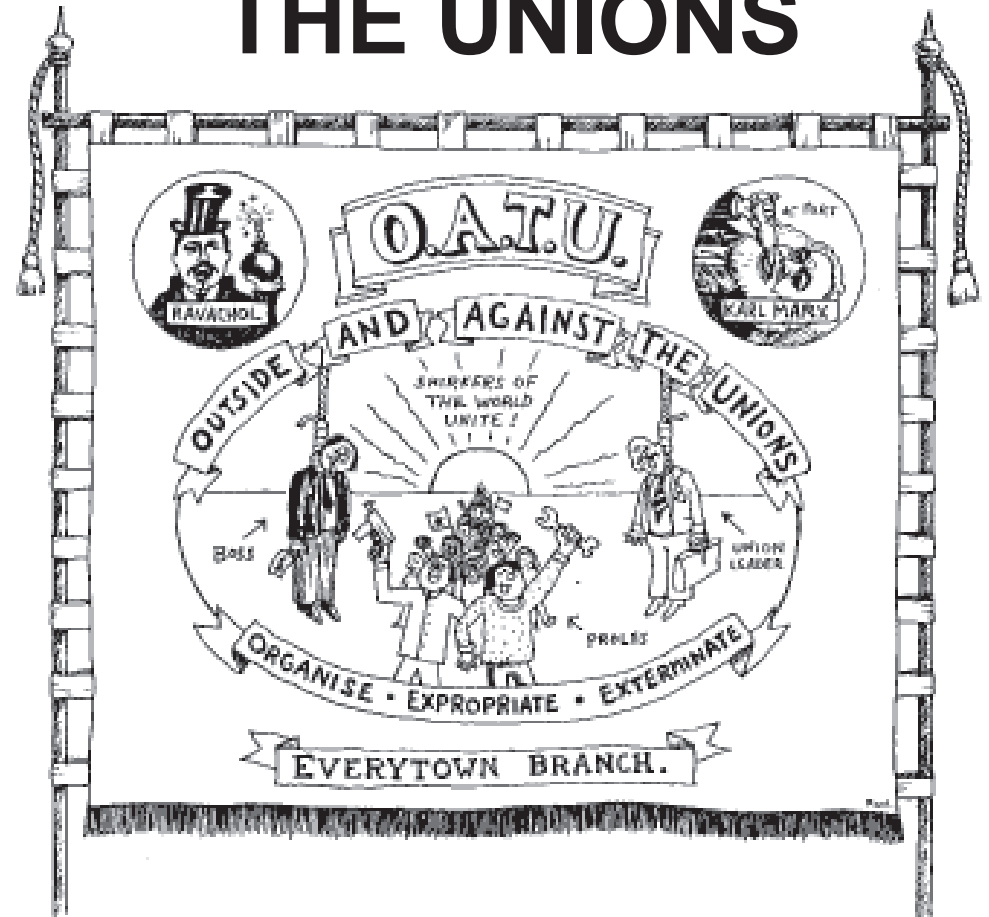


# OUTSIDE & AGAINST THE UNIONS



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**WILDCAT**

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Since the last conference had condemned partial strikes they had not received a penny in strike pay and union officials had been sent to try to get them back to work. Not surprisingly, thousands left the union over the next few months. In many cases the men had succeeded in winning large pay rises through their unofficial action!

But the union didn't have things all its own way. As well as the unofficial strikes (many of which it had to officialise) there were numerous occasions where the veterans of 1842 failed to fully observe the spirit of Rule 12. During a strike in Yorkshire in 1844 scabs had been brought in from Derbyshire in large numbers. At the Soap House pit near Sheffield they were housed in a barracks in the pityard. A large crowd scaled the walls, broke open the doors, smashed every window and gave the scabs a good kicking. During the same strike, at Deep pit in the same area, strikers blew up the engine boiler. These sort of incidents, though, had already become few and far between by 1842 standards. The Miners' Association largely disappeared after the anti-Chartist repression and recession of 1848, but the damage had been done.

## The Recuperators

It would be a mistake to think that the development of trade unionism and parliamentary politics was just a middle class conspiracy. If petty bourgeois and even bourgeois elements had an influence out of all proportion to their numbers it was because, for the most part, the proles saw nothing wrong with this. As E. P. Thompson says in *The Making of the English Working Class*:

Only the gentleman – Burdett, Cochrane, Hunt, Feargus O’Connor – knew the forms and language of high politics, could cut a brave figure on the hustings, or belabour the Ministers in their own tongue. The reform movement might use the rhetoric of equality, but many of the old responses of deference were still there even among the huzzahing crowds.

**But** the role of middle class types should not be underestimated. Most of the top leaders of the Miners’ Association had never worked in the coal industry despite the continual cry from the members for the appointment of sacked miners as officials. The Association’s treasurer, for example, was a pub landlord from Newcastle. A particularly important role in the union was played by W. P. Roberts, a solicitor from Bath, who was the union’s legal officer.

In so far as Roberts and his friends had a political program for the union it can be summed up as the Right to Strike. That is, a class deal whereby the bosses allow the workers to struggle by peaceful, democratic means in return for guarantees that they won’t go any further than that, that they won’t threaten the bosses property rights or control over the production process. The right to strike implies the right to manage. It also implies that the Rule of Law should, to **some** extent, apply to all classes. Obviously, workers will only have any respect for the law if they can sometimes win court cases. This is where Roberts came in.

The Miners’ Association was the first union in Britain to use the law courts in a systematic way to defend its members. Roberts became known as the “workingman’s Attorney General”. He used to travel up and down the country representing miners, and often other workers, in magistrates courts. “We resisted every individual act of oppression, even in cases where we were sure of losing”, he explained. He was very good at his job, winning many small victories against the employers, here freeing a man imprisoned for leaving work without permission, there taking back wages illegally withheld. He once boasted that he had taught the magistrates law and how to make legal warrants. He regularly had the decisions of magistrates overturned by the Court of Queen’s Bench in London. The fact that the authorities allowed him to get away with all this shows how much the ruling class were prepared to make concessions to integrate the proletariat into civil society.

The commitment of the union to the rule of law was nothing short of fanatical. They always told miners to be peaceful, even when they were being evicted from their homes. This happened on a massive scale during the strike in Northumberland and Durham in 1844. The Northumbrian miners’ union leader Thomas Burt (later to become a Liberal MP) describes how families “stood with tears in their eyes and saw villainous wretches throwing to the door articles to which the memory of past years had given sanctity; but they had been taught by their leaders that if the peace was broken, they might bid farewell to their cherished union; and such was the power, eloquence, and advocacy of their leaders that the peace was not broken, even under such trying conditions”. Rule 12 of the union’s constitution (agreed in May 1843) stated “That this Association will not support or defend any member who shall in any way violate the laws of the country”.

