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Workers' struggles

The industrial revolution caused incredible hardship on many workers and their families, with long working hours, harsh and unsafe conditions, poor pay and brutal treatment on the job, which can be summed up by the word exploitation. In many parts of the world such exploitation continues today. These conditions—a commonality of experience—helped form a collective identity and a unity of purpose to change the situation.

This commonality of identity and purpose was the foundation for the rise of the organised working class. Most of its gains were achieved through the power of nonviolent action, supplemented by enlightened employers and governments. Nonviolent action by workers includes strikes of various types, bans on certain types of work, workplace occupations, working-to-rule and pickets, plus a host of other actions that are less specific to the workplace such as ostracism, meetings, marches and fasts.[1] Violence by workers has played only a small role in workers' action, though violence by employers has been frequent.

The aim here is to assess workers' struggles for their potential to undermine capitalism. Suppose we start with the strike. Does a strike help to undermine capitalism? That's a difficult question, because it depends on what the strike is intended to achieve or, in other words, how it fits into the wider picture. This suggests that it is not so useful to start with a type of nonviolent action. It is more useful to look at the purpose of a workers' campaign.

Wages and conditions

Let's begin with a familiar campaign: for higher wages and better conditions. The better conditions might include improved lighting, safer machinery, clean toilets, greater flexibility in working hours, employer-provided child care facilities, and any of a host of other items. Better wages and conditions are certainly beneficial to workers.

The question is, what potential do campaigns for better wages and conditions have for transforming capitalism? The check list is a good place to start.

1. Does the campaign help to
   • undermine the violent underpinnings of capitalism, or
   • undermine the legitimacy of capitalism, or
   • build a nonviolent alternative to capitalism?

To begin: does a workers' campaign for better wages and conditions undermine the violent underpinnings of capitalism? Capitalists can rely on the power of the state to back up private property. Does such a campaign challenge this? In nearly all cases, the answer is no.

Next, does a workers' campaign for better wages and conditions undermine the legitimacy of capitalism? This is more difficult to answer, since capitalism's legitimacy is not a fixed entity, but varies from person to person, issue to issue and in other ways. A few examples may help. Imagine a highly exploitative industry, with low wages and horrible conditions. The industry's practices, if widely known, might discredit capitalism more generally. A campaign to improve wages and conditions could contribute to this by publicising the industry's practices. On the other hand, if the campaign leads to improved wages and conditions, then capitalism as a system may appear not so bad.

This points to a general feature of legitimacy: if problems due to capitalism are fixed up promptly and fairly, this actually increases capitalism's legitimacy. That means, ironically, that workers' campaigns that succeed quickly without much fanfare can lead to an increase in system legitimacy. In contrast, drawn-out campaigns, especially those that fail, or conspicuous problems where there is no campaign at all, can reduce system legitimacy.

To take a somewhat different example, the world's most serious industrial accident was in 1984 at Bhopal, India, where release of poisonous chemicals from a pesticide plant killed thousands of people and injured hundreds of thousands.[2] This was bound to be bad publicity for capitalism, but it was seriously aggravated by the failure of the owner Union Carbide to make prompt and fair restitution. Quite the contrary: Union Carbide made every effort to minimise responsibility. This means that Bhopal is a "running sore" for the image of capitalism.

Consider a different sort of campaign: some very highly paid and privileged workers—such as doctors or lawyers—take industrial action to improve their salaries even further. This does nothing to undermine capitalism's legitimacy and in fact may increase it, because the "normal" salaries, before the campaign, might be perceived as due to the fair operation of the market.

Thus, whether a campaign undermines or strengthens the image of capitalism depends on perceptions of fairness as well as on how the campaign is carried out. This is further complicated by the fact that the operation of capitalism has a big impact on whether people perceive particular wages and conditions to be fair.

In general, campaigning for better wages and conditions does not challenge the legitimacy of capitalism at its foundations, including private ownership, the boss-employee relationship and the market. Improved wages and conditions are important, but occur within capitalism rather than against it.

Finally, does a campaign for better wages and conditions help build a nonviolent alternative to capitalism? Except in special cases, the answer is no. So for point 1 on the check list, it can be concluded that campaigns for wages and conditions seldom satisfy any of the options, except sometimes helping undermine capitalism's legitimacy.

