

**MARTIN GLABERMAN**  
***PUNCHING***  
***OUT***  
***& Other Writings***



*Edited & Introduced by*  
**Staughton Lynd**



Chicago

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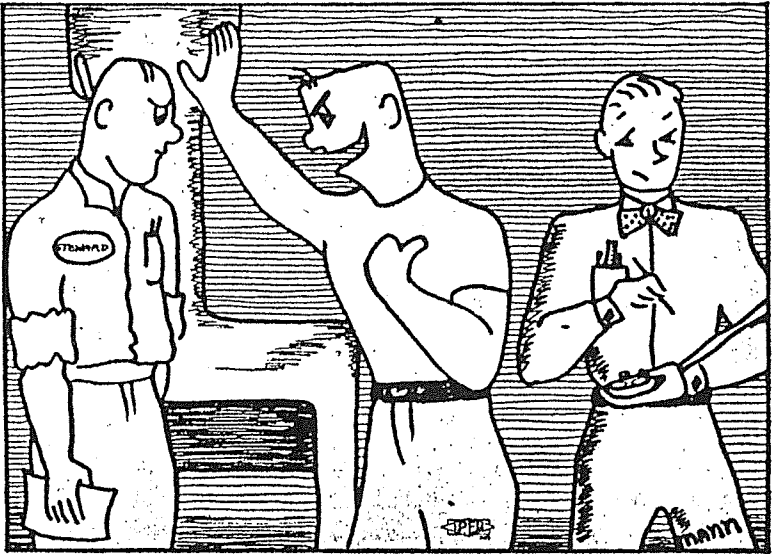
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The Needle

by Mann



"They're wasting his talents, Joe. He oughta try time-studying the grievance procedure."

# INTRODUCTION

## I

**M**artin Glaberman (known to friends and coworkers as “Marty”) died in his sleep on December 17, 2001, in Detroit. He was 83.

Born and raised in Brooklyn, Marty became a socialist at the age of thirteen. He remained a lifelong Marxist who never lost faith in the capacity of the working class to emancipate itself and to transform society.

On the eve of World War II, Marty Glaberman associated himself with the West Indian Marxist intellectual, C.L.R. James. He became a member of the Johnson Forest Tendency (named for James who was “Johnson” and Raya Dunayevskaya who was “Forest”) within American Trotskyism. This small but enormously productive and influential group made the first translation into English of what came to be called the “early economic-philosophical manuscripts” of Karl Marx. Members of the group saw in the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 a confirmation in practice of what they had projected in theory. The workers’ councils of the Hungarian Revolution remained for Marty Glaberman the closest approximation to a genuine working-class revolution thus far experienced anywhere in the world.

Marty received a bachelor’s degree from City College of New York. He was working on a master’s degree in Economics at Columbia University when he dropped out to become a radical doing full-time industrial work. There followed twenty years laboring for wages in plants in and around Detroit as an assembly line worker and machinist.

Marty quit factory work toward the end of the 1960s. The immediate impetus for him to leave the factory was a decision to work full-time for the organization. It may have seemed that the growing unrest of the late 1960s was an opportunity for a group on the Left to grow. In fact the organization did not grow, and Marty moved to dissolve the group in the face of apparent lack of interest from the New Left and against the wishes of C.L.R. James.

Marty Glaberman then earned a master’s degree from the University of Detroit and a Ph.D. from Union Graduate School. In moving from factory to university, Marty changed the way he made his money but not his central purpose. He brought his experience as a factory worker to the political journalism he had begun while in the

plants as editor of the newsletter *Correspondence*, to his teaching, and to his work as a labor historian.

The transition to academia from factory work must have been stressful, Marty Glaberman's son conjectures. "I don't think," Peter Glaberman writes, "that Marty would have put up with the bullshit of getting his degrees in the regular manner." Many of Marty's friends, admirers, and comrades were academics. They gave him credit for classes in which Marty actually lectured, and his book on wartime strikes was submitted as his doctoral thesis after it was published.

Marty Glaberman taught at the University of Michigan-Dearborn and in the College of Lifelong Learning at Wayne State University. George Rawick was a colleague. Through Rawick, Marty met several of the young men who were students at Wayne State while working in Detroit factories, and who formed the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. With them he studied *Capital* by Karl Marx in private sessions away from the university.

In 1989 Marty retired from Wayne State University, continuing to teach part-time. He also continued to manage Bewick Editions (named for the street in Detroit where the Glabermans lived), which published and distributed the works of C.L.R. James.

In their marriage of over thirty years, Marty and Jessie Glaberman kept a house that was open to the world as a way station, a meeting place, and a refuge. In 1957 the Glabermans and a neighbor, Ms. Winifred Jenkins, started the nation's first inner city Little League. Marty acted as league president, keeping the bats and balls in his basement. After the tragic death of a husband and wife in Flint who were both rank-and-file workers and political comrades, Marty and Jessie Glaberman became the foster parents of the couple's sons, keeping the three together when relatives wanted to separate them.

