

12p

THE CASE OF  
JEAN JEPSON

VICTIMIZATION  
BUREAUCRACY  
AND  
MASS STRUGGLE

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Hull branch

INTERNATIONAL MARXIST GROUP

as a contribution to

the campaign by the

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## INTRODUCTION

On 14th January 1974 the elected Transport and General shop convener representing about 600 workers at Armstrong Patents Ltd. of Beverley near Hull was offered a bribe in the region of £5,000 to induce her to leave her job. She refused the bribe, and was promptly handed her cards.

Nearly four months after the sacking, convener Jean Jopson and other victimised workers are still picketing the gate of Armstrong's Swinemoor Lane plant. And they are still waiting for official action by their union to secure their reinstatement.

The dispute at Armstrongs raises more than one issue of urgent concern to the working class movement. Because the case of Jean Jopson is not an isolated or exceptional phenomenon. Quite the opposite: in an extreme form it typifies the sorts of problems that will be faced by working class militants up and down the country during the coming months. As we shall explain further on, Jean Jopson was sacked for trying to defend the interests of T.& G.W.U. members under the Tory government's '3-day week'. Getting rid of a militant convener was part and parcel of Armstrong management's efforts to take full advantage of the two-day lock out by first making a drastic cut in its wages bill and then speeding up the pace of production, intensifying supervision, etc. The three-day week and the Tory government are, for the moment, things of the past. But speed-up accompanied by direct attacks on workers' shop-floor organisation are very much a part of the current industrial scene. You only have to look at the recent experiences of the Cowley car workers to see that, following the failure of the Tory government's strategy for smashing the unions, increasing numbers of employers are adopting these tactics.

The fight for the reinstatement of Jean Jopson to her former job is a fight to defend a hard-won trade union right, the right of workers to choose who represents them. Despite this, and despite the fact that Jopson was victimised for implementing the official policy of her union, the full-time officers responsible for the T.&G.W.U.'s Region 10 refused from the outset to give any decisive leadership to the struggle. As the dispute has worn on, in fact, these officials have gone over from a sell-out of their members to out-and-out scabbing. This pamphlet describes in detail the way in which particular Transport and General officials on Humberside have acted in recent months, not to blacken the name of the individuals concerned but as a warning - as a warning of what every militant can expect from the current leadership of the trade union movement. So long as officials are not responsible to the workers they represent (in the case of the T.&G. they are not even elected by them) the behaviour of Brothers Shenton and Upfold of Hull will be typical of the response of local union bureaucrats to crucial workers' struggles. In fact it goes further than that. When all is said and done, the reader of this pamphlet may ask, what is the difference between the scabbing of Shenton and Upfold and the 'Social Contract' so eagerly espoused by the so-called 'left' trade union leaders, Jack Jones and Hugh Scanlon? Our answer is: very little.

One feature of the Armstrongs struggle does distinguish it from the general run of victimisation disputes. The majority of the workers involved are women. From this point of view, the case of Jean Jopson is an important illustration of what can happen when male trade unionists (or the women themselves, for that matter) underrate the special problems faced by working women. The neglect with which the leaderships of the T.&G.W.U. and the A.U.E.W. habitually treat this

question lies at the root of the demoralisation and confusion which struck the Armstrong workers in January and which indirectly caused the victimisation of Joan Jepson. For this reason alone the Armstrongs experience heavily underlines the need for a campaign in the labour movement around a Working Women's Charter which will take the rights of women workers beyond pious resolutions at union conferences.

#### NATIONAL LOCK-OUT AND GUARANTEED WEEK

From the beginning of the Armstrongs dispute, Transport and General Workers Union officials have blandly ignored the fact that Joan Jepson was victimised by the management for one reason only: for attempting to implement official union policy on the engineering industry's guaranteed-week agreement during the Tory government's '3-day week'.

The national two-day lock-out was imposed by the Tories at the beginning of the year in an attempt to head off the miners' struggle against Phase 3. Its principal objective was to demoralise other groups of workers and to sow confusion among them regarding the real causes of the fuel crisis. In this way it was hoped to isolate and then to defeat the miners' offensive.

The national lock-out failed to achieve its main objective: despite the failure of other unions such as the engineers to back them up by pressing their own claims simultaneously, the miners won.

Nevertheless the 3-day week was a roaring success from the point of view of some of the smaller engineering employers, who used it as a

lever to divide and demoralise their workforce as a prelude to speeding up the pace of production.

For workers' leaders on the shop floor in these firms, everything hinged on what to do during the lock-out with the nationally-negotiated agreement between the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions and the engineering employers laying down a guaranteed minimum wage of 40 hours' basic pay a week. From the outset it was clear that this issue was potentially divisive. Strongly organised groups of workers could well do without the agreement, since they could earn more on three days' full pay plus two days' dole money than on the guaranteed basic. For less well organised sections, and for nearly all married women workers, on the other hand, the maintenance of the agreement was vital to keep up their earnings.