As well as assisting Queen Victoria’s judiciary the union also attempted to suppress strikes, even legal ones, in a way which today we find very familiar. During 1844 there were strikes in almost every coalfield in Britain but the union doggedly maintained its position of opposing all “partial” strikes. Only a “general” strike of the whole industry was supposed to be good enough.

The union conference in Manchester in January 1844 was held in the midst of a strike wave in the South Lancashire coal-field. There had been 20 strikes and hundreds of men had been out for 5 months.

## INTRODUCTION

This is a new edition of a pamphlet we have distributed since September 2002. The article “Good Old Fashioned Trade Unionism” has been added and the introduction has been rewritten.

The pamphlet contains two articles written in the early 1990s by the now defunct British communist group *Wildcat*. “Outside and Against the Unions” is about the sabotage of the massive coalminers strike in the UK in 1984-5 by the National Union of Mineworkers and thus might seem irrelevant in Australia twenty years later. However as well as much that is specific to the Miners strike there is an excellent exposition of the critique of unions as pacifiers of workers struggles that revolutionaries have been propagating for at least ninety years. “Good Old-fashioned Trade Unionism” is about the origin of the modern trade union movement in 1840s Britain and how these early unions controlled the massive workers struggles of the time.

A similar critique of the unions could be written with reference to recent Australian history. The best example would be the Maritime Union of Australia accepting job losses and lower pay in the settlement of Patrick’s lockout of the wharfies in 1998. They did this despite the struggle being easily winnable with the mass pickets holding firm and the NSW and Victorian police forces very reluctant to smash them. There are of course many other examples such as the blockade of the NSW state parliament in 2001 that was called by the unions to give the pretence of doing something against the proposed changes to workers compensation laws that they had no intention of seriously opposing. And in September 2002 there was the disgusting spectacle of CFMEU bureaucrats grassing up six undocumented Korean workers to the Department of Immigration with the excuse that it was to protect the wages of Australian workers. The Koreans were deported. As always unions help to divide the working class; citizens from ‘illegals’; employed from unemployed; skilled from unskilled...

And now there is the Howard government’s Industrial Relations reform agenda. The unions organised but didn’t really promote the demonstrations that took place all around Australia at the end of June. They were surprised and scared by the large number of workers that showed up. At those and the handful of smaller demonstrations union and ALP hacks have shouted at us that they are going to keep on fighting until the reforms are defeated yet never say anything specific about how they could be defeated. The unions are genuinely concerned about these reforms but only to the extent that the move to individual contracts would leave no room for unions as the sellers of labour. They care nothing about the pay-cuts, longer hours, loss of holidays and sick leave that we workers will have to endure if the reforms go through.

With the opposition to the reforms we now have the best opportunity for years for mass working class action outside of the unions and also the most need for it. If there is no large-scale autonomous action against the IR reforms they will be implemented.

Other texts by *Wildcat* can be found at: [http://www.againstsleepandnightmare.com/wildcat/SUBSPAGE.html#\\_ftn1](http://www.againstsleepandnightmare.com/wildcat/SUBSPAGE.html#_ftn1)

Canberra, Australia  
August 2005

# OUTSIDE AND AGAINST THE UNIONS

## Introduction

This pamphlet is written in response to the pamphlet “Refracted Perspective”. As you may have guessed, this is mostly a flimsy excuse to make a general critique of the trade unions — something we in Wildcat haven’t done for quite a while. It focuses on the situation in Britain in recent years, particularly the 1984-85 miners’ strike. This is not because of some nationalistic obsession with what goes on in these islands but because we want to make our analysis as concrete as possible - this means writing about things we know from reliable sources or were actually involved in. We also want to refute Mr. Douglass’ arguments as thoroughly as possible so we can’t avoid talking about particular things done by the NUM.

A detailed article on the origins of modern trade unionism in Britain, focusing on the crucial year of 1842 when the Miners’ Federation was founded, can be found in Wildcat No. 16.

In the British Isles and North America at the present time (late 1992) the trade union question may seem a bit irrelevant given the low level of workplace class struggle. Since 1979 membership of TUC-affiliated unions in Britain has declined from 12 million to 8 million. We can be sure, though, that once workplace struggle starts to pick up again trade unionism will once again rear its ugly head and wherever workers are struggling **as workers**, be it Germany, South Africa or South Korea, the issue is as important as ever.

## That Speech

The purpose of Douglass’ speech at the Class War international conference (the text of which was published as “Refracted Perspective”) was quite clear. It was to stifle criticism of trade unionism in and around the anarchist movement. Before getting stuck into some serious criticism of what he said we should point out that he was not just expressing his opinion but defending his role in society. He is not, as he likes to describe himself, a “Yorkshire miner” but a full-time NUM delegate.

The main way he attacks criticism is by means of the classic Stalinist “amalgam technique”. This means deliberately mixing up two or more very different political positions which you don’t like in order to create confusion and uncritical support for your point of view. For example during the Second World War the Communist Parties referred to “Trotsky-Fascism”.

Similarly, Mr Douglass tries to amalgamate idiotic lefties like the Workers’ Revolutionary Party with people he calls “Situationists” - this is obviously a code word for class struggle militants who are against the unions from a communist point of view. I assume he calls us Situationists because he wants to give the impression we’re a bunch of misfit art students. This is not what the Situationists were but it’s a popular stereotype of their **followers**, which has some truth in it.

The amalgam technique at its crudest is shown when he claims that the Socialist Workers’ Party are “venomously anti-union”. Since when? The SWP don’t just **support** unions, often it’s SWUpPies who keep union branches going. The same goes for his “The Leninist with his [sic] vision of the trade union as an obstacle to the struggle...” comment. Most Leninists stare at you in amazement if you suggest that the unions are anti-working class. Try it sometime. You might even say that “The Leninist intellectuals of and by themselves can only achieve a trade union consciousness”.

To be fair though, a lot of what he says about lefties and the 1984-85 miners’ strike is true. For example, the SWP believes that the only thing wrong with the mass picket at the Orgreave depot in S. Yorkshire was that it wasn’t big enough. This view is still supported by SWUpPies to this very day. His description of some icepick head selling “Workers’ Power” in the middle of a riot is both amusing and familiar.

days later a large mill was successfully burnt down in Westhoughton.

April-May 1812 was a real high point in the class war. Outside the Luddite areas there were serious food riots in Bristol, Carlisle, Leeds, Sheffield and Barnsley. In Cornwall the miners struck and marched into the market towns demanding reductions in food prices. In Sheffield a militia arms store was broken into. On May 11 the Prime Minister, Perceval, was assassinated in the House of Commons. Joy amongst the proles was unrestrained. In London large crowds gathered outside the Commons and cheered the assassin as he was led away. In Nottingham order could only be restored by military force and the reading of the Riot Act. It was widely assumed that Perceval’s death must be the result of some revolutionary conspiracy. There was widespread disappointment when it turned out to be the work of a solitary hero.

