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THE UNIVERSITY OF ASTON IN BIRMINGHAM

NEW TECHNOLOGY, INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND WHITE-COLLAR TRADE
UNIONS: THE CASE OF THE NATIONAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT
OFFICERS ASSOCIATION

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SUMMARY

The decade since 1979 has seen the most rapid introduction of microelectronic technology in the workplace. In particular, the scope offered for the application of this new technology to the area of white collar work has meant that it is a sector where trade unions have been confronted with major challenges. However the application of this technology has also provided trade unions with opportunities for exerting influence to reshape traditional attitudes to both industrial relations and the nature of work.

Recent academic research on the trade union response to the introduction of new technology at the workplace suggests that, despite the resources and apparent sophistication of modern trade unions, they have not in general been able to take advantage of the opportunities offered during this period of radical technological change. The argument being that this is due both to structural weaknesses and the inappropriateness of the system of collective bargaining where new technology issues are concerned.

Despite the significance of the Public Sector in employment terms, research into the response of public sector white collar trade unions to technological change has been fairly limited. This thesis sets out the approach of the National and Local Government Officers Association (NALGO), the largest solely white collar union in the world with over three quarters of a million members employed in a wide range of public service industries.

The thesis examines NALGO's response at national level and, through detailed case studies, at local level in respect of Local Government and Water Industry NALGO members. The response is then evaluated and conclusions drawn in terms of a framework based upon an assessment of the key factors relevant in judging the ability of NALGO to respond effectively to the challenges brought about by the technological revolution of the last ten years.

KEY WORDS: INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE,
UNION POLICY AND TECHNOLOGY, TECHNOLOGY BARGAINING,
TECHNOLOGY, SOCIAL ASPECTS, NALGO.

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ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS THESIS

ACAS	Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service
APEX	Association of Professional, Executive, Clerical and Computer Staff
APT&C	Administrative, Professional, Technical and Clerical
ASTMS	Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs
AUEW	Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers
AUEW/TASS	AUEW Technical Administrative and Supervisory Section
EEC	European Economic Community
FUMPO	Federated Union of Management and Professional Officers
GMBATU	General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trade Unions
LAMSAC	Local Authority Management Services and Computer Committee
NALGO	National and Local Government Officers Association
NEC	National Executive Council
NJC	National Joint Council
NUPE	National Union of Public Employees
RJIC	Regional Joint Industrial Council
RJSC	Regional Joint Staff Council
TGWU	Transport and General Workers Union
TUC	Trades Union Congress
VFM	Value For Money
VDU	Visual Display Unit

CHAPTER ONE

Report on new technology and its

the 'decade of debate',

1.1 INTRODUCTION

1.2 COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AND TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE

1.3 WEAKNESSES IN TRADE UNION ORGANIZATION AND
STRUCTURE

1.4 A FRAMEWORK FOR TRADE UNION RESPONSES TO
TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE

1.5 METHODOLOGY

1.6 THE PROJECT

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1.1 Introduction

It seems reasonable to characterize the ten years since the publication of the T.U.C. report on new technology and its implications for members (1), as the 'decade of debate', debate, it may be argued, and very little concrete progress. Recent commentators point to the constant stream of publications since the late 1970's particularly on the social implications of new technology (2), including strategies for trade unions, and note that much of it has been highly general, futuristic in orientation and implications for policy and practice often a matter of 'off-the-cuff' prescription. (3)

Francis (4) points to a 1983 Labour Research commentary which reported that:

Whereas 1978-1980 were years of frantic trade union activity at national level in the production of policy statements, model agreements and booklets for members on the problems of negotiating new technology, since then there has been a relative silence as the movement has progressed from propaganda to the problems of implementation. Hopes and aspirations (among trade unions) of the late 1970's have not been fulfilled. (5)

This was supported by Cooley (6) who as early as 1982 had noted that it was becoming clear that the recently evolved trade union strategies for coping with new technology were already proving inadequate. (7)

The ACAS 1986 Annual Report noted that technological change often offered opportunities for re-examining traditional forms of work organization and the design of jobs (8).

Dodgson and Martin (9) make it quite clear that most trade unions in their opinion have missed opportunities to influence crucial decisions affecting their members and to offer guidance on a number of increasingly important issues. (10)

The reasons for these missed opportunities seem to fall into two categories, those associated with weaknesses in trade union structure and organization, and those associated with the very nature of the established collective bargaining procedures that exist within British industrial relations.

Before examining each of these categories in turn one should set the British trade union response to technological change in the context of a 1980's Britain pictured as subject to increasing stresses and tensions. (11) These stresses and tensions for the labour movement being brought about by having to operate against a backdrop of high unemployment, declining membership, legal restrictions imposed by Government, and tough managerial stances. These are factors to be taken into account when evaluating the effectiveness of trade union response to technological change, they do not however, invalidate the weaknesses of structure and collective bargaining referred to above. Finally, if drawing conclusions about policy options or strategies for

the future handling of technological change it is significant that there will be nothing 'new' about the workplace technology to be handled by the next generation of trade union members, ie: those tens of thousands of school and college leavers who will have spent their formative educational years in an environment where the use of microelectronic technology is regarded as the norm, and who will move into a work environment with natural expectations of using such technology. If the power of collective bargaining is seen as a function of the relative willingness and ability to strike or to take a strike, (12) then there is little chance of this breed of trade union members regarding 'new technology' as an issue for such action.

The collective bargaining picture of the late 1980's seems to be one of the decline of industry wide and multi-company of bargaining and the increase of local bargaining. Even where centralized bargaining continues it is suggested that it:

often provides a framework emphasizing greater opportunities for managers and employees to reach local agreements suited to their particular circumstances.
(13)

It is also indicated that the issues subject to collective bargaining will change with more and more managements seeking 'enabling' agreements or the acquiescence of employees rather than bargaining about detail. (14) So the picture for the 1990's is one where the whole sufficiency of collective bargaining as a method of achieving union objectives will be

under review. It is therefore important to examine further the relationship between collective bargaining and technological change.

1.2 Collective Bargaining and Technological Change

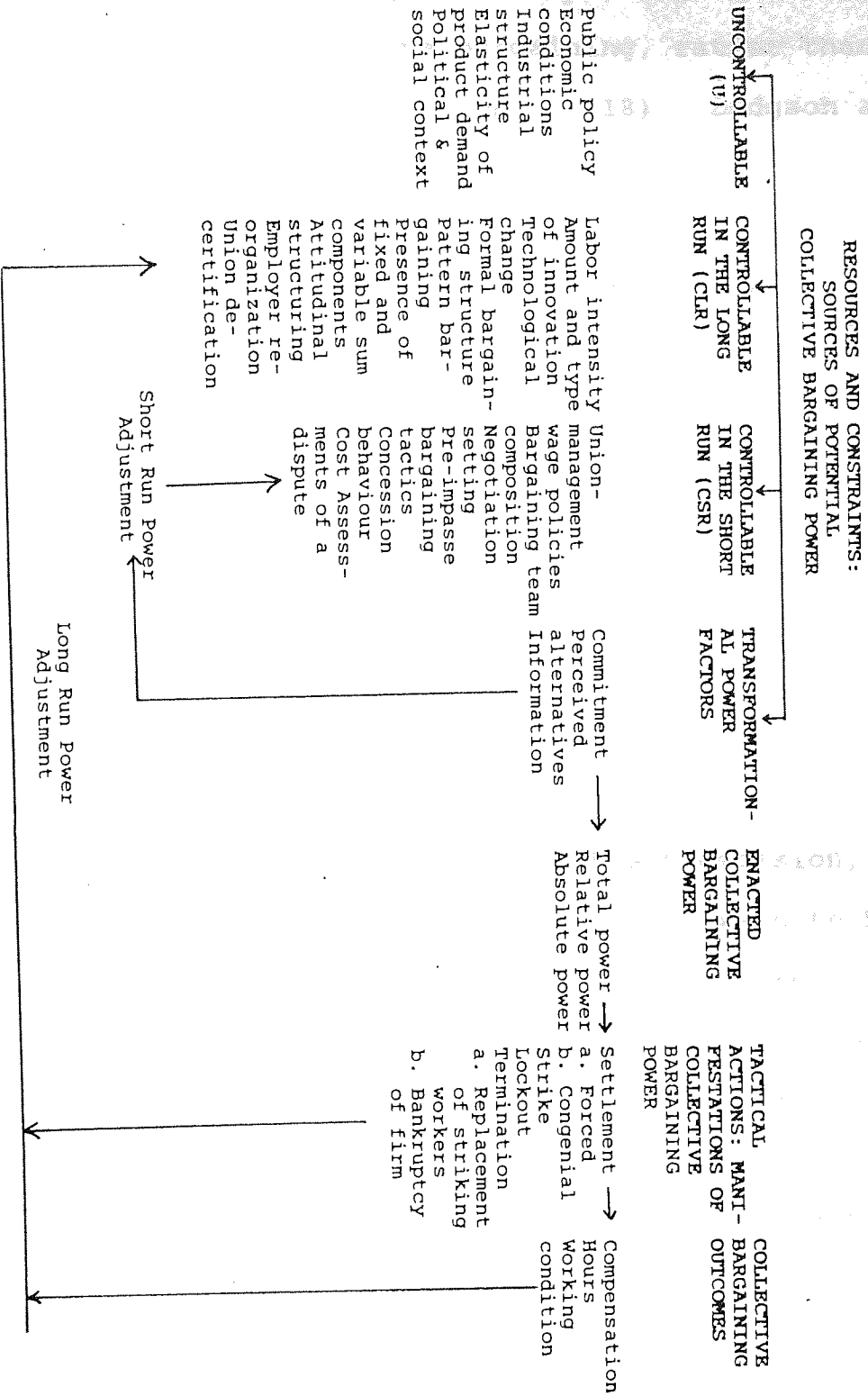
Collective Bargaining is an institutionalized feature of British industrial relations practice, indeed Fox calls it:

"by far the most significant and deep rooted form of representative participation in our kind of society" (15)

Collective Bargaining is based upon the functions of the power relationships that exist within a given workplace. The 'standard model' of collective bargaining noted by Fox (16) is grounded on the acceptance of a pluralistic view of the organization by the negotiating parties. The assumption being made that a power distribution exists which, while not necessarily equally balanced between the two sides, is at least not so unequal as to induce either side to feel that it is being coerced.

There may be many sources which give rise to potential collective bargaining power, as illustrated by Leap in the diagram overleaf, (17) one of which is technological change, shown as a long run controllable power source. Whether it is in fact a long run or a short run controllable power source is arguable, what is clear is that new technology

Diagram One: Theoretical Model of Collective Bargaining Power



appears to have been regarded as part of continuing employee relations, ie: collective bargaining, rather than as an issue requiring special action. (18) Dodgson and Martin note that:

Negotiations about new technology issues are generally included in established collective bargaining procedures. Such negotiations have concerned traditional issues such as pay, grading, redundancy and health and safety. Very little negotiation has occurred on the selection and specification of new technology, job design and work organization. (19)

Technological change may be recognized as a power source within the collective bargaining framework but if the objective of that power is to provide for the trade union movement a basis for a new form of participation from the design and planning stage of investment decision, it would appear that incompatibility may arise between technological change and the collective bargaining structure. Davies sees a desire at national level by trade unions to seek involvement beyond traditional collective bargaining (20) and yet it appears that negotiations over technological change in Britain have remained rooted in the established bargaining procedures.

Levie and Williams (21) highlighted the incompatibility between technological change and collective bargaining in two specific areas. Firstly, that collective bargaining might not actually operate at the right level for trade unions to exert influence on planning for technological change (ie: at

the investment planning level) and secondly, that collective bargaining can be seen as an overcrowded agenda of annual negotiations into which technological change does not easily fit although its effects may influence the agenda issues.

Cressey, referring to the Ruskin College and European Foundation studies, (22) reinforces the point that collective bargaining is often restricted to issues concerning the effects of technological change and not the instigation or direction of that change. It was noted that even within differing national contexts, bargaining took place at a point in the organization where only operational issues rather than initial decisions could be affected.

(23)

On the other hand, Cressey noted that in many cases the base for concluding an agreement regulating the effects of technological change was general collective bargaining, and that collective bargaining had a range of advantages that had been proved in practice:

- it was flexible and open ended,
- it gave the chance to discuss specific topics within a framework and to make the most appropriate arrangements,
- it allowed union and workforce representatives a part in influencing outcomes,
- it concentrated on issues considered of prime importance to unions and workforce. (24)

It is not surprising therefore that managers prefer to seek the traditional collective bargaining route for negotiating

over technological change. Dodgson and Martin refer to the problems that managers see in isolating new technology as a separate issue from normal collective bargaining: delays, cumbersome procedures, problems of definition, reductions in managerial flexibility and judgement, and difficulty in responding to local circumstances. They also note that the concern of employers appears to be to keep trade unions confined to traditional bargaining areas, preferring informal consultation over new technology rather than bargaining per se, and where new technology is included as a separate issue in the form of new technology agreements, their procedural nature leaves the success of negotiation down to individual negotiator's skills. (25)

To summarize, the collective bargaining structure in Britain may have been generally satisfactory for the negotiation of new technology agreements, however imperfect these may be in practice, but in terms of providing a route for potential trade union attempts to put forward a new style participatory approach to bargaining over technological change, then the collective bargaining structure appears to have been inadequate.

1.3 Weaknesses in Trade Union Organization and Structure

Academic research during the 1980's has pointed to several areas of weakness of trade union organization and structure when negotiating over technological change in the workplace.

These can be listed as: its weakness of knowledge and

individual steward and member

1. Lack of knowledge and facilities to evaluate proposals for new technology. (26)
2. Divergence between the interests of the leadership of unions and that of other sections of their membership. (27)
3. Entrenchment of bargaining relationships which militates against any 'new style' approach to bargaining. (28)
4. Divisions that can arise out of separate groups of trade union members bargaining over technological change within an organization. unions lack
5. The role of the trade union representative and the level of activity of shop stewards committees within the workplace. (29)

In order to overcome the premise that any proposal for technological change put forward by management is the only and the best possible option it is necessary for trade unions to develop the same levels of technical expertise and have access to the same information as management. This is especially important if seeking to move away from the traditional reactive stance that trade unions take and move towards some sort of independently developed policy toward

technological change. This weakness of knowledge and expertise comes not only at individual steward and member level but also in terms of time and facilities devoted to technological change as a separate issue at regional or at national level within a given trade union structure.

Recent research by Dodgson & Martin (30) shows that British trade unions employ fewer than one hundred and fifty researchers in their departments and that few unions have a researcher responsible for new technology and those that do spend only a fraction of their time working on new technology issues. Diagram two overleaf shows a list of trade union researchers and research effort on new technology. Even if management recognized a trade union role in evaluating new proposals for technological change it seems that unions lack the expertise to make a response. Dodgson and Martin imply that this lack of expertise has meant that while the nature and scale of new technology has changed considerably in the period since unions produced their policy documents, the policy documents have not been updated.

This is not to say that trade union members are not technically qualified, in many cases they are, and may be as least as knowledgeable as management. The problems is that they may lie untapped in the membership. Dodgson & Martin's conclusion is that:

Trade unions' response to the challenge of new technology has been severely hampered by the lack of research resources they have been able to direct towards

and speculating about the
change which affects their

Diagram Two

Trade Union Researchers and Research Effort on New Technology

<u>Trade Union</u>	<u>Number of researchers</u>	<u>Person responsible for new Technology</u>	<u>Person responsible for new technology spends more than half of their time on new technology issues</u>
APEX	3+1 P/T	1 Researcher	Yes
ASTMS	7	1 Researcher	No
AEU	8+1 P/T	1 National Officer	No
AUEW-			
TASS	8	1 Researcher	Yes
BIFU	5	1 Researcher	No
CPSA	4	1 Researcher	
		1 Assistant Secretary	No
COHSE	3	None	No
EETPU	7	1 National Officer	No
GMBTU	12	1 Researcher	No
IRSF	1	-	-
NALGO	13	1 Researcher	Yes
NGA	5	None	No
NUM	4	-	-
NUPE	7	1 Researcher	-
NUR	4	None	No
NUT	2	-	-
SCPS	4	1 Researcher	No
SOGAT			
82	2	None	No
TGWU	8	1 Researcher	-
UCW	4	1 Researcher	No
UCATT	2	None	No
USDAW	8	2 Researchers	Yes

Source: M Dodgson & R Martin, 'Trade Union Policies on New Technology: facing the challenge of the 1980's' in New Technology, Work and Employment 2 (1987), p 16.

identifying, quantifying, and speculating about the consequences of technical change which affects their members. (31)

Another problem can arise where there is a divergence between the interests of the union leadership and that of other sections of the membership. It may be the long term interests of members and the overall economic situation that may be the concern of union leaders whereas members in particular establishments may be more concerned with safeguarding their own jobs by agreeing to the introduction of new technology even if this meant a long term reduction in employment opportunities in the industry as a whole. This can lead to tensions existing between members in particular areas of an organization and union officials at regional and/or national level.

Batstone and Gourlay (32) point towards the idea of the entrenchment of procedures in bargaining generally which lead to the assumption that there are 'particular ways of doing things' which come to be part of shop stewards and workers assumptions as well as that of managers. These in-built assumptions lead to the development of a degree of consensus as to the balance of power and strategies likely to be effective. The result is therefore the fostering of a degree of stability based on the very existence of shared understandings and strong bargaining relationships. This in itself militates against moves towards 'new style' approaches to bargaining over technological change, it also, as Batstone

& Gourlay point out, helps to explain why disagreements over technological change often took so long to resolve. (33)

Another weakness is exposed when one examines where the bargaining over technological change actually takes place in the organization. In many cases, from a management point of view, this is seen to be the function of personnel or industrial relations officers who bargain centrally for the organization as a whole. When one turns to their union counterpart, it may be the case, as will be illustrated in this project, that departmental or sectional bargaining takes place. Thus giving rise to precedents being set by one department in the organization in their new technology agreement which management will then use as a basis for negotiating with other departments. Again, this can lead to the formation of tensions between union representatives in individual departments in the same organization.

Lastly, there is the question of the role of the trade union representative and the activity level of the shop stewards committee within the workplace. Moore & Levie (34) point out that technical change is always just part of a series of changes at company or workplace level which means that trade union representatives have to divide their time between many important and related issues. This, coupled with lack of expertise on new technology is just one reason why new technology may not be the first item on the agenda. As will be illustrated in later case studies, there may be other

issues seen as more important eg: the fight against privatisation, which come to dominate the agenda for action of local trade union representatives.

Levie and Williams noted two other problems in this area, firstly, that if there is a full time worker representative who does most of the work, he or she may be so isolated from the members and their jobs that it becomes difficult to anticipate the effects of technological change. Secondly, if there is no active shop stewards committee, the individual representatives may be too isolated to see links between technological change in one section and its effects on worker in other sections of the organization. (35)

1.4 A Framework for Trade Union Responses to Technological Change

In forming a framework for analysing trade union responses to technological change it is worth distinguishing between those analyses which attempt to offer an explanation of technological change at the workplace, and those analyses which offer a typology for trade union behaviour and the formulation of responses to technological change, although there may be a relationship between them.

For example, McLoughlin and Clark (36) cite three influential perspectives which focus on technological change at the workplace largely from a sociological orientation.

Firstly, there is Joan Woodward's work based on 'contingency theory' (37). This stems from the idea that there is no one best way to manage production and that particular situations will demand different approaches depending upon a range of 'contingent' factors, Woodward's focus being on technology as the most significant contingency which shapes an organizations structure and behaviour. Working on empirical studies on production systems, Woodward's analysis suggested that the impact of highly automated production systems would lead to a typology of control system that she devised called 'integrated/impersonal' management. The theory being that the control is incorporated into the technology itself resulting in new forms of work which increase the autonomy of the work team, transform the traditional role of the supervisor and enable new approaches to industrial relations to be pursued. Woodward's views fall into the category of 'technological determinism', criticisms being levelled that this type of explanation ignores social contexts and processes and also assumes a model of the employment relationship which 'depoliticise' the issues raised by technological change.

The second perspective comes from the 'Labour Process' approach. This comes largely from Braverman's work (38) arguing that automated technologies were introduced deliberately to increase management control over the labour process by the deskilling of job content, the management control systems therefore being the product of the class

based conflict between capital and labour. It should be noted that Braverman thought that under a different social system advanced technology would open up the possibility of different approaches to work and industrial relations which would benefit the workforce, these could not however, be brought about without a radical transformation of society.

The third perspective cited by McLoughlin and Clark is what they call the 'Strategic Choice' approach. This is based on the importance of the role of the 'organization actors' ie: manager, unions and workforce at critical stages in the process of technological change. As McLoughlin and Clark say: -

The key to this new approach is the assumption that the outcomes of technological change, rather than being determined by the logic of capitalistic development, or external technical and commercial imperatives, are in fact socially chosen and negotiated within organizations by organization actors. (39)

Attention is therefore directed to the process of technological change at the workplace and how managers, unions and workforce are able to effectively influence the outcomes. This leads well into an examination of trade union behaviour in the process of technological change.

A first mode of behaviour can be categorized as the 'Defensive' position. According to Thompson and Bannon

(40) this stems from a legacy of traditional perspectives and practices which mean that unions can only react in limited ways when faced with a major challenge such as the introduction of the new microelectronic technology. The approach therefore is based upon fairly narrow economic bargaining. Gill (41) notes that given the more hostile economic and political climate at the end of the 1970's it was not surprising that the British trade union movement adopted a response to new technology which could be characterized as adaptive and retrospective. As Gill says:

Given the 'raison d'etre' of British Trade Unions as being primarily concerned with collective bargaining both as a means of maintaining and improving the terms and conditions of employment of their members and of limiting managerial prerogative, the approach was essentially defensive, concentrating on job losses, pay and working conditions. (42)

Inherent within the defensive position is the potential for conflict which stems from 'closed' attitudes by both management and union. This results according to Cressey (43) from the application of a 'mechanistic' response to the problem of change and management's fear of a lack of control. Even where the option of positive involvement in the process of change exists, Cressey notes that unions too opt for clear lines of responsibility. In addition to this there is the problem of role confusion where trade unionists take part in what they would consider traditionally to be 'management' areas, as to be seen to be implicated in decision making forums that could result in job loss or substantial change in

workforce conditions may be seen by many as compromising the interests of their members, hence the preference for the traditional defensive model.

At the other end of the spectrum from the defensive position lies the situation where there is full participation in the process of technological change by trade unions. In between there lies various stages of participation. Diagram three overleaf illustrates forms of technological participation in relation to management and union attitudes.

In relation to the participative models for analysing trade union behaviour in the process of technological change it is important to be clear about what is meant by 'participation' and, in what context the model has evolved and is used. Williams, for example, for the purposes of a 1983 working party report, defined participation as: -

Used to decide an approach whereby trade unions attempt to influence the process of decision making (in contrast to those approaches based on demands over the outcome of decision making). (44)

Keul, (45) in a paper on technological change in the Norwegian context notes that participation can have a double meaning. This being involvement by ordinary union members in systems design activities or in union activities related to systems design, or, it can also mean involvement by the union apparatus during the system design processes. Keul points out that to base union participation in system design

Diagram Three

Technological Participation and Management/Union Attitudes

Management Attitude	Closed	Closed	Open	Open
	+	+	+	+
Union Attitude	Closed	Open	Closed	Open
Forms of Technological Participation	Conflict: objectives rigidly defined by both sides	Unilateral decisions by management: little involvement of workers	Consultation: minor areas of negotiation	Shared decisions: joint committees: workers potentially involved in all phases

<----->

Conflict-----Full participation

Source: P Cressey - New Technology: An overview of Regulation in European Industrial Relations Review 157 (February 1987) p 15

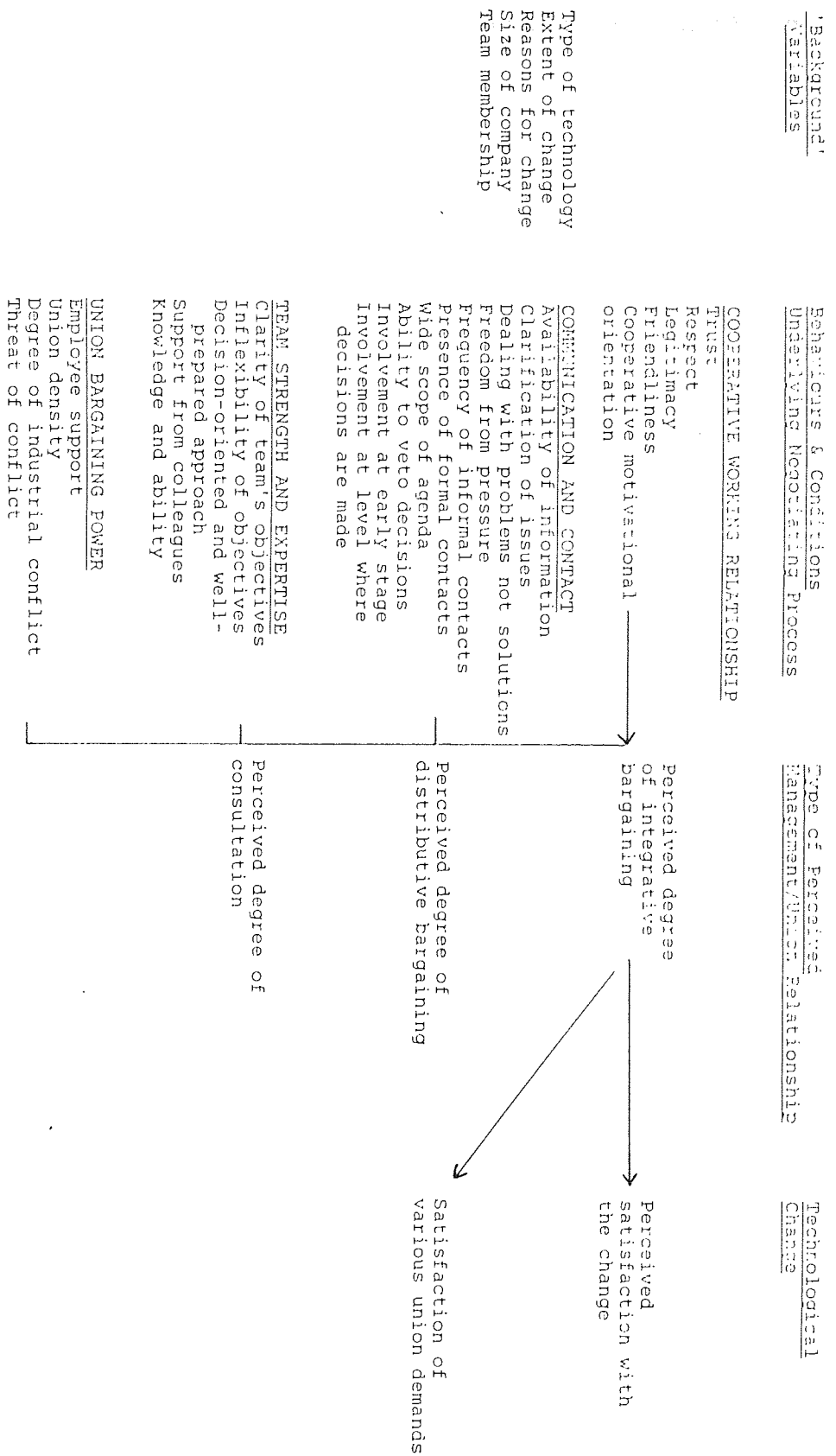
on member involvement is unreasonably idealistic and that one can talk of 'non-participative strategies' which imply a way of having union representation and participation in system design without the involvement of the larger membership.

(46)

Annette Davies (47) distinguishes three types of management - union relationship in the context of technological change, integrative bargaining, distributive bargaining and consultation. It is integrative bargaining which is the participative model in the analysis, consultation being regarded as a 'non-relationship' with unions being able to exert no influence, and distributive bargaining reflecting a traditional adversarial relationship where agreement comes as a result of a compromise of the opposing demands of the two parties.

As far as the integrative bargaining model is concerned, the assumption is made that during the process of negotiation both parties will seek alternative solutions to issues or problems until they arrive at an agreement which is mutually satisfactory. The model has four major independent variables, illustrated in diagram four overleaf, which are assumed to be associated with the perceived extent of integrative bargaining during technological change. These variables are, a co-operative working relationship, communication and contact, team strength and expertise, and union bargaining power. Davies argues that: -

Diagram Four:
An Analysis of the Impact of Interactive Bargaining on the Outcome of Micro-Technological Change



Source: A Davies, Industrial Relations and New Technology, (Kent, Croom Helm 1986) P108

The conceptual model provides a framework in which the occurrence and content of co-operation may be studied, and it therefore constitutes a first step towards a predictive model of integrative bargaining between management/union negotiation in a British context. (48)

Much of the interest in the participative role for trade unions in the process of technological change has stemmed from the 'alternative' approaches to new technology pioneered by the Scandinavian trade unions in the 1970's. Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and to a lesser extent, West Germany. The importance of the participative models though must be set firmly in the national political context concerned. As Gill says: -

It is significant that the social and employment effects of new technology have received most attention in those European countries where a continuing social 'consensus' has existed between the labour movement and the Government. (49)

Taking Sweden as an example, there exists a strong and unified union movement and centralized collective bargaining system which is based on a legal framework for national agreements to be concluded between central employers' and trade union organizations. The legal framework comprises the Working Environment Act 1978, the Co-Determination Act 1977 and 1981 Regulation on work with V.D.U.s. The legislation is not specific to technological change but places it alongside other aspects of management policy, so for example, the Co-Determination Act of 1977 covers major questions of

management policy including technological change and requires employers to initiate discussion and negotiate with the union before final decisions are taken. In addition, under the 1977 Act the employer is obliged to provide information to the trade union concerning production plans, manpower policy and the financial position of the firm.

Despite the legal framework, Ullmark, (50) expresses the view that the Swedish trade unions right to influence did not increase as the opportunities to influence new equipment depended on their capacity to argue and convince management that their demands were also good for the company, the management still having the final say as long as the negotiating procedures were followed. Ullmark notes: -

The unions sometimes say that companies have only to hoot twice before they run over the employees.
(51)

The effect of the additional Swedish legislation has been on the working environment where the Working Environment Act of 1978 further developed the powers of local committees and safety representatives giving them the right to be consulted and, an obligation to issue an opinion on any changes which can affect the work environment when they are at the planning stage.

The other area of interest arising out of the Swedish model, in terms of the participative role for trade unions in the

process of technological change, is the work that arose out of the Swedish Centre of Working Life, set up in 1977. The research projects of DEMOS (Democratic Planning and Central in Working Life) and the UTOPIA project have already been well documented. (52) In brief the aim of DEMOS was that trade unions, through the use of the investigative groups set up in four firms, should formulate an action programme for influencing the planning and use of new technology based on the experiences and aspirations of their own members. The aim of UTOPIA was to contribute to the development of technology and training to enhance the skills of print workers, by the print workers themselves working through their trade unions with computer specialists and social researchers. Both DEMOS and UTOPIA provided the basis for an independent participative model for trade union involvement in technological change despite the fact that UTOPIA was essentially abandoned when the trade unions involved failed to co-operate.

Gill (53) highlights three lessons that emerge from the Scandinavian experiences. Firstly, that the direction that new technology takes depends on political and economic forces which ultimately determine the power relationships in the workplace where new technology is applied. Secondly, that Scandinavian unions have been instrumental in highlighting the interrelationship between legislation, the negotiation of collective agreements, state sponsored support for trade union education and research, and the way such an

interrelationship is linked to job design and industrial democracy. Thirdly, that there are alternatives to a 'laissez-faire' approach to new technology.

A useful table, shown in diagram five overleaf, is provided by Cressey, (54) which lists the regulatory framework over technological change in Western Europe. He notes that the variety of regulations in force in different member states and the varying context of industrial traditions in the area of participation, especially 'technological participation', have not helped towards the adoption of a common European policy instrument on technological change.

To summarize, this section has attempted to put forward the key approaches that have been evolved in analysing technological change at the workplace, and to reflect these in models of potential trade union responses to new technology, being aware that such models and their effectiveness cannot be isolated from the political and social context in which they are set.

1.5 Methodology

Investigations into technological change at the workplace can be roughly divided into two categories as regards methodology. Firstly, there are those studies that follow what could be called a 'survey' approach, usually on procedural theme looking for example at the bargaining

Diagram Five: *How change takes place across a*
Regulatory Framework for Technological change in Europe

Country	Unionisa- tion rate (%)	Laws used	Collective agreements		
			National frame- work agreements	Sector level	Company or plant level
Belgium	75		1983 collective agreement on new technology	Printing	Local agreements implementing national agreement
Denmark	70		1981 agreement for private sector between LO and DA	Banking/ public sector	
France	20	(1) Health & Safety legis- lation, (2) "Aurous" laws 1982	None	None	Some local agreement
W Germany	40	(1) Works Constitution Act 1972, (2) Works Safety Act 1973, (3) Regulation on work with VDUs	None	Job protection agreements in metalworking, textiles, footwear, leather, paper processing, printing	Upwards of 100 agreement concluded
Italy	43	(1) Statute of Workers' Rights 1970, (2) Health and Safety Act 1978	None	Clauses included in sectoral agreements on metalworking	Clauses included in several company agreements, eg FIAT, Olivetti, Alfa Romeo
Netherlands	32	(1) Works Council Act 1979	None	Clauses in 14 agreements (5 in printing)	
Norway	45	(1) Working Environment Act 1977, (2) Regu- lation on work with VDUs 1982	1975 agreement on computer-based systems NAF-LO	Banking	Most of industry and services covered by local agreements
Sweden	73	(1) Working Environment Act 1978, (2) Regu- lation on work with VDUs 1981 (3) Co-deter- mination Act 1977	Work environment agreement SAF-LO- PTK 1976	Technology agreement in printing sector, co- determination agreements in central Govern- ment, local Government, private sector	Use of legis- lative rights
UK	50	(1) Health and Safety at Work 1975, (2) Date Protection Act 1984	None	Parts of public sector	Several hundred agreements
Other countries	N.A.	Health and Safety legis- lation, co- determination legislation, eg Austria	None	Printing sector in Austria and Greece, banking in Luxembourg	

framework in which technological change takes place across a variety of industries or, providing an analysis of the extent and nature of technology agreements negotiated so far. An example of this 'broad brush' approach is the work of Daniel (55), whose survey work provides a picture of the extent of patterns of variation in the organizational and industrial relations processes surrounding technological change. The breadth of the picture is illustrated by Daniel when he says:

The core questioning in the survey gave us unrivalled information about labour relations institutions, practices and procedures including trade union representation, recognition and densities, multi-unionism, the closed shop and bargaining and consultative structures. (56)

The comprehensive nature of the survey, covering over 2,000 workplaces provided systematic information on technological change across private manufacturing, private services, public services and nationalized industries and is of obvious value in terms of its comparative analysis across the economy.

The work of Williams and Steward (57) provides another example of a wide ranging survey of new technology agreements concluded between 1977 and 1983, this work being further supplemented by Batstone and Gourlay's (58) survey of over 1,000 shop stewards which indicated a far higher percentage of non-manual, mainly public sector workplaces being covered by technology agreements than workplaces in the field of production. (59)

The second category of research methodology revolves around the case study approach. It is probably appropriate to make a distinction here, between those case studies that are carried out with a view to drawing some wider conclusion about the nature and processes of technological change at the workplace, perhaps for comparative purposes, and those case studies that stand in their own right as a detailed investigation of the 'micro' processes of technological change in a specific organization or area.

