This author's ethnography of shop-floor struggle against the introduction of new management techniques at a South Wales-based brownfield manufacturing plant questions the emergence of a 'new industrial relations' characterised by worker co-operation and commitment. The article describes the impact on shop-floor social action of such factors as the suppression of independent shop steward organization, worker divisions, job insecurity, militant customer interventionism and the state's employment legislation. Although these can critically constrain effective collective resistance the article highlights how management-labour conflict and struggle remain inherent in the capitalist labour process.

The 'New Industrial Relations' and Class Struggle in the 1990s

by Andy Danford

ANYONE SCANNING the latest industrial relations survey data might be forgiven for assuming that workers in British manufacturing industry have forsaken class struggle for the principles of peace and co-operation with their employers. For example, the WIRS surveys identify a decline in both strike and non-strike action in manufacturing, from almost a third of establishments being affected in 1979-1980 down to just 10% in 1989-1990 (Millward *et al.* 1992). Employment Department and OECD data suggest that by 1994, the UK had sixth lowest strike rate of the 22 OECD countries, whilst the rate in Britain's traditional industries was 89% lower between 1990-1994 than the previous five year period (Sweeney and Davies 1996).

In conjunction with this, we have managerialist advocates of new modes of work organization and labour deployment, such as lean production control and teamworking, which are held to have an 'enriching' and 'empowering' impact on the shop-floor. The new management techniques might represent instruments of efficient capital accumulation but they are also assumed to provide workers with new skills, new responsibilities and

greater personal control over the labour process. Thus, according to this view, contemporary shifts in the nature of the capitalist labour process encourage a progression from low-trust to high-trust labour relations characterised by worker loyalty and commitment to the firm (see for example, Imai 1986; Fukuyama 1995 and Womack *et al*. 1992).

In contrast, the few studies that have researched the concrete impact of the restructuring of work and employment relations on the shop-floor have, with few exceptions, discovered a different picture. For many workers in British industry, this can be a disempowering and exploitative process designed to maximise the extraction of surplus value by weakening shop-floor controls over the labour process, maximising labour utilisation and intensifying work rates (see for example, Delbridge *et al*. 1992; Garrahan and Stewart 1992; Turnbull 1986). Some of these critiques account for the absence of traditional conflict in conditions of heightened labour exploitation by emphasising the impact of different ideological practices, deriving from changes in the labour process, which contribute to a framework of consensus. For example, Garrahan and Stewart (1992) present teamworking as a critical social form in which workers' consent to domination and exploitation is secured through the processes of self-management and peer pressure. Similarly, Delbridge *et al*. argue that teamworking and internal customer relations on the shop-floor act to 'obscure and mystify, or at least take attention away from, the labour-capital relation of exploitation' (1992: 105).

One unifying implication of these conflicting arguments, therefore, is that the new management techniques may constitute a significant determinant of the low level of industrial action in contemporary manufacturing—whether mediated through a process of concrete 'empowerment' (managerialists) or ideological 'disempowerment' (labour process critics).

However, to what extent have contemporary employment relations really changed? Can the typical workforce of the 1990s be characterised by a new commitment to the employer and capitalist enterprise, or at least, a new malleability and acquiescence? Is it really subject to total management control? This article casts further light on these questions by providing an ethnography of the politics of production which shape the

'management of change' at a UK brownfield manufacturing plant. The case study firm operates in the autocomponents sector. Following intense global competitive pressures and the cost-cutting interventions of its major customers, the company introduced a series of labour intensifying practices including stock and buffer reductions, strict bell to bell working, teamworking and management-led continuous improvement. These changes caused considerable shop-floor resentment at the loss of control over such matters as labour deployment, skill levels and work rates; most workers perceived them as concrete mechanisms of labour subordination rather than sources of 'empowerment', or for that matter, 'ideological disempowerment'.

The article demonstrates that although it might not always be manifest in national labour dispute data and other conventional indicators of conflict, organised worker resistance remains inherent in the contemporary capitalist labour process. It divides into three sections. The first section describes management's initial attempts to fashion a more 'consensual' style of industrial relations—something akin to business unionism—by simultaneously incorporating the firm's senior shop stewards and exploiting the oppressive ideological impact of the state's anti-trade union legislation. Management then takes advantage of these conditions of uncertain opposition by introducing new labour intensifying working practices onto the bargaining agenda. When the company fails to change the resistant attitudes of the shop-floor rank and file, 'consensus' rapidly transforms into coercion and victimisation. The second section examines this and describes the struggle between management and labour which culminates in the sacking of 21 scapegoated workers who were considered trouble-makers and 'obstructionists'. The final section discusses the nature of some of the contemporary impediments to effective collective resistance to managerial control. It focuses firstly on the processes which act to fragment worker solidarity and then examines different facets of an environment of fear, indeed, management by fear, which facilitate a decidedly non-consensual process of change. The article highlights the contradictions between the pervasive ideology of 'worker commitment' and 'empowerment' and the material processes of labour exploitation and resistance at work in the 1990s.

The Case Study

The case study firm is given the pseudonym 'CarPress'. It is located in Llanelli, on the western tip of the unemployment belt that extends along the South Wales valleys. Although site employment has declined from a peak of nearly 2000 in the 1970s to 770 workers today, CarPress remains one of the largest employers in a town that has suffered widespread job insecurity for almost two decades.[1] The plant manufactures large pressed steel sub-assemblies such as car doors, sub-frames and dashboards. It started life in 1962 as a feeder for British Leyland's Longbridge and Cowley factories. Following the privatisation of Rover in 1989, the plant was sold to the CarPress Group of British autocomponents factories. CarPress then itself became subject to a series of asset stripping take-overs before falling into the hands of a major German steel and engineering conglomerate. CarPress is now a first tier supplier[2] to Rover, Opel, Honda and Toyota.

The factory is primarily a manufacturing facility. Out of a workforce of 770, 621 are hourly paid shop-floor workers comprising 431 semi-skilled and 190 skilled operators.[3] These are divided between a press-shop containing over a hundred presses of 250-1100 ton capacity; an assembly shop housing different types of single welders, multi-welders, automated transfer lines and robot clusters; and finally, a toolroom/maintenance area.

As we shall see, despite its foreign ownership CarPress remains autonomous and 'British' in terms of management style and industrial relations traditions. The shop-floor is 100% unionised.[4]

The research was carried out between December 1993 and November 1995. During this time, the CarPress management gave the author a free hand to wander around the shop-floor to observe labour processes and informally discuss issues with different employees. In addition, facilities were provided for more structured interviews with approximately 150 shop-floor workers, office workers and managers. Two questionnaires were distributed in October 1994 and November 1995.[5]

Managerial Incorporation and State Control: the beginnings of a New Industrial Relations

When the Llanelli plant formed part of BL and Rover, its management-labour relations were marked by a combination of low trust and guarded mutual respect. Although the factory was not especially militant in respect of its record of official strikes, the shop-floor unions still exerted considerable control. In the post-war British car industry, the growth of trade union power, and in particular local shop steward power, was based on buoyant employment levels and a high consumer demand for cars. Shop stewards and rank and file members were able to exploit this as they became accustomed to management's obsession with avoiding strikes (Marsden *et al*. 1985). Managers were forced to make concessions on questions of fair wages, parity and 'job property rights' in return for high output, the costs of which were passed on to the consumer. Accordingly, as one CarPress convener commented, the real power of the unions lay in their ability to exploit their collective organizational strength by keeping the rank and file in work and maintaining control over their work by periodically executing the 'in-house strike', that is, the go-slow, the work to rule, the overtime ban or the brief sectional walkout.