One of the factors which brought this movement to an end was more repression – more troops, more spies, more arrests and an increasing number of executions. But probably more important was a major concession. This was the repeal of the so-called Orders In Council in June 1812. This was the policy of blockading France as part of Britain’s war effort. Its repeal led to an immediate improvement in trade, greatly relieving the famine conditions existing in many parts of the country.

But the ending of the bosses’ recession didn’t completely kill the movement. Luddism in Yorkshire and Lancashire largely gave way to preparations for an insurrection. During the summer of 1812 there were numerous raids for arms. Lead for making bullets was also being taken, in the form of pumps, water-spouts and guttering. The conspiracy extended well outside the Luddite areas but, unfortunately, never got as far as an actual uprising.

Over the next two or three decades the tactics of Luddism did much to inspire other movements of class warfare.

In the early 1820’s in Monmouthshire, Wales there existed a secret organisation known as the “Scotch Cattle” based on the colliers. They claimed that Ned Ludd was their founder. Like the Luddites they had a well developed system of threatening letters, night meetings and military-style signals. They specialised in blowing up furnaces and terrorising scabs. Their leader was said to be *Lolly*, obviously *Lol* – the Lord of Misrule.

In 1830 the discontent of agricultural labourers exploded through the southern and eastern counties of England in marches from village to village, breaking threshing machines and demanding higher wages. Night time arson and machine-breaking were very widespread. “Captain Swing” was the signature most often attached to the threatening letters sent to landowners, farmers and parsons. Wages were successfully raised for a time but the main lasting effect was that the widespread introduction of threshing machines in rural England was delayed until the 1850’s.

An important feature of all these movements was the commitment to secrecy. The clandestine hit squads of the day were premised upon a mass culture of non-cooperation. Whole working class communities refused to collaborate with the authorities. Often secret mass meetings were called which were only occasionally infiltrated by the state. This is why so few Luddites were ever caught despite the affected areas being saturated with troops and the extensive use of spies from outside the areas. The harsh sentences imposed by the judiciary were a sign of the desperation of the authorities.

Contrast this with a statement made by the executive of the Miners’ Association in 1844 to the employers. It began: “We have no secrets; all is done openly and to any of our meetings all are invited. Manufacturers! Traders! and Shopkeepers! You are deeply interested in our welfare”.

The legalisation of certain forms of organisation such as the repeal of the Combination Acts in 1824 is not something which enabled the working class to organise itself better – the Luddites were pretty well organised and everything is legal if you don’t get caught! What it did do was enable the recuperators, particularly middle class ones from outside “impenetrable” working class communities, to become better organised. The attitudes which the working class had had towards rich reformers was summed up by Francis Place “The laws against combinations...induced [working people] to break and disregard the laws. They made them suspect the intentions of every man who tendered his services”.

The Luddites were masked and had a well developed system of signals, sentinels and couriers. Whoever led the raiding party on the particular night would be referred to as *General Ludd*. They also had “inspectors” who went around investigating pay and conditions and collected money for the workers made unemployed by the frames being broken.

At the beginning of February 1812 this phase of Midlands Luddism quickly died away. There were three main reasons for this. Not least of these was the fact that the use of terror by the workers had been quite successful, and wages had risen. Secondly, there were now several thousand troops in the area. Thirdly, there was now a Bill before Parliament to make frame breaking punishable by death. This didn't stop the movement but did cause considerable panic in the workers' ranks. It also created a space for parliamentarism and trade unionism. A quasi-legal association, the “United Committee of Framework-Knitters” was formed to petition parliament for a Bill to protect pay and conditions. The Committee tried to suppress machine breaking but feelings were running high in Nottingham, where seven Luddites were sentenced to transportation. In April a hosier was shot and wounded outside his house. He was accused in a letter from “the Captain” of attempting to force his women workers into prostitution by paying them such low wages. After the inevitable defeat of the Bill a union was set up. The prime movers of the union were Henson and Coldham. Henson was an experienced activist in the secret “Institution” to which all framework-knitters belonged. Coldham was the Town Clerk of Nottingham! It had an effective existence for two years and seems to have been powerful enough to prevent a serious resurgence of Luddism.

The Nottingham events directly inspired the Yorkshire coppers. Luddism appeared modelled on the existing tactics but accompanied by a much greater number of threatening letters. A leaflet was distributed in Leeds which was far more insurrectionary than anything seen in Nottingham,

...You are requested to come forward with Arms and help the Redressers to redress their Wrongs and shake off the hateful Yoke of a Silly Old Man, and his Son more silly and their Rogueish Ministers, all Nobles and Tyrants must be brought down...

These Luddites expressed solidarity with struggles in Ireland and elsewhere. One letter goes:

...the Weavers in Glasgow and many parts of Scotland will join us the Papists in Ireland are rising to a Man, so that they are likely to find the soldiers something else to do than Idle in Huddersfield and then woe to the places now guarded by them...

Many of the smaller manufacturers just gave in, destroying or storing their own shearing-frames. After six or seven weeks only a few substantial mills were still holding out. In particular there were two owners who were notorious for their determination to defy the Luddites, they both kept armed company goons and troops on the premises day and night. According to tradition, the luddites drew lots to decide which mill to attack. The choice fell on Rawfolds in the Spen Valley. Around 150 Luddites attacked it. They failed. Many were wounded, two of them mortally and they had to be left behind. The first blood had been shed and it did not go unavenged. Later the same month the other notorious owner, one William Horsfall from Ottiwel, was shot dead.

In Lancashire the movement was more one of open mass riots. On 20 March the warehouse of one of the first manufacturers to use the power-loom was attacked at Stockport. In early April there were numerous riots aiming to force down the prices of potatoes and bread. On 20 April in Middleton a power-loom mill was attacked by several thousand. It's defenders fired muskets, three attackers were killed and many wounded. The next morning the crowd assembled in even greater strength. They were joined by a body of men armed with muskets and picks with an effigy of General Ludd and a red flag at their head. Finding the mill still impregnable the crowd burned the mill-owner's house instead. Four

## Anarcho-Leninism

Dave Douglass attacks the lefties for arrogantly telling the workers what to do and for seeing workers' struggles as just a means of spreading their politics. But what he's really slagging them off for is being too honest - they **openly** try to push their ideology and present themselves as leaders. Dave Douglass would like to see Class War do it more subtly. That his perspective is not much different from the Leninists is shown by his attitude toward Orgreave. He gives a really good account of what's wrong with trench warfare against pigs on a terrain they have chosen. BUT he publicly supported it (and therefore encouraged participation in this defeat at the hands of the pigs). This is not much different from those lefties who encourage workers to do things that they know are a load of crap - like voting Labour and calling on the TUC to call a general strike.

