

# PART 6

## PROGRESS AND CONTROVERSY

**I**N this and the immediately following chapters we shall carry the Union's story from the early 1950s to 1965, years in which memories of the war receded and the post-war world was born. Most of the war leaders had gone, through death or retirement. Stalin had died in 1953, Roosevelt much earlier in 1945. Churchill gave up the Premiership in 1955. C. R. Attlee, his Labour Deputy in war time and his successor as Premier for the Parliaments of 1945 and 1950, retired in the same year. The new men who succeeded the war leaders could have been expected to enjoy a long run of power or the pursuit of power. But they were an ill-starred generation. Churchill's successor, Anthony Eden (later Lord Avon) wrecked his career in 1956 in the brief and unsuccessful Anglo-French war with Egypt over the Suez Canal. Aneurin Bevan, at the age of 63, died in 1960. Hugh Gaitskell, Attlee's successor, died in 1963 at the age of 56, and Harold Wilson was elected as Party leader. Morgan Phillips, Secretary of the Labour Party, died a few days before Gaitskell. J. F. Kennedy, elected President of the United States in 1960, was killed by an assassin's bullet three years later.

The military occupation of Western Germany ended in 1955. A year later the German Federal Republic opened diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. But it was a period of fragile peace, as was seen in the Korean war and the brief military adventure of Suez. The latter was a particularly bitter experience because it diverted the attention of the world from the almost simultaneous Russian invasion of Hungary and the abuse of Soviet power to stamp out an early attempt by a Communist state to liberalise Marxist dogma and practice.

They were the years when science and technology increased the ability of mankind to soar into outer space or to commit nuclear suicide on a global scale. In Britain they were the years of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the Aldermaston March, two gallant enterprises that achieved considerable

influence but were not successful in changing national policy. We have since learned to "live with the bomb" in a mood of fatalistic optimism that it will never be used, or alternatively, by closing our minds to its existence.

Industrial production and world trade had revived, although Britain soon began to be outpaced by other European countries. Six of them (Belgium, France, Western Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Luxembourg) had launched the European Economic Community (the Common Market) in 1958. Britain was divided (and still is) over the issue of membership. Japan, having failed disastrously to establish by military means the so-called Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere, was gaining a wider dominion in many fields of world trade. It is fascinating to read, in light of current events in Britain, that in 1957 the production of motor vehicles in the United States was 7,200,000, in Great Britain 1,149,000 — and in Japan 45,000.

Conservative Governments were in power for the thirteen years from 1951 to 1964. Their disastrous influence on the British economy and on labour relations do not enter into this chapter but will be seen when we come to USDAW's role in the political and wages policy issues of the fifties and sixties.

For the Union this period saw several changes at the top level of executive and political service. Some were predictable through the operation of the retirement age. The most shocking to Union members was the death of the General Secretary, Alan Birch, in Manor House Hospital, London, on 13th December, 1961, at the age of 51. He had been in the hospital earlier in the year but seemed to have recovered and to be well on the way to resuming his role in USDAW and the TUC. But it was not to be. Most of his comparatively short life had been spent in the Union. He joined as a junior on the clerical staff of Warrington Co-operative Society. Thereafter, as branch secretary, Liverpool Divisional Councillor, Area Organiser, National Officer, he progressed to the General Secretaryship when Sir Joseph Hallsworth left for the National Coal Board in 1949. He had been knighted in the Birthday Honours of 1961. Others who departed without the poignancy of early death were Margaret Bondfield (81) in 1953, J. R. Leslie (81), former General Secretary of the Shop Assistants' Union, in 1955, and P. C. Hoffman in 1959, three who had done much to

pioneer the Shop Assistants' Union and wage the battle against the iniquitous living-in system.

In the election in 1962 which followed the death of Sir Alan Birch, Alfred Walter Henry Allen, better known in the Union as Alfred or Alf Allen, was elected as General Secretary. Born in 1914 in Bristol, his career had been along similar lines to that of his predecessor — early membership of the Bristol Co-operative Branch, Area Organiser in Liverpool and later the South West, National Officer at Central Office in 1951, eleven years later elected General Secretary by a very large majority. In a by-election following the death of Sir Alan Birch, Alfred Allen was elected to the General Council of the TUC, and re-elected at the subsequent Congress. He continued to serve on the Council until his retirement in 1979, when he was Chairman of the powerful Economic Committee.

Another change at the top was the retirement, for health reasons, in June, 1964, at the age of 60, of J. D. Hiscock who had served USDAW and previously the Shop Assistants' Union for 42 years. He had been Assistant General Secretary since the amalgamation and had played a leading part in Union campaigns to win wage agreements in the private sector of retailing and wholesaling. He was awarded the OBE in 1952. In the international field he was acting President of the International Federation of Commercial, Clerical and Technical Employees at the time of his retirement. The new Assistant General Secretary was J. Phillips, who was promoted from the position of National Officer in which he had dealt mainly with the retail distributive private trade, catering and check and credit trades. Aged 48, he had seen long service in the Shop Assistants' Union as well as in USDAW.

The memory of Sir Alan Birch was commemorated by a Union scholarship in his name at Ruskin College, tenable for two years. A great many Union branches were associated with the scholarship. There was also a moving tribute by Walter Padley, MP, at the 1962 annual meeting, to which Lady Birch responded.

The new General Secretary was introduced to the ADM of that year and declared that the immediate tasks before them were to replace the current minimum wage of well below £10 (which was then the Union's target) by a basic weekly rate that

was an adequate reward for a week's work, together with attainment of the five-day, 40 hours, working week and equal pay for men and women — three objectives with which he was to see substantial progress during his term of office.

Changes also took place in the Presidency of the Union. When the Labour Government was returned in 1964, the new Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, appointed Walter Padley, who for sixteen years had been President, as Minister of State for Foreign Affairs. R. B. Seabrook was elected to fill the remainder of Padley's term. An Area Organiser in the Southern and Eastern Division since 1937, "Dick" Seabrook had also been an Executive Council member since 1957. In the subsequent election of 1965, however, Rodney Hanes was returned as President. A Lancashire man, he had long been based as an Area Organiser in London, and had served on the Executive Council since 1949. In 1960 he married one of the few women members to be elected to the Council, Miss E. Falkingham, who, under her married name, was awarded in 1963 the annual TUC gold badge for service to the Movement. She had been a Union member for 38 years and until her marriage worked in the private distributive trade in Leeds. The badge was presented at the 1963 TUC. Rodney Hanes held the Presidency until 1967, when R. B. Seabrook was re-elected.

Another well-known member left the Union's service in September, 1960. Alfred Robens, MP for Blyth constituency since 1945, was appointed Chairman of the National Coal Board. As Lord Robens he became widely known as a vigorous opponent of the short-sighted policy — pursued by Governments of both Parties — of running down the coal mining industry on the assumption that the oil producing countries would obligingly continue to supply the West with cheap fuel. At the subsequent by-election in November, 1960, E. J. Milne, an USDAW Area Organiser in Scotland, retained Blyth for Labour.

From personalia we now turn to policy. The sixties in particular saw the beginning of a breakthrough with a reform that had been official Union policy since the amalgamation of 1947 — the five-day working week for retail distributive workers. Many progressive employers recognised the cogency of the Union's argument that with full employment the distributive

trades would find it increasingly difficult to enlist new recruits for a lifetime of Saturday working with no compensatory benefits. But private trade organisations, as distinct from individuals, dredged up from Victoriana an old, old argument — that reform was a matter for individual employers. They ignored a century of experience that if one or two employers rejected a reform, the rest, in self defence, would follow suit.

In 1955, Trevor Bowen, chairman of the John Barker store organisation, had publicly suggested that the trade must face up to the five-day problem. USDAW's Executive Council was quick to respond with a supporting statement and invitations to the Retail Distributors' Association, the Multiple Shops' Federation and the Multiple Shoe Retailers' Association to discuss the subject with the Union. The National Chamber of Trade was also approached. The general response, however, was insistence on individual action. The Union declared that this left no alternative but to go ahead with regional or single firm campaigns in every suitable area, and an article in *New Dawn* of October 29th, 1960, affirmed that "... in the absence of any kind of joint recommendations nationally, this is the course which we shall have to pursue." Department stores, which were one of the few fields of large scale distribution which had not negotiated comprehensive voluntary agreements on wages, etc., were to be given special attention.

The Union continued the campaign on two fronts — pressure for negotiation with Trade Associations, and on individual employers. Two store firms, Bentalls in South London and the John Lewis Partnership, with 21 shops in London and the provinces, decided of their own volition in 1960 to introduce the equivalent of a five-day week. Other firms were reported to be operating or contemplating similar arrangements.

The Union won its first individual agreement in 1961. It was with the powerful Lewis's group of department stores, and related to the company's Manchester store. The agreement provided for a six full-day trading week and a five-day working week, based on a staff rota cycled over periods of three weeks, giving one day off each week and so arranged that in each span of three weeks there was one week with Saturday, Sunday and Monday off. This arrangement was possible because Manchester was one of an increasing number of cities in which

most department store and other traders in city centres were exempted from the observance of an early closing day.

A year later there was a similar agreement for the staff at the firm's Birmingham store. In that city the Chamber of Commerce had recommended retailers wishing to trade for six days to consider arrangements for five-day working, and USDAW members backed up the recommendation with meetings and poster parades. Agreements were made with other Lewis's stores as and when municipalities granted exemption from early closing.

Progress was being made. But, to misquote Abraham Lincoln, you cannot satisfy all of the people all of the time, and at the 1962 ADM the Central London Hairdressers' branch were successful with a resolution expressing concern at the slow progress towards the five-day, 40-hour week. By 1963, however, the Executive Council reported an advance that should have satisfied the sternest of its critics. It was an agreement on a five-day working week for the multiple grocery trade in England and Wales, the culmination of some two years of negotiation, long periods of frustration and one stage when a series of conferences in the trade declared the Union's members to be ready for "a head on collision" if results were much longer delayed. As J. D. Hiscock described it in *New Dawn* the experience had been not unlike the long saga of the first Co-operative national agreement, with the difference that in the latter case both parties were willing negotiators, while it was some time before the multiple grocers were willing to sit round the negotiating table. About 100 firms were involved, with thousands of shops, ranging from supermarkets to small counter service branches. There could be no uniform standard that fitted every case and the agreement provided a variety of alternative ways in which the five-day week could be operated, the central factor being that however it was done, there must be an additional full half-day of leisure.

A year later, in the autumn, the General Secretary (who traditionally led negotiations with the Co-operatives on behalf of the joint committee of Unions concerned) reported another victory — a five-day — forty-hour week agreement for retail shops with the National Wages Board of the Co-operative Union. At local level the agreement was to be translated into

opening and closing hours through negotiations between retail societies and the Trades Union branches concerned. In most societies weekly working hours were reduced by two. This agreement also stated that both parties had taken into consideration "the urgency of improving the Co-operative Movement's share of the national retail trade to enable present wages standards and conditions to be maintained and improved upon".

We temporarily leave the five-day week campaign at this point. It was no longer a dream. Distribution was still rife with exploitation of the worker, but the curse of excessive hours was being lifted.

During the nineteen sixties the Executive Council was increasingly aware of the need to reorganise the Union's arrangements for member-education. The number of agreements with trade associations of employers and with individual firms was increasing. So, too, was the number of trades and services in which the Union operated. To service these developments trained and experienced shop stewards and collectors were required at the grass roots level of store or factory. Moreover, the large turnover in membership (which is the subject of the next chapter) required constant effort to educate recruits in the social and political objectives of the Union and of the Trades Union Movement in general. As was pointed out in Chapter 22, the education scheme adopted in 1949 was well-fitted to provide social/political education but much less so for training in Trade Union organisation and administration.

In 1958 a new programme was introduced, and still continues as the basis for the Union's educational work. A special report by the Executive Council to the ADM of that year declared that *in addition to contributions to national bodies, for pooled facilities to the Trades Union Movement as a whole, "...specialised services maintained by the Union itself are also indispensable"*. The report made six basic proposals:—

(1) In addition to the established one-week summer school there should be a second school annually of a more advanced nature, for which students who had attended the first school would be eligible.

