

# PART 5

## PROBLEMS OF THE PEACE

THE war was over. But between 1945 and the mid-fifties the problems of peace were never-ending as they overlapped each other in rapid succession. At times it seemed that Britain's war-ravaged economy would collapse under the strain. The tension of these years was reflected in *USDAW* and we must now sketch in the national background against which the Union had to operate.

Even the weather was against us. In the winter of 1946 the country was buried beneath mountainous snow. Coal was frozen at the pitheads, transport immobilised. Electricity for industry had to be severely reduced in many areas. Along with other periodicals, *New Dawn's* issue of 22nd February, 1947, could not be published because of the fuel and power crisis. The wettest March on record brought floods, destruction and loss of life, and when at last it seemed that the storm gods had relented they returned with snow in April.

In July, 1946, bread, which had never been rationed in Britain throughout the war, went on ration to release cereals for the hungry millions who had become the responsibility of the victors with the collapse of Germany and Japan. Supplies continued to be rationed until the middle of 1948. In August and October, 1947, there were cuts in other food rations and in November potatoes were rationed (rationing was not completely ended until 1955). With overseas assets liquidated to pay for the war, and with enormous debts in addition, Britain staggered under a further blow when American aid under Lend-Lease was withdrawn in 1945. A dollar loan was negotiated in 1946 but it soon began to disappear under the pressure of rising world prices and the multiplying needs of an ailing economy.

A more fundamental solution to the problems of Europe as a whole came in 1947 when General G. C. Marshall, then American Secretary of State (who, during the war, was the organising head of America's military effort) proposed the plan

for European recovery that was known by his name. The Marshall Plan, which was authorised by the United States Congress in March, 1948, was denounced by Communists and some Labour people as dollar imperialism but undoubtedly it provided the means by which Europe, Britain included, hauled itself from the edge of the abyss.

Life goes on under the worst conditions and as well as agonising problems there were great achievements. The United Nations had been launched and was hopefully welcomed as a successor to the League of Nations, welcomed nowhere more wholeheartedly than in USDAW and the British Labour Movement generally. If it has not lived up to those hopes it has at least been more successful than its predecessors as a forum in which international disputes can be defused, and in particular where East, West and the Third World can talk to each other. As Churchill once said "Jaw, jaw is better than war, war". In the dark and frozen days of February, 1947, Prime Minister Attlee made the historic announcement that power would be transferred to Indian hands not later than June, 1948. On 23rd June of that year Lord Louis Mountbatten, the last Viceroy, gave up his imperial role to the two new States of India and Pakistan.

Here at home life slowly crept back to something like normal conditions. After six years there were lights in the streets again (the blackout had been relaxed in September, 1944, and ended in April, 1945). Football resumed some of its former glory (though not, alas, to regain the international superiority of which we had once been proud). In April, 1946, the first Grand National since 1940 brought the crowds to Aintree and in June the one hundred and sixty third Derby — the first since 1939 — was won by Airborne at odds of fifty to one. In July that quaint annual mixture of Old School Tie, tea on the lawns and tough athleticism came back to Henley, after seven years in which Leander and other ties had been food for the moths.

Death also made its regular accounting and two writers whose influence had been world wide, particularly in turning the minds of men and women towards Socialism, died during the period — Bernard Shaw (1950) and H. G. Wells (1946). So, too, in 1946, died Will Thorne, the man who as much as anyone had founded what is now the General and Municipal

Workers' Union, and "Jimmy" Maxton, one of the best known leaders of the Independent Labour Party. Sidney Webb (Lord Passfield) who, with his wife Beatrice (died 1943), had done so much to shape the thinking of the British Labour Movement, died in 1947. But the loss most keenly felt by USDAW members was the death on 6th February, 1947, of Ellen Wilkinson, MP and Minister of Education, the Union's first woman officer, one of its first MPs and a fiery torch-bearer of Socialist idealism for most of her life (the Union retained the Jarrow seat when E. Fernyhough won the by-election). A happier event was the knighthood conferred on Joseph Hallsworth in 1946 after thirty years as General Secretary and forty-five in the service of the Union.

For USDAW, 1946 was the year of the two great achievements already discussed; the National Wages Policy in the Co-operative Movement and the amalgamation with the Shop Assistants' Union. To these could be added at the beginning of 1945 the Bevin Act which enlarged the power of Wages Councils (formerly known as Trade Boards) to fix statutorily enforceable wages and conditions. Several of these Councils were introduced into the distributive trades, on all of which the Union was represented. It was also represented on the Wages Councils for many other trades (such as milk, aerated waters, laundry) and a wide range of Joint Industrial Councils. Where changes to Wages Councils took place, however, the result was not always an unmixed blessing. When it came to recruitment, many short-sighted workers argued that they did not need a Union, as "the Government" now fixed their wages. It was to be a long hard slog to convince them that the Councils only fixed minimum rates, and only through Trade Union power could they ever hope to build higher earnings onto the Wages Councils' minima.

The years between 1946 and 1950 saw the first great measures of nationalisation which were the economic side of Labour's *far-reaching social reforms*. Taking in most cases the vesting days (i.e. when the public corporations or other form of control became operationally responsible) the succession was: Bank of England and Civil Aviation, 1946; Coal, and long distance road haulage and Cable and Wireless, 1947; Electricity and Rail, 1948; Gas, 1949; Iron and Steel, 1950. More than half a century

of Socialist agitation reached a climax with the nationalisation of these basic industries and services.

USDAW welcomed the change and for several years sought to bring the distributive trades under some form of public ownership. The Union had long maintained that the uncontrolled opening of new shops, and the plethora of intermediaries between manufacturer and consumer, wasted more in national resources than was saved for consumers by the theoretical advantages of a competitive free-for-all. In addition the Union contended that price competition between shops was largely financed by the low wages of distributive workers.

During the war, distribution to the consumer was controlled by rationing, registration with a chosen shop, and the points system for unrationed goods. Shops were controlled through licensing under the Location of Retail Businesses Order of 1941 and the Register of Withdrawn Traders established in 1943. These Orders were partially revoked at the end of 1945, although licensing still continued for food retailers (soon, however, to be diluted by the right of anyone to open a food shop who could show 25 registrations for one of four rationed commodities). With the general scarcity of goods in 1945/6 there was no immediate rush of new businesses. But the door had been opened. The Union feared that if nothing was done to control new entrants, distribution would be back in the old jungle, only slightly controlled by town planning legislation, and shop workers would be the first to suffer. The Union's Objects Rule included (as it still does) a clause "To work consistently towards securing the control of the industries in which its members are employed" and this in itself was a mandate to seek participation in the nationalisation programme of the Labour Government. The first move, however, was over the licensing of shops.

The Shop Assistants' Union, prior to the amalgamation, had advocated the continuance of licensing to be carried out by a revised version of the licensing bodies that had operated under the Location of Retail Businesses Order. NUDAW's Executive Council joined in the debate at the beginning of 1946 with a lengthy statement in *New Dawn*. It began with the question: "Can economic planning be accomplished under a capitalist system?" and reached the conclusion that it cannot. In any case, Britain was "... only on the threshold of socialisation".

The Labour Government, it went on, was dealing with a few basic industries through nationalisation. Even this would take much time and "We cannot just stand aside waiting in the queue for the turn of the distributive trades to be socialised". Therefore, the Executive supported a continued system of licensing. Not, however, by special bodies set up under the Board of Trade, as the Shop Assistants' Union had suggested. NUDAW proposed that the power should be exercised through local authorities, which already could control the number of retail outlets in new development areas, and through their statutory duty to administer the Food and Drugs Acts, Shops Acts and other legislation had an "... exact knowledge of these areas that cannot be gained otherwise." The local licensing committees should, however, "... be augmented by representatives of the traders and of the Trades Unions of distributive workers". With both existing and new traders, wages and conditions "... must be not less favourable than ... laid down by Trade Union agreement for the district".

It was recognised that there could be difficulties in determining *what* was the appropriate agreement — Co-operative or private trade (where the latter existed) and on this subject the Union's conclusions were, to say the least, on the vague side. The Executive also insisted on the right of consumers to "... purchase Co-operatively or through private trade" and, particularly in new housing estates, that the Co-operative Movement must not be barred (as not infrequently happened in areas controlled by Tory Councils).

The statement was introduced to the 1946 ADM by J. Hallsworth and was adopted, surprisingly, considering the importance of the subject, without discussion. However, there was more interest in the subject than this quiescence appeared to indicate. Resolutions in favour of licensing continued to be sent in for the ADM agenda and the Executive continued to enlarge and strengthen its preliminary ideas of 1946. A much fuller document on *A Planned Distributive Economy* was submitted to the ADM of 1950.

It repeated the charge that distribution was too costly, unnecessarily increased the cost of living, and absorbed too much labour at a time when "... the nation needs the maximum number of workers on production. If there were more

workers making things and fewer workers were needed to distribute them efficiently the standard of living... could be higher". The central problem was that there were too many shops and too many middlemen, and without fundamental change "... substantial economies cannot be made". The document then went on to grasp the nettle that lies in front of any attempt to rationalise distribution — the consumer's right in a free society to freedom and variety of choice.

It was accepted that in trades where taste, fashion or personal service were concerned "... freedom of consumer choice is essential". Nationalisation on the lines of coal mining, gas or electricity would be harmful "... except possibly in the case of standard commodities."

Therefore, more than one type of undertaking was necessary, provided that none could "... exploit the public or the worker, viz, that they were non-profit making and subject to democratic control". The Co-operative Movement, being non-profit making and democratically controlled, would thus continue to cater for its voluntary membership. That was as far as the statement went in trying to define by structure, by geographical area or by trade the different types of undertaking that should carry out distribution. Those were "... matters for future consideration", but municipal trading and State purchasing of some commodities were mentioned as possibilities. Wholesaling was discussed in rather more detail. While accepting that this function was necessary for many commodities, the Executive contended that there was too much duplication and too many intermediaries. There should be an investigation, trade by trade, to determine the appropriate route for goods from producer to retailer, and wholesalers should be licensed only if they conformed to such conditions as buying direct from the producer, holding stock, breaking bulk, etc. Many of the so-called middlemen and dealers, it was argued, would be sieved out by this test.

Detailed proposals were made for the milk and coal trades, which were considered to be ripe for immediate public ownership and control, with protection for the Co-operative Movement to compete with the public undertaking, thus maintaining consumer choice.

This plan was adopted by the 1950 ADM with one dissident.