In March 1989, the new owners of Rover, British Aerospace, sold the Llanelli plant to CarPress. The old Rover management gave way to a qualitatively different regime; the new style was more assertive, more aggressive and more congruent with Fox's (1974) ideal type of unitarist management. The concept of meaningful bargaining and negotiating with trade unions was abandoned in favour of minimal consultation. The shop-floor responded in appropriate fashion with a series of short strikes and walkouts over job security, pensions rights and union recognition. Then, in February 1990, again with only minimal negotiation, the CarPress management introduced a new 'agreement' which harmonized Llanelli's basic wages and conditions with those operating at the company's other UK plants. This had the effect of reducing most basic rates and cutting back on redundancy terms, pensions payments, overtime premia and sick pay.

This distinctly 'macho' management therefore intensified the low-trust relations inherited from Rover. Attacks on union rights and working conditions generated increasing militancy.

A war of attrition continued until September 1993 when the company recruited a new Operations Director and Personnel Manager whose single objective was to secure a radical overhaul of shop-floor working practices.

These two new men were guided by principles which embody the contradictions inherent in contemporary 'human resource management' theory. They regarded any challenge to their right to maintain control and order on the shop-floor as anathema, yet, they were also keen to build a new ethos of shop-floor co-operation and participation with an emphasis upon joint interests between manager and worker. In other words, they envisaged an industrial relations of 'sophisticated unitarism' (Scott 1994) aimed at inhibiting rather than suppressing any dissension.

Even if it were possible, the new management had no intention of dismantling the plant's existing machinery of collective bargaining; instead, the objective was to ensure that the machinery worked in the company's interests. The managers were faced with an autonomous rank and file control, which, as Hyman (1975) has argued, provides the means for workers to more effectively resist the intensive exploitation of labour which develops from the 'rationalisation' of management in modern capitalism. In these circumstances, formal bargaining and disputes procedures deliver important advantages to capital by effectively disarming and demobilising trade union members and imposing a 'peace obligation' which leaves management the prerogative of initiative (1975: 159).

Resurrecting the 'peace obligation' required a number of initiatives aimed at different levels of the union organization. Incorporating the senior stewards came first.

Traditionally, the senior stewards maintained a distant relationship with their full time officials, a situation that reflected the enclosed 'factory consciousness' shaping social action on the CarPress shop-floor. Working with a union bureaucracy sometimes means complying with constraining rules and regulations, complying with policies on trade union law for example, that undermine rank and file control. The new managers desired a shift in attitudes here. They became agents for building a new tripartite co-operation between the company, the senior stewards and their officials. Union Regional officers were drawn into a regular dialogue with senior management; meetings were organised between officers and stewards to enable

discussions on matters such as national agreements and legal procedures for taking industrial action; senior stewards participated in management workshops; and as a result of such activity, the officers and stewards were drawn together towards management's agenda for securing the survival of the plant.

In this way, incorporation into management accompanied incorporation into the union bureaucracy; and for a senior steward, the act of making positive contributions towards company performance and responding favourably to the manager's viewpoint involves the reshaping of more than one social relationship. Unlike his predecessors, the CarPress Personnel Manager began meeting the stewards on a daily basis, sometimes for formal negotiating sessions but more often for informal discussions and 'friendly chats'. This subtle process of soliciting for union co-operation had the effect of usurping rank and file democracy and reversing the steward's line of accountability. CarPress sought a new style of shop steward; somebody who was prepared to act as a transmission belt for management policies and who had the determination to maintain control over the rank and file. In other words, a shop steward representing something akin to business unionism. The Personnel Manager summarised the effect of this:

> We inherited a group of senior stewards who used to be a law unto themselves. They spent too much time doing what the members wanted and they ended up becoming their members' mouthpieces. They failed to carry out their responsibility of member management. But over time, they've become more committed to the management's viewpoint.
>
> Previously, the stewards used to come up to meet me in this office and it would all end up in a slanging match with a lot of shouting and hot air. They used to get a lot of flack from us and we used to get a lot of flack from them. So there would be arguments alright and then they'd go back to their members parading their victories. But nowadays there's less argument up here and much more downstairs between the stewards and their members.

'Downstairs' on the shop-floor the senior stewards did not exactly warm to these changes. Despite a series of Government measures aimed at weakening union membership densities, virtually 100% of the CarPress shop-floor belonged to a union.[6]

These 600 members annually elected 17 TGWU and 13 AEEU shop stewards to the Joint Shop Stewards' Committee (JSSC) —a steward-member ratio of 1:20.[7] The JSSC then elected four conveners or senior stewards. Since the Llanelli plant opened in 1962, this local union hierarchy provided the lines of accountability and democratic rank and file control which so disturbed the new management's vision of a trouble-free industrial relations. The company's attempt to fracture it placed the senior stewards in a difficult position. Their hearts remained close to the members but they realised they would have to make unpopular decisions if they were to stay within the law, stay within the management's agenda and fight for the survival of the plant. Three of them, Barry Edwards, Gethin Rees and Neil Rolfe discussed this with the author:

Neil: The members have always viewed us with some suspicion, mind. That hasn't changed. But yeah, things have got worse. We're placed in a difficult situation. The members think that we're the bastards who sit up here, doing nothing, just sat on our arses. And they think we've all been bought off. So we can't do right can we? We're wankers whatever we do.

Gethin: That's right. And we're now having to police our members a lot more and keep them in check with respect to the law. Many of our members still want to walk out at the drop of a hat whenever there's a problem. But you can't do that anymore and we have to tell them. I know they don't like it but we have to tell them that we're putting ourselves at risk.

Barry: But don't forget there's been dramatic changes around here. For a kick off the plant capacity is down from a peak of 2000 to 800 and that affects your strength. And the Government's legislation has attacked us. But we still have to try and work within it. That's just the reality of it. We have to be careful to protect the union and to protect the members' jobs as well and make sure that the union organization survives.

All three of us have got kids at school. And I for one would not like to see any of them employed in some of the cowboy outfits around Llanelli where the conditions are terrible. CarPress is one of the few major employers left and if it went down it would have a disastrous effect on the town.

Protecting jobs, protecting the union and working within the system. These responsibilities have always characterised the ambiguous position of Britain's senior shop stewards: they are dependent on management, they operate against the background of managerial power and to keep their jobs manageable they have an inevitable interest in 'orderly' industrial relations (Hyman, 1975: 168). Nevertheless, in the current context of 'new realism' in industrial relations it is misleading for some authors to argue (for example, Bratton, 1992: 217) that determined managerial attempts to incorporate shop stewards represent no real threat to their authority or to their trade union organization; as if it were the mere existence of organization that mattered rather than its qualitative nature. The CarPress rank and file were all supportive union members but many perceived their own unions as increasingly impotent in the face of the management's introduction of new working practices aimed at increasing the rate of exploitation. In the first of two questionnaire surveys carried out during the research (October 1994), 59% of the workforce indicated a belief that their unions were ineffective. Many commented on this during interviews and informal discussions. A toolmaker complained:

> The unions here just don't support us anymore, especially the AEEU. All they're doing is looking after the company's interests. They sign agreements with the company without consulting the members at all.