(2) Between fifty and sixty Union Federations were already organising one-day or weekend schools, individually or jointly with other Federations or Divisional Councils. In South Wales



and Monmouthshire there had been experiments in linked schools, with the same body of students attending a series of lectures. Federation schools were mainly financed by branches. To stimulate interest it was proposed that they should be given greater help from central funds.

(3) Facilities should be provided at Central Office for the training of voluntary branch officers and intensive courses should be organised. The educational staff should be increased.

(4) Full use should be made of the Union's entitlement to nominate members for places on the one or two week courses which the TUC had begun to provide at its training college in London.

(5) Places should continue to be taken and allocated on a Divisional basis at the summer schools of the TUC, Scottish TUC, Workers' Educational Trade Union Committee, the Co-operative Union and the Labour Party.

(6) Various other grants or facilities should be extended.

The scheme introduced in 1949, said the report, had been financed by an annual allocation of 5d per member, increased to 7d in 1952. During the preceding six years about £10,000 a year had thus been allocated to education, plus an amount which was not segregated in the accounts for administration, expenses of Union officers addressing Federation schools, the income from the sum invested to finance the Sir Joseph Hallsworth scholarship at Ruskin and that part of the TUC affiliation fees which went to finance the TUC training college. About £7,000 of the total went in part on payments to national bodies for direct services, and more than £5,000 of the sum represented affiliation fees, of which £4,300 consisted of affiliation to the NCLC at 3d per member.

The NCLC had sought to increase the fee to 4d, to which the Union could not agree. Instead it proposed that payments should cease to be on a per capita basis but should be made for services actually rendered, such as correspondence courses; a method which operated with several other Unions. The NCLC, however, had stated that this form of association was no longer available. The Union Executive therefore proposed to discontinue affiliation from the end of 1958.

After so long a link between the two bodies it was natural that when the report reached the ADM, and was moved by

Alan Birch, there should be some opposition to breaking the link with the NCLC. A fear expressed by some delegates was that it would diminish political education. But the fact was that while the Union had grown enormously since affiliation began there had been no similar progress in the use that members made of NCLC facilities. In 1938 3,511 members took part in one or some of the facilities provided by the NCLC, 1,911 of them taking correspondence courses. In 1957 the total was 3,141 of which 785 represented correspondence courses. ADM delegates accepted that times had changed, new methods were necessary and they adopted the report.

The decision was quickly followed by the appointment of the Union's first full-time Education Officer, Peter Rosenfeld, who took up the position in October, 1958. He is still in office, and we shall see later how the Union, under his guidance, began to develop the well organised educational scheme that it operates today.

Another historic decision of the 1958 ADM meeting was to change the date of the annual meeting. It had long been at Easter, Standing Orders prescribing that it must be held on Easter Sunday, Monday and Tuesday or at Whitsuntide, whichever was the more practicable. An Executive Council statement proposed that while Easter should still be named Whitsuntide should be deleted and the alternative should be "... on the last Sunday in April and the two subsequent days". A principal reason for the change was the size of the conference and the problem of securing accommodation for between 1,100 and 1,200 delegates, and 400 to 600 visitors. Only three centres in the United Kingdom were suitable, at all of which there was competition from other organisations for accommodation at Easter. In addition, Easter is, of course, a movable feast and arrangements for conference documentation had to be altered from year to year. The proposed alteration, the statement said, would still permit a return to Easter if that was justified by experience.

Old habits die hard and the meeting was not totally enamoured of the proposal, particularly in Scotland, where the new date could clash with municipal elections. But the difficulties involved in sticking to Easter or Whit were self-evident to many delegates with experience of the ADM, and after some objections

the proposal was carried by a large majority. A proposal to return to Easter was defeated at the 1961 ADM, the April date survived a further examination in 1962, and continues to be the Union's practice.

There were three General Elections in the period covered by this chapter — in 1955, 1959 and 1964. In the first two the Conservative Party was returned with a substantially higher vote than Labour: 1955, Conservative 49.7 per cent, Labour 46.4 per cent: 1959, Conservative 49.4 per cent, Labour 43.8 per cent. The balance was the other way in 1964: Labour 44.1 per cent, Conservative 43.4 per cent. In that election Labour won 317 seats, the Conservatives 303 and the Liberals 9. In all three elections USDAW candidates did well. The 1955 result was given in Chapter 20, but will be repeated to complete the picture of the period covered by this chapter.

**Union members elected to Parliament in—**

1955: A. Robens (Blyth), G. Craddock (Bradford South), W. A. Burke (Burnley), A. E. Hunter (Feltham), H. Boardman (Leigh), W. E. Padley (Ogmore), R. E. Winterbottom (Sheffield, Brightside), J. T. Price, (Westhoughton), E. Fernyhough (Jarrow).

1959: All the above re-elected except W. A. Burke who did not stand. G. W. Loughlin won South Gloucestershire, a new seat for the Union.

1964: All re-elected with the exception that E. J. Milne was Member for Blyth. H. Solomons won Hull North, a new seat for the Union.

The Union continued to give generous support to Labour's General Election funds. In 1964 the amount was £55,000 in two donations.

Other events of the fifties and sixties can only briefly be mentioned. The Union regularly entered candidates for the TUC Gold Medal awards, and during the period women members outnumbered men by three to one in receiving the coveted distinction. One, Mrs. Hanes, has already been mentioned. The others were, first, Miss Alice Brown, of the Guildford Branch, in 1959. She had worked in the Movement for fifty years. The other was Miss M. I. Groves, Blaina branch, in 1961. The man was H. Winipenny, St. Helens (S) branch, who received the men's award in 1960. The TUC itself, after years

in which it had occupied eight different sets of rented offices in Central London, obtained a home of its own when it moved into newly built headquarters in Great Russell Street, London, in March, 1958.

The Union, with its long links with the Co-operative Movement, and its large Co-operative membership, welcomed the report of an Independent Commission set up by the Co-operative Congress of 1955 under the general oversight of Hugh Gaitskell, and with Anthony Crosland, then out of Parliament, as Secretary, USDAW had submitted recommendations to the commission on the subject of labour relations. The report, which was presented to the Co-operative Congress of 1958, proposed major changes in Co-operative policy and trading practice, many of which were later implemented. A conference of Unions with members in the Co-ops, retail and wholesale, was organised by the TUC on the suggestion of USDAW and set up a committee to consider the proposals, Alan Birch being secretary. The Union's members were urged by the Executive Council to work to secure the support of their own societies for the Commission's proposals.

The Union gave financial and moral support to the ICFTU International Solidarity Fund, set up at the beginning of 1958, with the principal purpose of helping Trades Unionism in under-developed countries; each Union being asked to raise contributions equivalent to 1/6 per member over three years. A practical example of the Union's international spirit was an interest-free loan of £10,000 to the Belgian Commercial Employees' Union in 1961, for the relief of distress during a General Strike.

In 1963 the Union began a practice which still continues — the provision of financial assistance for the attendance of young members as visitors at the annual delegate meeting.

We saw many chapters ago that A. Hewitt, the Union's first secretary, worked as a proof reader at the Co-operative Newspaper Society (now the Co-operative Press Limited) before becoming full-time secretary of the Amalgamated Union of Co-operative Employees and for a long period the Union's Offices were in the Newspaper Society's premises. The link has continued ever since, in representation on the Press Board to which A. Hewitt was elected in 1903, and in printing of the

Union journal and other publications. Cyril Hamnett, who became Administrative Officer of the Union in addition to having responsibility for *New Dawn* and publicity, was chairman of the Co-operative Press from 1952 to 1977, having been elected to the Board five years earlier. In that capacity he devoted endless time and energy to maintaining and building the circulation of the *Sunday Reynolds News*, the principal newspaper of the Co-operative Press (the title derived from George William MacArthur Reynolds, an early Victorian Chartist and Socialist who was also a novelist of considerable quality). National newspaper production is a notoriously high-cost industry, and the paper was kept going mainly by voluntary contributions from the Co-operative Movement. The title was altered in September 1962 to *Sunday Citizen and Reynolds News* and to finance publicity for a relaunch Trades Unions were asked for help. USDAW responded magnificently with a contribution of £10,000, and with further grants of £1,500 in 1966 and 1967. But the odds today are against a small national newspaper (or many big ones, for that matter, judging from post-war experience) and the paper appeared for the last time in June, 1967.

After many years' membership the Executive disaffiliated from the Labour Research Department in 1962. This action was challenged at the ADM of that year but was defended on the grounds that the LRD was dominated by the Communist Party, was proscribed by the Labour Party whose constitution the Union was expected to observe, and in addition adequate research facilities were now available through the TUC and USDAW's own research department. The Executive's action was endorsed on a card vote.

In 1963 USDAW launched a new publication of its own, specially designed to back up recruitment among employees in retail distribution. Entitled *Employee in Shop and Store* it was issued quarterly and supplied free to Area Organisers, collector-cavassers, voluntary branch officials and other key members in shops and stores. Printed in web-offset by the Co-operative Press, it served a useful purpose but eventually was discontinued because of difficulties in distribution.

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*The "Committee of Investigation"*

AT the annual conference of 1947 J. D. Hughes had warned that unless USDAW "mended the hole in the bucket" new members recruited in private trade would pour in at one end and run out at the other. His remedy was to ensure that before the Union began to recruit there should always be a shop steward or collector available to maintain contact with the new members and secure the payment of Union dues.

In the following years many measures were adopted to "mend the hole", including full-time collector-canvassers, additional organisers, appeals to active members to help in holding recruits, experiments by existing branches with schemes to interest new members, educational programmes for shop stewards, youth groups, the development of special trade conferences. But lapses on the scale which annually occurred continued to be a source of frustration to the Union.

The problem was almost entirely in the field of private trade employment. Membership in the Co-ops was established and stable. But the new Union, as USDAW then was, sought to break through to the hundreds of thousands of distributive workers who had so far been impervious to the Trade Union appeal.

Between 1954 and 1958 there was a steady though usually comparatively small increase in net membership each year; the biggest figure being 4,791 in 1954 and the smallest 798 in 1958. As a percentage of total membership, however, lapses remained persistently high. Even in a "good" year like 1954 the percentage was 28.7. Between 1950 and 1963 it never fell below 24 per cent and in 1961 it was 31.33 per cent. Divisional figures reflected the same tendency. Taking 1962 (a "good" year — there was a net increase in membership of 4,667), only one of the ten Divisions had a lapses rate as low as 23.29 per cent, while five were over 30 per cent.

The actual "in-out" figures (taken from a special report to which we shall shortly return) from 1950 to 1963 are shown in the following table:

<i>Year Ending</i>	<i>Membership</i>	<i>New Members Enrolled</i>	<i>Lapsed</i>	<i>Lapsed Members as a percentage of Membership</i>
1950 ...	342,789			
1951 ...	347,737	99,043	94,095	27.05
1952 ...	345,990	86,233	87,980	25.42
1953 ...	339,044	86,162	93,108	27.46
1954 ...	343,835	102,693	97,902	28.47
1955 ...	346,135	107,236	104,936	30.31
1956 ...	348,855	102,994	100,274	28.74
1957 ...	352,333	98,279	94,801	26.90
1958 ...	353,131	88,525	87,727	24.84
1959 ...	351,465	84,597	86,263	24.54
1960 ...	355,271	106,287	102,481	28.84
1961 ...	351,371	106,201	110,101	31.33
1962 ...	356,038	107,698	103,031	28.93
1963 ...	354,701	101,199	102,536	28.90

This situation was not, of course, one which the Union was likely to shrug off. It was acknowledged that "in-out" was a characteristic of the distributive trades. But even allowing for this, the "out" element seemed more than reasonably could be expected. In almost every year from the first debate on recruitment and lapses in 1948 resolutions on the subject appeared on the agenda for the annual delegate meeting. Some related to recruitment in general, some to special groups such as women workers, others urged the appointment of more organisers.

While everyone deplored the scale of lapses, there was argument as to whether or not the problem was being over-exaggerated in terms of the actual number of workers who were potential recruits to USDAW. At the 1963 annual meeting, at which the issue came to a head, Walter Padley, from the chair, had a word of caution for "well-meaning comrades" who talked of two or three million members. The real task was formidable enough "...without daunting ourselves with imaginary statistics".