But instead of launching a centralised defence of the agreement which would overcome these divisions, the leadership of the Confederation vacillated. With one hand they instructed local officials not to sign away the agreement. With the other they conceded in practice that this instruction could not be enforced. The result was that the better organised sections of engineering workers were permitted to abandon the agreement, whilst the weaker sections were left to fend for themselves as best they could.

#### WOMEN WORKERS

At Armstrong Patents a majority of the T&GWU members are women. Many of them are married women who pay the reduced National Insurance stamp which excludes unemployment benefit. These

workers stood to have their earnings reduced by as much as £6 a week under the national lock-out if they did not have the protection of the guaranteed week. Jean Jepson fought for the interests of her members by refusing to sign away the agreement on a local basis as Armstrongs management demanded. In standing by the agreement she was acting on written instructions from the Confed., endorsed by the Transport and General, which stated that local officials had no right to sign away a nationally-negotiated agreement. Yet Jean, and many others like her, received no effective backing from the leadership of her union over this question. That is what gave the management at Swinemoor Lane the opportunity they had been waiting for.

#### THE TACTICS OF VICTIMISATION

From the start the management played their cards skillfully. They first approached Jean as T&GWU convener to persuade her to abandon the 40-hour agreement in the first week in January. When this move failed, they decided to proceed on their own. On Monday 7th January workers found notices stuck up all over the factory announcing the employers' intention of (unilaterally) abandoning the agreement. Together Jean and the AUEW convener at the plant responded to this provocation by calling the whole day-time workforce out on strike on Thursday 10th January and Friday 11th January.

Their position was clear. But in the absence of a coordinated strategy from the engineering Confed. nationally, the 3-day week had created divisions within the Swinemoor factory which were difficult to resist. It was obvious what management intended: to carry off the same trick as they had managed at their York factory,

to obtain virtually normal production levels while paying out 20 per cent less in wages. This meant shifting part of the burden of the 3-day week onto the State in the form of dole payments (a statement from the local Department of Employment on January 14th estimated that the lock-out would cost £18,000 a week in unemployment benefit). But the rest of the burden would not be borne equally by all sections of the workforce. The skilled workers would not suffer much, once bonuses and dole money had been added on to their three days' basic. But the unskilled and especially the married women would be hit hard. It was clearly a situation in which it was very difficult to maintain the unity of the Armstrong workers, a situation which called for decisive leadership from the local full-time officials of the T&GWU, the union principally involved.

A return to work was made on Monday 14th January. The management played on the workers' financial insecurity by claiming over the factory's loudspeaker system that they had lost £10.15 pay as a result of the previous week's strike. They followed this up by calling their employees to a meeting in the canteen at 10 am at which the company's position would be 'explained'.

In order to make her argument clear, Joan Jopson called in the full-time official directly responsible for the T&G members at Swinemoor, Les Upfold. Upfold spoke to the morning's meeting though, because it had been called by management, it was very poorly attended. He spoke clearly and forcefully in support of the stand Joan had taken. When the meeting was re-convened after lunch, however, Upfold was not present, because of other commitments. Partly for this reason, the decision eventually reached by this much larger meeting was a kind of compromise which satisfied no one: the management's proposals



for 3-day working would be accepted, but the agreement guaranteeing 40 hours' pay would not be given up. The motion which was passed, an amalgam of Jean's position and that of a group of sell-out merchants, infuriated the management who visualised themselves paying workers for doing nothing two days a week. But it also reflected the shakiness of Jean's support among the T&G rank and file. So they decided to act quickly.

For some years it had been the ambition of Armstrong's 'Industrial Relations Officer' to get shot of Jean Jepson. As a class-conscious trade unionist who supported the miners in their fight against Tory wage controls and who had led the struggle on Humberside to secure the release of the Pontonville Five, she had proved all too effective as a defender of the living standards of Armstrong workers. She was a "disrupter". So they had built up a fat file of information and gossip about her to use when the time was ripe. Immediately following the mass meeting on Monday 14th, Jean was called in to the office. She was told that if she left her job voluntarily the company would be more than generous to her. (On previous occasions she had been offered and had refused supervisor's jobs and substantial pay-offs). She replied that she could not be bought off in this way, and was told that her employment had ended.

#### THE INITIAL RESPONSE

130 workers out of about 400 T&G members on the day shift followed Jean Jepson out of the factory gate. They included nearly all of the 10 T&G shop stewards in the plant. But why was not the immediate response of union membership (who had elected Jean to her position by a direct ballot) more massive? This question cannot be dodged.

Firstly, a dispute where management succeeds in seriously dividing one section of workers from another always provides them with opportunities for the victimisation of workers' leaders on the shop floor. The recent victimisation of senior steward Alan Thornett at British Leyland's Cowley plant is a reminder that this is true of the best-organised and militant sections of the working class.

