and confused at these actions. The marching workers left the university with only two students and one academic giving support. The students in the Workers-Student Alliance were conspicuous by their absence. The march grew in numbers, enthusiasm and determination as workers marched from construction sites in Gawler Place, Pirie Street and Waymouth Street calling their workmates to strike. The numbers were about 400 when the march stopped in front of the Chamber of Manufacturers - the symbol of powerful interests making the decisions affecting their lives.

The question was posed. Where do you want the meeting to be held? Upstairs! came the roar. Upstairs we marched. Inside a meeting room which was obviously used by a smaller number of men making decisions, it was overwhelmingly decided by vote to stop out all day, not to go back until Monday and to initiate similar action later if the need arose.

Les Robinson, secretary of the Builders' Labourers, welcomed the first meeting of the Australian Building and Construction Workers' Federation to be held in enemy territory. "The immediate reason for the stoppages are to protest against the Master Builders Association's failure to honour their obligations. They stated earlier that they would not oppose the application for holiday pay by the Building Trades Federation. Now, just before Easter, they want the application to the Industrial Court delayed and to negotiate on numerous points. The position of public pay is not negotiable," he stated, (much applause). He said that workers in the same trades in other states were getting holiday pay. And this was by the same building firms that refused it in S.A. He said that S.A. workers in the building trade were not second rate workers. (Better! came the cry from those present). "We have shown today that we can play it hard against the MBA, and we will continue to do so!" (Applause). Other speakers commented on the tremendous unity shown in supporting the strike by the Union members present, although at some sites there were difficulties in persuading some men to come off.



Throughout the growing march there were continual high spirits, determination and good humour with a definite sense of solidarity with one another and for an issue concerning everyone's livelihood. Cries of "smash the M.B.A.!" and "What do we want? Holiday Pay! What do we get? Nothing!" were frequent. And although the immediate issue was over narrow wage claims, the nature and determination of the spontaneous rolling strike was an important event towards a much needed militancy and strength among the working class.



. . . AND THE PRESS.

Occasionally the mass media shows signs of supporting liberal social reforms. Never does the mass media criticise the controlling business and corporate interests. And always the people who sell their labor to make profit for others and who build our environment are attacked as society's major enemy after the screaming yellow Asian hordes.

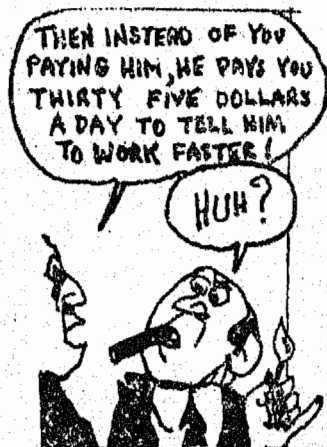
Thus again it was really no surprise to see "The News" reporting last Friday's strike. Notice the language "Wild scenes," "stormed the building," "cheered loudly" . . .

The only people showing signs of wildness were the foremen and bosses, surprised by the spontaneity and solidarity of the strikers. Shoppers attending bargain sales don't "storm" into the shops because profit will be made. Workers entering a building protesting for their rights "storm." And an office girl's dull work is interrupted by enthusiastic clapping and cheering which constitutes a "bad scare", whereas no pay for a workers' public holiday doesn't constitute a "bad scare" for his family. Surprising prominence is given to unexplainable mud on steps, and chairs and tables, despite the fact that all had just left their muddy work conditions and jammed into a small office. And it is far more a social danger to throw some eggs rather than to continue working for business interests who won't listen to, by an overwhelming majority of their employees' demands.

And of course once again, it is dangerous to allow everyone to get used to the idea of people in the streets, rather than cars.

"The News" doesn't print how much profit these large building concerns make from the labor of some exploited people or the nature of the work that a laborer does and the conditions he has to work under.

One would almost start to think it was some sort of conspiracy by the mass media to frighten other members of the public of the power of working men acting together. Because such unity and solidarity might just one day effect the business interests, the promotion of which is after all the business of "The News."



THE MEANINGS OF WORK . . .

Some extracts from Work I and Work II, Pelican originals.

"My work comes to me in a completely automatic way in the gestures of an automation. With a rag wrapped around my eyes I could still do it. But underneath this my mind never stops working. It lives by itself. Some call it dreaming, and if so, I am dreaming all day long, five days a week. The whole bench dreams like this. It is a galley of automations locked in dreams. If you didn't dream at work it would send you mad." A worker talking about his experience on the industrial line.

He concludes "... a man isn't just born to be a worker, like the bees, and nothing else. I'm sure every man can do something good for his life, apart from just slave all the time. You might not think so though if you listen to people who have never put their heads inside a factory gate."