The annual meeting had before it a resolution from South London which noted that in 1961 the Union recruited 106,201 members but showed a net loss of 3,900. It called on the Executive Council to appoint a committee to examine Union activities and make recommendations with a view to reducing loss of members, the committee to give special attention to the sections of distribution most likely to be fields of recruitment.

There was some feeling that the resolution was an implied criticism of the Executive and officials, although this was strongly denied by the mover, W. H. Kendall. The General Secretary, in replying to the debate, accepted this disclaimer but argued that as the subject of recruitment and lapses was *constantly before the Executive*, and there could be few aspects of the problem with which they were not familiar, the resolution did not really introduce anything new except the appointment of a committee. However, the general opinion was that a specific inquiry would concentrate the mind of the Union on a problem that was a constant irritant, and the resolution was accepted with a few dissentients.

In due course the committee was set up by the Executive Council. *It consisted of W. E. Padley, MP, Union President, W. S. Jones, H. M. Nunns, J. E. Priest, R. B. Seabrook (Executive members), A. W. Allen, General Secretary, J. D. Hiscock, Assistant General Secretary, and T. W. Cynog-Jones, Research Officer.* J. D. Hiscock resigned when he retired from service, in June, 1964, and his place was taken by his successor, J. Phillips, while W. E. Padley resigned on his appointment as Minister of State for Foreign Affairs in the Labour Government of 1964. *At its first meeting the committee defined its scope as being the wholesale and retail Co-operative trade and the wholesale and retail multiple and private trades; milk and bread distribution being within this scope.* An interim report was presented to the 1964 ADM. It was mainly concerned with the procedures adopted by the Committee in carrying out its task, or with research work in progress, and need not concern us here. The final report to the ADM of 1965 was one of the most comprehensive studies of a basic problem that any Trade Union has presented to its members. It did not come up with a clear-cut solution to the problem of lapses, for none existed. It did equip USDAW for the first time with a more accurate picture of the many varying reasons why members left the Union, the extent to which these reasons could be countered, and a long list of recommended courses of action.

The first part of the report described the procedure followed by the committee. *There were two lines of approach, one on recruitment, the other on lapses.* With the former, written inquiries were made on:—



- (1) Recruiting Co-operative employees — sent to 778 branches, of which 603 replied.
- (2) Methods employed in recruiting — to Divisional Officers.
- (3) USDAW propaganda material — to Divisional Officers, Area Organisers and Collector-Canvassers.
- (4) Area Organisers' Duties — to all Area Organisers.

For research into lapses, the record cards of members lapsing from the 225 branches administered at Union offices were analysed for the quarter ending September, 1963. Letters were sent to 21,284 persons who had dropped out during the quarter. Arrangements were made with 146 branches to follow up members when they changed their employment. All branches received a letter inviting individual members to give their views on recruitment and lapses, and the invitation was prominently repeated in *New Dawn*.

Once this programme had been set in motion, the committee members set out on their travels. Every Division in the Union was visited and meetings held with the Divisional Council and with the Divisional Officers, Area Organisers, and Collector-Canvassers. The committee also had discussions with the Central Office officials, National Officers and heads of Departments.

Part 2 of the report concentrated on figures of recruitment and lapses and analysed the potential in which new members could be sought, beginning with the 3,421,000 people recorded by the Ministry of Labour as engaged in the distributive trades in July, 1964. Taking the Census of Distribution, 1961, as its measuring rod, the committee concluded that deduction of self-employed people and their families reduced the number of paid employees in the trades to 2,800,000. This was not, however, a realistic potential. It included a great number of part-timers: Saturday-only sales staff, errand boys such as schoolboy newspaper deliverers, market traders, the one or two employees of small independent shopkeepers.

For a realistic assessment of recruiting possibilities the report began with the Census of Distribution figures for employment in retail Co-operatives (195,144), multiples with ten or

more branches (633,029) and large independent retailers (217,292). The total for these three groups was 1,045,465. In this section of the report it was pointed out that Co-operative membership of the Union was shrinking through the declining trade and consequent rationalisation of many societies. The peak employment figure for Co-operative Societies as a whole was 292,562 in 1958. By 1963 the number had fallen by 32,758.

After making adjustments for part-timers (although many of these were considered to be potential Union members), and also for the wholesale food and retail trades, the committee reached the conclusion that a realistic maximum potential for Trades Union recruitment was about 1,000,000. But this figure had to be shared with other Unions that recruited in distribution (six were mentioned), and the potential for USDAW was unlikely to be more than 800,000. On this basis, the Union, with 354,701 members at December, 1963 "... has recruited a rather higher proportion of its real potential than is realised".

Turning to lapses, the report stated that of the 21,284 lapsed members who received the questionnaire mentioned earlier, 7,273 (34.2 per cent) replied. Their reasons for giving up membership were summarised as follows:—

	<i>Per cent</i>
Gave up employment .. .. .	29.2
Took employment in a trade outside the scope of USDAW .. .. .	55.8
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	85.0
Took up employment in a shop where a collector does not call .. .. .	4.4
Dissatisfied with USDAW .. .. .	1.6
Some other reason .. .. .	5.6
Reclaimed into membership of USDAW ..	3.4
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To quote the report: "The striking fact is that 85 per cent of these lapses were unavoidable. This figure is greater than many believed. In the meetings in the Divisions, officials and Divisional Councillors were asked if they had any figures of this kind. Guesses were made ranging from 23 per cent to 80 per cent . . ." The Committee was told that "... harm is done to the Union

when local leaders overstate the problem of lapses. Confidence in the Union is undermined if it is believed that 100,000 workers 'throw their card in' every year . . . it is of importance that the membership should recognise that 85 per cent of the lapses are due to people leaving work altogether or leaving employment within the scope of USDAW".

Part 3 of the report dealt with the central problem — reducing the avoidable 15 per cent of lapses. The two main factors which led to the loss of members who could have been held were given as (1) a breakdown in the arrangements for collection of subscriptions, (2) loss of contact with the Union when members removed to another job. To deal with these problems the committee drew the obvious conclusions that (1) all branches "... must accept the importance of ensuring that adequate collection arrangements are maintained" and (2) that contact must not be lost with members who joined another employer. It was also emphasised that members themselves had a responsibility to ensure that they paid their dues and notified the Union when they changed their employment, but "regrettably, it seems clear that some members have no such clear understanding of the value of Trade Union membership".

In interviews up and down the country the committee was told that it was becoming increasingly difficult to find good voluntary collectors with a sincere interest in the Union. Commission at the rate of up to 5 per cent was already paid to collectors, but a widely held view was that the amount paid was not the real problem — interest in the Union was a stronger motivation with a good collector. Branches could determine the rate of commission, which was drawn from local funds, and the committee recommended that there should be "a flexible attitude" towards payments, according to "the needs of the situation" and local financial resources.

It was also emphasised that to deal with cases in which a voluntary collector in a store left, or was ill, there should be a deputy, or two collectors in large establishments. Branches should keep close contact with their collectors, support them with advice and guidance and take steps to ensure that the branch was notified when a collector left his job — members could be lost if the position was unfilled for several weeks.

About one-third of lapses were due to members losing contact

with the Union when they left their immediate employment. The committee estimated that about 5,000 members a year were lost when they changed jobs in the distributive trades. Many could have been retained by efficient follow-up. Unfortunately, the general experience seemed to be that only sporadic efforts were made to follow a member from job to job. Several suggestions were made to improve the situation, such as the provision of forms on which shop stewards and collectors could notify the branch of the members' new employment, and branches were urged to appoint a membership secretary who would be responsible for follow-up. The report recognised, however, that this was often a thankless task. The 146 branches which has co-operated in a follow-up experiment found that in general the response was poor. Nevertheless "... the problem must be regarded as a major challenge to the Union".

It will be noted that these recommendations were mainly concerned with what were basically routine matters of local administration. But it is at those local levels that the strength and future of an organisation are often determined. Although the report did not say so, it seems apparent that as the Union had grown in size and the great variety of trades in which it operated, there had been some loss of the local zest and interest of earlier years and a considerable measure of apathy in many branches.

Part 4 turned to the question of recruitment, beginning with the Co-operative sector. The committee was disturbed to discover that while Trade Union membership was a condition of employment in most societies, at any one time "... a fair number of Co-operative employees are not within our ranks". This showed up wherever a contributions deduction scheme (the "check off") was introduced, when "... invariably a number of employees are found who are not members of the Union". In the eighteen months to June, 1964, deduction schemes were arranged with fifteen societies, producing 1,448 new members who should have been in the Union from the beginning of employment. The figure equalled 22 per cent increase of membership in the branches concerned (By June, 1964, schemes were in operation in 476 branches covering 136,059 members. Twenty of the branches, with about 6,000 members, were in non-Co-operative employment.)

To ensure full membership in those societies where it was a condition of employment the committee listed eleven methods which had successfully been followed by different branches. All branches were recommended to study the full list and introduce the methods that would be most effective in their local circumstances. Five activities were given as particularly important.

- (1) That Divisional Officers assist branches to ensure 100 per cent membership.
- (2) That all branches consider the appointment of a membership recruitment secretary.
- (3) That 15 year old employees be recruited as associate members.
- (4) That membership cards be issued to all members covered by deduction schemes.
- (5) That Divisional Officers ensure that periodically a card check was carried out wherever Union membership was a condition of employment.

The report made it clear that it was not an end in itself to ensure that all Co-operative employees observed Trade Union membership. There was also an obligation on branches to help new members to become Trade Unionists in the full meaning of the term, so that they had a real appreciation of the Union's purpose. In particular, branches with deduction schemes should still appoint a full quota of shop stewards to maintain contact between the branch and individual members.

Part 5 began by defining the multiple and private trades as the principal future recruitment potential for USDAW. There was, however, considerable difference in the Divisions on the extent to which recruitment had been successfully carried out. In some Divisions membership had reached a high level in the main trades. In others it was strong only in particular firms in certain trades. Union membership was most complete in the traditional multiple firms in food, footwear and tailoring, but even within such firms there were wide variations as between one Division and another. The same was true of department stores and wholesale warehouses.

Changes in the methods of distribution had brought about geographical variations in the pattern of retailing. Some Divisions had been hit by the closing of small branch shops by

multiples, with consequent loss of membership. The Allied Suppliers group was quoted as a case where 1,170 branches have been closed in the six years 1957-1962, and only 427 new branches had been opened. The new supermarkets and large food stores had developed geographically at a different time and pace.

The nature of the appeal which should be made for Union membership in private trade was analysed; a fairly general view of Divisional Officers being that effective campaigns were based upon a specific issue and not on the general Trade Union appeal. Comments included "... when trying to recruit in a new field, the effective campaigns were based upon a specific issue and not on the general Trade Union appeal" ... "A recruitment campaign must be purposeful — a wages claim, five-day week, etc. A campaign must have a reason, otherwise it is aimless" ... "Private trade recruitment is not on the general issue. Special efforts and campaigns are related to specific issues" ... "Campaigns are undertaken on the general issue and on a specific issue. The latter has produced the best results". One Divisional Officer, however, said that he had never found that wage negotiations provided a particularly good platform, partly because of the remoteness "... as between the JIC and the workers concerned", partly because "... people expect Trade Unions to embark on wage negotiations [it is] part of the normal pattern, and not something to arouse exceptional interest".

On the latter point the committee commented that in statutory or other form of wage regulating machinery affecting distributive workers, particularly Wages Councils which covered most of the retail trades, it was USDAW that initiated wage claims and Union officials led the negotiations for the workers' side.

This power of initiative was in itself a means of defence and attack on wages and its effectiveness depended largely on the scale of Union membership in the trade concerned. Branches and Organisers were also urged to drive home the additional argument that strong Union membership could lead to voluntary Union agreements which were essential to reach the next stage of something "... over and above Wages Councils".

The committee summed up its study of recruitment in the private trades by recommending that the priorities lay in the

supermarkets, department stores and variety chains' There was, however, a "... continuing responsibility to maintain and extend recruitment in the traditional multiple shops" and in the multiple grocery trade automatically to extend this into the supermarkets. The wholesale grocery and textile trades were ranked as second priorities. The latter, it was said, in the large cities offered "particular opportunities".

