

UCS—the fight for the right to work



Photo by courtesy "Morning Star"

by Alex Murray

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INTRODUCTION

The British working class has experienced stay-downs and stay-ins, but never in their history have they carried through a work-in.

When the workers at UCS decided to take over the yards and continue building ships, they initiated a form of struggle that has inspired the whole Labour movement.

The trade unions, the Parliamentary Labour Party, the Communist Party, the local authorities, the churches, the shop-keepers, even the children have rallied to help the work-in. Support has come from all over Britain. More and more people have begun to see that victory for the principle of the right to work at UCS could be a turning point in the struggle against rising unemployment; that it would be a big step forward in winning a new Government committed to planning an expanding economy in the interests of working people.

THE CRISIS AT UCS

After the postwar shipbuilding boom and the spurts associated with the Korean war and the closing of the Suez Canal, the industry in Britain faced a slump. In 1965, a Shipbuilding Enquiry Committee was set up to investigate how the industry could be made competitive in world markets.

A year later, the Committee issued its report, known as the Geddes Report. It was a sharp indictment of the incompetence of the British shipbuilding employers, but instead of drawing the obvious lesson of the need for public ownership, it proposed a programme of capitalist rationalisation. In essence its solution was to try to rescue the shipbuilding employers from the mess they were in at the expense of the workers in the industry. The

Communist Party called for the rejection of the Geddes Report. It called on the Labour Government to reorganise the shipbuilding industry on the basis of public ownership so that it could be planned and modernised as a single integrated unit in the interests of the workers in the industry and of the nation as a whole.

But the Labour Government accepted the principles of the Geddes Report. As it suggested, a Shipbuilding Industry Board was established to carry out the rationalisation of the industry by grouping together the yards in the main shipbuilding centres. For this purpose, it had at its disposal Government funds.

One of the first jobs of the Shipbuilding Industry Board, in February 1968, was to set up the UCS consortium by amalgamating the John Brown, Fairfield, Stephen, Connel and Yarrow yards on the upper reaches of the Clyde. The Government had a 48.4% holding in the consortium. It was given a £5½ million loan, interest free for the first three years. The combined labour force was 13,000. Orders amounted to £87 million. A new era for shipbuilding on the upper Clyde was proclaimed.

But within a year, in May 1969, UCS was in financial difficulties. Some of the shareholders wanted to bale out. Lord Aberconway, chairman of John Brown and Co., offered their million shares to the then Labour Government. This would have given the Government a majority holding in the consortium. Despite the clear failure of private enterprise, Wedgwood Benn turned the offer down.

The crisis at UCS, as today, was a phoney crisis. The first report of the consortium published in August 1969 showed a loss of £10.3 million. But £8.4 million of this was for losses on contracts taken over from the parent firms, reflecting the total inadequacy of the way they had been managed, and the past lack of capital investment to modernise their yards.

To meet its difficulties, UCS asked for a Government loan of £12 million. The negotiations were protracted. Attempts were made to blame bad labour relations for the crisis, and to use the offer of a loan to force through attacks on the conditions of the workers.

But the workers had already gone more than half way in making concessions to the new consortium. They had agreed to mobility, flexibility, interchangeability, relaxation of working practices, job evaluation, and had cut down on absenteeism. This proves that the labour force was not responsible for the difficulties at UCS. In view of the redundancies which followed

within a matter of months, not to mention the redundancies being proposed now by the Tory Government, it also emphasises the dangers of productivity bargaining in our present capitalist society. The Communist Party has always emphasised this danger.

In the end, the Government advanced a total of £9.3 million, one million less than the loss for the year. It is hardly surprising that a further crisis hit UCS within a matter of months in April 1970. The Labour Government made it a condition of further financial assistance that the labour force be reduced by 3,500. The company complied with this. But it continued to be dogged by lack of finance due to tardy Government assistance.

Inadequate liquid resources

Firms like UCS cannot function without considerable working capital. Take the four bulk carriers on order from Irish Shipping Ltd. which will cost £12 million. If there are, as there could be, twelve such ships under construction at any one time, there is a potential income of £36 million. But that money only becomes available a little at a time, e.g. when the keel is laid, when it is launched and when it is handed over and accepted. In the meantime, before the income matures, wages have to be paid and materials purchased. Considerable funds have to be available to bridge the gap. UCS was never provided with enough, although it was saddled with ancient fixed assets, and, along with them, the losses on previous contracts.