No doubt those of us who said at the time that Orgreave was a waste of time were just “vanguards” who were “telling ordinary workers what to do”.

His attitude is further revealed in the last paragraph of his Really Fucked Perspective when he defends the classic Leninist separation between the masses and the Party - “THEY ARE NOT WAITING FOR US”. Who are “THEY”? Who are “US”? “We should assist them in the way THEY wish to be assisted” - This is patronising drivel. What if “THEY” want us to help “them” lobby the Labour Party conference? We would tell them this was a stupid thing to do. If this makes us “vanguardists” then, Yes, it's a fair cop, guv.

Why should one section of the working class put itself “at the disposal” of another? If our comrades in struggle makes mistakes we have to criticise them and sometimes even physically stop them from doing what they want to do. The reason for this is simple: if they fuck up it fucks up things for all of us. There can be no question of “self-determination” for any section of the class: we're all in this together. If this approach means we don't sell as many papers as we'd like, that's too bad.

## The Unions

What Douglass doesn't talk about at all in his reminiscences of the 1984-85 Great Strike is the antagonism that existed between the union apparatus and the unofficial actions of the miners and others in the mining communities which he thinks were just extensions of the unions.

Let's start with an example from before the strike. In mid-1983 Arthur Scargill, NUM President, was about to meet then Coal Board Chairman Derek Ezra in Pontypridd. Some Welsh miners on wildcat strike against pit closures occupied the regional NCB office. Scargill came along in person to order an end to the occupation. Later in the day, though, he did maintain his reputation as a militant by “storming out” of the meeting with Ezra, revealing the Board's hit-list of threatened pits.

Obvious examples from the strike were:

- 1) Anyone seriously involved in the miners' strike who didn't live in a mining area very quickly worked out (sometimes from bitter experience) that the only way to get money to where it was needed was to give it directly to the strikers and their families. Money given to the union bureaucrats generally never reached strikers at all and certainly didn't reach those known to be trouble makers.
- 2) The union threatened to discipline and fire miners who threw bricks at the police at Gascoigne Wood.
- 3) Throughout the strike McGahey and his cronies issued orders forbidding mass pickets in Scotland.
- 4) At the beginning of 1985 the Yorkshire Area NUM took its minibuses away from the Fitzwilliam miners to stop them indulging in aggressive flying picketing.
- 5) In March 1984 in Ollerton, Notts, a picket was killed by a scab lorry. Scargill stood on top of a car and called for two minutes silence in order to stop the strikers from taking revenge against the cops and scabs.

I could go on...

It should be obvious from these examples that his metaphor about the workers driving the union bus as far as it will go is rather misleading. It's not just a case of the bureaucrats applying the brakes - more a case of them turning the bus around and using it to run over the workers!

In fact when he's writing about "the union" he conveniently forgets (most of the time) that there is a union apparatus at all. He talks as if the union was just a collection of autonomous union branches. This makes it much easier for him to repeat the classic lie of every left-wing union hack - "It's your union, you can do what you like with it. It's a democratic organisation and if you've got enough support from the membership you can give it any policies you want".

The lie that the union is its members is continually exposed in practice. The NUM is no exception. The 1977 productivity deal initiated by Tony Benn, which did so much to divide miners between regions, was forced through by the NUM executive despite a National Ballot rejecting it. In 1983 NUM leaders ignored an 80% strike vote in South Wales. In April 1984 the leaders of Lancashire NUM held an area delegate meeting to try to find a way to send the Lancs miners back to work. Thirty of the miners who had been lobbying the meeting organised an occupation of the NUM headquarters in Bolton. They wanted to prevent further meetings, saying "you don't need a meeting to run the strike - only to call it off".

### What Are Unions?

Dave Douglass would have us believe that unions are workers' self defence organisations. This is the traditional lefty view which you can read in every Trot paper ever written. It's also believed by millions of workers but not by us.

If unions don't defend workers' interests (even badly), what do they do? The answer is that they negotiate with the bosses. They negotiate the rate of exploitation.

We're not taking a moralistic "Death before negotiation" stance here. As long as wage labour exists workers will be forced to negotiate with employees from time to time, particularly when struggles are defeated. Most workers negotiate with their bosses individually in one way or another ("I'll let you go home early if you get this finished").

Negotiations, though, always involve an agreement to play by the rules of the game, for example by agreeing to honour productivity deals. It is a form of class collaboration. As the institutionalisation of the negotiating process unions must inevitably hold back workers' struggles. It is no surprise that unions have almost always condemned forms of struggle, which are difficult to negotiate, such as theft and sabotage. This is **not** a recent phenomenon. In 1889 Tom Mann, the famous leader of the London based Dockers' Union, signed several appeals for the men to work more enthusiastically. They were trying to force the bosses to increase manning levels and were making widespread use of "ca'canny" (going slow). In 1892 Tom Mann even suggested to the Royal Commission on Labour (of which he was a member) that piece rates be brought in!

Negotiation is not just an economic activity, it is a political one as well. Negotiating with the bosses on behalf of workers **is** a form of political representation. Representing people is **not** about fighting for their interests. It is about maintaining the loyalty of a passive "constituency". This can clearly be seen from union recruitment policy which is to try to sell membership to anyone who will pay the membership dues, no matter how reactionary they may be, as long as they work in the right trade/industry. It should be obvious that no working class organisation could ever operate this way.

It is no coincidence that the democratic ideology is promoted more vigorously in the unions than anywhere else in society. Workers' own struggles, though, almost always begin with militant action by a minority. They make nonsense in practice of "majoritarianism" (the idea that nothing should take place unless a majority agrees) and the separation between decision-making and action that is enshrined in democracy. Democracy, with its fetish for the airing of opinions, and the moment of decision as a preliminary to acting, offers nothing to workers. It offers everything to those who would divert, institutionalise or block their struggles, whether it's the Right with their secret ballots or the Left with their delegate conferences and mass participatory democracy.

The Luddite movement was focused around three main industrial objectives - the destruction of power looms in Lancashire, the destruction of shearing frames in Yorkshire and resistance to the break-down of custom in the Midlands framework-knitting industry. But the movement went well beyond these objectives, drawing in proletarians from outside these sectors and raising all kinds of political demands. It was a movement of such strength that for several months it could successfully resist 12,000 troops, not by military confrontation but social means - unbreakable community solidarity and spreading disaffection in the troops' own ranks. In June 1812 the Vice-Lieutenant of the West Riding declared, "...except for the very spots which were occupied by Soldiers, the Country was virtually in the possession of the lawless...the disaffected outnumbering by many Degrees the peaceable Inhabitants."