Secondly, management made clever use of their tannoy-system to cajole and browbeat workers into staying on their jobs, as well as hiding from them what had actually happened. They would not have been so successful had they relied just on the traditional vehicles of company propaganda, the foremen and charge-hands. They also used from the beginning a more subtle anti-union instrument: the spreading of malicious gossip concerning the personal integrity and respectability of Jean Jepson herself. Because Jean was not what most people think of as a normal woman (because she was not married and had no children, because she was not a flirt and treated men simply as equals), it was suggested that she could not be trusted. A number of women workers at Swinemoor swallowed this line, showing that - just as race prejudices are used to weaken and divide the working class - so certain common ideas about the sexes can be played upon to undermine working class solidarity. That is why the workers' movement needs a leadership which will fight against sexism as well as racism in all its everyday struggles.

Finally, it is clear that not enough had been done by Jean and the Armstrong shop stewards themselves to prepare the workers they led for the sharp class confrontations predicted by the revolutionary left (and fully expected by the employers) for the winter of last year.

In particular the need for trade unionists to defend under all circumstances their right to decide who represents them was not explained often enough and hard enough. This is easy to say but vital to stress, as Jean herself agrees.

THE RESPONSE OF THE T&GWU OFFICIALS

On Tuesday 15th January only 80 workers remained outside the factory gate with their convener, the rest having been persuaded to submit by management threats of redundancies, layoffs and further selective sackings. The same day a leaflet was issued by Les Upfold's office at Bevin House in Hull. It read:

"TO: ALL MEMBERS OF THE SWINEMOOR T. & G. BRANCH

JEAN TODAY, WHO TOMORROW?

As you are aware your convener, Jean Jepson, was called in by management on Monday 14th January, after the mass meeting which lifted the sanctions and the overtime ban, and was told that the company could no longer afford the luxury of employing her. The management offered Jean a generous amount of money to leave, but Jean's principles would not allow her to sell the membership, or herself short by accepting such an offer. Management by doing this have openly stated that they have no reason, valid or otherwise, to dismiss your convener Jean Jepson.

The membership in the factory should remember the good work Jean Jepson has carried out throughout the years on behalf of the whole membership and individual members, particularly those who are working there who have got their job back through the persistence and hard work of Jean Jepson. The time has come now for the membership to show their appreciation and loyalty to Jean Jepson by supporting Jean Jepson.

Your Officer, L.W. Upfold, has stated that he has recommended this for official action. Therefore, he now awaits the membership to join him so that he can notify the management of that action.

SUPPORT JEAN NOW, OR IT MAY BE YOU TOMORROW"

In other words, on the day after the victimisation, the full-time official at Bevin House who was best informed on the dispute called for official strike action, as the necessary minimum response by the union. The management naturally stopped up the pressure. Those who had walked off their jobs were given a deadline of 24 hours to reconsider their position. Brother Upfold was refused entry to the factory. The local press played its usual part, insinuating that Jean Jopson belonged to a socialist political organisation, implying that politics has no business in a factory (at least, not among the workers!) As it happened she was not, and she said so. (Hull Daily Mail, 15/1/74, p.1)

But before we carry on the story let us look at what happened to the attitudes of the Transport and General officials in Hull after it became clear that no easy victories were going to be had at Swinemoor Lane. On 20th March, more than two months after the victimisation dispute began, a special Enquiry by the Region 10 Committee of the T&GWU decided, after considering a mass of 'evidence', much of it consisting of lies about the course of events supplied directly or indirectly by Armstrongs management, that Jean Jopson was "unjustifiably dismissed". The Enquiry also resolved "that a further attempt should be made to endeavour to persuade the Company to re-engage Sister Jopson as an employee at the Factory". A handful of Regional Committee members put up a strong fight for a recognition that more was at stake at Swinemoor than the job of a single worker.

But the truth is that the Regional Committee's decision has proved a complete dead-letter, because of the do-nothing attitude of the Region's full-time officers. Here is a sample. On 29th March the acting Regional Secretary for Region 10, A.D. Shenton, wrote to Jean Jopson

a letter, which read:

"Dear Miss Jepson,

Regional Committee Enquiry

I am taking this opportunity of attaching for your information a copy of the decisions of the Committee of Enquiry held on Wednesday, 20th March to enquire into the circumstances relating to the difficulties at Messrs. Armstrongs Limited, all of which you will find to be self explanatory.

The up to date position is that a further meeting was held with Management in an endeavour to persuade the Company to reinstate you but this was completely rejected on the basis that your reinstatement was absolutely opposed by the vast majority of the membership, not only in the Swinemoor Plant but the whole of the Armstrongs, Beverlcy complex and indeed as you will already know, the membership within the complex threatened to withdraw labour if in fact you are reinstated.

I understand that you have circulated a number of appeal leaflets calling for financial support for the "Official Strike" existing at Armstrong Patents Ltd. and I have to tell you that this policy is completely contrary to the Union's Rules and that you are not entitled to circulate appeals of this nature without the authority of the Region 10 Committee. In order that you may be quite clear about the position, I have to say that the action that was taken by yourself and your relatively small number of supporters was completely unofficial and unsupported by the Union and I must instruct that no further appeal leaflets must be distributed in future.

Your kind attention to this matter would be appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

A.D. Shenton,  
Regional Secretary."