2. Is the campaign participatory?

The answer to this depends on the campaign. A strike or a work-to-rule, to be effective, needs as many workers as possible to participate. But sometimes a strike can be effective if just a few key workers, in vital positions, take action. So sometimes a workers' action can achieve immediate goals with relatively low participation.

Another aspect to participation is in planning and decision making. Is the campaign plotted by a few trade union bosses and announced to the members, or are all planning meetings open to all members, with special efforts to involve members from all sectors of the workforce?

Some trade unions are more autocratic and corrupt than the corporate executives they confront. Union-led campaigns in such circumstances are seldom fully participatory.

A further dimension to participation is involvement of others besides the immediate workers, including customers, workers elsewhere, other organisations and the public at large. If teachers go on

strike for higher pay, that does not by itself generate participation by anyone else. But if the campaign involves rallies and teach-ins with involvement by students, parents, administrative staff and prospective employers, the participation level is far higher.

One group often overlooked in workers' struggles is the unemployed. A campaign for higher wages can result in job losses. Trade unions typically look after their members and neglect others.

3. Are the campaign's goals built in to its methods?

The answer here is "not very often." A campaign to improve wages seldom has any potential to use improved wages as the method! Quite the contrary: going on strike, especially for an extended period, reduces wages.

For improving conditions, there are some possibilities. Requests for rest breaks could be pursued by taking the breaks, as a form of disobedience on the job. Demands for safety measures could be pursued by workers bringing in equipment, organising their own training and taking time on the job to follow the desired procedures. A push for procedures to protect against unfair dismissal could be accompanied by establishing a "workers' tribunal" to judge the evidence for a dismissal, set up alongside existing procedures. However, these sorts of initiatives are the exception. Most campaigns for improved conditions rely on methods such as bargaining with management or strikes, which as methods have little in common with the goal.

4. Is the campaign resistant to cooption?

A campaign for better wages and conditions, far from being resistant to cooption, can be interpreted as an attempt to *be* coopted. After all, it is not a campaign for workers to own and manage the enterprise themselves. Improvements to wages and conditions are changes within the capitalist framework.

In summary, campaigns for better wages and conditions are unlikely to be effective means for transforming capitalism into a nonviolent alternative, especially because they do not challenge the foundations of capitalism and are an open invitation to cooption. That said, such campaigns are vitally necessary for the many poor and exploited workers of the world.

Of course, campaigns for better wages and conditions can be part of wider struggles to transform capitalism. But they are unlikely candidates to be prime movers.

This very general analysis of these campaigns suggests two areas of potential strength. First, participation can be broadened as much as possible, both among workers and others, and include planning and decision making. This is a good prescription for a broad-based workers' movement in any case. Second, in some cases campaigns for better conditions can incorporate ends within means.

Jobs

For most workers in a capitalist economy, jobs are necessary to escape poverty and sometimes just to survive. This is not universally true. Some jobs are so poorly paid that those holding them remain in poverty. On the other hand, in some countries unemployment payments are ample enough to provide a decent life. Finally, of course, owners of capital do not require jobs in order to make a lot of money. Still, for many people a job is seen as absolutely essential for income. Furthermore, having a job is often crucial for self-esteem.

Individuals seek jobs and so do trade unions for their members. For governments, creating jobs is seen as a fundamental goal. Nonviolent action is possible at any of these levels but is most commonly pursued by trade unions, through strikes, rallies, work-ins, work-to-rule and the like. Campaigns for jobs have a high priority, but do they provide a challenge to capitalism?

1. Does the campaign help to
   • undermine the violent underpinnings of capitalism, or
   • undermine the legitimacy of capitalism, or
   • build a nonviolent alternative to capitalism?

The answer to this question is almost always "no." Having jobs or creating jobs does not provide any challenge to the violent foundation of capitalism.[3] Campaigning for jobs is little threat to the legitimacy of capitalism, since allocation of work and income via jobs is the standard way that capitalism is supposed to operate. If there is massive unemployment, the legitimacy of capitalism can come under threat, as occurs during periods of economic depression or crash. A campaign to maintain or increase the number of jobs does not question the job system. Quite the contrary, it endorses it. Finally,

campaigns for jobs, since they are built on the job system, seldom do much to build an alternative to capitalism.

It is vital to distinguish between jobs and work. A job involves providing one's labour power to an employer in exchange for payment. A job, therefore, is part of a market, namely a labour market.

