

the hook and tied the Charter to inaction.

The Charter was never officially wound up. The beginning of the end was 1976. The CP had won a number of positions in the union, so to a large extent the Charter had lost its rationale for them. Consistently the CP policy has been to attempt to influence the bureaucracy at the expense of organising the rank and file. Such a strategy ends up in a cat and mouse game, with the CP always cast in the role of the mouse.

When they thought they had become part of the Establishment, then the need for organisation round the Charter simply disappeared.

IN 1976 the paper Building Worker started. A number of comrades had left the SWP over the leadership's attempt to channel all our activity into the Right to Work campaign — or, rather, that had been the straw which broke the camel's back.

We, along with SWP members and other non-aligned building workers, continued to attend the Charter meetings. We often found that we had a majority at the meeting. When this happened the CP refused to hold the meetings. Or if we did get anything like support for the Right to Work march through one meeting, the CP would reverse it at the next.

Then we put a resolution for the 1976 Charter conference, condemning UCATT and TGWU rivalry. The CP member who went as delegate did not even bother to get the resolution on the agenda. It must be understood that this rather modest resolution cut across the CP's pro-UCATT line.

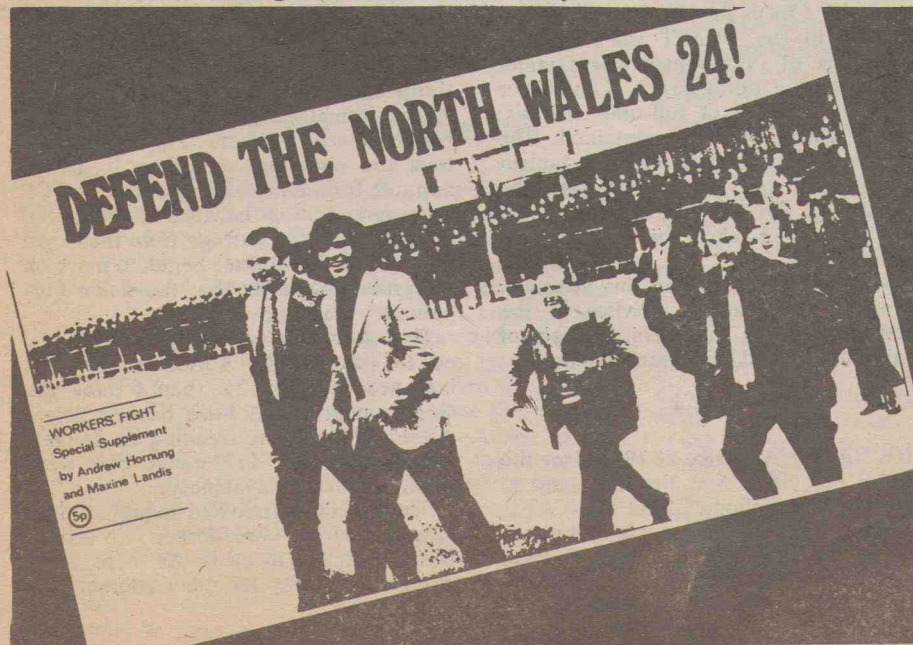
We realised then that they weren't going to accept any democratic decisions, so we decided to leave.

It was shortly after that, though not because of it, that the Charter began to fade away.