There is obviously a problem in using the case study approach and then drawing wider conclusions about the nature of technological change. For example, Batstone (60) points out that detailed case studies are more able to identify complexities but all too frequently jump to the 'general' argument. Davies too, in her study of technological change in the Brewing industry notes that although the study gains a number of advantages in being industry specific, this, in fact, imposes limitations, especially in the degree to which one can generalize from the results. (61)

Both the Ruskin College studies (62) and the European Foundation studies (63) used case studies carried out in individual countries as a basis for comparative statements about the processes of technological change across national boundaries. An illustration of the difficulties in drawing conclusions from this type of study can be seen in a comment

made by the Trades Union group on the European Foundation Study consolidated report on new technology in the public service:

The conclusions are too vague, the report amounts to no more than a somewhat colourless review which fails to bring forward any suggestions of the kind that it would have been reasonable to expect in a study of this kind. (64)

The value of the detailed workplace case study is two fold, firstly it lies in enabling an understanding of the processes involved in technological change in a given context which may or may not then enable the researcher to formulate a number of questions that can be investigated further in different settings. Secondly, the detailed case study may be of considerable value to the workplace practitioner ie: the particular trade union involved, thus giving rise to the possibility of future changes in organization, strategy, or overall policy towards technological change. As Clark et al comment in the introduction to their telecommunications case study:

We felt that by looking in detail at micro processes, rather than simply attempting to assess macro inputs, we would be able to provide empirical material which might perhaps be of more immediate relevance to practitioners involved in the introduction of new technology. (65)

McLoughlin and Clark go further in noting that many commentaries have been based on speculative prediction rather than hard evidence derived from studies of the actual

experience of introducing new computing and information technologies. Their view is that as such, little clue is given to the day to day realities of technological change at work and how managers, trade unions, work groups and individual employees might make more effective contributions in implementing and using new technology. (66)

The European Foundation Report noted that:

There has been remarkably little research into the public services, the UK's largest users of information technology. (67)

Given this lack of public sector research, and the fact that NALGO themselves had the capability, and indeed had in the past, carried out wider surveys of technological change at the workplace, (68) it was decided that the case study approach would be of most value in terms of this project.

As the project was dependent on the co-operation and goodwill of NALGO West Midlands District, the researcher had to be cognizant of their recommendations as to which particular areas could provide potential case studies. After the completion of initial survey work, and taking into account the fact that the researcher had carried out a research project within NALGO West Midlands District for a Master of Science degree in 1981 which focussed on NALGO's response to new technology, (69) areas were selected for preliminary investigation to see if they could provide worthwhile

developments for detailed study.

Two areas were selected, firstly because of the significance of Local Government in terms of NALGO membership (nearly 70%), and the fact that of that Local Government membership a high proportion are female and clerically based, forming the group which it was generally accepted would be hardest hit by the early applications of new technology, ie: word processing, this area seemed to provide worthwhile studies. However, membership alone did not provide the sole reasoning, taking into account the stringent financial constraints imposed by Central Government, the management viewpoint within Local Government was that new technology could be seen as a method of maintaining services and improving productivity. This view, coupled with comments made following the LAMSAC 1984 report on office automation in Local Government: (70)

The scope for office automation in Local Government is tremendous. Investment to take advantage of these opportunities should not be prejudiced by existing finance and accounting restraints. (71)

confirmed the Local Government area as a case study, all that had to be done then was to investigate within that area to find an appropriate branch involved in technological change.

Secondly, bearing in mind NALGO's membership in the public utilities and the desirability of examining the introduction of different types of technology, it was suggested that

examining technological change within defined areas of NALGO membership in the water industry would provide a useful and interesting alternative focus, especially as the industry itself is one with a long tradition of automation albeit mainly on the process/control technology side.

With any field research the question of access to the relevant parties is of vital importance in gaining a real insight into the reasoning behind particular patterns of bargaining. It is of little use to have a clearly defined methodology beforehand if, in the final analysis, access to key individuals, groups, or documentation is not possible. As Nicholson et al point out:

In field research, what is desirable or possible to investigate, and by which methods is constrained by the access opportunities available to the researcher and the special characteristics of the setting in which the research takes place. (72)

Initially, a general framework was drawn up concentrating on areas such as geographical factors, branch structure, management structure, pattern of industrial relations procedures, relationships with other trade unions. This general framework was used at the first meeting with the full time NALGO officials involved. In addition to this information provided, file searches were carried out to identify any further 'key names' or relevant issues in the bargaining over new technology. The individuals concerned ranged from NALGO members operating new technology to branch

officers and management personnel, management services, computer staffs etc. In liaison with the full time branch officials these personnel were contacted direct by the researcher and interviews arranged. Full co-operation was given by NALGO members and management (usually NALGO members themselves) although for the purposes of access to management the researcher adopted the 'independent' role, representing the University of Aston. A helpful factor here was undoubtedly the 'mature age' of the researcher which probably enabled greater access to, and responsiveness from, the case study participants.

In the case studies, a range of methods were used, based on the experiences of tested research, (73) these included observation of the work situation, searches of primary source documentation, interviews - structured and unstructured, by referring to the literature on file in NALGO branches it was possible to construct a framework containing a list of specific questions for each interviewee along with standard questions. Once the purpose of the research was discussed the pattern was to use this framework, letting interviewees have the freedom to develop their response with the interviewer ensuring that relevant areas were being covered and that the interview was not diverging from the aims of the research. On completion of each interview an analysis was undertaken to identify any new issues to consider or personnel to interview.

Two aspects of the research methodology are worth stressing. Firstly, the access to primary source documentation in the case studies permit observations to be made from a more objective base than the personal interview. In addition, in the Local Government case study access was available to management documentation, a situation which is not usual for researchers engaged on trade union related projects.

Secondly, the duration of the research. As this project was undertaken on a part time basis it permits a more 'medium term' view of the bargaining processes over new technology, in fact, based on the researchers work in 1981, it allowed a follow up visit during the pilot studies and therefore provided a view over a much larger period than is normal with this kind of research.

1.6 The Project

In evaluating the growth of trade unionism during the twentieth century one of the evident characteristics is the growth of the 'white collar' trade unions. With regard to technological change, it is generally recognized that British white collar unions are 'front line' unions which have faced the greatest challenges from new technology in terms of job loss and changed conditions of service. The work of Willman (74) argues that the recent growth in white collar unions had produced on the one hand solvent, ambitious organizations capable of devising and effecting wide-ranging policies in the area of technological change, and on the other hand,

organized collectively a stratum of highly skilled literate workers whose knowledge of the potentials of technological change is considerable. NALGO, as the fourth largest union in the country and the biggest white collar union in the Western World (75) is regarded as one of the 'front line' unions that has been, 'active in its response to new technologies'. (76)

The project commenced in October 1984 following discussions with NALGO West Midland District staff, staff from the Technology Policy Unit of Aston University and the staff, and researcher, who was appointed as a part-time research student. The central purpose of the project was to explore the problems faced by NALGO in relation to the introduction of new technology, in a range of institutional contexts, to gain an understanding of the processes involved and to evaluate the strategy and appropriateness of union procedures for forming and implementing policies on new technology in the light of current academic research. The project was seen as having three distinct phases:

- 1 An overview of the pattern of technological change in the service areas/branches covered by NALGO West Midlands District. This was carried out primarily through formal interviews with all NALGO West Midlands District officers. An initial report containing the findings of the first phase was submitted to NALGO in December 1984.

2 Selection of a pilot study. The aims of this being to clarify the objectives of the research, to provide a methodology for further case studies, and to develop the researchers acquaintance with the structures and procedures of NALGO. This was completed in October 1985.

3. Selection of several detailed case studies. The criteria for selection being decided in joint consultation with the researcher, University staff, and NALGO West Midlands District officers. These case studies were to provide the field research on the project during the period from 1986 to 1988.

In addition to the field research the following activities have taken place in the duration of the project:

a. Liaison between the researcher and the NALGO West Midlands District officer responsible for the project.

b. Attendance at meetings of the Trade Unions and New Technology Research Group at the University of Aston.

c. Attendance and reporting on progress to the NALGO New Technology Sub-committee - West Midlands District.

d. Reporting on research progress to NALGO's National New

Technology Working Party in London.

- e. Attendance at relevant conferences on the approaches taken to the introduction of new technology at the workplace.
- f. Updating on current developments within the field of new technology using the resources of the University of Aston, NALGO, LAMSAC, and the Work Research Unit.

It is intended that the project can be seen to be meeting the following aims:

Firstly, to contribute to field case study work on public sector responses to technological change.

Secondly, to add to knowledge about the nature of white collar unions generally. The sort of questions that can be posed here are: Is there anything distinctive about white collar union developments in relation to technological change? Is there any relationship to the so called 'Craft Unions'? For example, unlike the Craft Unions whose interests although in many cases narrow, can be clearly defined and where formal procedures exist right from shop floor level giving a framework within which bargaining over new technology can take place, is it the case that white collar unions objectives and strategies are less clearly defined and that the organizational context in which

bargaining takes place differs greatly? If there is a lack of procedures, are technology agreements the white collar answer to this?

Thirdly, it is worth asking the question if there is anything special about the nature of the white collar member?

Francis (77) suggests that one of the reasons for NALGO's relative success in the field of negotiating technology agreements is because of the fact that many of the chief officers who have responsibility for implementing the agreements are also members of NALGO. Therefore, does more 'informal' grievance smoothing sometimes take place because of the proximity to management of white collar trade unionists? Where representatives are located at management/supervisory level are they a resource for the union or are they 'de-proletarianizing' the union?

Finally, and most important, the aim is to measure NALGO, through the individual case studies, in terms of how far one can see evidence of the weaknesses in structure and organization referred to earlier and how this had affected response at the workplace and at national level. In addition, the implications of trade union 'weakness' is that there is a 'management strength'. The assumption is not infrequently made that management had a coherent strategy for technological change, which fits closely with organizational goals. Willcocks and Mason (78) provide an analysis where information technology and industrial relations management

are rarely integrated and where both often lack a strategic approach. They state:

Serious and underlying problems remain and begin further back, from managers' limited visions and understandings of what new technology can achieve; and in their attitudes towards, and relative neglect of both the human resource and industrial relations issues surrounding computer based technologies. (79)

It is hoped that at least one of the case studies in this project will provide an investigation into the question of management strategies towards the introduction of new technology at the workplace.

CHAPTER TWO

- 2.1 NALGO'S ORGANIZATION AND OPERATING STRUCTURE
- 2.2 MEMBERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS
- 2.3 THE STEWARD SYSTEM

2.1 NALGO's Organization and Operating Structure

In order to understand the procedure for bargaining over new technology within NALGO it is necessary to have a clear picture of how NALGO functions in operational terms. On the face of it, NALGO has a structure which is typical of most trade unions, that is, members belong to local branches which are then organized on a district and/or regional basis, and which are then in turn linked to the national executive and conference.

However, NALGO's structure is in reality somewhat more complex, as one might expect in a voluntary organization with over three quarters of a million members and being the biggest solely white collar union in the world. In addition the membership spans a range of different industries covering local government, electricity, gas, water, the National Health Service, new towns, road transport, and universities, as well as membership in specialist bodies and groups such as polytechnics, colleges and schools, residential homes, the probation service and after care staff to name but a few.

The organization can be seen as having two halves, one which deals with service conditions matters, and one which deals with policy issues affecting all members. This can be illustrated in terms of the service conditions 'half' being responsible for the negotiated agreements over new technology

sometimes at both local and national level, and on the other hand the remaining 'half' generating policy documents which state NALGO's overall approach to new technology. Each half of the structure is then designed to provide representation and discussion at three levels, local (the branch), district and national, and at each level there are democratically elected bodies to make the decisions.

The base of the organizational structure is obviously the branch, of which there are over 1240 in existence. These branches are generally based on employer units and so each local authority, water division, university and so on, has an equivalent NALGO branch except where the employing units are very large, and where it is felt that branches based on such units, perhaps districts within a region are more appropriate, examples would be the electricity and gas industries. Given this it is not surprising that branches can vary considerably in size, from a dozen or so in the smallest branches to nearly 20,000 in other cases.

The branch operates according to model rules which ensure that basic functions are carried out correctly but that there is scope to organize the branch structure in a way that is best suited to local needs with the result that considerably variations can occur across the country. NALGO themselves say that: -

Indeed it is sometimes suggested that there are as many different branch structures as there are branches. (1)

This lack of standardization may be seen as one of the potential obstacles to the implementation of any nationally based procedures for bargaining over technological change and this will be further exemplified by the case studies as well as by reference to NALGO attempts to organize its steward system.

The key officer within the branch structure is generally the branch secretary. However, this role also can vary from branch to branch. On the one hand, the secretary may be the main negotiator as well as the branch administrator and on the other hand, where there is a heavy volume of work, there may be a branch organizer or administrator who is on the NALGO paid staff and is responsible to branch officers, but who may not carry a negotiating role. There are also larger branches who employ full time staff direct.

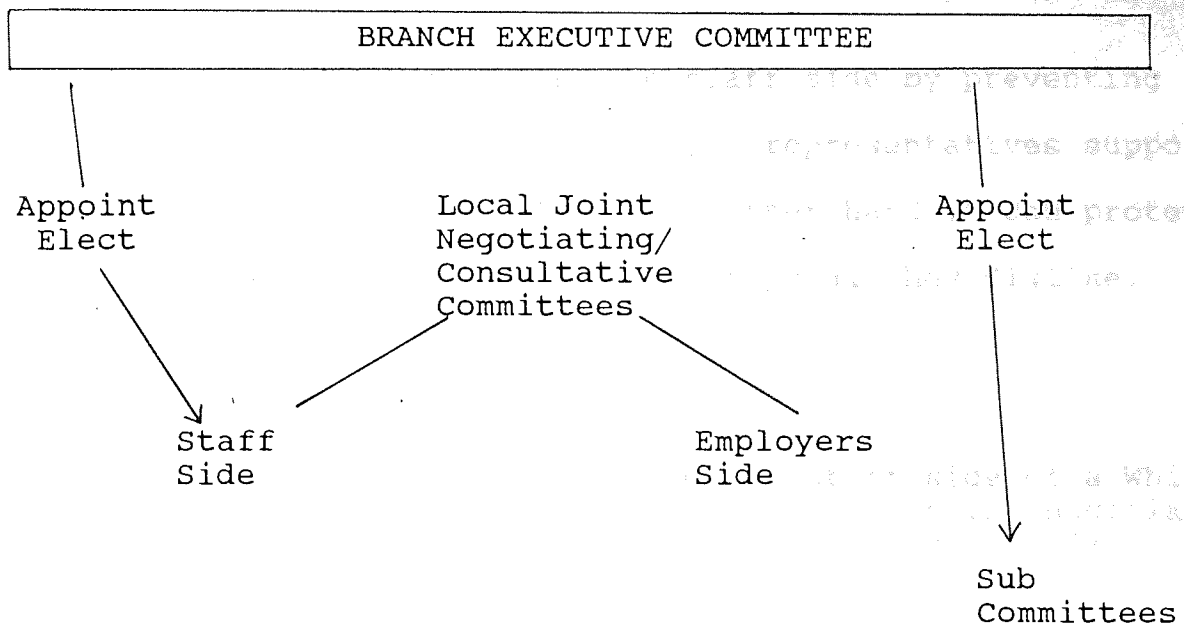
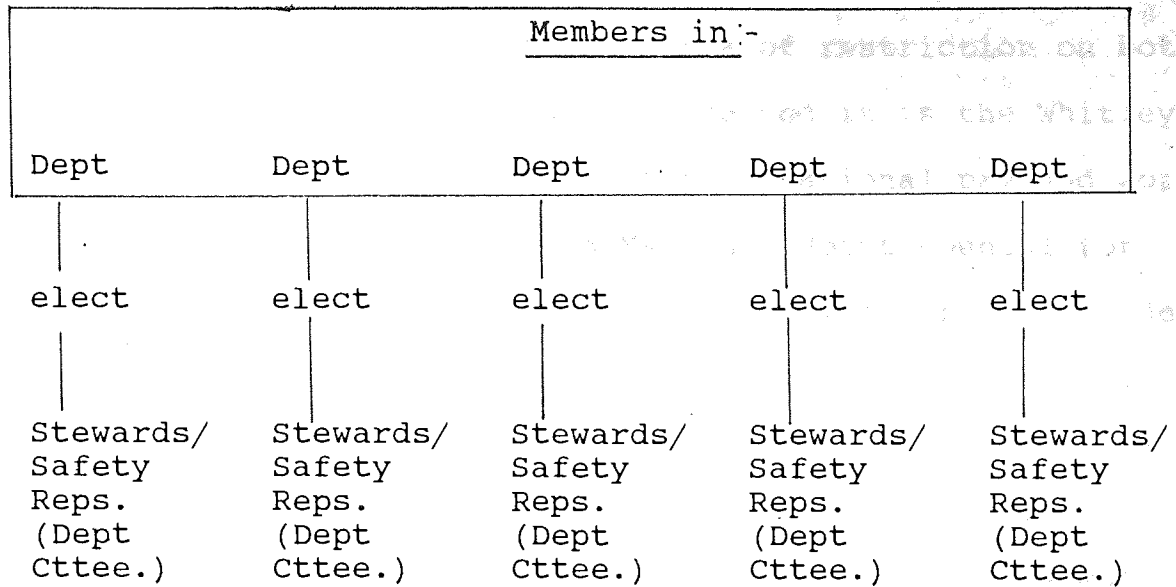
Branch officers, with the departmental stewards committees where appropriate, form the branch executive committee which is responsible for the day to day running of the branch, these persons being elected on a yearly basis. The branch may also appoint sub committees to the branch executive to deal with specific subjects. This is where the 'New Technology Sub-Committee' might be found in certain branches,

if one exists or existed at all. An illustration of a possible branch structure is shown in diagram 6 overleaf.

In addition to the points already raised in terms of lack of standardization it is not possible to generalize about how negotiations may happen at local level. Negotiations with employers vary according to branch organization and the service in which the branch exists. Branch officers or departmental representatives/stewards will handle minor individual grievances, the variation comes where more major disputes are concerned. Most local government, new town, water and university branches have the ability to negotiate through local joint committees/consultative committees; the staff sides of these bodies normally either being elected by all branch members or appointed from the executive committee. This staff panel will generally meet an equal number of employers representatives on a fairly formal negotiating basis.

Where electricity, gas, and the health services are concerned, the first level of formal negotiation is based on how the employers are organized, this usually being on an area or regional level. Normally, a full time NALGO officer will be involved early on in the negotiations. Consultative machinery does exist at local level, but it is more concerned with consultation and information than with negotiations.

Diagram Six: Possible Branch Structure



BRANCH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

OTHER GENERAL MEETINGS

It can be seen that the variations in branch structure and size give rise to considerable autonomy for some branches, the main restrictions on branch autonomy being indicated as in the areas of (a) bargaining and (b) industrial action. (2) National level is the chief source of restriction on both of these. Where bargaining is concerned it is the Whitley system which applies - meaning that national pay and working conditions are settled by a National Joint Council (or National Whitley Council) made up of employers and trade union representatives. The unique feature of Whitleyism is its method of voting. No decision can be reached by a simple majority of all the members of the council. A resolution is adopted only if it is supported by a majority of each of the two sides, voting separately.

This may sometimes handicap the staff side by preventing acceptance of a claim some employer representatives support but the majority oppose. On the other hand it can protect staff by enabling them to reject proposal they dislike.

NALGO state that: -

Thanks to this voting system the staff side of a Whitley Council can never be forced to accept at the negotiating table any worsening of pay and conditions. (3)

The view of Nicholson et al is that increasingly large sections of NALGO rank and file members have come to regard

the Whitley system with disfavour, believing it to exert insufficient pressure on management. (4)

As far the other restriction on branch autonomy, industrial action, is concerned the situation here is that it was as late as 1970 when the union made constitutional provision for strike action. Normally a strike can be called only if it is backed by the branch or branches concerned, by a majority of members who would have been affected and, most importantly, by the National Executive Committee or its emergency committee. Naturally, current law regarding the industrial action of trade unions must also be complied with.

Nicholson et al note that whilst these restrictions are a constraint on militant unionism, they do not prevent it, and there remains considerable scope at local level for union action, in terms of how members grievances are handled, how national agreements are interpreted, how local pay and conditions are affected by organizational change ie: new technology, and how the branch reacts to wider social issues.

(5)

The second level of NALGO organization is that of the district, these being geographically based and totalling twelve. The district boundaries are in fact blurred because gas, electricities, health and water regions do not always

coincide with local authority boundaries, meaning that there is some overlapping between districts. Within each district the District Council is the main policy making body, this body however, because of its size is not appropriate to deal with anything other than major policy issues affecting the district as a whole. Detailed business is carried out by district committees elected from District Council members and dealing with particular aspects of NALGO activity eg: Equal Opportunities, Health and Safety, Education, Finance and General Purposes. These committees may appoint sub-committees to focus on certain issues, for example, within NALGO's West Midland District, the New Technology Sub-Committee was formed as a sub committee of the district Finance and General Purposes Committee. This particular sub-committee drew its membership from service conditions representatives eg: local government, water etc, and District Council Officers, as well as co-opted 'specialists' and 'interested parties'.

Each district has a separate service conditions committee for each of the services which it covers, and each of these committees deals only with its own service, this is because the types of employment and occupation are very different and service conditions vary widely. Most districts have systems in which every branch is able to nominate at least one representative to the appropriate service conditions committee and from this representatives negotiate with

employers at regional level, known as Regional Joint Council or Provincial Council in local government. The service committees also link with the national service committees because each district service conditions committee provides a representative to its counterpart national committee, any matter affecting only one service being channelled to national level via this route. Diagram seven illustrates the organization at district level.

It is important to note that it is at district level that many NALGO members meet full time district officers for the first time, because every district has a district office. The significant issue here is the role of the district officers who at the request of a branch, can advise branch officers, representatives and ordinary members, handle cases for them and try to achieve satisfactory solutions to disputes, taking this to regional/provincial or national level if necessary. The level of involvement once again varies, for example in gas and electricity, where management deals with issues regionally, a district officer may become involved earlier on and on simpler issues than in other services, the important factor is that the involvement comes at the request of the branch. This will be discussed later in relation to the case studies. A typical district office structure is shown in diagram eight.

Diagram Seven: District Service Conditions

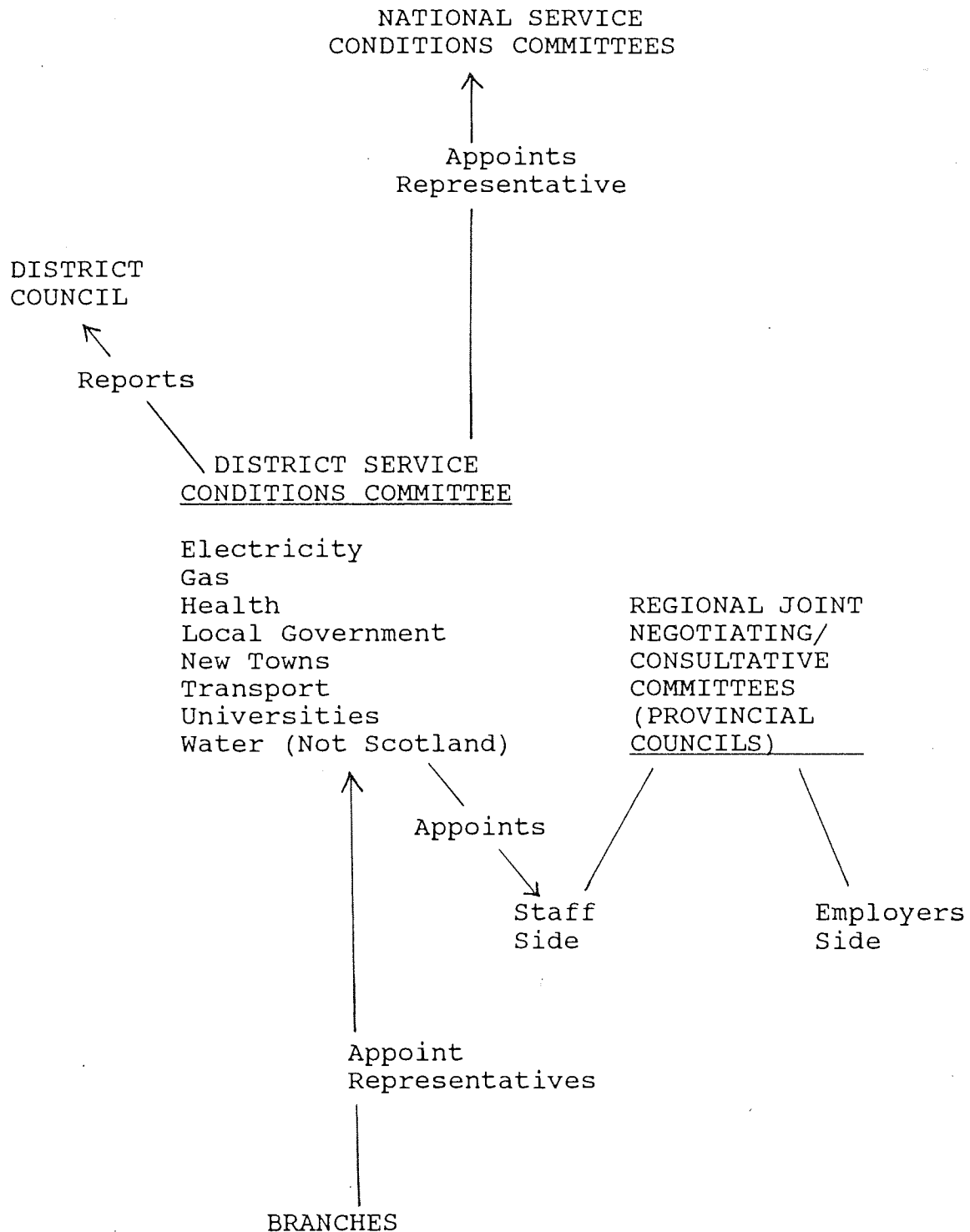
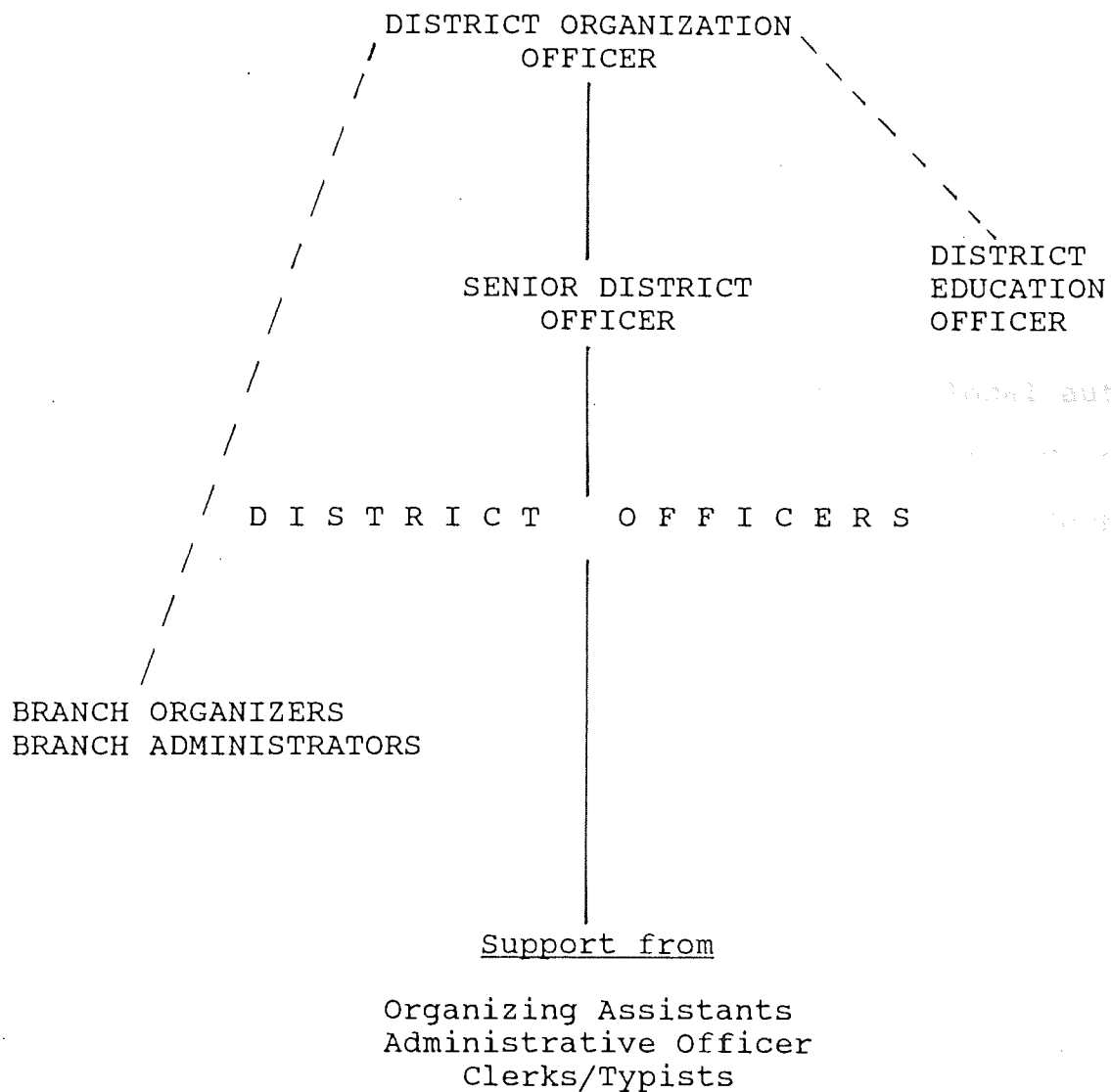


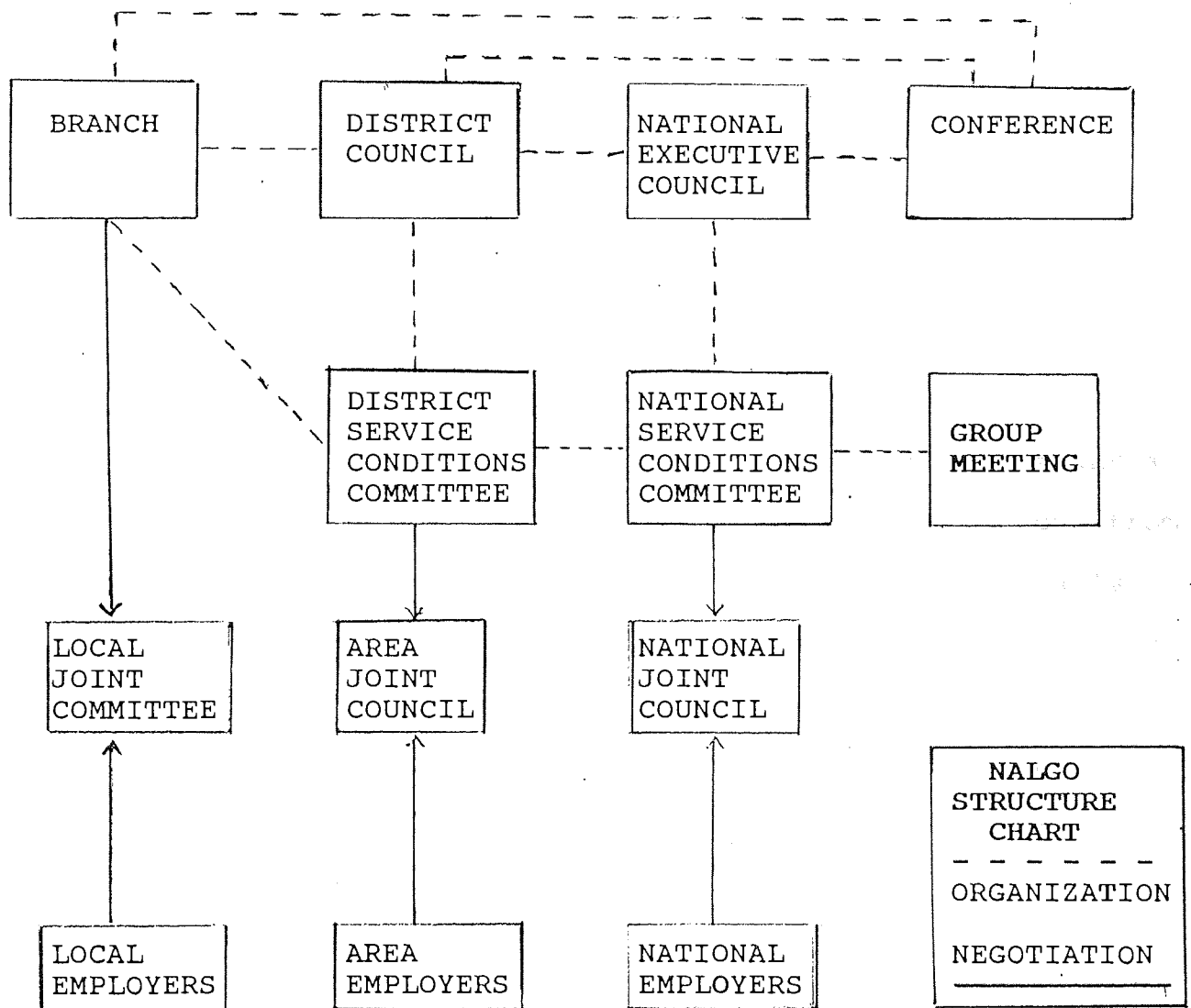
Diagram Eight:
Typical NALGO District Office Structure



At national level there are two major policy making bodies, Conference and the National Executive Council (NEC) as well as more committees but in essence the structure is still the same as at the other levels. In terms of new technology the two 'halves' of NALGO's organizational structure mentioned earlier can be illustrated by the policy making National Executive Council appointing in 1978 a 'New Technology Working Party' and the service conditions committee agreeing via the National Joint Council a Code of Practice on automated and new equipment for the electricity supply industry in 1979.

Finally, it is worth noting the joint negotiating machinery at national level for the two industries in the case studies. As regards Local Government both unions and local authority employers are represented on the 'National Joint Council for Local Authorities' Administrative, Professional, Technical and Clerical Services' (NJC). The NJC carries out the national negotiations on salaries and conditions of service; its decisions are binding on local authorities (unless expressed as 'permissive' recommendations) and it acts as the final court of appeal on the appeal and grievance procedures. In respect of the Water industry there is a National Joint Council for Water Staffs on which NALGO has thirteen out of nineteen seats. Diagram nine overleaf illustrates the overall structure of NALGO.

Diagram Nine: NALGO's Overall Organization



2.2 Membership Characteristics

A feature of the degree of influence on the manner of technological change at the workplace and its outcomes concerns the relative status of those parties who are involved in the negotiating process. What is interesting from the point of view of this project is the particular nature of the NALGO member, not simply in terms of relevant expertise usable in this process but in terms of the level of position within the workplace hierarchy and whether or not this can be viewed as a potential strength or weakness in negotiating over technological change. It would be unwise to draw any generalizations however it is worth considering several points: -

Firstly, NALGO's membership of 754,701 (6) not only spans a wide range of industries as noted earlier but also runs from top to bottom of those industries. In Nicholson et al's study of Sheffield City Council NALGO it was noted that the membership could be viewed as a white collar microcosm, containing analogues of almost all the administrative and technical specialists to be found across the range of white collar employment. (7)

NALGO themselves in one of their internal documents state that: -

Something almost peculiar to NALGO is that because chief officers and senior officers (including personnel officers) are usually NALGO members, NALGO representatives often find themselves negotiating with managers who are also members of the same union. Vic Feather, a past General Secretary of the TUC, once called this NALGO's 'internal incestuous relationship'.
(8)

Secondly, Nicholson et al also draw attention to the fact that for most of NALGO's history it has been dominated by the forces of high status conservatism with senior council officers regularly holding positions of local union responsibility and the national complexion of policy making being conciliatory and non-militant. (9) This picture however has certainly changed during the 1970's and 1980's, due to a combination of changing composition of the workforce - just over half being female - and changes in the social and economic context which have lead to an increased willingness to resort to industrial action, July 1989 seeing NALGO's first ever national strike after a 3-2 ballot majority of local government employees in support of strike action. It may be the case that these changes lay behind the creation of the Federated Union of Managerial and Professional Officers (FUMPO) on 1st January 1986. This body was formed after ballot results from twenty public sector unions (mostly small) had shown overwhelming support for an organization which it was claimed could better represent the interests of

managerial and professional employees. It was claimed that some of its membership derived from those officers ~~Crompton and~~ disenchanted with what they saw as the militant stand made by NALGO against Government cuts in the public sector. (10) NALGO's response was to mount an immediate publicity campaign aimed at members carrying professional status to discourage them from joining FUMPO. (11)

With regard to the nature of white collar trade unionism, Crompton and Jones draw a broad contrast between the membership of manual and white collar unions, in that whereas manual union membership is, or tends to be, drawn from occupations in a similar location in the occupational hierarchy and is therefore relatively homogeneous, this is not the case generally with white collar trade unions. Referring to three case studies, one which included NALGO, they noted that: -

Thus their membership will include routine, low level clerks - who, as we have consistently argued, should be viewed as sharing the same class position as the mass of the manual labour force - as well as individuals in positions of real power and authority within the organization. (12)

So NALGO's diverse membership includes those whose class position, according to sociologists, can be compared with the membership of manual trade unions, as well as those whose status could conceivably place them on a level of what has become known as the 'service class'.