Forget about the insulting form of this letter as a communication between fellow trade unionists. Forget, too, about the fabrication concerning the appeal leaflets (naturally the main point they made was that the dispute, deplorably, was not official). That only goes to show that Dave Shenton is either a fool or a liar. The rest of the letter is sufficient to illustrate that, more important, he is an utter charlatan as a workers' leader.

However, this is not the first time that Regional bureaucrats of the T&GWU have simply washed their hands of a local workers' struggle. And Dave Shenton is not the only charlatan in the leadership of the labour movement! In recounting the real course of the Armstrongs dispute since the middle of January (which is different from the version being peddled around the country by Shenton's office) we need to explain why the bureaucracy sells out in this way.

#### FROM SELL-OUT TO SCABBING

The fact is that the dice were heavily loaded against victory for Jean Jopson and her supporters from the beginning. The day after the dispute began 500 out of 600 T&G members were claimed by the management to have reported for work. Another shop steward and the T&G branch secretary defected from the picket line. Meanwhile inside the factory the process of turning the 10/41d branch of the T&GWU into a tame union was already under way. When the stewards who remained at work met to discuss the situation on the afternoon of the 15th, they invited management representatives! (Hull Daily Mail, 15/1/74, p.1.) And yet, despite verbal and written threats that they would all lose their jobs for it, 70-80 strikers stayed

out until 22nd January, not a "small number" under the circumstances.

January 22nd was the date of the industrial tribunal, appeal to which Les Upfold recommended as Joan's main, and in fact only, hope once he saw he might have to lead an unpopular mass struggle. But before that the situation polarised further. On Tuesday 15th Upfold spoke to the Hull dockers, in response to which the dockers imposed a black on all Armstrong products until such time as Joan Jepson was reinstated. This action was "unofficial", naturally (two months later the Regional Committee exemplified the hypocrisy which T&G officialdom shows where the dockers are concerned by passing a resolution

"That the members of the Unofficial Docks Shop Stewards Committee be instructed to remove the embargo which has been placed on Armstrongs products and that the Shop Stewards be reminded of the Declaration they had signed stating that they were, under no circumstances, authorised to institute industrial action without the proper authority of the General Executive Council of the Union."

To their credit, the dockers have to date ignored such invitations to scab on the reinstatement fight.)

Support for the strikers also came promptly from the shop stewards at Hallis Brothers' timberyard in Hull, who themselves had just won a victimisation dispute. But inside Swinemoor scabbing was rapidly becoming the rule. On Wednesday 16th January a branch meeting of the T&G 10/41d Branch voted to suspend the 40-hour guaranteed week agreement. A motion of 'no confidence' in Joan Jepson (who was of course not present to defend herself since the meeting was held in the factory during working hours) was then proposed and passed. A lot has been made of the voting at this meeting, so it is worth mentioning that the line-up reported to

Bovin House looks too good to be true - 300 for the motion, 15 against it and 13 abstaining, out of a total branch of only 600 and in the absence of the strikers, the night shift and most of the part-time workers. This impression is strengthened by the fact that the branch secretary's notebok was found to have an otherwise identical page, a carbon-copy of a letter addressed to Upfold, reporting the voting as 450 for, 15 against and 13 abstaining!

On Friday 18th January the Hull Daily Mail reported under the headline "Sacked Convener Not Wanted" that a press conference had been held at Swinemoor Lane. At the conference 7 workers who claimed to be speaking for 450 said that Jean Jopson was not wanted back. They also denied that they had been selected as spokesmen by the management. (18/1/74, p.1)

The industrial tribunal which sat in Bridlington on January 21st and 22nd to consider Joan's appeal against her dismissal was composed of four management representatives, two of the shop stewards who had remained at work and two trade unionists selected by Joan herself. Not surprisingly it voted 6 to 2 to reject the appeal. As Joan said afterwards, it was a kangaroo court. Why then did Les Upfold, who was reported in the local press to be "stunned" by the result, recommend appeal in the first place? Was there any alternative? And what could be lost by gambling on a favourable decision by the tribunal?

Yes, there was an alternative: for Les Upfold to lead a struggle in the working class movement to force the reinstatement of Joan Jopson, arguing on the basis that the victimisation of a convener is an attack on the working class as a whole. This would have meant taking



the issue into the local labour movement and into the official and unofficial bodies of the T&G locally and nationally, campaigning for the strike to be made official immediately, for action by the Region 10 Committee to force the stewards and branch officers inside the factory to fulfill their elementary class duty, and for an extension of the blacking into the motor industry for which Armstrongs produce about one third of all shock-absorbers. This was the alternative. But it was an alternative which went against the grain for bureaucrats like Upfold and his superior, Shenton, who despite claims to be "lefts" have an undying fear of being themselves labelled "disruptors" or, worse still, "politicals".

As for what was lost by the tribunal affair, valuable time was lost which sapped the will to resist of the strikers and made them more vulnerable to management threats. This was clear the afternoon following the hearing. At Bevin House Les Upfold recommended to the 75-odd strikers that they return to work immediately, explaining that the dispute would now be conducted from the T&G office. Of these, about 55 took this advice the following day.