Work is productive labour. Much work is carried out without pay, such as subsistence farming and parenting. In growing food for one's own needs and in rearing one's own children, there is no employer. In producing cash crops and in undertaking child care for pay, one is also working, but it is reasonable to speak of having a job.

As well, jobs are possible that involve little or no work. Many people in high-paying office jobs do very little productive work. Many members of corporate boards receive high pay for attending a few meetings. So, in summary, work is possible without jobs and jobs are possible without work.

In a nonviolent economic system, people's basic needs would be satisfied and there would be satisfying work for everyone who wanted it. The job system is not a good way to achieve either of these goals.

It is for this reason that campaigns for jobs are not a challenge to capitalism. In contrast, campaigns for satisfying work and for provision for those in greatest need are much more of a challenge.

2. Is the campaign participatory?

Job campaigns can be and often are participatory, but the participation is usually restricted to job-holders and their families, and perhaps a few others. The existence of a significant level of unemployment means that workers are pitted against each other for those jobs that exist. A campaign to retain jobs in a particular sector of the economy may not attract support from job-holders and job-seekers elsewhere.

Trade union bodies, though, can help to create a more general concern about employment, and in some cases there is mass action over job issues.

3. Are the campaign's goals built in to its methods?

The goal is more jobs. Work-ins, where employees stay at the workplace continuing to do their work in spite of employers seeking to terminate their jobs or to shut down the entire workplace, are quite compatible with this goal. However, the more commonly used

methods, such as leafletting, meetings, rallies, strikes and pickets, do not directly incorporate the goal of more jobs.

4. Is the campaign resistant to cooption?
A successful campaign for jobs is itself cooption into the capitalist system.

In summary, job campaigns, like campaigns for better wages and conditions, are unlikely to be effective means for transforming capitalism in a nonviolent direction, especially because they do not challenge the foundations of capitalism. They are a type of cooption. They are essentially about making capitalism work a bit more fairly. Capitalism is retained but with some adaptation for people's needs. Although they do little to challenge the foundations of capitalism, job campaigns are essential for the survival, standard of living and self-esteem of many people and communities.

Consider now some other goals for workers' struggles. One important goal is the right to organise legally, especially to form trade unions. Going through the check list, it turns out that the answers are much the same. The campaign doesn't do much to challenge the violent underpinnings or legitimacy of capitalism, nor much to build a nonviolent alternative. Participation often has to be high in order to be successful, but it might only be to vote in favour of having a union. Cooption is a big risk, because with legal recognition of workers' organisations, there is a greater possibility that trade union officials will act to dampen worker radicalism. The officials often find that their power is greater when workers "play by the rules," namely obey all laws and regulations governing worker organisation.

There is one question for which the answer could be different: Are the campaign's goals built in to its methods? The goal in this case is an official worker organisation. One way to seek this is to set up a "shadow" or parallel organisation—namely, an organisation that is run the same way a legal one would be. This is often a powerful way to proceed, since it gives participants ideal training for running an organisation.

Workers' control

For a strong contrast to campaigns for better wages and conditions, jobs or the right to organise, consider a campaign for workers' control, namely for the alternative in which workers collectively and democratically control all aspects of work in an enterprise, including who does what, who gets paid what, and what gets produced. With workers' control, owners and managers are eliminated or made irrelevant to the actual operation. This is also called workers' self-management.[4]

There are various ways a campaign for workers' control could proceed. It might be by lobbying government to introduce it as a more efficient method of production. It might come about by enlightened owners turning a company over to the workers, as has happened on a few occasions, such as with the Scott Bader Company in Britain. It might come about when workers join together to buy out a failing company. Finally, it might come about by a direct takeover by workers.

The focus here is on scenarios in which direct worker action is the primary driving force behind introduction of workers' control. Few governments have ever supported it and few private owners have relinquished their role. The exceptions most often occur during revolutionary upsurges, for example during the Russian Revolution when workers took over factories (making them into "soviets"). The Bolsheviks supported this while it served the purpose of helping overthrow the existing regime but introduced bureaucratic control once the party had solidified its power.[5]

So to the check list.

1. Does the campaign help to
   • undermine the violent underpinnings of capitalism, or
   • undermine the legitimacy of capitalism, or
   • build a nonviolent alternative to capitalism?

Most obviously, workers' control is a nonviolent alternative to capitalism, since it dispenses with the need for owners and managers. One self-managed enterprise itself does not constitute an alternative, but as a model, workers' control provides a fairly comprehensive alternative, typically along anarchist lines.