The notion of the service class is described by Crompton and Jones (13) as including those occupations, often characterized by a high level of material reward and considerable autonomy within work itself, that direct, administer and control the major institutions of the advanced capitalist state, both public and private. With regard to the public sector, Child notes that: -

The State as employer or accreditor has strengthened the position of service workers by giving recognition to their occupations and their regulation of qualifications, standards and career progression. These professional groups are likely to seek control over the applications of new technology to ensure that it does not threaten their own work and market position. (14)

Apart from noting the above, it is not the intention of this project to become embroiled in a debate on the class position of the white collar worker. What is of most interest is the level of influence of the trade union member in the negotiating process. There are conflicting views on the value of having 'senior status' union members. For example, Ingham's view (15) is that there is more than a suspicion, albeit unsubstantiated, that white collar industrial relations at the local level are very strongly a function of individual personalities. Proximity to management and possibly shared union allegiances presenting the opportunity

for more informal grievance smoothing procedures than is perhaps open to manual employees. with the interests

This viewpoint would correspond to Francis's (16) previously mentioned suggestion of NALGO's 'success' in the area of negotiating new technology agreements being partly due to the senior status of some of their membership, and also Hindell's point that both the presence of, and the need to recruit, higher status members has been responsible for NALGO's 'respectable soft-sell approach'. (17)

Crompton and Jones refer to the status differences as 'multi-level unionism' (18) and recognize that in such cases the necessity to reconcile potentially conflicting interests within the same organization may lead to difficulties. In one of their case studies, based on a NALGO branch, they note that a minority of those interviewed recognized the potential conflict and felt that it worked to the disadvantage of the union. An illustration of this came from a NALGO member who said: -

It's wrong that the governor's in the same union - it doesn't seem a good idea - sitting on both sides of the fence. (19)

Another example of the conflict of interests referred to by Crompton and Jones is that of a graduate manager in one of their case studies who had been an active and militant committee member of ASTMS, but who had resigned his committee

position because the future direction (and therefore status) of his job would bring him into conflict with the interests of the members he was supposed to represent.

Nicholson et al in their discussion of shop steward role characteristics note that role demands can be conceptualized on two fronts: firstly, pressures exerted on the steward by members and by management and secondly, pressures on the steward deriving from his or her dual occupation of work and union roles. They note that 60% of those interviewed claimed that they experienced a 'two hats' problem of inter role conflict. (20) However they also noted that, in terms of their study, they found higher job status employees were most prepared to participate in the union and more willing to take on the representative role, the resultant dual occupancy of significant positions in both union and work organizations tending to foster further advantages of privileged access to both information and key personnel. (21)

Also, Crompton and Jones' analysis of the work of Nicholson, Blyton and Ursell points to the argument that the preponderance of high status employees in NALGO posts increased, rather than impeded, the organizational effectiveness of the union. This increased effectiveness coming from the union gaining greater resources of legitimate

authority, expertise, social contacts and information.

(22)

In summary, there is insufficient evidence from the case studies to date to draw any generalizations regarding the advantages or otherwise of high work status white collar trade union members. With regard to this project one must note that such 'multi-level' unionism is probably more apparent in NALGO's structure than any other white collar trade union and recognize the conflict in this. Secondly, if regarding the union membership as a 'resource' to draw upon in taking 'control' of the implementation of new technology at the workplace, there is no doubt that the characteristics of NALGO membership provide such a resource - what is in question is the extent to which that resource has been used in relation to the introduction of new technology.

2.3 The Steward System

Daniel points out that the one issue upon which all parties and representative groups in industry, commerce and administration agree is that there should be worker involvement in the introduction of technological change.

(23) The exact nature of this involvement however is subject to wide ranging debate but as far as 'consultation' over the introduction of technological change is concerned Daniel's work provide a comprehensive picture of the extent and form of consultation for both manual and non-manual workers. (24) The forms of consultation run through formal channels, both union and non union, and informal channels which cover discussions with individual workers and meetings with groups of workers. As far as the formal union channel is concerned, it is the consultation with the union shop steward that is most significant.

In NALGO's case, it has only been in recent years that there has been a major effort to implement a widespread adoption of a steward system. This stemmed from the virtual trebling of NALGO's membership since the 1960's coupled with major changes in the structure of the services in which its members were employed. In 1976 a Communications Working Party set up by the National Executive Council recommended that

branches move to adopting a steward system. The mainhes and argument of the working party in support of the steward system was that the creation of large branches, as a result of growth and re-organization, had left many small groups isolated from the main body of members in the branch. They were also worried that the workload of branch officers had become too great and needed to be spread.

The key to the system was that of negotiating responsibilities, it was stressed by the Communication Working Party that this was not simply a delegation of more tasks to the departmental representatives, who formed the traditional link between branch executives and members. What was proposed was a partial decentralization of responsibilities by creating a new pattern of 'constituencies', in each of which an elected steward would be responsible to and for a particular group of members and negotiate on behalf of this group and of individuals within the group. The 1977 NALGO Conference accepted the recommendation of the Communications Working Party and called on the National Executive Council to issue guidance to branches on its implementation.

Implementation however was slow, a survey carried out in 1982 showed that 34% of responding branches had a steward system and that a further 6% had agreed to introduce one. Some 36% were either undecided or had not considered the issue. (25) The slow adoption of the system lead to a composite motion

being presented to the 1983 Conference by eight branches and two district councils. The motion lead Conference to reaffirm NALGO policy in support of steward systems and instructed the National Executive Council to mount a campaign to get all branches to adopt stewards systems and to set up a Campaign Committee to oversee progress.

In NALGO's view, the steward has an essential role in four main areas. Firstly negotiation, each steward having the power to negotiate with local management on local working conditions subject to the branch executive committees control. Secondly communication, stewards being responsible for a two way flow, giving out information to members and taking opinions and decisions back to NALGO. Thirdly organization, this implies working with branch officers on matters such as new technology, health and safety, equal opportunities and education. Lastly recruitment, it being seen as a primary tack of a steward to recruit new members.

It is interesting to note that the slow pace of adoption of steward systems corresponds with a generally high pace of introduction of technological change during this period. The tentative suggestion could be made that NALGO's organizational structure was (and still is) in a period of transition and therefore the ability to plan for a participative strategy for technological change was limited by operational factors. The respect for branch autonomy is

reflected in NALGO publications on the steward system, for example the guide to steward systems says: -

A variety of steward systems already exist within NALGO. It is not the purpose of these guide-lines to lay down any rigid or ideal steward system. (26)

Even where steward systems do exist in NALGO branches, the effectiveness of those stewards in terms of the four elements in the role outlined previously remains to be judged in case study work. Certainly the four elements of negotiation, communication, organization and recruitment are highly significant in relation to the overall impact branches have in dealing with the introduction of new technology.

Kessler's work on shop stewards in local government (27) drew the conclusion that, in contrast to the powerful manufacturing steward, acting as a bargainer, capable of maintaining a regular contact with constituents, able to meet with fellow stewards in strong plant wide committees, the local government steward had been revealed as inexperienced, able to perform only a limited number of tasks, and faced major difficulties in servicing constituents and developing contacts with fellow stewards across large areas and a wide range of occupational groups. (28)

Whilst Kessler was examining the manual worker stewards in local government, the model of steward organization which he

developed contained characteristics which he points out may be directly applicable to the white collar groups within local government. These characteristics were as follows:

(29)

1. The work group has very limited significance as a basis of steward representation, initial organization is dependent on the intervention of branch or full time union officers.
2. Collective bargaining forms only a very small part of the steward's activities.
3. Geographical dispersion inhibits informal interaction both between stewards, and between stewards and their constituents.
4. The diversity of occupational groups employed in self contained services leads to an inherent and deep-seated tendency towards fragmentation in organization.
5. The degree of fragmentation or unity of steward organization is dependent on branch structure and the pattern of consultative machinery.
6. The political/electoral basis of strategic decision making may influence steward development and introduce major sources of uncertainty into steward - management relations.

Bearing in mind that the bulk of NALGO's membership is in the Local Government sector the extent to which Kessler's characteristics operate in relation to the white collar Local Government steward is of obvious importance in assessing the significance and effectiveness of the steward in the process of technological change at the workplace.

CHAPTER THREE

- 3.1 NALGO'S POLICY ON NEW TECHNOLOGY - THE NEW
TECHNOLOGY WORKING PARTY
- 3.2 NALGO'S PUBLISHED RESPONSE

3.1 NALGO's Policy on New Technology - The New Technology Working Party

The policy documents and publicity materials on new technology produced by NALGO stem largely from the New Technology Working Party which was set up by the National Executive Council's Economic Committee and first met in March 1979. The terms of reference of the New Technology Working Party were:

1. To Examine recent developments and probable future developments in computer technology.
2. To investigate and attempt to determine the potential of these developments in terms of their practical applications in NALGO's Services.
3. To consider what steps could be taken by NALGO to prevent the harshest consequences to their members inherent in the application of advanced computer technology.
4. To make recommendations to the TUC for action to be taken on a national and possibly international level, in view of the inevitable disparity, against the background of present concepts, which developments in computer technology will create between the number of people requiring work and the number for whom work is available.

5. To consider all other matters relevant to this subject.

(1)

The membership of the Working Party comprised three representatives of the Economic Committee, one representative of each of the national service conditions committees and the Chairman of the Economic Committee (ex-officio), making a membership of eleven. Each representative also had a nominated substitute in case of non-attendance. Meetings of the Working Party were also attended by full time NALGO officers comprised of the Deputy General Secretary and a Research Officer and Research Assistants. The Research Officer acting as Secretary to the Working Party and, with the Research Assistants, being responsible for the production of reports and documentation for discussion and approval of the Working Party.

Resolution 109 carried at the 1979 NALGO Annual Conference welcomed the setting up of the Working Party, expected NALGO to play a full role in the development of TUC strategy, (2) urged the union to establish links with comparable unions in other countries to exchange information and called for an early and comprehensive report and for the dissemination of advice to members.

The Working Party's first year functions were based upon collecting information on the experience of other unions and collating available information on what was happening or

proposed in NALGO services. This led to the issuing of a preliminary guidance leaflet to branches in November 1979, (3) followed in 1980 by the booklet 'New Technology - A Guide to NALGO Negotiators'

NALGO Annual conference 1980 passed two motions on new technology which were referred to the national service conditions committees and the New Technology Working Party for action. The first motion emphasized the need for appropriate trade union measures to ensure that the benefits of new technology were distributed equitably throughout society. The second motion was most interesting in that it recommended that NALGO should establish a technical capability at national level to make a full assessment of the impact of new technology. (4) It also argued that the introduction, installation and purchase of new technology should be conditional on there being: no reduction in manning levels; no immediate or subsequent devaluing of the wages or skill levels of the jobs; full consultation at all levels with members affected prior to the introduction of new technology; new arrangements to be agreed by the staff involved and the branch; no deterioration in health and safety standards. (5)

During 1981 the Working Party was responsible for the publication of 'The Future with New Technology - A NALGO View' and an accompanying leaflet, 'New Technology - Threat or Promise'. In line with the 1979 Annual Conference motion to look at the international aspects of new technology, members

of the Working Party represented the TUC at a meeting in Geneva of the International Labour Organization's Advisory Committee on Salaried Employees and Professional Workers which considered, as one of two items, the effects of technological and structural change on the employment and working conditions of workers. Also the Working Party was represented at the Public Services International Technology meeting held in Brussels which was particularly devoted to new technology in the health service and the public administration sector.

This involvement in international aspects of new technology was continued during 1982 with representation at a Brussels seminar organized by the Trade Union Research Unit, Ruskin College, Oxford and the European Commission to discuss the cross cultural research project on new technology underway in five European countries and, representation on the Public Services International Working Party on New Technology.

One of the themes for the Working Party during 1982 was to launch a programme to raise member's awareness of new technology. The key element in this was the production of a new technology pack and a new technology tape/slide show to promote member's awareness of the employment implications of new technology and the need to negotiate agreements. The new technology pack contained a variety of materials to increase and enhance branch publicity and member discussion on new technology and was sent to branch education secretaries. The tape/slide show was available for branches to borrow from

district offices or was available for purchase from NALGO headquarters.

The Annual Reports of the Working Party during the period from 1980 to 1984 stressed the need to negotiate technology agreements with special consideration to be given to reductions in the working week linked wherever possible to the creation of new jobs or the maintenance of existing job levels at the very least. A motion at the 1983 Annual Conference endorsed this approach but also called on the National Executive Council to give full support to branches which refused to co-operate with the introduction of new technology in the absence of satisfactory agreement, but leaving it to branches' individually to decide in the light of local circumstances whether or not any agreement was satisfactory.

During 1983 the Working Party continued the process of monitoring technological change in the workplace and was involved in two national service conditions surveys in local government and in universities. Also highlighted, given the extent of NALGO's female membership, was the special vulnerability of women members to new technology. The 1983 Annual Report notes:-

It is now generally acknowledged that office workers, in particular, clerical workers, typists, secretaries and machine operators will be especially affected by new technology in the first instance and these grades are predominantly occupied by women. (6)

This concern was reflected in the 1984 leaflet entitled 'Women and New Technology - Hardware, Software Beware' which highlighted the issue.

By 1985 the Working Party was aware that the two booklets which formed the mainstay of NALGO's new technology publicity were five years old and were in need of amendment and updating. With this in mind the Working Party undertook a review of materials with the aim of: -

Producing various new publicity materials which will completely update your Council's views and advice on new technology. (7)

The result of this exercise was the fifteen page booklet published in 1986 entitled 'New Technology and Change - NALGO negotiating guide-lines' and the leaflet 'New Technology - the NALGO view'.

The 1985 Annual Report of the New Technology Working Party noted that a motion had been submitted to the Annual Conference, which was not reached, calling for improved training and retraining for staff on the introduction of microelectronic systems and consequent changing patterns of work. It is in relation to this that the report emphasizes the Working Party's concerns at this whole area and the fact that work had commenced on the question of job content and design. (8)

The concern with job design is reflected in the 1986 and 1987 reports of the Working Party, pointing to meetings with the National Equal Opportunities Committee to look at the Sheffield polytechnic 'human centered' office systems project and making reference to the Scandinavian Utopia Project. The question of job design also gave rise to a fringe meeting at the 1987 Conference where speakers from the Civil and Public Services Association, Sheffield City Council and Sheffield Polytechnic gave presentations.

In February 1986 the Working Party considered an analysis of 147 new technology agreements reached between 1983 and 1985 and compared it to an earlier analysis of 88 new technology agreements reached in the years prior to 1983. The Working Party noted that the most striking differences between the two sets of agreements was the number of agreements negotiated after 1983 which insisted on the need for agreement to be reached over any changes resulting from the use of new technology (92%) as opposed to more consultation by the employer. Also, whereas 'status quo' clauses (ensuring no changes would occur until agreement had been achieved between the branch and the employer) were extremely unusual in pre-1983 agreements, 36% of the post 1983 agreements had managed to include such a clause.

NALGO's national service conditions committees considered the future of the New Technology Working Party during 1987 and

their responses were considered at the October Working Party meeting. Annual Report for 1987 states:

It was clear that in the past the Working Party had proved an invaluable forum for new technology issues but that currently it was considered that the issues could equally well be dealt with by individual national service conditions committees and other committees such as the Economic Committee, the National Health and Safety Committee and the National Equal Opportunities Committee as and when appropriate. Consequently it was agreed to disband the Working Party. (10)

Throughout the life-span of the Working Party it was NALGO's research department that had been the driving force in terms of bringing the issues to members and in producing the published responses. The disbanding of the Working Party did not leave NALGO with a total break in terms of gathering information on new technology as it was agreed that a data bank on new technology would continue to be maintained by the Research Section at Headquarters and that regular bulletins would be issued to national service conditions committees.

Examination of the Working Party's annual reports from 1979 to 1987 show a wide range of issues relating to new technology were discussed. For example, the position of women and equal opportunities, job design and content, international developments, links with university research projects, technology agreements, health and safety, biotechnology, homeworking, training and retraining, to name but a few. Surveys to monitor developments in NALGO services were undertaken and a range of publicity materials produced.

of reference under
However, it comes as little surprise that the Working Party was disbanded when one reflects upon NALGO's structure and the autonomy of the different services and of individual branches. Also, by 1987, new technology I would suggest was no longer being seen as a 'forefront' issue. Not only could it not really be called 'new' by this time but other issues had overtaken it in terms of priorities in different services ie. privatization, Local Government spending controls. Therefore new technology tended to be seen in terms of traditional collective bargaining issues within service conditions.

The centralized documentation that was produced was undoubtedly valuable in terms of member education and did present a published NALGO response to new technology. It would appear though, that timing is critical, for the opportunity to seize the initiative in the early stages of the introduction of new technology was missed. It was the early 1980's that probably provided the best opportunity for the union to take some form of 'radical' action that could have helped branches to take the initiative over new technology. There are hints at this, for example the 1980 Annual Conference motion that recommended that NALGO establish a technical capacity at national level to make a full assessment of the impact of new technology never seems to have been taken on board.

The Working Party largely met the terms of reference under which it was set up. Those terms of reference, it could suggested, never really provided a positive framework for action. For example, in terms of wording, item number three in the terms of reference could have been rewritten from: -

To consider what steps can be taken by NALGO to prevent the harshest consequences to our members inherent in the applications of advanced computer technology. (11)

to: -

To consider the positive opportunities that NALGO can take to use the applications of advanced computer technology for the benefit of our members.

There seemed to be tendency in the Working Party to concentrate on 'what is happening in', rather than 'what should NALGO be doing'. Perhaps this is natural given the involvement of the full time research officials in the Working Party's activities.

3.2 NALGO - The Published Response on New Technology

NALGO's published response to new technology spans the period from 1979 to 1986, a chronology is detailed overleaf. The first statement, a three page leaflet entitled 'The Micro-chip Revolution - Your Job, Your Health, Your Pay' (12) was published in November 1979 as preliminary advice to

NALGO New Technology Publicity - A Chronology

- 1979 The Micro-chip Revolution & your job, your pay, your health - Leaflet
- 1980 New Technology - A guide for NALGO negotiators - Booklet
- 1981 The Future with New Technology - A NALGO View - Booklet
- 1981 New Technology - Threat or Promise? - Leaflet
- 1984 Working Terms - NALGO video about New Technology
- 1985 Hardware, Software, Beware! - Women and New Technology - Leaflet
- 1985 Hardware, Software, Beware! - Two page review of above in NALGO News, Friday 7th June 1985, PP 4-5
- 1986 New Technology Agreement Survey - Two page review in NALGO News, Friday 7th March 1986, PP 4-5.
- 1986 The Health & Safety Aspect of VDU Work - Sixteen page NALGO Health & Safety Briefing issued for the attention of Safety Representatives
- 1986 New Technology, Time to make up your mind - Leaflet
- 1986 New Technology and Change - NALGO negotiation guide-lines - Fifteen page booklet
- 1986 New Technology, The NALGO View - Leaflet
- 1987 New Technology and Change - Review of Booklet, Three page feature in NALGO News, Friday 31st July, PP 4-6

negotiators. This leaflet was intended to 'stir members to action' by giving them a basic awareness of the implications of new technology in the office and advised negotiators: -

To refuse to agree to agree to the operation of word processors, etc, until a satisfactory agreement has been reached at local level, possibly with the backing of a national agreement. (13)

The leaflet also contained a check-list for negotiators outlining what were considered the minimum steps to take in negotiating technology agreements.

This leaflet was followed in May 1980 by the first major publication, a forty-six page booklet intended to give:

More comprehensive guidance to assist in the negotiation of new technology agreements covering the employment, pay, and health implications of the introduction of new technology. (14)

In common with other trade union responses of this period the booklet contained a section outlining the types of new technology and their implications and more specific chapters dealing with the steps to follow in negotiating a new technology agreement and giving a 'model' new technology agreement.

The principles upon which NALGO's National Executive Council based their approach to new technology were set out in the introductory chapter of the booklet and follow in general the

responses made by other trade unions and the TUC at this time. The principles can be summarized as follows: -

- 1 NALGO noted the 'disturbing' unemployment forecasts for the next decade and advocated a reflationary strategy to deal with this but point out that 'technological' unemployment requires special measures to be taken, and that trade union action was essential to safeguard overall employment levels.
- 2 The benefits of new technology could only be distributed fairly if employment levels were maintained. NALGO's position was that within any particular employing organization every effort must be made to ensure that the total number of posts were maintained with retraining and redeployment where necessary.
- 3 The 'selling' of jobs through productivity agreements, redundancy payments of other means must be rejected. Also the erosion of employment levels through natural wastage and nonfilling of vacancies should not be accepted.
- 4 A reduction in the working week, longer holidays, extended education and a reduction in the retirement age were called for, whilst maintaining and increasing incomes in line with output.

5 NALGO called for greater investment in leisure, noting that the local authorities have a primary role to play here. They also called for job creation in areas of work where human contact is involved and valued, eg: social work. Finally, the NEC noted that better and more relevant education and training at all levels, including trade union studies, would be required to adapt to the changing circumstances brought on by the introduction of new technology. (16)

These principles therefore constituted NALGO's first 'macro' level statement of its policy in relation to new technology, most of the rest of the booklet being concerned with the 'micro' level issues of negotiating technology agreements as a means of achieving the above.

The 'macro' theme was further developed in the second major NALGO publication on new technology, 'The Future with New Technology - A NALGO View' (17) published in July 1981 along with a one page leaflet aimed at raising individual member awareness entitled 'New Technology - Threat or Promise?' (18)

This new booklet set out the National Executive Council's approach to the wider social and economic issues raised by the emergence of new technology and discussed the broader implication of new technology for society to provide: -

A more substantial political context in which negotiating advice and objectives may be set. (19)

As well as a chapter dealing with the wider issues of new technology there were chapters dealing with its implications for employees and, interestingly a chapter devoted to an examination of international developments in new technology and trade union approaches taken in different countries such as West Germany, the USA, Norway, Japan, France and Sweden.

One of the major concerns of the booklet was that of technological unemployment, particularly compounding in NALGO's view the economic recession of the late 1970's and early 1980's. Their approach to this was to call for central planning, believing that only a government exercising positive controls over employers and the economy could ensure the smooth and equitable introduction of new technology. For example NALGO say:

A free market approach will not meet the social challenge of new technology, nor is there an automatic route whereby new technologies will be translated into social advance. (20)

and: -

NALGO believes, therefore, that new technologies can only be equitably and successfully introduced in a planned economic and social environment. (21)

The reliance on collective bargaining as a means of control of new technology by trade unions is highlighted in the 1981 NALGO Annual Report, (22) and yet the negative aspects of this approach are recognized by NALGO when they say:-

At the workplace trade unionists can be really effective, but in a largely negative way, by preventing the introduction of new technology until agreement on jobs, working arrangements, health and pay is reached. (23)

The concluding paragraph (24) of 'The Future with New Technology -A NALGO View' stresses the urgency of the need for trade union action pointing out that in the NALGO view, the short term is vital to establish and maintain trade union control over the introduction of and operating arrangements for new technology, this being seen as achieved through the medium of technology agreements. They go as far as to say that:-

The long term struggle depends crucially on the short term union action. (25)

The two booklets and leaflets referred to so far formed the published response up until 1984, the intervening years being seen as a period of raising member awareness and of collecting data on the handling of technological change within NALGO services. The awareness raising exercise was supported in 1984 by the production of NALGO's first video on the new technology, entitled 'Working Terms'. The 23 minute video

was designed to be shown at short meetings of members and on trade union courses. The video was a follow-up to the new technology tape/slide show produced for members in 1982. It looked at two separate case studies of the introduction of new technology in the offices of a metropolitan borough council in the Greater Manchester area. The two case studies showed how problems could arise despite the existence of a new technology agreement. Guidance notes on the use of the video were prepared by the Research Section at NALGO Headquarters which included: -

1. Details of the issues raised by the two case studies.
2. Hints on how to use the video and how to encourage discussions among members after a showing.
3. Sample exercises/activities.

The 1986 Annual Report noted that over 175 copies of the video had been sold to branches and that many branches had borrowed District copies or used the 16 mm film version to show at Annual General Meetings, day schools and branch executive meetings. (26)

The National Executive Council, through the New Technology Working Party had since 1982 been paying particular attention to the issues concerning women members and technological change. In March 1984 the Trades Union Congress published a

discussion document entitled 'Women and New Technology' (27) and NALGO followed this in 1985 with a special leaflet aimed at women members entitled 'Hardware, Software, Beware' (28). Once again, this was essentially an awareness raising leaflet, emphasizing the vulnerability of the female NALGO member because of the nature of their work. It also drew attention to the particular concerns regarding the health and safety aspects of visual display units.

The area of health and safety, perhaps because of the Statutory back up of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, does appear to be an area where trade unions can make headway in relation to the introduction of new technology. It is also one of the very 'real' issues which can prove to be successful in eliciting member participation. February 1986 saw the publication of a sixteen page booklet, 'The Health and Safety Aspects of VDU Work' by NALGO's National Health and Safety Committee. (29)

NALGO first produced advice on the health and safety aspects of VDU work in 1979. This advice was similar to that of other unions and 'experts' in that it concentrated mainly on the equipment itself. The 1986 publication differed in that it recognized that the technology itself had changed in the intervening period and that to concentrate only on equipment meant that issues such as the working environment and, more importantly, the nature of the work itself, were missed. Therefore this booklet contained an 'action check-list' for

branches to examine, at the planning stage, areas such as job content/job design and the organization of VDU work. (30) It is worth stressing that this document was the result of the National Health and Safety Committee and not the New Technology Working Party. The reports of the Working Party contained within the 1986 and 1987 NALGO Annual Reports make no mention of it.

1986 was to see NALGO's last publications on new technology before the Working Party was wound up. These comprised two more leaflets, 'New Technology - the NALGO View' (31) and 'New Technology Time to Make Your Mind up'. (32) These leaflets accepted that the earlier pessimism over large scale job loss, a major fear in the 1980 and 1981 booklets, was misplaced. NALGO's explanations for this were as follows:-

1. New technology had not always matched up to expectations and, at the same time employers themselves had often expected too much of new technology, disillusionment leading to a reluctance to invest.
2. Equipment manufacturers had not always been able to agree common standards.
3. Employers had used new technology to extend employees duties rather than cut jobs.
4. Spending cuts meant that money for new technology in the

public sector had not always been available. (33)

The leaflets also placed emphasis on job content/design as an important factor in the introduction of new technology and realized health and safety issues as a major concern.

The fifteen page booklet, 'New Technology and Change' (34) represented NALGO's re-examination of the issues raised in its 1980 guide to negotiators with the aim of:-

Not only helping those branches without an agreement to negotiate and implement one, but also giving branches that have an agreement a framework within which they can assess how effective it has been and whether improvements are needed. (35)

Essentially, NALGO's viewpoint remained the same as in its earlier documents, calling for the benefits of new technology on a national scale to be achieved through a properly planned economy and stating that in the absence of this improvements must be achieved at branch level through negotiated technology agreements. It is interesting to note that although NALGO say:-

Our attitude to new technology should not be purely defensive. (36)

the technology agreement is still seen as the central way forward. This is despite a recognition in the document, (following the 1985 survey of technology agreements) that in terms of the aims of technology agreements being to protect

and improve workers conditions of service, protection is achieved more often than improvement. (37)

The remainder of the booklet set out the main elements to be negotiated in technology agreements, giving examples from branch agreements across the country and listing a series of questions on each element for negotiators to use as a method of review. Two appendices were contained in the booklet, an update on new technology negotiations in NALGO services, and a check-list for stewards. Despite the clearly stated principle that the introduction of new technology is based on consultation and joint agreement, (38) the check-list for stewards is very much a reactive list of points in that it makes the assumption that the introduction of new technology is a one-way exercise, from the employer. This can be illustrated by the following sample of points from the check-list and by the fact that the appendix starts off with the statement: -

Make sure management fully answer this minimum list of points before any application or proposal for new technology is considered by members affected and their stewards. (39)

Sample of points from check-list:-

1. Description of proposal/application including timetable.
2. Employers objectives including benefits to be obtained and value for money considerations.

3. Details of planned trials/demonstrations.
4. Details of potential staffing implications including changes in staffing levels, job descriptions, working hours, redeployment and reorganization. (40)

In conclusion, NALGO's published response on new technology provided the union with at minimum some policy statements and offered helpful guide-lines for the negotiation of technology agreements. The response however could hardly be termed 'radical' despite the 1979 leaflet speaking of trade unions 'taking control of the situation now'. (41) The extent of the achievement of this can be drawn from the fact that the 1986 leaflet was still saying, 'unions must seize the initiative'. (42) The case studies to follow offer an insight into the extent at local level of opportunities for 'seizing the initiative'.

CHAPTER FOUR

- 4.1 THE WATER INDUSTRY AND NEW TECHNOLOGY - BACKGROUND
- 4.2 CASE STUDIES - THE SEVERN-TRENT WATER AUTHORITY
- 4.3 SCIENTIFIC SERVICES - THE JOINT MANAGEMENT/UNION STUDY
- 4.4 SCIENTIFIC SERVICES - THE SITUATION WITHIN THE SEVERN-TRENT WATER AUTHORITY
 - 4.4.1 SCIENTIFIC SERVICES - THE SEVERN-TRENT WATER AUTHORITY REVIEW
 - 4.4.2 SCIENTIFIC SERVICES IN THE SEVERN TRENT WATER AUTHORITY - THE NALGO RESPONSE
- 4.5 THE BILLING OPERATION - THE JOINT MANAGEMENT UNION STUDY
- 4.6 THE BILLING OPERATION WITHIN SEVERN-TRENT WATER AUTHORITY - THE REVIEW
 - 4.6.1 THE BILLING OPERATION WITHIN THE SEVERN TRENT WATER AUTHORITY - THE NALGO RESPONSE

4.1 The Water Industry and New Technology - Background

The last two decades have seen major changes in the organization and structure of the Water industry in England and Wales, with the most major change, that of privatization, due to take place in November 1989. Until privatization takes place, the most important re-organization occurred in 1974 following the 1973 Water Act.

Prior to that date the only step towards integrated management in the water industry had come ten years previously when the River Authorities were given the task of controlling the water resources of their catchments. It is possible to view the situation before 1974 in terms of 'clean' and 'dirty' water. On the clean water side of distribution and supply there were some 187 Water Boards responsible, including 28 private Water companies (these are statutory companies created by individual Acts of Parliament and although they operate under the various Companies Acts, their financial and operational activities are strictly controlled - they remained intact under the 1973 Act). On the dirty water side, which was handled by local authorities, there were 1,366 separate local authorities in 1973 dealing with sewerage and sewage disposal, most of them too small to cope with capital projects needed for the dirty water cycle.

The current framework of the water industry was created by the 1973 Act, which cut across the barriers between clean and

dirty water and local government, to set up 10 Water Authorities. Each authority has responsibility not only for the development of its water resources, supply and distribution, sewerage provision, sewage treatment, pollution control, river management, but also for fisheries and recreation, land drainage and sea defences. The ten Water Authorities in effect constituted a nationalized industry and as such are subject to the tight network of financial control imposed by the government. In addition, membership of the EEC meant that the stringent EEC directives on water supply and treatment could only be met through a new organizational structure.

The Water Services industry employs around 50,000 staff of whom some 30,000 are administrative, technical, professional, clerical and supervisory staff. Of this 30,000, NALGO has some 25,000 members. (1)

The Water industry is no newcomer to technological change, NALGO themselves say, 'The water industry has always been highly automated and technologically efficient'. (2) The point is that this automation has been largely on the process side whereas: -

new and replacement technology puts many 'white collar' jobs at risk and will change the content and nature of many other jobs. (3)

NALGO's National Water Committee first issued a circular to

water branches in January 1980 (4) setting out its policy on the introduction of new technology in the water industry. This policy can be summarized as: -

- 1 No further new technology should be introduced without prior written agreement at Regional Joint Council level, and branches and district committees should ensure that the status quo clause operates until agreement is reached.
- 2 The Staff Side of the Regional Joint Council should resist job loss and should attempt to reduce or eliminate the threat of job losses by jointly agreeing retraining schemes, a reduction in the use of outside staff, a no compulsory redundancy agreement and by considering reducing overtime. The Staff Side of the National Joint Council should mitigate the possibility of job losses by seeking substantial improvements on the Employers Side's voluntary severance scheme and a voluntary early retirement policy.
- 3 Staff Sides of the Regional Joint Council and the National Joint Council should seek agreements on the various health and safety aspects of new technology before new technology equipment is introduced and re-examine existing equipment.
- 4 A National Joint Sub Committee of the National Joint

Council, which was set up in January 1980 at the Staff Side's request, will examine and report to the National Joint Council on conditions of service implications and the Staff Sides of Regional Joint Councils should ensure that the correct grades are established for new posts.

(5)

The National Joint Sub Committee of the National Joint Council referred to above was established with the following terms of reference: -

- 1 To ascertain the future impact of introducing new technology within all areas of work carried out by non-manual employees.
- 2 To examine the possible scale and scope of such applications, and consider future possible developments against a probable timescale.
- 3 To examine, identify and report to National Joint Council on the likely effect on non-manual employees in terms of both numbers involved, skills required and any other relevant factors, including conditions of service.
- 4 To examine and identify the training requirements and initiatives necessary to keep pace with such development.

5 It will be for the National Joint Council to consider
the effects of the findings in terms of pay and
conditions of service. (6)

Previously, in June 1979, the National Water Committee had established a Sub Committee on New Technology to look at the implications for the water industry staff and had sent out a questionnaire to branches in November 1979 (7) to gain a clearer picture of the extent to which new technology had been introduced and the effects of its introduction. In addition, this circular had advised branches to appoint a branch executive member with special responsibility for issues arising out of the introduction of new technology and had advised district committees to establish new technology sub committees to co-ordinate the introduction of new technology at a regional level. In addition, in March 1980 the National Water Committee issued guide-lines for use by district water committees when negotiating procedural agreements, (8) and emphasized that procedural agreements should be negotiated at regional levels.

In 1980, after an initiative by the Trade Union side, the National Joint Council for Water Service Staffs decided that research should jointly be undertaken to examine the manpower implications of new technology to the employees in the Water industry. It was left to the Joint Sub-committee of the National Joint Council on New Technology to decide the best

way of undertaking this research. It was decided that the scope of the research programme would cover three main areas:

- 1 Administration
- 2 Engineering Services
- 3 Automated Plants (Water Treatment/distribution and Sewage Treatment)

For the purposes of this project, given that the bulk of NALGO members are located in the administrative side, I will concentrate on this aspect only.

It was agreed in January 1981 that external consultants would be used for the administrative research study and Urwick - Nexios Consultants Ltd were retained to conduct the research under the direction of the National Joint Sub-Committee. The consultants were jointly selected by both the Staff and Management side and were jointly monitored. The brief given to the consultants was to identify the developments in equipment which were likely to be available within a five year period and the type of staff and skills required to operate such equipment. The studies centred on two Water Authorities. Thames Water and Wessex Water and the Regional Joint Councils and branch representatives involved were fully consulted.

It should be noted, that as a backdrop to this research, an application had been made to the EEC Social Fund, via the then Manpower Services Commission, for a sum of £3 million over five years to fund training, retraining and redeployment of employees within the Water industry.

The report was made available in July 1981 (9) and accepted by the National Joint Council in October of that year.