An attempt was made to amend the proposals by demanding that distribution and a considerable part of associated productive industry should be nationalised under a public corporation (the Co-operative Movement being excluded). This was defeated, as was a proposed reference back for discussion by branches and Divisions. The Executive's proposals, won a notable victory in the larger forum of the Labour Party. At the Party's 1950 Conference USDAW presented a resolution much on the lines of the two statements. The Party Executive opposed the resolution, in particular the suggestion that the number of shops should be restricted. Dr. Edith Summerskill, who spoke for the Executive attributed this idea to "doctrinaire economists" and said that she believed there should be competition between shops — not exactly the most cogent argument from a Socialist platform. But the conference did not agree with her and on a show of hands the resolution was carried by a large majority. A composite resolution carried at the TUC of 1951 also embodied the Union's criticism of wasteful marketing and distributive methods.

On the whole, however, the Executive's patient efforts over many years had not made much headway on the national scene. But they had at least forced the issue on the attentions of the Union itself and the Labour Movement in general. Apart from the national forum, the future of distribution had been discussed widely at the conferences of the Union's Divisions, at one-day and weekend schools arranged by Federations, at the annual summer school and, outside the Union, at Co-operative schools and conferences, Trades Council and local Labour Party meetings. USDAW's initiative had also contributed to discussions that took place between the Co-operative Movement and the Labour Party on the role of the Co-operatives in a collectivist economy.

By 1951, however, the Executive decided, probably with an eye on the Labour Government's already heavy commitments on nationalisation of basic industries, that it has done all that was possible, that there was no likelihood of "... fundamental action... in the immediately foreseeable future" and that decisions on the details of nationalisation could be deferred "... until after experience is gained from activities of a similar kind in other fields". This advice was adopted by the ADM.



As this is being written in 1978 there have been 27 years of the "immediately foreseeable future". Those years have seen vast changes in distribution; through self-service into supermarkets, into hypermarkets, into discount houses, into huge shopping precincts, into a great increase in credit trading interlocked with finance capital. The number and variety of products, basically identical in everything except their plastic wrappers or containers, has enormously increased. A large industry is dedicated to the task of persuading the shopper that brand X is better than brand Y. Far from being sheltered by competition, consumers have had to band themselves into voluntary protective associations. Governments of both parties have found it necessary to establish statutory bodies for the same purpose. The wages and conditions of distributive workers have been partly protected by the existence of USDAW itself and the fall-back of Wages Councils. But shop workers still rank low in the table of earnings. Britain undoubtedly has an efficient distributive system, possibly the most efficient in Europe. But it is arguable that we do not need so great a number and variety of shops and stores and brands to maintain either efficiency or the consumer's freedom of choice. Perhaps it is time for USDAW to again turn its attention to the future of distribution.

The years covered by this chapter also saw the beginning of a national debate that still continues. The post-war public expected and demanded rising personal standards of living in addition to the wide-ranging social provisions introduced by the Labour Government in the National Health Scheme and other "services of life". The problem that no government has yet solved is to bridge the gap between these expectations and the apparent inability of the British economy to meet them through production and exports.

The issue first emerged in its post-war form in 1947. In two White Papers the Government warned that the country was drifting into a level of inflation that would damage both the standard of living and an already shaky balance of payments. In the White Paper *Personal Incomes, Costs and Prices* there was a call for restraint in wage claims as one means of checking inflation.

This was a new concept at the time. But, writing more than thirty years later, it is depressing to note how little the basic

argument has altered and how far from solution the problem is. In 1948 the Chancellor, Sir Stafford Cripps, and Prime Minister Attlee expounded the same unpalatable facts about national housekeeping that we heard from Chancellor Healey and Prime Minister Callaghan during the Labour Government that ended in 1979. The debates on the problem at the annual meetings of USDAW (as of other Unions) during the late seventies were in essentials an echo of 1948.

For USDAW the White Paper was bitter medicine. Distributive workers were still near the bottom of table of wages and earnings and many of the productive and service workers in the Union were no better off. The Union was torn between two loyalties. Its support for the Labour Government was unshakable. For most of its existence it had advocated Socialist planning of the economy and the Government had made the first moves along that road. It was difficult to argue that wages should be excluded. On the other hand, Britain was still a mixed economy, Socialism was only beginning, and it was impossible for a free Trade Union to remain inactive when so many of its members were on a bare subsistence level.

In February, 1948, the Executive Council issued a statement declaring that "... to freeze wages whilst the cost of living continues to rise would only lead to new industrial disturbances". It urged rigorous control of prices, limitation of profits and recognition "... of the necessity for a minimum wage throughout industry". A special conference of Union Executives gave qualified support to the White Paper in March. In the same month the USDAW ADM carried a resolution endorsing the Executive's statement with, however, the inclusion of words declaring that criticism of wages policy did not diminish support of the Labour Government.

By 1950 the first attempt at wages policy had ended. USDAW's annual meeting in April again declared its opposition and condemned the action of the Executive Council in casting the Union's vote at a special 1950 conference of Executives in favour of TUC wages policy. The General Council's case for continued restraint was rejected by the TUC itself in the Autumn. As readers will know, however, the problem that first emerged in 1948 has refused to go away and today is aggravated by heavy unemployment. We shall meet it again

all too often in future chapters.

The late forties and the early fifties saw the breakdown of the wartime co-operation between the Soviet Union and the Western nations. Hopes for continued co-operation had been institutionalised in the United Nations and other international bodies. These have served since 1945 to moderate mutual suspicion, and at times outright hostility, but have not yet been strong enough to maintain genuine friendship and co-operation. This is not the place to trace in detail the story of those troubled years. But a brief description must come into a history of USDAW because of the cold war's impact on the ADM and on the Union's stance at the conferences of the Labour Party and the TUC, particularly when the Labour Government launched out on a massive programme of rearmament.

The break between East and West began over the growing conviction in the West that the Soviet Union was determined to extend its power and influence by every means open to it, not excluding the use of force. The first counter-move by the Western nations came in 1949, with the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty, of which the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) was — and still is — the military arm.

In Korea, which had been a satellite of Japan, a Communist North faced a South under American control. Open war began with a Northern invasion in 1950. This was condemned as aggression by the United Nations, and under American leadership a UN force was formed to expel the invader. China was later involved on the side of the North, which, less directly, was supported by the Soviet Union. For three years the world teetered on the edge of a greater war, until the conflict in Korea was ended by the cease-fire of 1953. There was no thaw in the cold war, however, to which another degree of frost was added with the agreement in 1954 to incorporate West German forces in NATO.

In this deteriorating situation Britain embarked on a hurriedly drawn up programme of rearmament, announced by Prime Minister Attlee on 3rd August, 1950. It was designed to cost £3,400 million over three years, and would raise defence expenditure from 8 to 10 per cent of the national income.

The conflict of ideology and mutual mistrust had also

affected the international Trades Union Movement. The World Federation of Trade Unions had been a hopeful development of 1945. But as the wider conflict increasingly intruded on its activities the TUC and other national federations withdrew in 1949 on the grounds that the WFTU was being misused as a forum for Soviet propaganda, in which the representatives from Communist countries were spokesmen for their Governments rather than for Trades Unionism as such. At the end of the year a conference in London led to the formation of the present International Confederation of Free Trade Unions.

USDAW's Executive Council endorsed withdrawal from the WFTU, and a critical resolution was heavily defeated at the ADM of 1949. The re-armament programme, however, brought the Union into conflict both with the Labour Government and the TUC. In ADM resolutions and in speeches, particularly by Alan Birch and Walter Padley, the Union accepted that Britain must play its part in precautionary measures for Western defence. But it was argued that an increase in spending on defence of the scale envisaged was beyond the country's resources, and could only disrupt its all-too slow recovery. The Union consistently maintained this attitude, alike while Labour was still in power and when the Tories came back in 1951.

Feelings ran high. The TUC, in a statement on rearmament in 1952, more or less accused USDAW and Unions that took a similar stand of being among those whose "... first loyalty exists outside this country". The statement defended the rearmament programme, but accepted as a reasonable condition that the programme might require adjustment in the light of what was industrially practicable. Alan Birch, in a reply sent to the TUC and published in *New Dawn*, pointed out that this latter qualification was "... difficult to reconcile with out-and-out rejection of all criticism of the original programme". In answering the inference that the Union was "playing the Communist game" he said that Trades Unionists, while appreciating the need for collective resistance to aggression "... are not convinced that our rearmament programme was originally planned with a full realisation of its economic effects and they see... a danger of our becoming so preoccupied with the military 'answer' to international problems as to find ourselves

committed to a military 'solution'."

It was a confused and unhappy situation. USDAW's criticism probably had a great deal more support than was ever expressed in votes. But loyalty to the General Council was stronger, and at the 1952 TUC a Union proposal to reduce the arms programme was heavily defeated.

There were three General Elections during the first half of the fifties — in 1950, 1951 and 1959. In the first Labour just scraped back, in the second it was defeated and was not to regain power for thirteen years. There are times when a word or a phrase can sway the public mood and if ever that was true it was in the election of 1951. Labour had saved Britain from disaster by controlling the economy, stimulating exports and encouraging the re-equipment of our war ravaged industry. The Tories and most of the newspapers used every trick in the armoury of politics and print to brand this as a policy of needless "austerity" which wantonly deprived the people of a better life. Even with this evocative appeal they only just made it in terms of votes. Labour's poll in 1951 was actually bigger than that of Churchill and his followers — 13,948,385 Labour/Co-op against 13,724,418 for the Tories and associates. But the distribution of the votes gave the latter a majority of seats — 321 Conservative, 295 Labour/Co-op, six Liberals and two "others". The Tories retained their grip in 1955.

At the 1950 Election, held in February, eight Union candidates were returned. Five were existing MPs — A. Robens (Blyth — a new constituency due to redistribution), A. W. Burke (Burnley), E. Fernyhough (Jarrow), H. Boardman (Leigh), R. J. Davies (Westhoughton); three were new — W. E. Padley (Ogmore), R. E. Winterbottom (Sheffield, Brightside), G. Craddock (Bradford, South). T. Scollan lost his seat at Renfrewshire, West.

Al Robens was appointed Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fuel and Power and later was to become Minister of Labour and National Service; H. Boardman was reappointed as Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Minister of Labour.