If workers do a reasonable job in running an enterprise themselves, this undermines the legitimacy of capitalism. The standard ideology

is that organisational hierarchy is essential for purposes of efficiency. A functioning workplace based on participatory principles is a living rebuttal of this ideology.[6] This is one good reason why workers' control is so often attacked by governments.

If workers' control is introduced by workers buying an enterprise, or by owners voluntarily relinquishing their role, there is no challenge to the use of state power to enforce property rights. But if workers' control comes about as a takeover of private property, without going through legal requirements—as in the case of a revolution—then this also becomes a challenge to the violent underpinnings of capitalism.

In summary, workers' control satisfies point 1 extremely well.

2. Is the campaign participatory?

If workers' control is brought about through the initiative of workers, it is almost bound to be participatory. On the other hand, if workers' control is a "gift" from owners or imposed by government, participation may be much lower. Indeed, it may require considerable effort to convince workers that it is a good thing.

Participation of the wider community—namely, those who are not workers—is not automatic in workers' control. If workers decide how to do their work, that doesn't really affect others all that much. But what if workers decide what products to produce? That certainly affects others, and a fully partipatory campaign would involve community members in such decision making.

One of the most famous workers' campaigns involved the British firm Lucas Aerospace in the 1970s. Responding to the possibility of job cuts, the Lucas Aerospace Shop Stewards' Committee took the initiative to investigate and propose possibilities for producing alternative products using the highly skilled workforce. The alternatives proposed, including road-rail vehicles, kidney dialysis machines and artificial limb control systems, included some products that were socially beneficial even if not as profitable as other options.[7] The Lucas workers' initiatives were repeatedly rebuffed by management but inspired many people around the world. They do provide evidence that workers, if given a say over what is produced, are likely to think more about community needs than a traditional management.

3. Are the campaign's goals built in to its methods?
Compatibility between means and ends is greatest when workers start exercising control as a method to bring about workers' control. Compatibility is least when the method is to lobby governments.

4. Is the campaign resistant to cooption?
Workers' control seems like such a radical alternative that cooption would be difficult, but the reality is closer to the opposite. There have been a host of ways to give workers some semblance of participation and control over their work while falling far short of full workers' control.

One option is to have worker representatives sitting on the board of management, along with executives and owners. This is a type of "industrial democracy" modelled on representative government.[8] It preserves the conventional structure of a corporation with board, chief executive officer and various levels of management down to workers at the coal face. The worker representatives on the board are usually outnumbered but, more importantly, they often adapt to the corporate way of doing things. They can serve useful purposes for workers, to be sure, but they can also help management by soothing the relationship between management and workers.

Industrial democracy can also be introduced at lower levels, with various committees formed allowing workers at different levels to be represented. Again, this can serve useful purposes but may also give greater legitimacy to the hierarchical structure, since workers seem to have some input into decisions but are very far from controlling things fully.

Further down the hierarchy, it is possible to have "semi-autonomous work groups," which are groups of workers who make many of the decisions about how they do their work. Rather than being given very narrow and rigid tasks by bosses, groups of workers decide how to achieve a more general work goal, including who does what and what methods to use. The groups are not fully autonomous since the overall work goal is set higher up in the enterprise.

Greater worker autonomy at this level usually makes work far more stimulating, drawing on and developing a wider range of skills, while interactions between workers can offer great work satisfaction. As a result, productivity is often much greater. However, bosses may be less than enthusiastic since some managerial roles are eliminated.

From the point of view of most workers, semi-autonomous work groups are a great improvement, but they fall short of workers' control. If introduced as a result of campaigning by workers, they provide a considerable challenge to capitalism, but they can also be a form of cooption.

In recent decades, management gurus in developed countries have touted the virtues of flat hierarchies, self-managing teams, open organisations and a host of other wonderful-sounding developments that move away from traditional authoritarian management practice.[9] These messages about the benefits of giving greater power to employees can be interpreted in several ways. One response is that this is nice rhetoric but that the reality has hardly changed in workplaces.[10] Another response is that changes in this direction make sense in a world where flexibility and cost-cutting have become essential for corporate survival. A third response is that moves to give greater freedom to workers serve admirably to coopt any deeper challenge, given the enormous job losses, career changes and general disruptions of previous certainties caused by globalisation. For all the talk of flat hierarchies and self-management, the changes being recommended do little to challenge core features of capitalism.

