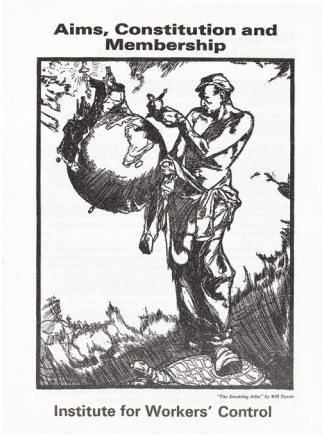
Institute for Workers' Control

Rachael Orchard



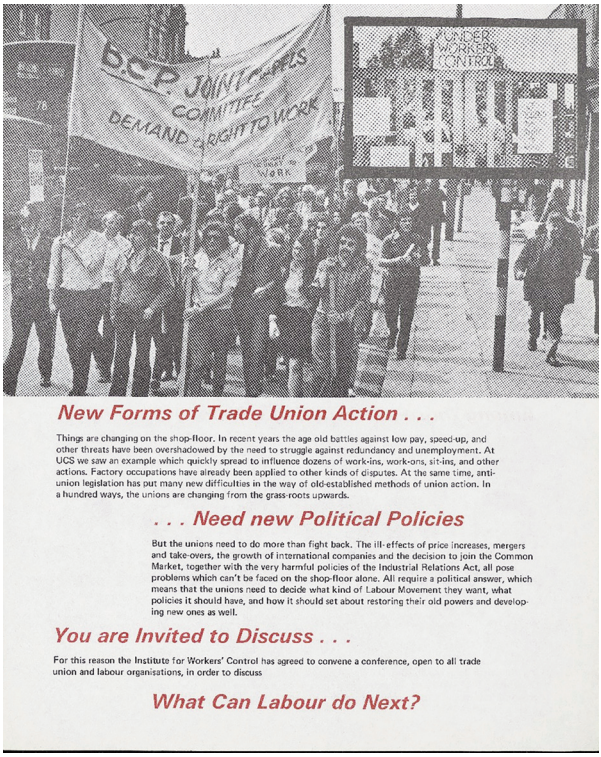
Rachael Orchard of Nottingham University catalogued the IWC's lively story close to its origins and activities in the Trent Valley.

Manuscripts and Special Collections at the University of Nottingham are pleased to announce the opening of the catalogue of Papers of the Institute for Workers' Control. We would like to thank Tony Simpson for his assistance with compiling information about the organisation and Alan Tuckman who kindly contributed his research files to be added to the collection (IWC 4). The collection primarily reflects the work of Ken Fleet, Secretary of the Institute for Workers' Control, particularly his role in publishing and in organising meetings, workshops, and conferences.

The Institute for Workers' Control began as a series of conferences organised by University of Nottingham Adult Education tutor, Ken Coates (later Chair of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation and MEP) and Tony Topham (Workers Educational Association Organising Tutor in Hull). The conferences covered topics such as Industrial Democracy and Workers' Control and, in 1968, the Institute was formally established during the Sixth Annual Conference.

The IWC Aims and Constitution agreed at that time states the organisation was formed "to assist in the formation of Workers' Control groups dedicated to the development of democratic consciousness, to the winning of support for Workers' Control in all the existing organisations of Labour, to the challenging of undemocratic actions wherever they may occur, and to the extension of democratic control over industry and the economy itself, by assisting the unification of Workers' Control groups into a national force in the socialist movement".

There are 8 boxes of material relating to Conferences dating from 1968 to 1986, and these show the wide range of topics covered