Methods of organising the private trade potential were the subject of Part 6. For obvious reasons the committee did not fully "show its hand" in a publication which could have a wide circulation, but various details of methods which had been successful were supplied to Divisional Councils and organising staff. Some general proposals were, however, published. They included:—

Attempts should be made to get the consent of management to give out or post notices. This had the advantage of showing the staff that the Company was not anti-Union.

In the large establishments recruitment could be facilitated if there was inside contact with someone who had a knowledge and understanding of the Union.

Also in large establishments, organisers should try to obtain facilities for meetings on the premises at the commencement of a recruitment campaign. A number of firms, it was said, were willing to give such facilities.

Members of other Unions should be asked to encourage wives, sons or daughters employed full-time or part-time in distribution to join USDAW. Help in this and other ways should be sought through Trades Councils and Labour Parties. (Ironically, it was reported that some husbands who were themselves active Trades Unionists discouraged their wives or families from joining or taking an active part in USDAW).

Many firms which were potential recruitment areas operated in more than one Division. Effective campaigns must be conducted simultaneously over the whole area in which a firm operated, which called for central direction and co-ordination.

National direction raised the question of national or multi-divisional mobilisation of Area Organisers for some campaigns, according to the parts of the country in which a particular firm

operated. This, in turn, brought up the related problems of Organisers' duties while they were away from base, and the extent to which some of those duties could be carried out by part-time branch officials. The temporary transfer of staff into other Divisions for a specific purpose was already an established practice, but the report visualised an extension of the practice for campaigns in the increasing number of national multiples. The three related problems of central direction, temporary transfer of organising staff, and continuity of organisers' local duties were considered in Parts 7, 8 and 9.

There was general support for the principle of direction. As one of the comments made to the committee put it "In the past ran unco-ordinated campaigns. Made progress in one Division, but not elsewhere. This led to disillusion and the collapse of the membership". Another comment was "Central Office will have to take command and direct Area Organisers and not allow Divisional Officers to give different instructions". Objections were based mainly on the opinion that experience had shown campaigns to be most effective when linked to local issues.

On the use of Area Organisers the committee discussed but rejected the formation of a mobile team. Instead, it recommended that the *Executive Council* should consider arrangements to "... make available in each Division" staff who could participate in multi-Divisional campaigns. The fear that work in the Divisions would suffer while Organisers were away from base led to a number of alterations being suggested. One was that regional rather than national campaigns should be carried out, which could reduce the time an Area Organiser was outside his territory. Another was to "consider the using of effective rank-and-filers, get them time off and pay them loss of wages". The committee, however, stood by a recommendation on transfers for urgent campaigns and in Part 9 it devoted several pages to the subject under the heading "Easing the Load on Full-time Staff by Securing the Help of Rank and File Members".

It was reported that information and opinions collected by questionnaire, by discussion at the meetings in the Divisions and by letters from members was: "(1) That Area Organisers spend so much time servicing members and on collecting



contributions that they have only little time for the actual job of membership recruitment; (2) Too few rank-and-file members play a part in the day-to-day work of the Union". The committee found it "difficult to accept this assessment [and] they hope it is a too gloomy view". It declared, however, that these two conclusions raised a problem basic to the future of the Union and — "... it was of the utmost importance that immediate action be taken to increase rank-and-file participation in the work of the Union".

Inquiries showed that one-third of the Area Organisers spent more than one day a week (or its equivalent) collecting contributions, and 86 per cent spent some of their time collecting. In addition Collector-Canvassers were employed in some areas. Two systems of collection were in operation: in one case collection in a shop by someone who worked there, in the other collection from a parade of shops. The latter was the more difficult to organise, but both systems were successfully practised in many areas. The quality of Collectors was vital. To interpolate a quotation from Oliver Cromwell into the committee's report, collectors must be like Cromwell's Ironsides, men and women who "knew what they fought for, and loved what they knew". As the report pointed out, they *were* USDAW to the members, and were expected to know the relevant agreements on wages and conditions, and the general policy of the Union. Seven suggestions were made for assisting collectors:

- (1) Some form of "briefing" upon appointment.
- (2) An information broadsheet, or other means to ensure that they were in touch with Union developments in their trade or firm.
- (3) A simplified collecting system.
- (4) A simple banking system.
- (5) Prepaid envelopes or postcards to call on the Area Organiser when necessary.
- (6) Employer to be asked to provide facilities.
- (7) Payment of a realistic commission, to be settled according to local circumstances.

Further consideration of spare-time collectors — retired members or married women — was also recommended.

Part 9 also contained a lengthy section on the desirability of a procuracy fee for recruiting new members. On this there

were "very mixed" feelings among officials and Divisional Councillors, ranging from outright opposition to qualified approval. The committee's own recommendation was highly qualified — "... that there are circumstances where the payment of a procuration fee would be justified . . . but do not consider that such a payment should be made as a regular continuing policy".

Servicing was a problem for Area Organisers. Some branches required a lot of time, in others branch officials did much of the work themselves. Area Organisers frequently had to act as branch secretaries. The committee supported the view that this system should be ended, and the Executive Council should insist that Area Organisers "... create an effective branch administration, and train rank-and-file members to do it". The formation of trade committees in large branches, supervised by the branch committee, was recommended as a means to spread the duty of servicing members.

Part 10 dealt with "Information, Publicity and Advertising". This, said the report, was a problem facing all Unions but it was particularly acute in retailing. Branches were fragmented because members worked in small numbers in separate shops. In the multiple trades there could be a feeling of isolation — the next branch of a firm could be many miles away. The "in-out" nature of the trade aggravated the problem — the Union could not assume that members knew what had happened "a year or two ago", so basic information had frequently to be restated. The Union was responsible for "a massive output of informative circulars, leaflets and other publications." But it was failing to get its message through to *all* its members — "Conveying information from the branch to the rank-and-file members is the fundamental problem that today challenges the Union".

Reading between the lines of the report, it would seem that the committee was baffled by a problem that is not confined to USDAW — that of maintaining interest and participation with a mass membership. Some suggestions were made. To minimise the time spent in reading information circulars from Central Office, a brief summary of the main points should be attached. Staff representatives should be encouraged to take part in the work of a branch and could help in ensuring that information

reached members who did not attend branch meetings. Some Divisional and Area Officers periodically produced local bulletins about wage negotiations, etc., and frequently these were posted on staff notice boards. The committee also supported proposals that there should be a wider distribution to officials of information about firms that operated in more than one Division.

*New Dawn* was regarded as "excellent for the good member but maybe too serious for the others". This was not regarded as a criticism because "there is a real need for a serious Union journal". But it needed to be supplemented "by other lighter, more newsy publications."

The great variety of leaflets produced by the Union was praised, both for their information and recruitment value. The committee was satisfied that the Union received a full measure of publicity in the national and local Press. It urged every branch to appoint a local publicity and Press officer and recommended that Central Office should supply basic briefs to help in preparing local news stories or letters to the editor.

This has been a lengthy chapter but even so it has only summarised the mass of material in the report. The document went out to branches in good time for the annual meeting of 1965, where it was the first major business following adoption of the annual and auditors' reports.

Alfred Allen moved adoption. For obvious reasons, as he put it, he did not traverse the mass of data and recommendations already in the hands of delegates. He did, however, call attention to three points. Firstly, the problems that had caused them so much concern "... have not just emerged now, or within the last couple of years". They had been with them for a much longer period of time, slightly different in character but basically the same. They were being felt much more sharply because of the rapidly changing structure of distribution and a decline in the trade of Co-operative societies, with its consequential drastic effect on Union membership. Secondly, he emphasised the "irreparable harm" done to the Union if the public and other Trades Unionists were left with the belief that 100,000 workpeople withdrew because of dissatisfaction with the service given by the Union. "The report gives the lie to that".

His third point was to place USDAW's experience "against

the background of other Trades Unions". He quoted figures from the journal of the Electrical Trades Union of March, 1965, in which it was stated that 1963 figures showed 874,000 women to be in the electrical engineering industries while the Union's female membership in that year was 22,347. The *Daily Telegraph* of January 22nd, 1965, was cited as reporting a statement by the General Secretary of the Amalgamated Engineering Union that although the AUE had a million members, it only just managed to keep recruitment ahead of losses; the figures for the previous year being 143,000 recruits for a net gain of little over 2,000.

There was one resolution and an amendment linked to the report. The resolution, from South West London, called for a sustained campaign to reach a membership of 500,000 by 1970, for regular contact with other Unions involved, and for the Executive to set up a campaign development committee with a full-time senior officer to plan and supervise campaigns in all sectors of retailing.

This was moved by Mrs. L. C. Thurgood, who argued that it was a necessary step to "complete the job" described in the report. The amendment from Chester No. 1 urged an examination of the cost and value of Collector-Canvassers. The debate was comparatively short, probably not through lack of interest but because the report itself had covered so much of the ground. T. Kay (Manchester Central CWS Transport) argued for the appointment of women organisers. D. Huxstep (Booksellers and Stationers) emphasised the vital role of the rank-and-file and urged a policy based on "a substantial increase in wages." A. Pyatt (Manchester Divisional Council) said the proposed campaign committee showed lack of confidence in the Investigation Committee and the Union's back-up organisation. W. F. H. Kendall (London Divisional Council) argued that increasing rank-and-file participation was not enough. To get a breakthrough in private trade they needed full-time Organisers.

The South-West London resolution was referred to the Executive, the Chester amendment had fallen through lack of a seconder, and the report was adopted unanimously.

So ended this study in depth of a problem that had long haunted the Union, and to some extent still does. The report did not produce absolute solutions, for the problem is endemic

in modern retailing. It did give guidelines and a realistic measuring rod for the future.

The report did not, however, (probably because it was outside the Committee's terms of reference) consider another source of recruitment which historically has been a factor in the growth of USDAW — amalgamation with Unions of a similar character. Apart from the recruitment of workers who are not in any Union, there is undoubtedly scope for further growth through mergers such as that which took place with the Scottish Bakers' Union in 1977.

## 27 THE POLITICS OF WAGES — AND FIVE STRIKES

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WAGES and conditions in Britain are traditionally settled in free collective bargaining between employers and workers, who are represented by their Unions. For industry generally negotiations are sometimes with an individual firm, but more commonly with an employers' association, or through a Joint Industrial Council or Wages Council. In nationalised industries and services they are with the appropriate State corporation. The various Unions of public service employees negotiate through organisations set up for the purpose by local authorities or Government. When negotiators fail to agree, there are in many cases provisions for arbitration. But in whatever manner negotiations are carried out it is a hard-won and cherished Trades Union principle that there should be free bargaining between the two sides.

The Government's role was for long considered to be one of non-involvement, standing on the sidelines or offering conciliation services. Tory Governments sometimes all too obviously stepped from the sidelines to the side of the employers. *But until recent times*, Governments did not attempt to regulate the overall national pattern of wages or seek openly to influence the decisions of negotiating bodies or arbitrators.

The change in post-war years began in 1948, when, as we saw in Chapter 20, the Labour Government appealed for restraint on wage increases. This appeal had only a limited success. There was a lull until the fifties, when the three successive Tory governments between 1951 and 1964 opened a long campaign to control the rate at which wages advanced. The Labour Government of 1964 sought a similar objective though with a very different order of priorities in regard to the economy in general. In this chapter we shall follow USDAW through the still continuing controversy engendered by this change of policy in both Parties, and through much agony of spirit when the desire to support a Labour Government conflicted with the

needs of members in the many low-pay trades that are organised by the Union.

Before coming to USDAW's problems it is necessary, however, to attempt a brief description of the circumstances which led both Parties onto a new course. After all, Governments do not avidly seek to become the arbiters of so contentious an issue as wages. That is a problem which politicians could happily be without. But in recent years the state of the national economy has left them with little choice. Once the post-war sellers' market had ended, it was soon apparent that Britain's industrial record was lagging behind that of other countries. We had made a good beginning under the Labour Governments of 1950 and 1951. The fruits were wasted in the free-for-all of the successor Tory Governments. Industry declined, Productivity was low. Money poured into new office blocks, of which we now have the finest collection in Europe, many of them still empty. Asset stripping became a substitute for new factories and new technologies. We imported (and still tend to do) more than could be paid for by exports. These facts were common knowledge and brought about recurring crises in the balance of payment on overseas trade and in the value of the pound. Harold Macmillan said of those years that we had "never had it so good". Maybe, in some ways, But it was by eating up the seed corn.