This is made plain in the press statement issued when the directors applied for a Provisional Liquidator:

"Throughout the three years to the end of 1970, production was mainly devoted to the completion of a variety of complex and unprofitable ships, many of which were inherited from the predecessor companies. During that period, substantial losses were inevitably incurred which were largely financed by loans and grants from public funds. *By the end of 1970, the initial order book had been superseded by a programme of standard bulk carriers and "Clyde" ships which, backed by the necessary working capital, would have become profitable.* However the continuing acute shortage of working capital disrupted supplies and thus seriously retarded the shipbuilding programme with the result that the company has continued to incur substantial losses for longer than had been forecast". (my italics, A.M.)

The statement went on to outline the record of achievement at UCS, forecast to produce a profit in 1972:

"The throughput of steel today measured in gross tons is over 1,300 tons per week, compared with the average in 1970 of 867 tons per week. This has been achieved by a steelwork labour force 16% less in numbers than in 1970. The overall reduction in the labour force in the past fifteen months is 25%. The number of ships delivered from the yards now controlled by the company is as follows:

Annual average deliveries 1963-67	..	..	8
Deliveries in 1968	..	..	3
Deliveries in 1969	..	..	7
Deliveries in 1970	..	..	12"

According to the *Glasgow Herald* (14.6.71), if UCS stays in business, it is in line to win orders worth at least £100 million—in addition to its existing order book of £90 million. This is enough to keep it going to the end of 1974. It is clear that given the necessary financial transfusion by the Government, UCS could become as viable as any other shipbuilding enterprise.

The difficulties experienced by UCS are not peculiar to shipbuilding on the Clyde. They reflect the state of neglect of the whole British shipbuilding industry, neglect which is the responsibility of private owners who have preferred to use their inflated war-time profits for more lucrative investments rather than for modernising the yards.

The effects of this neglect are to be seen throughout the industry. Swan Hunter, for example, has announced shipbuilding losses of £6,153,000 in 1970 compared with £4,265,000 in 1969. Writing in *The Times* (18.9.70), Peter Hill contrasted the boom in world shipbuilding with the performance of the British industry:

"The past financial year was a disastrous one for several major shipbuilding groups. Harland and Wolff recorded a net loss of £3.77 million. Upper Clyde Shipbuilders continued to struggle with a backlog of unprofitable orders. Doxford and Sunderland's pre-tax profits slumped to £562,000. Swan Hunter revealed a trading loss of £4.3 million after making provision of £5 million for losses on existing contracts. Cammel Laird was saved by the Labour Government who acquired a 50% stake in the shipbuilding company through the public trustees".

Harland and Wolff have since been granted £7 million by the Ulster Government. This only serves to emphasise that the Government's refusal to provide the £6 million needed by UCS to avert the present immediate crisis was a deliberate act of sabotage aimed at destroying shipbuilding on the upper reaches of the Clyde.

THE FOUR "WISE" MEN

When UCS decided to petition for the appointment of a Provisional Liquidator, Mr. John Davies set up a group of four to advise him on the course of action to take to establish a viable industry on the upper Clyde. The group consisted of Mr. Alexander McDonald, chairman of Distillers, Sir Alexander Glen, well-known in the shipping world, Mr. David McDonald, director of Hill Samuel, and Lord Robens, ex-chairman of the Coal Board, who, in his own words, is no longer a socialist (if ever he was!). To this day, the figures on which these men have based their conclusions have been kept a closely guarded secret.

Few would expect such men to have the interests of the working people of Scotland at heart. True to form, they tried to pin the blame on the workers, ignoring the efforts made by the workers and the co-operation they had shown. They asserted that the UCS management had "not exercised efficient control of costs, particularly wages, which in their impact seriously threatened other industry on the Clyde". But surely the UCS management and workers cannot be held responsible for inflation. Inflation is the direct result of Government policy.

The four did however admit that losses on previous contracts, estimated at £12 million, had been a massive drain on an already weak working capital, and that the manner of the consortium's formation had imposed on it an annual burden of £2 million loan interest.

Despite that the conclusion they reached was that "any continuation of Upper Clyde Shipbuilders in its present form would be wholly unjustified, and indeed, would cause serious and more widespread damage".