At the General Election of 25th July, 1951, all the sitting members were re-elected, with the exception that J. T. Price (head of the Union's Legal Department) had replaced R. J. Davies at Westhoughton. After holding the seat without a

break since 1921, the politically almost immortal RJD had retired, J. T. Price winning at the by-election and the subsequent General Election. Davies, the first and for many years the best known of the Union's MPs, died in 1954.

In the May election of 1955, ten of the members of the Parliamentary Panel fought constituencies and eight were elected. They were A. Robens (Blyth), G. Craddock (Bradford, South), W. A. Burke (Burnley), H. Boardman (Leigh), W. A. Padley (Ogmore), R. E. Winterbottom (Sheffield, Brightside), J. T. Price (Westhoughton), E. Fernyhough (Jarrow). W. A. Burke had presided over the Labour Party Conference of 1953. USDAW donated £15,000 to Labour's General Election Fund.

From issues of national policy, which USDAW could influence but where it did not have the power of decision, we now turn to Trade Union activities within the Union's control. One of the most important was the increase in the machinery for specialist consultation on wages and conditions with its members in different trades. In part this development was linked with the recruitment campaign in private trade that followed the amalgamation. Divisional and federal conferences of a general character had been held for many years. But up to 1939 there is no evidence in *New Dawn* of systematic consultation on the problems of specific trades. Although not all meetings would be reported, only two specifically trade conferences are recorded in 1930 — for flour millers in Scotland, and for London shop stewards. There were three in 1935 (a national conference of flour milling branches, one for Midland boot repairers and one for Yorkshire transport workers) and five in 1939 (E&S Joint CWS workers — jointly with the Shop Assistants' Union — London bakery roundsmen, national meat trades, Scottish creamery workers, Yorkshire chemists).

During the war transport difficulties, air raids and the absence of so many members restricted the scope for consultation. But by 1946 a new policy was evident, with national conferences for the bacon curing and check and credit trades; Divisional or regional conferences for dental technicians in the South West, Northern and Yorkshire (joint) and North Western Divisions; milk recorders in Southern and Eastern; Retail Co-operative milk workers in the same Division and laundry workers in South Wales. Thereafter in the post-war

years the development of consultation was continuous and in 1950 a National Conference Structure report was adopted by the ADM. By 1952 the trades or individual employers covered by conferences, national or divisional (in some cases both) were: soap, candle and edible fat; bacon curing; check and credit; catering; insurance (CIS); CWS branches; retail Co-operative; dental technicians (Midlands); dairy; NAAFI; optical; research and laboratory assistants; retail meat; retail private trade (non-food); retail private trade (food); chemical; Co-operative boot and shoe; hairdressing; laundry; milling; wholesale meat; wholesale grocery; food manufacture and sugar confectionery. Nor is this list complete, for in some trades conferences were held at longer intervals than a year, and do not appear in the 1952 list.

Parallel with the trade meetings was an even wider range of general conferences and schools organised by Divisions, Federations and sometimes by large branches. Add the extensive educational work carried out by the Union and it will be seen that USDAW was embarked on a comprehensive programme of contact with members as individuals and as wage earners in a particular trade.

Much else of concern to USDAW members was happening in the not-so-brave new world which we entered in 1945. But it must wait on another chapter while we next consider the first results of the amalgamation between NUDAW and the Shop Assistants' Union.

# 21 PROBLEMS OF RECRUITMENT

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## *The First Breakthrough in the Multiple Grocery Trade: Wages to 1955*

THE Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers began life on 1st January, 1947. The birth of the new Union was celebrated with pride but also with an optimistic vision of the immediate future that was to be harshly qualified by events. The Union, it was predicted, would speedily breach the double bastions of hostility from private trade employers and the apathy of their employees. At the last of NUDAW's own annual meetings a million members was spoken of as the target. At the first delegate meeting of the new Union the target became a million in five years. The figures were over-optimistic but not necessarily absurd. Very large numbers *were* recruited. But there was a "worm i' the bud" and we shall soon see how it gnawed at the *bright hopes of 1947*.

First, however, the spectacular programme of celebration that marked the launch of the new Union on 9th February. The King's Hall at Belle Vue, Manchester, was packed with 5,600 people for an "organising and celebration" concert. For weeks beforehand volunteers had been canvassing shops and stores and distributing leaflets throughout nine miles from the centre of Manchester. The event was publicised as "... part of the vast organising campaign to obtain a £5 per week minimum wage for a five day week of forty hours for all shop workers and to celebrate the formation of one Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers". Well known radio and concert artistes of the period were engaged — Anne Ziegler and Webster Booth, Carrol Gibbons, and others. In spite of the savage winter of that year the hall was packed under P. Cottrell's chairmanship and with J. Hallsworth putting the case for Trade Union organisation of shop workers.

More than half a century earlier a handful of members of the



Manchester District Co-operative Employees' Association had held their first annual meeting at Belle Vue. Some would still be alive, as would pioneers of the Shop Assistants' Union, and although their presence was not reported, a few could have been there on that night of rejoicing — and what memories it would bring back! Similar events were held in the Royal Albert Hall, London, and in Birmingham.

So the great crusade was launched. But the first results were disappointing. The new Union had begun with 343,137 members; 210,178 males and 132,959 females (38.75 per cent of the total). By the end of 1948, however, the Executive had to report a drop in membership of 1,471, and a year later there was a further drop of 1,363. A net increase of 7,434 for 1950 and 1951 together was more than cancelled out by a total drop of 8,693 in 1952 and 1953. The balance of members between the sexes was changing. Between 1951 and 1955 male membership fell by 12,836, female membership increased by 11,234.

What had gone wrong? Not in the balance of membership between men and women (the Union's purpose was to organise *workers*, regardless of their sex) but in the hopes of rapid and maintained overall growth? The first part of the answer lay in the nature of the distributive trades that were the special target of the early recruiting drive. They were "in and out" trades, particularly in the private multiple store chains. The shop worker recruited this week could have drifted into a completely different job a few weeks later. Women workers, according to the 1951 census, were about two-thirds of the number in the grocery and provision trade and an even higher proportion in general and mixed retail businesses. They left to get married, or if they continued to work for a time, eventually left to start and bring up a family. There were a great many part-time married women who were much more difficult to organise than full-timers. Conscription was still in force and the Union found that in many cases young men called up were replaced by boys. Many members left distribution for better paid jobs in industry, building, transport or commerce.

Another adverse factor lay in the machinery of the Union itself, or, rather, in almost unavoidable defects which weakened the ability to hold recruits once gained. There were 123 Area Organisers and seven National Officers in 1961; not a very large

army to tackle and service the huge and scattered labour force of the distributive trades. Moreover, as Alan Birch reminded the 1948 ADM, the Organisers also had to service the large existing membership in productive and service trades.

One of the most acute difficulties was the regular collection of subscriptions from thousands of new members. This could efficiently be organised in a large Co-operative society, or CWS factory (in both of which Trades Union membership was a condition of employment) or in a large private department store or warehouse. It was a different matter when new members were scattered over hundreds of shops, and could live and work remote from a Union branch. Some new private trade members faded away because they saw no quick results in wages or hours (a practice for which the Executive had criticised some Co-operative employees as far back as the annual report of 1892!). The fixing of wages through Wages Councils and JICs diminished the interest of shop workers in Trades Union membership — illogically so, but, then, when was logic the sole motivation of human conduct? The distribution of leaflets and the holding of meetings proved to be an imperfect method of recruitment. An article by W. J. Davies in the *New Dawn* issue of 10th July, 1948, said that in the Central London area a distribution of 10,000 leaflets brought only 40 people to a meeting, 30 of whom were already members.

It will be noted that few of these problems were new. There was no mystery about the difficulty of organising shop workers scattered over tens of thousands of shops or about the volatile nature of distributive employment. The former Shop Assistants' Union had a long experience of both these factors, NUDAW (with its relatively stable Co-operative membership) had less. What was new was the scale on which the Union was now operating. It was seeking to organise without limit the last of the great trades of which it could still be said that it was un-organisable. And the frustrating fact was that the Union was very successful in recruitment — but then lost most of the new army through desertion.

The actual figures were at once impressive and disappointing. A. W. Burrows told the ADM of 1950 that in the previous two years 190,000 new members had been enrolled but 175,000 had lapsed, mainly for the reasons given earlier. A. Birch reported

to another Divisional conference in 1950 that nationally they had enrolled 80,000 new members in 1949 but "... no increase was shown above the 1948 figure". An investigation by Central Office had indicated that between two-thirds and three-quarters of the lapses were inevitable, due to members leaving the trade, retirement, marriage or other factors beyond the control of the Union. Maybe so, but taking Burrows' figures of 190,000 recruits, and on the assumption that the loss rate was an inevitable three-quarters, 47,500 recruits had "deserted" in two years for other than inevitable reasons.

Potentially, what the Union was facing was a problem of success. The fruits of success, however, could only be won by overcoming four preliminary problems, none new in kind but all now greater in scale. They were:

1. To strengthen organisation and contact with members, both in their capacity as individual Trade Unionists and as workers in a particular section of distribution or a related trade.
2. To carry out a strategy on wages and conditions that would visibly yield results unobtainable except through Trade Union action.
3. To mobilise active members as voluntary "recruiting sergeants" and particularly to involve strong and long established Co-operative branches in organising their fellows in private trade.
4. To accept as a *fact of life* that "in and out" was endemic in retail distribution and some of the trades related to distribution.

During 1948, and to a lesser degree in subsequent years, the Executive Council, Divisional Councils and Federations, full-time staff and active members devoted themselves to these problems with an intensity rarely equalled in the Union's history. Articles and letters in *New Dawn*, speeches at the ADM and other conferences analysed the problem and came up with a variety of solutions.

A report on the Scope and Organising Policy of the Union was presented to the ADM of 1948 by the Assistant General Secretary, J. D. Hiscock. In moving the adoption of the report he explained that, in broad outline the strategy on wages and conditions in private trade was based on a two-pronged attack.

Once the Wages Councils had issued their first Wages Regulation Orders, which were statutorily enforceable, the Executive Council, in consultation with the Divisional Councils and officers concerned, would select national multiple firms with significant standing in the multiple trades for concentrated campaigns aimed at securing Trade Union agreements on wages and working conditions above the statutory minima in the Wages Council Orders. In effect, the aim was to establish a two-tier structure of collective wage regulation — the legally enforceable minimum and above that the superior provisions of a Trade Union agreement. It was a strategy, he emphasised, that would call for maximum efforts by all concerned — Executive and Divisional Councils, full-time officials and active lay members, for such a campaign could be expected to meet with powerful resistance from the employers.

