

The Alternative Plan

What the Lucas plan proposed

Workers Solidarity Movement

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What was the alternative Lucas Corporate Plan? Over a period of two years a series of proposals that later became known as the Lucas Plan were drawn together through the active involvement of most of the workers in the 15 different Lucas factories. Its aim was to shift Lucas Aerospace, as a company away from the production of military goods, mainly for NATO (an emphasis that was capital intensive and had high profit margins for Lucas's owners) and towards the production of socially useful goods (which was a labour intensive field, relying more on the skills already in the Lucas Company). Such a shift would mean the preservation of jobs at Lucas and the fulfilment of some of the more pressing needs of society. Here is what was proposed:

Medical Equipment:

The proposals were:

- Increase production of kidney machines by 40% and look into the development of a portable model.
- Build up a 'design for the disabled' unit, with the Ministry of Health, to look into things like artificial limb control systems (which could use Lucas' control engineering expertise), sight aids for the blind, developing the 'Hobcart'. This vehicle was designed in the 1970s by an apprentice at Lucas to give mobility to children suffering from Spina Bifida. Lucas management had refused to develop it on the grounds that it was incompatible with their product range.
- Manufacture an improved life-support system for ambulances. An ex-Lucas engineer turned doctor had offered to help design and build a prototype for this, using a simple heat exchanger and pumping system.

Alternative Energy Techniques:

Due to the finite availability of fuels like coal and petrol, they proposed that Lucas concentrate on renewable sources of energy generation and developing more efficient methods of energy conservation from fuel sources. Up to 60% of energy is lost with traditional forms of its use (car engines etc.). Moreover this would provide a real alternative to nuclear power generation which was unsafe and damaging to the environment.

- Development and production of heat pumps which were efficient in saving waste heat. Such heat pumps would be used in new housing schemes to provide a very cheap service.
- Development and production of solar cells and fuel cells.
- Development of windmills. Lucas' experience in aerodynamics would be invaluable.
- Development of a flexible power pack, which could easily adjust to people's situations allowing for small scale electricity generation using basic raw materials. Such instruments would be invaluable in under-developed countries where electricity provision is very poor.

Transportation:

- The development of a road-rail public transportation vehicle which would be light-weight using pneumatic tyres on rails. Such a system would be cheaper, safer for use and more integrated. It would allow rail services to be provided in areas where they were being closed down, etc. The road-rail vehicle would be able to travel on rails mainly but also convert to road use when needed.
- A combined internal combustion engine/battery powered car which could give up to 50% fuel savings while reducing toxic emission from cars.

The Plan proposed various other ideas in the areas of braking systems, undersea exploration technology and remote control devices,

The thrust of the Lucas Plan was radical from the beginning. It asked basic questions like what was the real use of Sting-Ray missiles and high technology fighter aeroplanes to society. Their production gobbled up money resources and technical inventiveness, making those who owned the Companies richer and richer but society got nothing from them.

WASTE

Basic needs in society are only filled inadequately, like for instance kidney machines, whose general shortage in society was then and still is a crying shame. Lucas, its workers argued, had the expertise to develop better, smaller and more mobile units which kidney sufferers were crying out for. Why shouldn't they do so?

Worse still, under a system that produces high quantities of weapons and armaments, not only is money wasted but also much human technology and innovation is wasted or mix-used as well. Take the proposal by the Lucas workers that the sophisticated radar systems used in modern fighter planes be used in the development of an "alternative sight" aid for blind people. Such a thing is easily within human capabilities, but is not made or even developed as a priority now.

Under Capitalism the world's resources and wealth is owned and used to make profit for the wealthy, Most money is invested where profit is highest. The fulfilment of human needs is always a secondary priority The Lucas Plan challenged many of the basic assumptions of Capitalism: why should profits come before people? What value have military goods in a world with so many other pressing needs? As such it was important. But far more fundamentally it showed what capacity workers have to articulate their priorities and their values,

ANARCHISM

For the future it showed what enormous potential a society based on socialism could have. Such a society with real workplace democracy and the participation of all in the management of society would allow for the creative capacity of each individual to have its say while the real needs of society are met. But for this to be achieved as the Lucas workers learned, Capitalism and its priorities must be overthrown .

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