A whole community at stake

Could anything illustrate more the utter irresponsibility of these representatives of big business! How can anyone in their right mind talk of "more widespread damage", when at the same time they advance proposals to close UCS yards and thereby create a severe crisis throughout the whole of the West of Scotland. Scrapping shipbuilding on the Upper Clyde means the sack for 8,500 workers. But it goes further than that, because we must also add the 20,000 workers involved in the supply of parts, equipment and services to UCS who would also get the sack. This puts in question the future of a whole community. That is what is at stake.

The "wise" men's recommendations are not only unacceptable.

They are unworkable. Look at what they proposed: scrap UCS; establish a successor company at Govan/Linthouse; shut the Clydebank and Scotstoun yards; concentrate shipbuilding in the Govan yard; limit employment to 2,500 with changes in workshop practice and a two shift system; and as an afterthought, arrange for assistance to be given in redeploying redundant workers and staff. But they admit that a successor company at Govan would have difficulty in getting the financial support needed. Destroying UCS would make it almost certain that private finance would not be forthcoming for the new company, so that even the proposals for the Govan yard would most probably not be realised.

It's not on

It is sheer hypocritical nonsense to talk of re-deploying redundant workers and staff when there are so many in the area unemployed. One in ten male workers are out of a job, and this is an industry employing male workers. To suggest, on top of that, that trade unions and workers should accept changes in workshop practices when their mates have been thrown on the stones is to insult the intelligence and sense of decency of ordinary people.

No, Mr Davies, it is not on.

THE PEOPLE TAKE A HAND

When John Davies announced the Government's refusal to advance £6 million working capital to UCS, he sent an explosion reverberating around the whole of Britain. In the words of Jimmy Reid, chairman of the Clydebank shop stewards, Communist Councillor for Clydebank, and a member of the Communist Party's Executive Committee:

"We should be under no illusions. It means either the total closure or a colossal contraction of the industry. It virtually means the death knell of the upper reaches of the Clyde. The repercussions are as yet incalculable in relation to their effects. The Upper Clyde is being sacrificed on the altar of sheer political dogma. We refuse to accept that somebody sitting in Whitehall is going to kill our industry".

This determined refusal to allow such an important part of Scotland's economy to be sacrificed has been the keynote of all the subsequent historic actions that have taken place and are still to come.

Mass popular unity

The thing which has characterised the campaign to save UCS has been the breadth of the movement, involving the trade unions, churches, local authorities, M.P's and civic leaders. Harold Wilson has visited the work-in at Clydebank yard to express the support of the entire Labour movement for the UCS workers. But this is a movement in which, above all, ordinary men and women have stepped out on to the stage. Children as well—in Aberdeen, children held a jumble sale and sent the proceeds of their efforts to the shipyards. Eleven Clydebank youngsters were photographed by Swedish television handing over the money they had raised to shipyard shop stewards. The clergy of all denominations in Clydebank have come together in a Christian Action Group. They have declared that "we, too, are deeply involved in this, because anything threatening the social life and welfare of our people must be our concern also. We cannot and will not stand idly by".

The fight to save the yards has galvanised the West of Scotland into determined united activity. And they are not alone—support is coming increasingly from working people throughout England, Wales and the rest of Scotland, whether by workshop collections, messages of support, or participation in meetings and demonstrations organised to keep the yards open.

This is as it should be. For what is involved is more than UCS, more even that the future prosperity of the West of Scotland. Here is a stand for the right to work, for an end to the Tory policy of sackings, closures and unemployment.

THE CAMPAIGN GATHERS MOMENTUM

It was late on Friday afternoon, June 11th, when the men's representatives were informed of the full consequences of a Government refusal to provide the £6 million needed. They immediately called a meeting of the shop stewards for Sunday, June 13th, which was attended by 200 stewards. It was agreed to ask the workers at mass meetings the following day to work normally and resist any closure. Arrangements were made to send a large group of workers to patrol Downing Street if the Government actually took the step of refusing to grant the money needed by the yards.

On the Monday evening, after the mass meetings had backed the stewards stand, Clydebank Town Council was called to discuss the threat to this key industry on Clydeside. The outcome

of that meeting was a decision to charter a special train to London the following evening.

450 delegates from the yards and works affected by the Government's decision, along with Clydebank Town Councillors, crowded the special train. Others, including delegates from neighbouring local authorities, went by plane.

Faced with this explosion of anger, the Prime Minister was obliged to meet a deputation of the shop stewards, along with the Provost of Clydebank. Heath refused to give any assurance that there would be no redundancies. Nevertheless, feeling the pressure arising from the wide support the workers were obviously receiving, Heath invited a deputation from the Scottish TUC to meet him the following Monday, and reversed a decision not to meet a group from Glasgow Town Council led by Sir Donald Liddle, the Lord Provost.