There was little disagreement with this as strategy. Since, however, it depended for success on recruiting and retaining thousands of private trade employees, the subsequent debate at the ADM, in Divisions and Federations and in the columns of *New Dawn*, broadened to include organisation. It is not possible to cover the whole span of ideas and arguments ventilated during the great debate but a selection is given in paragraphs which follow.

At the ADM of 1948 it was argued that the Union should not begin recruitment in any area until a team of shop stewards or collectors had been organised. In the words of J. D. Hughes, later to become Chief Organising Officer and President of the Union, unless you thus "... mend the bucket... you are putting in the water and it is running away".

R. Silk (Houndsditch and Whitechapel), in a letter to *New Dawn*, agreed that collectors or shop stewards were vital. But generally they did not exist in small units. Most recruits lived far from their places of employment, they "... cannot or will not bother to attend a branch meeting" at or near their place of work. He proposed that new members should, if desired, have the right to attend and pay contributions at any branch convenient to their home, while retaining membership of the branch to which they were recruited.

In an article J. R. Elliott suggested the Union should concentrate all activity for a period on the wholesale grocery,

drapery, footwear and other trades, build up a strong organisation at the source of supply and use the threat to cut off supplies when tackling wages and conditions in the shops. S. R. Pearson (Grimsby (S) Branch) argued for compulsory Trade Union membership by law as the surest way to rake in these contemptible workers, "the take all and pay nowts". A. Cohen urged that there should be more single-trade branches and Divisional activities to hold the interest of new members according to their trade, instead of including them in general branches of many trades. The appointment of paid collectors was already being discussed in 1948, but E. Parker objected in *New Dawn* on the grounds that "... we shall make progress only on the basis of voluntary effort by rank and file members". He also agreed with a trade rather than a mixed membership basis of organisation.

From the powerful Royal Arsenal (Woolwich) Co-operative Branch F. R. White voiced the opinion that they would never recruit on a mass scale by expecting full-time Organisers to do the job in the multitude of retail shops and stores, nor by piecemeal individual canvassing. His proposal was that in every Division they should seek to establish multiple stores branches based on Woolworth, Marks and Spencer and similar firms which, like City Co-operatives, were large concentrated units, with identical problems and capable of effective organisation. Recruitment would be carried out by existing branches in every Division through "... a core of keen members" who would campaign among the local chain store workers. Full-time Organisers "... engaged in the unenviable task of 'organising the private trades'" would co-ordinate the local groups. Established branches would help the new groups until they could elect their own committee and operate independently.

A. Waistow (Sheffield General No. 1) pointed to the argument that "The Government now fixes my wages" (through JICs and Wages Councils) which was often used by shop workers as a reason for leaving or staying outside the Union. He proposed that immediately a statutory or agreed scale minimum had been adopted, USDAW and other Unions concerned should begin to agitate and recruit for a Trades Union scale above the minimum. Also, no new branch should be formed completely from new recruits. Where there was an

established branch they should attach new members from the multiples. Branches should be reorganised on a residential basis, regardless of places of employment, should be limited to 1,000 members and should be divided into trade categories for the discussion of common problems.

So the debate continued. But there was action as well as argument. By 1951 seven full-time collector-canvassers were operating in certain Divisions (there were thirteen by 1955). As described in the last chapter, there was a large increase in specialist machinery for consultation with members in different trades. The Union had more or less come to terms with the fact that it could not avert a heavy turnover of membership and was concentrating on means of cutting the loss to the minimum.

A new approach to the problem of contributions began in 1953. The Executive Council reported that the Audit and Special Investigation Department was negotiating with Co-operative Societies and private firms for the deduction of contributions from wages (the "check off", as it is known). A year later the Department (its name now abbreviated to Audit Department) had concluded a number of agreements, the first being with Newcastle upon Tyne Co-op. Today the greater part of the Union's members pay their contributions in this manner.

We saw earlier that the Union's strategy was to superimpose Trade Union agreements on Wages Council minima. The opposition to this policy by multiple firms and their organisations was every bit as strong as J. D. Hiscock had warned would be the case. The Union had to walk warily. But by 1951 it was ready for action. The Wages Council for the Retail Food Trades (England and Wales) had settled its first Wages Regulation Order at a low level. After consultation with the South Wales and Monmouthshire Divisional Council and the Divisional Officer, B. F. C. Weston, it was decided to concentrate on a Welsh subsidiary of the International Stores combine — a grocery multiple with national ramifications.

The subsidiary selected for action was the Direct Trading Company and a few other Welsh subsidiaries of International. Wages and conditions were unsatisfactory and Union attempts to negotiate were constantly rebuffed. Shop managers and staffs were ready for a showdown if that was the only way to secure improvement. An application to the controlling company

for an agreement above the Wages Council rates was summarily rejected. Intervention by the Conciliation Department of the Ministry of Labour failed to bring about a change of attitude. Following a ballot of members there was a general stoppage of work throughout the Welsh valleys and other areas, beginning on 27th August. Since food rationing was still in operation, customers registered with Direct Trading had to transfer their registrations to other shops — a consequence which was not without its effect on the company.

It was said earlier that the Union had to walk warily in selecting the first ground for battle with the increasingly powerful multiple retailers. One of the factors in deciding to open the campaign with the Direct Trading Company was that USDAW also had complete organisation in London in the central distributing warehouses which serviced the shops of the entire International combine. London members had already indicated their readiness to strike in support of South Wales. By the end of the first week formal authority was sought from the Executive Council for supporting strike action in the London warehouses.

That was the turning point. International Stores might have been ready to fight a localised battle but it was not prepared to see the trading operations of the whole combine brought to a stop. At the request of the company the Ministry of Labour intervened to bring the parties together on 13th September. With a representative of the Ministry in the chair, the Union and the Multiple Grocers' Association (acting for the company) met. The Association argued that it would create serious difficulties for the company if it was singly picked on to sign a Union agreement, and offered as an alternative that there should be negotiations at an early date for a collective agreement to cover all the signatory firms in the Association. The Union negotiators, led by the Assistant General Secretary, made it clear that by then the dispute with the International company had gone too far. The Union was ready to negotiate an agreement with the Association but the dispute in South Wales must be settled first if an extension of the strike was to be averted. The meeting was told that shop stewards in the London warehouses had instructions that failing word to the contrary by midnight, work was to cease the following morning.

There would be some anxious clock watching by both sides as the hands crept towards midnight. But International did not want a total confrontation. Agreement was reached, bringing managers and staff in the Direct Trading Company and the other companies in South Wales and Monmouthshire up to the level of the current retail Co-operative agreement. Arrangements were also made for early discussions with the Multiple Grocers' Association. By the end of the year J. D. Hiscock was able to report a settlement with the Association which provided for wage rates substantially higher than the Wages Council minima, and for improved conditions.

It was a major victory, a text book exercise in co-ordinated planning and execution by members. Executive and Divisional Councils, officials and outside sympathisers (of whom there were a great many). Even *The Times* supported USDAW's case in a second leader of 13 September, 1951.

Although the victory in Wales was rightly described as "... a landmark in the advance of the Union's policy" by W. E. Padley in his New Year message of 1952, it was not, of course, the only major activity on the wages front during the immediate post-war years. Some of the improvements won for members have been mentioned in previous chapters. As the cost of living continued to rise and distributive workers lingered at the bottom of the wages scale the target of a £5 minimum became £6, then £6.10s, then £7.10s, and by 1955 the ADM was demanding an increase of 15 per cent. Subsequent negotiations did not reach a 15 per cent settlement, but over the whole period up to 1955 the Union was successful in securing annual increases for most of its members, Co-operative and private trade; either through direct negotiations (as with the Co-operatives, including the Wholesales) and some private employers, or through Joint Industrial Councils, Wages Councils or other national wage fixing bodies.

In a typical annual report (for 1953) there were 34 pages giving details of settlements on wages and conditions. The overall tendency can be judged by brief quotations from the introduction to the wages section of several annual reports. For 1950 it spoke of a "... general advance in many rates". For 1951 the "... upward movement of wage rates generally was greater than in any previous year. In 1952 "... wage



increases have been won in practically all the trades and industries with which the Union is concerned". There was a similar report in 1953. In 1954 the attempt to secure a 15 per cent increase in Co-operative and private trade was unsuccessful, but resulted in substantial advances. The proposed increases were submitted to and adopted by a vote of members at branch meetings. By 1955 the report was "... increases have been recorded in every trade".

Recruitment and lapses continued to concern the Union, particularly during the sixties, when there was massive re-organisation, and consequent redundancies, in the Co-operatives, retail and wholesale, and unemployment was once again becoming a problem for the nation and for Trades Unions. As we shall see later, recruitment was to be the subject of an exhaustive examination by a special "Committee of Investigation". While the Committee did not solve the problem, it was to give the Union a more realistic view of the road to the future than the rosy vision of 1947. And in the meantime, USDAW was proving by results that it genuinely served the interests of shop and allied workers, whether or not they were members of the Union.

**D**URING the war there had necessarily been a halt to many of the Union's efforts to improve conditions. Campaigns of the thirties had to be put aside for more urgent tasks. They were renewed when peace returned and are the subject of this chapter, together with new battles that had to be fought and new developments in the Union's services.

With superannuation, the most important of the pre-war campaigns, there had been more or less a standstill. The percentage of Co-operative employees, in retail, wholesale, productive and special societies, covered by pension schemes was 84.59 in 1939 and 85.77 in 1945. The number of retail societies with schemes, however, increased from 378 to 423 and the proportion of *retail* employees covered from 82.89 per cent in 1939 to 84.21 per cent in 1945. In the first of these years only 106 of the 695 societies with up to 100 employees had schemes, by the end of the war the number was 127 out of 660.

The reluctance to form new schemes was mainly due to wartime conditions and, after the Beveridge Report was published in 1942, to uncertainty over future provision of State pensions. But in 1941, after long agitation, the CWS scheme was revised to the benefit of about 38,000 employees, many of them retired. The alterations followed closely proposals made in a Union publication *The Case for Better Pensions in the CWS, Ltd.*

From the end of the war there was steady progress. By 1955 95.76 per cent of all Co-operative employees were covered by pension schemes. But small societies still remained a problem. They constituted most of the 416 societies, with 15,986 employees (4.24 per cent of the total) which still made no pensions provision. An enquiry by the Union in 1955 showed that 165 independent schemes and eleven federal (covering 172 societies) had carried out total or partial consolidation of war bonuses. Full consolidation had taken place in the CWS, E&SCWS and

CIS. Aggregate funds of all schemes amounted to £53,377,938 in 1954.