Marty's commitment to principle also showed itself in his continuing readiness to lead a discussion class on Marx's *Capital*, anywhere, any time. In his early 80s, he repeatedly drove from Detroit to Toronto and Youngstown, Ohio for this purpose. In Youngstown, a retired electric line worker, an inspector at a shop manufacturing metal drums, a tow motor driver, a steelworker and two lawyers, will never forget brother Marty reading from his battered paperback copy of *Capital* as he explained that Marx considered work under capitalism to be alienating for the worker "be his wages high or low." As he sometimes summarized the thought, Marty believed that as

long as “work [under capitalism] sucks,” workers will resist.  
He never lost a fundamental revolutionary optimism.

## II

I consider Marty Glaberman the most important writer on labor matters in the United States during the second half of the twentieth century. He developed distinctive concepts concerning the nature of trade unionism; the unfolding of working-class consciousness; and the forms of revolutionary organization appropriate to modern industrial society. The three parts into which the essays in this book are divided roughly correspond to these three conceptions.

The foundation or scaffolding for many of Marty Glaberman’s more specific ideas was the concept of “state capitalism.” In contrast to the principal organizations of Trotskyists in the United States, the Socialist Workers Party and the breakaway Workers Party, the Johnson Forest Tendency concluded that the Soviet Union was neither a “degenerated workers’ state” or a “bureaucratic collectivism.” Marty and his colleagues came to consider *both* the Soviet Union *and* the United States to be “state capitalist.”

At first glance, it may seem that the term “state capitalism” when applied to two such different societies as the Soviet Union and the United States is not especially useful. Marty sometimes distinguished “totalitarian state capitalism” (as in the Soviet Union) and “welfare state capitalism” (the kind in the United States). Nonetheless, if both the Soviet Union and the United States are “state capitalist,” how does that concept make possible accurate prediction about the particular dynamics of either of these societies?

But the concept of state capitalism may be useful in a different way, not so much for prediction, as by encapsulating a threat to the workers’ movement in all modern industrial societies. We in the United States speak casually of the state-dominated character of other countries. But in the United States as well, the rights of labor have come to be dependent on the state. Since the passage of the National Labor Relations Act (Wagner Act) in 1935, the rights of workers in this country to assemble, to organize, to strike and to picket have been protected by law. The fact that these rights have been created by the state, however, has the result that the state can define and limit them: can declare them inapplicable in a national emergency, or find that they have been “waived” (surrendered) by a given worker’s union. This “state capitalist” approach to labor relations has taken the place of more

straightforward class conflict in which workers simply asserted their rights to collective self-protection, acted them out, and took the consequences.

### WORKPLACE CONTRACTUALISM AND “PUNCHING OUT”

The bureaucratic national trade union appeared to Marty to have become an obstacle to workers’ self-activity. He felt that trade unionism, in its origins an autonomous, fiercely embattled, jealously independent movement, had become an instrumentality through which state capitalism rules. Trade union leaders had become agents of the state.

This theme is memorably articulated in the first item in this collection, a 1952 pamphlet entitled *Punching Out*. Scholars have termed the workplace regime established by the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) “workplace contractualism,” that is, the regulation of the relationship between worker and boss by a collectively-bargained contract. Marty pointed out that in such a system even the well-intentioned union representative becomes an enforcer of the contract, including its no-strike clause. Even the former picket-line leader, chosen by his or her fellow workers to be their steward, becomes a cop for the boss.

I recall being handed a copy of *Punching Out* when my family and I moved to Chicago in the late 1960s. It turned my ideas about the labor movement upside down. Instead of seeing unions as “good” institutions that had inexplicably taken “bad” positions toward the Vietnam War and the Southern civil rights movement, I glimpsed the concept that the union in a capitalist society—even when its leaders honorably strive to establish certain minimum workplace conditions—functions in the last analysis to stabilize the status quo. (After twenty-five years’ experience in which I have used this concept as an hypothesis, I would now say that what is described in *Punching Out* is especially true of national unions, and that local unions may under certain conditions play a more creative and radical role.)

One discerns two sources for the provocative notions set forth in *Punching Out*. The first, of course, is the collective learning experience of the Johnson Forest group as its members, Marty included, took up industrial work during and after World War II.

In August 1947 the group’s Internal Bulletin contained an article by Marty (writing under the pseudonym Martin Harvey) entitled “Strata in the Working Class.” After some preliminary remarks about the upper layers of the labor bureaucracy (rather similar to the roughly



contemporaneous comments of C. Wright Mills in his book *The New Men of Power*), Marty turned to “the nature of the trade union movement under capitalism.”