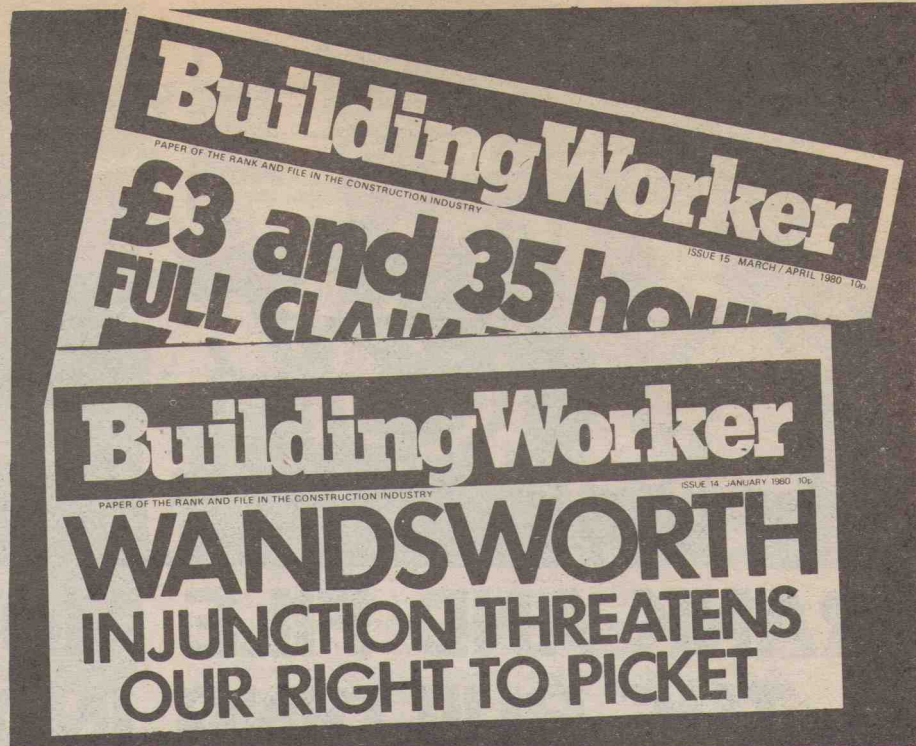
The Charter still organised the odd conference, but it had effectively stopped producing the paper. So we started publishing Building Worker.

There is clearly a strong need for con-

Revolutionaries led the fight to defend the Shrewsbury 24



WORKERS' FIGHT
Special Supplement
by Andrew Hornung
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5p



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sistent rank-and-file work in the building industry. You build up the union on site, and then six months or a year later, you have to start all over again. A long job is a year to eighteen months. Thus, in a much more limited way than the Charter was able to do, we attempt to play that coordinating role for the rank and file, filling the gap left by the Charter.

There are members of the SWP, the Labour Party, Big Flame, Workers' Action, IMG, and a couple of CP members in the Building Worker group, so we have certain differences among us. But we manage to work very well as a group.

While this gives us a certain coherence among the individual members of Building Worker, my personal opinion is that both the IMG and the SWP are not interested in rank and file groupings which they don't control. We have difficulty getting articles and even ads placed in their papers.

Our main function has been that of coordinating militants, where this has been possible. It has taken us a long time to build up, but over the last year we have been able to develop this role in terms of helping some strikes and pickets. With our small forces, I don't think this is any small achievement.

Also, we have made an impact on the union bureaucracy. While I can't say we worry them, they certainly know of our existence.

If over the next year or so there isn't an upturn in the struggles, the role of the group will be much more one of holding together militants in different areas.

The economic situation has hit the industry hard. Large numbers of building workers are unemployed, and in UCATT check-off has taken a massive toll on branch life. Before at stewards' nights you could not get in the door. You would have literally hundreds in the room. Now, to a large extent, branches are dead.

In 1978 56% of members' dues were deducted at source. While this is a general trend in most unions, it has a far more sinister side in building. Sub-contractors do deals with the union and buy in bulk orders. The employers hold the cards. Many of the workers don't even know they're in the union.

It has got to the stage now where UCATT has started a price war with the TGWU, whose rates are cheaper. They are offering a six-week rebate if you pay for a year.

This situation has not only destroyed branch life, but also made it virtually impossible for the union to take national action. The contractors would just have to issue instructions to stop paying in to the union, and they couldn't finance a strike.

It is this growing hold of the contractors, plus the slump in the industry, which has put UCATT as a union in such a precarious position. Yet the fact remains that Building Worker is there, and will be in a relatively strong position to help build or initiate a fightback against this trend.