> You see I thought everything was supposed to be negotiated but nothing is these days. Now if the company wants changes to any of our agreements then they change it. All they do is give us 10 days notice and it's done. That's it. Full stop. The union just has no power.

And an assembly shop operator:

> The Tories have taken a lot of the rights away from your union. These days, before you can take any action the conveners we've got in the plant just put the fear of Christ into you before you take a vote. It's not their fault, they're forced into it. They have to tell us before we vote that under the law the company can sack you, the company can do this, that and the other to you. And of course it puts the fear of God into the youngsters.

Some advocates of a 'new industrial relations' attempt to fashion benign alternatives to such disillusion by presumptuously arguing that business unionism and innovations such as 'no strike deals' are becoming popular with trade union members and employers alike because they offer a measure of job security and the prospect of stable, consensual industrial relations (Bassett 1986; Trevor 1988). The problem here is that such arguments tend to ignore workers' accumulated experience of the stark concrete nature of exploitation in capitalist mass production. As Hyman comments, 'strikes are, quite simply, a challenge to the autonomy of managerial control. They are the means by which labour refuses to behave merely as a commodity' (1972: 151). Accordingly, in the first CarPress questionnaire survey (October 1994), although 46% of small groups of specially recruited young teamworkers supported the idea of 'no strike deals', only 12% of all other shop-floor workers did so; 74% opposed the idea. During discussions on these issues, different shop-floor workers articulated strong convictions that particular manifestations of this business unionism represent a transparent threat to customary collective safeguards against the commodification of labour. As one worker put it, 'it all means that you jump on your shovel, you do what they tell you to do, and you lose your liberty.'

Nevertheless, the point was also consistently made that the whole debate is becoming academic: in the workers' own experience, the state has effectively provided British capital with a nation-wide 'no strike deal' through the cumulative obligations contained in the Government's employment and trade union reform legislation.

Of course, some writers would reject such a notion. For example, drawing primarily on different sets of quantitative data, Marsh (1992) and Edwards (1992) suggest that the impact of the legislation on strike activity could be limited compared to determinants such as the business cycle, the political climate and changes in the occupational structure. However, such arguments only consider part of the picture; in particular, their reliance on quantitative analysis obscures the qualitative impact of the changes.

Firstly, they overlook the implications for workers of the highly restrictive definition of what constitutes a legal trade dispute in the 1990s. Secondary action, solidarity action,

political action and crucially, in the context of worker attempts to maintain customary local controls over their work, unofficial action, are all outlawed.[8] Moreover, the sheer complexity of balloting regulations is increasingly making the strike weapon both prohibitive in terms of costs and an impractical means of resolving the many problems that demand immediate action (Labour Research February 1993, August 1993). Secondly, as Nichols argues, just because the laws are not used regularly—in the sense of daily appearances of trade unionists before the courts—does not mean that their impact is slight. Injunctions against some of Britain's most powerful unions and the sequestration of funds might be rare events but when they do occur they make a 'public clatter', so much so, that just the threat of using the law can have a critical psychological impact on organised labour (1990: 45).

These factors inform us of the need to take into account the impact of the anti-union legislation on social action on the shop-floor. In the case of CarPress, the legislation engendered feelings of impotence and defeatism, to the extent that many workers believed the intervention of the state had provided management with a decisive set of controls over institutionalised collective resistance. The following remarks were repeated consistently throughout the factory. A Press Shop Operator:

> I support the unions and I always will do but these days their powers are non-existent. These days we're all governed by the law aren't we? Everything must go through procedure, and even when we've managed that we can't win, the stewards just bring in the full time officials and they never do anything. All these laws, they're all on the company's side.

An Assembly Shop Operator:

> I believe every individual should have the right to strike. It's a basic right. But nowadays strikes seem to be a thing of the past. Not because they are wrong but because there are so many procedures you have to go through before you're allowed to go out. I mean with these Government laws the management just can't be touched, everything seems to be in management's favour. If you put a foot wrong they can seize all your union's assets. It just seems like taking action now is virtually impossible.

Defeatism in some quarters converted into a caustic, trenchant anger in others, an anger which would soon spill over into more 'unofficial' forms of opposition. One worker complained that, 'the management in this plant are nothing but industrial thugs. They've got the law on their side and they use it to the full'. A woman in the assembly shop was more discriminating: 'we've got no union anymore what with the stewards being bought off and with all Thatcher's laws. There just doesn't seem to be anything we can do about it, we've got nothing left. What we've got here is not Victorian times it's bloody Thatcher times. All the management are just Thatcher clones.'

Shortly after his arrival, the CarPress board of directors considered a proposal from the personnel manager for a pendulum arbitration-type 'no strike deal'.[9] In a mirror image of shop-floor sentiments, the board rejected it, believing that the combination of strong management and supportive employment legislation is more likely to provide the prized 'stable industrial relations' than a pendulum that can swing both ways. However, by themselves, these conditions do not completely suppress resistance, they only reshape it into alternative forms. The CarPress management soon realised that fostering a more pro-company, law abiding attitude amongst the senior stewards would be ineffectual without also addressing the plant's historical legacy of rank and file control on the shop-floor. The senior stewards represented the members during the formal collective bargaining process but the members and their local stewards exerted their own controls on the production line. It is in relation to this more informal wielding of collective power that many CarPress workers were keen to stress that, 'we are the union—not the officials or the stewards—the shop-floor is the union'.

In the winter of 1993, the company inserted into the annual wage bargaining process the package of new, labour intensifying working practices. The management was confident of dissipating senior shop steward resistance to these innovations through careful, assiduous negotiating but it recognised that it faced a more serious oppositional challenge from the rank and file, chiefly from the more experienced workers. Drawing on the plant's historical traditions of low-trust relations and conveniently leaving aside its pretensions to 'sophisticated unitarism', the management opted to induce this change through a mobilisation of fear, and in particular, by publicly

punishing a number of individual scapegoats for the shop-floor's 'spirit of opposition'.

Trust, Treachery and Class Struggle at the Point of Production

First and foremost of these scapegoats was an assembly shop senior steward named Ieuan Thomas. Ieuan had been a TGWU representative in the plant for 23 years, culminating in 8 years as a convener. He came to union activism out of an intense concern for the health and safety of his workmates. In the 1960s and 70s, compensation for industrial injury in manufacturing tended to be restricted to the more tangible and immediate impairments; slow developing injuries, such as those associated with continual limb movement or work on constantly vibrating machinery, often went unreported. Ieuan became increasingly disturbed about the rising incidence of recurrent debilitating limb conditions amongst his colleagues, conditions such as vibration white finger and repetitive strain injury, and he resented the cynical way in which his shop-floor managers turned a blind eye to this. He became a health and safety representative, immersed himself in the fine print of the laws and regulations governing industrial injury and compensation, and then commenced filing claims on behalf of his members. Over the years he achieved many notable successes through a combination of scrupulous research and personal representation at meetings with management and union lawyers and with doctors at medical appeal tribunals.

This was the original basis of Ieuan's union activism, a resolute attachment and sense of duty to his members and his class, a relationship that was sustained during his later role as a shop convener. It provides the quintessence of something that Beynon (1984) refers to as a dialectical social process involving the construction of strong mutual bonds of respect and understanding between the steward and the member. He attracted none of the cynicism recently encountered by other senior stewards in the plant, indeed, many members revered him, variously describing him as, 'a clever man, just too clever for this management, but also too good for them', 'a man you could depend upon, he would always look after your interests', and, 'a real shop steward, someone who stuck up for all the members in the plant not just his own'.