The workers who remained on the picket line with Jean Jopson were from here on abandoned by their union. A number of them, including Jean herself, completed applications to the National Industrial Relations Court (NIRC) under strong pressure from Les Upfold, an action which Jean later regretted. Within a few days Brother Upfold was crossing the picket line at Swinemoor, now manned by a hard core of about eight, to organise elections for new shop stewards. This was the first of a long line of actions by the full-time officials of Region 10 of the T&GWU which increasingly amounted to straight-forward scabbing.

THE RESPONSE FROM THE LEFT

At this point it is necessary to say something about the political groups of the far left active in the Hull area. It was clear by the end of January that, despite their relatively small resources, these organisations alone were capable of initiating a campaign on the case of Jean Jopson. That is, it was only the 'revolutionary' left that was prepared to take up with any vigour the defence of a hard-won trade union right. But it must also be said that, with variations, the revolutionary socialists as a whole were slow to act. If between 14th and 31st January the strikers relied heavily on the tactics recommended by Bevin House (up to and including appeal to the NIRC), a part of the blame for this lies jointly with the local branches of the International Marxist Group (IMG), Workers' Revolutionary Party (WRP, previously the SLL) and International Socialists (IS). The IMG first interviewed the strikers with proposals for leafleting on the 17th. On Tuesday 29th January Jean Jopson was invited at the last minute to speak to a meeting organised by the IS group on the defence of the Shrewsbury building workers. This was the first opportunity she had had to address a public meeting of trade unionists on the dispute. The meeting, which was well attended, could have been used to launch a broad-based committee to campaign for Jean's reinstatement. This opportunity was not taken. (Not surprisingly. The meeting, called ostensibly to draw attention to the threat to the right to picket which the Shrewsbury case represented, was not even used to mobilise broader forces on this issue. The main platform speakers seemed to be suggesting that the only way trade unionists could fight on the Shrewsbury question was by joining IS, and there was no discussion on the floor of the meeting.) After this, IS dropped Jean Jopson like a hot brick and for two months busied themselves with the supposedly

more important and certainly safer project of organising a national rally for their industrial supporters.

Two days later Jean spoke on the platform of a 'Red Forum' organised by the local branch of the IMG on Working Women and Equal Pay. The meeting was a good deal smaller but was attended by the whole of the Armstrongs strike committee and a number of other Armstrong workers. From the discussion it was clear that the management at Swinemoor Lane were quickly capitalising on the success of the victimisation by increasing their intimidation of the workforce and speeding up the pace of production. It was also clear that the key to the employers' plan for taming the union completely was the election of a new body of shop stewards who would prove more 'loyal' to the company. Support for the reinstatement struggle was still forthcoming in the local labour movement. The Hull dockers had extended their blacking on 25th January and T&G drivers from Fenner's transmission-belt factory had been refusing to cross the pickot line. It was out of this meeting that the first steps were taken which resulted in Cowley car-workers imposing a black on Armstrongs. But the most immediate danger was that, inside Swinemoor, an unholy alliance of management, full-time officers and 'loyal' branch officials would succeed in quietly sweeping the whole affair under the carpet and carrying on as if nothing had happened. For this reason it was decided to call through a leaflet for a boycott of the elections scheduled for 5th February.

Despite management exhortations over their loudspeakers, only about 40 per cent of the T&G membership participated in the elections of the new shop stewards.

A fortnight later, at another 'Red Forum' which was packed-out with employees of Armstrong Patents Ltd., it was decided to escalate these tactics. On Tuesday 19th February Jean Jopson spoke to a factory-gate meeting attended during working hours (to coincide with the election of a new T&GWU convener) by 60 workers. All 60 were suspended for three days without pay for their action. This has led some people to say that the factory-gate meeting was "obviously a bad move" (Women's Voice, 10, p.2). But it is probably only because it took place that it is still possible today to fight on the issue of Jean Jopson's reinstatement.

Twenty-three workers appealed against their suspensions the following day, and eighteen of these had it reduced to one day. The others, however, refused to appeal after District Officer Les Upfold explained that they could only do so by pleading that they had been misled. In trying to evaluate the importance of figures such as these, the reader of this pamphlet should bear in mind that, according to reliable estimates, as many as one hundred T&G members had voluntarily left their jobs in disgust at conditions inside the factory by this time.

"Tell the dockers to mind their own business!"

This was the punch-line of the campaign launched at the beginning of March by Armstrongs' new T&G convener Tommy Shields, a man who openly boasts that he does not believe in trade unionism and who was 'promoted' by the management from the night-shift to the day-shift on night-shift pay.