His analysis is dialectical. “Although one essential element of unionism is its character as an organ of struggle, contradictory to this—even because of this—the unions are also organs of class peace.” The contract embodies these contradictory elements. “On the one hand it contains the gains won by the workers and obligates the company to carry them into effect. On the other hand it stabilizes the worker-capitalist relation . . . and is enforced against militant workers who utilize opportunities to make greater gains.”

At the end of the article Marty focused specifically on stewards and committeemen. They come directly from the rank and file. They share its income and existence (except, of course, when the committeeman becomes full-time and operates out of an air-conditioned office that he rarely leaves). When stewards and committeemen fail to represent the rank and file, the response is immediate and strong. But

comrades should understand the contradictions which are present even here. The committeeman and steward is called upon to enforce the contract and while a good steward fights for all he can get for the workers he represents he is tied to the contract and feels duty-bound to support it. He accepts the contract as a normal way of life in the factory and is often in a position where he has to enforce it against the workers. . . .

A second source of *Punching Out* was Marty Glaberman’s poignant personal relationship with a comrade and union committeeman named Johnnie Zupan. (“I recruited him,” Marty recalled, “and I spoke at his funeral.”) Zupan is described in the second essay in this book, “The Left Wing Committeeman.” He embodied the self-described radical who, without realizing it, upon assuming even the office of steward begins to drift away from the rank-and-file fellow workers who elected him.

As was the case with so many of Marty Glaberman’s ideas, the analysis he expressed as a young man in *Punching Out* became part of a conceptual arsenal on which he drew for the rest of his life. (He did not believe that the working class could make a revolution through trade unions.) In an interview with my wife Alice and myself in 1997, later published in our book *The New Rank and File*, Marty said:

What forms are available to the working class? The union movement is not a force for revolutionary change. I do not

think it can be transformed. Mostly workers boycott and ignore unions: they do not go to meetings, they do not vote in union elections. Occasionally they will vote a contract down. They will occasionally, but rarely, participate in opposition caucuses. Whether the workers become revolutionary or not does not depend on what the union leadership does.

This means that the course of future developments in the workplace has to be sought outside the unions. Caucuses and factions will still be built and, here and there, will have temporary and minor successes. But the explosions that are still to come are likely to have the appearance of new revolutionary forms, organizations that are not simply organs of struggle but organs of control of production.

For the moment, the germ of such new forms of organization can be discerned in the informal work group on the shop floor. Like the late Stan Weir, Marty Glaberman viewed the informal work group in which workers manage their own collective labor as the only kind of workers' organization that cannot be bureaucratized. The leaders thrown up by the informal work group remain leaders on the job, subject to all the collective means by which peer groups discipline their members. All over the world, Marty writes in the essay "Poland and Eastern Europe" in this collection, workers have "the ability to run production and, therefore, the ability to interfere with the running of production." It "doesn't matter whether that factory speaks Russian, or English, or French, or German, or Chinese: workers respond in very similar ways" through their "informal shop floor organizations."

It is also the informal work group that enacts the wildcat strikes that Marty and others in his group saw as the fundamental form of self-activity by the industrial working class.

The belief that workers must and therefore will develop new forms of organization outside traditional trade unions through which to express their collective self-activity was one of a cluster of related ideas that Marty Glaberman advocated all his adult life.

#### IN THE BEGINNING THERE WAS ACTION

A second central idea of Marty Glaberman's was that activity precedes consciousness.

As Marty saw it, the working class is shaped ("made" in E.P. Thompson's term) by the activity forced upon it in a capitalist

society. Working-class consciousness is not best understood by taking a public opinion poll. Marty liked to say that a sociologist who took a poll in Budapest in September 1956 or in Paris in April 1968 could not have predicted the working-class upheavals that occurred a month later. Indeed the workers themselves did not know in advance of the moment of action what they would find themselves doing when that moment came.

Thus for Marty, the path to revolution was not first to change workers' ideas, and then to proceed to revolutionary action. Quoting Marx, Marty insisted that the activity would come first, and in the course of the activity consciousness would change.

This is the significance of Marty Glaberman's best-known published work, *Wartime Strikes*, a study of the struggle within the UAW during World War II over the no-strike pledge. Marty found that at the same time that UAW members, voting alone in their homes, recorded a majority for continuing the no-strike pledge, a majority of the workers in Detroit automotive plants took part in unauthorized wildcat strikes. He concluded that what workers say they are willing to do is not necessarily true. The workers' "real" consciousness was better revealed by how they acted than by how they voted.

Marty made the same point with a down-to-earth example. Say you are working at your machine and see a group of fellow workers heading down the aisle in your direction. There are too many of them to be going to the tool crib. It is too early for lunch. Their procession can only mean one thing, and so you turn off your machine; put your tools in your tool box and lock it; wipe your hands; and join the line on its way to the door. Only when you get outside do you turn to your fellows and say, "What the hell is going on?" and then, by your action, let other workers know whether you feel the wildcat is justified. The poem "Wildcat II" at the end of this volume describes the process.