The "croppers" of Yorkshire were highly skilled (and highly paid) wool cloth finishing workers whose status was threatened by two important inventions, the gig-mill and the shearing frame. The gig-mill was a device for raising the surface of cloth by passing it between rollers. It was at least as old as the mid-16th Century since there was a statute of Edward VI prohibiting its use. Workers had prevented its widespread use ever since. Who says you can't stand in the way of Progress? This struggle had been particularly intense at the end of the 18th Century. In the West Country bodies of rioters 1,000 or 2,000 strong had attacked the hated mills. In 1809 Parliament repealed all the protective legislation relating to the woollen industry - covering apprenticeship, the gig-mill and the number of looms which could be owned by one master.

The grievances of the framework-knitters of the Midlands (mostly Nottingham, Derby and Leicester area) were a bit more complicated. They mostly worked in small industrial villages in workshops containing three or four looms. These were rented from their employer. Since the end of the 18th Century they had suffered a severe worsening of general conditions as the development of uncontrolled prices and shoddy goods had undermined their earnings and craft status. The cotton weavers of Lancashire were also used to an artisan status which was directly threatened by the factory system.

The movement began in Nottingham in March 1811. A large demonstration of framework-knitters was dispersed by the army. That night 60 frames were broken in the village of Arnold by rioters who didn't try to disguise themselves. They were cheered on by the crowd. For several weeks similar incidents occurred throughout northwest Nottinghamshire. Despite the presence of troops and special constables, no arrests could be made.

In November of that year Luddism appeared in a more organised form. Frame breaking had become the work of disciplined bands that moved rapidly from village to village in the dead of night. From Nottinghamshire it spread to parts of Leicestershire and Derbyshire, and continued without cease until February 1812. On 10 November a hosier in Bulwell defended his premises with arms. A Luddite was killed but, after taking away his body, his comrades returned, broke down the doors and smashed the frames. Three days later a large force of Luddites armed with muskets, pistols, axes and hammers destroyed 70 frames at a large workshop in Sutton-in-Ashfield.

Only those frames were attacked which were associated with reduced wages or the production of lower quality goods. This "reformist" spirit of the Nottingham Luddites is expressed well by the popular ballad of the time, *General Ludd's Triumph*:

*The guilty may fear but no vengeance he aims  
At the honest man's life or Estate,  
His wrath is entirely confined to wide frames  
And to those that old prices abate.  
These Engines of mischief were sentenced to die  
By unanimous vote of the Trade  
And Ludd who can all opposition defy  
Was the Grand executioner made.*

In small villages lying out from Newcastle the exhortation to arms was being taken quite literally...a strong tradition of owner-paternalism had been replaced by an extremely class-conscious Chartism, and fowling pieces, small cannon, stoneware grenades, pikes and 'craa's feet or caltrops – four-spiked irons which could be strewn in a road to disable cavalry horses – were being turned out in quantities. It was localities like this which, on hearing rumours that troops would be present at the great meeting in Newcastle on Christmas Day, sent couriers to find out if they were to bring arms with them.

### The Insurrectionary Tradition

*“The Levelution is begun,*

*So I'll go home and get my gun,*

*And shoot the Duke of Wellington”*

an 1820's street song from Belper, Derbyshire

Since the 18th Century there had been an almost unbroken tradition of organised violent resistance to capital. The 19th Century was ushered in with a rash of riots across England against high food prices caused by Britain's war with France. Much of the rioting seems to have been organised in advance with handbills being distributed. One, from London in September 1800, said: “How long will ye quietly and cowardly suffer yourselves to be imposed upon, and half-starved by a set of mercenary slaves and Government hirelings?... We are the sovereignty, rise then from your lethargy. Be at the Corn market on Monday”. Six days of rioting at the Corn Market followed. Another called upon “Tradesmen, Artisans, Journeymen, Labourers &c.” to meet on Kennington Common. The meeting was prevented only by the use of troops.

For the first two decades of the century rural Ireland was swept by one revolt after another. Secret societies – Threshers, Caravats, Shanavests, Carders – used various forms of violence to defend tenant rights, to force down rent and prices, resist tithe payment and drive out landlords. In 1806 the Threshers virtually controlled Connaught. According to the Irish Solicitor-General in 1811 the countryside suffered from the “formidable consequences of an armed peasantry, and a disarmed gentry”. The Lord Chief Baron, sentencing a teenage boy to death for stealing arms, declared: “Can it be endured, that those persons who are labouring by day, should be legislating by night?”

### The Luddites

*In the three counties, the agitation for parliamentary reform commenced at exactly the point where Luddism was defeated.*

E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*.

The information in the following section is almost entirely taken from E. P. Thompson. This is because he seems to be the only lefty historian who's written anything decent about them. Many of the academics who deign to mention the Luddites are such blatant brown-noses of the bourgeoisie they're not worth reading – for example, one hack describes them as “simple-minded labourers... smashing the machines which they thought responsible for their troubles” (*The Age of Revolution*, E. Hobsbawm, p55). Thompson, on the other hand, regards Luddism more as an honest mistake made by the workers on the long and tortuous path which led to the election of Harold Wilson. As you can see from the above quote, though, he is honest and often gives factual examples which contradict his progressive, social democratic ideas. From a communist perspective there is nothing “outmoded” about the forms of action described here. Some kind of Luddite-style community organisation would be appropriate for workers in small, scattered work-places today and, as for Captain Swing, perhaps a few burning hayricks and smashed farm machines might be just what rich farmers need to persuade them to share some of their fat EC subsidies with their miserably paid labourers.

### Corporatism

Corporatism is the identification of workers with their workplace or industry. It is not just an idea. It is a material force resulting from the absence of solidarity between workers in different sectors and between workplaces and other areas of society (particularly where proletarians live). Unions are **the** corporatist organisation *par excellence*. The attachment of the NUM to the “Plan for Coal” was just one expression of this.

Admittedly corporatism can't simply be blamed on the unions. When workers on a picket line express suspicion toward “outsiders” who come to show support it's not just because they believe in “the union” (although it's usually the shop steward who's the first to ask “What union are you in, then?”) Nor, unfortunately, is it just because “they don't want to be told what to do by middle-class students” as many apologists for working class conservatism would have us believe.