In the context of the company's attempts to insert a divide between the senior stewards and the more militant rank and file—by incorporating the former—Ieuan Thomas constituted a problem for management. He was able to mobilise principled and authentic legitimising arguments in the negotiating process which consistently opposed company interests. This was not the new 'business unionism'. Management's idea of a virtuous union activist is now any individual who is prepared to break the link of accountability between the member and the representative. In contrast, Ieuan's motives, interests and personal vocabulary fully corresponded with the rank and file's; he perfectly encapsulated the model shop steward, an individual who is able to act in spontaneous rapport with his constituents (Armstrong *et al.*, 1981: 36). This conflict of interests came to a head during negotiations over the new working practices.

A number of elements in the company's proposals were anti-thetical to shop-floor interests. As well as further eroding conditions of employment such as sick pay and holiday pay, the company proposed to substitute continuous bell to bell working for payment by results, it proposed to introduce management-led continuous improvements to continually improve rates of labour exploitation and it sought a deepening and widening of the labour flexibility process, primarily through teamworking. As the latter practice constituted the most significant change, the management spent all of 1993 pursuing the consent of the senior stewards through informal discussions and joint management-union workshops on the subject. This strategy proved effective for some but it had little impact on Ieuan Thomas. He understood that teamworking amounted to little more than the redistribution of extra tasks amongst fewer workers. This knowledge erupted into angry confrontation during a negotiating session in December 1993:

> I remember facing up to the Managing Director, head on, nose to nose. I tell you, a cigarette paper couldn't have separated us. There was this real heat being generated between us. And I remember saying to him, 'I'm telling you straight, teamworking is not coming to this plant if it hurts my members. I'm not selling my members' jobs.' And that's how it ended. The MD just stood up, smiled, held out his hand, shook mine and said, 'its been a pleasure doing business with you leuan.' The next thing I knew I was given an ultimatum—stand down or be sacked.

The following day, an indignant shop-floor held a mass meeting and voted overwhelmingly for strike action. But this threat was soon incapacitated in the face of authentic management warnings of widespread dismissals, the lack of support from some other senior stewards, and crucially, Ieuan's personal reluctance to place his members' jobs in jeopardy. He therefore decided to stand down from office. Despite this, many of his sympathizers in the assembly shop maintained an unofficial overtime ban for 3 months.

Six months later, in the early summer of 1994, after a long period of intensive negotiations, the remaining senior stewards felt confident enough to recommend a draft working practices agreement to the membership. However, both TGWU and AEEU members rejected it by four to one and attempted, section by section, to implement a plant-wide, unofficial overtime ban. The new management was incensed at this explicit rejection of its authority but it also realised that without the support of the senior stewards and the union bureaucracy the fragmentary, disorganised nature of the shop-floor's resistance rendered them easy meat. The Operations Director belligerently explained:

> They didn't have the brains to come out and have a go at the company *en masse*. If they'd done that we wouldn't have known what to do. But instead they came to us in groups. The maintenance group came to us saying they were refusing to work to the new contract and threatening to implement their overtime ban. So we immediately turned around and gave them a 15 minute warning to withdraw the threat or they'd be sacked. Of course, they all capitulated.
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> Then what happens? The toolroom workers came in, they came out with the same threats and so we gave them the same 15 minute warning and they capitulated. Consequently, the operators were left by themselves and they had to give up because their strategy was to leave it to the skilled groups to come out and halt the whole of production. But I'm afraid the skilled groups were stupid enough to raise themselves above the parapet and they got their heads shot off.

The company then turned the screw decisively. The Group's Managing Director spent a week at the plant

'counselling' small groups of workers and urging them to abandon their resistance; representatives of Rover threatened the shop-floor with the withdrawal of work and immediate redundancies; and finally, with the explicit connivance of right wing union officials, the plant management sent to the home of every employee a written ultimatum to sign the new labour contract or face instant dismissal. The workforce had no choice but to submit. The agreement was signed in August 1994.

The company's problems did not end there, however. Signatures placed on contracts under duress do not denote support for their contents. Workers in many areas of the plant remained bitterly resentful at the management's dictatorial and arrogant stance. This manifested itself in a variety of different forms of informal resistance: some sections maintained discrete 'go-slows' and 'work to rules'; individuals might refuse to work overtime on the basis of sudden personal or medical problems; machines would develop mysterious disabling faults; quality defects would go unreported; and so on. The management created a cycle of discontent by responding in kind with frequent threats of dismissal and repeated use of the disciplinary procedure.

In consequence, manufacturing performance deteriorated. The plant used a 'break even' gross efficiency bench mark figure of 133% as a basic performance target. By October 1994, this figure had fallen to 128% for the first time in many years. CarPress decided to act swiftly to reverse this decline.

CarPress had expropriated Ieuan Thomas's union position yet he retained a significant influence. In his own assembly shop, many members still came to him for advice and to discuss ways of combating management's actions. He remained a kind of 'champion of the rank and file', if no longer an elected one. As well as causing continuing displeasure in management circles, Ieuan's sway and popularity on the shop-floor generated resentment amongst some senior stewards. For example, during a regional TGWU inquiry into the circumstances surrounding his removal from office, two of these stewards complained that his continuing participation in union affairs was resulting in their being 'hounded by the membership to secure concessions which were almost impossible'. This rank and file pressure clearly constituted a problem for management yet its severance from

the union hierarchy, something the management had assiduously cultivated, also provided propitious conditions for the isolation and destruction of its protagonists.

The problem of overtime provided the flashpoint to precipitate this. Beynon (1984) observed that on the assembly lines of the 1960s and 1970s, the allocation of overtime became an important aspect of the conflict of control between the shop steward and the supervisor. Put crudely, workers in general needed their extra hours for extra money to help control domestic debts; foremen also needed extra production hours but they liked to exercise control over who worked it. In many plants, this contradiction was subsequently managed through informal agreement and evolving custom and practice. However, the same conflict of control has again become acute in the 1990s. Whilst the contemporary mass culture of credit card consumerism intensifies worker debt and the general demand for overtime, the simultaneous trend towards a more immediate factory production for consumer demand places a higher premium on managerial control over the allocation of working time.

Prior to the new agreement, overtime on the CarPress shop-floor was distributed on a rota system managed by the shop stewards. In normal circumstances, no operator could be offered more than 'two shots' of extra working during any one week thus ensuring general equity and protecting individuals from overwork. Management disliked this system for three reasons. Firstly, it interfered with managerial prerogatives; secondly, it prevented foremen from choosing their favoured, most productive workers; and thirdly, it frustrated the new principle of working extra time—just in time—for immediate market requirements.

Accordingly, the new working practices agreement placed overtime allocation firmly back into management's hands. And as a result of this, extra working hours became the exclusive property of both the 'blue-eyed boys' and other more reluctant workers who, against their will, were routinely requested at short notice to work on at the end of their shift.