The idea that action comes first is critical in understanding Marty's thoughts about overcoming white racism, a subject about which, at the time of his death, he was planning to write a book. He considered it a liberal pipe dream to suppose that one could *first* make white workers integrationists, and *then* launch a common struggle of both white and black workers for a better world. The Marxist approach, in Marty's opinion, was that racism would be overcome in struggle. He believed that the conditions of life and work of the proletariat would force the working class to behave in ways that would ultimately transform society. As he explained in *The New Rank and File*:

In other words, what Marx said was: We're not talking about going door-to-door and making workers into ideal socialists. You've got to take workers as they are, with all their contradictions, with all their nonsense. But the fact that society forces them to struggle begins to transform the working class. If white workers realize they can't organize steel unless they organize black workers, that doesn't mean they're not racist. It means they have to deal with their own reality, and that transforms them.

Like his mentor James, Marty Glaberman expected black workers to desire their own organizations. James and Glaberman rejected the idea of white and black workers as indistinguishable colleagues in a common struggle, albeit with certain distinctive "black" demands. Marty dismissed that approach as embodying the slogan, "black and white, unite and fight," associating it with the Communist Party. Instead Marty, following James, visualized white and black workers acting through separate organizations against a common enemy.

The Detroit uprising of summer 1967, which he witnessed at close hand, made this concept more concrete for Marty Glaberman. In a leaflet not included in this volume, "Detroit: The July Days," Marty observed: "Except for minor incidents, blacks and whites did not battle each other. Both battled businessmen and police." In one of the essays in this book ("Black Cats, White Cats, Wildcats") he wrote:

Tensions between black and white workers have existed in varying degrees since the earliest days in auto. Sometimes they have erupted into open struggle. Sometimes they have been submerged in major battles against the industry. Tensions exist today, especially in relation to the skilled trades, which can easily break out into battles between workers. But that is secondary to the fact that black workers are attempting to assert working-class control on the shop floor.

Notes and outlines left by Marty at the time of his death, and made available to me by his companion Diane Voss, make clear that Marty intended in explaining his approach to overcoming racism to utilize Antonio Gramsci's concept of "hegemony." (Gramsci used the word "hegemony" to refer to the fact that when a ruling class develops an ideology that expresses its class interests, those ideas tend to be diffused throughout the whole society and even to be adopted by oppressed groups.)

A list of chapter titles projected by Marty for his book on overcoming racism reads as follows:

1. The Struggle for Freedom (DuBois, Booker T. Washington)
2. American Racism
3. Gramsci & Hegemony
4. The Class Struggle
5. Marx and the Working Class.

A list of works that had been read or were to be read included books on Gramsci by Carl Boggs, Walter Anderson and Chantal Mouffe, and articles on hegemony by John Patrick Diggins, T.J. Jackson Lewis and George Lipsitz. Finally, Marty Glaberman had typed out three quotations from Gramsci's prison notebooks and three quotations from the newspaper *Ordine Nuovo*, published in 1920, the period during which factory committees were occupying Italian factories.

Of course we cannot know exactly how Marty would have used Gramsci in setting forth an argument about racism. Based on his other writings and on the notes and outlines that he left at his death, three things seem reasonably certain. First, Marty would have separated himself from scholars who use the concept of "hegemony" to try to show that capitalism, imperialism and racism are so powerful as to be invulnerable. He would have emphasized the effort of exploited classes to create a counter hegemony, a hegemony from below.

Second, Marty would have gone beyond Trotsky's conception in his *History of the Russian Revolution* (to which Marty called my attention) that the new society exists within the shell of the old in the form of the revolutionary party. Like Gramsci, Marty would have sought the new society in more varied institutions and ideas, such as informal work groups, factory committees, workers' newspapers, and antihierarchical religious congregations.

Finally, Marty would have stressed that the workers who made the Russian Revolution were largely illiterate, anti-semitic, and male chauvinist. The struggle transformed them. So it can also transform, he would have insisted, even those workers in the United States who seem most caught up in enjoying the wages of whiteness.

#### NEW FORMS OF ORGANIZATION

The Johnson Forest Tendency also abandoned the concept of the vanguard party.

Yet James and Marty Glaberman remained admirers of Lenin. Marty explained as follows. In the special circumstances of Tsarist

Russia, so his argument goes, a centralized radical party was necessary. Indeed the same might be said (and James, according to Marty, apparently said it) about vanguard parties in developing societies in Asia, Africa and Latin America. But in Europe and the United States, by the second half of the twentieth century a centralized vanguard party was no longer needed and had become a brake to the political development of the working class.

For one thing, the working class in these societies is more educated than in pre-revolutionary Russia. For another, new technology now makes possible horizontal communication among rank-and-file workers, so that vertical leadership no longer serves a purpose. Once again the concept is dialectical. A form of organization effective and legitimate in one historical situation becomes an obstacle in another.