Jimmy Reid, who had been one of the spokesmen on the deputation to Heath, commented: "To us it seems that it is the 1930s all over again, but this time there is one difference. We are not going to queue for the dole. We are going back to the yards and we are not leaving".

The liquidator intervenes

The following Sunday, June 20th, the UCS shop stewards Co-ordinating Committee met to decide its attitude to the statement which had been made by the Provisional Liquidator, Mr. R. Courtney Smith.

Mr. Smith had announced his plans for dealing with the yards for the period during which the four "wise" men were carrying out their so-called investigation. He was suspending work, he said, on a number of contracts and redeploying the work force to speed up other contracts which would provide a speedy cash return. But, he said, "work will not be available for the total work force, particularly in the steel preparation and fabrication sections". There would not be any redundancies, however, for the time being. Those for whom there was no work would be put on paid leave.

The Co-ordinating Committee decided not to accept paid leave and to oppose the proposed suspension of contracts. This stand was endorsed by the men at meetings in the yards. A special District Committee meeting of the Boilermakers had already decided to instruct their members not to accept "paid leave", but to report for work, and where none was provided, to assist those who had jobs to do.

On Monday, June 21st, a meeting was held of representatives from all over the West of Scotland. Over 800 shop stewards, trade union officials, and ministers of both religious denominations attended. The UCS stewards plan for a token stoppage and march through Glasgow on Wednesday, June 24th, was approved with acclamation.

100,000 workers stopped work that afternoon. 50,000 marched through streets lined with onlookers who made abundantly clear their sympathy for the UCS workers' cause. Every factory in the West of Scotland was there. The entire Clydebank Town Council joined in. The Carlisle Trades Council sent a deputation with their banner. The Scottish Committee of the Communist Party joined in with a contingent carrying its banner.

At the meeting in Glasgow Green, the traditional meeting place of Glasgow's working class, Jimmy Airlie, Chairman of the Co-ordinating Committee, declared that the workers in the shipbuilding industry would not tolerate any closures of the yards, nor any redundancies. Anthony Wedgwood Benn, recognising his mistake in not nationalising the Clyde shipbuilding firms when in office, read out the draft of a Bill he was sponsoring together with his colleagues Willie Ross, William Hannan, William Small and Hugh McCartney. This Bill, now adrift somewhere in the procedure of the House of Commons, was for the nationalisation of UCS and the provision of adequate finance. It also gave powers to the management and workers of UCS to prepare plans for the development of the nationalised concern.

The decision of these Labour M.Ps to fight for a policy they resisted while in office is a further indication of the powerful impetus the decisions of the UCS shop stewards in defence of their members' jobs has given to the whole Labour and trade union movement. But if it is to have any real credibility, then the leaders of the Parliamentary Labour Party as a whole have got to show far more determination to fight on behalf of the UCS workers than hitherto, making it clear that they also will accept no redundancies and no closures, and that when returned to office they will nationalise the industry as a top priority.

The work-in begins

Mr. Davies made his statement to the House of Commons accepting the recommendations of the four "wise" men on July 29th. The next day, the shop stewards took control of the yards.

Men and materials entering or leaving the yards came under the jurisdiction of the stewards who are in control of the gates. Mr. Courtney Smith had now dropped the "provisional" and become the fully fledged liquidator. His first action was to refuse permission to the press and television to enter the Clydebank yard to cover a mass meeting. But the shop stewards countermanded Mr. Smith's decision and invited the reporters to attend their meeting. Mr. Smith capitulated and recognised the fact of workers' control over exit and entry to the yards.

The spokesman for the shop stewards, Jimmy Reid, announcing the takeover of the yards stated:

"This is the first campaign of its kind in the history of trade unionism. We are not going on strike. We are not even having a sit-in strike. We are taking over the yard because we refuse to accept that faceless men can make these decisions. We will conduct ourselves with dignity and discipline. The world is watching us and it is our duty to act with maturity and dignity. The shipyard men at UCS are no wildcats. They want to work. The real wildcats are in 10 Downing Street. The biggest mistake we could make would be to lie down, capitulate and grovel. We don't only build ships on the Clyde. We build men, and Davies has taken on the wrong people".