During the last week of October 1994, the rank and file tried to put a stop to this development by implementing another unofficial overtime ban. By midweek, the management responded in turn by asking all individuals on the shop-floor to indicate in writing whether or not they were prepared to

comply with their new contract of employment. In the resulting indecision and confusion, a group of 105 assembly shop operators decided to hold an impromptu shop meeting. There was nothing unusual in this. Historically, whenever the shop had a specific problem, the operators would meet together to openly discuss it. In some circumstances the company might sanction either a paid or unpaid meeting in advance but far more common was the unofficial, spontaneous assembly where the members would finish their business in a matter of minutes and then send their senior steward to gain retrospective managerial authorisation for an unpaid meeting. By giving their tacit consent to this tradition, the shop-floor managers became assimilated into it, to the extent that they could read the minds of their operators, they always knew when a meeting was likely to be called. Things were no different on this occasion, they fully expected the operators to gather together. What was abnormal this time, however, was that the management was rather pleased to see it happen.

An amendment to the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act introduced in 1992 established that an employer wishing to dismiss an employee who is taking part in unofficial industrial action no longer has to be concerned about selective dismissals or re-engagements.[10] As Income Data Services have confirmed, 'he can select those employees he considers to be organisers of the strike or general trouble makers in order to get rid of them. Furthermore, there is nothing in the Act to prevent him from deliberately provoking unofficial industrial action in order to bring these dismissals about'. The same amendment also prevents unions from defending members dismissed in this way by removing immunity from proceedings in tort in respect of industrial action.[11]

These changes became engrained in the minds of certain CarPress senior managers, particularly so since they also came to realise that, under the terms of the law, the shop-floor's tradition of holding short unofficial meetings constituted unofficial industrial action. The time had arrived to translate this knowledge into action. Two minutes after the CarPress assembly shop operators assembled together, the Head of Production suddenly arrived on the scene and suspended all 105 operators. Over the following three days they were each called for interrogation before a disciplinary hearing in a local hotel. As a result of this 'kangaroo court'—as many workers

described it—the management decided that the decision of some workers to exercise their traditional right of collective discussion for just two minutes constituted unofficial industrial action and 'gross misconduct'. Forty seven workers, mainly shop stewards, rank and file dissidents, women and disabled workers were dismissed; the remaining 58 were handed final warnings.

The workforce was stunned. Not surprisingly, Ieuan Thomas was one of the dismissed. A week later he told the author:

> This was a management set up—it was an entrapment. I hate to use the word but I was watching a programme on the telly last night about prostitution and the word entrapment kept being used, it hit me in the face, that's what happened with us. It was like policemen catching prostitutes by asking favours, asking for sex. The management knew the concerns of the plant, they knew our traditions and they knew people would respond with a meeting. It was all over in 2 minutes. The management set us up, they pounced and sent us home in disarray.

The Personnel Manager was interviewed during the same week. In normal circumstances, these managers of factory politics tend to act as 'dealers in ideology' (Nichols and Beynon 1977), seeking to obscure the harsh fact of capitalist exploitation by smooth talking those who have the patience to listen into believing that life in a factory is essentially harmonious and trouble-free. But on this occasion the factory had reached a state of crisis; nerves were on edge, adrenalin was flowing and the mask dropped:

> I know you outsiders think that these disputes happen by accident, that they're all the result of individuals making unfortunate mistakes. But you're wrong I'm afraid. They're often planned. We plan these battles and so do the other side. I tell you, some of the operators down there are anarchists, they believe that they are the ones to control the shop-floor. We were determined to take these groups out. I don't like talking about industrial relations as if it's a war, but this *is* a war as far as we are concerned. And this was the big one, this was the big battle, it was the final Alamein for both sides. And we had to win.

> This wasn't any accident. It was planned strategy, we were planning it and so were the anarchists. This factory is not a mini police state but it was absolutely essential that we got rid of the militants, the obstructionists. You cannot implement change, you can't have progress with these people around.
>
> We knew they'd go off on an unofficial dispute, and of course we knew that their union officials couldn't support them on this any more. And they're fools. If it were an official dispute we could still have sacked them but we would have been forced by law to sack the lot of them. And maybe we would have done. But the laws on unofficial action allow you to select who you want back and who you want to dismiss. And we don't have to say why! They're all fools, and they walked right into it. But I'll tell you something. It's concentrated minds down there all right. We've got the bastards working at last!

The 47 dismissals were subject to a final appeal procedure. The company appeared to prejudge this by immediately employing 60 young temporary workers, who, after a two week period of intense coaxing and heavy-handed supervision, were proclaimed in Stakhanovite fashion as paragons of effort and high productivity. Needless to say, all 60 were shunned as 'scab labour' by the rest of the workforce. During this period, 21 appeals against dismissal failed. CarPress reluctantly re-employed 26 workers in order to dissipate the potential for strike action and, since a good proportion of these were women, to avoid tribunal applications for sex discrimination. However, it made sure that the remaining 21 were useful scapegoats. Ieuan Thomas headed these. They also included four shop stewards and some of the more vocal dissidents amongst the rank and file. Others were workers with an absenteeism record due to intermittent disabilities sustained by the continuous operation of heavy metal finishing machinery for most of their working lives.[12]

As little as ten years ago, such an attack on the shop-floor's moral order would have been countered by immediate strike action. But this is not 1984, it is 1994. If you are a trade unionist attempting to defend yourself, 'Big Brother' really is watching you. Two days after the initial sackings, a meeting of the plant's TGWU membership voted overwhelmingly for an all-out strike if any one of the appeals failed. But the intimate

collectivism of the mass meeting is qualitatively different to the loneliness of the secret ballot. The essential logic of the Government's balloting legislation is to both debilitate the collective power of the mass and extinguish the immediacy of workers' anger. It removes men and women from the collective security of the mass meeting and places them, after a suitable cooling off period, into individualistic insecurity, into the domestic environment of the debt-ridden consumer.

The cumulative practical ramifications of the legislation ensured that the CarPress rank and file would not get their legally sanctioned, heavily scrutinised and individualised vote for nearly 3 months. Firstly, the legal imposition of postal ballots in 1993 placed decisive time consuming state and employer controls over union organization and strategy.[13] Secondly, support from the TGWU regional officials was, in any case, lukewarm. They were well aware that the union faced possible fines and the sequestration of funds since the law no longer gave immunity against organizations supporting workers who are dismissed for taking unofficial action. Moreover, despite the protests from some groups of its rank and file, the AEEU Executive Committee decided that since none of its 190 members were sacked they could not offer any traditional solidarity action.

During the second week of December 1994, the plant's 421 TGWU members had their first secret ballot. In keeping with contemporary management's perverse notions of what counts as legitimate workplace democracy, the membership was bombarded with continual warnings of the likely loss of contracts and jobs in the event of a strike. Immediately before the vote, each member received a personal letter from the CarPress Chairman threatening the loss of Rover contracts and instant dismissals if any strike went ahead. And it was Christmas. Ieuan Thomas was pessimistic:

> These laws are so clever. You'll have the members receiving their ballot forms at home, they'll have their wives and husbands looking over their shoulders, they'll have their kids bawling for Christmas presents and they've got their mortgages. And worst of all they've got fear.

Despite these intense pressures, a small majority of members voted to strike. But it counted for nothing. The state-

approved scrutineers discovered that some ballot forms had been despatched to a number of retired members. The result was nullified. In a rearranged ballot in mid-January, a full 3 months after the sackings, a dispirited CarPress TGWU membership produced a tied stalemate; 83, by this time apathetic members, did not even bother to vote. Amidst anger, despair and resentment at what many activists perceived as growing evidence of collusion between union officers and management, a relieved union bureaucracy announced that the dispute was over.