The central projection for employment in the industry was that there would be a net loss of 3% of jobs over the next five years. It was based on the premise that the degree of financial pressure would remain roughly at the same levels, that the benefits of new technology would be split between a higher level of service and a lower level of staff, and that not all organizational changes needed to ensure maximum productivity gains would be implemented.

The maximum level of job loss considered conceivable in the report was roughly four times the above figure - 12%. Equally important, the report estimated that some 10,000 staff would need training over and above 'awareness training'. The jobs expected to disappear were cited as 'almost all relatively low level': -

The majority are clerical jobs split almost equally between the direct billing function and other predominantly financial activities such as pay-roll, stock control and accounts. In addition, roughly equal numbers of secretaries, typists and data preparation staff will be displaced. (10)

Following discussion between the Management and Staff sides a realistic projection of a 3% job loss over five years was accepted, together with an estimate that 40% of staff would need 'awareness' training and a further 10,000 staff more in-depth training in systems and procedures. This training it was recommended, should be undertaken by the individual regional water authorities under the auspices of national and regional negotiating machinery.

Apart from the Urwick - Nexos Report, there was also being undertaken a two year joint study by Water industry employers and staff associations on the effects of new technology on Water industry employees. This joint study was described as 'possibly unique', (11) and resulted in the publication of a major report entitled 'Technology and Employment' in June 1983. (12)

The joint study was a wide ranging one, covering the key areas of the water service, operations, design and contract management, scientific services, support services and administrative services. The conclusion on manpower forecasts was in the same vein as the Urwick - Nexos report, between 3% and 12% job loss, with 3% being the agreed central projection. The value of this study was not that it produced any concrete answers to the issues apart from the emphasis played on retraining but that it was a joint effort to review the situation. As the report says in its

conclusion: -

The undertaking of this investigation in itself has brought about a new understanding of the problems being faced by both management and employees within the industry. It has given the opportunity to both the employers and staff associations to jointly identify and discuss the mutual problems faced by all who work within the Water industry, in trying to cope with the pressures created by this technological revolution. (13)

In 1983 a regional new technology agreement was signed with the Yorkshire Water Authority which is of special interest. This agreement, signed by NALGO, NUPE, and MATSA, contained a detailed formula to identify and distribute any savings generated from the loss of posts as a result of new technology in the proportion 60% to 40% between the Authority and the staff concerned. This agreement was described as, 'the most advanced of its kind both in terms of its detail and scope'. (14)

The early sections of the agreement follow a fairly standard pattern, definition of the purpose of the agreement, acceptance of the need to improve efficiency, a definition of what constitutes 'new technology'. The area of 'assurances' is of note as the agreement states that: -

The staffs' side gives an assurance of whole-hearted co-operation with the Authority in the introduction of new technological equipment: this assurance includes an undertaking not to impede the rate of introduction as indicated by management whilst the procedures outlined below are being followed. (15)

Given these assurances, it is the section on the sharing of the benefits of new technology that was the most 'advanced' as the formula in the agreement was founded on the principle that the introduction of new technology should not be reflected in improved salary levels through, for instance, productivity agreements, but in improved conditions of service, notably a reduction in the working week. The Yorkshire Water agreements provided for a level of reduced working time of up to two hours less than the normal working week, or the equivalent in terms of additional holidays per year, up until the review of the agreement in March 1986.

However, at national level in 1983, legislation was passed to abolish the National Water Council with effect from the end of September in that year. With the passing of the 1983 Water Act, water authorities and companies assumed a greater degree of autonomy and were able to negotiate on a range of items previously negotiated nationally, although pay negotiations remained at this level. With these changes there was, in the opinion of employers, no longer a place for a national new technology agreement. National new technology agreements therefore ceased to apply and as a result local new technology agreements had to be re-negotiated to accommodate the changed circumstances.

NALGO did manage to establish a national new technology ad hoc forum, under the auspices of the National Joint Staff

Council. This forum did not negotiate on new technology as such but merely provided a place where views and information were exchanged. The forum did agree to a 'statement of intent' which was to govern the general approach to new technology for the foreseeable future. The statement was as follows: -

- 1 The National Joint Staff Council for the Water Industry has established an Ad-Hoc New Technology Forum, with the following terms of reference: -

"a forum for consultation and advice, where appropriate, on new technology."

It has been jointly agreed within the Ad-hoc Forum that both employers and employees within the Industry be informed of the attitude and philosophy adopted by both sides of the Ad-Hoc Forum.

- 2 It is recognized by the Ad-Hoc Forum that it is not possible or desirable nationally to delineate comprehensive parameters within which employer based negotiations on new technology can be conducted. However, by indicating the climate within which national discussions take place, it is hoped that a similar approach will be reflected and adopted thorough the negotiating machinery at all levels.

- 3 It is hoped, however, that a knowledge of the type of

discussions taking place through the auspices of the NJSC will assist and be complementary to Employer level consultation.

- 4 The Forum recognizes that it is primarily a local responsibility to introduce new working methods and practices and to maximize efficiency to the benefit of the Industry and the consumer.
- 5 It is also recognized that there are genuine fears among employees about the impact of new technology, not only on levels of employment, but also on the nature and content of working methods being introduced. The Ad Hoc Forum, therefore, believes that the co-operation borne out of consultation will serve the best interests of employees, the Industry and the consumer.
- 6 It is hoped that both employers and employees will continue to develop a joint approach to the introduction and development of new technology and that this approach will prove meaningful and effective at National as well as at Employer level. (16)

The trade union side of the ad hoc forum was comprised of members of the new technology sub committee of NALGO's National Water Committee. NALGO's efforts therefore were subsequently to be concentrated at local level where actual negotiations on the introduction of new technology were to

take place.

The central issue for NALGO for the future was to become the fight against the privatization of the Water industry in line with Government policies. It was suggested that the introduction of new technology was allied to this as part of a slimming down and efficiency programme to create a more 'saleable' attractive asset. In December 1984, national organizer John Pitt said: -

It looked as if the industry had been selected for a leading role in the technological revolution - an experiment to find out whether a major public utility could be run by a small number of highly paid staff.
(17)

Woods and Watts in a 1984 article make comments in line with this when they conclude that: -

The industry is turning to the new technologies and to changed methods of operating as a means of enabling further economies to be effected in water supply operations over the next decade. (18)

The fight against privatization has occupied massive NALGO resources over recent years, there was limited success in that in July 1986, faced with a NALGO High Court challenge, the Secretary of State for the Environment was forced to call off temporarily, legislation for privatizing the Water industry. This was however re-introduced with new proposals in July 1987 with a time-scale of November 1989 for the sale of the ten water authorities.

There is no doubt that the abolition of the National Water Council in 1983 was a severe blow to the joint national initiatives that had been launched on new technology in the years from 1979 until that date. What had seemed to be an opportunity for a 'unique' (in terms of UK trade unions) approach on a national level was undermined by the subsequent fragmentation of bargaining and by the subsequent legislation on privatization of the Water industry which was to become the dominant focus for NALGO action in the industry.

4.2 Case Studies - The Severn Trent Water Authority

The Severn Trent Water Authority is the second largest of the ten regional water authorities in England and Wales. Based in Birmingham, the Authority covers an area which runs from the Humber Estuary in the north, to the Bristol Channel in the south and from mid-Wales to the East Anglia border. This area totalling some 8,337 square miles, serving a population of over eight million people and having a turnover in 1987 of over £400 million. (19) The total employed by the Authority in 1987 stood at 8,426, (20) this being a considerable reduction on the 1974 figure of 11,150. (21)

The management structure underwent a major structural shake-up in 1986 to provide a clearer distinction between operational and support activities. Services are now provided in fifteen districts which are supported by regional

headquarters and four outposted divisions. These are listed overleaf.

In terms of negotiating upon new technology, there existed in 1980 a set of procedural guide-lines agreed between the trade unions and the Authority. These guide-lines provided for discussions with the recognized trade unions prior to the introduction of new technology and certain procedures to be followed in the case of disputes arising. Towards the end of 1982, the Staff Side of the Regional Joint Council called for the Severn Trent Side of the Regional Council to take advantage of the National Joint Council's offer to hold regional New Technology workshops to discuss the Urwick - Nexos report referred to earlier and to discuss the implications of new technology in individual water authorities. On the 8th March 1983, a workshop was held at the Severn Trent Headquarters.

At the workshop, representatives of Severn Trent Water Authority revealed that in April 1982, the Authority had entered into a joint venture agreement with the Computer firm, ICL. The object of the agreement was to provide ICL with a 'testing ground' for their office automation products and to provide STWA with practical experience of different office technologies to enable them to develop and plan more effectively their own introduction of new technology in the office environment. According to Authority representatives present at the meeting, the STWA/ICL agreement was to take

Severn-Trent Water Authority - Operating Structure

Divisions and Districts

Western

1. West Shropshire and Montgomeryshire
2. East Shropshire
3. Wolverhampton
4. Birmingham
5. Tame

Southern

6. Worcester
7. Gloucester
8. South Warwickshire
9. Coventry & North Warwickshire

Eastern

10. Leicestershire
11. Nottingham
12. Sherwood

Northern

13. North Derbyshire
14. Derby
15. Stoke

the form of four pilot schemes to be undertaken over the next 18 months or so.

The new technology workshop was the first time, despite the existence of the guide-lines, that the trade unions had been informed at all about the pilot schemes. Trade union representatives present at the workshop expressed surprise and disappointment that given the well established nature of the Authority's plans and their regional character, there had been no attempt to inform or discuss the pilot scheme plans with the unions at regional level prior to that date. The management's reply was that the issue had been and would continue to be discussed 'with the staff involved' together with their trade union representatives.

Investigations by the NALGO District Officer with responsibilities for water showed that the extent of discussions held with staff at local level were extremely limited. In a letter to Water Branch Secretaries he stated that:-

In some cases approaches have involved little more than staff/union representatives being informed of some of the Authority's plans rather than being involved in joint discussions on the matter. In any event, there had been no attempt to discuss or agree any terms or conditions for the pilot schemes with the unions at regional level, and despite the formation of extensive monitoring arrangements for the pilots at both local and regional levels, there has been no attempt to involve the trade unions in these. (22)

The concern generated over this issue lead to the trade

unions tabling a draft New Technology Agreement for the employers consideration at the Regional Joint Council meeting held on 4th February 1983. In the meantime, NALGO's District Water Committee resolved to block the implementation of the pilot schemes until such time as substantial progress was made on the draft New Technology Agreement.

It was stressed by NALGO that: -

This motion was passed not out of any prejudice against the pilots themselves but rather to ensure that any introduction of pilot schemes or permanent installation of new technology is undertaken on the basis of joint agreement with the necessary procedural monitoring, disputes mechanisms and safeguards for staff. (23)

With the abolition of the National Water Council at the end of September 1983, referred to earlier, so too disappeared the old framework of national and regional joint councils which had constituted the major industrial relations format in the water industry. The result was, for nearly a year the Severn Trent Water Authority actually had no formal bargaining machinery at all.

During this period the Authority made it clear that they were completely opposed to the establishment of any standing committee dealing with new technology at regional level, this being central to the new technology agreement. The employers insisted that 'consultation' would take place on a division by division basis. This attitude lead the NALGO District Officer to note that: -

Such attempts to fragment bargaining at the same time as management's decision making is becoming more centralized is increasingly a feature of Severn Trent's industrial relations style at present. (24)

Negotiations on the new technology agreement ground to a halt during 1984 and no further progress was to be made. The Authority's insistence that discussions on new technology would only take place on division by division basis weakened the effectiveness of the trade union response and presented severe problems for NALGO's attempts to monitor the situation on a regional basis. In a letter to the National organizing Officer for Water Staffs, the NALGO District Officer commented: -

The reluctance of the Authority to consult on proposed developments of new technology in advance and the failure of union members and some representatives to report or tackle attempted unilateral introductions of new technology by management have often meant that we have ended up doing little more than 'shutting the stable door after the horse has bolted'. (25)

The view of the District Officer was that it seemed unlikely that NALGO would be able to significantly improve its performance on controlling and effectively negotiating over the introduction of new technology within the region, until such time as they could get members on the ground to take action. The District Officer recognized the need for better membership education on the implications of new technology and for improvements in NALGO's own bargaining strategies. (26)

District Officer

This depressing picture was reflected in a 1987 letter from the NALGO District Organization Officer who said: -

I am afraid the general picture is fairly bleak with the employers offering little more than cursory consultation on the introduction and spread of new technology within Severn Trent. (27)

There is no doubt that the Authority were able to use fragmented bargaining, especially after 1983, to continue to introduce new technology with little or no consultation with NALGO. It is also clear that the Authority had a firm commitment to cost cutting via the introduction of new technology, for example the 1985-86 Report and Accounts said:

We now have a workforce over 2,000 fewer. Since 1979 we have made cost savings of 13% by improving efficiency and we plan to save another 9% by 1990. We cut costs and improve efficiency in a number of ways, by increased automation, new technology, improved management of human resources. (28)

And the 1988 Corporate Plan spoke of ensuring that the organizational structure was appropriate for the services to be provided:

in the light of improving technology and techniques.
(29)

The two case studies that follow were drawn from the Severn Trent Water Authority and were selected following

consultation with NALGO West Midlands District Officers. They focus on two areas, the re-organization of Scientific Services, and the centralization of the billing operation, both enabled by the introduction of new technology.

4.3 Scientific Services - The Joint Management/Union Study

The Joint management/union report 'Technology and Employment' published in June 1983, (30) considered specifically the implications of new technology for scientific services. As a result of the analysis two main aspects of new technology applications in scientific services were identified, analytical, and, data handling.

Taking the analytical function first, the reasons given for the introduction of improved analytical equipment were: -

1. Improved speed and greater throughput, and broader parameters of analysis.
2. Improved analytical procedures. (31)

One respondent in the sample, identified one of the benefits of the improved system to be the ability to meet a greater workload with the same number of staff. (32)

As regards data handling, the motives for introduction were based on projected large increases in workload, in one case

being linked to the development of a management reporting system. Evidence varied as to whether the equipment advances made in scientific laboratories formed part of an overall strategy or plan within an Authority, in some cases there was limited evidence, in others it was more the initiative of individuals or individual management groups based on interpretations of their laboratories needs or desires.

The report stated that on no occasion had there been any indication that new technology had been introduced with the intention of reducing staffing levels: -

In all cases the objective had been to meet envisaged increased workloads without increasing staff levels. In the case of analytical equipment another objective was the need for analysis across an broader range of parameters and to a greater degree of accuracy. In the case of data handling systems, the need to process information more quickly without increasing staffing levels was a primary objective. (33)

It is interesting to note that the study found that laboratory staff at all levels were both interested in and receptive to new developments in equipment, and that no delays in implementation of new technology arising from reluctance to co-operate had been experienced. (34) Also it was pointed out that the combined effects of advances in analytical and data handling equipment and systems was to facilitate the development of larger centralized laboratories. (35)

In concluding, it was recognized that the workload in the scientific service would increase, influenced by both government and EEC directives and that the trend towards automation of the services would continue. While stating several times that the workforce levels should remain the same the report does finally note that: -

It is recognized that the possibility could exist of advances in new technology enabling the same work to be achieved by fewer staff. (36)

4.4 Scientific Services - The Situation Within Severn Trent Water Authority

Within the Authority there had already been a progressive centralization of laboratories dictated mainly by the replacement of slow, less reliable manual methods, by modern instrumental methods of analysis. In terms of numbers there had been a reduction from over 40 laboratories in 1974 to 13 by 1984 with one regional specialist laboratory.

The position in 1984 was that the 13 Divisional laboratories services were concerned with chemical analysis, micro biology and biology with the regional laboratory carrying out specialist analysis, analytical quality control, development work and some contract work. The divisional chemical analytical laboratories employed 169 staff concerned with analysis of some 340,000 samples per annum, carrying out some 2.1 million measurements. Productivities and the proportion

of analyses performed by modern instrumental techniques varied markedly from laboratory to laboratory.

In 1984 a review of laboratory services was undertaken. The first indication that the Trade Union had that plans for changes in the scientific services were underway came in a reference in the Authority's Corporate Plan Consultative Document where it was stated that: -

Provision has also been made for centralizing laboratory facilities where these do not already exist. (37)

At the stage no consultation had taken place at all with the union, leading to a request for full information from the union's District Officer. This request elicited a response from the Employers side Secretary of the Regional Joint Staff Council who said: -

A review of laboratory services across the region is being undertaken with the objective of developing the quality of the service provided with due regard to efficiency and cost effectiveness. The main areas of consideration include:

- 1) laboratory techniques and procedures,
- 2) data handling facilities,
- 3) levels of service,
- 4) laboratory locations,
- 5) manpower resources. (38)

The review was carried out with no trade union involvement or consultation until a presentation was made by the management in March 1985.

4.4.1 Scientific Services - The Severn Trent Water Authority Review

The specialist laboratory had already had its role reviewed the previous year and there were no structural changes planned to that. Also regarding the working of biologists it was found that the arguments for continuing to provide these services within the divisions far outweighed the case for change. Therefore the review was to be concerned with the routine and non-specialist chemical analytical services.

Two main objectives were stated for the review: -

1. Primarily to ensure that a proper level of service is provided in the future,
2. Secondly to achieve this at minimum cost. (39)

Initially a survey took place of the number of different kinds of sample needed for the effective working of the Authority and the measurements which needed to be made upon the samples. This showed a positive need for some 310,000 samples per annum and 1.9 million measurements per annum. Once this was complete the implications of modern approaches to chemical analysis were reviewed.

The study noted that one of the outstanding features of modern analytical systems was the potential that existed for

large output, (40) this meaning that effective exploitation depends on large scale laboratory operation. This extension of laboratory size can be done far more economically on an instrumental basis than on manual methods. It was also pointed out that the characteristics of modern analytical systems were: -

1. More accurate than normal methods in most applications,
 2. Automatic data capture and validation,
 3. Good record of reliability,
 4. Large capacity,
 5. Large scale operation essential for best use.
- (41)

In his presentation to the Staff Side representatives the Regional Manager for Scientific Services said: -

Although other important factors affect accuracy, the fact that instrumental techniques give better results is beyond question. The high initial cost of these instruments makes it essential to see that they are fully utilized. (42)

At the time of the review there was also in pilot operation a system called SLIM for laboratory data processing, this system had been designed and sized on the 13 laboratory basis.

As stated, the Review's main objective was in terms of chemical analysis, this meant all work within the laboratory from delivery of samples to issue of results (except maintenance and cleaning). After defining user requirements,

identifying the key systems for mainstream workload, and examining the effects of scale by using modern techniques, the Review concluded by saying: -

Considerations of efficiency and effectiveness with the laboratory together with the provision for the best use of future analytical techniques plus the flexibility to smooth out variations in demand for service, all point to the largest possible scale operation of laboratories under common management. (43)

It was suggested that in pursuit of efficiency alone the solution of one single laboratory on a greenfield site would have been the simplest solution. However, bearing in mind the disruptive effects of this the strategy recommended was for a two laboratory solution. (East & West within the Authority). These two laboratories, plus the specialist laboratory would be managed as an integrated regional system providing service to the whole Authority.

In staffing terms this proposal required a total chemical laboratory complement of 127 compared with the existing 169. Also the two laboratories were to operate on an extended working hour basis to "ensure the appropriate level of service to uses and to make the best use of resources." (44)

As the Authority operated on a policy of no compulsory redundancy, the reduction of staffing was to come by natural wastage, redeployment (with training) or voluntary severance. The proposals would also mean changes in working hours and locations for staff and it was proposed that staff would be

individually counselled to take into account their particular circumstances.

4.4.2 Scientific Services in the Severn Trent Water Authority - The NALGO Response

Faced with the fact that, although they were aware that the review was taking place, the findings were not formally presented to the union until March 1985, the initial move by the NALGO District Officer was to call a mass meeting of staff trade union members within NALGO to discuss the situation. This meeting was scheduled for 24th April 1985 and because of the possible effect on manual worker, members from GMBATU, NUPE and the TGWU were invited to attend.

It is important to bear in mind that at this time negotiations on regional new technology agreement had broken down and that the management strategy was based on fragmented bargaining, clearly seeing the introduction of new technology as a management prerogative. Also, it is worth bearing in mind that the NALGO staff concerned here are technical specialists, whose knowledge and skill could provide on 'resource' equal to that of management 'experts'.

Before the meeting, two papers were circulated, one by the RJSC Trade Union Side Officers, (45) and one by laboratory staff in one of the divisions. (46)

The RJSC document criticized the management presentation paper on several grounds: -

1. The essential liaison between operational, pollution prevention and trade effluent control staff effectively limited the extent to which economies of scale based on centralization could be justified.
2. The maintenance of local knowledge by which means the implications of chemical analytical results can be interpreted and applied was vital in the provision of an effective service to consumers.
3. That the objective of reducing the number of routine analytical laboratories to two 'sample factories' was a political decision by which a number (forty-two) of posts could be lost.
4. That no 'emergency' sample services were to be provided.
5. That logistical and costing exercises on transportation had not been carried out because they would provide 'inconvenient' results.
6. That the current data processing system had been developed for a thirteen laboratory system and that considerable resources would be required to re-orient it.
7. As Scientific Staff were technical specialists the availability of relevant alternative work was small. (47)

The paper submitted by Divisional Scientific Staff in Upper Trent reflected the above concerns, making a particular point about the lack of consultation: -

The current proposal for a two laboratory option had been derived with minimal input from senior staff in Divisions. The result is that the chosen option has been made without adequate knowledge of the problems likely to be encountered by a centralized analytical service, and without any knowledge of the standard of service required by Divisional operational departments. (48)

Interestingly, this paper put forward a well argued case for an eight laboratory option (at one stage under consideration by the Authority) which it was argued would lead to the required staff savings at minimal cost whilst maintaining the level of service.

The meeting on the 24th April 1985 was attended by 188 staff, the recommendations put to the meeting were that they: -

1. endorse the RJSC Trade Union Side's rejection of the Authority's plans for the reorganization of laboratory facilities,
2. support the campaign to be mounted by the trade unions against these proposals,
3. believed the trade unions should be prepared to negotiate with STWA on bona fide proposals to maintain and improve levels of service as well as protecting jobs, defending conditions of service and advancing the interests of staff. (49)

The recommendations were unanimously accepted. A media release following the meeting quoted one of the scientists as saying: -

The objections we are making are based on a constructive approach to the water service. NALGO members are willing to accept change which will genuinely improve the service The present proposal will mean a less effective service to the customers of the authority.
(50)

The Employers Side of the Regional Joint Staff Council were notified of the rejection of the proposal the following day.

Following rejection of the proposals a joint 'Ad Hoc Working Party on the Laboratories Review' was established and held its first meeting within a week. At this meeting the trade union side were asked to provide details of technical reservations and problems that were foreseen and this was agreed to. Also, the issue of privatization was raised by the union, management stating that there was "No suggestion of privatization and that the pursuit of management efficiency was the required result". However at a meeting a month later a reply by management suggests that the privatization issue was a background nature: -

The two-laboratory option provides the best defence against severe undercutting by the private sector and that where the existing in-house service was cost effective there was much less likelihood of the possible use of an external service becoming an issue. (51)

During the months of June and July 1985 there were a series of exchanges in the Ad-Hoc Working Party on the Authority's responses to the trade union sides submitted reservations on the laboratory re-organization. An examination of the trade union counter-response on 24th July 1985 indicates several points of interest. Firstly, the union themselves used the argument that the new technology ie: distributed data processing via micro-computers, could be used to justify an eight laboratory option, achieving the same results as a two laboratory option without the need for sophisticated and expensive equipment. Secondly, the trade union side

explicitly stated that in their view the purpose of the reduction to two laboratories would be to make the chemical analysis service more attractive to a potential buyer. (52) The employer responses were also questioned in very great technical detail by NALGO scientific staff in one of the existing laboratories.

Faced with a situation where little progress was being made, and the counter proposals and technical expertise of the trade union side seemed to be ignored, NALGO scheduled another mass meeting of staff for 9th July. In the view of the trade union side there were two broad options available to be put to the meeting.

- a. To direct attention to the staffing structure for the two laboratory proposal - it being recognized that the momentum of such negotiations could well lead to the eventual acceptance of the proposals.
- b. To reject the Authority's proposals - in which case members should be prepared to take some form of action.

Just before the meeting a motion was received by the NALGO District Officer from the Branch Secretary of the Derwent Branch which asked for an independent assessment to be made of the policy with regard to the scientific services re-organization. The motion requested that the union should seek a sufficiently qualified person to carry out the task as a matter of urgency. (53)

The mass meeting took place, calling for non-cooperation with

all aspects of the review and for a one day strike. The motion was also carried that "The Trade Union side will seek independent assessment of the policy with regard to scientific services."

This was conveyed to management by the District Officer who also drew attention to the nature of the staff involved in the dispute when he noted "The deep sense of professional and service commitment felt by scientific staff "and "the views expressed recently by scientists should be seriously considered by the Authority's top management." (54)

Ballot arrangements for strike action were put into motion, meanwhile the District Officer received a reply to this letter by the Employers side who made it clear that they saw the issue as firmly a management prerogative: -

You should appreciate that the Authority must move forward in the constant search for improvements in operational efficiency, economy, and levels of service. These matters are a prime responsibility of management We remain convinced that the two laboratory option is the right approach for the authorities, its staff and the consumer for the foreseeable future. (55)

An appeal for support was made by NALGO to the Chairpersons and members of the Authority's Consumer Consultative committees. This elicited after some weeks a response from a member of the Consumer Consultative Committee who was also a member of a firm of consulting scientists and analysts, and who broadly shared the trade union's doubts over the

operational effectiveness of the system. The union also contacted at this stage the Labour Research Department to ask for an independent analysis of management's plans: -

You will notice that there are a number of contradictions between the authority's comments and our own both on the factual implications of their proposals and possible interpretations of them. (56)

Management's strategy now became one of attempting to go over the heads of the union, against NALGO's wishes, they stated their intention of holding a meeting with Divisional scientists and to discuss draft staffing structures for the two laboratory option. These staffing structures were made available to NALGO.

As stated earlier, the employees potentially affected by the re- organization of scientific services included not only NALGO members, but members from other trade unions eg: NUPE and GMBATU, these unions being represented at Regional level by a Regional Joint Industrial Council (RJIC). Following NALGO's mass meeting and decision to ballot for a strike NUPE agreed to support the strike action. Their area Water Committee passed a resolution:

To support the decision of a mass meeting of the staff concerned, convened by NALGO, to oppose this Review in principle on the grounds that it was designed to centralize and streamline the service in order to make privatization of the Authority easier. (57)

In response to the attempt by management to appeal directly

to the laboratory staff, NALGO circulated an update to branches asking branch members to inform staff that they should not allow themselves to be spoken to either individually or in small groups by management. This circular also identified another management tactic which had commenced. This was the use of 'the rumour machine' eg: Staff in Division 'A' being told that staff in Division 'B' have begun to co-operate with the Authority's proposals and attempts are then made to persuade them to do likewise. Around the same time, staff in Division 'B' are being told exactly to same story about staff in Division 'A'. NALGO warned members of this tactic and told them to use the unions communication network. (58)

The ballot of scientific staff resulted in a majority in favour of strike action and a one-day strike was set. During this day of action it was intended to lobby the Authority's Board meeting which would be taking place and to present a petition bearing the signature of as many of the Authority's employees as possible. Other trade unions were circulated and asked for their support as well as not crossing picket lines. Letters were sent to all the Authority's Board members putting NALGO's view on the re-organization.

Prior to the day of action NALGO received a reply from the Labour Research Department to their request for assistance in providing an independent assessment of the Authority's

proposals. The Labour Research Department turned down the request on the grounds that, "It is felt that NALGO has more collective expertise."

Also, an event occurred that was to enable NALGO to obtain press coverage and point to the problems of emergency cover if the centralization plan was to go ahead. There was an accidental case of pollution caused on one of the Rivers in the Authority When there was a leakage of pig slurry. The seriousness of the case was such that a pumping station was closed down and water used from boreholes instead. Samples for analysis had to be taken every quarter of an hour and the level of pollution monitored continually as the affected water was carried down stream. This incident was used by NALGO to point to potential Public Health risks in the press and to claim that it was only because scientists were on the spot immediately and were able to work all weekend that the risks to the region's water supplies were averted. The Authority's reply was to state that emergency cover would be provided locally but that "The precise nature and level of this local service is currently being decided."

The one-day strike took place on 12th September with some 50 of the scientists attending the lobby of the Authority's Board. On arriving at the meeting the Authority's Chairman repeated the commitment to re-organizing the laboratory services but also agreed to a NALGO demand for further talks.

A questionnaire was sent to all branches following the strike to enable the District Officer to assess its full effects. The result of this obviously influenced the decisions taken at a special meeting of the District Water Committee where the following significant resolution was passed: -

While continuing to reject the Authority's arguments in favour of the two laboratory option this Committee resolves to receive the employers proposals for a new two laboratory set up and further resolves to seek a satisfactory staff protection agreement. (59)

This decision was also influenced by the fact that the Employers had made it quite clear that they would not move on the proposals. This was explicit in an internal document which stated that "Following the meeting with Board members it was recognized that the Authority intended to proceed despite staff reservations." (60)

Following this decision negotiations focused on obtaining a staff protection agreement covering the appointments procedures to the new laboratories, relocation, travelling time, shift working, training/retraining, and grade and conditions of service protection. This agreement was concluded in January 1986. This document, signed by both sides, was circulated to all members and re-stated the objectives of the Laboratories Review which had been modified by joint agreement.

The re-stated objectives set out for the Laboratories Review were:

1. Consistent and improved standards of service.
2. Increased efficiency and cost-effectiveness.
3. More economic use of existing equipment and technologies.
4. Greater ability to adapt to future technology without further major re-organization.
5. Improved opportunities for training and staff development.
6. The optimization of scientific (chemical analysis) expertise.
7. A more comprehensive emergency laboratory service. (61)

Finally, it is interesting to note that an internal NALGO document in June 1986 (62) pointed to the rapidly increasing costs for the two laboratory option, this being a source of considerable embarrassment to Severn Trent Water Authority, but which did not stop the completion of the re-organization.

4.5 The Billing Operation - The Joint Management/Union Study

The 1983 Joint Management/Union study, 'Technology and Employment' (63) devotes a complete chapter to an examination of the impact of new technology on administrative services within the water industry. The findings of this section are based on the work carried out by Urwick Nexos Ltd, which formed part of their earlier report commissioned by the National Water Council. (64)

Direct billing by regional water authorities to customers, as an administrative function, had been progressively implemented since 1974 and was virtually complete by 1981. In most, if not all water authorities large numbers of clerical staff had been recruited to assist in direct billing. The Urwick-Nexos Report noted that: -

When computer systems to support direct billing are replaced, as many will be within the next five years (by 1986), we expect authorities to take the opportunity to review, revise and co-ordinate operational procedures.
(65)

The report showed that individual water authorities had chosen different ways of organizing the billing operation, four running a decentralized system, four running a single centralized direct billing team, and two falling somewhere in between.

Two different systems were included in the study, a centralized system run by Wessex Water Authority consisting of an IBM mainframe with 35 screens shared between 109 billing staff with associated facilities such as word processing, optical character recognition for reading accounts and suite of routines for handling exceptional billing cases, an example of this being the calculation of partial bills due to changes of address which could be handled five times more quickly using a computerized system.

The decentralized system operated at Thames Water Authority and was based on divisions individually handling billing but still using shared, central IBM mainframe computers. This system had links with other functions so that, for example, the legal section had two terminals which could be used to check on unpaid bills, an application which could be extended so that information stored in the central computer could be printed out directly on to a summons. The report pointed out that: -

One of the most significant features of new office technology is the scope that it offers to combine the best elements of centralized and decentralized systems - ie: the economies of scale provided by centralizing specific functions, coupled with the ease of access to information which a localized system can offer. (66)

In the chapter on administrative services contained in the 1983 'Technology and Employment' report the employment implications for staff involved in the direct billing operation are considered. The conclusion was that the main

impact of the progressive development of direct billing systems would be felt by junior clerical staff, the figures quoted were: -

Jobs lost	20 - 30% junior
Jobs gained	nil
Net loss	20 - 30% junior 5 - 10% senior
Retraining required	50% senior 80% junior (67)

The projections for clerical staff involved in direct billing were based on several reasons. Firstly that about two thirds of the authorities would change the computers used for billing by 1986. This, as the cost of hardware and software would fall, would enable considerable scope for increased productivity in terms of the number of accounts processed per member of staff. Secondly, that staff involved in direct billing would take on some additional functions: -

As text processing is added to the existing data processing system, clerical staff in direct billing are likely to produce more of their own correspondence with the public. Some specialized functions within direct billing may be incorporated into programs on the system so that they can be handled by 'front line' rather than specialist clerical staff. (68)

To conclude, direct billing formed an area where new technology was in operation from the early stages and where staff were familiar with the use of a VDU and, according to the 1981 survey were on average positive about working with the new technology. (69) Yet because of the advances in technology bringing the benefits of economies of scale, more integrated functions and greater productivity it was suggested that it was in this area that the greatest effects of new technology would be felt by water industry staff in the shortest timescale. (70)

4.6 The Billing Operation within Severn Trent Water Authority - The Review

At the outset of the events to be detailed in this case study in 1984, the Authority had a management structure of eight operating divisions with a regional headquarters responsible for overall co-ordination. This structure reflected the billing operation in that customer billing was primarily a divisional responsibility with the regional headquarters taking a central co-ordinating role.

It is important to be aware at this stage that the billing operation was carried out by a workforce characterized by female workers occupying lower graded clerical positions working in fairly large units within each operating division and at the regional headquarters. Also the new technology had been in operation in the billing function for a number of

years, it being the changes in this technology and its reduction in cost that opened up the possibilities for a centralized operation.

Initial planning for the billing re-organization commenced in January 1984 with the formation by the Authority of a "Billing Organization Review Group". This group comprised of four senior Authority personnel responsible to the Regional Charging and Billing Manager. The four were a Principal Development Officer - Charging and Billing, who acted as Chairman, a Principal Internal Auditor, a Divisional Billing and Collection Officer, and a Senior Development Officer - Charging and Billing.

The objectives of this group were: -

1. to consider the Authority's requirements in respect of Billing and Collection and examine the present methods of working, organization staffing levels and other resources utilized in carrying out these activities.
2. To consider and advise upon the most efficient organizational structure to meet those requirements and to achieve maximum effectiveness in management, staff utilization and customer relationships having regard to the place of billing within the Authority's overall management plan.

3. To carry out an appraisal of both the revenue and capital costs of the present and alternative structures.
4. The group should have regard to: -
 - a. The role of billing as a support function to the Authority's main operational activities.
 - b. Its importance in customer relationship terms and its role as a "shop window" for the Authority.
 - c. Anticipated development in computer technology and database techniques.
 - d. Changes necessitated by the development of charging policies and legislation.
5. To set out a timescale for the implementation of the most cost effective option, relative to the introduction of the Authority's Customer Services and Billing System.
6. To prepare a report for submission to the Executive Management Group by mid-March 1984. (71)

Following the report of the Review Group, the Authority formally announced in the Autumn of 1984 its plans to create a large Regional Billing Unit with three satellite units controlled from the Headquarters. This Regional unit would take over the functions carried out in Divisions including customer liaison, metering/trade effluent control, billing/collection, debt recovery and development charge

setting. The only remaining billing presence within Divisional locations would be small teams dealing with a limited range of functions. These small teams would be controlled by and be accountable to the Regional headquarters rather than the Division in which they would be based. A diagrammatic representation of the Authority's plan is shown overleaf.

Key features of the Centralized Billing service were listed as: -

1. Single property/service occasion for all maincharges.
2. Unified bill.
3. Customer accounting/integrated debt recovery.
4. Ability to consolidate bills.
5. System flexibility. (72)

The Authority's view was that given the features of the centralized billing operation the proposed changes in structure would bring many benefits. Firstly, consistent and in many cases improved standards of service. Secondly, increased efficiency and cost effectiveness. Thirdly, the sharpening of accountability and reduced duplication of effort. Fourthly, development and communication of policy would be speeded up. Lastly, billing expertise would be used to the full and, it was argued, staff training and career development would be improved.