Marty greatly emphasized the question: If the Movement is not led by a vanguard party, how should it be organized? He based his answer on the experience of the movements of the 1960s.

In the short piece "Student Unrest," Marty said that the worldwide student protests of the 1960s were "revolutionary." Rebutting Hal Draper, he insisted in "The New Left" that the youth movement of the 1960s was more free of adult domination than had been the youth organizations that he and Draper were a part of. He argued that "the anti-war politics of the New Left is superior to that of the old." Even the notoriously inchoate ideology of the New Left was, in Marty's view, "far superior to the rigid stupidities that most of us held on to in the thirties and forties." The New Left's belief in the revolutionary potential of the American people was preferable to the "romantic vanguardism that characterized the movement in the thirties" and the "cynical nihilism of the old left," so Marty believed.

Of greatest importance were Marty's comments on New Left organization in the essay "Toward An American Revolutionary Perspective." Here is what he said:

When the NAACP proved inadequate to the needs of the civil rights movement, . . . it was not replaced by a new organization that represented the black community. It remained to perform its specialized functions. Instead, a host of new organizations appeared, some national, some local, some temporary, some permanent, some membership organizations, some loose coalitions and committees: the organization of the Montgomery bus boycott, SNCC, SCLC, CORE, local committees, ad hoc groupings, regional formations, and the like.

When particular organizations outlived their usefulness or proved inadequate or could not accommodate themselves to changes in the struggle, they disappeared and were replaced. When the struggle moved from the rural south to the urban north, organizations like the Panthers and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers appeared to reach a new constituency and to put forward new tactics.

“Similar phenomena appeared in the student movement, the anti-war movement, and, most recently, the women’s movement,” Marty continued. “This experience is clearly not the result of some secret strategy or some historical accident. It arises out of an objective situation and corresponds to the nature of that situation and of the times in which we live.”

The crucial concept, he went on, “is participatory democracy.”

[T]he multiplicity of organizations and the ease with which masses or groupings of people can form them or abandon them, reflects the control of the movement from below. It has been impossible for any single organization to dominate the left and to force strategies and tactics into a single mold, a mold which thereafter acts as a brake on further developments. The looseness and freedom of organization, on the other hand, has made it possible for varying kinds of “constituencies” to enter the political arena with issues and organizations of their own choosing. Students or workers, urban or rural, middle-aged or young, whites or blacks, can participate in political activity without the necessity of subordination to some over-all political formation.

As with all of Marty Glaberman’s ideas, one can agree or disagree. That is what he would have expected. What he asked, and I as his editor ask on his behalf, is that these ideas not be evaded but be squarely faced.

### III

Marty and I began to work on this book together at the end of 1999. I knew we were racing against time. There were long waits while three university presses and Monthly Review Press considered and then rejected publication. In the end we turned to the Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, that promptly agreed to publish the book if I could type the manuscript. Following Marty’s untimely death, Kerr

also agreed to become the distributor of the Bewick Edition titles that Marty had for many years devotedly made available from his home.

Marty was able to do a great deal in preparing this book for publication. He and I jointly selected the items to be included. He suggested the addition of some of the cartoons of Egghead and the Needle, the captions for which he wrote, and some of the poems of Mr. Toad. I suggested a bibliography. After I did a first draft of the bibliography based on items Marty had sent to me, he prepared a list of additions, and finally, typed a new bibliography in which his publications were divided into categories (“Books,” “Booklets,” “Essays and Chapters,” “Reviews”) and within each category the most recent items came first. It appears at the end of this volume essentially as I received it from him. At the time of his death Marty had also proofread the first eight or nine essays.

Considering that this volume represented Marty’s opportunity to preserve for another generation scattered writings that had appeared in a variety of small Left periodicals, many of them no longer in existence, he was an extraordinarily patient and generous collaborator. When I initially proposed giving the first section of the book the title, “The Union As A Cop For The Boss,” Marty gently reproved me:

I am a little uneasy about the union as cop for the boss as a major heading. . . . What I am nervous about is the idea that unions are a trick of the bosses. They are not. They are formed in the first place by workers—and then the nature of their function, more or less, leads to their becoming bureaucratic and undemocratic (helped along, of course, by government and management).

He also commented at one point, “I was wondering whether there should be at least one piece on James in the book.” (There are now two.) Such suggestions were followed by comments like, “Anyway, I trust your judgment,” or, “Anyway, your judgment is final.”

I wish to thank friends and relatives of Marty Glaberman who knew him for many more years than did I and who supported me in completing this book for publication. Special thanks are owed Seymour Faber, Grace Boggs, and Peter Glaberman, who generously reviewed a draft of the Introduction. Errors of fact or interpretation are, however, wholly my responsibility.