When the war began 502 retail societies employed only Trades Union labour. Scotland, which was the fourth Division in number of members, was well in front with the number of Union-only societies — 120, more than twice the number of the much bigger Manchester Division. By 1945 499 societies, and by 1955 564, were one hundred per cent Trades Union; Scotland still being well ahead.

Full membership rights had been won in 118 societies by 1939. The number had increased to 146 in 1945. Thereafter progress was rapid; to 257 societies in 1955, covering 68 per cent of retail employees. It was the smaller societies with up to 5,000 members which obstinately resisted this democratic innovation. Out of 597 in this membership bracket only 46 had introduced full rights for employees by 1955.

In 1947 the *Distributive Trades Journal* which had been published by the Shop Assistants' Union (for many years under the title *Shop Assistant*), was incorporated in *New Dawn* from the first issue of February. *New Dawn* itself had previously been restyled in typography and layout. It continued to merit the praise it received as one of the brightest of Trades Union journals. There was a thorough coverage of the Union's far-ranging activities. Particularly useful for active members were case studies of the distributive and related trades by T. Cynog-Jones (Research Officer). In 1953, for example, the Census of Distribution was analysed in seventeen articles and another ten were published on the major distributive combines. For branch officials the regular articles on legal subjects by H. G. Pridmore constituted a textbook in serial form on subjects that could affect Union members. The literary quality continued to be high and *New Dawn* must have introduced many Union members to the giants and the lesser luminaries of literature. The journal serialised such working class classics as *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* by Richard Tressell (the pen-name of Robert Noonan). Circulation of *New Dawn* was about 25,500 in 1947. A peak of 27,600 was reached a year later. But after an increase in price from 1d to 2d in 1952 circulation began to fall away.

C. (Cyril) Hamnett, the editor, was also publicity officer and

produced a steady flow of impelling recruitment leaflets. His responsibilities included contact with the Press, national and regional. In that capacity he developed close links with the political and industrial correspondents, an association which secured for USDAW a wider and better-informed presence in the Press than was enjoyed by many other Unions. In 1947, continuing the Union's long association with the Co-operative Press Limited, he was elected to the Board of that society in the succession to A. Robens. In 1953 R. A. Campbell, Chief Administrative Officer, who had served the Union for forty years under three General Secretaries, retired. He had largely been responsible for the investment of accumulated funds, which underpinned the finances of the Union. On his retirement there was a threefold reorganisation of his function. C. Hamnett became Administrative Officer, but continued his supervision of the Journal and publicity, T. Whittaker was appointed Clerical Officer supervising clerical staff throughout the Union, and L. Cain, while retaining the position of Central Treasurer, was given wider responsibility for the Union's financial arrangements.

In 1948 the Executive Council carried out its obligation under the amalgamation agreement to draft an education scheme for the new Union, to be considered by the next annual meeting. It comprised six main clauses: (1) To establish an educational fund of 5d per member per annum (increased to 7d in 1952). (2) To continue the existing link with the NCLC. (3) To continue the association of the former Shop Assistants' Union with the Workers' Educational Association and the WEA Trade Union Committee. (4) To focus attention on "domestic educational matters", which were defined as (a) branch administration; (b) the structure, function and industrial relations of the Union, including the very wide range of wages negotiating machinery in which USDAW was concerned; (c) industrial and economic questions, including "... the place of distribution in Labour Britain".

Clause 5 provided that the Union should continue to support the summer schools to which it normally sent students (TUC, Labour Party, NCLC, Co-operative Union, WEATUC). Under Clause 6 Divisional Councils and Federations would be encouraged to run one-day and weekend schools, with approved

speakers, and a suitable grant would be made in each case. Finally, a national one-week's school would be run by the Union itself. (The first school was held in 1950 at Beatrice Webb Memorial House, Dorking, with Cyril Hamnett as organiser, a role he continued to fill for many years).

This scheme, which was adopted by the 1949 ADM, was sound in one respect, less so in another. It provided for a wide diffusion of the sort of education in political and social policy that could be acquired at one-day and weekend schools (there were 53 Federations and fifteen Divisional Councils in 1949). But schools, meeting for a few hours, with intervals of several months between "sessions", were not suited for the systematic study of the "domestic" educational matters which the Executive regarded as important. For systematic education the Union relied on an outside contractor, the NCLC. That body had played a great part in Trades Union history. But the times were changing. A large general Union such as USDAW, covering a great variety of disparate trades, had a growing need for specialist training of members. In the firms organised by the Union the growing influence of shop stewards had to be matched by systematic training if they were to operate effectively. Knowledge of procedure and negotiating techniques, of work study and other procedures that could affect earnings and conditions, could not be effectively acquired at occasional one-day or week-end schools. Branch secretaries, too, required specialist training. These factors were soon to lead to a further development of the Union's educational policy.

In 1953 the ADM recommended that representatives from sister Unions abroad, particularly young people, should be invited to the summer school. The following year there were two students from Holland and one from Denmark, the beginning of a practice which has continued down to the present time. USDAW representatives also attend the schools of Continental unions.

International links were quickly renewed after the war and by the middle fifties the Union was affiliated to the following Internationals: Transport Workers, Food and Drink Trade Workers, Commercial, Clerical and Technical Employees, Industrial Organisations and General Workers' Unions, Hotel, Restaurant and Bar Workers, Garment Workers. J. D. Hiscock

was on the Executive of the International Federation of Commercial Clerical and Technical Workers, and later became its acting President. Fraternal delegations to annual meetings were exchanged with overseas Unions, In the same period national affiliations were:—

British TUC	NCLC
Scottish TUC	WEA
Irish TUC	WEA Trade Union Committee
Labour Party	Labour Research Department
Scottish Council of the Labour Party	United Nations Association
Northern Ireland Labour Party	Royal Institute of International Affairs
National Joint Committee of Working Women's Organisations	Scottish Council of Development and Industry
National Council of Labour Colleges	British Workers' Sports Association
British Institute of Management	Fabian Society
Industrial Welfare Society	Movement for Colonial Freedom
National Federation of Professional Workers	*Women's Service Library of the Fawcett Society
	British-Asian Socialist Fellowship

The last named body had been formed in March, 1953, on the initiative of the Labour Party National Executive. Clement Attlee was Honorary President. Some of these were "sympathetic" affiliations with a nominal subscription (e.g. to the Women's Service Library). Others reflected the moves towards Colonial freedom that were widespread in the fifties and sixties (there were frequent resolutions at the ADM demanding that the freeing of India and Pakistan should be followed by similar measures in other Colonial territories).

New Appointments to the organising staff continued to be made. In 1939 there were 66 Area Organisers, eleven Divisional Officers, three National Organisers, and five Central Officials. By 1951 there were 123 Area Organisers (the number included MPs) and seven Collector/Canvassers (thirteen in 1955), with seven National Officers and three Central Officials.

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\* Formerly the London and National Society for Women's Suffrage.

The 123, of course, included staff of the former Shop Assistants' Union. One new Area Organiser appointed in 1946 was A. W. H. Allen (now Lord Allen), who later was to become General Secretary. Following the merger in 1947 the number of Divisions (and Divisional Officers) for the enlarged Union was for a period increased to seventeen, later reduced by stages to eleven in 1963. At that figure it remained until 1969, when a further reorganisation reduced the number of Divisions to the present figure of eight. For the Union's own staff a scheme of voluntary retirement at 60 to 64 was introduced in 1945, and a five-day working week in 1947; provision being made to cover events which might arise on a Saturday. In the same year arrangements were made to affiliate to the Irish TUC on the basis of Northern Ireland membership.

A national campaign for Saturday half-day closing was launched in the Autumn of 1948 and the annual report for the year announced that 493 retail Co-ops (out of 1,032) were completely closing food shops on Saturday afternoon, while many others were working various sorts of rota. In "at least six towns" all private trade shops were also closing. As the future was to show, however, these figures were not typical of what was likely to happen when there was a complete return to a free market. Most goods were still scarce in 1948 and it was a very foolish or unlucky housewife who left her weekend shopping to a Saturday afternoon. We shall return to shop closing hours in the next chapter.

A special Delegate Meeting in October, 1952, increased contributions to all scales by 1d per week and also introduced large increases in the rates for dispute and victimisation benefits. In proposing the alterations Alan Birch said that pre-war contributions at the most popular scale represented about 2½d in the £1 of wages; in 1945 (when they were increased by 1d), the proportion was about 2d; and on the new proposal would be a little over 1½d. The weekly wage of shop assistants had increased from around £3.5.0d in 1939 to £6.9.0d in the period.

A new wing was added to "Oakley" in 1951, and was opened in June by Lewis Lumley, who had by then completed the remarkable record of 60 years' membership of the Union and its predecessors, holding membership card No. 5 of the Manchester District Co-operative Employees' Association.

This chapter ends with two tributes. One to a man famous in the Union's history, the other to thirty members, most of whom achieved no more than local fame.

In 1950 the ADM approved the establishment of an annual Sir Joseph Hallsworth residential scholarship at Ruskin, renewable for a second year if the student was satisfactory, and in 1951 applications were invited for the first scholarship. There were nine applicants, five were interviewed and the award went to E. A. Webb of the South Suburban (London) branch (at the *Golden Jubilee of Ruskin* in 1949 £1,000 had been given to endow an USDAW Room).

In 1945, immediately after the end of the war, the Executive published and paid tribute in *New Dawn* of 28th July to a list of members of more than fifty years standing who had joined the Union in the pioneering days of the Manchester District Co-operative Employees' Association. There are, of course, others who have since achieved a membership of half a century and, with a break during the war, the Union already recognised membership of thirty years and more with the presentation of badges. Awards were also made to branch secretaries with more than 21 years' service. But only the thirty remained of those who had helped to establish the Union when it was still a plant with a doubtful future. Their names and the Co-operative Societies in which they had worked as "servants" (in the nomenclature of the time when they joined the Union) were as shown in the table on the following page.

They have all gone now and most of the Co-operative Societies in which they served have disappeared through amalgamation. They were the last of the pioneers.