Any workplace struggle can fall into the trap of corporatism **as long as it remains just a workplace struggle**. Against the workerist lefties who claim that workers only have power at the point of production we would say that it is territorially based struggles which have the greatest subversive potential. This was undoubtedly one of the strengths of the anti-poll tax movement (despite the obvious problem of “localism” - usually involving sentimental notions about “our local community”). In the miners' strike too the high points were when the whole of the working class in a particular area became involved - e.g. defence of pit villages against the police. “Territory” includes workplaces and it is often strategically very important to disrupt, seize and/or destroy them. Workplace occupations, for example, are an important opportunity for undermining the role of the workplace as an “enterprise” separate from the rest of society - by inviting other proletarians into the site besides those who normally work there, by reappropriating resources such as printing and communications, by giving away useful products stored at the site... Then there's straightforward destruction - denying it to the enemy! The miners who responded to coal-faces collapsing during the Great Strike by saying “to hell with the pits!” were expressing a real break with NUM corporatism.

### Degenerates

An organisation can start off defending workers' interests and degenerate into a trade union. That is, it can start off organising and extending the struggle and end up negotiating it away. This has often been the fate of independent strike committees in France, Italy and Spain (in Britain they usually just end up integrated into the official unions).

The question of when to stop participating in such a committee and start denouncing it is always a tricky one but with officially recognised trade unions there is **NO** such ambiguity.

Certainly unions have to be flexible to stay in business. Under rank and file pressure they will often adopt a militant stance and to some extent will even allow workers to use the local union apparatus to conduct struggles - e.g. branch meetings, strike funds, picket caravans. Trying to “take over” the apparatus, though, is a dead end. Even on an organisational level a union is simply not designed for advancing workers' struggles. The most basic rules of branch procedure are designed to hinder them. In mid 1984 some striking miners from South Kirkby tried to organise a team of miners who could not easily go out picketing due to stringent bail conditions. They were to go out knocking on doors trying to convince passive strikers to become active pickets. They started doing it anyway but tried putting a resolution to the NUM branch. It was rejected by the branch committee. It could still go through as correspondence so they tried packing the meeting with their supporters. The branch committee ruled it out of order. One of the strikers concluded “I think that shows you we've got to know the rule book...”. This is rubbish. What it shows is the need to throw the rule book out the window and the authority of the branch committee with it.

Unions are certainly not designed for spreading strikes outside the industry or sector where they start. Quite the opposite. On many miners' picket lines non-NUM members were regularly allowed to cross and in Lancashire there was no attempt to close down opencast pits in the area - these were not owned by the NCB and their workers were in the T&G not the NUM.

During the Great Strike NUM leaders (particularly Scargill) certainly made appeals to support from other groups of workers but this never went beyond meetings with other union leaders and televised public speeches. To have appealed directly to other workers would have breached the democratic etiquette between unions - one set of “laws” that the oh-so-radical Mr. Scargill has no intention of flouting.

### **Bureaucracy**

Many people say that the trouble with the unions is that they are too hierarchical and bureaucratic. This misses the point. Unions don’t serve the interests of capital because they are bureaucratic. They are bureaucratic because they serve the interests of capital. The very process of negotiation fosters specialists in the sale of labour power. It inevitably involves a small team of active negotiators and a lot of workers hanging around waiting for the result. The negotiators and bosses need to develop personal understandings, to trust each other. Usually this is all done by union bureaucrats but even where strikers elect their own representatives, these almost immediately start to fight the control and revocability exercised over them. They will want to assume the role of leaders on a basis of equality with their opposite numbers in negotiation, and will be supported by strikers themselves who will want to be led by people who reassure them that everything is going well. When a deal is finally done there will no doubt be those who cry “sell out!”, but it is the workers who have sold themselves out by accepting the logic of negotiations.

Some people say that unions are infected with reactionary ideas, such as parliamentarism and statism (affiliation to the Labour Party in Britain for example). This also misses the point. It should come as no surprise that those who run capitalist institutions usually have shamelessly pro-capitalist ideas. But even where they don’t the fact of running a union imposes its own logic. In the years before the First World War the syndicalist Confederation Generale du Travail (CGT) in France had passed numerous motions at its congresses calling for a general strike in the event of war. It had even distributed handbooks informing its members of detailed practical steps to be taken to sabotage the war effort. But when war came the CGT rushed to join Poincare’s union sacree. This was a popular front in support of the war.

Closely related to these ideas is the commonly held view that there are “real unions” (such as UCATT and NUPE) and “scab unions” (such as EETPU and RCN) and that it’s better to be in a real union than a scab union. This hardly stands up to the most superficial historical investigation. Every union has blatantly encouraged scabbing at some stage in its history. In the construction industry in Britain, for example, it’s certainly true that EETPU members have crossed UCATT picket lines but it’s also true that UCATT members have crossed EETPU picket lines - sometimes justified on the grounds that EETPU is a scab union so its OK to scab on them!

### **Base Unionism**

The particular brand of rank and file unionism put forward by DD isn’t the usual Trot variety. He doesn’t call on workers to lobby the union leaders. He even criticises Arthur Scargill at one point (a serious offence in the eyes of most lefties and militant miners!).

His view is that workers involved in subversive actions (hit squads, surprise pickets, organisation involving the whole of the working class not just miners...) should still be encouraged to see themselves as part of the union and still try to act within the framework of the union. They should still be loyal to it even if they have their disagreements. So when Heathfield, the leader of the Yorkshire NUM, condemns them for defending themselves against the police, or the area NUM takes away the branch minibus, they should still respect the authority of these people.

Like many anarchists, DD has a lot of respect for “ordinary people”. He wants them to stay ordinary, that is: submissive to capital. At one stage he asks “which has more loyalty FROM the class”? Unions or obscure lefty groups? The Royal Family have more loyalty than either.

### **Chartism**

Most of those involved in setting up and running the unions in this period, particularly the Miners’ Association, would have described themselves as “Chartists”. This meant they supported the “six points of the People’s Charter” on the reform of parliament. These were: adult male suffrage, no property qualification, annual parliaments, equal constituencies, salaries for MP’s and the secret ballot. This was first formulated for a specifically working class audience in 1836 by the London Workingmen’s Association, a small society largely formed on the suggestion of the rich radical MP, Francis Place. Their program was hardly original – 58 years previously one Major Cartwright had introduced a Bill in the Commons containing the same six points.

As can be imagined, Chartism was a very broad church indeed, encompassing everyone from those who thought that adult male suffrage would somehow enable the country to be run a bit better to those, such as James Bronterre O’Brien, who honestly believed that it would lead to the abolition of private property. Numerous progressive historians have written that it was a “revolutionary demand” – in “the context of the times”, of course. We won’t waste time trying to refute this absurd idea except to ask a rhetorical question: how come the famous Chartist leader Feargus O’Connor was actually **elected to parliament** in 1847 by the middle class electors of Nottingham, and with a comfortable majority? It is often described as the “first working class organisation”. It would be more accurate to describe it as a middle class movement dedicated to recuperating working class struggle. The intention of Chartism was always to divert working class anger into demands for an extension of the franchise. In 1848 when the working class urban centres of much of Britain were engulfed in strikes and riots their response was... a massive petition to parliament, though they couldn’t quite make up their minds whether to appeal to the Cabinet or directly to the Queen.