I also wish to express appreciation for permission to reprint the following articles:



“Be His Payment High or Low,” which first appeared in *International Socialism*, 1:21, Summer 1965;

“Walter Reuther and the Decline of the American Labor Movement,” which first appeared in *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, v. II, no. 1, 1997;

“The Labor Movement is Not Dead” and comment on Hal Draper, “In Defense of the New Radicals,” which appeared in *New Politics*, v. III, no. 4, Winter 1992 and v. IV, No. 4, Fall 1965;

“Comment on Student Rebellion,” copyright (c) 1969 by the Antioch Review, Inc., which first appeared in *The Antioch Review*, Vol. 29, no. 2, and is reprinted by permission of the Editors;

“The Marxism of C.L.R. James,” which first appeared in *The C.L.R. James Journal*, Winter 1992.

Staughton Lynd  
Niles OH  
May Day, 2002

## EGGHEAD



That time study man gives you a good feeling, letting you know how much you can really do.

## EGGHEAD



Why should the men tell the committeeman what they want done? After all the committeeman knows his job. He should run the department.

I.  
THE TRADE  
UNION MOVEMENT



## PUNCHING OUT

Not long ago two men in a Detroit auto plant were discussing their steward. Both had known him for long years. They had worked together in the same department when the shop was unionized in 1937. None of them were very active in the union but all three were among the first to join.

They had done picket duty together—in 1937 and again during the war when the plant had wildcatted a couple of times. They had helped organize an undercover terror campaign against a foreman that they finally threw out of the plant. One way or another each one was looked to and respected by the men around them. They were not foolhardy men. But they had courage and self-confidence, gained from long years in the shops. They were years spent in constant struggle over production; in cutting the ground from under a foreman to give the men greater freedom in arranging production to suit themselves; in isolating and defeating a steward who proved himself incompetent or a company man.

Only four months before they had put the new steward in to try to regain some of the ground lost by the union over the years. And now they were discussing their friend.

“Joe should know better,” they agreed. “He’s a worker just like us. And now he’s just a contract lawyer like the rest of them.”

What it all boiled down to was—Why?

Why does a working man or woman, chosen by his or her fellows to represent them, sooner or later turn against them? Why does a worker, when he is elected to union office, turn against his own kind? How does an ordinary rank and file worker become a pork-chopper, a pie-card, a bureaucrat?

The question isn’t a personal one. At one time or another it has been asked in every shop, in every city in the country. In auto plants, in steel mills, in coal mines, in ships in every port, the same question keeps coming up. It is a fundamental question. It is one of the most important questions facing working people today.

### YOU CAN’T HELP YOUR BUDDY

The general feeling in the shops today is that the men chosen by the workers to run their unions, to represent them against management, although chosen, by and large, from their own ranks, aren’t worth a damn. From top to bottom the union is run by bureaucrats,

by people who may once have been workers, but who are now a group apart, who oppose or ignore what the workers want to do.]

What is it that the worker wants? You just have to look around you a little bit, listen for a while, and you'll get an answer. He wants anything but what he's got.

The idea that comes up as often, or oftener, in talk in the shops is to get out of the shop. Everyone has heard it. Most of us have repeated it ourselves. Anything is better than working in a factory. A milk route, a small garage, a salesman's job. It may pay less and the hours may be longer but it's a way of getting out of the factory. Every time there is a layoff, men say that if they can find a half-way decent job on the outside they won't be back.

But everyone knows that getting out of the shop is just a dream. They always come back. Once in a while a man saves his money carefully—and his kids' if they're working—and gets himself a small farm. Or someone finds another kind of job. Some of them make it but most are back in the shop after a year or two, building up their seniority from the bottom again.

What is meant by all this talk is that there has to be some kind of basic change, that working in a factory is a hell of a way to make a living. Everyone knows that getting out is next to impossible. The change must be inside the factory.

A man wants to grow. He comes into the shop with brains, ability, and the desire to learn, to develop himself. He is put on a machine, told what muscles to use, and forbidden to use any other skill or ability he may have. To add to his knowledge he has to figure out ways of getting around the shop rules and the union rules.

### WORKERS WANT TO LEARN

To work a job other than his own he must be sure the foreman isn't looking. To see how something is done in another part of the plant he has to sneak behind machines or piles of stock. The rules are almost always violated because no one can suppress the desire to learn, to see how things work. But workers want to be able to learn as human beings, not as criminals. They want knowledge, the power to learn, to be theirs as a matter of right, not as something that must be stolen from the company.

If a worker wants to learn, it is not for the sake of getting a lot of useless information. He wants to learn in order to be able to use his knowledge in the organization of production. Time after time

workers get together to discuss the mistakes of supervision in planning the production process, the ignorance of foremen of what their machines will do. One of the deepest sources of resentment in the factories today is the fact that the workers' knowledge and ability in production must be kept secret from the company. Management attempts to get some of this information through suggestion plans in which rewards are offered for improving production. But these plans are usually boycotted by workers. They are profoundly convinced that any improvement in production today will only help capital and work to their own disadvantage.