In summary, campaigns for workers' control can provide a powerful challenge to capitalism, especially if the primary method is for workers to proceed by taking greater control. Workers' control is potentially a full-scale alternative to capitalism, and successful examples of workers' control provide a powerful challenge to capitalism's legitimacy. A campaign for workers' control can be highly participatory, especially if it proceeds by direct implementation of control, in which case the ends are incorporated in the means. However, cooption is a serious risk. It is not so much that a workplace controlled by workers will be given an offer of lesser control but more money: it is much more likely to be attacked or undermined. Rather, various form of limited participation and autonomy, including worker representatives on boards and semi-autonomous work groups, may serve to pre-empt more radical challenges.

On the other hand, limited forms of worker participation and autonomy may improve work life tremendously. This should not be ignored. It just needs to be taken into account in assessing the potency of workers' control campaigns for challenging capitalism.

A deeper issue is that many workers, given collective control over the workplace, may not want to work! Evidence from the French Popular Front and from the Spanish Revolution in the 1930s suggests that workers resist work in reformist and revolutionary situations, rather like they do in conventional circumstances.[11] If this applies more generally, it means the strategy of workers' control requires creative rethinking and possibly reformulation.

Green bans

In the early 1970s, construction workers in the Australian state of New South Wales pioneered a new form of workers' action. The militant trade union covering the workers was the NSW Builders' Labourers Federation (BLF). Union officials were approached by residents living near some park land called Kelly's Bush, in Sydney, that was threatened by a proposed building development. The officials proposed to the union membership to put a ban on any work that impinged on Kelly's Bush, and this was approved. Not long afterwards, all Sydney trade unions banned work at the site. This was the first of what were called "green bans"—industrial action in support of environmental goals.[12]

The employers tried to overturn the ban, but at this period the BLF and the trade union movement were too strong. There was a building boom and workers were in short supply. Any developer that used non-union labour could suffer union retaliation through refusal to work on existing sites. Furthermore, green bans captured public imagination through creative tactics that gained favourable media coverage.

The initial ban over Kelly's Bush was soon followed by many more, including some massive projects. In most cases, the primary motivation was to protect environmental or heritage values. While the circumstances and details varied, there were several fundamental features.

• There was wide local support for a ban in the area affected, including endorsement at a public meeting. Bans were not undertaken solely at the initiative of the union.

• The union membership considered the proposal for a ban. Bans were not ordered by officials on their own initiative.

• Proposals for bans were considered on a case-by-case basis.

After several years of dramatic action, the leadership of the NSW BLF was toppled by the leadership of the national BLF, acting in concert with the government and employers. However, the example set in the green bans had by then been taken up elsewhere in the country and was an inspiration around the world. Union bans on development continue to be instituted to this day.

There were special circumstances in Australia that encouraged the rise of green bans. There was a long tradition of militant trade union action that often went beyond the narrow self-interest of the workers. The early 1970s were a period of rising environmental consciousness, and some unions were leaders in action on environmental issues. (Later on, employers were able to create or exploit divisions between workers and environmentalists.) The legal system did not offer effective opportunities to intervene in the urban planning process. Therefore, middle-class environmentalists had a greater incentive to approach trade unions than might have otherwise been the case.[13]

The projects that were stalled or blocked entirely by green bans came from both the commercial and government sectors. In any case, government was very pro-development, so that in nearly every case it was a struggle between government and corporations on one side versus residents and workers on the other.

Now consider green bans according to the check list for anticapitalist campaigns.

1. Does the campaign help to
   • undermine the violent underpinnings of capitalism, or
   • undermine the legitimacy of capitalism, or
   • build a nonviolent alternative to capitalism?

Green bans undermine the legitimacy of capitalism by emphasising the importance of environmental and other non-market values, demanding that these be taken into account rather than decisions being made simply on the basis of profitability or bureaucratic fiat. Furthermore, by involving residents and workers in decision making, green bans challenge the assumption that owners and managers have the right to do whatever they like.

Green bans have elements of a nonviolent alternative to capitalism, namely participatory decision making, but usually this is for the purpose of blocking development proposals. There is little scope

for actually taking charge of urban planning. The bans do not challenge the state's control over organised violence in support of property. The main value of green bans in relation to question 1 is in undermining capitalism's legitimacy.