As might be expected of a movement with such conservative aims its main activities consisted of organising petitions to parliament (with millions of signatures) and mass peaceful demos and rallies (hundreds of thousands of people). The fact that it was possible to assemble this many proles peacefully shows how much the working class had been tamed by the 1830’s. This had not gone unnoticed by Francis Place: “Look even to Lancashire” he wrote a month after the vicious pig massacre of a pro-democracy demo at “Peterloo” (St. Peter’s Fields near Manchester) in 1819:

‘Lancashire brute’ was the common and appropriate appellation. Until very lately it would have been dangerous to have assembled 500 of them on any occasion. Bakers and butchers would at the least have been plundered. Now 100,000 people may be collected together and no riot ensue, and why?...The people have an object, the pursuit of which gives them importance in their own eyes, elevates them in their own opinion, and thus it is that the very individuals who would have been the leaders of the riots are the keepers of the peace.

There were, however, those who believed in achieving the goals of the Charter by insurrectionary means. These were known as “physical force” Chartists, as opposed to “moral force” Chartists. Sometimes they were as good as their appellation. One night in November 1838, for example, several thousand workers marched into Newport intending to free the imprisoned Chartist leader Vincent. They were led by Frost who had just been sacked from his post as a magistrate and was the chairman of a Chartist Convention which had just dissolved. They were attacked by troops and special constables and ten workers were killed. Violent rhetoric was also very common. The famous Chartist “extremist” Julian Harney once advised his audience to carry “a musket in one hand and a petition in the other” – an early example of “the armalite and the ballot box”! This was, after all, an age in which the state had very little legitimacy and the idea of taking up arms was very widespread amongst the working class. Harney wrote of the winter of 1838-9:



It was clear that the workers had won this victory not through peacefully withdrawing their labour but through the traditional methods of rioting, freeing prisoners, plundering and burning the houses of the rich, theft, sabotage and undemocratically spreading strikes through going directly to other groups of workers. The numerous unions founded shortly after this time set about blatantly suppressing all of these activities in favour of legality, peaceful behaviour and, sometimes, the myth of the “General Strike” in which the workers would redress all their grievances without a shot being fired.

The Miners’ Association was not the only union formed at this time. The Potters’ Union was formed in 1843, so was the Cotton Spinners’ Association. In 1845 the local bodies of the printing trade were united as the National Typographical Association. The tailors and shoemakers were being enrolled into national societies as were glassmakers and steam engine makers. It **was** the most significant though, given its size (at one stage it may have had 100,000 members) and the important role played by miners in the strike/riot wave.

The trade unions, including the Miners’ Association, openly opposed all forms of struggle apart from the peaceful withdrawal of labour. At one of the founding meetings of the Miners’ Association at Wakefield in November 1842 every pit was asked to appoint delegates and urged to make “unity, peace, law and order” its motto. This meant accepting the logic of capitalist economics since obviously workers are less able to achieve anything by peaceful strikes when there is a surplus of labour. This doesn’t mean they can’t fight at all: it means they have to use different methods. The struggles of 1842 were against economic logic, taking place in the middle of a “recession” and succeeding where peaceful strike action would undoubtedly have failed. This wasn’t the only way unions attempted to impose economic logic – the Miners’ Association made regular appeals to employers to unite with the workers in demanding higher coal prices!

This period wasn’t just critical for the development of modern unions but modern social democratic politics as well. The National Association of United Trades for the Protection of Labour, formed in 1845, even seriously debated launching a Labour Party. Fortunately this particular attack on the proletariat had to wait another half century or so.

It was also an important time for the state reform of working conditions, that is; for planned pre-emptive concessions to the working class designed to buy social peace in the long term. This was the year of *The Midlands Mining Commission Report* and the *First Report of the Commission on Children and Young Persons* – this was the first official exposé of the widespread employment of children (often sent down the mines at the age of four or five) and the appalling conditions under which they worked. There was renewed parliamentary agitation for the ten-hour day for women and juveniles in the cotton industry. This was led by Tory philanthropists such as Lord Ashley (later Lord Shaftesbury) and finally became law in 1847. In 1848, when many bourgeois commentators thought that Britain was on the brink of revolution, the Secretary of State wrote to Lord Ashley saying “I shall declare without hesitation...that the passing of the Ten-Hours Bill has kept these vast counties at peace during this eventful period”. In 1864 Gladstone declared in the House of Commons that the law had been beneficial “both in mitigating human suffering and in attaching important classes of the community to Parliament and the Government”. At first sight it may appear that this “movement” had very little connection with what was actually happening within the working class but in fact there were numerous links between trade unionism and philanthropic reformers. The Miners’ Association passed many resolutions praising Lord Shaftesbury’s work and continually plied him with data. He once replied to them, saying he was “only an instrument, and possessed little power unless the working classes stood at his back”.

## The NUM

It’s true that during the 1984-85 strike the behaviour of the NUM posed real problems for revolutionaries. It didn’t **seem** to fit pre-conceived notions of how unions are supposed to behave. Outside one or two traditional industries (what’s left of mining, what’s left of craft unionism in the print industry ...) the working class experience of unions in Britain is pretty straightforward. They almost always oppose **any** strike until they realise they can stop it or it’s been balloted to death. The anti-strike (so-called “anti-union”) legislation passed under the Thatcher governments has made them sabotage workers’ struggles even more blatantly than they used to. In short, The NUM is not the T&G. It is a radical, left wing union. The main reason for this is simple - the existence of a militant rank and file. An area official in the NUM who tried to behave like his counterpart in NUPE or NALGO would simply lose control. This doesn’t in any way alter the fundamental nature of the NUM.

The militancy of the miners has been a real obstruction to capital accumulation - a blockage which could only be removed by closing the pits. Miners’ militancy goes back a long way. In the 1930’s the number of days “lost” (to the bosses) in strikes by miners equalled the number lost in the whole of the rest of British industry. After nationalisation in 1947 they were still accounting for a third of the days lost. It has not been an unbroken tradition though. Throughout the sixties hundreds of pits were closed and many miners left the industry. In other words, full employment **at first** enabled the economy to be peacefully restructured; mining was no exception, by 1970 the workforce was 47% of what it was in 1960. But full employment and the central importance of coal mining in providing energy for a still-expanding economy created the conditions for a massive upswing in militancy in the ‘60’s and early ‘70’s. The example of the miners undoubtedly inspired many millions of workers to confront the bosses.