Tory Governments had good reason to panic when the results of their free market free-for-all began to show up in the late fifties and early sixties. Once upon a time (but no further back than the twenties and thirties) economic difficulties could be met by leaving it to industry to enforce wage cuts and close down factories, while the financial Establishment juggled with the Bank Rate and Governments complacently looked on. But these regulators no longer worked. Trades Unions were too strong and public opinion would no longer meekly accept industrial depression and massive unemployment.

Not that the Tory Governments of 1951, 1955 and 1959 did not try hard within their direct power to make the nation swallow the mixture as before. By manipulating Bank Rate and restrictions on credit they further aggravated the poor showing of British industry. They ran down the social services built up by the two Attlee Governments. But on wages they had them-

selves to swing the hatchet formerly left for employers to wield.

They tried to impose a policy of "pay pause". They tried a "guiding light" as a criteria by which those who negotiated or arbitrated on wages could reach their decisions. It ranged from zero awards to  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. They intervened in the awards of Wages Councils. They appointed a so-called independent council of Lord Cohen (chairman), an accountant and an economist (soon derisively named "the three wise men") to review prices, productivity and the level of incomes. Hugh Gaitskell described its first effort a "not a scientific report . . . but a political tract". They even talked of planning and their one achievement of this sterile period was to set up the National Economic Development Council (Neddy), at which employers, Unions and the Government could discuss the problems of the economy. The TUC joined on the grounds that it was at least one positive move towards better direction of the economy, but with the reservation that its representatives would not be expected to preach wage restraint.

USDAW's attitude to the shifts and expedients of Tory policy during this period can be summed up in two words: unqualified hostility. The Union's case against the Government was summarised in this extract from Walter Padley's New Year message of 1958, in *New Dawn* of 11th January. "It is important that we should see wages policy in its right setting, i.e. against the background of Government economic policy. The supreme indictment is that from 1951 its attempts to redistribute the national income against the wage earner, via the Budget and legislation such as the Rent Act, along with its doctrinaire preference for high Bank Rate and credit restriction instead of selective planning controls, has led to inflation and has cut the rate of economic growth by one half. If the Government deliberately puts up the cost of living as an act of policy, wage applications are bound to follow from the Unions . . .".

At the ADM of the same year he pointed to the other side of the problem which would arise if and when a Labour Government, too, found it necessary to follow a wages policy " . . . real wages consist in the goods which money will buy . . . increases in real wages depend largely on the growth of production and efficiency in distribution (though redistribution of wealth can still make a contribution to greater equality). It



follows from this that when we have secured a Labour Government, which pursues policies of economic planning for full employment, then . . . it will be the duty of all of us in the Trade Unions to co-operate . . . to ensure that wage increases are matched by economic growth and economic growth is matched by wage increases . . . unless this problem is squarely faced and solved by our industrial and political Movements, all our ambitious plans . . . will be endangered”.

An emergency resolution which was adopted in 1958 embodied the chairman's criticism of Tory policy and endorsed the Executive Council's policy of making wage applications to offset the declining standards of living of Union members. The meeting also carried a resolution from Aberdeen proposing a joint Labour Party/TUC inquiry into whether a wages policy could be compatible with a free Trades Union Movement.

Padley's speech and the first of these two resolutions typified the attitude of subsequent annual meetings. In 1961 the Executive Council issued a strong statement in opposition to the “wages pause” which the Chancellor, Selwyn Lloyd, sought to introduce. The Union, it said, would continue to launch claims at the appropriate times “ . . . regardless of the considerations outlined in the Chancellor's statement, which are not accepted as valid under present economic and social conditions”. The Executive declaration also objected to the Minister of Labour referring back decisions of Wages Councils. This, it said, was direct discrimination against the lowest paid members of the wage earning population, since these Councils had been set up by Statute to protect workers at the bottom of the wages table.

We now come to 1964 and the return of the first Labour Government for thirteen years. The Government was elected on 15th October and immediately concentrated on the economic problems it had inherited, including increase in and distribution of the national income. Shortly before Christmas a Statement of Intent was signed by the Government, the TUC, the Association of British Chambers of Commerce, the British Employers' Confederation, the Federation of British Industries and the National Association of Manufacturers. It declared the Government's economic objective to be “ . . . to achieve and maintain a rapid increase in output and real wages combined with full employment”. The Government pledged itself to implement a

plan for economic development, increase productivity, develop policies to promote technological advance in industry, get rid of restrictive practices and prevent the abuse of monopoly power. It undertook to set up machinery to "... keep a continuous watch on the general movement of prices and of money incomes" and to correct any excessive growth in aggregate profits "... as compared with the growth of total wages and salaries".

The TUC and the employers' organisations undertook to co-operate with the Government in carrying out this policy. In particular they agreed to attack obstacles to efficiency "... whether on the part of management or of workers" and to co-operate with machinery which the Government was to set up to keep under review the general movement of prices and money incomes of all kinds (this machinery was established in 1965 in the Prices and Incomes Board, later abolished by the Heath Government.)

For many members of the Union this would be a time of heart searching. The Government's plans would introduce a new factor into wages bargaining. Free collective negotiation was enshrined in their traditions. Their predecessors had fought to establish the principle in the Co-operatives. Many members of the present generation had engaged in similar battles with private employers. Would this hard-won right now be diluted? But the quiet voice of memory would speak up to remind them that for the entire existence of NUDAW and USDAW they had also fought for social planning and control of the economy. At annual meetings of the recent past they had repeatedly endorsed this policy as the constructive alternative to Tory free-for-all. As we saw in earlier chapters, the Union itself had drafted plans for the planning of distribution. Now they had a Labour Government dedicated to the same purpose. Could wages be excluded when other major factors in the economy were to be planned?

The immediate issue came before the annual meeting of 1965 on an Executive Council resolution accepting in principle the Statement of Intent, pledging full support to the Labour Government in mobilising the economic resources of Britain, declaring that "... the policies pursued by the Government, with continued emphasis on expansion and full employment

and the rejection of deflation will materially assist in creating the right economic conditions that will make an incomes policy acceptable to Trade Unionists". It also affirmed the belief that a general plan for economic development would result in a rising standard of living for workers in distribution and other trades.

Alfred Allen, who moved the resolution, made three crucial points. They had opposed, and still opposed, wage restraint, but they believed that economic planning would promote expansion and create conditions in regard to wages "... in which Trade Unions can more effectively do their primary job of improving the real standards of the people we are representing". It would require a great effort by Government and the nation to solve Britain's problems, and the Trades Union Movement must play its part. "To shirk from this effort now after years of exhortation in support of the need for a higher and more stable rate of economic growth under the direction of a Labour Government, would be worse than defeatist".

Various amendments and separate propositions were on the agenda. To reserve the right of the Union to continue with a wages policy (Birmingham Co-operative), to reject any policy of wage restraint (Metropolitan Fur Skin Dressers), to insert in the resolution a demand for redistribution of existing wealth and the curbing of private economic power (Coventry), to oppose any form of co-operation either directly or through the TUC with the Government on an incomes policy which would prevent free negotiations (South East London). Only the Fur Skinners' proposition was carried. The Executive Council resolution was carried with only two dissentients.

This chapter ends in 1965. For the time being we must leave USDAW's first contribution to the Great Debate on Labour Governments and a national wages policy. It is a problem that has continued to dominate the affairs of all British Trades Unions since 1965, and we shall return to it later.

One other political event of 1965 must be recorded. It was the first occasion when the ADM was visited by a British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson being a guest at the opening session. The report of the proceedings records that he "entered the conference hall to a standing ovation".

The policies of Governments on incomes were not, of course, the only way in which the Union was involved in wages questions

during the period of this chapter "Ordinary" negotiations on traditional lines absorbed much of the Executive Council's attention, that of officials and of the ADM. We saw in Chapter 21 that up to 1955 annual increases were reported each year, varying, of course, from trade to trade or whether they were the result of *direct negotiations with employers or the awards of Wages Councils*. The pattern was much the same in the following ten years.

Advances in wages were, however, secured against the background of an increasingly militant annual delegate meeting, and increasing concern throughout the Union that distribution and many related trades lagged so far behind the general level of industrial earnings. While increases were regularly won they *did not materially narrow the gap for the greater number of members*.

By 1959 a £10 minimum was the target but was already regarded as inadequate. In 1960 London Co-operative branch was successful in a call for a "... complete review of the retail Co-operative national agreements". D. McCallum, who moved, said that even if they got the £10 minimum shop workers would still be something like £3-10-0d behind typical *earnings in industry*. The resolution was carried. At the same ADM W. G. Devonald (Barrow-in-Furness), was, however, sceptical of resolutions which fixed amounts and time limits for securing improvements in wages and hours. All the Executive could do was "... get the maximum for you". T. A. Jones (Cardiff CWS) made a similar comment — "Let us keep this £10 minimum wage before us as a target . . . but do not tie the hands of our negotiators".

*So it continued*. The Union could, and did, secure increases. By 1962 it was in sight of the £10 minimum for adult males in the retail Co-operative Movement (£9-13-0d) and in multiple footwear (£9-16-6d). But the rate was still under £9-10-0d in multiple grocery and meat and £9-10-6d in tailoring. And even where these figures were increased by commissions they were still a long way short of the average industrial wage of £15. In all cases, women's rates were very much lower.

In a debate at the 1965 ADM Alfred Allen summed up the problems and the achievements of the past decade. The first problem was to keep wages at least in line with rising prices.

"Only in a few cases have we been able to overtake the increases in prices which . . . have debased, if not destroyed entirely, the hard-won achievements in pay levels some months earlier". That was a continuing battle, and once again the Executive could report that all the main voluntary agreements had been improved since the last annual meeting and there had been changes in rates in the principal Wages Councils for the retail trades.

The second problem was the five-day, 40-hour week, and he said, they could be proud of the progress made against the inherent difficulties of operating this reform in retailing, with its diversified trading interests. "The differing circumstances of trades and localities makes it impossible, and indeed undesirable, to try to lay down a uniform pattern of shopping hours." But employers were coming round to the Union's view that the retail trades must be prepared to face up to five days/40 hours if they were to compete for and retain the best type of worker.

The third problem was training. A well trained labour force was essential to an adequate career and wages structure in distribution. There was too much labour wastage, and this ". . . affects the kind of wage standards we hope to get, and will get . . .".

Strike action is the other side of negotiations. We have seen in previous chapters that USDAW has never flinched from calling members out when the Executive considered the cause was just and there was no hope of a peaceful settlement. But it has not sought combat. There were few strikes in the period covered by this chapter. In two cases, however, the Union was in conflict with powerful national organisations and in two other cases with companies of international fame.

In 1956 the 7,000 CIS agents in USDAW (the only Union which organised the Society's agency force) voted that they would not canvass for or accept any new business after 1st May. This decision followed long and unsuccessful attempts to negotiate improved remuneration or, failing agreement, to set up joint Conciliation Board machinery such as that which had for long existed in the Wholesale Societies (which were themselves the joint owners of the CIS). The ban lasted for four months, when the Society agreed to the establishment of a Conciliation Board similar in constitution to that of the CWS.

When the Board met the two parties could not agree and the issue was referred to the Independent Chairman, Sir John Forster, QC. His award, operative from 1st January, 1957, fell short of the Union's claim but represented a material advance on existing remuneration.

The Union's second opponent was Woolworth, and the battleground was South Wales and Monmouthshire. USDAW had been organising the company's employees in the area and in 1961 sought improvements in wages, working conditions and facilities for the collection of Union dues. Woolworth refused to negotiate, the girls marched out from many stores — and almost immediately the Company announced the introduction of a revised wage scale involving substantial increases throughout their 1,060 stores in the United Kingdom. Since only a few stores were on strike, one could safely say in terms of wages that never had so many owed so much to so few. The strike ended with an agreement that in stores where a strong Union organisation had been established there should be arrangements for the collection of contributions. Also, all store managers were to be informed by the Company that Union membership was a matter for the individual to decide and no pressure should be brought on members of the staff to join or not to join.