Many times workers devise short cuts for doing their jobs, sometimes even tools or gadgets to ease the work. In some places these are kept hidden from supervision, even if it means taking them apart at the end of the shift. In other places there is an understanding that the foreman will not report such labor-saving devices to higher supervision.

In a zinc smelter in Pennsylvania, near Pittsburgh, a man was given a job which required pulling a series of switches that controlled the furnaces. He sat on a cot or bench in a small room and at regular intervals he had to get up to pull the switches along one wall. One day the foreman realized that although he had passed the controls room frequently, he had never seen the guy off the cot. He went in to investigate and found that he had rigged up a series of wires from the switches to the head of the cot which he could pull at the required time. The boss told him that it didn't look good for him to lay on his back all day, he'd have to take the wires down. If a higher-up saw the wires he'd have a fit. The wires were taken down. But not long afterward, the foreman noticed that once more the man never left the cot. He investigated again and found that he had wired the switches themselves, not the handles as before, and could throw the switches from his cot without any wires being strung around the room. The foreman threw up his hands and said, "If you could figure that out, then lay on your damn back all day."

#### MACHINE SHOULD SERVE THE MAN

This is an extreme case, but only because the worker was able to keep some of the benefits. Every worker is always looking for ways to make the machine serve him. But he must spend his life fighting the fact that he has been placed in the factory to serve the machine or assembly line.

It isn't just helping his own job along that's involved. Production in a modern factory usually prohibits that. The worker can help himself only by helping his buddies. A job can be improved only by changing half a dozen operations. This is especially true on an assembly line. Improving production means a group of people cooperatively organizing the work. It can be done in no other way.

An auto worker said that the thing he hates most about his job is that the company has production so fouled up that he can't help his buddy. That's an opinion that's shared by workers everywhere.

The guy next to you on the line isn't feeling well, or he's got a hang-over, or he's just feeling lazy. Or maybe he's having trouble with his tools. He starts to fall behind, moving up the line to keep up with his job. The first instinct you have is to give him a hand. You know the terrible pressure he's under. But you also know that helping him get out his production won't do him any good. He'll have the same job to do tomorrow. The company will have a few pieces they wouldn't otherwise have gotten. And you resent it. Everyone resents it.

In a shop with a strong union tradition on production standards no one would think of helping and they are bitter at not being able to help. In other shops a man might lend a hand and be just as bitter because only the company benefits from his human action.

### TO COOPERATE FREELY

A worker learns the need for cooperation the day he is broken in on his first job. All his feelings and instincts turn that way. But in a factory today every effort is made to stamp out and stifle free, democratic cooperation among human beings. The man is put to serving a machine and it is the position and nature of the machines which determine the cooperation between the workers. Workers want to have a free association in labor in which people can cooperatively and collectively organize and arrange machines and production to suit themselves. They resist every attempt to organize them to suit the machines.

Working people express this in their actions every day. A slow-down in one department of a General Motors plant is typical of the worker's desire to organize production himself. The slow-down was caused by a whole series of petty annoyances, enforcing of company rules, and so forth. Production standards in that department were low enough for the men to be able to finish their work in from one to four hours less than the full shift. Because of the different speed of different machines the whole department could not make its

production unless most of the men did get done early. What started the slow-down was the foreman telling a couple of men to slow their machines down to save tools and get better work. To show their opposition these men ran exactly production each hour. They were soon joined by the others and for three or four days the department was short a considerable number of pieces although each man ran his production if he had the stock. When the slow-down was about over, the foreman remarked to a worker:

“I can’t tell Joe anything. If I tell him to slow down, he hollers. If I tell him to speed up, he hollers. Maybe I’d better keep my mouth shut and let him run his job his own way.”

The desire, the need, for free cooperation in the organization of production makes itself felt over any other ideas or feelings the worker may have. A worker may be prejudiced against Negroes. But when a fight with the company over production is involved the average worker would join with the Negro on the next machine without a moment’s thought.

The same is true of workers who may look down on women working in the shop. In a Fisher Body plant in Flint a new department was started up with all women workers, newly hired. Since no one had any seniority or protection of any kind, the bosses rode rough-shod over the girls to establish the highest production standards possible. The men became very antagonistic as they saw work standards go sky high with hardly a fight and the women were bitter because their plight wasn’t understood. However, as soon as the first girls began to get their three months’ service in and acquire seniority they began to fight back vigorously with every trick in the book—jammed air guns, faulty stock, illness, grievances. It was only a short while later that mutual respect and cooperation developed between the women’s line and the men’s operations that fed them stock and they joined to make life miserable for the foremen and time study men.