## HISTORY OF USDAW

<i>Branch</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Date of Joining</i>	<i>Years of Continuous Membership</i>	<i>Branch</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Date of Joining</i>	<i>Years of Continuous Membership</i>
Blackburn	Atkinson, J.	1894	51	Pelaw CWS	Forster, F.	1893	52
	Wright, J. J.	1894	51	Preston	Fowler, W.	1894	51
Huddersfield	Collier, H.	1894	51	Rochdale	Blomley, J.	1894	51
	Marsden, H.	1894	51		Clegg, G.	1894	51
Leigh (Lancs)	Hunter, F.	1894	51		Guest, J.	1894	51
Middlesbrough	Lynn, F.	1894	51		Turner, J.	1894	51
Oldham	Broadbent, A. E.	1892	53		Whinray, J.	1894	51
Industrial	Elliott, J.	1893	52	Seaton Delaval (Northd.)	Adams, W.	1894	51
	Horrocks, J. H.	1894	51		Gibson, T. W.	1894	51
	Kendall, J.	1893	52		Kneebone, J. C.	1894	51
	Lawton, F.	1894	51		Kneebone, R. A.	1894	51
	Lumley, L.	1891	54		Knox, R.	1894	51
	Mee, P.	1894	51		Lowther, T.	1894	51
	Tetlow, C. E.	1893	52	Sherburn Hill (Durham)	Jennings, E.	1894	51
	Thompson, H.	1893	52				
	Wormald, J. H.	1891	54				

## 23 SHOP HOURS — 1

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### *The Long Struggle for Legislation*

ATTEMPTS to reduce the excessive hours worked by shop assistants began in the early years of Queen Victoria's reign. But the aged Queen had been in her tomb for eleven years before the first reform of any substance reached the Statute Book in 1912. Apart from the Co-ops, where wages and hours had improved by the end of the century, the hundreds of thousands in the private trade were little better off than their predecessors had been on that June morning of 1837, when Victoria woke up to find herself Queen of Great Britain and Ireland. In a great many cases, they were probably worse off, for competition had become much fiercer during the century and the wages and hours of shop workers were sacrificed to the cut-throat struggle for custom.

The more energetic among the workers, a minority of the multitude of self-employed shopkeepers and some progressive department store owners did not tolerate this servitude without challenge. In the case of private trade shop assistants, however, a considerable degree of snobbery, a feeling that they were socially superior to manual workers, and an even larger measure of apathy, delayed for a long time the day when the more intelligent of them accepted that Trades Unionism was an essential tool of reform. There were many efforts from early in the century through local Early Closing Associations and the initiative of individuals to introduce voluntary agreements on closing times. But one bad apple could spoil the barrel and an almost unanimous local agreement could collapse on the refusal of one or a few retailers to observe the agreed closing hour. The response of their competitors was "if they stay open they'll steal our trade" — so all stayed open.

The obvious solution was statutory regulation, which had been invoked to end the employment of women and children in

the mines, and to control many of the more brutal aspects of factory employment. But most of the small shopkeepers shied away from the thought of compulsory regulation and middle-class reformers were for long convinced that in time persuasion would win the day. It was the age of *laissez faire*, in which the conventional wisdom held that a man had the right to do what he liked with his own, including his labour, and if he chose to work until his legs would scarcely hold him and his eyes could scarcely see, that was his affair. You could try to persuade an employer to ease the burden, but if he refused, well, he, too, was doing what he liked with his own business.

Eventually, however, the Early Closing Association, which was the leading non-Trades Union advocate of shorter hours, accepted that only statutory regulation could bring about reform. But division among the supporters of early closing and the hostility or indifference of Parliament still had to be overcome. Time after time Sir Charles Dilke (the headquarters of the Shop Assistants' Union were named in his honour) and Sir John Lubbock (later Lord Avebury) brought in Shop Hours Bills, actively supported by the Shop Assistants' Union and by AUCE, and time after time their efforts ended in whatever was the receptacle for unwanted legislation. There were some slight improvements in the law relating to the employment of women and children. A Shops Act of 1904 gave local authorities the power to impose a closing hour not earlier than 7 p.m. except on one day when it could be not earlier than 1 p.m. But the Act was so hedged around with reservations as to be virtually useless. It was not until 1912 that there was real progress.

Before coming to the Shops Act, which was operative from the beginning of that year, it is desirable to consider the problems which reformers hoped to solve by legislation. Overwhelmingly the most important was to impose a legal limit to the hours shop assistants could be compelled to work. That necessarily meant the inclusion of one-man businesses which employed no labour, for if they were exempt, as it was frequently argued that they should be, they would enjoy an unfair advantage over retailers who were also employers. The second target for reformers was to give legal force to the weekly half holiday which was already observed in many retail shops, and to safeguard against cheating through employers juggling with the

hour at which the half day should begin. The third problem was to hold the line against any general extension of Sunday trading which was only feebly controlled by an Act of 1677. All these factors, sometimes, singly, sometimes together, figured in the Shops legislation that began with the Act of 1912. Finally, in all cases it was necessary carefully to scrutinise the exemptions which it was accepted could be necessary in any general regulation of the distributive trades.

The Act marked a real advance. But as it made its long and weary journey towards the Statute Book (it took two years to get through Parliament) it was pushed and pulled from every point of the compass, and ended up as a series of compromises. There was something for those who favoured legislation and for those who were opposed to it, those who sought a comprehensive measure covering hours, the weekly half holiday and welfare regulations and those who wanted only a cautious piecemeal approach, for those who believed there should be very few exceptions and those who, if they had had their way, would have exempted almost the entire range of retail trades. Thus, proposals to limit the number of hours that could be worked weekly soon disappeared from the Bill.

But the weekly half holiday (with exemptions that we shall come to later) became compulsory in a clause that "Every shop shall . . . be closed for the serving of customers not later than one o'clock in the afternoon on one week day in every week" (the Unions had proposed twelve noon). Shop assistants, however, were not to be free until one thirty, presumably to allow time for clearing up the shop. Local authorities were given the power to fix the day on which shops were to be closed, and could either fix the same day for all shops, or vary the day according to the different classes of trade, different parts of their district or for different periods of the year.

Exemptions, however, were numerous. Where a local authority had reason to believe that most of the shopkeepers of "any particular class" in any area wished to be exempted from the half day, either wholly or by fixing a later hour, the authority would, after consultation with or vote of the shopkeepers (no mention of the assistants!) exempt the class from the provisions of the Act. In holiday resorts the local authority had power to suspend the half day closing for not more than four months in

any year. Compensation for this loss of the half day was to be not less than two weeks paid holiday in every year. Nine trades or activities were exempted from the provision of the weekly half holiday, including the sale of intoxicating liquors, newspapers and magazines, meats, fish, milk, cream, bread, confectionery, tobacco, medicines.

While the Act did not fix a statutory limit to weekly hours worked, it gave local authorities powers to make "closing orders", which could not be earlier than seven o'clock in the evening on any day of the week. Parliament appears, however, to have had some doubts whether — given the general composition of local authorities in 1912 and their failure to use the Act of 1904, restricted as it was — there would be much zest for the use of this power. So it made provision for a gentle prod. A "substantial number of occupiers of shops and (in this clause) *shop assistants*" could ask the Secretary of State to appoint a competent person to hold a local enquiry and if he was satisfied that a closing order should be issued he could prepare a draft order for the acceptance or otherwise of the Secretary of State. The Shop Assistants' Union made frequent and skilful use of this provision to secure more civilised closing hours. So — the Act protected the half holiday for most shop assistants, and took a timid step towards the control of hours. *Not a lot, but at least a beginning.*

It took a world war to galvanise the Government into any general control of shop hours. To economise on heat and light during the war of 1914-18, and because of the general shortage of goods for the civilian market, a Government Order made under the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) introduced nationally compulsory closing in winter at 8 p.m., with a late night of 9 p.m. on Saturday. There was a considerable number of exceptions, mainly covering the sale of perishable goods. This Order was extended to the summer, and continued until August, 1920. In practice a great many shops were by then already closing earlier than the times given. And the entire world of shopkeeping, having tasted and enjoyed the sweets of leisure, did not want to lose them. Even the National Federation of Small Traders' Protection Associations had no wish to go back to unrestricted hours. The public, too, had become accustomed to the new closing times. Parliament, now including

an increasing number of Labour MPs, was more responsive than it had been in the past.

So control of closing times to 8 p.m./9 p.m. was continued by a temporary Act in 1920 (when war regulations expired). This limitation was renewed annually until 1927, when the House of Commons appointed a Departmental Committee to consider whether the temporary provisions should become permanent. The Shops (Hours of Closing) Act of 1928 followed, and enshrined in permanent legislation a general closing time of 8 p.m. with 9 p.m. on the late night. Holiday resorts could fix later hours for up to four months, but shop assistants who were affected were entitled to corresponding holidays with pay. Both the Shop Assistants' Union and the then NUDAW campaigned in support of the Act, although they were unsuccessful in efforts to reduce closing hours to 7 p.m./8 p.m. Another Act in 1934 further limited the working hours of young people, and provided for the improvement of heating, lighting, ventilation and sanitary conditions for all shop workers. It did not, however, specify standards that must be observed, the requirements being couched in the vague form of "suitable and sufficient".

During the second World War closing hours were again controlled by Government Order under temporary wartime legislation, although, of course, the hours in the basic Shops Act still remained at 8 p.m./9 p.m. By the end of the war, however, there was a general feeling that the statutory closing times were too late and in addition that health and safety factors should be improved not only in shops but in many other unregulated occupations. It was estimated that about eight million people were in jobs where the provision for health, safety, etc., was minimal or non-existent. To study the situation and make recommendations the Government set up a committee in 1946 under the chairmanship of Sir Ernest Gowers. Its comprehensive purpose was to enquire into the closing hours of shops; health, welfare and safety in places not covered by the Factories or Mines and Quarries Acts; and hours of employment of young persons.

Those were the halcyon days of reform. Labour's great programme of social welfare and nationalisation was beginning. Trades Unionists in many occupations looked forward to a

shorter working week. USDAW — as the Union had then become — believed that shop assistants should share in the better times. In particular it believed that the shorter hours already prevailing in a great many shops through Union action or custom and practice should not be under the constant threat from predatory retailers seeking to invoke the statutory closing hours of 8 p.m./9 p.m. The kernel of the evidence, written and oral, which USDAW submitted to Gowers on hours was that the closing times should become 6 p.m. and 7 p.m. on the late night and that the power of local authorities to suspend shop closing hours provision should be withdrawn.