Since its formation on January 1 1945 the NUM (just like its predecessor the Miners’ Federation) has always played an indispensable role in managing capitalist exploitation. After nationalisation in 1947 the National Executive of the NUM pledged itself to “do everything possible to promote and maintain a spirit of self-discipline ... and a readiness to carry out all reasonable orders given by management”. In this period there were numerous wildcat strikes opposed by the NUM. When, seven months after nationalisation, a strike which began at Grimethorpe spread to 38 pits the Yorkshire Area General Secretary said that the men must choose “between industrial democracy and anarchy”. Another union bureaucrat, Will Lawther, said that the NCB should prosecute the strikers “even if there are 50,000 or 100,000 of them”.

A major factor in miners’ militancy is that mining is about the only industry left (just about) where workers still live in a community which exists almost entirely to serve that industry. This means that links of solidarity are forged not just at work but in the street and the Miners’ Welfare Club as well. The involvement of the union in the community means that it is much more a part of daily life than elsewhere. This makes it much harder for miners to even think about acting independently of the union. Contrast this with the situation for most workers, where “the union” consists of a membership card, cheap insurance deals and a group of hacks who attend an inqorate branch meeting every month.

This makes it easier for the NUM leaders to put across the classic lie that “we can’t fight without our union”. That this **is** a lie is shown by the history of workers’ struggles. As we’ve seen, many of the important strikes in the coal industry have been unofficial, or at least started off that way. An even better example is the dockers in Britain before “decasualisation” (casual labourers being given permanent jobs) in 1967 who were a notoriously stropic group of workers. After World War II the T&G (the main union on the docks) didn’t make any strike official until 1961 despite over a dozen major stoppages. In the mid-60’s a third of Liverpool dockers weren’t even in unions despite the high level of union control over hiring. From around the world we can think of far more dramatic examples: of mass strikes which have had nothing to do with union organisation at all - from the 10 million workers who went on strike in May ‘68 in France completely against the wishes of the ‘Communist’ Party controlled

unions (to which most of them belonged) to the Iranian oil workers on strike in 1979 who stayed out despite being offered pay rises of hundreds of percent (they wanted to bring down the Shah's regime not just win a pay rise!).

### **But What's The Alternative...?**

This is the question lefties and trade unionist always ask of us weirdoes who are for workers' struggles but against the unions. The short answer is: we're not proposing an "alternative to the unions". If you want to negotiate the rate of exploitation and reinforce working class corporatism the unions are an excellent way of doing it. Just like the cops, union hacks are doing a difficult job and doing it very well under the circumstances. That's why we hate them.

A more relevant question is: "How should we organise in work-places to fight for our immediate needs and undermine capitalism?". The short answer to this is: the same way we organise anywhere else. We are not interested in representing anybody but in building up groups and networks of activists who want to escalate the class war by whatever means are necessary. The links we develop between class struggle militants **now** will be useful when mass struggles do break out, in terms of spreading and coordinating struggles, circulating information, seizing resources and so on. It should be clear from what we've said so far that this process can only take place **outside and against the unions**. How many more times do union officials have to promise to grass up workers involved in sabotage to the police before this becomes obvious to every class struggle militant?

### **Glossary Of British Trade Unions Mentioned Above:**

COHSE: Confederation of Health Service Employees

EETPU: Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications and Plumbing Union

NALGO: National and Local Government Officers Association

NUM: National Union of Mine Workers

NUPE: National Union of Public Employees

RCN: Royal College of Nurses

TGWU (T&G): Transport and General Workers' Union

UCATT: Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians

## **GOOD OLD-FASHIONED TRADE UNIONISM**

The year 1842 was a very significant one for the proletariat of the British Isles. On the positive side it was the occasion of a great struggle against wage cutting and on the negative side it marked the formation of the first modern national trade union. This was the Miners' Association of Great Britain and Ireland, an organisation every bit as anti-working class as the trade unions today, which used almost identical methods to undermine the workers' struggle for their interests. **This** was an event of significance for the proletariat of the whole world since the trade union form (once perfected) was one which was to be exported across the globe. Unionisation was not the only important event in the "domestication" of the proletariat of Britain but it is one of the clearest examples of a general trend from the uncontrollable mobs of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century to the passivity of the modern Labour Movement.

But first let's start as we mean to go on, with mass strikes and uprisings. In mid 1842 conditions for the working class were even more desperate than usual. In some industrial towns half the population were unemployed and those "lucky" enough to be in work were often on short-time and subjected to frequent wage cuts and speed up. The first sign of a fight back was in West Bromwich in May when miners went on strike. The strike was smashed by the police and army and the workers were forced to accept a 10% wage cut but the strike had only been over a fortnight when more than 10,000 iron and coal workers struck in the Black Country. From here trouble quickly spread to North Staffordshire and by the end of July all the North Staffordshire mines were closed and industry ground to a halt across the whole of the Midlands. This was just the beginning.

In the textile towns large crowds of strikers and other proletarians roamed about emptying the factories and filling the streets. Many had sticks and did not hesitate to use force to extend the struggle. They pulled plugs from factory boilers so in Lancashire and Yorkshire the strike became known as the Plug Plot Riots. At Shelton, North Staffordshire, Lord Granville's pits had two furnaces blown up. They still had not been replaced two years later. At Bingley in Yorkshire strikers threatened to burn down any mill that carried on working. They meant it.

At this time the police force barely existed. In the Scottish town of Airdrie, for example, one superintendent and four constables attempted to control a mining community numbering 33,000! The total force in Staffordshire was 184 men. Rescue of prisoners was very common. On 6 August a large crowd surged through Burslem, North Staffordshire, in response to the arrest of three colliers for begging. They broke into the police station, freed the men and then smashed all the windows in the Town Hall. A few days later in the same town Thomas Powys, a magistrate and deputy lord lieutenant of the county, ordered troops to fire on a strikers demo in the market square. One was killed and many wounded. A crowd of 500 set off to burn Powys' house. Later various rich scumbags had their homes pillaged and burnt. Coalowners and magistrates were singled out for special treatment. So were the clergy – as well as most of them preaching in support of coalowners some of them actually were coalowners. God may forgive, the proletariat doesn't!

Many of the early clashes occurred because of attempts by the authorities to crack down on poaching and the stealing of vegetables, which went on on an enormous scale. In Cheshire a special mounted force was formed to ensure that information about attacks on farms was quickly sent to the army.

When the strike movement ended in September, it was a partial victory for the workers, despite the vicious repression meted out by the state – hundreds were imprisoned and sentences of over 20 years transportation were common. But employers were not able to impose the large-scale wage cuts (around 25%) which they had intended. Some workers (such as the spinners of Bolton) even won small increases. The situation was summed up well by Richard Pilling, a mill worker on trial for calling his fellow workers out on strike when the bosses announced a wage cut. In court he said, "If it had not been for the late struggle, I firmly believe thousands would have starved to death".