We spend the greater part of our lives working, yet rarely find time to think what our jobs mean to us. The repression is curious, as though a vital sector of our lives were incommunicable, or perhaps not worth communicating. And yet work, the capacity of acting humanly on the world, is a shared experience, for the majority of us it is done in common with others, for everyone of us it is done, however privately for others.

By work, by the transformation of the environment through work, we produce the society we live in, produce ourselves. At the same time the society produces our work, channels and defines it, delimits its purpose, rewards it according to its aims. To ask the purpose of work is to ask simultaneously what purposes society assigns to it. Is it for this reason that the question is so often passed over in silence?

Ronald Fraser Work Vol. 1.

It is a fact that most men and women want to make their own living; to do something that gives meaning, a way of making life, and to get back from the activity not only the physical means to live but also a confirmation of significance, of the process of being oneself and alive in this unique way. From this book we come to see that there is never only a work process, of the kind that is usually abstracted; a set of operations on things. There is also, whether recognised or not, a set of social relationships, which in experience are quite inextricable from the work. In organising the work, these real relationships have defined it; a change of social organisation can change the definition. It follows that we can only properly explore the meanings of work if we explore this kind of organisation; whether by asking how we come to be doing a particular job or by asking why it is being done in this way and not by that.

... The decision about what needs to be done, about what is worth giving his energy to, is usually not made by the worker, or by co-operation with others. It is made by those who, as it is usually put, have work to offer. Who are these people, and how do they come to be in such a position, that they can decide what work there is and how it is to be done? The simple answer used to be the rich; if you have money, you can employ others... but it isn't the possession of money, as such, that decides most work. It is the possession of a very different thing; capital, not a store of currency to be dipped into to get some service done, but a store, an organisation, of labour, and of the means of labour. Most work can only be done if its means are provided; tools, materials, work places, outlets. But then the decision about what work will actually be done and how it falls to those who own or control these means. This, fundamentally, is capitalism. The means of work have passed into the hands of the minority who own this necessary capital and who are alone in a position, in a developing society, to begin new major enterprises. What is really social capital — the produce of generations of co-operative work — has passed into the hands of a small group who then, as they say, have work to offer to others...

The meaning of work, in such a system, is reduced, against all other human interests, to a profitable return on the investment of capital.

If we are even to recover effective control over the direction of the energy that we call work we shall have, it is clear, to call for more than common ownership, though we shall certainly have to call for that. Common ownership will only mean anything, in practice, if it is experienced where it matters, when decisions are being made... to use machines, rather than to be used by them; to impose a new social organisation, where decisions are made by the men actually doing the work.

Raymond Williams.

ON AND AROUND CAMPUS

MEETING TO CONDEMN RACIALISM IN SPORT

Watch details for general student meeting next week.

SPEAKERS: Peter Macgregor — Convenor anti-apartheid movement.

Jim Boyce — Wallaby player refusing to play in the Australian team against the South Africans.

Sekai Holland — Black Rhodesian.

Sponsored by the Adelaide University S.C.M.

MORATORIUM

Demonstrations this Thursday to the Department of Labour and National Service.

On the following Fridays marches will be held against "The Advertiser" as the main representative of the capitalist press which continually prints lies to manipulate public opinion in favour of the war. A march may be organised against Defence Standards Laboratories, Woodville, which is carrying out war research.

SEX!

Sexological paperbacks, hardbacks, journals, copies of journal articles, mimeographs, and references for exchange and loan. Wanted by/available from Adelaide Zoology/psychology student for academic study with intention of lobbying for sexological studies in an Aust. Tertiary Institution. Contact G.S. SRC Office.

WHY MARX?

Marxist seminars every Wednesday in the Lady Symon Hall. 1.00 p.m.

WRE ON CAMPUS

University appointed committee to investigate the allegations made concerning the use of the computer's facilities. University Council Rooms. Wednesday afternoons. See your local heavy science professor rationalise his position. See the computing centre spokesman blush. See student committee members being abused. Party hats are essential.

GENERAL STUDENT MEETING.

Barr Smith Lawns

1.00 p.m. Wednesday 7th April

[postponed from Monday]

to discuss: "The Students' Representative Council: Where's it going?"

James Parter Vice-President.

APRIL 30TH IS NATIONAL MORATORIUM DAY

EASTER CAMP AT LAKE BONNEY

Courtesy of the Sailing Camp \$1.75 a day.
See noticeboard outside Sports Union for details.

CREATIVE WRITING!

First meeting on Tuesday, April 13th 7.30 p.m. in the Honours English Room (Floor 6, Napier Building).

BOB HAWKE IS COMING!

SCIENCE FACULTY

Election of two students to the Curriculum Committee. Nominations must be submitted to the Secretary of the Faculty of Science, Mitchell Building on or before 5 p.m. on Thursday, April 8th, 1971. Elections later in April. Please note that matters relating to science education are not a matter for this Curriculum Committee.

THIS WEEK A LIMITED NUMBER OF SPECIAL ON DITS.