2. Is the campaign participatory?
Green bans involve citizen partipation on the community side and worker participation at the trade union side. Depending on the community groups and trade unions, the actual level of participation can vary considerably. However, the long-term success of green bans depends on a reasonably high level of support from residents and workers. If bans are placed inappropriately, workers may become disgruntled and residents withdraw support.

3. Are the campaign's goals built in to its methods?
In as much as one of the goals is participation in decision making about development, green bans build this goal into its methods, which are quite participatory. On the other hand, if the goal is environmental protection, the method is separate—a ban on development—rather than constructive work with the environmental areas in question.

4. Is the campaign resistant to cooption?
Cooption is a great risk at the community consultation side of the development process. There are all sorts of procedures that give some semblance of participation: opinion polls, meetings called by local government, planning displays, calls for submissions, environmental impact statements and a host of others. Most of the methods of community participation in planning are at the low end of the "ladder of participation," closer to manipulation or consultation rather than genuine citizen power.[14] If residents of local communities think they can influence decisions through various official procedures, they are less likely to build links with workers.

   Green bans are less open to cooption at the worker side. Employers strongly resist giving workers—especially blue collar workers—any say in what work should be done.

In summary, green bans appear to have a great potential as part of a nonviolence strategy against capitalism, especially in bringing

together residents and workers in ways that challenge the assumption that capitalism works automatically for the benefit of all.

Whistleblowers

A whistleblower is someone who speaks out in the public interest.[15] The classic whistleblower is an employee who discovers corrupt practice or danger to the public and reports it to superiors, regulatory agencies, politicians and the media. One of the most famous whistle-blowers is A. Ernest Fitzgerald, an employee in the US Department of Defense, who exposed vast cost overruns in which the US government was paying exorbitant prices to companies contracted to produce goods for the military.[16] There are police whistleblowers who report police corruption, pharmaceutical company whistleblowers who expose the dangers of certain medical drugs, tobacco company whistleblowers who leak documents about what the company executives knew about the hazards of smoking, church whistleblowers who expose sexual abuse by clergy, and a host of others from every occupation and walk of life.

Whistleblowers usually come under heavy attack from their bosses and by others who are threatened by the revelations. Whistleblowers usually suffer reprisals, including ostracism, threats, harassment, reprimands, demotions, punitive transfers, referral to psychiatrists, dismissals and slander. As a result of these sorts of attacks, it is common for their careers to be set back greatly and their physical and emotional health to suffer.

Most whistleblowers are remarkably ineffective.[17] The problem they blew the whistle on remains unchanged, but instead they come under attack in the classic "shoot the messenger" syndrome. Whis-tleblowers often seek redress through official channels such as grievance procedures, ombudsmen, legislators, anticorruption agencies and courts, but seldom with any success.

This outcome can be understood by thinking of an organisation as a system of power in which those at the top exercise control over those further down.[18] A whistleblower is someone who challenges the hierarchy, for example by exposing corruption that is perpetrated or tolerated by those higher up. To support the whistleblower is essen-tially to support a challenge to the standard system of power. Instead of addressing the problem, the whistleblower is attacked as a heretic who threatens the normal operation of the system.

Whistleblowers have the greatest impact when they go public, getting their message to large numbers of people, often via the media. If they link up with social action groups, this is a potent combination: whistleblowers have inside knowledge and the credibility that goes along with this, while the outside action groups are relatively safe from the types of reprisals that can be visited on employees. For example, three nuclear engineers in 1976 spoke out about the hazards of nuclear power, giving an enormous boost to the anti-nuclear campaign.[19] Prior to that time, most insider experts had either supported nuclear power or kept quiet. By speaking out, the engineers punctured the apparent monopoly of expert support for nuclear power. When they spoke out, they resigned from General Electric, realising that their survival as employees would have been impossible. The impact of the GE engineers was great because of the existence of a broad-based antinuclear-power movement.

Employees who blow the whistle challenge the organisational hierarchy; in many cases they challenge corporate power, either as corporate employees or by exposing government connivance with corporations, as in the case of A. Ernest Fitzgerald. So there is a potential to challenge capitalism. In assessing this challenge using the check list, the most potent type of whistleblowing—namely, when it operates in alliance with social movements—will be considered.

1. Does the campaign help to
   • undermine the violent underpinnings of capitalism, or
   • undermine the legitimacy of capitalism, or
   • build a nonviolent alternative to capitalism?