Discussion: Structural Impediments to Collective Resistance

We have seen how the capitalist state can profoundly influence the processes by which employers seek advantageous shifts in the nature of contemporary employment relations. Most conspicuously, the sheer weight of Government legislation has created an ideological power sufficient to decisively reduce worker self-confidence whilst its particular concrete interventions may seriously undermine rank and file attempts to maintain a sense of moral order on the shop-floor.

However, this is not a solitary influence; anti-trade union legislation can be debilitating because it is exploited within distinctive contemporary political and economic conditions which are advantageous to capital in so many ways. These same conditions also provide the framework for an interplay of important additional factors which together may further influence the outcomes of class conflict in capital's favour. At CarPress, the most significant of these were management's manipulation of the perpetual fear of unemployment in South Wales; the political ramifications of the new customer-supplier relations; and both the political isolation of, and divisions within, the shop-floor rank and file. Starting with the latter, these factors will now be briefly considered.

Isolation and division

Virtually since the CarPress plant opened in 1962, the shop-floor's ideology of resistance derived exclusively from the practical experience of local class conflict, struggles over work rates, seniority, discipline, and so on. It constituted a classic example of Beynon's (1984) 'factory-class consciousness',

bolstered by expanding product markets and the self-assurance that comes with job security. Autonomous shop stewards ruled the roost; they felt no need to build relationships with the union bureaucracy, with external political organization, or even with shop stewards in other plants.

This sense of separateness was given a further twist by its Welshness. For example, during one interview, Ieuan Thomas reminisced about the activities of senior stewards on the old BL/Rover combine committees in the 1970s and 80s and how the Llanelli stewards would sometimes communicate privately with each other in the Welsh language to prevent their English colleagues from eavesdropping on their independent strategic discussions; when the members donated money to the miners during the 1984 strike many were essentially supporting Welsh miners; and when the new CarPress managers arrived in 1989, they were not regarded as typical agents of control but as something more alien, as 'English barrow boys', as people who, as another operator put it, 'being English have no regard for the Welsh and its culture'. These Welsh identities were therefore built on a strong sense of difference as well as pride. As one woman commented when asked about teamworking: 'all that is putting worker against worker. The bosses don't understand that we're not like that in Wales. We're real workers, we're Welsh workers and we stand up for ourselves!'

In consequence, when its rights at work and union organization came under intense management attack in the more competitive and insecure market conditions of the 1990s, the Llanelli workforce found itself isolated; it had no established means of securing solidarity support in any decisive form from outside the factory gates. Crucially, the Joint Shop Stewards Committee failed to build close relationships with stewards at other CarPress plants in England, many of whom were dismissed as weak and poorly organised. Moreover, as indicated earlier in this article, the senior stewards' customary rejection of positive and constructive relations with the union officialdom in South Wales and beyond was only eventually reversed on management's terms. Yet, as Spencer (1989: 73) argues, adverse political and economic conditions dictate that shop-floor organization will not successfully engage in struggle without the support of official union structures as well as combine committees and branch networks, despite the political constraints involved. The CarPress stewards therefore failed to

develop the necessary contacts and relationships beyond the workplace. The corollary of this was that solidarity support was restricted to the well meaning petitions and speeches of local Labour MPs, local authority dignitaries, trades councils and church leaders. But as the miners discovered in 1991, an outbreak of public moral indignation is no substitute for action.

Traditional Marxist analysis insists that the trend towards homogenisation of work increasingly unifies the working class, an argument that tends to minimise the resilience of intra-class divisions and the impact upon work of the wider social division of labour concerning race and gender (Thompson, 1989). Although CarPress employed no ethnic minority workers and the most significant gender conflicts were those between male supervisors and female operators, other less conspicuous divisions emerged on the shop-floor sufficient to weaken unification and solidarity.

The two workforce attitude surveys (October 1994 and November 1995) detected attitudinal differences between older and younger workers and particularly, between workers with different lengths of service, on issues associated with seniority, teamworking and industrial relations. Less experienced workers tended to be less oppositional; and although their attitudes rarely completely contradicted those of the more experienced workforce, the relatively higher number of 'undecided' respondents amongst this group reflected a greater degree of apathy and passivity towards change. Many had a different set of priorities. The view of a young teamworker in the Honda section was both typical and instructive here:

> I think there's one big difference between younger people like myself and the older workers at CarPress. The older men are all too set in their ways. They've been used to coming here for three basic reasons: marriage, kids and mortgages. They've been used to nothing else, nothing's ever changed in their lives for twenty years or more. But me, I'm young, I'm not interested in that crap, I'm interested in other things, you know? The three things I'm interested in are cars, beer and women. That's all. So to tell you the truth, I don't worry about changes at work here, it really doesn't bother me. I'll do anything to get the money into my hands. The only thing that bothers me is that I'm able to spend it to have a bit of fun before its too late!

Such values reflect the relative lack of class awareness amongst young people in the 1990s which in turn is a function both of contemporary adolescent youth cultures and the growth of youth unemployment (Bradley 1996). Of course, these values also create a new set of headaches for managers; but their immediate problem, in the brownfield context of the management of change, is to separate the 'experienced obstructionists' from the 'inexperienced submissives'. The management therefore purposefully created age and experience-based shop-floor divisions by concentrating recruitment on younger people, whether on a permanent or temporary basis, separating these workers off into discrete teams and then nurturing pro-company, pro-customer attitudes by, as one quality manager put it, 'coaxing them all the time, bringing them along, keeping our eye on them, making sure they are looking at the customer' s needs.'

The historically fragmentary nature of autonomous shop steward control contributed to further divisions. Craft and seniority demarcations, the disparities of piecework and the different personal qualities and political positions of the stewards, together impart different degrees of local control over work. At CarPress and elsewhere in the auto industry it created a situation where, 'work groups were thus competing against each other to maintain their pay positions as well as against managerial control, so that their aspirations were sectional and fragmentary' (Marsden *et al*. 1985: 145). For example, the divide between the CarPress assembly and press shops was not merely technological or spatial. The press shop workers tended to display a more macho image and looked down on their assembly shop colleagues, 'the press shop employs real men, we're handling 800 tons of steel a week', one operator typically explained. Increasing labour mobility was beginning to undermine this divide but even so, the two groups rarely communicated with each other. This even extended to union organization. Although both groups of operators were TGWU members, for historical reasons they insisted on maintaining two separate union branches. One senior steward commented that, 'sometimes it's like a "Berlin Wall" between the two branches.' Political divisions such as this continually hindered the attempts of the more progressive shop stewards to mount effective plant-wide campaigns.

Management by fear

Shop-floor isolationism and division therefore undermined the construction of a disciplined, broad collective resistance necessary to oppose managerial prerogatives and particular acts of management aggression. But the attendant discord and defeatism were also a consequence of an environment of fear. CarPress exploited two particular aspects of this: a fear of the dole and a fear of the customer. As outlined at the beginning of this article, Llanelli has suffered consistently severe unemployment for many years. The fear of job loss, particularly among CarPress's young workers, was acute. Hardly an interview or more informal conversation went by without the subject being raised in one form or another, particularly in relation to managerial attitudes. A toolmaker characteristically remarked:

> Yeah, unemployment's had a real impact here. As far as we see things the days of full employment are going fast. A lot of the youngsters in Llanelli have never had a job at all. We've been lucky here mind but we're fighting to keep ours now. And really all these changes and practices that have been forced upon us all boil down to that. They all boil down to the threat of unemployment. That's how the company has got away with it.