The Hull dockers had continued their black, arguing that if Armstrong workers were dissatisfied with Jean as convener they should have voted

her out and not allowed management to sack her. Following an unsuccessful attempt by the 10/41d branch committee to persuade the docks stewards to change their minds (there were also attempts to expell Jean from the union) they had decided on 25th February to use their influence to get the black extended to all registered ports. Again on 7th March the dockers stuck by the principle that all trade unionists should come to the defence of a victimised convener. This was despite being presented with a completely distorted account of the origins of the dispute by 10/41d branch officers, including the out-and-out lie that Jean was voted out as convener before she was sacked. (This lie has been repeated so often that it was unfortunately swallowed by a majority of members of the Regional Enquiry which sat on March 20th. Since then Regional Secretary Dave Shenton, who must know better, has felt free to broadcast it throughout the car industry.)

At the weekly meeting of the Hull docks unofficial shop stewards' committee on 14th March a motion was passed asking the National Ports Shop Stewards' Committee to urge a ban on Armstrong products in the car industry. This worried management. Unlike the dockers' own blacking, it was a mortal threat to production at the company's four North Humberside plants at Swinemoor and Eastgate in Beverley, at York and at Clough Road, Hull. And this provided a simple argument with which the company chairman, Harry Hooper, and his more enthusiastic stooges could appeal to the shop floor. Accordingly on March 17th between 700 and 800 workers were mobilised by stewards from Eastgate, Swinemoor and Clough Road and transported in a fleet of coaches to the dock gate. Who paid for the coaches is still a subject for speculation, but no worker has yet been asked to foot the bill. Nor was any worker suspended for leaving the factory.

This is not the first time that dockers have made themselves unpopular by carrying through acts of elementary class-solidarity (most recently, the Hull docks were the first to back up their fellow trade unionists undergoing savage repression in Chile in South America). When they rejected the demonstrators' argument that the blacking constituted "interference in the affairs of another branch by an unofficial body", they were absolutely correct, as usual. But the mass-picket episode also illustrates a serious weakness in the dockers' approach to the class struggle: because they are strongly organised and because, in immediate terms, they do not need to, they do not live up to their responsibilities as class-conscious militants. In other words, they are prepared to take decisive action themselves in defence of the workers' cause. But they refuse to lead other sections of the working class in a continuous and active fashion. On Humberside this attitude is exemplified in the fact that dockers' delegates turn up to Trades Council meetings once a year at most and, more important, that they refuse to play a full part in ad hoc bodies of the whole labour movement (such as the Chile Solidarity Campaign, or the Armstrongs Defence Committee) using the reasonable but short-sighted argument that they can't fight properly for their own members on less than seven nights a week.

Sooner or later this chicken will come home to roost. It very nearly did during the 1972 containerisation dispute when, because they did not raise and incorporate into their demands the unemployment-struggles of other groups of workers, the dockers became perilously isolated on a national scale.

THE REGIONAL ENQUIRY - FOR AN EXECUTIVE ENQUIRY!

Two points have to be stressed about the Region 10 Committee's special Enquiry which sat on March 20th (at the initial instigation of the 10/4ld branch).

First, it came out overwhelmingly (12 votes to 3) in favour of the view that Jean Jopson was unjustifiably dismissed and that she should be reinstated. Second, however, the resolution which was passed left the acting Regional Secretary, Brother Shenton, and his successor, Brother Cairns, free to do nothing to secure Jean's reinstatement. This is at least partly because the Enquiry accepted the false information that Jean was removed as convener before she was sacked. Resolutions passed by T&GWU branches in the Region 10 should therefore demand the RECALL OF THE REGIONAL ENQUIRY. At the very least, such a re-convened Enquiry should be called upon to institute IMMEDIATE OFFICIAL STRIKE ACTION until Jean Jopson is reinstated, and to instruct union officers both at Bevin House and at Swinemoor Lane to LEAD A FIGHT OR RESIGN.

However it is now clear to all concerned that the matter cannot be resolved simply at Regional level. In Hull as elsewhere under the rules of the Transport and General Workers' Union, it is not in practice the Regional Committee which controls the Regional Secretary, but the Regional Secretary who manipulates 'his' Committee. This was obvious at the Regional Committee's subsequent meeting on 24th April. In spite of their judgement of the previous month that Joan Jopson was victimised, all but five members of the committee voted to refuse her victimisation money on the technicality that her dues payments fell into arrears during February and March. The line-up was identical on a challenge to the minutes of the Enquiry, and on a motion

asking for the dispute to be raised on the General Executive Council of the union. This happened, as one Regional Committee member put it, simply because "Brother Shenton had done his homework".

That is why T&G branches up and down the country must take up the demand: FOR A FULL ENQUIRY BY THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE! They should also consider the pros and cons of a situation where full-time officials in their union are not merely not responsible to their members but are not even elected. The demand for elected officials, answerable to and recallable by the workers they represent is placed squarely on the agenda by the activities of A.D. Shenton.