Much whistleblowing reveals flaws in organisations, policies or individuals. It seldom sets out to question the purpose of organisations or policies, but rather is an attempt to get them working correctly, namely without corruption or injustice. Nevertheless, whistleblowing can contribute to a general undermining in public confidence in institutions. When there are continual news stories about massive swindles by wealthy entrepreneurs, often aided and abetted by governments, this undermines belief in the automatic beneficence of capitalism.

Sometimes whistleblowing can help stop expansion of corporations into new sectors of activity. Exposures of large-scale corruption by hospital corporations, for example—some companies have been

fined hundreds of millions of dollars for their transgressions—can be a factor in stopping expansion of corporatised medical systems.

Whistleblowing seldom builds an alternative or challenges systems of violence. Fitzgerald's exposures of waste by the Pentagon were intended to make the military more efficient, not to dismantle it.

2. Is the campaign participatory?

Whistleblowing is mostly an individual activity, though it is far more likely to be effective when carried out in groups. When whistleblowers liaise with social action groups, there can be participation at the activist end, but the whistleblowing itself is seldom participatory.

3. Are the campaign's goals built in to its methods?

The method of a whistleblower—speaking out, typically through official channels—is quite different from the goal, which is dealing with a problem such as corruption. Whistleblowing is indirect action, an attempt to get someone else—usually someone in a position of power—to do something about a problem.

On the other hand, it is possible to interpret whistleblowing as an attempt to bring about a society in which people are free to speak out without reprisal. In this, whistleblowing combines means and ends.

4. Is the campaign resistant to cooption?

Whistleblowers are more likely to be attacked than coopted. The attacks serve both to discredit the whistleblower and discourage others from speaking out. However, cooption has a role in preventing people from becoming whistleblowers. The whole system of official channels, including grievance procedures, government agencies, parliamentary inquiries and the courts, serves to encourage people who have a complaint to use those channels. This takes them down a path that chews up time and energy with little result. So, from the perspective of a social movement that could benefit by building links with insiders who are aware of problems, the existence of official channels serves as a way of coopting employee dissent. It could almost be said that whistleblowing through official channels is itself a manifestation of cooption, when the alternative is linking with social activists or becoming one.

In summary, whistleblowing is seldom a great danger to capitalism as a system, though it can sometimes threaten individual capitalists. The best way for whistleblowers to help challenge capitalism is by teaming up with social action groups.

Notes

1 There is no definitive work on nonviolent action by workers. Lots of material is available in writings on nonviolent action (see chapter 2), studies of workers' control (see below) and history of the labour movement. See for example Root & Branch (ed.), *Root & Branch: The Rise of the Workers' Movements* (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett, 1975).

2 T. R. Chouhan and others, *Bhopal: The Inside Story. Carbide Workers Speak out on the World's Worst Industrial Tragedy* (Goa, India: The Other India Press; New York: Apex Press, 1994); Sanjoy Hazarika, *Bhopal: The Lessons of a Tragedy* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1987); Paul Shrivastava, *Bhopal: Anatomy of a Crisis* (London: Paul Chapman, 1992, 2nd edition).

3 It is possible to imagine rare exceptions, for example jobs in designing nonviolent alternatives to the military.

4 Gerry Hunnius, G. David Garson and John Case (eds.), *Workers' Control: A Reader on Labor and Social Change* (New York: Vintage, 1973); Paul Mattick, *Anti-Bolshevik Communism* (London: Merlin, 1978); Ernie Roberts, *Workers' Control* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1973); Jaroslav Vanek (ed.), *Self-Management: Economic Liberation of Man* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975); H. B. Wilson, *Democracy and the Work Place* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1974).

5 Oscar Anweiler, *The Soviets: The Russian Workers, Peasants, and Soldiers Councils, 1905-1921* (New York: Pantheon, 1974). For an insightful analysis of workers' control and revolutionary action, see Carl Boggs, "Marxism, prefigurative communism, and the problem of workers' control," *Radical America,* Vol. 11, No. 6–Vol. 12, No. 1, November 1977–February 1978, pp. 99-122.

6 Seymour Melman, *Decision-Making and Productivity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958) is one of many studies showing that productivity can be increased by extending workers' capability in decision making.

7 Hilary Wainwright and Dave Elliott, *The Lucas Plan: A New Trade Unionism in the Making?* (London: Allison and Busby, 1982).

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