Severn Trent Water Authority - Re-organization of Billing

THE AUTHORITY'S PLAN

Regional Billing Unit	dealing with customer liaison, meters/ trade effluent control, billing/collection, debt recovery, development/charge setting.
248 staff - Birmingham	

Satellite Unit	Satellite Unit	Satellite Unit	Dealing with rateable value maintenance, supply/tariff changes, customer data, refunds, apportionments, etc.
60 staff	42 staff	32 staff	
Derby	Leicester	Shrewsbury	

Outposted teams	Dealing with meter reading, property liaison, outside debt recovery, operations/services liaison
90 staff across all divisions	

The suggested timescale for the implementation of the new system covered a period from June 1985 to April 1988. The implications of the changes in terms of the net loss of jobs projected by the Authority was 95, or 17% of the numbers employed in the operation at that time. What is significant however, given the nature of the billing staff outlined earlier, was the geographical and/or occupational changes which could potentially make the real impact of job loss much greater.

4.6.1 The Billing Operation within Severn Trent Water Authority - The NALGO Response

The re-organization plans were formally announced by the Authority in October of 1984. However prior to that date letters had been circulated to Divisions which indicated the move towards centralized billing and told Divisional managers of the existence of the Billing Organization Review Group. NALGO's internal files at West Midlands District Office show that copies of these documents were sent to the District Officer with responsibility for Water by one of the Water Branch secretaries on 20th June 1984. (73) The District Officer made a rapid response sending a letter to the Employers Side Secretary of the Regional Joint Council asking for details about what was being considered and the plans for Trade Union consultation on the subjects. (74)

It is interesting to note that a response to this request was

not forthcoming until 17th October 1984 and informed the District Officer of a presentation to be given to the Trade Union side of the Regional Joint Staff Council on the 24th October - this was in fact to be the formal announcement of plans, hardly "consultation". Along with the structural details given at the presentation the Trade Union side were informed of the projected loss of 95 posts. No detailed information was provided at the time of staffing structures or grades.

Following the presentation NALGO's District Office took two actions. Firstly, membership of the Water Branches were informed of the changes by means of the circulation of a special issue of "Watercourse" a broadsheet published by the NALGO District Water Committee at the West Midlands District Office. (75)

This told NALGO members that: -

The Authority intends to use a massive expansion of computer based technology to create a large new Regional Billing Unit based at Lionel Street, Birmingham and at the Authority's Computer Centre, also in Birmingham. The idea is that this unit would take over most of the functions now carried out in divisions, including customer liaison, meters/trade effluent control, billing/collection, debt recovery and development/charge setting. (76)

While NALGO accepted that increased computerization may well have allowed for greater speed of communication they criticized the plans not only on the basis of the predicted

job loss of 17% but also on the basis that the transfer of billing functions to a 'potential remote regional location' would not be in the interests of the consumer. The second action that was taken following the presentation was that a letter was sent to the Authority asking for a detailed breakdown of staff statistics at divisions and at headquarters.

On the 8th November a meeting took place of the RJSC Trade Union side at which it was resolved to adopt the following policy: -

1. That as no formal discussions had yet taken place on the proposed reorganization with the trade unions and no agreement had yet been reached, there should be no attempt by management to implement any changes or commence any "counselling" of staff at the present time in relation to the proposed reorganization.
2. That at the outset of any discussions the trade unions should seek from management a categorical assurance that a no compulsory redundancy policy remained in operation and that all staff potentially affected by the proposed billing reorganization should have the guarantee of continued employment within the area in which they currently work.
3. That prior to any acceptance by the trade unions of the

principle of the Authority's proposed reorganization, the Authority should be challenged more closely about whether or not the proposed changes are in the interests of service provision or the consumer.

4. That any staffing structures produced by management in relation to the proposed billing reorganization should be the subject of discussion with the trade unions at regional level in the first instance. If and when draft structures are the subject of agreement with the trade unions they should be published in detailed form within the Authority, and the procedure for any implementation should be clearly agreed in advance.
5. That management should be asked to confirm that the trade union representatives and members should be afforded adequate time off and facilities to consider the proposed reorganization properly.
6. That Constituent unions of the trade union side ensure that billing staff are effectively represented.

At this stage it is worth noting that there appears to be in the above policy resolutions a confusing mix of acceptance of the changes on one hand and statements which indicate moves towards an independent union analysis of the proposed changes on the other. We shall in fact see that the independent analysis was not to be forthcoming, probably because the

union itself was not structured in such a way to enable this, and that negotiations tend to settle into a traditional stance centring around conditions of service.

Both sides of the RJSC were to meet on 13th November 1984. At this meeting the Trade Union side were supplied with some of the staffing statistics that had previously been requested. These figures confirmed the earlier statements regarding the nature of the workforce as predominantly female and lower graded and are detailed overleaf.

At this meeting there was considerable discussion over the question of the no compulsory redundancy policy of the Authority, the union requesting that unless members chose to move they should at least be guaranteed continued employment within the same location or geographical area in which they worked. The Authority made it quite clear that their interpretation of the policy carried with it the expectation of the acceptance by staff of some mobility. They would only guarantee continued employment through one of the following mechanisms: -

1. A post within the new Billing structure.
2. Alternative duties within the existing home Division (but not necessarily within the existing location).
3. Other duties within the Severn Trent Regional

GRADE AND SEX DISTRIBUTION OF BILLING STAFF WITHIN
SEVERN-TRENT WATER AUTHORITY

<u>GRADE</u>	<u>MALE</u>	<u>FEMALE</u>
1	34	182
2	38	105
3	20	46
4	23	13
5	17	6
6	18	4
7	7	1
8	11	
9	5	1
10	9	
11	5	
12	1	
13	1	
JNC	1	
Total	190	358

LENGTH OF SERVICE

YEARS SERVICES	MALE	FEMALE
10 Years +	46	13
5 Years up to 10 years	107	201
1 year up to 5 years	27	119
Under 1 year	10	25
Total	190	358

complement.

The notion of "mobility" is significant when looked at in the light of the workforce characteristics, ie: it seems a fair generalization that a largely female and lower graded workforce will have a higher degree of both geographical and occupational immobility than would otherwise be the case.

The issue of rationale for the proposed reorganization was raised with the union questioning what alternatives had been considered. The Authority's response was "that many alternatives had been considered from retention of the status quo to full Regional Billing, and that after close scrutiny the proposed structure was the best one." (77)

It appears that there was no further union comment on this. The request for reasonable time off for representatives was granted and matters of training/retraining and staff protection were raised by both sides.

An area of contention at this meeting concerned the Authority's wishes for a phased implementation of the new staffing structure. A proposed Billing staffing structure was produced (shown overleaf) which it was claimed represented initial plans for discussion. However, it was made clear that the Authority wished to implement the senior level of posts (shown above the dotted line) as a matter of some urgency. The union's response was that they would not

PROPOSED BILLING STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS

REGIONAL CHARGING AND BILLING MANAGER

SENIOR
MANAGEMENT
STRUCTURE

REGIONAL
DEVELOPMENT
CO-ORDINATOR

REGIONAL CUSTOMER
ACCOUNTING
CO-ORDINATOR

ASSISTANT
DIVISIONAL
MANAGERS
SERVICES
DEBT
RECOVERY

PRINCIPAL
CHARGING

PRINCIPAL
CUSTOMER
ACCOUNTING

SATELLITE

SATELLITE

DEVELOPMENT
SERVICE

PROCESSING
SERVICE

CUSTOMER
ACCOUNTING
SERVICE

CUSTOMER
ACCOUNTING
SERVICE

CUSTOMER
LIAISON
SERVICE

CHARGE
SETTING

DEVELOP
MENT

BILLING

METER READING BULK OWNER
T/E VOLUMES CONTROL

SUPPLY AND
TARIFF
CHANGE

CUSTOMER
MAINTENANCE

RECOVERY
ACTION

AREA
LIAISON

ACCOUNT-
ING

COLLECTION

INTERNAL
CONTROL &
FIREFIGHTING

CHANGES
AND
CONTROL

TELE-
PHONE TRACING
BUREAU AND
MONITORING

INSPECTION
STAFF

DEBT
RECOVERY
METER
READING

FUNCTIONS

TYPING
AND
ACCOUNTS

CASH
ALLOCATION

MISC
INCOME &
ABSTRACTION

TYPING
AND
ADMIN

ENQUIRES/
CORRESPONDENCE

consider one part of the proposed structure in isolation and that they wished to see the Authority's detailed proposals for the whole structure before agreeing any one part. Related to this was the issue of counselling staff and the Authority made it clear that they intended to counsel senior staff as soon as possible. The issues arising out of this meeting were communicated to the membership in general via another special edition of 'Watercourse'. (78)

Following the developments at this meeting, on the 27th November a full meeting of the RJSC Trade Union side took place and agreed as follows: -

1. That agreement on the whole billing structure, including grades, outline job descriptions, etc and an RJSC staff protection agreement are concluded prior to staff counselling.
2. That in putting forward this policy to the employers the officers of the trade union side should also discuss with employers a draft staff protection agreement.
3. That Severn Trent should also be asked to ensure that no fixed term contract staff should be introduced into the billing function without prior discussion with the trade unions.
4. That all constituent organizations of the trade union

side make every effort to win further support for trade union side policy amongst the membership.

A further negotiating meeting of the RJSC was held on 5th December. In response to the request at the last meeting for details of training/retraining plans in relation to the proposed billing review, the Authority distributed a paper entitled "Staff Training and Development". The thrust of this paper centered around the notion of career development through more training in the use of computer technology: -

1. Whilst all units operate basically standard computer systems, there are significant differences in approach. Consequently it is not always cost effective to adopt changes in technology and training of staff may be limited by the facilities at a particular location or the ability to release staff in sufficient numbers. The degree to which staff have felt able or competent to transfer between Divisions or Division/HQ has been relatively limited and career progression for the majority of billing staff has consequently been limited to a single location.
 2. Suitably experienced staff will have both the opportunity and be encouraged to transfer between functions to develop their careers.
 3. The new organization enables the Authority to invest more heavily in training and technological development particularly in the short run to get the new system off the ground. It is anticipated that these arrangements will also improve the working environment for the majority of staff and offer them even better long-term career prospects.
- (79)

Draft staff protection agreements were exchanged by both sides at the meeting. The difference in approach of the two sides can be clearly seen, in fact at the meeting the

Employers side stated that: -

An initial perusal on their part had led to a reaction against the tone of the document and a concern that some of the contents were unacceptable. (80)

In reply, the Trade Union side acknowledged the limitations of their own paper but commented on the fact that the Employers Side draft was dated the 8th November, nearly a month before the meeting and that their proposals were merely noted with no attempt to incorporate any part into the Employers version.

A major sticking point at this meeting concerned the Employers Side intention to commence counselling filling the senior management parts of the structure in advance of full discussion of the remainder. This was to become a key issue in future months.

Finally it is interesting to note that it appears that the Authority was releasing information on the billing review proposals to Divisional management, information which they had requested the Trade Union side to keep confidential. This shows at this stage a clear determination to press ahead despite the fact that the negotiating process with the union was not complete. The Trade Union Side representatives asked that any information put out carried the specific comment that no proposals had been agreed by the unions.

After the Christmas period negotiations continued on the staff protection agreement with a third draft appearing at the end of January 1985 which was sent to all Water Branch secretaries with the request for urgent branch meetings to be held. At this point NALGO were recommending acceptance in principle. A meeting of the Trade Union side of the RJSC was held on 14th February and this meeting was attended by Officers of the Authority whose presence was to explain the draft staff structures proposed in the reorganization. This meeting was to arouse union concern over several issues which are typical of those which are found in disputes over new technology (bearing in mind that his case study is somewhat different in that computer based technology was already in use).

These issues can be clearly illustrated by the following statements made in a letter from the NALGO District Officer to the Employer's Side Secretary of the RJSC: -

There could be further job loss within departments or sections other than billing, arising out of the billing reorganization. Support services such as administration and typing may be particularly at risk.

There will be a considerable depression of grading levels within billing and a proportionate contraction in the grade distribution of all levels other than grade 1.

That there is little recognition of the skill requirements implied by the introduction of new technologies, nor any attempt to share the benefits of these technologies in the remuneration of staff.

The implementation of the structures as proposed could lead to serious loss of job satisfaction and diminution of job content for large numbers of employees. (81)

The letter ended with a request for the Authority to postpone counselling plans to commence on 25th February pending formal discussions on the structure proposals. The Employers Side response to the above letter failed to satisfy the Trade Union side. A further meeting of the RJSC Trade Union side held on 21st February indicated different views on the counselling issue with the result that it was decided to approach the Authority to postpone counselling until a ballot of billing staff could take place to determine their views. The motion passed was. -

That a ballot be held of all trade union members of billing staff to determine the level of support for existing trade union policy as follow: -

- a) That the structures as presented are unacceptable.
- b) That counselling should not proceed in advance of agreement with the trade unions on staffing structures. (82)

The request for postponement was rejected by the Authority with the result that the union advised billing staff not to participate in any counselling exercises organized by the Authority.

On 5th March NALGO's District Water Committee met to consider the situation and agreed in principle to adopt the policy of non-co-operation with the reorganization and called for a ballot of all NALGO members. The ballot was held on 18th March.

The ballot affected 479 members, the voting return was: -

FOR	-	215 (62.5% of the return)
AGAINST	-	129 (37.5% of the return)

At the end of March the policy of non co-operation was given official backing by NALGO's National Executive Council.

Requests were also made for support from MATSA and NUPE.

The results of this vote were conveyed to the Authority via the next RJSC meeting with the Employers Side on 2nd April at which the employers agreed to have a further look at aspects of the staffing structure and gradings. This resulted in some movement on the Employers behalf at a meeting on the 19th April when an offer was made to upgrade a certain number of posts and modify job outline. The Employers side did make it quite clear at this meeting that this was their final position and that they intended to proceed with selection of staff and implementation of the reorganization within ten days. Internal notes of this meeting show that the Trade Union Side were aware of the fact that this was now a situation where further progress would only come through concerted action by members: -

Following the meeting the Trade Union Side representatives present were firmly of the opinion that there is now little or no prospect of securing further changes to the Employers proposals by negotiation alone.
(83)

With the above in mind a discussion paper was prepared by the NALGO District Officer with responsibility for water which gave the background to the dispute and outlined the options open to the Union now. This paper was circulated to members of the West Midland District Water Committee and the RJSC Trade Union Side on 1st May for consideration on 10th May. The paper considered achievements in respect of the staff protection agreement and the staffing structures, and also detailed the major problems that still existed. Two broad options were stated: -

1. To reaffirm existing policy that the failure of the Authority to produce acceptable proposals which adequately safeguard members jobs and careers makes the entire Customer Services Billing reorganization unacceptable. There should, therefore, be no co-operation with the re-organization and members should be prepared for possible escalation of action if the Authority attempts to impose its plans on staff.
2. That despite the problems associated with the Authority's plans as presented, implementation of the proposed CSB reorganization be reluctantly accepted as the best package achievable at this time. That the trade union side keep the situation under review and continue to discuss with the Authority matters of concern arising from implementation of the re-organization. (84)

The escalation of the action meant members having to take strike action, it was felt that given the ballot results on non-co-operation with the Billing review, the results of a ballot on strike action would not provide adequate member support. The discussion paper recognized that although some concessions had been gained from management, major problems still existed. These were summarized as: -

1. There was no conclusive evidence that the proposed reorganization will benefit the consumer. Indeed, many believed the opposite to be the case.
2. Billing remained scheduled to disappear in divisions and the implications for staff within those divisions remained exceptionally serious, despite the existence of a no compulsory redundancy guarantee and the staff protection agreement.
3. There was bound to be major diminution of job content and lack of career prospects for any staff who remained in billing, particularly those within the satellites.
4. There was major depression of grading levels throughout the entire billing structure and this would affect staff both within the regional unit and the satellites.
5. Staffing levels within the regional unit and satellites had not been justified to the trade union side and they remained concerned that in a number of areas the new billing organization is likely to be short staffed.
6. Job descriptions and job outlines remained a problem and unclear in many areas.
7. The reorganization would have a disproportionately

adverse effect on women and would, therefore, be at odds with the Authority's stated equal opportunities policy.

8. Various important items of information had not been supplied to the trade union side, despite repeated requests. In particular, the Authority had refused to tell them the financial implications of the proposed reorganization, which was of major importance to the trade unions in negotiations. (85)

Despite these problems, it was the second option that was accepted. Negotiations were to follow during the next year on the detail of staff protection agreements. Examination of subsequent documentation showed several noteworthy points.

Firstly, letters were received from staff unhappy with the way they were treated under the counselling procedure and with the "new" job offered. These were to be reflected at a meeting with the Authority's Personnel staff when the Trade Union side told management that they had received disturbing reports of questions asked during counselling interviews concerning: -

- A. Applicants trade union activities,
- B. Women applicants marriage/family plans,
- C. Applicants time keeping records,
- D. Applicants sickness records. (86)

Secondly, the Authority clearly used the rationalization of the billing operation to examine other areas: -

With the introduction of the new billing organization it is opportune to examine certain practices which affect either the customer or other departments and consider whether standardization is appropriate. Revised procedures have therefore been developed which will result in changes in practices in some, though by no means all, Divisions. (87)

Lastly, as regards the cost of the whole operation, this was only to be ascertained by the NALGO District Officer acting in his capacity as a private individual and asking to inspect the Authority's 1986-87 Accounts, the reply being received on 24th June 1987: -

Equivalent costs for the billing reorganizations relating to Aqua House amounted to £379,000. No other additional costs were incurred other than charged to the Extraordinary item for the reorganization provision in the Accounts. These costs will be more than offset by savings in operating costs as a result of the reorganization. (88)

CHRONOLOGY - BILLING RE-ORGANIZATION

1984

January	Formation of Billing Organization Review Group
June	Documents indicating re-organization of Billing "leaked" to NALGO. NALGO asked for consultation.
October	Employers respond.
November	RJSC T.U. Side meet. Policy resolutions passed. RJSC both sides meet. Proposed staffing structure produced by employers. RJSC T.U. Side meet. Staff Protection Agreement sought.
December	RJSC both side meet. Draft Staff Protection Agreements exchanged. Difference in approach taken by both sides. Employers state intention to commence counselling.

1985

January	Third draft of Staff Protection Agreement. NALGO recommend acceptance in principle.
February	RJSC T.U. Side meet - Draft staff structures explained. NALGO request employers to postpone counselling pending discussions on staff structure proposals. RJSC T.U. Side meet - Ballot of staff to be held. Employers reject request for postponement of counselling. NALGO advice staff not to participate in the counselling exercises.
March	NALGO District Water Committee and RJSC T.U. Side meet -Policy of non-cooperation endorsed.

Ballot result 62.5% in favour of non-cooperation.

NALGO NEC give dispute official backing.

April

Staff Protection Agreement signed.

RJSC both sides meet. Employers agree to re-examine staffing structure.

Employers make adjustments to staffing structure - state that this is their final position.

May

District Water Committee and RJSC T.U. Side meet - Decide to accept Employers package while keeping situation under review.

CHRONOLOGY - SCIENTIFIC SERVICES REORGANIZATION

1984

November Review of laboratory services undertaken.

1985

March Formal presentation of review to Trade Union Side.

Reduction in staffing level from 169 to 127.

April NALGO call meeting along with GMBATU and NUPE members to discuss findings.

Motion passed to campaign against the proposals.

May Ad Hoc Working Party set up.

June Meetings of Ad Hoc Working Party.

July Mass meeting of staff called.
Request for independent assessment of Authority's proposals.
Motion carried to reject proposals and call for one-day strike.

August Members balloted on industrial actions.
Labour Research Department decline to do an independent assessment.
Accidental pollution occurs within the authority.

September One day strike takes place.

October District Water Committee accepts employer's proposals.

1986

January Staff Protection Agreement concluded.

CHAPTER FIVE

- 5.1 LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND NEW TECHNOLOGY - BACKGROUND
- 5.2 LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND NEW TECHNOLOGY - THE NALGO RESPONSE
- 5.3 LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND NEW TECHNOLOGY - THE PILOT STUDIES
- 5.4 SHROPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
- 5.5 SHROPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL - BRIDGNORTH DISTRICT COUNCIL BRANCH
- 5.6 SANDWELL METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL
- 5.7 CASE STUDY - BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL
- 5.7.1 BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL NALGO BRANCH

5.1 Local Government and New Technology - Background

Of NALGO's three quarters of a million members, some two thirds are employed in the local government sector, a sector where it was recognised at an early stage that the impact of new technology could be vast. Many local authorities had been using mainframe computer systems during the 1970's for applications such as pay-roll and rates, however the accelerating technical advances of the new micro-electronic technology and the rapidly reducing cost by the early 1980's, taken together with two other factors, meant that new technology offered a means of potentially cutting costs and yet maintaining or improving levels of service.

The two factors were firstly that local government was, and still is operating in an atmosphere of cutback and squeeze. Secondly, that new technology offered productivity gains in an area that had previously been seen as a productivity 'bottleneck' - the office. For example, the Deputy Director of Management Services of Cheshire County Council said in 1983:-

Cheshire first began to make use of the current generation of office technology at the beginning of the 1980's. The benefits of word processing equipment were required for improving productivity. (1)

At a technology seminar early in 1981, the then Environment Secretary, Michael Heseltine, stressed the potential benefits to local authorities of new technology and urged a deeper commitment to a corporate word and data processing and telecommunication policy. He pointed out that: -

Although Local Government has invested heavily in data processing, other developments such as word processing, facsimile transmission and telecommunications may also bring new dimensions to the work of administrators and the efficient provision of services to the public. (2)

The scope for the introduction of new technology into local government can be traced back to the changes in local government structure that took place in 1974. One can see this if one looks at the reasoning behind the reform of Local Government system at that time. Firstly the old structure had been created for a different society with different needs and the range of functions performed by Local Government had increased enormously. Secondly failure to adjust to population growth and movement led to anomalies between different authorities with the same functions and status. Thirdly, there was an outdated distinction between urban and rural areas leading to much wasteful and inconvenient duplication of services, eg. between Urban District Councils and Rural District Councils, or between counties and county boroughs. Fourthly, and this was perhaps the main problem, many of the first tier units of Local Government (counties and county boroughs) were simply too small to perform their

functions properly and economically. Specialised services, needing expensive equipment and highly qualified staff could only be provided economically where the population served was large and linked to this was the notion that planning could only be carried out effectively over a large area. Seeley, in discussing the Maud Commissioners' view of the defects in the system noted that: -

Many Local Authorities were too small, in size and revenue, and in consequence too short of highly qualified manpower and technical equipment, to be able to do their work as well as it could and should have been done. (3)

Taking reasons three and four above in particular it is apparent that the larger the administrative scope and structure of an authority and the more 'centralised' its functions, the greater was the potential for the application of systems of work based on new technology. Local authorities wishing to adopt new technology were able to turn to a specialist organisation for support. This organisation was the Local Authorities Management Services and Computer Committee (LAMSAC). LAMSAC was established in 1968 and was managed by a committee composed of representatives of its constituent associations. Reporting to the main committee were two bodies, one of which was the Technical Advisory Sub-Committee. The Technical Advisory Sub-Committee was responsible in turn for advising three of

LAMSAC's specialist panels: -

1. The General Management Panel.
2. The Organisation and Methods Productivity Panel.
3. The Computer Panel.

Of particular interest as regards this study are the terms of reference of the Computer Panel which include: -

- A) The appraisal and development of new procedures and systems and the promotion of related research activities with the assistance of such application groups and working parties as may be appropriate.
- B) Co-ordination and assistance in the development of computers in Local Government, the dissemination of information and advice on current practices and installation details, and co-operation with other organisations in developing the use of computers.
- C) Advice on courses, conferences and seminars as necessary for the advancement of computer education and training, on training needs of computer personnel and on the maintenance of L.A.M.S.A.C.'s index of computer applications in Local Government. (4)

Apart from its specialist advisory and consultancy services

to individual Local Authorities, L.A.M.S.A.C. seminars and conferences showed the emphasis placed on the importance of new technology in Local Government at the beginning of 1980's. For example at the National Computing Seminar organised by L.A.M.S.A.C. from June 30th to July 3rd, 1980, a report was given which included a paper on "The possible effects of the new technology on local authorities roles in the next decade". (5)

Also on 23rd July 1980 L.A.M.S.A.C. held a multi-disciplinary meeting of specialists and generalists in the field of office systems to discuss "Converging new technology in the office".

At the L.A.M.S.A.C. national management conference at Eastbourne between March 23rd and March 27th, 1981, one speaker at the technology seminar urged Local Government to a full scale acceptance of new technology to allow councils to handle massive workloads with ease and told the conference that: -

New technology promises resilience and information distribution on a scale not hitherto thought possible, together with a progressive and fairly radical blurring of traditional departmental boundaries that will significantly affect organisational structures. (6)

An examination of LAMSAC's publications list shows a comprehensive series of reports on information technology in

local government spanning the years from 1977 to 1988. (7)
One of the most important of these reports was the 1984 survey 'Office Automation in Local Government' (8), which documented the results of a project to examine the opportunities for office automation in local government based on studies made in 1983 of four 'typical' local authorities.

The studies examined the extent to which the authorities were already using computers and other office technology, identified the general nature of the needs of managers, professionals and support staff for information, and developed overall strategies for the introduction of office automation. In some instances this work was supplemented by a more detailed analysis of existing activities.

The report concluded that: -

The beneficial applications for local government of office automation are considerable, investment to take advantage of these opportunities should not be prejudiced because of existing financing and accounting constraints. (9)

The report also commented on new technology agreements, taking the view that they were of doubtful value if they in any way restricted the applications of new technology from improving the cost effectiveness of local government services. (10) The report notes: -

There is a role for new technology agreements which are

not merely protective but also include a positive commitment by both sides to accept change. They must therefore be flexible and adaptable and ideally, should not involve too much detail. (11)

It is interesting that the report discussed the key influences affecting future developments in office automation and recognised, listed as a 'political' issue, that unions or worker stipulations or agreement may have some influence on the type of technology introduced and its pace of development. (12)

LAMSAC was to undergo restructuring in both 1983 and 1987. In 1983 the panels on specific areas of work were disbanded and a system of working parties set up on an ad hoc basis for specific purposes was introduced. In 1987 a major restructuring took place which gave LAMSAC two operational areas: Client Services, and the Advisory Division. Client Services looked after commercial products and consultancy and the Advisory Division embraced all activities funded by grant allocated under Section 56(9) of the Local Government and Planning Act 1980. The main thrust of the Advisory Division's work was aimed at raising awareness, providing information and advice, undertaking research and co-ordinating activities in the fields of information technology and management services. (13)

However, the organisation was dogged with financial problems and serious cash flow problems were announced at the

beginning of 1989. The reported loss for 1988-89 was put at between £300,000 and £400,000 (14) and as a result LAMSAC was wound up in May 1989 with the loss of 59 jobs, many of whom were NALGO members. There is no doubt that LAMSAC was to provide an important input into aiding local authorities in the introduction of new technology during the 1980's.

Finally, the extent of spending by local government on information technology for 1988/89 was estimated at £530 millions, this being an increase of 10% over the 1987/88 figure. (15)

5.2 Local Government and New Technology - The NALGO Response

It has been suggested that the response of NALGO to the introduction of new technology in local government can be traced back to the dispute that arose out of the introduction of word processors in Bradford Council in 1976. (16) When the Local Authority wanted to introduce word processors into the typing pool they were opposed by the typists, all NALGO members. However they did not gain the support of their NALGO branch, mainly, it was reported, because one of the local branch officers was on the working party that recommended the introduction of the new technology. Eventually 9 word processors were introduced and 22 jobs disappeared from the typing pool. A 1979 report said: -

Since this dispute NALGO has moved to try and prevent

any repetitions. (17)

Whilst negotiating over new technology is primarily the responsibility of the branch, there were moves at national level following the above dispute and it is worth examining these first.

In June 1979 the Staff Side of the National Joint Council submitted proposals to the national employers seeking a revision of Appendix G of the National Joint Agreement for Administrative, Professional, Technical and Clerical services staff, better known as the 'Purple Book'. Appendix G was headed, 'Introduction of Management Aids, Improved Methods of Working, Automation, etc.' and contained a recommended outline procedure: -

Intended to assist in the maintenance of good staff relations and to facilitate the fullest cooperation of staff in the installation and use of new equipment and techniques where these would lead to an improvement in efficiency or more effective service to the public.
(18)

Appendix G in its existing form placed an onus on authorities to consult with local Staff Side on proposals to change working methods. It recommended local authorities to adopt a procedure on the following lines, wherever practicable through the machinery of the local joint committee or in its absence direct with the trade unions: -

1. At the earliest opportunity to provide the fullest information of proposals to introduce organisations and methods reviews, install computers and other machines or to reorganise work, including mergers or reorganisation of departments.
2. To consult at all stages on the future of staff whose work is to be varied in a significant manner or transferred to machines.
3. To consult on any amendments to working hours which the authorities might feel its appropriate to introduce to enable new techniques to be used effectively.
4. To give existing staff with the appropriate qualities and qualifications every opportunity of applying for appointment to work connected with new machines or changed methods and provide adequate facilities for such staff to attend training courses etc. (19)

In June 1979 the Staff Side of the National Joint Council sought from the employers amendments to Appendix G that would: -

Ensure that the changes taking place as a result of the expected rapid growth of micro-chip technology applied to office systems take place in an atmosphere of confidence and agreement with the staff involved. (20)

The four principal changes being sought by the Staff Side in their revised Appendix G were as follows: -

1. The procedure should be mandatory
2. There should be consultations and the fullest sharing of information with the trade unions when proposed changes in working methods are in their formative stage.
3. Changes should only be introduced with the agreement of the unions, and
4. There should be reference in the procedure to work undertaken by central employer organisations at either provincial or national level. (21)

The employers did not respond to the Staff Side proposals until August 1980, in between this time there was an interesting debate at NALGO's 1980 Annual Conference on the subject of national agreements over new technology. A motion put to the National Executive Council to instruct branches to block the introduction of all new technology until national agreements on it had been negotiated for all services was narrowly defeated on a card vote by 321,560 votes to 308,082.

The debate centering around the call for national agreements

showed clearly the opposing views within NALGO. For example, the Chairman of the New Technology Working Party said: -

It's for the membership to be vigilant and ensure that where new technology is being introduced they find out what the conditions will be. Unless you get motivation coming from the grass roots, you will never be able to get reasonable technology agreements at national level.
(22)

This view was supported by a delegate from Coventry who said that the aim was to put the necessary action in the area where it belonged - with the branches, as long as this was with the knowledge of NALGO district offices and headquarters. (23)

Opposing views were put forward by delegates from Camden who felt that employers would try to introduce new technology in the weaker sections of the union and it was therefore vital that NALGO had a strong national response. Also they took the view that it was absolutely vital for agreements to be reached at a national level first or it would be possible for employers to rush through agreements in a selection of authorities which would undermine any sort of national initiative. (24)

At a group meeting in October 1980 the policy on a national new technology agreement for local government was substantially confirmed when a motion from a delegate from

Havering was defeated. The issue before the group was whether the drive to secure new technology agreements should take place at branch or national level. The Havering delegate felt that new technology was too important an issue to be left to branches and was convinced on his own experience that local authorities were unwilling to share it benefits with employees. The motion put forward was that there should be a national ban on the introduction of new technology until substantial improvements in service conditions were negotiated at national level. A delegate from Knowlsey opposed this arguing that any attempt to quantify the benefits of new technology at national level would be out of date before they were agreed and that only branches could handle the situations. This was the view that prevailed. (25)

The above view was probably enforced by the response of the employers to the Staff Side proposals for a revised Appendix G. The employers stated that they believed the proposals provided a procedure which was too rigid, would weaken managerial prerogative and cause unnecessary delay. They submitted counter proposals on the revision of the Appendix. The Staff Side rejected the claims made by the employers and emphasised that changes in working methods could only be implemented successfully with the agreement of the trade unions locally. The employers were told that the Staff Side would be advising its members not to co-operate with the

introduction of new working methods and arrangements until the negotiations on the revision of Appendix G had been satisfactorily completed or until their authority agreed to accept locally a procedure along the lines proposed by the national Staff Side.

The National Joint Council met again in January 1981 and failed to agree. At the March 1981 meeting the Employers Side refused to meet any aspect of the Staff Side claims and as NALGO felt that no further progress was possible the claim was withdrawn and a circular was issued advising branches not to co-operate with the introduction of new technology unless agreement had been reached and to negotiate agreements with employers even where there appeared to be no immediate proposals to introduce new technology.

NALGO's view remained that Appendix G was regarded as 'totally inadequate for the purpose of the introduction of the new technology'. (26) The employers viewpoint was clearly expressed in the 1982 LAMSAC report on word processing applications in local government: -

The employers have resisted arguments that the introduction of new equipment or new techniques must depend on the prior agreement of local staff sides, and they continue to see the introduction of new of improved methods of working as management's responsibility.
(27)

Whilst the national negotiations over Appendix G were going

on, several circulars on negotiating new technology agreements were issued to members by NALGO's National Local Government Committee. (28) A circular sent out in February 1980 incorporated a questionnaire seeking detailed local information about new technology, the result of which were made available to NALGO District Offices. Thirty-seven percent of branches replied to the questionnaire. 80 of these reported word processors in operation but only 16 had negotiated a general new technology agreement.

The circular also set out guide-lines for negotiating new technology agreements, urging branches to give detailed consideration to the following: -

1. The need for a 'new technology' agreement providing for union agreement at all stages of the introduction of new equipment or proposals for changes in operation of existing equipment. Such an agreement, which is required before new equipment is put into operation, should include full provision of information and adequate time for consultation without commitment.
2. There should be no job loss either through redundancies or natural wastage.

3. There should be no compulsion to work on new equipment. Detailed consideration should be given to agreements on retraining and redeployment (vague assurances are not enough).
4. Consideration should also be given to overall training programmes as career prospects and longer term employment prospects may be severely affected by the introduction of 'new technology'.
5. There should be no detrimental change in methods of working of work organisation and any attempts to install work measurement devices should be resisted.
6. There should be negotiations on service conditions improvements that lead to job creation such as longer holidays, study leave, better maternity leave and, particularly, shorter working hours. Shorter working hours can be justified on the basis of savings made and can benefit everybody.
7. There should be full health and safety precautions.
8. Re-grading may be negotiated on the basis of increased duties and responsibilities but pay increases should not deter branches from negotiating on the other issues.

(29)

The need for monitoring once new equipment was in operation was also stressed, this to be carried out both by safety representatives and stewards.

The policy therefore, for the remainder of the 1980's, was to place the emphasis firmly upon the local government NALGO branch to negotiate a satisfactory technology agreement. NALGO's National Local Government Committee continued to give advice stated in NALGO's published response referred to earlier, and also undertook a major survey in 1985 of the introduction of new technology into local government. (30)

The survey was based on a questionnaire sent out to all branches which sought a response to 92 questions broken into six sections, dealing with the existence or otherwise of new technology agreements and the experience of trying to achieve or monitor them; the grading of word processor operators; the impact of new technology on jobs; health and safety; details of new technology installed; and technical details on computer packages.

The result of the survey was not uniformly instructive as some branches and stewards responded to some parts of the questionnaire and not to others. Of the 145 branches, a quarter of all in local government, indicating that new technology had been introduced, half said there was an

agreement. Of the remainder, most were finding their employer introducing new technology without agreement. The survey lead NALGO to conclude: -

It is clear that many local authority employers are bent on introducing new technology without an agreement with their staff unions. (31)

Following the survey the National Local Government Committee renewed its call for branches to conclude new technology agreements with their employers. In the local government section of the 1986 NALGO publication, 'New Technology and Change', it was claimed that local new technology agreements were widespread in local government, however no statistics were provided to support this. (32)

In the same section of the 1986 document it was stated that the particular need was seen to be the monitoring of agreements: -

There is a high incidence of branches producing agreements and then failing to monitor further new technology developments. Some employers are using agreements as 'carte blanche' for the uncontrolled implementation of new technology. (33)

The 1986 section on local government also noted the changing nature of the technology. Whereas the initial response was directed towards issues such as word processing and health and safety, the increased introduction of personal computing

for more users, including more senior staff, raised new questions of job content, knock on effects of direct managerial access and the need for training. A 1987 survey of the use of information technology in local government showed that there had been a marked increase in information technology managers who were chief officer status and that the estimate of local government computer users was between 100,000 and 150,000. (34)

5.3 New Technology in Local Government - The Pilot Studies

The pilot studies detailed below both took place during 1984-5 and formed the basis of the researcher's end of first year report for the University of Aston. The essential aim of the pilot studies was to enable the researcher to 'refamiliarise' himself with developments in relation to new technology and NALGO since the earlier work in 1981 for an MSc thesis. In addition, the pilot studies sought to; provide an insight on how technological change was affecting the selected organisations; evaluate this information in terms of its operational use to NALGO; provide a research methodology which could be tested as regards its appropriateness for later use in other studies and, help clarify the academic objectives of the research.