#### COWLEY

The biggest boost that the Armstrongs fight has had so far came on 29th March, when the strike committee received a telegramme of support informing it that the CKD and Service Divisions of British Leyland's factory at Cowley had instituted an immediate black on Armstrong components. This decision, which followed a documented appeal by Jean Jepson, was the result of persistent campaigning by Cowley shop stewards belonging to the International Marxist Group. A subsequent meeting of the 5/55 T&GWU branch at Cowley endorsed the decision to black, made an immediate donation of £25 to the strike fund and sent a telegramme to the National Executive of the T&G demanding official recognition for the strike. A fortnight later the branch reaffirmed this position after hearing Jean Jepson speak about the manoeuvres of the local union bureaucrats in Hull to sabotage her fight.

But by this time the Cowley workers had had first-hand experience of Shenton's scabbing. It was reported that, within an hour of turning



a lorry carrying Armstrong products away from CKD division, a member of the union's Regional hierarchy in Oxford contacted the leading steward and asked him to lift the black. Clearer evidence of collusion between Armstrongs management and the local T&GWU bureaucracy could hardly be found. Letters were later received by the senior stewards (via the Oxford district official) again asking them to lift the black. The branch committee replied, restating the branch's position on the black and emphasising the matter of principle involved.

Since April the position of the Cowley car-workers has taken what every trade unionist will agree is a very grave turn. following the victimisation of deputy senior steward Alan Thornett. One result of the deteriorating situation has been a weakening of the Cowley branch's resistance to the dictates of the union bureaucrats, and the Armstrongs black has been lifted. This makes it doubly important for every militant in the motor industry, especially at Dagenham, Halewood and Longbridge, to campaign FOR A BLACK ON ARMSTRONG SHOCK-ABSORBERS THROUGHOUT THE MOTOR INDUSTRY.

#### THE ARMSTRONGS DEFENCE COMMITTEE

Since late March the spearhead of the Jean Jepson fight on Humberside has been the Armstrongs Defence Committee, an ad hoc body open to all organisations and individuals prepared to campaign on the issue. The committee was launched from a well-attended public meeting, addressed by Jean Jepson and Tariq Ali of the IMG, on 21st March. The weekly meetings of the Defence Committee were attended from the outset by workers directly involved in the dispute, some prominent figures from the local labour movement in a personal capacity, and

delegates from two political groups, the IS and the IMG. The local branch of the Communist Party, which attended the first meeting, withdrew at the second on the grounds that a majority of the workers at Swinemoor Lane were not behind the campaign. This was unfortunate but not unexpected. It followed discussions between the area industrial organiser of the Communist Party, Howard Hill, and district and branch officials of the T&GWU. The WRP also acted true to form, overcoming their sectarian refusal to participate in a united front called forth by the urgent requirements of the class struggle only after three weeks and some ombarassment to their members at Cowley.

The establishment of the Defence Committee has achieved two things. It has centralised the limited resources of those involved, permitting a bigger and better-coordinated campaign than any single organisation could have mounted. As this pamphlet goes to press, the Defence Committee is holding a public meeting on "The Victimisation of Jean Jepson" sponsored by the Hull Docks Unofficial Shop Stewards, the UCATT/T&GWU Unofficial Joint Shop Stewards and the Hollis Brothers T&G branch in addition to individual workers' leaders. At the same time it has provided an essential forum in which proposals on the conduct of the struggle can be discussed and debated with complete frankness and seriousness.

As we write, it is still an open question whether the right of workers to choose who represents them without management interference will be restored to Swinemoor Lane. Today Jean Jepson is almost alone on the picket line. But as recently as 8th April more than 130 T&G members and the AUEW stewards at the plant risked putting their signatures to a petition addressed to the Regional Secretary which gave the lie to the officials' version of the balance of forces at Swinemoor. It stated

"We the undersigned workers at Armstrong Patents, Swinemoor Lane declare that in view of the decision of the Region 10 official inquiry into the present dispute we shall not oppose the reinstatement of Joan Jepson to her job by taking any form of protest action, and we reject the right of management to interpret our views on this matter."

The petition was put into the factory by the strikers, and workers were under strong pressure from their stewards not to touch it. It should also be remembered once again that 100-odd workers, many of them longstanding T&G members, have left the factory since the dispute began four months ago. Many of the new workers taken on do not know Jean Jepson from Adam. In view of this, the results of the petition are conclusive refutation of the claim, originally made by Company Chairman Harry Hooper (Hull Daily Mail, 26/2/74) and since parroted by Regional Secretary Shenton, that 95 per cent of the workforce would oppose reinstatement, with strike action...!

