

[UK] Roger Seifert**Contact Information**

Address: Keele University, Keele, Staffordshire, England ST5 5BG

Telephone:

Fax:

Mobile:

Email Address: Ida12@keele.ac.uk

Homepage:

Roger Seifert, Professor of Industrial Relations and Director of the Centre for Industrial Relations at Keele University, and Director of the Centre for Dispute Resolution, a member of the British Commonwealth Universities panel, independent evaluator for a variety of and management projects, And for unions including: UNISON, FBU, Police Federation; RMT, PCS, RCN and UNITE.

His Recent Books include:

1. *Facing up to Thatcherism: History of NALGO 1979-1992* (2000), with M.Ironside, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 420pp
2. *United They Stood – the story of the 2002/4 strike in the UK Fire Service* (2005) with Tom Sibley, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 304pp
3. *The case for Civil and Public Services* (2005) with Mike Ironside, PCS, London, 60pp

His Recent publications in journals include:

1. 'The consequences for the management of conflict of the reform of English local government finance and structure', with W Gill and M Ironside, *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, vol 14, 2003, pp255-272
2. 'The significance of comparability in national pay bargaining in the public services: case studies of the 1980 and 1989 Local Government White-Collar strikes' (with M.Ironside) in *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, no 16, pages 81-116, autumn 2003
3. 'From poor to rich' in *The Chartist*, no 206, Jan/Feb 2004, pages 14-15
4. 'The impact of privatization and marketisation on employment conditions in the public services', with M. Ironside, *Radical Statistics*, issue 86, 2004, pages 57-71

Communist Party influence on strike waves: a case study of the UK from 1970-1985

[UK] Roger Seifert

This paper traces the influence of CP activists and leaders on British trade union political and industrial strategy during the critical years from 1970 to 1985. The importance of this period was that it saw a shift in hegemonic domination away from a broad ruling class consensus that working class organisations should be used to deliver some prosperity and security to the masses through the mixed economy of Keynesian welfare redistribution. That was then challenged in the 1970s and ended with the election of Thatcher in the UK and Reagan in the USA in 1980 in what was memorably phrased by Hobsbawm as the ‘forward march of labour halted’.

It was replaced by the reborn paradigm of partial neo-liberalism tied to aggressive foreign policy through military invasion, and linked with a market rhetoric that restored the intellectual and to some extent the moral authority of the ruling elites. At the same time the relative position of most workers declined in economic and social terms just as their political voice was increasingly unheard.

So both the centre of class struggle and the balance of class forces shifted in the 1970s, and it was mainly (although not exclusively) communists that recognised the dangers within the debates and actions and sought to fight to maintain the broadly progressive order. In the UK this meant fighting with and through those organisations most open to communist influence and class struggle, namely trade unions.

A central figure in this was Bert Ramelson, the industrial organiser of the CP, and he and his colleagues created a line of argument and a group of cadres that enabled the CP to wield substantial influence in union policy-making, especially over the link between the industrial and the political struggle. So there were famous disputes in 1969 of schoolteachers; in 1971 against Conservative legislation in the shape of the Industrial Relations Act; in 1972 in the coalmines, docks, railways and in engineering; in through to the strike wave of the late 1970s known as the Winter of Discontent with action in the car industry, road haulage, and most of the public sector. This was followed by electoral success for the neo-cons as further strikes sought to stave off the policy implementation of the new right. In the UK there were strikes by nurses, local government workers, and most famous of all coalminers in 1984/5.

In the end strikers were largely defeated, communist influence receded, and the balance tipped against the forces of the progressive left with falling union membership, the rise of New Labour, and the end of the welfare consensus.

This study, therefore, illustrates the potential importance of strongly held political views rooted in a Marxist tradition and applied practically to the material world faced. Acute observation, clear lines of analysis, broadly based policies, and organisational robustness, can challenge and change the dominance of the ruling elite. That is why they are so brutal in anti-communist repression. The lessons from this period of intellectual, ideological and class struggle show that the British state has re-invented itself as both repressive abroad and oppressive at home, and that that shift was mainly opposed at the time by the leading role of the communist party.