After discussions with NALGO's West Midlands District officers it was decided that the pilot studies would be based

in the local government sector and would focus on two branches, one being a rural County Council branch, the other being a Metropolitan Borough Council branch, geographically only some forty miles apart. Both branches had also formed part of the researcher's earlier study, providing a base of material and familiarity with which to begin.

5.4 Shropshire County Council

The County Council covers a large geographical rural area (349,000 hectares) and serves a population of some 382,000, giving one of the lowest densities of population. This however is misleading since there exists within the County a major new town - Telford, which houses nearly 30% of the population. At the time of the study unemployment rates were greater than both regional and national rates, Telford containing over half the people out of work in the County. This situation has changed significantly in recent years with development of Telford as a major industrial site, well served by communication links and recognised for its ability to attract 'hi-technology' industry.

The County Council's operations are based on a modern centralised site and they were generally recognised as being advanced in the introduction of new technology. To quote the branch response to a NALGO questionnaire in 1980: -

I understand that this authority was one of the

'pioneers' of word processing in the West Midlands and at that time the implications of this technology were not fully appreciated by branch negotiators or the Trade Union generally. (35)

The NALGO branch comprises approximately 2000 voting members with support being provided at the time of the visits by a full time Branch Administrator and three part time clerical staff. There was no steward system in operation at that time and the branch operated on a system of Departmental representatives, following a fairly typical NALGO Branch structure.

Negotiations over New Technology

At the researcher's 1980 meetings with the Branch Administrator the picture painted as regards the union's involvement over new technology issues within the branch was pessimistic. There was no consultative machinery in operation and according to the Branch Administrator 'VDU's spring up everywhere'. (36) The branch had no record of what technology was being introduced, it was only when members drew attention to it that it came to the Branch's notice. The Branch Administrator made several other points. Firstly that new technology was not only being introduced without consultation but that it was being 'hard sold' directly to staff in post by the Organisation and Methods Department of the Authority.

Secondly, that no technology agreement had been reached and there was nothing on the cards as regards a technology agreement, the reason for this being given as the attitude of the membership - apparently the employees were keen to operate new technology and took a deferential view towards management, being keen to please. Thirdly, the membership were not willing to take any industrial action and expressed a wish for any technology agreements to be negotiated on a national basis. (37)

The situation had changed when the branch was visited during 1984-85. Firstly, the Branch Administrator interviewed in 1980 had left in 1983. This person had a strong interest in new technology matters and had led a working group on new technology formed in 1981 comprised of the branch President, Secretary, Assistant Secretary and the Health and Safety Subcommittee Chairman. Following the departure of the Branch Administrator in 1983 it was made clear that the role of the new appointee would be one of office manager giving administrative support to the branch. (38) In an interview with the former Branch President it was stressed that this change of role was one that the Branch wanted.

(39) On the face of it therefore it seems that there had been something of a personality clash within the branch, a fact made more likely by comments made by the County Personnel Officer who pointed to the 'insular nature of the Shropshire people' and that it was a 'soft' NALGO branch who

wouldn't want any 'hard-liners'. (40) It is also worth noting that former Branch President was a senior officer within the County Council's Planning Department. He saw the status of senior officer as giving his union post 'more credibility and bargaining power'. (41)

Negotiations over new technology did not get under way until dissatisfaction by members occurred in 1980-81 over the issue of word processing (this is dealt with separately below) and increasing worries over the introduction of equipment without consultation.

Management claimed that at that time there was no co-ordinated overall strategy for introducing new technology, initiatives simply arising from departments. However in an interview with the County Council's Computer Manager it was suggested that there had been an attempt at a 'corporate strategy' for computing in existence since 1981. (42) This was lead by the Computer Manager and the County Treasurer (computing originally being part of the Treasurer's Department in view of the early 'number crunching' applications such as pay-roll). This strategy was to develop major corporate computer systems in the area of finance, human resources and physical resources and to subsequently develop departmental initiatives in these areas. The Computer Department carried a semi-autonomous role servicing the whole of the County Council, working in hand

with the Organisation and Methods Department in implementing new applications. There also existed an 'Information Systems Advisory Group' comprised of senior management representatives, the function of which was to promote advice on priorities on new technology to departments and to advise on priorities in introducing new technology. An examination of the County Council's 1984 Annual Report and Accounts showed an 'Information Technology Fund' being increased by special contributions: -

To be used to encourage technological innovations in Departments with a view to increasing efficiency and effectiveness. (43)

Draft proposals for a new technology agreement were put forward by the NALGO branch in March 1982, following the NALGO 'Guide to Negotiators' guide-lines. At the same time they also drew attention to the fact that despite the agreement of the Joint Secretaries of the West Midlands Provincial Council in 1980 to remind authorities of their responsibilities for consultation in line with Appendix G of the 'Purple Book' (44): -

New technology is being introduced within the County Council without any consultation whatsoever with the Branch in some Departments. (45)

On the 8th July 1982 the County Personnel Officer responded to the effect that the draft proposals put forward by the

Branch were considered to be unacceptable by Chief Officers as a suitable basis for agreement. The employers offered an alternative draft for agreement. The Branch then referred the matter to the Branch New Technology Working Group to examine the employer's draft to identify specific areas of agreement and disagreement with NALGO's proposals.

It was not until September 1982 that the Branch responded to the County Personnel Officer, enclosing a detailed list of comments on the employer's draft agreement. They were critical in particular of the fact that the employer's draft started with a categorical statement on new technology being a management prerogative: -

The introduction of new technology is a means of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the Council's services and that is the duty of the Council to continually strive for such improvements. The responsibility for initiating investigations, formulating proposals and introducing such improvements rests with the County Council. (46)

The Branch was also critical that the employer's draft agreement did not establish any procedures for consultation over new technology: -

If the consultation procedures were already working properly, we would not experience the sorts of difficulties created when a department either inadvertently forgets to involve the Staff side at an early stage, or consider that staff involvement is unnecessary. (47)

The response to the County Personnel Officer made it clear that the Branch felt strongly that the terms in which the employer's draft was couched did not reflect a desire for working together with the trade union. In addition it was felt that the employer's draft suggested a reliance on existing agreements rather than the development of a new specific agreement suiting the particular circumstances of new technology. (48)

No further progress was made and at the time of the researcher's visit in 1984 the two draft agreements remained on the table. According to the Branch Administrator this meant working to the 'spirit' of the two (49), whatever could be taken to be meant by that. The 'spirit' was certainly questionable as equipment had continued to be installed without consultation. The branch list of technology installed was three years out of date - requests for updating being made to the Personnel Department with no response forthcoming (the researcher was able to ascertain that the Computer Department had in fact full knowledge of the extent of the County Council's equipment).

The continuing time lag over negotiations meant that the Council was able to pursue a 'back door' approach to the introduction of new technology. Interviews with senior management made it clear that the strategy was to work outside the trade union 'picking off' groups and individual

employees in relation to new technology. Even where consultation took place, approval to purchase equipment had already been gained via the Committee Cycle beforehand, thus strengthening managements hand.

In May 1985 the Branch re-formed another working group to push for a technology agreement but its meetings were sporadic and visits in 1986 and 1987 (50) showed that no progress had been made apart from discussions between the Education Department and NALGO on a draft code of practice on the introduction of new technology which it had been hoped would provide a lever for a central agreement. The main success in relation to new technology in the branch came through health and safety issues which will be discussed in relation to the word processing department.

The branch also introduced an internal newsletter in 1985 which it was hoped would provide better awareness and communication generally within the branch. In addition the Branch decided in 1985 to adopt a Steward System saying that: -

Branch representatives have had a very limited involvement in NALGO affairs and have had little opportunity to develop their own knowledge of NALGO policies and their conditions of service and in addition, members have not had the time allocated to their particular problems as a result of the workload of the Branch Officer dealing with it. (51)

A study of the 1987 and 1988 NALGO Annual Reports for the Shropshire Branch reveal several interesting points which, although not being concerned directly with new technology matters, do relate to overall issues of union structure referred to in Chapter One of this thesis, and are therefore of importance to note. Firstly, the 1987 Annual Report highlighted the fact that the implementation of a Steward System was proving to be a time consuming task, requiring a survey of all work place locations, membership levels and possible candidates for stewardship. In 1988 the process was still underway, partly hindered by an internal departmental reorganisation at the Shirehall. The report stated: -

This issue of a steward system is particularly important to a branch like ours with its large and diverse geography and diverse membership (the District Council's) under nine separate employers. Much of the ground work necessary before a steward system can be operational has now been done and the constitutional questions have been addressed. Once the 'dust' has settled from the latest reorganisation we will be well placed to complete implementation of the new system.
(52)

Secondly, the Branch decided in 1987 to replace the role of Branch Administrator by one of Branch Organiser. The major difference between an Administrator and an Organiser is that the latter is able to negotiate directly with employers at the Branch Executive's request. Unlike lay members such as Branch Officers, an Organiser has right of access to all employer areas, and as there were nine separate employing

authorities within Shropshire this was felt to be desirable. This request was granted by the District Office.

Thirdly, it was only in 1988 that the Branch had fully implemented a computer based membership record system. Ironically the introduction of this was in part brought on by the legal requirements of keeping records of membership and members address in a form enabling the branch to quickly contact all members in the case of a postal ballot being required. It also helped by keeping track of members changes of department. The 1987 report noted: -

Trade unions have so far been rather slow to tap cheaply available computing power but there are signs of growing interest. Should NALGO decide to set up a computer network enabling branches to link up we will be in a position to take advantage of this. (53)

Fourthly, the 1987 report indicated that FUMPO was managing to attract some of the Branch's more senior managers. The report states: -

The further division of staff this would produce would not be in anyone's interest, except those who see the diminution of trade union effectiveness as being desirable. We must therefore continue to resist FUMPO's influence. (54)

Finally, the 1988 report commented on the problems of getting members to attend the Branch AGM, indicating that even a target of 15% of membership would be acceptable in that over

300 members would have an opportunity to 'participate in the activities of a branch that they may feel does little else except relieve them of their subscriptions each month'. (55)

On a humorous note, the Branch Organiser commented that: -

Yet again there was a disappointing turn-out at last year's AGM and we all had to suffer an excessive intake of cheese and wine as there were so few members to help us. (56)

Word Processing in Shropshire County Council

In early 1979 the Central Typing Bureau of Shropshire County Council was approached by the Organisation and Methods section of the County Council with a view to the introduction of word processing equipment. Organisation and Methods maintained that word processing would give a three to one output increase when compared to conventional typewriter output. The subsequent 1982 LAMSAC report confirmed that this was not part of any co-ordinated strategy (Shropshire being one of the twenty one case studies contained in the report): -

The application of word processing was not part of any generally required strategy of development for the authority as a whole other than attempt to utilise new techniques in order to cut costs and improve services. (57)

The Central Typing Bureau supervisor, a NALGO member, was invited to look at various systems, the result that one

particular system was chosen, training provided for the operators, only to be scrapped three month later in favour of an IBM system linking with the County's mainframe computer. The equipment, a shared logic system with a series of screens and keyboards was installed with no union agreement on grading or working conditions for the operators.

Prior to the introduction of word processing, the typing pool consisted of twenty two full time and twelve part time typists, by 1985 these figures were fourteen full time and nine part time, coping with substantially more work with productivity increases being close to the Organisation and Methods original estimation.

Whilst the installation and start up took place with little member reaction, two areas of concern were soon to come to the fore. Firstly, to quote the LAMSAC report, one of the 'major problems' experienced by the authority was 'increased union interest in grading'. (58) The word processor operators did not feel that the County Council's grading reflected the responsibilities of their posts and a long battle ensued over re-grading in which no industrial action was taken but much goodwill lost and bitterness incurred. An internal branch document said: -

When the equipment was first introduced here in early 1979 there was no guidance available to branches from NALGO and we have learned from bitter experience the need to reach agreement on grading and working conditions prior to equipment being installed. (59)

The result was that no re-gradings were made but some extra incremental points were given.

The second issue of concern was over working conditions. Following complaints by the word processing operators an internal health and safety inspection was carried out in February 1981. The report concluded that: -

The conditions at present existing in this department are reminiscent of the Lancashire Spinning Mills of the early 1900's, with poor lighting, overcrowding, noise and dilapidated decoration. (60)

Member concern was such that remedial action was quickly taken by the authority. This issue, coupled with the appointment within the branch of a very active health and safety representative served to raise member awareness of the health and safety aspect of new technology and stimulated their willingness to vocalise concerns and, when appropriate, to take action over health and safety issues.

In 1984 an issue arose concerning eyesight testing for VDU users. Eyesight testing for all staff in the Central Typing Bureau working with word processors was on the basis of an annual check up carried out by a qualified Ophthalmic Surgeon. This test being considerably more sophisticated than the standard opticians test or that carried out by the

Area Health Authority via an attendant nurse. The County Council attempted to change this system to a standard test carried out on site every two years, with an annual test being given for employees over the age of 40. The motive for this was probably increased costs when faced with a growing number of VDU operators. Needless to say, at a time of growing publicity over the health effects of VDU's, this move sparked considerable concern on the part of the word processor operators, leading to a written appeal on their behalf by the Typing Services Supervisor (61) and the taking up of the issue by the NALGO Health and Safety Representative.

Subsequent meetings with management showed little concern to allay staff worries and an underestimation of the depth of feeling over the issue. The management view was expressed that: -

The new equipment test procedure was a reasonable response for the re-assurance of staff. (62)

This response lead to further action by the NALGO Health and Safety Representative and a direct appeal for assistance made by one of the operators to the Ophthalmic Consultant. The Health and Safety Representative drew up a questionnaire to be completed by all operators the results of which clearly reflecting health concerns, nearly 50% feeling that deterioration of eyesight had taken place. (63)

Faced with growing concern and the fact that the County Council's Central Safety Committee agreed to take the issue further the management withdrew proposals for changes to the existing procedures in relation to word processor operators. At a meeting with Branch Officers in 1987, the view was expressed to the researcher that the only 'success' that the branch could claim to have achieved over the introduction of new technology had come through the issues arising out of Health and Safety. (64)

5.5 Shropshire County Council - Bridgnorth District Council Branch

The NALGO branch on site at the District Council formed part of the NALGO County Branch. It was decided to focus on the District Council after the researcher noticed in the branch report at the 1984 Annual General Meeting that the branch was experiencing difficulties negotiating over technological change: -

There has been no prior consultation with the staff on the decision to install a telephone call logging system or, more importantly, a computer. We learned about both of these decisions through the local press. (65)

The NALGO branch at the District Council had a membership of approximately 75. Computing services prior to 1984 had been carried out by links with the County mainframe, however, the

increasing workload meant that the County could no longer guarantee the level of service required. During 1984 moves were made through the Treasurers's Department for an on site computing facility, although 'rumours' circulated there was no consultation with NALGO. In fact, referring to the quotation above from the AGM report, the first that the branch got to know about developments was when a newspaper report in the local press mentioned staff savings to be made from the introduction of new technology, in the region of £29,000, this being the equivalent of two to three full time jobs.

The branch called for a meeting of the Local Joint Staff Consultative Committee but this was not arranged until December 1984 by which time approval for the purchase of new equipment was a 'fait accompli' in terms of the committee system. At this meeting, the attitude of the employer side can be clearly shown by selected quotes from the minutes of the meeting: -

"New technology would increase efficiency and remove the drudgery of certain tasks"

"The staff should not be too concerned about redundancy"

"Aptitude tests were available for those members of staff who were interested in this exciting new area"

"There has been considerable staff involvement in the choice of equipment and those directly concerned had made invaluable contributions"

"There would be formal consultations now that the choice of system had been decided" (66)

A week after this meeting a NALGO branch meeting was held and the level of member concern was shown by the fact that of 43 of 75 members attending, 42 voted for a resolution seeking a new technology agreement, with one member abstaining. The resolution passed was as follows: -

This meeting, whilst wishing to co-operate fully with the installation of new technology, expresses its grave concern at the lack of information and consultation on the Council's current proposals. With so many unanswered questions stemming from the computer development report, representatives are requested to report back to a further meeting when satisfied that sufficient information has been obtained to enable information decisions to be taken. (67)

One of the factors that lead to the resolution was the fact that following the local Joint Staff Consultative Committee meeting, the District Council Treasurer had agreed to present a report to staff on computer developments. This was only provided to the NALGO representatives half an hour before the branch meeting. The memorandum attached to the report stated: -

As you know, the recommendations on page 16 of the report were accepted and the equipment has been ordered. The whole of the report will no doubt be of interest to you, but I imagine you will wish to confine your comments and observation to the staffing implications. (68)

A brief consideration of the report lead the meeting to

express 'grave concern' and to seek a new technology agreement as a matter of urgency.

A reply was received from the Chief Executive and Clerk on the 28th December 1984, who commented: -

I appreciate that some authorities have found it necessary to enter into 'new technology agreements' with their staff, but I am also aware that other authorities have installed computers without seeing the need for such agreements. (69)

At this stage, the NALGO District Officer was requested to assist in preparing a draft new technology agreement and this draft was submitted to the District Council in March 1985 and a reply 'negative' in tone was received from the Chief Executive and Clerk in May 1985. Several comments made in the letter are of particular interest: -

I hope the Staff Side have carefully considered whether any lasting good will come from insisting on a new technology agreement. The Council readily accept their obligations under the National Scheme of Conditions of Service, including those provisions which spring to mind as being particularly relevant in this context, namely Appendix G.

and: -

Members have always accepted the principle of no compulsory redundancies, despite the fact that this is not formally on record as Council Policy. I would expect members generally to be content to continue in this manner but I would not like to predict their reaction to being asked to enter into a formal

agreement. Do please consider whether your current tactics might not achieve more harm than good. (70)

A meeting of NALGO members was held on 16th May 1985 to discuss the response. It was agreed that the request for a new technology agreement would continue to be pursued with the management and with the Joint Staff Consultative Committee. However it was also decided that members would not withhold their co-operation with the installation of the computer system. The reason for this probably lay with the fact that the branch had been weakened by a loss of members during 1985 due to NALGO'S support for the industrial action taken by the National Union of Miners, nearly 30% of members had resigned within the branch, and the feeling was that any industrial action would not be widely supported despite the membership's expressed concern over the introduction of new technology. Therefore negotiations over the new technology agreement were carried out from a branch point of view lacking any 'teeth' in the sense of recourse to industrial action by member should negotiations break down.

Negotiations continued through 1986 and 1987 with several deferments taking place. The draft agreement was finally discussed by the Joint Staff Consultative Committee in 1987 with the result that the draft agreement was rejected by the employers on the grounds that, with the exception of the 'no redundancy' provisions, the conditions of the draft agreement were already being followed via National Service Conditions.

(71) Following this rejection , and the lack of membership willingness to take action, negotiations foundered and new technology continued to be introduced without opposition.

5.6 Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

The Metropolitan Borough of Sandwell was created in 1974 as a result of Local Government reorganisation within the now defunct Metropolitan County of the West Midlands. Sandwell borders Birmingham, Dudley, Walsall and Wolverhampton and was an amalgamation of the previous boroughs of Warley and West Bromwich. Sandwell lies at the heart of an industrial area which, at the time of the researcher's visits in 1984 and 1985 was suffering badly from structural decline with an unemployment rate well above the national average. Population was in the region of 307,000 in a spread of 21,000 acres, giving a density of 14.61 people per acre. Despite it being only some forty miles from the County Council in Shropshire, the character of the problems faced in the region being quite different.

The Borough Council had no central site and was characterised by the fragmentation of its operations over a wide area. The NALGO Branch was of typical structure, membership being in the region of 3000. Support was provided by a full time Branch Secretary who took a negotiating role, along with two part time clerical staff giving administrative support.

Representation within departments was not yet on a steward basis, a list of Department Representatives being submitted to the Personnel Department each year, this list not being officially acknowledged or recognised for negotiating purposes.

In terms of the Council's strategy towards new technology, there existed an overall co-ordinating group responsible for the development of new technology comprised of senior staff from each department (NALGO members) plus the Computer Manager and the Deputy Director of Finance. Despite the existence of this group there was no formal written 'corporate plan', initiatives originating from within departments. (72) The Council's mainframe computer was supported by mini-systems in Technical Services, Social Services, Environmental Health and Housing Departments. Demands on the mainframe meant that the system was over-stretched and although proposals existed for expansion at that time they were not being implemented because of financial constraints.

Negotiating over New Technology

There existed a formal technology agreement signed in 1983 after several years of bargaining. NALGO was the prime negotiator with other trade unions, NUPE and TGWU being kept informed but not making any direct input. Both sides were

keen to implement an agreement, The Personnel Department feeling that it would at least set a clearer pattern of bargaining procedures than those which existed at present for APT & C staff.

The technology agreement followed a fairly standard pattern with a lengthy section on consultation procedures followed by a number of sections dealing with displacement, grading, re-training, redeployment and health and safety. Despite the existence of the consultation procedures, they failed to prevent a dispute from arising within one department. Also, from a file search at the branch there was little evidence of an up-dating of equipment being installed in the MBC, in general the branch information was several years out of date and the need for improved monitoring was acknowledged. However, the geographical dispersion of members across the MBC site makes communication difficult and it was also recognised that there was not always effective departmental and workplace representation. The 1984 Branch AGM report confirmed the monitoring problem: -

The New Technology agreement is emerging as an item which needs careful consideration, as the local authority seeks to speed up its work by the introduction of various forms of new equipment. Only vigilance by workplace representatives will enable the Executive Committee to approve and monitor new processes. (73)

Sandwell - Technical Services Department

At the time of the researcher's visit, the only dispute to occur over new technology occurred in the Technical Services Department. The Technical Services Department being responsible for the provision of a wide range of professional services to the Council, its committees and departments including Architectural and allied services, Engineering and Town Planning.

The dispute centred around the introduction of word processing. The proposals for this had gone through the Committee Cycle when consultation with the union took place, this, from the NALGO point of view was acceptable, to quote, "There is no point in driving a wedge between councillors and NALGO". (74) When formal consultation required by the technology agreement took place, a breakdown in communication occurred, as this 'consultation' did not reach those employees directly affected. As soon as the TSD typing pool were aware of the word processing issue they drew up a statement which formed an evaluation by the employees of the new requirements from their jobs coupled with worries about health and safety and training. One of the phrases from this statement shows the breakdown in 'consultation':

We were not approached in the first instance and asked our opinions as to how we felt in using this new technology. (75)

Union representation in the typing pool had previously been weak but the issue formed a basis for developing strength and the members were willing to take action. The major areas of concern emerged as re-grading and the training element. From management's point of view the only justification for re-grading was, "an increase in duties and responsibilities sufficient to be equivalent to promotion". (76) Also the view of Personnel was that they did not agree that the skill to be used in word processing were any different from conventional typing skills. Regarding training, a three day course had been proposed at the suppliers premises in Bristol, members felt that (a) this was insufficient period and (b) off site training would cause personal disruption.

Both of these were promulgated as a new technology issue. Using the procedures of the technology agreement a meeting at Departmental level was held which failed to reach any agreement, a meeting of the Personnel (Industrial Conciliation) Sub Committee being arranged as the next step. Meanwhile the 'status quo' provisions of the agreement were in operation. At the Personnel Sub Committee NALGO's case was found not to be proved and the Director of Technical Services was instructed to proceed with the introduction of new technology into his department. In accordance with the technology agreement the consultation procedure was now exhausted, the next move being to use the terms of Appendix

'G' for APT & C staffs.

At a special workplace committee meeting the union agreed to permit the equipment to be introduced and the staff to be trained to use it but that they would not use it until the dispute was resolved. However, to be really effective widespread 'blacking' would have been needed in the MBC and this would have been difficult to achieve. An approach was made to the Joint Secretaries of the West Midlands Provincial Council, the MBC making it clear that they "may or may not accept the recommendations of the Joint Secretaries".

Meanwhile, an attempt to use the technology agreement provisions to put pressure on the staff was made by the Director of Technical Services, who, in a letter to the employees 'explaining' the redeployment provisions said: -

I would emphasize that, if having given the new equipment a fair trial you are unable to continue using it, I will make every possible effort to redeploy you in accordance with the agreement. (77)

The meeting of the Joint Secretaries of the West Midlands Provincial Council failed to recommend re-grading for the typists but did recommend a single 'disruptive' payment to be made which 'gave some indication of additional duties'. However, because of the possibility of setting a precedent this was not accepted by the Council, the issue resting with the Personnel Department. No further action was to be taken

by the typists, the equipment was installed and was operated by them.

The Departmental Representative acknowledged that from the union's point of view there was a breakdown in the sense that management's consultation ended with the union, in accordance with the technology agreement, but the union had failed to involve the members directly affected. However he stressed that the issue had provided an opportunity to develop union strength within the department. (78)

5.7 Case Study: Birmingham City Council

The City Council is located in a region which suffered considerable economic decline during the latter 1970's and 1980's. This decline was mainly due to the reliance on a manufacturing base which had taken the full force of economic recession. Unemployment within the City stood on average some 8% above the national figures, while certain inner city districts had an unemployment rate over twice the U.K. average (up to 40.8% in one district).

In population terms, the City estimates and projections indicate that a downward trend is likely to continue. Between 1971 and 1981 there was a loss of 8% and between 1981 and 1985 a further loss has reduced the resident population to 1,007,500. Predictions to 1991 estimate a figure below one million for the first time since the 1920's. This continual population loss has been wholly attributable to persons moving out of the City (rather than the differences between the number of live births and deaths), presumably caused in recent years by the condition of housing stock, the lack of any major housing development and the effect of economic recession.

The City Council is the largest employer in the City with a total workforce as at 31st March 1986 of 49,519, comprising

manual and non-manual, full and part time, (the full time equivalent figure being 38,973). This represents an overall increase of 720 on the 1984-85 figure. Of interest is an increase in personnel in the central and support departments due to, "The continuing demand for new technology and computer services" (79)

In spending and finance terms the City Council's total income for 1985-86 was £797 million with 48% of income coming from Government grants, about half being from the block grant which offsets the cost of services generally. Employees costs came to £351 million, capital charges to £154 million and running expenses to £275 million. The biggest spender was the Education Committee where, because of the labour intensive nature of this service, employees costs accounted for nearly half of the expenditure.

In structural terms the City Council consists of 117 members, three for each of 39 wards. One third of councillors retire in three years out of four. Nominations of members to serve on the 17 main committees are approved by the council at the start of each year. It is the practice to delegate nearly all statutory functions, powers and duties to the committees. Notable exceptions are the power to borrow money and make a rate, which are exercised by the council on the advice of the major policy making body, the Finance and Management Committee. The policies of the Council (as determined by

its Committees) are implemented by 17 departments which cover the main functions of the Council and are staffed by professional officers.

Value for Money

"Value for Money" (VFM) arises out of the Local Government Act 1982 which was responsible for creating, on 1st April 1983, the Audit Commission oversees the ways in which Local Authorities secure VFM and prescribes annual "flavours" or areas of activity where they recommend VFM work should be carried out by the auditors that they appoint, in the case of this Council the auditors are Price Waterhouse. The auditors work closely with the City and the Audit Commission. Findings are reported and action taken to implement them is monitored.

The City's VFM strategy is known as the "3 E's" - Economy, acquiring resources in appropriate quality and quantity at the lowest cost. Efficiency - maximising output for those resources, and Effectiveness - ensuring that output achieves the desired result. The VFM strategy provides the backcloth for an examination of the computing and information technology strategy.

Expenditure on New Technology

One of the fastest growing parts of the City's budget in recent years has been expenditure on computers and new technology and associated staff. It is the City Treasurer, through the Information Systems and Services Division who leads for the City in this field. The table on the next page shows figures for expenditure under the control of the City Treasurer, in the budget of the Finance and Management Committee.

In addition the Computer and New Technology Sub-Committee asked IBM to tender for a new mainframe computer which resulted in a charge of about £5 million to capital in 1987/88.

The amount of expenditure shown above lead the City's Auditors, Price Waterhouse, to comment in their 1986 report that: -

The City has allocated significant resources to information technology. (81)

Organisation for the Approval and Management of New Technology

The procedures detailed below for approving budgets and projects for the introduction of new technology in the City

Expenditure on New Technology in the Information Systems and Services Division (80)

	1983/4 Actual £	1984/5 Actual £	1985/6 Probable £	1986/7 Estimate £
1 Total Capital Expenditure	3,063,236	2,038,445	6,390,113	5,492,000
2 Total Revenue Expenditure	5,325,585	7,344,540	9,957,135	13,268,990
a) Debt Charges	459,007	1,436,857	2,507,067	3,130,000
b) Cost of Employees, Agency staff and training	2,943,495	3,845,983	4,564,086	6,018,770
c) Running Expenses	1,923,083	2,061,700	2,885,982	4,120,220
3 Number of Employees at 31st March 1986	223	258	275	301

Council are, it is fair to say, fairly complex. The situation that was operating during 1985/6 was that the roles within the City Council were: -

- a) Finance and Management Committee - Approval of budgets for ISSD (Information Systems and Services Division) and Departmental investment in computing equipment and staff, and overall responsibility for the City Council's effectiveness and efficiency.
- b) New Technology and Computer Sub-Committee - Assessment of all proposals for computing investment within ISSD of referred from Service Committees, including value for money.
- c) Information Systems and Services Department - Provision of a computing services to the City. Determination of the feasibility and costs of all proposals for computing systems and ensuring their compatibility with the City's Computing Strategy and approved architectures. Assisting Departments to identify cost benefits of projects.
- d) Service Departments - Developing proposals for department computing provision in conjunction with ISSD. Using own computing staff where available in addition to ISSD resources. It is interesting to note that over

the period 1982 to 1986 computing posts on the establishments of Service Departments have been a major growth area, rising from 9 to about 50.

- e) Chief Officers' Computing Group - To consider strategic reports and issues as and when required.
- f) Computer Working Group - Consideration of major reports to Finance and Management New Technology and Computer Sub-Committee and Chief Officers Group, and strategic issues raised by ISSD or Department representatives.

As stated at the outset, this seems to be a complex bureaucratic system but was founded on the notion of balancing the role of the Services Departments in deciding what they want, against the need for a corporate approach to determining computer architecture and overall patterns of investment. The major weakness of the system appears to be in the area of accountability and cost effectiveness. This was noted by the Assistant Chief Executive in a report to the Finance and Management Committee: -

Although Services Committees have been bidding against allocation under the control of the Finance and Management Committee, there has been no explicit member or officer responsibility accountable to the Finance and Management Committee for checking the cost effectiveness of new technology applications. (82)

Although not specifically within its brief, it appears that,

on the member side, this has been done in part by the Computer and New Technology Sub-Committee. Also, the ISSD encouraged Service Departments to identify benefits from technological change. It is interesting to note that in other areas of organisational change within the City Council, the expertise of the Management Effectiveness Unit (MEU) was frequently drawn on but not in the case of new technology implementation.

The Corporate Strategy

The main drive towards the implementation of new technology within the City Council came with the appointment of a new treasurer during 1981/2. At this time the Computer Centre (now ISSD) was to undergo a high level review by Price Waterhouse which formed a major part of the 1982/3 audit. This review concentrated on four major areas,

- 1) The role of data processing within the organisation
- 2) The organisation and administration of Computer Centre
- 3) The personnel policies
- 4) The control of computer operations and systems development

The final report was highly critical, particularly as to the fact that there existed no strategy document. In addition projects were not being completed on time, costs were

escalating and requirements were constantly being changed. The main outcome of this report was the setting up of the ISSD and the widening of its brief.

The approach over the four years up to 1987 was to develop a "bedrock" mainframe system covering general ledger, rates, and a Housing and Engineering cost management system for billing work (CMIS). Other aims included spreading "user driven" technology throughout the Departments, formulating strategies for the purchase and delivery of hardware and software, user support, and to set up mechanisms and formulate a strategy to develop new technology investment by the City Council. The need also to inform and educate is clearly shown from the following quote: -

The starting point was one where new technology for the City Council meant the computer at Williams Street. Officer and elected member understanding of new technology and its capabilities was not high. (83)

This "education" has partly come about by encouraging Departments to identify and put a value on their own applications. However there still exists no overall business plan for the City, a fact of which the auditors were highly critical.

As regards studies, the City Council made use of two types of study, POINT and SESAME.

SESAME is an IBM lead post implementation tool on IT systems, it involves officers from several departments eg. Management Effectiveness Unit, Management Services Unit, Internal Audit, and the user department in conjunction with IBM.

POINT (Planning Office Information Needs and Technology) is based on a review of a department and concentrates on office systems and information needs. The data for the study is collected by department or function. Some half a dozen POINT studies (again IBM assisted) have been carried out in recent years.

There has been an attempt to evaluate 'Value For Money' in respect of the computing strategy. This basically involves comparing costs with benefits. Benefits as perceived fall into two categories, financial, and non-financial. Non financial are for example, service and administrative benefits, financial benefits are fundamentally cost savings.

Regarding non-financial benefits the difficulty that arises is that most Service Departments would claim considerable benefits of a general nature but to quantify these is difficult. From this research it is possible to spot cited examples such as: -

Increase ability to analyse information which would not have been possible with manual techniques.

The ability to match young people's needs more quickly and effectively with available opportunities.

Improved service delivery in the Housing Department,
especially the Neighbourhood Office Scheme. (84)

Financial benefits one would presume could be more clearly identified, however this, until recently, did not appear to be the case. The following statements taken from internal documents make this quite clear: -

Over the last year the Computer and New Technology Sub-Committee has received about sixty reports bidding for new technology of one sort or another. There were no full reports to the Sub Committee that had any clearly defined savings, where reductions could be made on budget allocations on the strength of information provided.

The Accountancy and Budgetary Control Division of the City Treasurers Department has been asked how many savings Accountants have taken out of the budget over the last four years as a direct consequence of the introduction of new technology. With the exception of the rates systems in the Treasurers Department the answer is none of any significance.

The rates system is the only major system where statements were made beforehand about expected savings, and those saving were clawed out of budget. But even here there have been problems. Although 67 posts were deleted from the establishment, the computer system is still not fully completed and some temporary staff have had to be re-engaged. (85)

In 1984, the City Treasurer's Department introduced a project evaluation sheet for items of new technology which departments wished to acquire. This sheet had two headings: -

a) Quantifiable savings

b) Anticipated savings

It was basically on the evidence of these sheets that the City Treasurer made decisions in relation to his delegated powers. Of the 150 sheets submitted since the system was introduced in 1984 and up until the 31st March 1986, 12 identified financial savings totalling £100,000, 81 identified general benefits, 57 identified no benefits at all.

It was apparent therefore that, coupled with other problems that the City had had in implementing new technology, there needed to be a significant review of the way in which the City approached new technology. This point was strongly made by the Assistant Chief Executive in a report to the Finance and management Committee: -

Great care needs to be taken to ensure that future new technology and investment..... is fully evaluated before resources are committed. Some important additions need to be made to the existing administrative and management arrangements for new technology approvals to enable this to happen. (86)

This concern was compounded by the 1986 Auditor's report which contained a critical review of the management of computing facilities.

Auditor's Report - Review of the Management of Computing Facilities

As part of the audit of the Council's accounts for the year ended 31st March 1986, the City's auditors, Price Waterhouse, undertook a review of the management of the City's computing facilities. As well as a general overview, the review focused on five key issues: -

- 1) The presence of a computing strategy, including its implementation review and revision.
- 2) The structure of the computing facilities.
- 3) Control over the cost of computing.
- 4) Management of the development of systems.
- 5) Use of Computing resources, including hardware, software and staff.