In 1962 USDAW recorded what was said to be the first strike in a supermarket in the United Kingdom. It took place in the Scottish town of Airdrie, where the firm concerned gave a week's notice to two senior employees that they must go because of high wages costs — a few days after two juniors had been engaged! The management refused to substitute "last in, first out" and the sixty assistants ceased work (five of them non-Union members who joined both the strike and the Union). A second supermarket of the firm came out in support and other shops were ready to do so. At this point management capitulated on the understanding that the stoppage would not be extended. A suggestion that the two dismissed members should be reinstated and the two juniors (both girls) should be dismissed was rejected — both girls were out with the strikers! The strike ended with the withdrawal of notices to the two adults and an agreement that if redundancies were necessary they should be on the basis of "last in, first out" (with the exception of

specialist staff and managers).

The Union's most ambitious national campaign came in 1965. The target was the House of Fraser group, a fast expanding department stores chain which from its base in Scotland had acquired a great many leading retail stores in London and other cities. It refused to meet the Union on the grounds that any negotiations should be through the appropriate Trade Associations. At a Press conference to launch the campaign on 1st March, Alfred Allen said that the Union's demands were for shorter hours, improved wages and a five-day working week. In some cases, he said, the Company was operating the inadequate Wages Council rates, in others rates that were a few shillings above the statutory minima. He contrasted this situation with the large profits made during the expansion of the group between 1948 and 1963. A wage application had been made but at present the Union had no agreement or negotiating status.

The campaign was impressive in its scope and enterprise. There was large scale advertising in the national and local Press. A converted double-decker bus toured the country as a mobile propaganda unit. Large numbers of leaflets were distributed, plus a special campaign newspaper. The General Secretary held regular Press conferences. Officials were concentrated on the cities where House of Fraser had stores. There were one-day strikes at South Shields, Darlington, Newcastle, Middlesbrough and *Dumfries*.

The Company refused to negotiate a voluntary agreement. It did, however, unilaterally revise its schedule of basic rates to provide substantial increases. Once again, with or without recognition, the Union had brought more into the pay packets of members and non-members alike. Eventually, in July, there was a sort of twilight recognition through an exchange of letters providing for a Union-Company review of wage rates as and when Wages Council rates were revised, facilities for collectors and a procedure for the progression of grievances at store level through to management. Subsequent annual reports of USDAW record a steady development of negotiating rights with the Company.

The other strike of 1965 was against Foyles, the world-famous London bookseller. It was a complicated affair, spread over

seven weeks, with workers being called out twice before the Union succeeded in establishing a wages scale acceptable to the members concerned.

We now leave one of the most hectic peacetime decades of the century. It began with the soon to be deflated euphoria of "never had it so good" and ended in a national mood of disillusionment and fears for the nation's future. In the Trades Union Movement it raised new problems which have not yet been solved, and to which we must return in subsequent chapters.



## 28 "BAN THE BOMB" — AND CLAUSE 4

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IN the early sixties the Labour Party and the Trades Unions, nationally and at constituency and branch levels, were involved in two controversies over which opinions were so strongly divided that for a time, in the words of Walter Padley, there was a state of "civil war" within the Movement. The greater of the two issues, world-wide in its significance, was the demand that unilateral nuclear disarmament should become the official policy of the Labour Party — "Ban the Bomb", as it was popularly known. The other issue was domestic, and concerned proposals to revise Clause 4 of the Objects Rule of the Party. In both controversies USDAW members were participants.

There had been resolutions on atomic weapons at the Union's annual meetings in the years immediately following the end of the war. They were, however, general in character, directed at the three nations (USSR, USA and Britain) which then possessed nuclear capability. Thus, at the 1950 ADM there was a call for the destruction of stocks of atomic bombs to be carried out under United Nations supervision, and in 1954 (after the development of the hydrogen bomb) for the immediate cessation of experiment with and production of atomic and hydrogen weapons.

Those were the years of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, based on an appeal that Britain should set an example to the world by unilaterally abandoning The Bomb. There were a great many CND adherents in the Labour, Trades Union and Co-operative Movements and in all three, the former generalised appeal for international action hardened into a demand for unilateral action. Few people except perhaps a few besotted generals would be likely to oppose world-wide agreement to abandon nuclear weaponry. But in the working-class Movements and in the country generally there was an acute and genuine difference of opinion over whether Britain would serve

the cause of world peace by acting alone.

For USDAW, other Trades Unions and the Labour Party the issue came to a head in 1960. The USDAW annual meeting adopted a unilateralist resolution on a card vote of 112,760 For, 93,736 Against. The mover, C. B. Norwood argued that the possession of nuclear weapons was neither a defence against nor a deterrent to attack; possession of The Bomb was in itself a magnet to attract attack. USDAW's conference foreshadowed an even more dramatic decision when the Labour Party met at Scarborough, where an almost evenly split vote carried a unilateralist resolution against an appeal from the Party leader, Hugh Gaitskell. The USDAW delegation voted unilateral, in line with their ADM decision.

The Labour Movement was in disarray. Most of the Press hopefully forecast that the Party was about to split. Conservatives, accustomed to decorously sweeping their own quarrels under the mat, chuckled at the folly of Socialists who argued great issues in the open. In practice, respect for Labour was probably enhanced by the insistence that such a life-or-death issue should be debated for all to see and hear. But the immediate consequence within the Party was a high degree of bitterness between men and women who for many years had shared common ideas on Labour policy and principle.

Hugh Gaitskell was attacked for his declared intention to fight for a reversal of the unilateralist vote. It was a situation that *could not* be allowed to continue. As Richard Crossman put it in presiding over the 1961 Conference "The great test of a democratic organisation is whether it knows the time to stop arguing and take a decision". There were demands from all sections of the Movement that unity must be restored. The Bomb was a gigantic and hideous problem but must not be allowed to dominate the Party to the exclusion of the many economic and social problems on which it was united.

To seek a basis for unity a Committee of Twelve was set up, representing the National Executive of the Labour Party, the General Council of the TUC and the Parliamentary Party. Richard Crossman and Walter Padley were among the four members of the Committee appointed by the National Executive. A lengthy policy document was drafted and published on 22nd February, 1961.

It outlined an essentially multilateral approach to nuclear disarmament; called for (1) negotiations on general disarmament with neutral countries taking part, (2) agreement to ban nuclear tests, (3) establishment of a non-nuclear zone in Central Europe; affirmed that "The West cannot renounce nuclear weapons so long as the Communist bloc possesses them" but "The West must never be the first to use the H-bomb"; and declared that Britain should "... cease the attempt to remain an independent nuclear Power, since this neither strengthens the Alliance nor is it now a sensible use of our limited resources". A fourth passage included a call for reforms in the United Nations, admission of China and an agreement between the West and the Communist powers to neutralise Africa and Asia from the Cold War.

Crossman and Padley drafted amended proposals which accepted several of these points, including membership of NATO, but rejected any defence strategy based on NATO forces being the first to rely on the use of so-called tactical nuclear weapons in the field, since, as Padley put it, "some of them have the explosive power of the bomb which dropped on Hiroshima". It was also proposed that the Labour Movement should press for a radical reconstruction of NATO, with five objectives, which included an end to the present dependence on nuclear weapons, no American nuclear bases in Europe and "the best possible NATO control of what must remain an exclusively American nuclear deterrent". On the basis of these changes the Russians should be offered a plan for disarmament in Europe, including a nuclear-free zone.

The "official" statement was adopted by the General Council of the TUC, the National Executive of the Labour Party and the Parliamentary Party (though on the National Executive by a narrow majority, 15-13 against the Crossman-Padley draft). It became the majority recommendation.

Nothing daunted, USDAW's annual meeting of 1961 adopted the Crossman-Padley proposals by 153,510 votes to 80,334 for submission to the Labour Party conference later in the year but with the proviso, made clear by Walter Padley from the chair, that this would not be done if the successive conferences of other Unions throughout the year showed that support was mobilising behind the majority proposals.

The annual meeting also reversed the unilateralist declaration of the previous year. The decision to do so was based on an Aberdeen resolution that "... unilateral disarmament by Great Britain, with its inherent implication of withdrawal from NATO, would create a much more dangerous situation. *Until lasting peace can be established by international control, Great Britain must continue to support the principle of collective security through membership of NATO, using its influence towards effective control of nuclear weapons.*" The Government was urged to take the initiative in preventing the spread and testing of nuclear weapons, and to obtain agreement on measures for multilateral disarmament. The resolution was moved by T. Fyfe, whose case centred on the maintenance of peace through deterrence "... the restraining knowledge that certain aggression will result in retaliation".

In the event the Crossman-Padley proposals never did reach the Labour Party agenda. As the year advanced it became obvious that the Unions whose votes would be decisive were opting for the majority statement. Defeat would have been certain. But even more decisive, there was no point in challenging proposals on which the Party could be united and which in important emphasis, but not in fundamentals, were not all that much different from the Crossman-Padley alternative.

Therefore, USDAW's Executive Council acted on the warning given by the President at the 1961 ADM — they did not send forward the resolution then adopted for submission to the Labour Party conference. This decision was challenged in letters from branches and at the 1962 annual meeting. But Walter Padley made it clear that the Executive had fully carried out the Mandate of 1961 — *submission only if it was obvious that opinion was mobilising behind Crossman-Padley.* The majority statement was adopted at the 1961 conference of the Labour Party. Multilateralism became official policy. The problem had not been settled, but neither had it been allowed to split the Party. And that, perhaps, was as far as one could expect to go in this dangerously imperfect world.

The Clause 4 issue agitated the Party over much the same period as the debate on unilateralism. It began in 1959, after Labour had been defeated at the General Election of that year. The annual conference had been overtaken by the Election, and

a two-day meeting was held at Blackpool in November, the Party's electoral defeat being the principal topic.

Clause 4 read (as it still does) "To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible, upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service". It was argued that the Clause implied an over-insistence on nationalisation and this had contributed to electoral defeat. Hugh Gaitskell, speaking, he said, for himself alone, urged the need to revise a constitution "written over 40 years ago". He pointed out that the Party had for long accepted a mixed economy and it should be made clear that nationalisation was not "the be-all and end-all" of Labour policy.

In the controversy that followed it was not so much Clause 4 itself that was at stake. It was the fear among many Labour activists that if the somewhat archaic language of the Clause was abandoned it could be the beginning of a retreat from Socialist objectives. The debate was sharp and sometimes bitter, involving, said Morgan Phillips, the Party Secretary "... a good deal of ill-will and suspicion". Again, it was as much as anything demands from the grassroots of the Party that saved the day. There was nothing intrinsically wrong with the disputed wording. There could be a case for refining and amplifying its meaning. There was equally a case for leaving well alone. And that was precisely what was done; Clause 4 still appears under the Subscriptions columns of every Labour Party membership card.

The Clause has, however, been more clearly defined. At the suggestion of Walter Padley a "Declaration of Aims" was adopted to clearly express the meaning. It "reaffirmed, clarified and amplified" the Clause and stated that common ownership, in addition to nationalisation, included consumers' and workers' Co-operatives, municipal enterprise and public participation on the lines of, for example, the present National Enterprise Board.

So ended two dangerous and bitter years. The basic unity that is the true strength of the Labour Party had once again triumphed over issues that in a more fragile movement could have led to disintegration.

THE last three chapters have dealt with the larger issues of national and Union policy; the problems of recruitment and lapses, Government intervention in wages bargaining, the threat of nuclear weapons to the future of civilisation. USDAW could influence these issues, but its voice was only one among many. We return now to the less spectacular subjects within the Union's own control during the middle sixties and into the seventies; in particular to problems of Union structure which were prominent in this period.

First, however, membership. The special report of 1965 had analysed the reasons why so many members were unavoidably lost each year, and had proposed measures to deal with the considerable number of cases where lapsed members could have been retained. It was, however, some time before the counter measures were effective. There were decreases of 12,941 in 1966, 15,252 in 1967 and 10,024 in 1968. The drift was checked in 1969 with an increase of 5,374. There was a further increase of 13,503 in 1970, a hiccup in 1971 (decrease of 10,518) and thereafter steady growth up to the last available annual report, for 1978. When the special committee's report was published in 1965 membership was 349,230. In 1978 it was 462,178, with the half-million well in sight.