The significance of the work-in

The problem facing the leaders of the UCS workers was to devise a new technique of struggle which would achieve their objective, to prevent redundancies and closures, in what was bound to be a tough struggle.

A strike could play into the hands of the employers when they were set on closures anyway. A sit-in would have been difficult to maintain for long enough. It would have also given the employers a good excuse to attack the workers by arguing that the sit-in made it impossible to fulfil any contract and aggravated the bankrupt situation. This could have helped the Tories to alienate public opinion from support of the UCS workers.

The new form of struggle evolved by the workers, the work-in, corresponded precisely with the needs of the struggle at UCS and this is a tribute to the ingenuity of working class leaders with their feet on the ground, rooted in the day-to-day life of the Labour Movement.

The work-in enables work on the contracts to proceed. The control of exit and entry enables the men to frustrate attempts to

declare them redundant, prevents the dismantling of equipment, and retains the viability of the enterprise as a going concern.

The work-in demonstrates the power of the workers in a dramatic form which thereby raises morale and confidence. Furthermore it is a form of struggle which provides the workers with a period of time in which to secure the necessary financial and other support from wider and wider sections of the working class. The financial support is of course crucial, because as the struggle proceeds the work force has to bear the cost of wages for an increasing number of their mates declared redundant. This also makes it a crucial issue to develop solidarity action aimed at removing the threat of redundancy altogether.

The work-in is not an attempt to establish "workers control" on a permanent basis. Such a conception would lack all credibility. But at the same time, it has demonstrated in a dramatic way the sense of responsibility, discipline and latent managerial capacity of the working class. In so doing, it has driven home in practice the important political lesson that socialism, a society without bosses, is not only feasible but long overdue.

The work-in, as we said, has limited objectives—to stop redundancies and closures. As the situation develops it may become necessary to supplement it with other forms of struggle, including the more traditional ones. But one thing is certain. To achieve the aims of the UCS struggle requires the maximum solidarity, in cash and every other way, from the working class and its trade unions throughout Britain. This is the responsibility which now rests on every worker outside the UCS.

The movement of solidarity grows

The response to the invitation of the UCS shop stewards to attend a meeting in Glasgow on Tuesday August 10th, showed how the movement of solidarity was snowballing. 1,200 shop stewards came from all over Scotland, and there were representatives from as far away as Sheffield and Liverpool. In an enthusiastic but determined spirit, speaker after speaker declared the support of the workers they represented for the demands of the shipyard men engaged in the work-in.

Reporting on behalf of the UCS shop stewards Co-ordinating Committee, Jimmy Reid said: "At last a section of workers has re-asserted the dignity of man. The UCS workers have struck a responsive chord in the hearts and minds of workers not only in Britain but throughout the world. This fight has become the battleground between economic policies that belong to the

laissez-faire of the 19th century, and social and economic policies which say that people are much more important than profits".

The UCS workers, he declared, had staged the new tactic of work-in to give time to the whole Labour movement to mount a campaign either to force the Government to change its policies or let the British people change the Government. He was given a spontaneous standing ovation, reflecting the enthusiasm and determination in the meeting to challenge policy that leads to unemployment and all the social consequences that follow.

The meeting unanimously endorsed the decision to hold a demonstration through Glasgow on Wednesday August 18th. It also agreed to an appeal to all workers to give financial support to the work-in. Regular donations are now being collected in various parts of the country, as far away as the Birmingham factories and among the Welsh miners for example.

The Scottish TUC adds its weight

On August 16th, the Scottish TUC called a special Congress for the first time in its history. This unprecedented action is typical not only of the concern being shown at the effects of Government policy on Scotland's economy, but the new determination to do something about it.

Speaker after speaker declared their admiration for the UCS workers and what they were doing. Vic Feather, in his speech made it plain that the men's work-in tactic was a correct one. "All the reflation in the world" he said, "will not bring to life a company which has already been slaughtered".

Jimmy Reid was invited to speak for the UCS shop stewards. "It is time", he said, "that the working class wrote a charter of rights, at the heart of which would be the right to work. If the Government cannot guarantee that right, and if the social system cannot guarantee that right, then we must change the Government or modify the system". Responding to this spirit of determination to win, the delegates expressed their enthusiasm for the fight of the UCS workers by giving him a standing ovation after he had spoken.

A mighty blow for the right to work

The second mammoth demonstration on August 18th exceeded anything of its kind ever witnessed in Scotland. 80,000 men, women and children marched from George Square to Glasgow Green. Industry was brought to a standstill and an estimated 200,000 workers, one in four of all Scottish workers, downed tools.