As stated earlier, there was no overall plan or strategy for IT within the City, only the tactical plan and strategy produced by ISSD and based largely on ISSD's own view of the direction in which the City was moving. Whilst commending ISSD's efforts the auditors noted: -

The City has not clearly defined business objectives identifying the direction the City is to take, policies to be adopted, services and services levels and levels of expenditure to be maintained. Without these business objectives it is difficult to define the IT needs of the authority. (87)

The development of such a business and IT strategy was seen as vital by the auditors and requiring the establishment of a formal mechanism and structure to identify, update and review the business needs of the City and in turn the IT strategy, taking into account all departmental requirements, priorities and resources to produce a co-ordinated approach.

There already existed within the City Council a concern that projects were not being sufficiently evaluated prior to and post implementation. This concern was echoed by the auditors: -

We identified that for the majority of implementation IT based systems no comprehensive evaluations exercise had been carried out to identify the full development, implementation and operating costs. Similarly in most cases no exercise had been undertaken to identify the potential cost savings and benefits, both tangible and intangible arising from IT. Without this information it is difficult for the City and its officers to identify, for inclusion in a development programme, those proposals which would offer the greatest benefit, in terms of improving services and efficiency, to the City. (88)

In short, the situation seemed to be that there was a tendency to find a place for IT, and to sell IT, in the City, rather than the City identifying and confirming IT as a solution to meet its requirements and solve its problems. Even the POINT studies, which were geared to identifying IT uses of particular Service Departments were not being considered in the wider context of the City's needs and commitments. In their overall assessment the auditors cast

doubt on the Value for Money of IT developments in the City.

We question whether the City is maximising value for money on the greatly increased expenditure in its use of computing and information technology.... We would also question whether the expenditure and activities during this period have been directed to those areas which would provide the most benefit to the City, both in terms of improving efficiency and better services.
(89)

The Response of the City Council

The Finance and Management Committee of the City Council referred the above report, along with other relevant reports, to the Computer and New Technology Sub-Committee for detailed consideration. A special meeting of the new Technology Sub-Committee was convened and within roughly a two month period a report (90) and recommendations were presented to the Finance and Management Committee.

These recommendations gave a new brief to certain units drawn from the Chief Executive's and City Treasurer's Departments, combining them, in what the Sub-Committee saw as a team approach to new technology within the City: -

- a) ISSD - Responsible for the technical evaluations of bids and for giving advice to departments on possible computer solutions.
- b) Management Services Unit - To help Departments put

together proposals and cases for the introduction of new technology (falling within the Organisation and Methods section of the Unit).

- c) Management Effectiveness Unit - Involved in ensuring that the organisational consequences and potential benefits are identified, together with assisting the City Treasurer in evaluating existing and proposed mainframe systems.
- d) Audit Division - To formally review a selection of projects after one year, whilst maintaining a watching brief in the interim. Reporting to the Computer and New Technology Sub-Committee and the appropriate service committee where expected benefits have not been achieved.

As can be seen, all new technology bids had to be produced by service Departments in conjunction with ISSD, MEU and MSU. The MEU became responsible for an assessment of new technology bids within ten working days of receiving the papers.

Recommendations were also made to change the brief of the Computer and New Technology Sub-Committee to include evaluation of the cost benefits of all projects and assessments of corporate information systems and that the

Officer Working Group arrangements take account of the responsibilities of the Computer and New Technology Sub-Committee. To show the significance of the CNTSC it was recommended that the Sub-Committee be serviced by the City Treasurer as the lead Officer supported by the appropriate officer. All recommendations were agreed by the Finance and management Committee and put into operation.

5.7.1 Birmingham City Council NALGO Branch

As at the 28th February 1987 the Birmingham City Council Branch of NALGO had a membership of 7,836 with the largest membership sections being Education (1594), Housing (1288), Social Services (1157), and Treasurers (716). NALGO's West Midlands District Headquarters is located only approximately half a mile away, the relationship between the two being the formal one where the City Council Branch have the services of a named District Officer upon who they can call as and when required.

The City Council Branch has a history of involvement on new technology issues, starting in 1980. In an interview with the then Branch Secretary in January 1986 the view was expressed that: -

New Technology was seen (circa. 1980) by the Chief Officer of the City Council as a means of solving staffing and service problems. A new mainframe was

installed to computerise rating provision for the City -
there were no moves by management to negotiate on this.
(91)

A file search of documentation at West Midlands District
NALGO showed the concern over the introduction of new
technology with a letter in March 1980 (92) pointing to the
introduction of a word processor in the Solicitors Department
without consultation. This letter broached the need for an
official committee to be set up to oversee all aspects of new
technology and stressed the need for full consultation to
take place whenever new technology was to be introduced.

During the months following the above mentioned letter
negotiations took place between the City Council and the
Staff side of the Joint Consultative Council resulting in a
statement on "The Introduction of Management Aids, Improved
methods of working, Automation etc" being issued on the 18th
November 1980, this being based on an interpretation of
appendix 'G' of the 'Purple Book'.

This document to some extent formed an early new technology
agreement (although neither party would see it as as such).
These are several interesting features to the statement and
it appears quite progressive when compared with other new
technology agreements of that era. Firstly it talked of
demonstrating the benefits of new technology: -

The Council and Staff Side support improvements in the

efficiency of Local Government and the provision of a more effective service to the public and recognize that this may be achieved by the use of various management aids, including organization and method reviews, installation of computers and other machines. Where the above changes in working methods and procedures have important staffing implications the Authority should demonstrate the benefits of such changes to the staff and for the service provided. (93)

Secondly, the document recognized the importance of securing staff agreement to change and puts forward a procedure to be adopted "wherever practical", through the machinery of joint consultation or, if appropriate direct with the Trade Union.

This procedure was as follows: -

1. To provide the fullest information of proposals in their formative stages and to consult with and seek the agreement of, the trade unions before decisions are taken to introduce organization and method reviews, install computers and other machines or to re-organize work including the merger or re-organization of departments.
2. To provide the fullest information and consultation at all subsequent stages and to seek the agreement of the trade unions on the action to be taken.
3. To consult at all stages on the future of staff whose work is to be varied or transferred to machines.

4. To consult and seek agreement on any amendment to working hours or other conditions of employment which the Council might feel it appropriate to introduce to enable new techniques to be used effectively.
5. To give existing staff every opportunity of applying for appointments to work connected with new machines or changed methods and to provide adequate facilities for staff to attend training courses.
6. To follow the procedure prescribed in the Council's Redeployment Agreement in respect of staff displaced by the reorganisation of the Authority's Services, changes in working methods, the introduction of machines, etc.

(94)

The document also contained statements on consultation on survey and investigatory work at local and national level and on the consideration of paid leave of absence to local staff representatives to attend appreciation courses in management techniques.

I mentioned earlier that despite the somewhat radical content of this document that neither party saw this as an agreement, certainly this is apparent from the management side for in the footnotes to the document it states: -

The reference "to seek the agreement of the trade unions" does not create a requirement for a formal agreement to be concluded. Rather it indicates a willingness on the part of the Council to make every effort to reach an understanding through prior consultation with an acceptance by the staff side that such consultation would be without prejudice to the right of the Council to take the ultimate decision on such matters. (95)

There is also an interesting footnote on the issue of consultation, for the question of at what stage consultation takes place is a difficult one: -

It is recognized by both sides that a precise definition of the juncture at which the information on management proposals should be made available presents difficulties. The reference to "formative stages" in paragraph 2i relates to the situation in which management have developed a concept to the point of identifying the possible staffing implications. (96)

Following the November statement the Joint Consultative Council New Technology Sub Committee in December 1980 produced an agreed definition of what constituted "new technology": -

The term new technology shall encompass all computer based systems including work processors, data processing, visual display units, other microelectronic systems incorporating microprocessors. The definition is a guide-line to the type of new technology that will be reported to and considered by the New Technology Sub Committee in the first instance. (97)

In the last months of 1980 the Staff Side of the Joint

Consultative Council submitted to the Employer Side a "Six Point Plan" which basically sought assurances from the City Council on conditions of service issues relating to the introduction of new technology eg. redundancy policy, grading, health and safety, and training. The Employers reply was reported to the Branch Executive Committee on 28th January 1981 and it was certain aspects of this reply that were to change the nature of negotiation over new technology and have a dramatic impact for the branch. Extracts from the reply are quoted below: -

It must be recognized however that the current economic climate and the financial constraints under which the Authority is obliged to work in practice make it unrealistic for the Authority to give the type of copper bottomed assurance being sought by the staff side regarding redundancies.

Clarification is also sought on how the submission of no job loss is seen to be compatible with a reference to the benefits of new technology being shared equitably between employer and employee. (98)

The staff side response to this was submitted to the JCC New Technology Sub Committee on 4th February 1981. In relation to the points on no job loss and no compulsory redundancy the view was expressed that no posts should be lost as a result of new technology and that if a reduction of posts occurred in one area it should be made up elsewhere. On no compulsory redundancy the staff side asked: -

Whilst the staff side would be happier with categorical statement that there will be no compulsory redundancy perhaps the Council side could make a stronger statement

just short of that type of guarantee, what we do not want is lip service to the redeployment agreement but a genuine effort to ensure that there is no compulsory redundancy. (99)

On the 11th March 1981 a circular was sent to the Secretaries of Local Government Branches, District Councils, Sectional and Professional Societies, from Geoffrey Drain, NALGO's General Secretary. This circular concerned the review of Appendix G of the National Conditions of Service Book (Better known as the "Purple Book"). Appendix G was entitled "The Introduction of Management Aids, Improved Methods of Working, Automation etc and was the document which formed the basis of local review in November 1980. The circular set out the proposed changes sought at national level and stated that: -

The staff side has never adopted a hostile approach to the introduction of changed working methods but believes that such changes can only be introduced successfully in a climate of trust and by agreement with the staff. This necessitates the fullest sharing of information, consultation and negotiation at all stages and demonstration by authorities of the benefits of proposed changes for both that staff and service provided. The national employers have however stubbornly refused to recognize the need for the National Joint Council to make a firm statement on the issues involved as a guide to both authorities and unions locally. This view was confirmed at the NJC Executive Committee on 4th March when they stated that the national scheme should go no further than recommending authorities to consult with their staff on the introduction of new technology and changed working methods. The staff side had no alternative but to withdraw their claim and tell the Employers that the unions would be issuing appropriate advice to their members. (100)

The timing of this document was significant in relation to

the stage at which Birmingham City Council NALGO Branch found themselves in negotiations with the City Council. The national circular gave branches the following advice: -

Where authorities are unwilling to reach agreement on the introduction of new technology, branches should advise their members not to co-operate with the implementation of any proposals. Where necessary branches should take stronger action following the usual industrial action procedures. This non-co-operation should apply, where prior agreement has not been reached, to surveys or other work undertaken by central employer organizations such as LAMSAC, either as a prelude to, or as a part of, proposals to change working methods. (101)

Five days after the national circular the City Council reported to the JCC New Technology Sub-Committee, concentrating their reply on the issue over the guarantees of no compulsory redundancy requested by the staff side. The last paragraph of their statement said: -

If the increased efficiency provided by the use of new technology is always to be realised in terms of benefits to the public service, there cannot always be no overall reduction in the Authority's manpower requirements. The Council side therefore is unable to give the categorical commitment sought by the staff side that no jobs will arise from new technology, particularly at a time when the constraints arising placed upon them inevitably give rise to job loss. The staff side however are given a firm assurance that every endeavour will be used by the Council to overcome the need for compulsory redundancies. (102)

Discussions continued within the Joint Consultative Council New Technology Sub-Committee and in November 1981 the Employers Side, through the City Personnel Officer made a

statement of their position (103) which still lacked the guarantees sought by the Staff Side. The instant response of the Staff Side made by the NALGO Branch Secretary was that the Staff Side could not associate themselves with the documents submitted. An adjournment of the meeting took place while the Staff Side considered the matter further. When the meeting reconvened the Staff Side asked for amendments to the original joint statement as well as to the report of the City Personnel Officer. The meeting decided to refer the report and amendments to the full Joint Consultative Council for further consideration. The Chairman also proposed that the New Technology Sub-Committee be discontinued with all further matters concerning new technology to be raised at the full committee level.

NALGO's Annual Report presented at the branch Annual General Meeting on 9th December 1981 noted that: -

Little progress has been made towards an agreement on the introduction of new technology. (104)

Matters were brought to a head in February 1982. A letter from the Branch to the NALGO West Midlands District Officer stated that: -

The Executive Committee noting that agreement has not been reached on the Six Point Plan put forward by the Branch now resolves to refer the matter to NALGO's Emergency Committee seeking blacking to the introduction of any new technology until a satisfactory agreement has been completed. (105)

The formal procedures of submission to the National Executive Council Emergency Committee were completed and on 15th March 1982 the Branch was instructed by the National Council Emergency Committee to organise a ballot of the membership on the issue of the blacking new technology. This vote took place on the 28th May. 9592 papers were issued, 1915 voted in favour, 1584 against, 30 were returned blank and 21 were spoilt. On the basis of this return the branch made a request to the Emergency Committee for approval for industrial action. This approval was given on the 11 June.

This blacking, according to the local press "Blocked Council plans to computerise Council rent and rates", (106) and was to continue through the remainder of 1982 and into 1983. At the Branch Annual General Meeting of 1982 a motion was passed as follows: -

That this annual general meeting while noting that there is little chance of any real gains in the field of new technology being made through central negotiations, feels that the blacking of new technology must be continued as any weakening of the branch's current policy will be disadvantageous to members. (107)

In early 1983 it seemed that progress was being made on a central new technology agreement for the City with statements on redeployment and mobility of staff contained therein.

This agreement was approved by the Branch Executive Committee on 2nd February 1983 but before the Branch Secretary could sign the agreement the Service Conditions Sub-Committee of the Branch instructed the Branch Secretary not to withdraw the blacking instruction. The Service Conditions Sub-Committee approved a resolution: -

That the Branch policy of centrally blacking new technology ceases but that blacking will continue in each department until agreement is reached in that department. (108)

The City Council's reaction to this was to stated that no agreements could be signed while blacking continued, new technology would be introduced, the redeployment agreement which gave salary protection would not be introduced, and that the Council would activate its consideration of introducing arrangements for full mobility of staff. The Authority also sent a notice to all non-manual staff asking them to co-operate with the introduction of new technology saying that "The Council consider that a most reasonable agreement has been frustrated". (109)

On the 16th March the West Midlands District Officer wrote formally to the National Emergency Committee asking for a review of the Branch's actions commenting that: -

The Staff Panel JCC thought it had achieved sufficient safeguards but the Branch Executive Committee reconsidered its position and continued blacking.
(110)

This letter was followed by a full report by the West Midlands District Officer to NALGO's National Emergency Committee. In this report the position of the District Officer was stated quite clearly: -

If the Branch Executive mistrusted the employers motives they should not have concluded an agreement or indicated likely acceptance of an agreement. I feel that it would be inappropriate to recommend continuing the blacking. (111)

The response of the National Emergency Committee was to accept this recommendation and authority for the action was withdrawn. The formal position as set out by the West Midlands District Officer to the Branch Secretary was,

In the event of the Authority signing a new technology agreement the blacking imposed by the National Emergency Committee at the meeting on 10th June 1982 be withdrawn. (112)

One aspect of this particular dispute within the Branch which highlights internal organisational problems was the action taken by the City Council in respect of the automatic collection of membership fees by direct deduction from salary via the City Council Treasurers Department. The process of direct deduction was stopped during the dispute with NALGO with the result that paid up membership by September 1983 had fallen from 9275 to well under 4000. The Council did in

fact take disciplinary action against a number of stewards for collecting subscriptions during working time. The impact was, to quote: -

Membership morale was low and activity within the branch was suppressed. (113)

The membership figures below show the picture and the slow process of rebuilding (clearly many members did not opt back into the system).

YEAR	PAID UP BRANCH MEMBERSHIP
1980	8913
1981	9728
1982	9321
1983	<4000
1984	5950
1985	6362
1986	6921
1987	7836

(Figures from Branch Membership files)

Although action was taken by the Branch to remedy this organisational weakness and by January 1984 a proper system for collection of subscription was installed and proper membership records were being kept for the first time in years, it was not until May 1984 however that agreement was reached with the City Council on the direct deduction of subscription from salary. This was achieved only because of the ending of action by members within the Social Services Department.

Despite the fact that the overall blacking of new technology was withdrawn in May 1983 and negotiations on a central new technology agreement were to continue, action within individual Departments of the City Council continued.

Reflecting the autonomy of the individual departments, moves were made by departments to secure their own agreements.

The result was: -

Some departments managed to get decent agreements, others suffered because the main agreement was not signed. (114)

With respect to the Social Services Department, there existed by November 1983 a draft "Statement of Intent relating to the Introduction of New Technology made by the Social Services Department and the Branches of all Unions represented on the Social Services Department", this draft along with a commentary recommending rejection by the Shop Stewards within the Department was put to a Departmental branch meeting on 30th January 1984. Twenty members, out of a Departmental membership of 200 attended and supported the Stewards recommendation. Following discussions between the Stewards and the NALGO Branch Secretary, a letter was sent to the West Midland District Officer recommending that the Departmental membership be balloted on refusing to operate new technology until a satisfactory agreement had been reached on, minimum gradings, salary protection on redeployment, guarantees on

overall staffing levels. (115)

On the 18th April a submission was made to the National Emergency Committee for approval for industrial action pending the ballot outcome. The ballot itself was held on Thursday 24th May 1984. Of the 200 members balloted the return was Yes votes, 53, No votes, 26, spoilt papers, 2. Based on this result on the 31st May the West Midlands District Officer wrote that: -

In the circumstances, given that less than 50% of those balloted voted in favour of the proposed industrial action I would recommend that support be not given for the requested action. (116)

Support was duly refused.

The remainder of 1984 and 1985 were characterised by the slow movement of negotiations on the central new technology agreement and individual departments being involved in industrial action over the introduction of new technology agreements. For example, the Branch Annual Report for year ending 30th September 1985 makes reference not only to the Social Services dispute but also to the Housing Department.

A victory was won by secretaries and typists in housing who won the best deal received by member in the City for the operation of word processors. Members within typing services must be congratulated for holding a firm line throughout the dispute.

The Treasurers Department

The start of the NALGO year was dominated by a Rates Rebate dispute which arose from a lock out of 55 members who had refused to work VDU's without appropriate grading and an adequate structure.

The Estates Department

Negotiations have been successfully concluded on a new technology agreement. In the absence of a central agreement we will continue to work in accordance with this agreement. (117)

A feature of this particular Annual Report was that it made reference to a decline in the activities of the Branch Health and Safety Committee. Health and Safety with respect to the introduction of new technology is the one area where it can be argued that the trade union movement have been able to record significant progress, probably as it is in relation to this that genuine member concern can be aroused and participation gained by members who would normally not play an active part in union affairs. For example, during the year ended 30th September 1985 the Housing Department within the City Council NALGO Branch were able to draft and successfully negotiated a "Code of Practice for the siting and use of screen based equipment", which covered all aspects of health and safety in respect of VDU's. This was commended by the Branch as: -

By far the best agreement of its kind throughout the

City and other Departments are expected to follow suit.
(118)

Given the success of negotiating over new technology through health and safety issues it seems strange that in the same Annual Report there was reported: -

A vast decline in the Health and Safety Sub-Committee. Part of the problem stems from the fact that most Departmental Steward Committees do not recognise the importance of health and safety and do not place any demands on their Health and Safety representatives. The Branch had no Health and Safety Officer for the twelve months prior to 1985. Due to this fact, literature and the general administration of Health and Safety throughout the Branch was in a pitiful state.
(119)

Regarding negotiations on the central new technology agreement, a draft was produced on 8th October 1984 (120), and at a meeting of the Joint Working Party on New Technology some four days later, it was agreed to incorporate within the draft those matters which did not already appear but which had tacitly been accepted by both management and staff representatives in one or more Departments. (121)

In fact the Personnel Committee of the City Council had issued guide-lines to Chief Officers to enable them, wherever possible to make progress at departmental level in the absence of a central joint agreement. Five departments had by this time either concluded agreements or were in the process of so doing, Education, Estates, Housing, Social

Services and Treasurers. Negotiation on the draft central agreement continued with particular attention being paid to each line and paragraph, a process which was fairly slow. A report of the Joint Working Party dated 15.1.85 (122) shows the nature of these negotiations with approval being given to some points but not to others and matters being put back before the Joint Working Party for further negotiation. By April 1985 another revised draft was in evidence and interestingly, attached as Appendix A, was the original statement on "The Introduction of Management Aids, Improved Methods of Working, Automation etc" that was issued nearly 5 years earlier on the 18th November 1980. The draft agreement referred heavily to the "original" especially on area of consultation. (123)

The NALGO Annual Report for the year ended 30th September 1986 makes little reference to new technology issues apart from one item on the Social Services Department who:-

Continued to seek re-grading for our members who are expected to operate new technology, both on the grounds that new technology involves greater productivity and increased skills, and also as a means of lessening the problem of poor pay among typing and clerical staff.
(124)

Regarding this particular issue a Departmental meeting had been held on 23 April 1986 to seek Branch support for a boycott of new technology in the Social Services Department and to seek approval for this from NALGO's National Emergency

Committee. (125) A document search revealed that only 33 members were present at this meeting , that the Resolution proposed was unanimously passed, and that the District Officer had not been involved in the dispute. This issue again showed the autonomy of the Department within the Branch as well as the autonomy of Branch from District Office. It is apparent that in certain circumstances this can work against the Branch particularly where District Officer recommendations are necessary in seeking National approval for action.

This question of Departmental autonomy within the City Council Branch was also illustrated by reference to the Housing Department. The Housing Department having the second largest departmental membership in the Branch, had been seeking a locally determined new technology agreement following the protracted negotiations over a central agreement. A departmental New Technology Sub-Committee had been established in 1984 comprising NALGO Departmental representatives and Employer representatives drawn from Management Services, Systems Development and Personnel. This group met on a bi-monthly basis and by November 1986 had issued a locally negotiated New Technology agreement as a management Services instruction throughout the Department.

(126)

This particular agreement contained several points of

interest. Firstly, it set out a series of objectives for the introduction of new technology these being: -

1. To improve the effectiveness of the Department and hence improve its provision of service.
2. To increase the productivity of employees of the Department.
3. To increase the scope of an employees work, releasing them from mundane tasks and thus increasing their job satisfaction.
4. To improve the Departments image, with other Departments, with Government bodies and most importantly with the public especially tenants and potential tenants by achieving the three objectives outlined above.

(127)

Secondly, the agreement recognised that the above objectives could only be achieved following full recognition and agreement with NALGO. This was to be reached through a procedure which gave NALGO full access to any initial surveys and investigations at the formative or proposal stage of the introduction of any new technology. Also attached to this agreement was a list of equipment already in existence in the Housing Department this being the sort of inventory not

normally seen within the Branch.

In an interview with the Housing Department NALGO Branch Secretary it was stressed that the Department was seen as "a leader in its field" and that it "actively accepted new technology". (128)

In the light of this in June 1987 a complete computerisation of the Housing Benefits System was announced, to be fully implemented by April 1988, to deal with new government legislation on Housing Benefits. This system was to be "the largest system ever undertaken by the City". (129)

The Housing Department employed over 250 staff to process Housing Benefits, this being approximately 25% of departmental clerical staff and one sixth of all staff employed within Housing. It is clear that the City Council saw the project, not just as providing a better service to customers, setting aside the legislative changes, but also in terms of cost savings for the City: -

After the initial implementation of the new system and the new legislation in April 1988, the number of staff required to administer these global changes will be reduced. Further reductions in the number of staff working on Housing Benefit will be possible once the system has been fully developed. A 20% reduction would make available approximately 50 staff for redeployment, which would equate to a value of £400,000 per annum. (130)

However, the Housing Department Branch Secretary seemed relatively unconcerned about this expressing the view that he was: -

Not worried about job loss or redeployment, it has never occurred in the past, in fact the additional workload may mean extra staff - job losses have never materialised. (131)

The full implication of the development of the computerised housing benefit system for NALGO members within the Housing Department Branch would have been interesting to follow through.

What did happen was that, rather than the system being implemented by April 1988, it was abandoned in November 1987. The City Council Finance and Management Committee requested the City Council Internal Audit Department to prepare a report on why the project failed. The report outlined a number of general management and technical problems and concluded that no individual was directly to blame. (132)

It was also reported that the project was abandoned: -

In view of escalating costs and concerns that the system may not fulfill requirements. (133)

At overall level in the City Council Branch, 1987 was to prove a critical year. In February the Branch New

Technology Working Party was wound up and its functions transferred to the Service Conditions Committee. The notes of the final meeting of the New Technology Working Party summarised clearly the situation: -

The poor attendance at this meeting and indeed the previous meetings is indicative of the fact that the Working Party is no longer functioning in any viable sense. Consideration needs to be given to the general question of new technology in the branch. What has occurred is basically uneven development. That is to say that the levels of grading vary widely from department to department. This is of course a natural result of not having any central policy. However the Branch should at least have the facts regarding what is going on in various departments. It was agreed that while the New Technology Working Party as such should cease to function, new technology should become a standing item on both Staff Panel and Service Conditions. Furthermore the Branch Secretary should write to Chief Stewards asking them for various details of how matters relating to new technology are progressing in their department. (134)

To sum up by quoting the NALGO City Council Branch Secretary: -

Interest in New Technology within the branch died, other issues were of greater concern. (135)

CHRONOLOGY

1980

- MARCH Letter from NALGO Branch Secretary to City Personnel Officer over lack of consultation on introduction of word processor.
- Formation of New Technology Sub-Committee of Joint Consultative Council.
- NOVEMBER Joint Consultative Council Statement on the "Introduction of management Aids, Improved Methods of Working - Automation etc." (Appendix G of National Scheme).
- Staff Side put forward Six Point Plan on Conditions of Services issues.
- DECEMBER Joint Consultative Council Definition of "New Technology".

1981

- JANUARY Meeting of Branch Executive Committee. Reply from Council Side on Six Point Plan considered.
- FEBRUARY Staff Side response.
- MARCH NALGO National Circular on Introduction of New Technology.
- Report of City Personnel Officer on the Introduction of New Technology Sub-Committee.
- NOVEMBER Report of City Personnel Officer on the Introduction of New Technology.
- DECEMBER NALGO Branch AGM Report on lack of progress over New Technology Agreement.

1982

- FEBRUARY Request to Emergency Committee for authorisation to ballot on blacking of new technology.
- MARCH Approval to ballot again.
- MAY Vote takes place. Results submitted to National Emergency Committee. Request made for

approval for industrial action.

JUNE

Approval given.

Blacking implemented. Negotiations continue.

NOVEMBER

Branch AGM motion to continue blacking.

1983

FEBRUARY

Branch Executive Committee approve new central agreement.

Branch Service Conditions Sub-Committee pass a motion for Department blacking to continue.

MARCH

City Council react by toughening stance.

NALGO West Midland District ask National Emergency Committee to review the action.

APRIL

District Officers reports to City Council
Branch - National Emergency Committee
withdraws approval for blacking.

MAY

Emergency Committee formally write to Branch
Secretary withdrawing approval to black.
Blacking withdrawn.

SEPTEMBER

Membership figures reach an all time low as
result of the stopping by the City Council of
direct deductions from salary.

1984

JANUARY

Social Services Department Branch meeting
rejects draft "statement of Intent", relating
to new technology.

MARCH

Social Services Department Branch requests
ballot on industrial action to black new
technology.

MAY

Ballot held. Less than 50% vote in favour.

District Officer refuses to support action.
Dispute over.

OCTOBER

Draft Central New Technology Agreement
produced. Department level negotiations also
continue.

1985

JANUARY Rates Rebates Staff dispute over VDU operation.

APRIL Revised Draft Central New Technology Agreement.

SEPTEMBER Re-grading for word processing operators in Housing Department.

Estates Department conclude New Technology Agreement.

Housing Department Code of Practice on VDU's.

Decline in Health and Safety Sub-Committee reported.

1986

APRIL Social Services call for boycott of new technology.

NOVEMBER Housing Department New Technology Agreement issued as an instruction.

1987

FEBRUARY Branch New Technology Working Party wound up.

JUNE Computerisation of Housing Benefits announced.

NOVEMBER Housing Benefits Project abandoned.

CHAPTER SIX

- 6.1 CONCLUSIONS - STRUCTURE
- 6.2 UNION STRUCTURE AND ORGANISATION FOR TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE
- 6.3 MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES
- 6.4 COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AND THE NEGOTIATION OF TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE
- 6.5 THE NALGO MEMBER
- 6.6 SUMMARY

Conclusions

6.1 Structure

The opening two chapters of this project pointed to several areas of concern for trade unions generally involved in the process of bargaining over technological change. Firstly, the apparent failure of collective bargaining procedures as an effective forum for negotiating new technology issues. Secondly, a number of weaknesses in trade union organisation and structure which have hindered their ability to respond effectively to the introduction of new technology over the last ten years. Thirdly for white collar unions, the relevance, if any, of special characteristics of the white collar trade union member. To these three I would add a fourth, that is the role, attitudes and objectives of the management side involved in bargaining over the introduction of new technology.

These areas of concern by and large relate to specific themes that Jon Clark sets out in a recent article (1) as being fruitful areas for future research into the processes of technological change: -

1. Management objectives and the role of personnel management in the introduction of new technology.
2. The negotiation of technological change (negotiation

used in a wider interactionist sense.)

3. Union structure and organisation for technological change.

4. New technology and the changing industrial relations role of the first line manager. (2)

Apart from the last point, the changing industrial relations role of the first line manager, in which Clark suggests that recent research shows a connection between the capabilities of new information technology and changes in the management of work and industrial relations that are leading to a significant trend in industrial relations towards a revised role for the supervisor away from a simple administrative role to that of a first line manager, (3) the other 'themes' that he sets out incorporate the areas of concern for trade unions examined in the opening chapters of this project. With the addition of an emphasis on the nature of the white collar NALGO member, it is proposed that these themes form the basic structure for a concluding analysis of both the case studies and NALGO's overall approach to the introduction of new technology.

6.2 Union structure and organisation for technological change

In his article Clark, (4) building on the work of Batstone et al (5) refers to the two variables of union sophistication and external integration as helping to explain the influence of trade unions on particular processes of technological change. Union sophistication includes the internal arrangements at the workplace and the resources at the union's disposal, including the range of knowledge and experience existing within the union membership, and the degree of cohesion between various levels in the organisation. External integration refers to the degree of cohesion between workplace/company organisation and the official union structure, including local or district full time officers, the national union executive, other unions, and the TUC. (6)

As far as an analysis of NALGO's structure is concerned, the factor of its sophistication in terms of resources at its disposal forms a useful starting point. Given NALGO's size and eminence as a white collar union and the extent of its involvement in the issues of technological change on behalf of its membership, it seems strange that in resource terms the union has not actively adapted on a widespread basis computer based technology as a means of strengthening its organisational and communications structure.

Clark suggests that present knowledge is limited on the use of computers and computer information networks in recruitment, organisation, and as a source of information, (7) and in NALGO's case it is not surprising that knowledge

is limited since it seems that few steps have been taken in this direction.

On a national level, NALGO was criticised as early as 1984 for its failure to adopt new technology in its organisation. The national NALGO electricity vice-chairman was quoted as saying that it was: -

Pathetic that an organisation of our size and diversity has to rely on the phone or the post. (8)

He urged branches to use the new technology for their benefit in improving communications, helping with financial control, administration and education, and also advised branches to use the expertise of their members who worked with computers. (9) His conclusion was that: -

NALGO has a golden opportunity to introduce new technology in its organisation and to prove to other employers that it can be done without losing one single job. We must not use arguments against our own staff that we would not allow our employers to use against us. We don't want staff savings, we want an improved service. (10)

The area of control of membership details is especially important as the co-ordination of branch members is essential if there is a potential dispute with employers. NALGO's membership register during the 1980's has been largely based on a manual application system with details completed by the potential member and containing an authorization for the employer to deduct the membership subscription directly from

the members pay on behalf of the branch. The shortcomings and work involved in maintaining an accurate register, were recognised in a 1986 article on membership which stated the problems in using the employers computerised systems as a means of membership control: -

Sometimes these systems fail to follow members when they change departments. Some people who have joined and and assume they are still paying are in fact no longer paying their subscription. Situations like this can deprive the union of thousands of pounds each year.
(11)

Despite these criticisms during the mid-1980's NALGO was not providing any centralised push to introduce new technology into branches as a means of supporting their administration although it was attempting in 1988 to establish a central register of membership. (12) Branches were therefore being left to their own devices regarding the introduction of new technology as an administrative tool and this concern was to be voiced at the 1989 Conference. 'Public Service', the monthly journal of NALGO reported that: -

NALGO came under fire from delegates for its failure to press ahead with the installation of new technology at headquarters and the lack of help offered to branches wanting to buy their own computers. (13)

At the 1989 conference two motions were put forward by NALGO local government branches. The Bristol branch, who were frustrated by the lack of response from NALGO headquarters in getting advice on branch computer services, (14) put forward

a motion noting the expanding role of computer and word processing technology and its potential to enhance the operations of NALGO branch offices and instructed the National Executive council to: -

1. Conduct a survey of branches currently using new technology so that experience gained by these branches can be made widely available.
2. Organise the preparation of an advice pack for branches outlining the implications of introducing new technology, highlighting the benefits and disadvantages of its use and offering practical guidance on the most suitable options available in terms of hardware and software.
3. Organise the development of easy to use software packages, covering the basic common functions of branch organisation, for purchase by branches introducing new technology. (15)

This was supported by a motion from the Hertfordshire County branch which noted that NALGO Headquarters had failed to move with the times and that the absence of effective high-tech communications and management systems diminished the union's effectiveness. The motion also stated that: -

Conference believes that it is time that NALGO adopted a co-ordinated, corporate approach based on the best of the wealth of experience and knowledge which exists in the branches and districts and taking into account the compatibility issue in the microcomputer industry it instructs the NEC to address this matter as one of urgency. (16)

The response from NALGO's General Secretary, can be assessed by the fact that he said that these demands would, 'require a considerable increase in resources.' (17) However,

Conference did approve the demands, rejecting an amendment which simply instructed the National Executive Council to provide 'adequate support and advice.' (18)

The importance of branches having new technology themselves as an administrative tool was further highlighted by the fact that a survey carried out for NALGO by MORI found that of 380,000 workers eligible to join the union but who had not been signed up said that they had never been asked to. (19) 'NALGO News' in September 1989 reported that NALGO's key strategy in firming up its recruitment campaign would be to strengthen branch organisation and that the NEC had identified organisation, particularly at the local level, as being a priority for 1990. (20) Add this to an article suggesting that the fragmentation of the local government workforce could increase during the 1990's with the potential for telecommuting being exploited, and the need for accurate control of membership and branch administration via new technology is even more strongly emphasised. (21)

The most striking application in this project of the failure by NALGO at national and local level to adopt new technology to strengthen branch organisation and thus assist in their own reaction to new technology in their members workplace comes from the case studies in the local government sector. For example, the Birmingham City Council branch membership fell by over 50% when the employers stopped the automatic collection of membership subscriptions by direct deduction

from salary during the 1982/3 dispute over the introduction of new technology. This situation simply arose from the fact that the branch relied on the employers 'technology' to maintain accurate membership records via the direct deduction system, the manual records being maintained at that time were inaccurate and virtually useless and even after the dispute had ended the branch still relied on manual methods of recording.

In the pilot studies, the Shropshire County Council NALGO branch, with some 2000 members did not have a computer based branch membership record until 1988, and this was only brought about by the requirements of meeting current employment legislation. The problem of recording membership becomes particularly acute when faced with a NALGO branch such as Sandwell, where the branch membership is not located largely on a central site but is fragmented with its operations over a wide area, making it difficult to register accurate information at the branch office and also posing problems for the stewards in terms of being in daily contact with the membership. This was highlighted in the Strathclyde University research project with NALGO on the introduction and effects of information technology on the clerical, administrative and technical staff in Strathclyde Regional Authority which said: -

The widespread geographical and spatial distribution of local government workplaces means that it is difficult if not impossible for the steward to be in daily contact with all his/her membership. (22)

As well as the membership applications, the use of branch based new technology, introduced at the same time that employers were introducing new technology into departments, would have assisted in the process of record keeping and monitoring the introduction of such technology. In all the case studies, including the Water Industry NALGO branches, there was a significant failure to monitor with any degree of accuracy, what technology was being introduced and where it was being introduced, thus enabling employers to introduce new technology via the 'back door'.