What is now more important, the opening of a new round of local pay struggles in the engineering industry introduces a new factor into the situation. It was clear at the mass meeting held at Swinemoor on 3rd May to discuss the wage rates management proposes to introduce on July 1st that the present convener and shop stewards have no intention of fighting for a decent claim. More than that, they do not seem to have the first idea how to fight. This is not surprising. As increasing numbers of Armstrong workers will be discovering during the coming weeks, leaders who refuse to take a stand on such a basic issue as the defence of a victimised convener will also prove incapable of leading a fight on pay and conditions. Many are going to be reminded of Jean Jepson's good

record on the wages front, including her insistence on the problem of equal pay for women. The derisory rates proposed at the moment at Swinemoor are:

	<u>MALE</u>	<u>FEMALE</u>
Works Staff Chargehand	£34.60	
Works Staff Tradesman	32.44	
Works Staff Semi-Skilled 3A	30.20	
Works Staff Semi-Skilled	28.20	
Grade 3A	28.35	
Grade 3	26.35	24.90
Grade 4	25.75	24.33
Grade 5	25.37	23.97
Grade 6	25.00	23.62
Grade 7	24.17	22.82
Grade 8	23.91	22.59

(Plus £3.25 frozen bonus; plus no  
less than 1.50 incentive bonus)

#### LOOKING AHEAD

Jean Jepson and her supporters have broken with the dead-end tactics which, because of their dead-end political ideas, are the only thing the T&G officials can offer in the Armstrongs dispute. (Jean has of course announced publicly her withdrawal of the appeal to the NIRC which was submitted against her better judgement back in January.) Everything therefore now depends on the emergence of a mass struggle inside and outside Swinemoor Lane, Beverley to force a change in the policies of the union leadership (or, if this fails, to organise independent action).

In practice much will depend on the Defence Committee's ability to do three things:

- 1) Broaden its base in the local labour movement, particularly by the affiliation of the bodies supporting the public meeting, and other shop stewards' committees and union branches;
- 2) Initiate a fight within the Swinemoor T&G branch on the twin issues of the victimisation and the pay claim;
- 3) Raise the dispute in branches, district committees and regional committees of the T&G up and down the country, demanding a full enquiry by the General Executive Council into the Region 10's handling of it. Whether or not an executive enquiry takes place, the broadest possible public workers' enquiry should be held on Humberside to examine the issues raised by the Jean Jepson case. An attempt should be made to get the Hull and District Trades Council to sponsor this, as the most influential local body, despite the fact that its officers (with certain honourable exceptions) take their orders direct from Bovin House.

All this will mean transforming the character and scale of the Defence Committee. But as the Armstrongs dispute has constantly raised issues of much broader concern to the working class movement, the need is becoming increasingly obvious to move on to the establishment of a local Action Committee. The tasks to be undertaken by such an action committee would flow from the needs of the struggles of the working class as a whole during the coming years, not just those of the case of Jean Jepson.

It is now clear to working class militants who are aware of what the future has in store that the problems that have plagued the

British and world capitalist economies in recent years - spiralling inflation, economic stagnation, unemployment and cut-throat competition for markets - are going to mushroom. In this country, unemployment levels of up to, and perhaps beyond, 1½ million are expected this winter. The employing class has no solution to this crisis except by drastically cutting working-class living standards. The Labour government's "social contract" with the trade union leadership is merely a variation on Heath's policy of attacking the unions head-on. Both are intended to insure that workers' income does not keep pace with inflation.

The arrival of a Labour government in parliament has made scarcely any difference to the ability of the working class to defend itself against the employers. (During his election campaign the MP for East Hull, John Prescott, blandly admitted that Labour would and could do nothing on the Jean Jepson case.) That is why in every major industrial struggle we must fight for:

- \* The immediate repeal of the Industrial Relations Act and, when it is repealed, the dumping of all proceedings under the Act, and the nullification of all past NIRC judgements (including the repayment of fines already collected).
- \* The immediate repeal of the Tories' Phase 3 pay laws.
- \* The freeing of the six jailed Shrewsbury building workers, and an unconditional pardon for all those convicted in the Shrewsbury frame-up trials.
- \* The immediate introduction by the Government of measures to abolish the conspiracy laws (on the basis of which, as Shrewsbury shows, trade unionists can be imprisoned for just organising a picket), and to guarantee the legal right to picket.

These demands should be the basis of an action committee on Humber-  
side, together with the demands on Armstrongs.

Because it has been shown that these measures have to be fought  
for outside parliament, it will be necessary to argue strongly  
against the common idea that such "political" questions have nothing  
to do with every-day trade union struggles. The comrades in the  
IS group should reconsider their position on this. As things  
stand, their backward conception of how to build a workers' party  
leads them to actively foster this illusion.

But it will not be sufficient for these demands to be taken up  
individually by different groups of workers as they go into  
struggle. And there is no reason why different sections of the  
working class should have to confront the employers and the  
government one by one. As unemployment and cuts in living  
standards loom nearer once again, the organisation and militancy  
of the working class are greater than ever before in our history.  
No important section of workers has been defeated by the employ-  
ers, despite sell-outs by their leadership. In a situation like  
this, the best and most effective way to unify the forces of the  
working class to impose measures for the crisis on the Labour  
government will be through a general strike.

In a general strike, however, the working class would confront  
the full power of the state apparatus of the ruling class. The  
signs of the strengthening of this apparatus - the courts, the  
police, the army, etc. - have been easy to see for some time now.  
New organisations would be needed to direct the struggle and

defend its gains: fully representative Councils of Action in every area.

To begin to forge now the necessary fighting unity of the workers' movement to prepare for the eventuality of a general strike would be a central task of an Action Committee on Humberside.