The biggest single cause of the losses in the sixties was the decline in Co-operative employment that followed the rationalisation of both the retail and wholesale sections of the Co-operative Movement. Although there were outstandingly successful retail societies, the Movement in general, retail and wholesale, had been slow to adjust its structure and trading methods to the revolution that was taking place in marketing and retailing techniques. It began to modernise and concentrate its resources just in time and one consequence of delayed action was a rapid run-down in employment. Between 1947, when USDAW came into being, and 1975 approximately 56,000 Co-operative

members were lost by the Union, most of them in the latter part of the period. USDAW was concerned in two ways; through the loss of jobs, and through the Union's historic links with the Co-operatives, not only as a source of membership but as part of the working-class movement. For both these reasons the Union encouraged rather than made any attempt to block the rationalisation of the Co-ops.

In the annual report and in other ways the Executive Council urged members to support the creation of bigger retail societies through amalgamation, including the establishment of regional societies. Union officials met CWS directors to discuss methods of increasing the sale of goods produced by USDAW members in CWS factories. A special conference of CWS branches at Manchester in July, 1967, while concerned at lack of consultation on the closure of factories and depots, expressed the desire of Union members to play a part at all levels in constructive policies to build up the Society. The Union was realistic in its attitude to the problems of reorganising the retail Co-ops. Thus, in many societies, local improvements on national agreements had been negotiated over the years, and at the ADM of 1972 Birmingham Co-operative Branch proposed, among other things, that there should be a standing Union committee to see that these were maintained when regional or other large societies were formed. The General Secretary pointed out that it was the job of local branches, which had secured these agreements in the first place, to see that they were maintained. The proposal was referred to the Executive.

#### STRUCTURE OF THE UNION

The Union was also examining its own structure in this period. Over a span of approximately three years, it twice pulled up its grass roots, so to speak, took a long hard look at them, and decided in one case that they should be replanted in new soil, in the other that, on the whole, they were best left where they were. The big change was a programme to reduce the number of Divisions, adopted by a special meeting at the ADM of 1969.

There had been little alteration in the Divisional structure since the amalgamation of 1921. The basic structure went back even earlier, for it largely followed the boundaries of the Co-operative Union's Sections. That pattern had been adopted

by AUCE and was appropriate to times when the Union was composed almost entirely of Co-operative workers. By the nineteen sixties, however, the Co-operatives, while still the biggest single section of the Union, were no longer preponderant *in the membership*, and the great private multiples from which new members were mainly recruited recognised no regional boundaries.

The drift of population from Scotland and the North of England to the Midlands and the South East was also distorting the pattern of USDAW's membership within the existing Divisions. Alfred Allen, in moving the alterations at the special delegate meeting, pointed out that the smallest Division represented about 4 per cent of the membership, 7 of the then 11 Divisions accounted for 50 per cent, and the other 50 per cent was in four Divisions.

The eleven then existing Divisions (with 1969 membership in brackets) were: Cheshire and North Wales (13,631), Liverpool (31,786), London (37,200), Manchester (33,788), Midlands (48,164), Northern (22,302), Scottish (43,064), Southern and Eastern (32,139), South Wales and Monmouthshire (14,592), South Western (15,956), Yorkshire (23,765).

The new pattern proposed by the Executive Council reduced the number of Divisions from eleven to eight, increased the number of members on each Divisional Council from eight to ten and provided that the Executive Council of 16 should consist of two members from each Division, plus President and General Secretary.

A map showing the prospective new boundaries was available to delegates at the special meeting and aroused opposition from two directions. Apart from the Manchester area, the two oldest Divisions in the Union were Yorkshire (originally known as Airedale) and Northern (mainly the area between the Tweed and the Tees). With good North-South communications, and, for much of their Western boundaries, with the line of the *Pennine range* to divide them from the other part of Northern England, these two logically could form a North-Eastern Division from the Tweed to the Humber and Northern parts of Lincolnshire. But each had a strong sense of regional identity and, in the case of the Union, of historical priority. They did not oppose the restructuring of the Union, but a Yorkshire



spokesman who was probably expressing also the "Geordie" view of Northern, supported an amendment from the London Blackfriars (Sainsbury) branch which, among other proposals, would have retained the two Divisions.

The main objection of Blackfriars was that restructuring would divide the capital North and South of the Thames, whereas, it was argued, London was a single entity, and the major employers with whom the Union negotiated ignored the barrier of the river. Another amendment reflected the Welsh desire to retain national identity. All the amendments were either withdrawn or defeated, and the Executive's proposals on Divisional structure were adopted.

The special meeting also carried proposals for increases of 3p in each of the principal scales of contributions, for variations in the scale of benefits, and various other matters.

In due course the Executive Council carried out the restructuring and decided on the titles of the eight new Divisions. They are given here, with their 1978 membership in brackets: South Wales and Western (45,866), North Western (57,485), Eastern (56,362), Manchester (59,367), Midlands (77,381), North-Eastern (64,158), Southern (41,357), Scottish (60,202). The latter Division included 7,702 members of the former Scottish Union of Bakers and Allied Workers, which transferred its engagements to USDAW on 1st January, 1977.

The 1969 changes rearranged the territorial basis of the Union's structure. But other ideas were already in the air. USDAW had diversified into many trades, whose only common factor was that they were mostly related to the supply of personal and household goods or services. Was it desirable that this "diversity in unity" should be reflected in specialised trade representation on the governing bodies of the Union? At the ADM of 1971 G. Cree, on behalf of the CIS National Branch, suggested that they should consider the possibility of "... national sections of members having their own by-laws and administration". This was referred to the Executive which appointed a sub-committee to examine the question.

The sub-committee had a two-part task. Firstly, to suggest changes in structure that might be desirable. These, it was decided, would be presented to the ADM of 1972 as a preliminary to discussion by Executive and Divisional Councils and by

branches. Secondly, in the light of the national debate, the sub-committee would submit firm proposals to its parent Executive which would decide whether or not to make recommendations to the ADM of 1974. This somewhat involuted process was duly carried out, beginning with a discussion document presented to the 1972 annual meeting.

The existing structure, said the sub-committee, had been created in the fifties to follow the then existing pattern of national negotiations. But the trend of development was towards more separate company agreements. This meant that some of the national trade conferences had "... less and less relevance to the more important questions affecting wages and conditions of employment in the various trades". To meet this situation there had been an increasing tendency to hold *ad hoc* conferences covering nationally based companies, such as Burton, Lewis's, Fine Fare and others. Parallel with this development there was pressure for a greater degree of national unification within particular trade groups, the milk trade being cited as an example.

The sub-committee recognised the advantages of dividing the Union's membership according to trade. But historical and administrative factors severely restricted the pace at which this policy could be carried out. In Co-operative and some other branches a variety of trades were linked in branches based on a common employer. To split them into specialised groups for grocers, butchers, dairy workers, etc., would fragment many branches, would increase administrative costs and would raise insuperable problems where a common employer operated the check-off through computer systems. In any case, the problem was partly being met by trade group committees within common employer branches.

Secondly, said the sub-committee, they had to recognise the special place of the Co-operative membership, and in that sector national negotiations were still of paramount importance. Therefore, it was considered essential to continue the annual conference for the retail Co-operative trade, but to ensure that all sections covered by national agreements were represented it would be desirable to increase from eight to ten the number of delegates from each Division. There was also full justification for the continuation of the annual conference for the retail

private trade. For fifteen other trades or groups of trades it was proposed that biennial conferences should be held.

The second part of the sub-committee's terms of reference had been to consider the electoral machinery of the Union, to meet the desire for wider representation of different trades at Executive Council level. A complicated plan for electing the Executive Council in part on a trade basis was suggested. It was not adopted, but gives a picture of the Union's diversified scope:—

<i>Section</i>	<i>Principal Trades</i>	<i>Proposed Executive Council Representation</i>
Co-operative	Retail Co-op	
	CWS .....	2
Food Distributive	Food	
	Wholesale Grocery ....	1
Non-Food Distributive	Non-Food .....	1
	Commercial	
Food	Mail Order	
	CIS Agents	
	Check and Credit	
	Football Pools	
	SATA .....	1
	Food Manufacturing	
Service	Biscuit	
	Milling .....	1
	Milk/MMB	
	Catering	
	NAAFI	
Meat	Hairdressing	
	Laundry .....	1
	Retail Meat	
	Slaughtering	
	Bacon Curing and Meat Processing .....	1
General and Industrial	Glass Container	
	Rubber Manufacturing	
	Surgical Dressings	
	Optical	
	Dental Technicians	
	Chemical	
	Soap and Candle	
	Miscellaneous .....	2

It was also suggested that if the proposals on structure were adopted, the Union should consider holding the delegate meeting biennially, and that "...to reflect the changing pattern of membership" the title of the Union should be altered to "Union of Distributive and Allied Workers (UDAW)".

The discussion on the document at the 1973 ADM, although brief, on the whole was favourable. The next stage, after fuller discussion throughout the Union, was at the ADM of 1974. The sub-committee, having tested opinion on its suggestions during the year, made its recommendations to the Executive, which adopted two:—

- (1) To accept the recommendation to continue the policy of seeking company agreements;
- (2) To review trade conferences with a view to holding them biennially, except for the Retail Co-operative and *Private trades, which should continue to be held annually.*

The Executive's report was accepted. For the time being the Co-operative and Private Retail Conferences were held but in 1980 they are to be merged. That in itself will be a footnote to history, marking the end of almost a century in which wages, conditions and mutual suspicion divided retail distributive workers in Co-operative and private trade. Biennial trade conferences are now becoming general, and the number of *ad hoc* single employer conferences is increasing.

It might be considered that the Union had laboured mightily and had brought forth a mouse. That would be to misjudge both the purpose and the value of the exercise. USDAW is still growing and changing in the basis of its membership. There will undoubtedly be changes in trade structure before the century ends, and they are already beginning. One change foreshadowed at the 1979 ADM was that the annual meeting may be extended by a day to deal with the increasing pressure of business. But a massive restructuring of the Union's organisation and electoral arrangements before there is a clearer picture of the future pattern of membership and of worker-employer relationships would probably have done more harm than good.

#### INTRODUCING SATA

One new development of specialised organisation was, in fact, already taking place and will explain what to some readers

may have been a mysterious alphabetical inclusion in the proposed Executive Council constitution that was mentioned earlier. The Supervisory, Administrative and Technical Association (SATA) had been established by the Executive towards the end of 1970. It was part of the Union but (like the CIS Branch) with a separate identity to attract the specialist workers covered by its title. By 1971 it was reported to be making steady progress, with recognition by several large companies.

Earlier in 1970 a similar organisation, the Association of Sales, Technical Representatives and Agents, which had been independently established, applied to come under the USDAW umbrella as a separate section. Because of internal disagreements it broke away in 1972, but the bulk of the members transferred to a new SATA branch administered from the Union's Central Office. As this is written, SATA is in the course of preparing a national and divisional branch structure for consideration of the Executive Council, and a more vigorous recruitment policy is planned.

#### *NEW DAWN SHADES INTO DAWN*

Of one Union veteran in 1973 it could be said "The King is dead, long live the King". *New Dawn*, for almost 53 years the voice of USDAW, was itself restructured. The editor since 1966 had been H. G. Pridmore who, on the retirement of Cyril Hamnett, succeeded him as Administrative Officer and also as journal editor and publicity manager. To meet rising costs the journal was changed from fortnightly to monthly publication in 1967. By 1973 it had been decided by the Executive that to maintain communication with a growing membership USDAW required a mass circulation publication in tabloid format, the newspaper format that is most popular today. It was to be printed by web-offset, a process which gives a clearer printing impression than traditional letterpress production, and also provides for a wide use of colour. Printing continued at the Co-operative Press, which had been early in the field with the introduction of web-offset. The editor was, and is, Patrick H. Jones, who had been appointed in 1973 to the new position of head of the Publicity and Public Relations Department, after a wide experience with provisional newspapers and in PR for commercial and public utility organisations. *New Dawn* had gone, but the name lived on in the new title of *Dawn*.