CarPress exploited local labour market conditions in a number of ways in its attempt to secure a compliant workforce. Firstly, although for some the fear of unemployment may remain abstract for as long as the jobless remain outside the factory gates (Fevre 1989), attitudes change if the gates are opened. By steadily increasing its utilisation of young temporary workers, CarPress harnessed the fears and hopes of Llanelli's experienced young unemployed whilst simultaneously undermining the security of its permanent workforce in the pursuance of higher labour productivity. Secondly, the proposition that any workers displaying the temerity to oppose managerial prerogatives would be likely to join the ranks of the unemployed became part of the natural vocabulary of the shop-floor supervisors. In some respects, this was little different to the employers' use of Roy's (1980) 'fear stuff' tactics to prevent organised labour opposition in the American South, twenty years ago. As one woman in the assembly shop said, their habitual retort that, 'you either work the way I tell you or its down the road for you—there's another 500 where you came from', tends to sap shop-floor

self-assurance when repeated often enough, especially inside factories that are continually fighting for survival. Thirdly, this is particularly so when management has sufficient confidence to prosecute the threat. As another worker commented on his questionnaire (November 1995):

> Since the termination of employment of 21 individuals the company has ruled by fear and is inflicting a dog eat dog atmosphere on the shop-floor. All attempts to make the operator feel more a part of the company are an affront to our intelligence. You are a clock number full stop. When they shout "shit!" you jump on the shovel.

Product markets also connect with managerial control strategies in ways which restrain worker resistance. Since CarPress's Llanelli plant opened in 1962 its organizational ethos was built around the belief that 'quantity is king'; success was measured solely in terms of approximate fulfilment of a weekly quota of parts to Rover's main car assembly plants. Intense global competition, contractualisation and a more accurate synchronization of product supply with demand undermined this ethos and placed a new onus on the 'needs of the customer'. That is, the plant had to satisfy the exact supply requirements of the final assembler—in terms of both quantity and quality—on a daily basis. The impact of these changes on worker consciousness was profound. The CarPress Personnel Manager:

> If we'd sacked 21 operators from this plant as near as 12 months ago we would have seen an all out strike here, with a 100% vote, there's no doubt about that. It just shows how attitudes have changed. We really have worked on that. We've made the shop-floor far more aware of what it means to break your employment contract. And I think we've successfully bred a new culture of customer awareness, we've made the shop-floor aware of where the customer lies in the chain and we've made them start to think about being responsible for their actions.

It has become standard practice for the final assemblers in the chain of mass production to intervene directly in the management of their first tier suppliers in order to secure maximum quality, minimum prices, acceptable working practices and crucially, a risk-free, continuous supply of parts. If

the latter is placed in jeopardy, these interventions may become more threatening. For example, during a number of the overtime bans described above, Rover sent teams of purchasing, supplies and logistics personnel to the CarPress plant to organise contingency plans for maintaining production. These personnel also spent time on the shop-floor cajoling operators into submission, warning them they were placing their jobs at risk. During the crucial new working practices dispute in 1994, Rover managers suddenly arrived in the press shop and threatened to permanently remove their press dies. This decisively affected its outcome. One operator told the author:

> The management told us that unless we accepted the package on the same day our pay rise and jobs would be taken away. And they'd done a good job you see, bringing the Rover boys down. They were really putting the frighteners on. We've taken on about a hundred new young lads here and they threatened them all with the dole.

So the strike-breaking interventions of the customer can have a sobering effect in particular circumstances. But such actions are merely single, albeit unfamiliar, manifestations of a more pervasive and malignant customer influence. Many CarPress workers blamed management's aggression, its introduction of new working practices and their own inability to frustrate this on the new customer prerogatives. Indeed, as one inspector intimated, the ramifications of the contemporary imbalance of power between the producer and the customer were embedded in the shop-floor's collective consciousness:

> Attitudes have changed on the shop-floor alright. There's this real realisation that if you go on strike your customer will get hit and just get up and go somewhere else. This is a real change. There's definitely a strong awareness of this especially among the younger workers on the line.

Moreover, the construction of an additional, more intimate social relationship between the teamworker and the customer provided another corrupting influence on shop-floor solidarity. CarPress sought to pervert customary notions of workplace democracy and instil a new sense of personal discipline by substituting team responsibility to the customer for traditional collective accountability. The views of two young teamworkers

supplying Honda and Toyota reflected the success of this strategy amongst some groups:

> I've built up a sort of loyalty with Honda, I don't know, it just seems to come down to pride. I am much happier here, I'm more involved. And loyalty makes you feel guilty some times if you make a mistake, it kind of makes you feel more responsible for the job.

Another:

> Oh yeah, we're directly involved with the customer all the time. I mean if there's quality problems with the parts the Toyota management might ring us up direct, senior management sometimes, and we might ring them. And they call us by our first names. So this makes you very careful about the job. You don't want to let them down. You're always watching what's going on, watching what you're doing, because its obvious, it's your job that's on the line.

This ideological dimension to the enhancement of management control follows contemporary developments elsewhere in factories subject to these new customer supplier relations (Delbridge *et al.* 1992; Oliver and Wilkinson 1992). Moreover, it is not in itself especially new. For example, Pignon and Querzola's analysis of work organizational changes in the American telecommunications industry two decades ago discerned evolving team-based principles aimed at modifying the social form of work in ways which both provided workers a measure of trust and induced a new accountability to the customer. In this environment, 'employees are no longer confronted with the boss as the person they are responsible to but rather with their customers and with the market' (1976: 75). However, qualitative ideological differences emerge when these new relationships are placed into the highly disciplined, closely supervised, low trust social relations of lean, mass production. As the above examples testify, a worker's perception of the customer may take on a new dimension in the context of the different ways in which contemporary customer supplier relations act to circumscribe shop-floor resistance. Significantly, despite the plant's immediate legacy of a classic Tayloristic culture, 81% of CarPress's shop-floor workers indicated in the second questionnaire survey (November 1995) that they

thought about the requirements of the external customer as they carried out their work; 52% indicated 'most of the time', only 13% indicated 'never'. Perhaps this does denote the emergence of positive attitudes towards product quality but such customer awareness also reflects the power of a new alienating hegemony on the shop-floor: a customer hegemony thriving on fear of retribution as much as customer satisfaction. The participative ideology of TQM may seek to obscure these processes but it is this real fear and insecurity which underlie the current fashion for 'customer care'.

Conclusion

So much of current labour process analysis focuses upon managerial questions: the extent to which new management techniques in the UK are different from old management techniques, or different from practice in other competing capitalist economies; or, whether the emerging restructured work organizations are fully functional, part-functional or dysfunctional. Labour resistance in its decisive, organised form is no longer a subject of interest; the process of change itself is not problematic. Where the standpoint of labour is considered it is more often placed into an analytical framework of advanced modernity rather than advanced capitalism, where subjectivity and conflicts over individual identity count for more than traditional resistance against a subordinating capitalist class.

In contrast, this article demonstrates that by putting labour back into industrial sociology and recognising that the essential conditions for resistance and misbehaviour are still present at the workplace (Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995: 629), we find that managerial attempts to restructure work and employment relations can encounter certain difficulties. To put this another way, class struggle from above may be accompanied by class struggle from below. If the new management initiatives constitute rational capitalist attempts to intensify rates of labour exploitation then we must expect worker resistance, including traditional collective forms. At CarPress for example, despite a pervasive fear of management, despite an ineffective and uncertain union leadership and despite the many impediments against taking official forms of industrial action, the implementation of new working practices was attended by an intense rank and file struggle against the employer's objectives.