The Union waited with confidence for news that reform of statutory hours was on the wing. The greater the shock when, with the argument that "It is now the public's turn for consideration", Gowers launched a bird with a crippled wing. In its interim report of May, 1947, the Committee recommended that 8 p.m./9 p.m. should go, but should be replaced by a general closing time of 7 p.m., with 8 p.m. on the late night. Both the proposal and the innuendo that shop workers were a pampered lot angered the Union, and, indeed, a great many private retailers who had no wish to be at the mercy of any competitor prepared to return to the bad old days of chronically late closing. Several other of the Committee's interim recommendations were, however, supported by the Union, in particular the proposal to withdraw the power of local authorities to exempt from the weekly half holidays any section of local traders who petitioned for the right to do so. But the Union deplored a recommendation to increase from four months to five the period in which the half day could be suspended in holiday resorts.

From the Executive Council and throughout the Union there were protests at the proposed new closing hours. At many meetings the question was asked: How could a Labour Government have landed itself with a committee that proposed a little that was good but so much that was reactionary? A deputation from the Union met the Home Secretary (Chuter Ede). The Government had received the report but it showed no inclination to legislate, possibly because it was impressed by the hostility expressed by Trades Union, Co-operative and private trade interests. In 1949 Gowers issued a second report dealing

with that part of its remit relating to health, welfare and safety of workers other than those regulated under the Factories and Mines and Quarries Acts, and with the hours of young persons. USDAW's annual report for the year welcomed the health, welfare, etc., proposals as far as they went, but was dissatisfied with those concerning the hours of juveniles, which fell short of the proposals which USDAW and other Unions concerned had made through the TUC (many of these proposals were included in the Office, Shops and Railway Premises Act, 1963, which was strongly supported by the Union on its passage to the Statute Book. *So at least part of Gowers reached home base*).

Nothing was done about the recommendation on hours but there was major "tidying-up" legislation in 1950. The Shops Act of that year consolidated the Shops Acts 1912 to 1938, including most of the provisions mentioned earlier. It is mainly this Act which currently governs closing hours, which remained at 8 p.m., with 9 p.m. on the late night one day a week.

Under the 1950 Act local authorities could still make closing orders different from those in the Act, though not earlier than 7 p.m. and 8 p.m. on the late night. No person could be employed on Sunday "about the business of a shop" unless he or she received compensating holidays.

There was a wide list of exemptions and partial exemptions, and in holiday resorts local authorities could permit Sunday trading in food and other commodities for not more than eighteen days in the year. The Act continued the provision for revoking a closing order by ballot of shop-keepers, and establishing a six-day trading week. The remainder of the Act was concerned with health, safety, meal times and breaks and hours of young people.

With one small exception there has been no shops legislation since 1950, the exception being the Shops (Early Closing Days) Act, 1965, which tightened up protection for the weekly half holiday (renamed the "early closing day") but continued the power of local authorities, in certain circumstances, to exempt shops in some areas from the early closing provision.

From USDAW's standpoint, the 1950 Act was a mixed bag, consolidating as it did some good measures, some not so good, some downright bad. But throughout this period the Union's main objective was to secure shops legislation that would lower



closing hours and narrow the range within which those hours, including the half day, were vulnerable to exemptions granted by reactionary local authorities. Sunday trading was not then the challenge which, as we shall see later, it was to become.

Year after year in the fifties and sixties, sometimes on its own, sometimes in conjunction with the TUC, at the annual conference and in the House of Commons, the Union pursued the Government along the corridors of power, and came away with prevarication as its answer, or with smooth half promises. J. D. Hiscock, the Assistant General Secretary, was the Union's specialist and principal spokesman on shop hours, backed up in the Commons by the Union's MPs whenever opportunity offered.

In 1953 the omens seemed to be hopeful. It was known that the Home Office was preparing drafts, largely based on Gowers, for amending shop hours legislation, and including general closing at 7 p.m., with 8 p.m. as the late night. The Union stood by its demand for 6 p.m. as the general closing hour, with 7 p.m. on the late night. Nevertheless, with new legislation there was always the hope that a successful amendment in Committee would be accepted by the Government. But whatever the drafts contained, they were still in the files of the Civil Service at the end of 1953.

A year later a powerful deputation from USDAW, retailers' organisations and the Early Closing Association met the Home Secretary and urged on him the Union's 6 p.m./7 p.m. proposals. Again, nothing happened. In 1955 T. W. Cynog-Jones, the Union's research officer, supervised exhaustive research into the closing hours actually operating. Returns were received covering private multiples and small shopkeepers in 296 provincial towns and cities, and 463 Co-operative Societies. These showed that throughout the country the general closing hour which actually prevailed was between 5 p.m. and 6 p.m. In grocery, only 3 per cent were later than 6 p.m., 73 per cent closed at 5.45 p.m. or earlier; in meat 2 per cent were later than 6 p.m. and 73 per cent closed at 5.45 p.m. or earlier; in drapery and department stores 65½ per cent closed at 5.45 p.m. or earlier and only 1½ per cent were later than 6 p.m. Principal exceptions were newsagency and confectionery/tobacco, where 21 per cent of the former and 30 per cent of the latter were open after 6 p.m.

Of all the trades surveyed (and only a selection has been given here) only newsagency and confectionery/tobacco bothered to have a late night at all. Still the Government was unmoved.

In the Queen's speech to the new Parliament elected in 1955 there was no reference to Shops legislation and the TUC sought a meeting with the Premier, Anthony Eden. USDAW was represented on the deputation which was assured that the Government intended to legislate on Gowers in general (which it did in the 1963 Act), while on shop hours in particular it was the intention to introduce a Bill in 1955-56. Victory seemed just over the horizon, with USDAW hopefully preparing to argue for the substitution of 6 p.m./7 p.m. closing for the 7 p.m./8 p.m. of Gowers. But that hopeful horizon was soon to recede.

The Bill was published during the winter and, as anticipated, contained the Gowers proposal on closing hours with, however, continued power for local authorities to revise them downwards, or upwards if justified by special circumstances. Although falling short of the Union's requirements, J. D. Hiscock reminded members in a *New Dawn* article that at least the proposals were one hour better than the existing law. There were other improvements in the Bill, such as stronger protection for the weekly half holiday and meal intervals.

Although it was a Government Bill, there was considerable opposition, in the Press, and in that last homestead of the backwoodsmen, the House of Lords. There were Peers whose own shopping was probably mainly done by servants who agonised over what they saw as a threat to the consumer's right to shop around the clock. USDAW issued a statement in answer to criticism that the Bill's proposals would penalise the consumer. On the contrary, it said, "They are necessary in the interests of the consumer, the shop worker and the shop keeper who wishes to keep reasonable hours. Without them, the highly competitive nature of retail trade will lead to later and later closing times for all shops and longer and longer working hours for those who work in them". It pointed out that the shift system was impossible in three out of four shops because of the small numbers of staff employed.

All seemed to be going well. But for USDAW it was soon to be a case of "Put not your trust in Tory promises". For suddenly the Bill was withdrawn on the excuse of lack of Parliamentary

time. The Government had ratted on the Prime Minister's promises. The Union's protests were long and loud, in Parliament and in the country. The Government's decision was condemned at the TUC, the Labour Party Conference and the Co-operative Congress. But to no avail. Shop closing hours, so far as the law was concerned, were to stay at the level fixed in the first World War. And there they stay to this day.

We have now reached the mid-fifties, with USDAW fighting for shorter hours within a pattern of retailing that had not altered in essence since Victorian times. But the pattern was changing. The battle over hours was moving onto new ground. In the next chapter we shall look at new problems that are facing the Union at the present time.

## 24 SHOP HOURS — 2

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*The Changing Face of Distribution:  
and the New Challenge of Sunday Trading*

IN previous chapters the story of the Union's growth, policies and problems has been carried forward in stages, covering developments over successive periods of time. With shop hours, however, it will be more convenient to the reader to complete the story in two instalments, from the beginning of Victoria's reign to the days of Elizabeth II. We now move into the seventies and a new challenge to USDAW's traditional attitude to closing times and the working week, together with special pleading by vested interests to open up Sunday as a trading day for most foods and a wide range of other products.

It is almost three decades since the Shops Act of 1950. Since the end of Hitler's war there has been a great reduction in the number of shops. The supermarket and the hypermarket have largely taken over the grocery trade in both the private sector and the Co-operative Movement. A Union report to which we shall shortly return has forecast that by 1980 there will be few grocery counter shops left of any size. The same tendency towards size is evident in the spread of large discount houses in the consumer durables trades.

Two trends have been pulling in opposite directions. Trade Union action by USDAW has been successful in reducing shop working hours to 40 a week or less (USDAW is currently campaigning for a 35 hour week). In recent years the opposite trend has been for many retailers, particularly in supermarkets and discount houses, to seek to extend the trading week to somewhere round sixty hours. In this situation some Union members have argued for a two-part policy. The Union should continue to fight for a reduction in the total number of hours in a standard *working* week. There should, however, be greater flexibility in meeting the pressure for a longer *trading* week in

which a standard working day would be maintained or reduced and there were plus payments, overtime rates or other concessions for days in which there was a later closing time, or in which unsocial hours were worked.

This conflict between the standard working week and the trading week surfaced nationally in the report of a working party on shop trading hours and the working week, called for by the ADM of 1974. The working party consisted of six officers — the Union's President, J. D. Hughes, John Phillips, the Assistant General Secretary, J. Flood, W. H. F. Whatley, T. F. Callinan and W. J. Jones; four lay members, W. Barrow, L. Hazell, T. Lawless and Mrs. P. H. Doyle, and also D. McGibbon and W. Tait of the Executive Council. Their report comprehensively covered the changes in retailing practice and their conclusions, together with the recommendations, are summarised in the paragraphs which follow, more or less under the headings in the report.

#### **CHANGING TRENDS**

The number of retail shops, it was stated, had fallen in the decade 1961-71 by 10 per cent to 485,000; grocery and provisions by 27 per cent to 108,000, "Other food dealers" by 18 per cent to 94,000, confectionery, tobacconists, newsagents by 23 per cent to 54,000. Households goods stores increased by 20 per cent to 74,000.

Multiples had decreased by 6,000 to 67,000, but in the five years 1966-1971 had increased their turnover by 58 per cent "illustrating quite clearly the movement towards larger shops in the retail multiple chains".