Publication began in September, 1973, with a circulation of 56,000, issued free to members. By the end of 1978 the figure was 149,872. The readership will be greater, for many copies are passed from one member to another. The Union's link with the Cooperative Press continued through the membership of the Press Board of the Administration Officer, H. L. Booth.

#### POLITICS

There were four General Elections in the period covered by this chapter — in 1966, 1970 and 1974 (two). In 1966 Labour was returned to power with a clear majority of seats over all other Parties; in 1970 the Party was defeated; in the February election of 1974 it had a working majority over all other Parties; and it won again in October but with the minute overall majority of six. USDAW sponsored candidates won eight seats in 1966 but in 1974 (October) the number was down to five, as follows:—

#### 1966

E. J. Milne (Blyth), G. Craddock (Bradford, South), C. W. Loughlin (Gloucestershire, West), H. Boardman (Leigh), E. Fernyhough (Jarrow), W. E. Padley (Ogmore), R. E. Winterbottom (Sheffield, Brightside), J. T. Price (Westhoughton).

#### 1970

All the above, with the exception that T. W. Torney replaced G. Craddock at Bradford, South.

#### 1974 — FEBRUARY

S. Tierney (Birmingham, Yardley — a new seat for the Union), C. W. Loughlin (Gloucestershire, West), T. W. Torney (Bradford, South), E. Fernyhough (Jarrow), H. Boardman (Leigh), W. E. Padley (Ogmore). Through death and other reasons the Union did not have candidates in the formerly held seats at Blyth, Sheffield (Brightside) and Westhoughton.

#### 1974 — OCTOBER

All the above, with the exception that a Union candidate did not contest Gloucestershire West.

#### STRIKES

The Union was involved in several strikes during this period. But the purpose of strikes was altering. They were less concerned with wages, more with recognition, the closed shop or with general conditions. We will look at some local and one spectacular national conflict.

In the earlier part of 1969 the staff of British Home Stores in Swansea came out against what they contended was the refusal of the company to grant facilities for the collection of dues and other Union contact with members. The local issue was soon settled and led to a general recognition and procedure agreement, under which the company recognised USDAW as the sole Union to represent those members of the staff who wished to join a Union.

At the long established tea firm of Twining two-thirds of the staff were in USDAW and in 1969 they stopped work *in support* of their claim for a closed shop. The strike ended on the third day with a formula that included membership of the Union as a condition of employment. The firm made the handsome gesture of paying wages and bonus to the strikers.

In April, 1970, the dismissal of two young girls, Patricia Warby and Sheila Sizer, led to a four months struggle against "Brierleys", a discount store group. The two had joined USDAW's Peterborough private trade branch and although their Union membership was not the formal reason for losing their jobs they were nonetheless sacked. Their colleagues came out in protest. Other Unions supported the strike, the management offered to recognise USDAW but refused to reinstate the two girls. Eventually the case went to arbitration, and the award was that they should be reinstated with the same status as prior to their dismissal and should be paid the earnings lost during the period. Patricia and Sheila duly returned to work and one must hope that the extensive Press, radio and television coverage of the strike would make many non-Union shop workers think again about the value of Trade Union membership.

In February of 1973 there would be some raised eyebrows in the exclusive shopping area of London's Jermyn Street. There in the heart of that area of high quality (and prices) were eleven men and women carrying banners. Banners that bore the name of USDAW and proclaimed that the eleven hairdressers were on strike against Ivan's, a highclass men's salon. They had earlier joined the Union's Central London Hairdressers' branch and had already won wage increases and an extra week's holiday. Other grievances had been left for later discussion. But nothing *had happened* and the staff gave notice that they would confine their duties strictly to hairdressing and refuse to do such work

as repairing electrical equipment, cleaning chandeliers, polishing brass, labelling and filling bottles. They were told that if they did not do their "usual" duties they would not be allowed to work. They downed scissors and combs and came out. They were out for a few days, when the employer conceded several of their grievances, with others to be discussed before the end of February.

The most spectacular strike of the period was against the CIS. The Society had expanded to become one of the largest insurance organisations in Britain but relations with its agents and, successively, with NUDAW and USDAW, left much to be desired. Although Conciliation machinery had been established in the Co-operative Movement in 1926 the Society did not adopt this peace-making service until 1956. Even then, as we saw in Chapter 27, it did not agree to the establishment of a Conciliation Board until the agents imposed a ban on new business for a period of five months. *Other disputes in following years were settled by awards of Conciliation Board chairmen. One, however, dragged on from 1965 to 1968 and some members were so dissatisfied with the eventual award that for a period there was a partial breakaway from the Union, particularly in Belfast and Liverpool.*

By 1969, L. H. Watson, the National Officer who acted as secretary of the Agents' Branch, would report smouldering discontent in the agency force. It came to white heat over a claim for an expense allowance. By definition, an insurance agent must be mobile, both in body and in his means of communication. Costs of travel, postage, telephone and other expenses were eating into commission income. There was a small *travel allowance for country agents*, but this was regarded by the CIS as a concession and was not part of the agent's agreement. A claim was made for a general expense allowance of £3 weekly, which, said the Union, should properly be the Society's contribution to the average expense of £6 weekly incurred by agents on CIS business.

The claim went to conciliation, where the CIS proposed that it should be wrapped up with other variations in terms of service. USDAW refused to agree to a Chairman's Award on this wider basis; contending that whatever the merits of these other proposals, the sole immediate issue was expenses. Deadlock



was followed by strike action on 11th June, 1970.

The strike lasted for eight weeks. It was in itself a remarkable feat of organisation. As G. Cree (chairman of USDAW's CIS branch) put it to the 1970 ADM "To shut a dock gate, close a factory door or even shut up shop in the retail trade, is comparatively simple — it is a collective act. To have 8,000 men individually resolved not to call on and give service to 3½ million people whom they know personally, requires a courage and conviction far exceeding normal standard".

There were mass marches and demonstrations outside CIS headquarters in Manchester and other cities. In London the embattled agents marched en masse to put their case to MPs. In Manchester 4,000 of them demonstrated, plus 400 District Office clerks. CIS District Offices were picketed. Many agents who had joined the breakaway came back into the ranks. There was support from other sections of CIS employees. A *CIS Agents' Journal* had been established in January, 1970. Fred F. Cullen, the Editor, not only produced a lively and hard-hitting publication. During the strike he issued a weekly duplicated "supplement" packed with information and encouragement for the far-scattered army of agents.

Protracted negotiations failed to reach a settlement. Eventually Alfred Allen suggested that Victor Feather, General Secretary of the TUC, should be asked to attempt to break the deadlock. At Congress House, on 29th July, under Vic Feather's chairmanship, Union negotiators again met the CIS, with the agents' National Branch Committee also on the premises for consultation. After a total of 39 hours, ending at 2 a.m. on Friday, 31st July, they reached agreement to refer the expenses issue to an independent arbitrator, and also on some of the other proposals in dispute. It was almost certainly the best that could be won, and for the first time it established expenses as a negotiable right. But feelings were strong and it was only narrowly endorsed by the agents — For, 3,050; Against, 2,464.

The arbitrator's award was 15/-, plus for country agents the existing travel allowance. There was provision for adjustment to meet changes in prices of such services as transport, telephone or in commission scales. The award was well short of the Union's claim. But as Fred Cullen pointed out in his "Supplement" — "Regardless of its amount, we have established an agency

expenses allowance . . . as part of our terms of employment. Without the strike we would never have broken down the Society's stubborn resistance".

#### PERONALIA

There were many changes in the Union, and in two cases Life Peerages were conferred on Union members. In 1976 the Executive, on the recommendation of the General Secretary, created the post of Chief Organising Officer, in a plan to sharpen the Union's drive for expansion. J. (Jim) D. Hughes was appointed. He had 20 years full-time service with the Union, and was a National Officer at the time of his appointment. In 1973 he defeated R. B. Seabrook in the election for the Presidency, and in 1976, while continuing to serve as the Union's President, he retired from the position of Chief Organising Officer. He did not stand for the Presidency in 1977, and was succeeded by S. (Syd) Tierney, who holds the position at the time this book is published. National Officer W. H. P. Whatley succeeded as Chief Organising Officer.

Cyril Hamnett, who had retired in 1966, went on to become chairman of Warrington New Town Development Corporation and a Life Peer in 1970.

In 1968 T. Cynog-Jones ended his long service as Research Officer. The Research Department was merged with the Organising Department to form a new Research and Economics Department and Diana Jeuda was appointed as Research Officer.

Herbert G. Pridmore retired from the position of Administrative Officer in 1976. He had served the Union for 47 years in various positions, and was an expert on pension matters. His father, G. H. Pridmore, had been a leading figure in the Union for more than four decades. On the retirement of "H.G." the duties carried out by the three central administrative officials were reallocated between H. L. Booth (formerly Clerical Officer), who was redesignated Administration Officer) and A. W. Hilton (formerly Central Treasurer) who was redesignated as Central Treasurer and Executive Officer.

In 1974 Alfred Allen became a Life Peer and was also Chairman of that year's TUC. Four years earlier he had become President of the International Federation of Commercial, Clerical and Technical Employees (FIET), one of the inter-

national Trades Union bodies in which USDAW has long played a prominent part. In 1973 he presided over the organisation's triennial conference, held in London and in 1976 over the Helsinki conference. At the TUC he had the pleasure as President of presenting the TUC award for youth to Union member Frank Yaffe, who was joint winner.

Death, as ever, removed some stalwarts of USDAW's history, including two who had played outstanding parts in building up NUDAW. Sir Joseph Hallsworth died in 1974 at the age of 89. A. W. Burrows, formerly Assistant General Secretary and for a period Acting General Secretary, died in 1966.

#### OTHER EVENTS

Nineteen-sixty-eight was the centenary year of the TUC and it was also the coming-of-age year for USDAW. The Union participated widely in the celebration of the centenary and had its own celebration when George Woodcock, General Secretary of the TUC opened further extensions to "Oakley".

The Distributive Industry Training Board was set up in 1968 and included three USDAW members. As this is written, John Phillips, recently retired from the Assistant General Secretaryship of the Union, is chairman of the Board. Two Union members were also appointed to the Food, Drink and Tobacco Training Board.

In 1974 the Legal Department obtained a Common Law settlement of £21,500 for J. Eckersley — the highest yet achieved. A slaughterman member of the Bolton Co-operative Branch, damage to his right hand severely restricted the work he could do. By 1977 Common Law settlements through the Department had reached £595,645, and the total sum recovered for members by legal action that year was £712,657.

Maternity leave agreements were secured with some employers. An example in 1974 was an agreement with Colgate-Palmolive Limited for up to 12 weeks leave, after which mothers could resume work without any loss of grade or seniority. In 1976 maternity leave became a right under the Employment Protection Act, but USDAW was able to make agreements with the Co-operative Employers' Association — as the national Co-operative wages negotiating body had then become — for provisions in advance of the Act.

Also in 1974, on the initiative of a Union branch, Littlewoods

Pools Division introduced a pre-retirement scheme through which all grades of full-time staff with a minimum of ten years' service could enjoy a progressively shorter working week without loss of pay.

In the autumn of 1973 Victor Feather, just retired from the General Secretaryship of the TUC, became a Life Member of USDAW. He had joined the Union almost 50 years earlier when he began work with Bradford Co-op.

In 1972 the Union first advertised for an O&M/Work Study Officer, and an appointment was made early in the following year. Work on the Union's own administration had been carried out earlier by consultants, and had been continued by A. W. Hilton, then Central Treasurer, later to become Central Treasurer and Administrative Officer. Derek Arkinstall was appointed and four years later left to take a University course for his Master's Degree. He was succeeded by Vivian Lowe, the present O&M Officer.

In 1967 the Executive Council agreed to a request from the International Federation of Commercial, Clerical and Technical Workers to provide organising assistance for the development of Trades Unionism in the Far East. Charles Brady, an Area Organiser in Yorkshire, was released for this work for two years.

The years from the mid-sixties into the mid- and late seventies had been a period of real progress for USDAW. But, as we shall see in the next two chapters, they were also a time in which new challenges faced the Trades Union Movement in general, and USDAW in particular.