This conflict highlights the superficial nature of the ideology of consent which pervades class relations in contemporary manufacturing. Whilst, theoretically, such new practices as teamworking and continuous improvement rely upon cooperation and high trust relations on the shop-floor, workers' actual experience of effort intensification, stress, fear and insecurity will ensure the reproduction of the same low trust relations inherited from Taylorist work organization. In response to this, managements at many mass production factories, struggling in ever more competitive global markets, are coming to realise that securing shop-floor cooperation does not always require trust-building measures; 'cooperation' through coercion may suffice in the short term at least, provided environmental conditions are favourable. At CarPress, the distinctive economic and political conditions of the current period brought about such an environment. It allowed management to exploit the different processes of shop steward incorporation; the legal interventions of the capitalist state; pervasive job insecurity; the new customer relationships; and internal class divisions, all in ways which weakened shop-floor resistance.

The 'management of change' at many brownfield plants progresses on this basis. For a good number of workers, the 'New Industrial Relations' involves a systematic suppression of rank and file dissent, and for those who do not respond to this treatment, the removal of certain basic rights: the right to work, the right to participate in decision-making at work and the right of freedom of association.

In these circumstances, although organised forms of collective working class resistance will continue wherever possible, their efficacy may remain critically restricted until environmental conditions change. On this last point, Nichols (1980) emphasises how recent history informs us that the development of socio-political forms of control over workers, whether 'hard' or 'soft', is not characterised by any inevitable, unilinear progression: 'hard', coercive forms of employer and state control may co-exist with 'soft' policies of incorporation, the balance between the two depending, *inter alia*, on perceptions of prevailing trade union strength. Therefore, the balance of power between employers and organised labour will not inevitably swing back to the latter in some natural process of political oscillation. Instead, a change in the economic and political fortunes of the working class is something that must

be assiduously worked and fought for by progressive trade unionists and socialists alike.

In the meantime, the underlying tensions and conflicts that accompany the contradiction between the contemporary ideology of worker commitment and the harsh reality of labour exploitation in lean production will continue:

> All changes have been forced through in an atmosphere of threats, intimidation and above all, fear. All talk of teamworking, co-operation, etc., has proved to be nothing but empty rhetoric. The sad fact is that management now behave in a way that is draconian, dictatorial and anti-union. This of course they are able to sustain with the support of oppressive labour laws and with a workforce that is captive owing to mass unemployment. The sad fact is that a management that is unchallenged will be unchallenged in making bad decisions. (*Press Shop Operator, Questionnaire Comment, November 1995*).

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Notes

1. The town's official unemployment rate fluctuated between 12-20% throughout most of the 1980s and early 1990s. In 1991, 43% of Llanelli's 16-64 year olds were either unemployed or economically inactive. Moreover, 36% of 16-20 year olds were either unemployed or registered on Government employment schemes; 40% of the town's young males were in this position. (Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, 1991 Census, County report, Dyfed, Parts I & 2).
2. Many auto assemblers in the West are moving towards exploiting a pyramidal structure of suppliers, as practised in Japan. Rings of first-tier, second-tier, third-tier, and up to ten-tiers of suppliers in the production chain surround the final assembler or buyer, a structure which facilitates the operation of just-in-time production and which requires the buyer to maintain close control over the activities of its different suppliers (Kenney and Florida 1993; Sayer 1986).
3. The gender composition of the workforce comprised 718 men and just 45 women (of whom 25 were shop-floor operators). These figures exemplify a gender bias which is typical for the auto industry in the UK. The majority of workers had been employed at the plant for more than 10 years. However, despite the workforce reductions, twenty two percent were aged under 30 and 28% had less than 5 years service. In addition, during the process of the struggle described in this article, CarPress employed 60 young temporary operators; and by the end of 1995, the company was preparing to take on another 200 young people on temporary contracts.

4. The shop-floor union structure comprised one TGWU branch in the press shop covering 200 production operators, a second TGWU branch in the assembly shop covering 240 operators, and an AEEU branch covering 190 skilled workers. The coexistence of two TGWU branches in the plant was an outcome of the maintenance of split loyalties following the merger between the NUVB (National Union of Vehicle Builders) and the TGWU; ex-NUVB members in the assembly shop succeeded in securing separate branch autonomy.
5. The interviews were not tape recorded because management believed this would cause a walk-out. Instead, the author took extensive notes and minutes of every interview and placed these onto tape at the end of each day. Where names are given to individuals in this article these are all fictitious.
   In the first questionnaire survey (October 1994), 572 questionnaires were distributed and 387 returned a response rate of 68%. In the second survey (November 1995), 630 questionnaires were distributed and 533 returned—a response rate of 85%.
6. The Government launched a legislative assault on the closed shop in the 1980, 1982, 1988 and 1990 Employment Acts. It is now effectively illegal. The Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act (1993) attempts to reduce both membership densities and union finances by forcing unions to secure their members' approval for continuance of check-off payments every three years. The Government assumes that some members will stop paying because of administrative shortcomings, apathy or personal finance problems (Labour Research, August 1993).
7. The numbers of trade union members per union representative in British workplaces varies directly with the size of the establishment. In 1990, stewards in establishments with 500-999 employees represented, on average, 27 employees (Millward et al. 1992). The 1:20 ratio at CarPress reflects the strength of union organization at the plant.
8. The 1990 Employment Act seeks to prevent unofficial industrial action by forcing unions to take positive steps to bring such action to an end. In addition, the 1990 Act (and more detailed amendments to the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act) allows employers to selectively dismiss individual employees who participate in such action (Welch 1991; IDS Employment Law Handbook). New definitions of a legal trade dispute established in the 1980, 1982 and 1990 Employment Acts outlaw secondary, solidarity and political action. Together these constitute the most devastating of the Conservative's legal changes. The total prohibition of solidarity action is in breach of the International Labour organization's Conventions on labour standards and is unique in the Western industrialised countries (Hendy 1991).
9. The practice of pendulum arbitration is central to a number of the no strike deals signed by the EETPU in the 1980s. Put simply, it involves an arbitrator finding wholly in favour of either the employer or the union side when agreement by negotiation cannot be reached.
10. Sections 223 and 237, Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidated) Act 1992.
11. IDS Employment Law Handbook, Series 2 No 7, 'Industrial Action'.

12. Many of this group were metal finishers. Different individuals suffered from vibration white finger, cervical spondylitis and carpel tunnel syndrome. These injuries were sustained by, in some cases, working for over 30 years with constantly vibrating machinery such as linishers, orbital sanders, 20lb mop machines and pneumatic hammers. Of the 21 workers dismissed, 8 were metal finishers with 8-10% registered disability.
13. As Labour Research (February 1993 and August 1993) describes, the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act (1993) places significant new constraints on unions: all ballots must be postal; employers must be notified twice before a ballot is held (the first being the formal notice of intention to ballot, the second being a copy of the ballot form); employers must be notified again after the ballot to give them at least 7 days notice of when the strike will take place; this notice must also inform the employer whether the union's action will be 'continuous' or 'discontinuous', thus virtually giving away all of its action strategy; unions have to appoint expensive independent scrutineers to oversee the ballot; and finally, following a later ruling from the Court of Appeal, unions now have to provide employers with the names of members being balloted.

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