Co-operative stores had decreased, under the drastic re-organisation programme which began in the sixties, from 29,000 in 1961 to 15,000 in 1971 and the tendency was for them "to concentrate their trading in an increasing number of large general stores".

#### **WORKERS**

Sixty per cent of shop workers were women and one in three of these were part-timers. One in four of all shop employees were part-timers.

A survey of sales staff carried out for the Distributive Industry Training Board, based on information from 1,600 firms, had illustrated the "in-out" nature of shop employment. About

200,000 were recruited as sales staff in the year to October, 1971, but at the end of the year only 110,000 remained with their original employers. There was also a heavy loss (7 per cent) of managers.

### **SHOP OPENING HOURS**

Investigations by the Union's Divisional Officers revealed an increasing movement towards late night opening up to 8 p.m. on two nights a week, while in discount houses — Co-operative and private — more extensive opening hours applied. There had also been a large increase in the number of six-day trading areas.

“In a number of Divisions the extended trading hours have been adopted in agreement with the Union at local level in return for improved working arrangements for the staff. These provide for improved five-day working week arrangements, overtime payment for late night working, etc. In certain cases full-time staff work a normal 40-hour week or less — the staffing on the late nights being done entirely by part-time labour or voluntary overtime or a combination of both”.

In non-Unionised firms it was assumed that late night opening had been arranged on terms acceptable to the staff concerned.

### **THE WORKING WEEK**

Most Union members were on a standard week of 40 hours or less. Most shops operated on a six-day week, on a cyclical basis, with a periodic long weekend of Saturday, Sunday and Monday.

### **PRINCIPAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. “The former policy of seeking to maintain a rigid closing hour of 5.30 p.m. or 6 p.m. for all shops is no longer practicable.”
2. “As shopping habits alter... greater flexibility and liberalisation in the weekday closing times of shops needs to be accepted — subject to there being no extension of the employees' normal standard working week”.
3. There was no evidence to justify opening of shops beyond 8 p.m. and the provision of the 1950 Shops Act was still appropriate.
4. The statutory half-day should be maintained.

### **PAYMENT FOR UNSOCIAL WORKING HOURS**

Recommendations (1) and (2) were amplified by proposals

for plus payments for unsocial (e.g. late evening) hours. They were:—

- (i) That the Union should seek to establish a defined standard working day of from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.
- (ii) Time outside the standard day should be covered by overtime and/or unsocial hours payments "... notwithstanding that the total hours constituting the working week have not been absorbed or exceeded".
- (iii) Additional payments to all full-time staff for hours worked on a Saturday.
- (iv) Provision within agreements for "daily overtime".

### SUNDAY TRADING

On Sunday trading the report reaffirmed the Union's opposition to any extension beyond that already permitted and against the extension of Sunday markets. Legislation should extend to Scotland, where Sunday trading was not illegal.

John Phillips, in moving the report at the 1974 ADM declared that the crucial issue was: how could a five-day working week of 40 hours or less be operated "... within the context of an approximate sixty hour opening or trading week which is currently operating in many sections of distribution?" They could maintain present policy of resisting any change, or they could recognise the change in trading methods and prepare their own proposals "... in such a way as to serve the best interests of the membership". He pointed out that in practice they had already established in agreements with many employers the principle of premium payments for Saturday working and for hours worked between 6 p.m. and 8 p.m.

The debate on the report was one of the longest at the 1974 ADM and the general tenor was against the recommendations. Mrs. C. Leishman (Midlands Divisional Council) questioned the inevitability of a longer trading week and said the Union should be concentrating on a decent basic wage rather than overtime or unsocial hours. Mrs. D. Vaughan (Birmingham, Lewis's) quoted women shop workers at a recent meeting in the Midlands as saying "Our hours now are unsocial enough. We have to rush home to get the old man's tea; we do not want any more of that". F. S. Beney (Area Organiser, Midlands) said extra money for unsocial hours would be passed on in prices. Since shopworkers themselves would have to pay the extra, they

would be working longer hours and be no better off. In support of the recommendations T. P. Callinan (Eastern Divisional Officer and member of the working party) contended in the face of interruptions that the later closing times were a fact and "... you must face the realities of the situation". In his Division they had obtained premium payments for staff who were willing to work after 6 p.m., and the payments were made whether or not the total hours worked were within the 40 hour week.

Delegates were not convinced, and the report was defeated. But a vote does not make a problem disappear. With or without Union agreement on compensatory payments, late night closing has continued. Moreover, shops legislation in general has been under increasing attack, and as this is written in early 1979, there is a new threat — the third since 1968 — to reduce the already frequently ignored restrictions on Sunday trading. The organisation of the shops inspectors (the Institute of Shops, Health and Safety Acts Administration) has prepared a Bill which could open a great many more shops on Sundays and it was introduced in the House of Lords on 13th March, 1979.

The Bill substitutes for Schedule 5 of the 1950 Act a new list of transactions for which all shops may be open on Sunday. The new list includes the sale of all kinds of food, including butchers' meat, for consumption on and off the premises. Another major schedule enables *any* local authority to allow shops within their area to open for sale on Sunday of a much wider range of goods than is at present permissible. The additions include souvenirs, articles for bathing or fishing, toys and fancy goods, cosmetics, stationery, photographic requisites, tents, caravans or trailers. Under existing legislation this power applies only to holiday resorts, for a limited range of products and services, and then only for 18 Sundays in any one year.

*Other non-food articles, such as clothing, footwear, consumer durables*, are not mentioned in the Bill. But once the gates were opened for food shops, it is obvious that non-food retailers would soon demand a similar right to open on Sundays, and the seven day retailing week would be complete.

We have already seen that USDAW's working party pronounced against Sunday opening. Even before the Bill was



mooted the Union was engaged in guerilla warfare against the "hit and run" market traders who come into a neighbourhood on Sundays, establish their stalls in defiance of a variety of legal provisions, and then depart to pastures new, or continue to return to the same locality if, as is too often the case, the local authority turns a blind eye.

The Union went quickly into action against the Bill. Branches were alerted in a memorandum from John Phillips which analysed not only the adverse effects on the lives of shop workers but also the increase in prices to the consumer through higher costs for labour, heating, light and other services that would inevitably follow Sunday opening. Private traders, including the National Chamber of Trade, also registered opposition.

In the columns of *Dawn* members of USDAW were urged to mobilise against the measure, and when the proposals reached the Lords on 19th March, 1979, the entire centre spread of the newspaper was devoted to a text and pictorial report of the debate.

The Bill was introduced by Lord Ponsonby, a member of USDAW and former member of the Union's Parliamentary Panel, facts which Lord Allen commented on with some astonishment when he made the principal speech in opposition. Lord Ponsonby argued that the numerous anomalies that had developed under existing legislation constituted a strong case for revision of the law. Other speakers accepted that there were anomalies and frequent failure by local authorities to enforce the existing legislation. They contended, however, that these defects were a case for clarifying and strengthening the law rather than, so to speak, pouring the baby out with the bath water.

Lord Allen pointed out that the vast majority of workers had Saturday and Sunday for family and social activities. But for shop workers "Sunday is the one day of the week which offers the opportunity of a common rest day with the family". Young people "of which the distributive trades take the greater proportion as school leavers" would bitterly resent having to work on Sundays as well as Saturdays.

Over 70 per cent of the labour force in distribution consisted of women. A high proportion were married, with families and

domestic responsibilities. For them the social disadvantages of Sunday opening would be most acute. Staffing difficulties were already severe in retailing and the effect of the Bill would be that many would leave the trade rather than put up with Sunday working in addition to Saturday. He went on:

“There is no evidence of a genuine or widespread demand on the part of the majority of the shopping public for extended shopping facilities on Sundays beyond those already permitted under current legislation. If you ask people ‘Would you like to see the shops open? — then of course you get the answer, ‘Yes’ . . . But if you ask ‘Would you, as a housewife, be prepared to pay more . . . over the counter’ . . . then I think you will get a different answer”. But the proposals would increase costs, and the increase would go into prices. He continued.

“If shops are to be kept open around the clock for seven days a week, no over-all greater volume of goods would be sold, for the housewife’s purse is not elastic. It would simply mean that the same volume of sales would be spread over a longer period with increased labour costs and overheads. Extended trading hours must in the long term . . . involve regular overtime, increased staff, shift work or all three.” But as over 70 per cent of shops in the United Kingdom employed less than four persons, including working proprietors and manageresses, the application of a shift or rota system would be totally out of the question.

He emphasised that increases in costs as a result of the Bill would fall on the consumer and challenged supporters of the Bill whether they were “. . . seriously suggesting that it would be in the national interest to legislate for increased retail prices on the questionable ground of a supposed demand as yet unproven for a seven day shopping service.”

Lord Sainsbury, who made it clear that he was not speaking on behalf of the great retailing firm with which his name is associated, also opposed the Bill, primarily on humanitarian grounds, and secondly on economic grounds. He did not believe, as had been argued, that the Bill would have only a limited effect. From his knowledge of retailing he thought the Act would lead to a steady increase in Sunday opening by food shops and supermarkets because of fear that competitors would take their trade, and this would happen despite possible diffi-

culties in obtaining staff or having to pay higher wages. Nor did he believe that the community had the right to expect more shop workers and more small shop owners to forego their Sunday rest.

The Bishop of Norwich and the well known Methodist, Lord Soper, also opposed the Bill, as did Lord Blease, another USDAW life peer who was formerly Northern Ireland Officer for the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. Lord Lyell welcomed the Bill for the Conservatives, Earl Grey for the Liberals.

For the then Labour Government Lord Favershaw declared a position of neutrality, saying "We shall do nothing to restrict the progress of the Bill and we shall . . . take note of reactions to it both inside and outside Parliament". On a vote 22 Peers expressed themselves as "Content" (i.e. in favour of the Bill) and 11 as "Not Content".

The Union's opposition was forcefully expressed at the 1979 ADM, held almost mid-way through the General Election of that year. But the Conservative Party, under Mrs. Thatcher, won the election. Their spokesman in the Lords had already welcomed the Bill. Opposition will continue during further stages in the Lords and in the Commons if the Bill reaches that stage. Nationally and in the country the Union will have many allies in Co-operative and private trade in continuing agitation against what, basically, is change for the sake of change, without any solid evidence that it meets a widespread public need. Religious bodies can be expected to protest at this increasing secularisation of Sunday. But given a Conservative Government likely to be in power for several years, a future historian may have to record a major setback in the long campaign for civilised working hours in the distributive trades.