It was a direct powerful message to the Government that on this issue of the right to work, the people of Scotland, supported by delegations from London, Wolverhampton, Birmingham, Blackpool, Derby, Barrow and Newcastle, are no longer prepared to submit to a return to the hungry '30s. The mood was clearly expressed by the UCS spokesman, Jimmy Reid. The UCS workers began their action, he said, to save their jobs. It did not take long to realise they were fighting for Scotland. Now, he said, they were fighting for the whole working class and Labour Movement.

The significance of this demonstration cannot be lost on the Government. Every political observer is aware of the very big development of unity that has taken place since the month of June when the Government refused to aid UCS. The platform on the demonstration was a public manifestation of that unity. It was also a tribute to the unswerving determination of the shipyard workers and their shop stewards.

The speakers included Jimmy Reid, Jimmy Airlie, Vic Feather, Danny McGarvey, Hugh Scanlon, Alex Murray, Scottish Secretary of the Communist Party, James Jack, General Secretary of the STUC, William Wolfe of the Scottish National Party, Anthony Wedgwood Benn, and ex-Scottish Secretary Willie Ross. The demonstration showed that in tackling real life problems, the irrelevance of bans of proscriptions stands out a mile.

In his speech to the demonstration on behalf of the Communist Party, the Scottish District Secretary of the Party paid this tribute to the UCS workers:

"I want to say first to the UCS workers that I am privileged to stand on the platform with your elected leaders, and renew the pledge given by John Gollan, General Secretary of the Communist Party, and myself, when we visited Clydebank yard at the outset of your struggle, that our Party would use all its influence and energy in support of your fight and your demands. Our Party has honoured that pledge and will continue to honour it till victory is won".

"I want also to say that I believe our movement stands deeply indebted to you. By your fight, you have forged a new unity of the working class to a degree and at a level never before known in any previous struggle. And also because your unity and courage and the quality of your leadership have brought a great new sense of pride to our movement, pride in the fact that you are members of our movement".

"The British working class stands just a little bit taller, a

little bit straighter today, the product of your struggle and your leadership, and I know you'll understand when I say that we are especially proud of the part that members of our Party are playing alongside their fellow shop stewards in that leadership; and in the service they are giving to the UCS workers and to the Scottish people".

"This struggle of the UCS workers has many lessons for the working class, including that the fight against unemployment cannot be conducted in the abstract, or by words alone, however reasoned. It is the ACTION of the UCS workers that has been the catalyst, that has galvanised millions of people to united action in their support. Their action, their struggle, has become the focal point of the common struggle of millions of workers throughout Britain".

Left unity—the key

Unity of the working class has been a growing feature of the UCS campaign. Left militants like Bob Dickie (ASW), Bob Cook (GMWU), and Sam Gilmour (ETU), have worked on the Shop Stewards Committees alongside Jimmy Airlie, Jimmy Reid, and Sam Barr, all active members of the Communist Party's Scottish Committee. And the mutual respect which exists is shown by the election of Jimmy Airlie as chairman of the Co-ordinating Committee, Jimmy Reid as chairman of Clydebank Shop Stewards and Sam Barr as convenor at Connells. This same unity has been reflected on the Clydebank Town Council, mobilising support from the Council itself, and through it, from other local authorities. It was also seen at the big demonstration on August 18th to which we have just referred.

Without this unity, the movement could not have developed into the massive campaign involving all sections of the population which we see today.

It is an example of left unity in practice, a kernel around which the mass popular movement can snowball and sweep away the obstacles in its path. Repeated on issue after issue, at every level of the Labour movement, and coupled with the election of the best representatives of the working class to the Councils and Parliament, be they Communists or Labour, it is the basis for winning immediate demands, and going beyond that, it is the way to open the road to a new, socialist future, where the sort of threat hanging over UCS would become unthinkable.

That is why the Communist Party has always fought for working-class unity, for an end to bans and proscriptions imposed

by Labour's right-wing. Isn't it time, for example, to restore to trade unionists the right to elect Communists, who pay the levy, to represent them on Labour Party bodies, alongside other militants?

Proposals to save UCS

The Communist Party fully supports the view of the shop stewards that the UCS can be maintained as a viable shipbuilding unit. For our part we have always advocated the public ownership of Britain's vital shipbuilding industry, but without the excessive compensation accompanying the nationalisation we have known in the past, and with control firmly in the hands of men who know the industry and are loyal to the principles of social ownership.