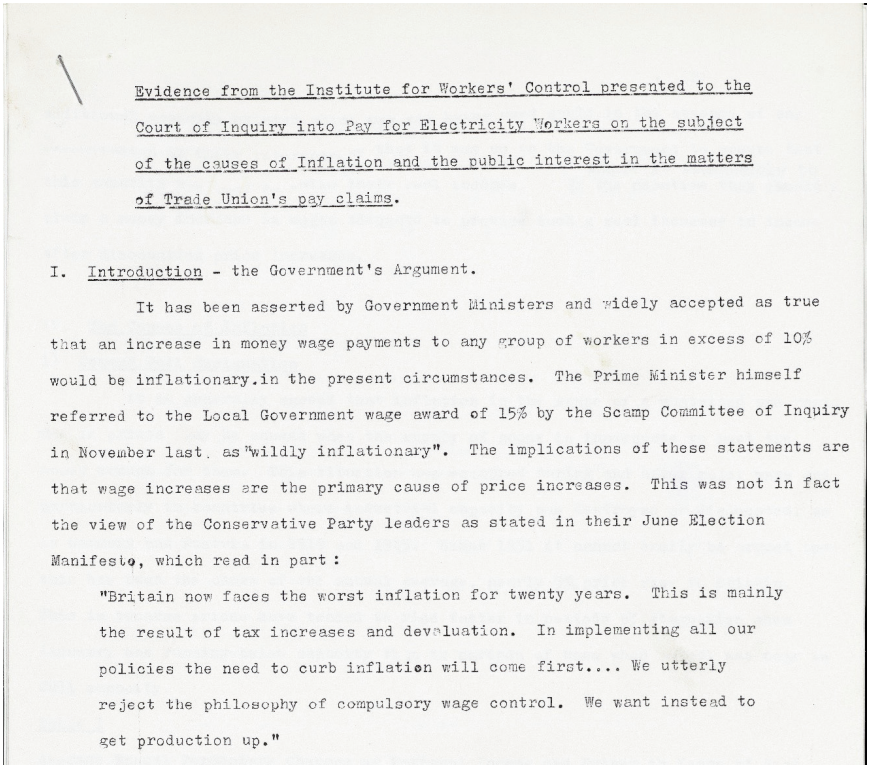
▲ Flyer for Ninth National Conference, 1973

such as Democratising the Mines, The Future of Workers' Education, and Right to Political Action: Keeping the Links between Labour and the Unions. The folders often include papers and reports, newspaper articles, and correspondence relating to the organisation of the Conferences. Although there are some GDPR restrictions on items like lists of union members, most of the material can be viewed in the Nottingham Reading Room.

The IWC sought to unite trade unionists from a wide range of sectors, including print, journalism and media, as well as dockers, miners, and other workers. Among the papers within this collection are 22 boxes of Research and Information files (IWC/3/5) on topics such as 'Docks Nationalisation', 'Fuel and Power' and 'Work-Ins, Sit-Ins'. The Institute advised on several cases such as submitting evidence to the Court of Enquiry on Pay of Electricity Supply Workers to try to raise wages (IWC/3/5/68), and the IWC's evidence to the Committee of Enquiry into Industrial Democracy set up by the Labour Government in 1975, which proposed a system of workers' control to strengthen employee participation in the workplace (IWC/3/5/10). The Committee produced the Bullock Report in 1977 which was laregly opposed by the IWC.

The IWC operated from an office on Gamble Street, Nottingham, which it shared with the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation. Subscription income enabled the Institute to print and publish 94 pamphlets in the IWC series, along with a regular bulletin. Additional workers' control titles appeared under the Spokesman Books imprint of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation.

This collection is extremely significant when looking not just at local Labour History but also the wider UK and Europe. The collection contains a wealth of information. The online catalogue can be viewed at the Manuscripts and Special Collections website (mss-cat.nottingham.ac.uk/) and everyone is welcome to visit our Reading Room to view material from the collection.



Evidence from the Institute for Workers' Control presented to the Court of Inquiry into Pay for Electricity Workers on the subject of the causes of Inflation and the public interest in the matters of Trade Union's pay claims.

I. Introduction - the Government's Argument.

It has been asserted by Government Ministers and widely accepted as true that an increase in money wage payments to any group of workers in excess of 10% would be inflationary.in the present circumstances. The Prime Minister himself referred to the Local Government wage award of 15% by the Scamp Committee of Inquiry in November last, as "wildly inflationary". The implications of these statements are that wage increases are the primary cause of price increases. This was not in fact the view of the Conservative Party leaders as stated in their June Election Manifesto, which read in part:

"Britain now faces the worst inflation for twenty years. This is mainly the result of tax increases and devaluation. In implementing all our policies the need to curb inflation will come first.... We utterly reject the philosophy of compulsory wage control. We want instead to get production up."

▲ IWC/3/5/68 (part) – IWC's Evidence into the Electricity Workers' Pay Dispute

More information on the Institute for Workers' Control, including a PDF archive of the IWC Pamphlet Series can be found at www.socialistrenewal.net