In relation to the introduction of the Steward system, the Shropshire County Council branch indicated that the implementation was proving to be a time consuming task, requiring a survey of all workplace locations, membership levels and possible candidates for stewardship, all this having to be done manually as at that time the branch had no computer. (23)

Another element of union sophistication is that of the research facilities available to branches as a source of information and support. On a national level, as was illustrated by Dodgson and Martin's research in chapter one of this project, NALGO employ some thirteen researchers and yet only one researcher was given to deal with new technology matters. The main focus for communicating the issues covered by the researcher was the New Technology Working

Party and the publications and documentation that emanated from this body. At regional/district/branch level in the case studies there was no direct linkage between those bodies set up to deal with new technology matters and the research facilities at national NALGO headquarters. At branch level in the Birmingham and Shropshire case studies, those individuals who sat on 'new technology sub-committees' were there either as 'interested parties' or, as one might suspect in many cases, simply there not because of any special interest in new technology matters but purely from their position within the branch officer structure. NALGO West Midlands District did establish a District New Technology Sub-Committee made up of service conditions representatives, district council officers and co-opted members, and this forum did act as a means of disseminating information from research sections at NALGO headquarters until it was wound up in 1986 after a series of inquorate meetings.

The research resource at a union's disposal is only one factor to be taken into account in evaluating proposals for new technology in the workplace. Perhaps the most important factor is the expertise that may exist within the membership of a given union, in NALGO's case it may be argued that this potential pool of expertise is vast but is underutilised, it could be that this underutilisation stems in part from the nature and work status of certain white collar members, this will be dealt with separately later.

A joint TUC/CBI/ACAS study in 1989 stated that: -

Employees have a major contribution to make in ensuring the most effective introduction and utilisation of new technology. (24)

Also Willman (25) argues that in respect of white collar unions there exists a pool of highly skilled workers whose knowledge of the potentials of technological change is considerable. Both of these statements seem to be stating the obvious and both can be accepted, the problem lies in using these skills in order to make an effective contribution. Dodgson and Martin noted that: -

Although many union members are technically qualified, their skills are not easily tapped by the union movement as a whole - the AEU is not in a position to use the professional skills of system analyst members as do ASTMS. (26)

However, even where such skills and expertise does exist, there is no guarantee that this can effectively be used in facing a management set on introducing new technology on their terms. The Water industry case study of the Scientific Services Laboratory re-organisation illustrates this where it appeared that the NALGO members concerned were technical specialists, able to equal in terms of well grounded and constructed argument, any 'experts' on the management side. The staff in the Upper Trent Division went as far as to prepare a paper setting out an alternative solution maintaining the levels of service while cutting

costs. In this same case study the mass meeting of Scientific Services staff called for an independent assessment of the management's policy on the Scientific Services re-organisation by a 'suitably qualified person'. This approach was made to the Labour Research Department who responded that 'NALGO has more collective expertise'. There seemed to be a non-realisation that the union within its membership already had the existing skills. As stated above, there are no guarantees that this will change management's plans, even when those personnel involved carry high job status within the workplace.

In the other case studies, NALGO's branch membership contained technical specialists whose knowledge, on the face of it, provided a resource for the union. In the Shropshire County Council study, the Computer Department, which comprised NALGO members, had full knowledge of the extent of the County Council's equipment that had been introduced and yet the branch attempts at monitoring had proved to be totally inadequate.

To focus more closely on the issue of expertise as a resource, in NALGO's membership there exists those members who undoubtedly can bring to bear knowledge and technical expertise and status of rank in dealing with the introduction of new technology. At another level, there are the ranks of relatively lowly paid NALGO members, mostly female, whose skill base lies in their understanding of the actual work

process that they are concerned with on a day to day basis. The difficulty is to bring the one section of membership together with the other to provide a united resource for all, in reality probably a utopian dream. Where self interest is concerned, as in the scientific services case, then those members were quick to attempt to bring their knowledge to bear on the situation. Otherwise, in the billing staff's case study and the local government case studies, the individual disputes that arose concerned staff of a different nature and who did not gain the use of the technical support of other sectors of their membership. Derek Hatton, talking of his early experiences as a Militant activist in Liverpool, said of the NALGO branch that he joined: -

The local branch consisted of white collar workers whose only interest in the union, apart from safeguarding their jobs, was for its sports and leisure activities. But there was a whole network of lowly paid NALGO workers who had never been organised. (27)

Hatton's point was that within NALGO's membership there existed what could be termed as a class structure based upon job status. This undoubtedly provides a barrier to the use of the expertise that lies within the membership structure.

In order to increase and effectively use the abilities of its membership the one area that seems to have been relatively neglected as a means of mobilising NALGO members is that of training. The emphasis seems over the last ten years to have been one of 'informing' and 'educating' the membership

on new technology issues rather than to devote resources to training the members in new technology skills with NALGO being the catalyst for this. It is recognised that such a policy would have meant a significant resource allocation but, given the economic climate of recession that dominated much of the period when the pace of technological change was most rapid, there existed external sources to use for such funding as would have been required. NALGO was not ignorant of this, and was instrumental in obtaining grant aid from the EEC Social Fund for training in the field of new technology for water industry employees. In 1987 £157,000 had been received for training aimed at the under 25 year olds. (28)

The subject of training for new technology has generally been left for the employer to provide via the training consultants package that is provided by the hardware and software suppliers. Such training can be perceived as a 'threat' to employees, particularly those in the older age categories, whereas it could be suggested that training negotiated by and delivered in co-operation with the trade union would have been seen in a different way and have enabled NALGO to strengthen the links with its members.

The TUC/CBI/ACAS study referred to earlier confirmed this point when they said: -

The provision of training for employees using new technology can result in a number of advantages in addition to the obvious one of enhancing skills and abilities. The training process can become an effective means of communication, promoting understanding and support for the initiative. (29)

One of the weaknesses in trade union organisation in negotiating over technological change, referred to in Chapter One of this project, was that of where the bargaining takes place in organisational terms. We have already seen that in some NALGO services bargaining takes place on a national basis whereas in the project case studies, despite initial attempts at national bargaining, the negotiating process focused on branch level. This corresponds with the autonomy placed on the branch in NALGO's overall structure, where the problems occur is in the divisions between the membership that can arise out of separate groups bargaining over technological change with one employer. In the Birmingham City Council NALGO branch study the autonomy of the branch seemed to be devolved down further to each department in the sense that after negotiations for a central agreement failed, each department's policy was to negotiate for its own.

The Housing Department within the City Council branch illustrates this point, having sought and concluded a locally determined new technology agreement following the protracted negotiations over a central agreement. This gave rise to a situation where one department had an agreement and yet other NALGO members in other departments in the City Council branch had not. It also appears that the fact that one department had concluded an agreement did not necessarily strengthen the hand of other departmental negotiators or the branch as a whole. This was recognised at overall branch level for it

was noted in the winding up of the branch New Technology Working Party in 1987 that : -

What has occurred is basically uneven development. That is to say the levels of grading vary widely from department to department. (30)

This 'subset' of negotiations could almost be regarded as a situation where there existed mini-branches based on departments within the central branch. The strength of these units, based largely on membership size and to some extent the attitude of the departmental representatives, in this situation effectively undermined the overall attempts at co-ordination by the branch through the New Technology Working Party. Clark, referring to Batstone and Gourlay's work defines this in terms of union sophistication as the degree of cohesion that exists between various levels in the union organisation. (31)

The slow pace within NALGO of the adoption of a full steward system is of note for, as stated earlier the push towards this change across NALGO branches corresponded with a time of generally rapid introduction of new technology. NALGO's 1982 survey (32) showed that only 34% of responding branches had a steward system. In the Shropshire County Council case study a full steward system had still not been achieved by 1987-88. However, if Kessler is correct in his analysis of the characteristics that may apply to the local government shop steward, (33) set out in Chapter Two of this project,

then there is no particular reason to expect that this would have been any more a successful platform for negotiating over new technology than the structure that already existed.

6.3 Management Objectives and Strategies

Willcocks and Mason in their article on the role of management in technological change during the 1980's (34) note that by and large management have had new technology introduced largely on their own terms. Their view is that this is not the result of, or has amounted to, successful information technology and industrial relations management, rather, they show a complex picture with information technology and industrial relations management rarely integrated and both often lacking a strategic dimension. (35)

The assumption is often made that management have a strategic plan for the introduction of information technology and that that plan relates to specific objectives for the organisation. However, a 1988 conference (36) concluded that one of the reasons why there seemed to be a poor apparent return on investment in information technology was that there was no overall strategic plan for the introduction of information technology. (37)

In the Birmingham City Council Case Study the City's own auditors, Price Waterhouse were highly critical in their 1982/3 audit of the fact that there was no strategy document

for the introduction of new technology and no overall business plan for the city. Even four years later, despite a tactical plan produced by the Information Systems and Services Department, there was still no overall business plan on which a strategy for the introduction of new technology could be based. What was still happening was a tendency for departments identifying particular information technology uses and these were not being considered in the context of the overall needs of the City.

In the Shropshire County Council study there was no overall strategy document that existed, it seeming again that initiatives for the introduction of information technology arose from individual departments, this view being supported by the LAMSAC report of 1982. In the Sandwell study, despite the existence of an overall co-ordinating group responsible for the development of new technology, there was again no formal written strategy document relating to a business plan.

This lack of an overall strategy casts doubt on the concept of 'management' as if it were an internally coherent entity. The Strathclyde University NALGO project also found that despite a heavily centralised policy there were significant differences in attitudes to technology on the part of section managers and that this had resulted in a pattern of uneven technological development. (38)

It is interesting to note that in all the case studies there appeared to be minimal involvement by the personnel departments in the bodies established to plan the introduction of new technology for their respective organisations. This corresponds with Daniels's findings that: -

A very modest picture emerged of the part played by personnel managers. (39)

Daniel's work found that the most common pattern was for the personnel department to be brought in after decisions had already been taken to go ahead with technological change, their brief being to deal with the personnel implications of the change. (40) Willcocks and Mason put forward the view that the lack of serious consideration of employment policies and their management until or after the implementation stage of the introduction of new technology necessarily builds up problems that enter the 'industrial relations sphere,' this being when personnel specialists are brought in. (41) They suggest that this gives rise to a narrow view of management responsibilities, seeing industrial relations problems as arising only between industrial relations and personnel specialists on the one hand and employees or their representative on the other. (42) This is despite the fact that Daniel found a strong and consistent relationship between the involvement of personnel managers at an early stage in technological change and favourable employee reaction to such change. (43) What is peculiar to the case

studies in this project is that because of NALGO's diverse membership in status terms, in all cases there were high status employees, NALGO members involved in the initial proposals for technological change. However the involvement of Personnel officers followed the patterns put forward by Willcocks and Mason.

It is clear that the introduction of new technology in all of the case studies was regarded firmly as a management prerogative and that this was reflected in the lack of consultation with both NALGO officials and the employers involved in the proposed changes. Arthur Young's 'Handbook of Management' (44) reflects this view in discussing the implementation of new technology suggesting that the first stage of any information technology project should be to:-

Establish an information technology working group comprising senior management. (45)

It is only in the design stage of project implementation that they make reference to ensuring the close involvement of potential users and nowhere at all do they make any reference to consultation or involvement of employee representatives.

Even in the Severn-Trent Water Authority where there existed a set of guide-lines providing for discussion with recognised trade unions there was no consultation on the pilot scheme for office automation that had been agreed with the computer firm ICL, the union representatives hearing about it by

chance at a new technology workshop. Similarly, in respect of the Scientific Services re-organisation, the first indication that the trade union had of the Authority's plans came in their Corporate Plan consultative document, by which time the plans were well established. The plans for the Billing re-organisation only came to the union's attention via a 'leaked' document and even then, after a delay of three months, the union were made aware of the plans by a formal presentation by the Authority, not involving consultation in any way in the sense of seeking and incorporating the other party's views.

The local Government case studies illustrate the same disregard for consultation with employee representatives. The Bridgnorth branch of Shropshire County Council only learned of their employers plans through a local press article. In the Technical Services Department of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Authority, even though the employers had consulted in accordance with the new technology agreement there had been no consultation with the users concerned, the blame for this being placed on the union representatives.

The question of fragmentation of NALGO members and the autonomy apparent within individual departments in the local government sector case studies is also of note, for the Shropshire County Council NALGO branch pointed out that the employers were basing their tactics of implementing new technology on approaches to individual departments and

'forgetting' to involve the union. The introduction of new technology clearly being seen as a management prerogative in this case.

To conclude on the question of consultation, Daniel showed that although there was more consultation with office workers than manual workers over technological change, (46) when it came to the question of formal consultation within the framework of trade union representation or established consultative machinery the consultations over change affecting office workers was less likely. He notes that: -

it remained the case that consultations through union channels were much less common in relation to office change. (47)

However Daniel reports that consultations with union officers over change affecting office workers were much more common in the public sector, (48) this is not reflected in the studies in this project for there is clearly a difference between management's perceptions of what constitutes consultation and that of the trade union, also the existence of clauses in a new technology agreement pertaining to consultation is no guarantee that the consultation that does take place is acceptable to both parties.

Management tactics in introducing new technology are demonstrated in the case studies, by and large the policy being one of isolating specific groups of employees and

introducing new technology 'by the back door', only going to consultation at overall branch or regional level when forced to do so. One factor which weakens the trade union attempts to deal with this is when re-organisation of the employer's operations takes place. Not only does this mean that membership mobility between departments or re-designated sections is increased, with the subsequent difficulty in keeping track of members, but also that the representative structure and negotiating process has to be revised every time that such an internal change takes place. For example the whole operating structure of Severn Trent was re-organised in 1986, in both the Billing and Scientific Services reorganisations the structural changes meant that new membership frameworks were needed by NALGO and new negotiating structures had to be established. During the researcher's visits to Shropshire County Council, the NALGO office had had to be moved three times over a period of about five years. It is therefore little wonder that the union had difficulty in keeping track of developments in new technology within departments when the structure of the departments kept changing.

6.4 Collective Bargaining and the Negotiation of Technological Change

Willman (49) suggested that the future development of trade union behaviour in the face of technical change depended upon changes in the political and economic climate, the incidence

and impact of innovations, changes in trade union structure, and most importantly in his view, collective bargaining developments. (50)

The criticism of collective bargaining procedures as a forum for negotiating technological change have been well documented and were set out in the opening chapter of this project, in essence, as Willcocks and Mason suggest, they centre on the fact that collective bargaining for new technology agreements take place through mechanisms which leave it too late for union and employee influence on new technology systems, the bargaining then being about accepting the system and limiting its negative effects. (51)

Before examining the collective bargaining and negotiating procedures as applied to the NALGO services in the case studies, it is important to recognise, as Clark points out, (52) that a focus simply on collective bargaining does not capture the wider interaction and bargaining that takes place, both formal and informal and that 'negotiation' should ideally be considered in a wider interactionist sense in order to gain an understanding of the processes and influences involved.

Collective bargaining over new technology takes place through the service conditions 'half' of NALGO's organisational structure, the bargaining being at local, regional or national level according to the particular service concerned,

and the actors involved in this process varying accordingly. This lack of standardisation, inevitable given the diversity of NALGO's representation, can be somewhat confusing as it may place a different emphasis on individuals such as the Branch Organiser and the full time NALGO District Officer according to the service industry in which they operate.

It is clear from NALGO's policy documents that the main feature of collective bargaining was the achievement of a procedural technology agreement which would then regulate the implementation of new technology. In the Water Industry, the initial collective bargaining focus was based on national bargaining over a range of items with national guidelines providing the framework for regional agreements through Regional Joint Council's. The joint approach between employer and trade union at national level between 1979-83 to the issues arising from new technology in the Water Industry and resulting in the 1983 'Technology and Employment' report seemed to point to the establishment of a national level technology agreement.

This situation was changed by the abolition of the National Water Council in 1983 and the subsequent focus on local negotiations. This external factor of governmental legislation changed the face of bargaining in the industry and was a factor over which NALGO had no control, just as the subsequent privatisation of the industry was to eventually be carried out through the successful passage of the required

legislation. The role of the full time NALGO District Officer with responsibility for the Water Industry within the West Midlands District NALGO office was different from that of the full time NALGO District Officer with responsibility for local government in that the former played a high level negotiating role at regional level and was a recognised actor in the bargaining process. This was at Regional Joint Council level prior to 1983 but the power given to Water Authorities out of the 1983 Water Act left negotiating over new technology, in the case of the Severn Trent Water Authority, not at regional level, for the case study shows that the Authority were clearly opposed to this, but at local level on a divisional basis.

Despite the 'spirit' of the joint studies prior to 1983 and the existence of regional procedural guidelines for the introduction of new technology the case study shows that this particular authority was paying little heed to those procedures, as in the case of the ICL office automation pilot studies, with the union noting that there had been no attempt to discuss or inform the trade union at regional level.

It is notable that in the Severn Trent Water Authority, following the 1983 Water Act there was a period of one year when there was no formal bargaining machinery at all and that during this period both the Scientific Service review and the Billing re-organisation were initiated. As far as the bargaining agenda was to be concerned, the fragmentation of

bargaining meant that the levels of decision making over the implementation of new technology were not reflected in the same levels of bargaining over new technology. This centralised policy combined with the Water Authority's insistence on divisional bargaining hindered NALGO's ability to respond and to monitor the situation on a regional basis as the NALGO operational structure for bargaining rested on the activities of the full time NALGO District officer through regional negotiating machinery.

As far as local government is concerned, early collective bargaining took place at national level and through the National Joint Council, seeking revisions to the existing national conditions of service to take into account the changes perceived to be brought about by the introduction of new technology. The failure of national negotiations in 1981 thereafter placed the negotiating emphasis at branch level. The question here is on whether NALGO had a structure at branch level to be able to respond to local bargaining, this being basically the 'spot contracting' that Willman points to, stating that to cope with this a decentralised structure is needed by a trade union. (53)

Therefore the role of the branch personnel is significant here, from Branch organiser to departmental steward. The Strathclyde University research noted that: -

Because of the dominance of centralised bargaining through the National Joint Councils the bargaining role of shop stewards has been minimal compared with other

industries. (54)

Certainly the slow implementation of the steward system has not helped matters. It is also notable that in the case studies in the project the relationship with the full time NALGO District Officer with responsibility for local government was not one where that person was involved in first stage negotiations, assistance only being sought if difficulties arose in the bargaining process and industrial action was called for, as illustrated in the Bridgnorth District branch of Shropshire County Council.

In the Shropshire County Council branch the Branch administrator had no negotiating role over new technology because of the nature of the post, negotiating being left to the branch officers as there was no steward system in operation. It was not until 1987 that the role of Branch Administrator was changed to that of Branch Organiser with negotiating powers, also the steward system by this time was only just starting to take shape. The point is that the key time for negotiating over new technology had passed. There is little doubt that the branch was not able to effectively respond during the period of most rapid introduction of new technology. The only area where successful negotiation took place was in the area of the Health and Safety issues relating to new technology, where, to comply with legal requirements, there were formal channels of communication and negotiation.

In contrast in both Sandwell and Birmingham City Council negotiations over new technology at employer level were carried out by the respective Branch Organisers. With the failure to negotiate a central new technology agreement in the Birmingham City Council case, the importance of the branch having a steward system in place was shown in the fact that negotiations took place on a departmental level to secure agreements. The relationship with the NALGO District Officer is of interest in this case study for in the early negotiations for a central new technology agreement there was obviously a difference of opinion between the branch and the District Officer which lead to the District Officer not recommending approval be given at national level for continuing with blacking the introduction of new technology in the branch. It is possible that the fact that the local government branch has a negotiating power base may have lead to the development of an uneasy relationship with NALGO at District level, it is also possible, albeit unsubstantiated, to surmise that this does not lead to the most effective use of NALGO's resources at District level.

It is probable that in both sector case studies, the employer's successful insistence on fragmented bargaining assisted in their by and large successfully carrying out their plans. In the final analysis the union relies on grass roots support in any industrial action necessary to oppose an employer's plans and where the union is not able to

act as a collective unity, even at branch level, then this ability to attract support is weakened. In the local government case studies both Shropshire County Council and Birmingham City Council NALGO branches had had to resort to departmental level bargaining over new technology, giving rise to a level of negotiating which exists outside the formal bargaining machinery and leading to as the New Technology Party said in the Birmingham City Council case, 'an uneven pattern of development'.

Another insight into the bargaining outcomes that occur in using formal collective bargaining machinery for negotiating over new technology stems from the timescale that is involved in going from stage to stage in the bargaining process. For example the Birmingham City Council bargaining over the central new technology agreement ran for nearly three years, there sometimes being months between responses from one side to the other and the next meetings. In the Water industry Billing re-organisation it took over a year before a settlement was negotiated. It could be suggested that the use of formal collective bargaining machinery and the time delays seemingly inherent in the process well suit management determined to introduce new technology and allow them to proceed with plans whilst negotiations take place.

It is also evident from the case studies that the nature of the bargaining that takes place is from a fairly narrow economic base being concerned with levels of grading,

employment levels, job descriptions etc. It was interesting though that the local agreement negotiated by the Housing Department in Birmingham City Council spoke of increasing the scope of employees work and thus increasing job satisfaction.

The technology agreements sought and achieved by the trade union movement during the 1980's have it has been suggested:-

made no significant impact on the way change was implemented. (55)

The weaknesses of technology agreements have already been exposed by many academic authors, Willman for example regards them as being of minor importance in the regulation of technological change under collective bargaining. (56) As far as white collar unions in general are concerned though, and NALGO in particular it could be said that they are the result of the lack of clearly defined machinery for resolving issues at local level concerning the introduction of new technology. For example, in the situation of Sheffield City Council NALGO branch it was reported that: -

There were no really comprehensive written and agreed procedures between the council and NALGO in many areas as basic as collective disputes or differences. Ironically while written and formalised agreements existed and had existed for many years between the council and its manual grades there were none relevant to staff grades. (57)

It is therefore interesting to speculate that the potential

convergence with manual workers, possibly to be brought about by NALGO's proposed merger with NUPE, (58) and the rationalisation of procedural bargaining arrangements implicit in this may actually re-inforce collective bargaining procedures as the methods of negotiating over change at the workplace. If this is the case then there is a need for collective bargaining to become increasingly strategic rather than routine and to be about setting the terms for a basic restructuring of production and work rather than just about negotiating narrow economic concerns.

6.5 The NALGO member

Chapter Two of this project attempted to set out the characteristics of NALGO membership in some detail and drew attention to the fact expressed by some authors, (59) that NALGO's 'success' in negotiating new technology agreements lay partly in the senior status of some of their membership.

There is little doubt that the dual role of manager and trade union member is one, for some NALGO members, which has become increasingly difficult to reconcile, particularly as the union has become more politically active and 'militant', leading to some NALGO defectors to FUMPO - the Federated Union of Managerial and Professional Officers - NALGO's newspaper 'Public Service' noted that: -

Existing managers were finding it increasingly difficult to 'wear two hats' because they were required to implement policies opposed by the unions. (60)

This difficulty was highlighted in NALGO documentation following the Billing re-organisation in the Water Authority and concerned the actions in a dispute between a NALGO Senior Customer Liaison officer, a NALGO member for twenty years, the full time District NALGO officer with responsibility for Water and the West Midlands NALGO District Organisation officer.

The NALGO District Officer wrote to the District Organiser regarding the activities of the NALGO member concerned stating that: -

The content of Mr X's speech was to argue that management had behaved reasonably during the dispute and significantly, when referring to management, he continually used the words 'we'. There was no doubt in my mind that he was using his access to the meeting as a NALGO member to convey a message on behalf of management. (61)

The member concerned wrote to the District Officer following the complaint and stated: -

I think it is quite possible to combine the roles of senior manager and union member providing one remembers in which capacity one is acting at any point in time. (62)

Correspondence continued with the full time District Officer asking the member concerned about the legitimacy of using his position as a NALGO member to attend union meetings in order

to report back to senior management on the content of discussions which had taken place. The outcome of the correspondence was that the member concerned resigned from NALGO, his letter of resignation saying that:-

This can only lead me to believe that our continued membership of NALGO represents an embarrassment to the union which is only slightly mollified by our annual subscriptions. (63)

This correspondence is illustrative of the difficulties posed for both the union and its members who hold management positions. This project has only touched on the issue and it really requires a detailed research project in its own right on membership characteristics to draw any reasonable conclusions. It would, for example, be of great value to establish detailed factual information on the employment status of NALGO branch officers as well as those ordinary members who hold management positions and try to establish connections with the industrial relations patterns within the given organisation. In the Shropshire county Council case study the Branch President was a long standing NALGO member and occupied a senior management position within the County Council Planning Department, his view being that his management position strengthened his ability to put forward the union viewpoint as he would be seen as 'respectable' from a management point of view.

It is also interesting to speculate as to whether the fragmented bargaining pattern illustrated in the case studies

where departmental or sectional bargaining, takes place means that grievance smoothing is more likely where departmental stewards occupy positions of status and attempt to reconcile promotion prospects with union membership.

The changing nature of NALGO'S membership during the last twenty years, with the influx of significant numbers of relatively lowly paid largely female workers, and the likelihood of this continuing into the mid 1990's due to demographic factors, may suggest that the character of the union will continue to change, especially if the merger with NUPE takes place. This would certainly imply a weakening of the 'domination by the forces of high status conservatism' that Nicholson et al say have characterised NALGO history. (64)

The case studies did not provide sufficient evidence and the scale of the project was not large enough to draw any generalisations as to the advantages or otherwise of high work status NALGO members. However, in terms of the aspect of union membership characteristics as a potential resource to strengthen union power in relation to the introduction of new technology then it is evident that the resource exists within the membership but that the exploitation of this resource in any effective manner remains a major problem.

6.6 Summary

In NALGO's case it appears that the 'hopes and aspirations'

in relation to the introduction of new technology, referred to by Francis at the commencement of this project, (65) and set out in NALGO's policy statements over the period from 1979 to 1986 have not been fulfilled. The 'short term union action' in relation to new technology referred to in the 1981 policy booklet, (66) never came, neither did the union 'seize the initiative' as referred to in the 1986 publication. (67)

It is certainly the case that in the second half of the 1980's new technology is no longer a mainstream NALGO issue, as evidenced by the disbanding of the National New Technology Working Party in 1987, the winding up of NALGO's West Midland District New Technology Sub Committee in 1986, and illustrated at branch level in the Birmingham City Council case study by the cessation of the branch New Technology Working Party in 1987. It is clear that the 'opportunistic' years for any radical union plan to use new technology to shape a new style of work organisation and pattern of industrial relations were the early to mid-1980's, after which there is evidence to show that the implementation of new technology by employers had largely been carried out and that such technology was no longer 'new' in the workplace.

NALGO's strategy towards new technology, in common with many other unions, has been based on the achievement, through standard collective bargaining procedures, of the technology agreement. McLoughlin and Clark state that the new

technology agreement initiative had lost its impetus at both national policy level and in the negotiating practice of individual unions by the mid 1980's.(68) Certainly in NALGO's case, the peak of new technology agreements occurred between 1983 and 1985 as evidenced by their surveys. (69)

The suggestion both within technology agreements and NALGO policy statements of 'sharing the benefits' of new technology is suspect when examined through the case study work in this project for it becomes apparent that these benefits are extremely difficult to quantify either by the union or by management. In the case of Birmingham City Council, it was not until 1984 that attempts were made to quantify benefits from the introduction of new technology and in the two years that followed over a third of all projects evaluated could identify no benefits at all. The attempt by the Yorkshire Water Authority in 1983 to identify and distribute benefits seems to be one of few attempts to do this and even then the definition of benefits are those in staff savings arising from job loss.

Levie and Williams (70) argued as early as 1983 that to promote an independent perspective for trade unions in relation to technological change would require the development of representatives with the necessary skills in this field. McLoughlin and Clark, referring to the work of Jary, (71) also point out that prior union investment was required in training full time officers in the specialist

skills of new technology.

Training in new technology skills seems to have been regarded as a function of the employer, usually the Personnel Department, in conjunction with the suppliers of hardware and software. This is also supported by Daniel's work. (72)

NALGO seemed to have failed to see the issue as one of significance even in 1985 a motion put to the Annual Conference calling for training for all staff on the introduction of microelectronic systems and subsequent changing patterns of work was never reached. The potential of using training as a means of mobilising NALGO members, especially the large proportion of female members, and providing a new power base for the union to influence working relationships seems not to have been recognised. The policy documents aimed at female members were essentially re-active towards new technology and would have done little to strengthen women's attitudes towards new technology except in a negative sense whereas increasing the members skill base through training could have brought positive gains in terms of union support. In the Water Industry there were joint attempts by the employers and NALGO to secure European Social Fund monies for training in new technology skills but this was perceived by the union as an answer to job loss and not as providing other opportunities. Clark points out that questions of training for new technology and the acquisition of information and knowledge about its capabilities are likely to become crucial factors in the regulation of work

and employment relations under new technological systems.

(73)

Public sector trade unions, it could be argued, are more prone to the political factors which dominate according to the nature of the government in power. In the Water Industry case study one cannot help but be aware of the impact of the political context and subsequent legislation to support the Conservative government's policy of privatisation as a major factor which militated against the union's ability to respond effectively to the introduction of new technology. For example the 1983 Water Act virtually destroyed the work that had been jointly carried out on new technology by the union and the employers at national level prior to that date. With the autonomy that was devolved to the regional water authorities after that date it would appear in Severn Trent's case that the application of new technology was to become linked to the rationalisation of operations in the run up to privatisation.

NALGO was structured to operate in the bargaining context at national and regional level in this industry and could not respond at the branch level which is where the employers were to focus their efforts, this being in general terms not just over new technology.

The characteristics of the NALGO membership in the two case studies in the Water Industry were quite different, on one

hand the professional status scientific officer and on the other the female administrative worker. Neither group was able to deal with a management determined to introduce new technology on its own terms and without consultation through formal union channels. With neither group willing to take more than token action, not surprisingly given the economic situation within the West Midlands in the mid 1980's, the union were powerless to respond, relying on the standard bargaining procedures to achieve staff protection agreements for their members. Although new technology was the prime mover in both the reorganisation of scientific services and of the billing operation, there was no regional or local technology agreement in place and therefore the issues were seen to be part of normal industrial relations bargaining.

As regards Local Government, comprising the bulk of NALGO membership, there seems to be evidence that despite the potential of new technology, the uptake was not as speedy as one might have thought, neither was it necessarily introduced as part of a coherent management strategy linked to a business plan in the case studies examined. However, if the employers had shortcomings in relation to the adoption of new technology in the case studies, NALGO was even less able to effectively respond. There was certainly greater autonomy at branch level than in the Water Industry and a much less formal relationship with the NALGO District officer, but despite the local power base the case studies, covering branches with some 12,000 members show fundamental structural

weaknesses in communication and organisation.

Yet again, faced with determined employers, who often gained project approval for new technology via the committee cycle in local government before consulting with the union, the union seemed powerless to respond in anything other than a traditional reactive sense and achieved little in the case studies apart from progress in the Health and Safety area.

Finally, there is no doubt that NALGO has had great difficulty in facing a technological revolution in the workplace which coincided with one of the most demanding decades politically for the public sector. One must be aware of the problems in dealing with technological change on behalf of over three quarters of a million workers with highly diverse characteristics spread across a wide range of industries. It does seem though, from the evidence of the work in this project, that NALGO's inability to take advantage of the opportunity provided by new technology in terms of the nature of work and industrial relations stems largely from the high level of complexity and the low level of sophistication of their organisation. I would suggest that any radical alternative for trade unions in dealing with new technology presupposed the existence of a sophisticated union organisation. The structural changes that did occur in NALGO, for example the spreading of the steward system and the computerisation of branches did not keep pace with the introduction of new technology by employers.

McLoughlin and Clark's view was that internal union organisational factors have been crucially important in determining the degree of influence unions have been able to exert over technological change during the 1980's, (74) this project supports that view in NALGO's case.

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Appendix One

Summary - Academic Issues arising from the Project Conclusions

The conclusions of the project related specifically to Jon Clark's agenda for future research in the field of new technology and industrial relations. However, as well as this agenda, there are two broad industrial relations areas arising which may be of value for further academic research. The first relates to the concept of 'white collar trade unionism' and whether this term has any relevance given the issues in the project. The second relates to the relationship of the industrial relations terms "negotiation" and "consultation" in the context of technological change.

In standard industrial relations terminology NALGO is classified as a 'white collar trade union', this presuming to tell us something about the particular membership characteristics of the Union. What is clear from academic research though, is that the term 'white collar' is fraught with difficulties of definition and as such may be of little use beyond that of a general descriptor.

It would seem that the technological revolution of the last decade has blurred further distinctions between 'blue collar' and 'white collar' worker leading to a greater convergence in definitional terms between the CNC operator on one hand and the word processor operator on the other.

The issues of seniority/status in NALGO's membership illustrated by the case studies are also of direct relevance to the above. The higher status members within NALGO clearly

lie within what is defined as the "service class". It would appear from the evidence in this project that this sector of membership within NALGO rests more uneasily than ever before in NALGO's history, as evidenced by the movement of senior members to other 'professional associations' in the latter half of the 1980's. Given the political context of this period with NALGO members who occupy senior status positions having to implement policies from a management stance which are clearly at odds with the Union's stance, it seems reasonable to predict that this element of 'managerial unionism' may well disappear, leading to a decline in the status differences in NALGO and therefore a changing character to the Union. The proposed merger with NUPE could well speed this process up.

The second broad area which may be of value for further academic research concerns negotiation and consultation issues. It is not uncommon for industrial relations textbooks to draw a distinction between negotiation, seen as a power relationship giving rise to an activity by which management and trade unions make agreements regulating service conditions and authority relationships between them, and consultation, seen as a process whereby managerial representatives discuss matters of common interest with employee representatives normally but not always trade unions prior to negotiating or taking a decision. It is not always clear however that such a difference exists between negotiation/consultation, the case studies showed clear evidence of this with the language being used clearly expressing the desire for consultation as the

critical issue for NALGO yet this being expressed in terms of the negotiating process. The industrial relations rhetoric in the language used in the case studies turned what in fact was a call for consultation into tests of industrial relations virility leading to distributive bargaining with its inherent conflict becoming the norm.

The case studies provide much evidence that suggests that the issue of consultation lies at the heart of avoiding conflict during technological change and that what is really required by both sides is a form of integrative consultation under which the artificial distinctions between the subject matter of negotiation and consultation are blurred.

Appendix Two

Summary - Practical Implications for NALGO

The conclusions drawn from the project suggest that the issues to be tackled by NALGO are:-

- 1 The need for speedy computerisation of all elements of NALGO's organisation, branch, district and national, to ensure that the Union has a technological capability to cope with administrative matters relevant to continuous change and are not disadvantaged or have to rely upon employers' technology.
- 2 The need to strengthen the relationship and communication between branch and district level so that the best use may be made of the resources that lie within the organisation.
- 3 A greater emphasis on the benefits arising from training of the membership in technological skills. The emphasis here being on practical training through NALGO's Education Department and the district and branch education officers, not simply based on the dissemination of information.
- 4 The implementation of the steward system to be reviewed and branches who have not adopted such a system to be given support and encouragement to adopt a steward system as a matter of urgency.
- 5 The role of the NALGO researcher and the relationship of the research department to branch and district levels to

be reviewed.

- 6 The need to evaluate areas where most successful bargaining takes place, ie: health and safety, and examine the reasons why bargaining is successful, ie: backing by legislation, greater member willingness to participate.
- 7 An examination of the benefits of a greater reliance on consultation, where such a process blurs the distinction between consultation/negotiation and can lead to both parties seeking common benefits.
- 8 A review of the characteristics of the members, particularly in terms of status/seniority and occupancy of a role within the Union.