One thing is certain—the crisis at UCS and the state of the industry elsewhere testifies to the total failure of private enterprise to run it.

The shop stewards are prepared to consider proposals which would lead to the formation of a new company, either wholly or partly publicly owned, and which would enable UCS to continue as one unit without any closures or redundancies. As Jimmy Airlie, Chairman of the Co-ordinating Committee, pointed out: "The workers will welcome any solution which will retain shipbuilding intact on the upper reaches of the Clyde. That includes bids from private enterprise or anyone else. *Once again, we have confirmed that there must be no contraction and no redundancy in any of the organisations. Any re-organisation must be based on the long term interests of the industry and must be aimed at expansion, not contraction*".

The Trades Union Congress Economic Committee has put forward a plan to save UCS which meets the requirements of the stewards with regard to no redundancies and no closures. It would mean setting up a Clydeside Development Authority, backed by a Government interest-free loan, and with power to raise loan capital. The authority would prepare a plan to bring into use the full economic potential of Clydeside. Its first responsibility would be to take over all UCS liabilities and assets, and seek sufficient new orders to keep employment at the present level for the immediate future. With this possibility for saving the yards being pressed by the TUC, it is essential that the entire working class in Britain pulls out the stops to make a success of the UCS work-in.

A new policy needed to revitalise British shipbuilding

The Communist Party throughout its history has put forward policies for shipbuilding aimed at both ensuring the retention and expansion of the industry and the harnessing of it to the needs of the people instead of private profit. This is why we have always advocated the nationalisation of shipping and shipbuilding. If these policies had been pursued there would be no crisis on the Clydeside today.

In 1944, the Scottish Committee of the Communist Party published a memorandum on shipbuilding which envisaged an expanding industry. This was based on the view that trade could be expanded enormously in the post-war years given correct economic policies. It was suggested that the work in the main shipbuilding centres should be co-ordinated, with a national plan for the whole industry, and that there should be standardisation within the particular yards.

In a subsequent pamphlet, published in 1960, entitled *Shipbuilding, Looking Forward*, we showed how the employers were restricting the amount of reorganisation required for the introduction of new techniques because they were preoccupied with the fear of recession. The Communists on the other hand saw the need for an expanding world output with Britain making a bigger contribution.

This estimate of expanding output in the world presupposed the introduction of new economic policies which would break with the stop-go nightmare that has held back the development of the British economy since the war. It presupposed a policy of rising living standards at home, trade with the expanding markets in the socialist countries, and efforts to assist the development and industrialisation of the new emergent nations that had won their freedom from imperialism. All this would have boosted trade and raised the demand for ships.

Attention was drawn to the handicaps from which British shipbuilding suffered. Very few yards had specialised in one kind of ship, as had been a feature of the record-breaking achievements of the Japanese yards. Our yards were laid out for shipbuilding during the last century, and have very little room for expansion in the highly industrialised areas in which they are situated. Even if all the possible internal arrangements and alterations were made, the yards would still not have the space and depth for the prefabrication methods which are such a feature of the reconstructed German yards and the new developments in Japan.

Moreover no other country had imposed such fetters on its shipbuilding industry in the past as Britain. In 1930, the National Shipbuilders' Security was formed. By 1935, this had closed down one-third of the berths by buying up shipyards and closing them down. The sites were sold but it was made a condition of sale that they should not be used for shipbuilding again. The plain fact is that in the post-war period when the demand for world shipping was growing and Japan and West Germany were increasing their production out of all proportion to ours, our capacity was deliberately restricted by the refusal of the Labour and Tory Governments and the employers to repeal the decisions of the National Shipbuilders' Security. The Communist plan would have meant removing these fetters.

Although one would hardly believe it from the crisis at UCS and the poor showing of the other shipbuilding firms, the demand for ships throughout the world today is actually greater than at any time in the history of shipbuilding. At the end of June 1971, there were over 22 million tons of ships under construction in the world's yards, a record. The number of ships on order and not yet started reached an all time record of 61 million tons. New yards are being built in Portugal and Greece, Canada is making big developments in its shipbuilding capacity, and Japanese shipbuilders forecast that their output will be doubled to more than 20 million tons by 1975.

Now no-one would dispute the fact that in relation to the most modern yards planned since the end of the war, the Clyde yards are out of date. But the bulk of the world's yards are in the same category as the UCS yards. There is no reason at all why the UCS yards cannot make a very big contribution to the needs of Britain's shipping and of the world's merchant fleet.

The Government has in its power to do what every maritime nation does—protect its shipping industry. Japan, with the greatest shipbuilding potential and with a high percentage of overseas orders, does not allow its own shipowners to order ships from foreign yards, so long as the yards at home are able to cope with the volume of domestic orders. To ensure that this principle is operated Government permission is needed before orders can be placed overseas.

Britain is the exception amongst the maritime nations. Britain is the largest buyer of ships overseas of any of the maritime countries. Two-thirds of British orders for new ships are placed in foreign yards. To close UCS yards in such a situation can only be described as economic sabotage. The Communist Party

has always maintained that British ships should be built in British yards and the same goes for routine repairs. We have also advocated a policy of replacing ships which are over twenty years old.

If further proof is required of the disastrous nature of the decision to close UCS yards, then we could quote from *The Times* shipping correspondent Michael Bailey, commenting on a confidential report prepared by the Maritime Transport Research Division of the Shipbuilders and Repairers National Association:

"The general cargo ship, widely regarded as a dying breed because of containerisation is heading for a big come-back within the next five years. The outcome could be a growing spate of orders that British yards like Upper Clyde—which largely missed the containership boom—would be well placed to capture. UCS's new 19,000 "Clyde" design exactly fits one of the main market opportunities pinpointed by the report" (*Times*, 5.1.70).

The more one looks at the shipping demands being made by the world's merchant marine, the more one realises how crazy this Tory Government's policy really is. What is needed is a policy of expansion, *not* contraction. Victory for the Clyde shipyard workers becomes more imperative in a world in which we visualise greater exchanges of goods between expanding economies planned in the interests of the people. That is the perspective of the Communist Party and has always been the declared aim of the Labour and Trade Union Movement.

Conclusion

The struggle at UCS is not an isolated issue, nor simply one for Scotland. It is an important battlefield in the fight to get rid of this disastrous Tory Government and win new left policies and leadership in the Labour movement which will set this country on the road to socialism. The fiasco at UCS and Rolls-Royce shows that this is long overdue.

This broader struggle is developing over a wide range of issues—the Common Market, the Industrial Relations Act, the fight against unemployment in which UCS is the focal point, the wages struggle, indeed the whole gamut of social and political issues.

The right to work, to earn enough for a decent life without excessive hours of work, is an elementary right to which every worker is entitled especially in an age when technology has the potential of creating abundance for all. If this Government, this system, cannot guarantee this right to the working class,

if it can only create an atmosphere of insecurity for workers and their families, then as Jimmy Reid so rightly said, its time to change that Government, to change that system.

The UCS workers deserve the support of the entire working class because they are in the front line, fighting a battle not only for their own jobs but for every worker concerned about the future prospects for himself and his family. Victory for the UCS workers means a defeat for the Tory policy of creating unemployment as a weapon to force down the living standards of every worker, in or out of a job. The Communist Party will do all in its power to mobilise the maximum support for the UCS workers, in cash and other ways, throughout the working class of Britain. This is now the key task and the responsibility of the TUC and every trade union at every level.

Tributes have been paid to the way the *Morning Star* has backed the UCS workers. It has published appeals for financial and other assistance, and day by day, it has exposed the phoney Tory arguments. In this it has demonstrated its vital significance for the whole working class struggle, whatever the issue. It has highlighted the need for all those on the Left to read the *Morning Star* everyday, and to persuade others to do likewise.

The fight at UCS has also indicated the important role played by the Communist Party and its members alongside all others on the Left. It underlines the need for a bigger Communist Party. How much more effective would the Communist Party's contribution be on every issue if those thousands who from their own experience appreciate the role and dedicated work of Communists in the working class movement were to take the vital step of joining the Communist Party. This is not a narrow question of concern *only* to Communists. It is a question for everyone on the Left, for every militant, for everyone concerned about the future, for everyone who wants to see a speedy end to this Tory Government and real steps towards opening the road to socialism in Britain.

I would appeal to them all—join the Party which has produced such outstanding working class figures as those to be seen amongst the leaders of the UCS struggle today.

I wish to join The Communist Party/Young Communist League
(delete inapplicable one)

Name _____ Age (if under 18) _____

Address _____

Return to Communist Party, 16 King Street, London, WC2E 8HY