### “BACK TO THE MINES”

In the factory the worker’s desire to organize production can only be expressed in opposition to things as they are, in resistance to company domination. But if you have helped a friend build his house or repair his car you know the release of freely associated labor. Whether your skill is small or great, whether you can do the wiring or can only carry cement blocks, you feel a part of something. There is a holiday spirit when you go out to the lot on a Sunday. Lots of talk,



friendly joshing, a picnic lunch. But everyone takes part in the planning and carrying out of the work. Everyone gives the best that is in him and feels better for it. You may have a charley-horse when you go back into the shop on Monday—but it's like going back into a prison after a taste of freedom.

The worker wants to organize production in his own way and it is the fundamental purpose of factory supervision to prevent this. 90% of all company rules have nothing to do with producing the product. They have everything to do with keeping him tied to his machine, with keeping him from learning, with keeping him from doing. Above all they seek to establish the discipline of the machine over the man and a foreman is put there to enforce it.

The average foreman knows no more, and usually less, than the workers under him about production. He is there only to enforce discipline, to see that the workers work. Sometimes company policy is to promote foremen from the ranks, sometimes it is to bring in outsiders completely unfamiliar with the operations. In either case, every worker recognizes that he is there as a policeman. The planning of production is left to engineers, chemists, and others. The basic job of supervision is to prevent the worker from developing his natural and acquired powers and using them to benefit himself and his fellows.

This aggravating conflict, a daily source of bitterness to the worker, combined with man-killing speed-up, long hours, miserable wages, corruption, and favoritism resulted in the tremendous eruption that overwhelmed the country in the formation of the CIO.

### “WE'RE TAKING OVER”

The desire of the workers for a new way of life can be seen most clearly in the rise of the CIO, although, to one degree or another, it can be found in all unions and industries.

The organization of the CIO was a nation-wide revolt of the working class against its conditions of life inside and outside the factory. It was a mass attempt to change American society fundamentally by freeing the working people from the domination of capitalist production and establishing in its place a cooperative society of free men.

Long before the CIO, workers, in organizing unions, were looking for more than a bigger pay check. In 1861, and this was not the beginning, a miner in Illinois, calling on his fellows to organize, felt compelled to say:

“In laying before you the objects of this association, we desire it to be understood that our objects are not merely pecuniary, but to mutually instruct and improve each other in knowledge which is power; to study the laws of life, the relation of Labor to Capital; politics, municipal affairs, literature, science or any other subject relating to the general welfare of our class.”

Before labor was organized nationally in powerful organizations, before workers could feel their collective strength, thoughts were directed toward the reorganization of any aspect of society—not merely the question of wages and hours.

The spontaneous movement of masses of people in the rise of the CIO cannot be understood in any other way than as a revolt against the conditions of life in capitalist society. This does not mean that the working men and women who took part in that great upheaval knew clearly and consciously what they were doing or what they intended. People who do new things usually think of them in old ways. Most workers thought they were loyal to the American government, to private property, to things as they were. But their actions spoke differently.]

The workers, organizing in the CIO, wanted to establish *their* control over production, and to remove from the corporation the right to discipline. Their method was direct action—the carrying out of their own plans for the organization of production to the extent possible. In the first upsurge in the rubber and auto industries the workers in the shops established their own production standards. They announced what they would do and that was it. Their answer to company discipline was the wildcat strike. It was a common practice in the auto shops for negotiations on the shop level to consist of the steward, surrounded by all the men in a department, arguing with the foreman. No one worked until the grievance was settled—and most of them were settled in the workers’ favor without the red tape of a bargaining procedure, appeals, and umpires.

### ONE PAGE CONTRACT

The first contract won from General Motors in the sit-down strike of 1936–37 was one mimeographed page. It merely gave the union bargaining rights for its members. But the old timers look back on that as the contract under which the greatest gains were made because the bargaining and the decisions were made by the workers on the job. It wasn’t that the contract was any good. It was that there

wasn't enough in it to prevent the workers from doing pretty much as they pleased. Foremen, for the first time, *asked* the steward how much production the department would get so he could plan accordingly. The steward consulted with the men—and then gave his answer to the foreman.

Not merely on the job did the workers blaze a new trail. The sit-downs themselves were a revolutionary development—the taking over of the private property of the capitalists.

This was not merely an unconscious means to a limited end. The propaganda of the daily press which called the sit-downs communistic and anarchistic made the workers fully aware of what they were doing. The opposition of the labor leaders, such as Sherman Dallymple of the Rubber Workers Union, or, at best, their concealed hostility, as the auto workers leaders, helped the workers understand the significance of their actions. The workers were showing their power, their organization, their discipline. They were showing that they didn't need anyone to tell them where to go or to lead them there. And before this great new power of labor corporate executives and government officials quaked in their boots. And the labor leaders were scared silly.

#### RANK AND FILERS AND LEADERS

At the meeting of GM strike delegates in Detroit on March 14, 1937, Wyndham Mortimer, then a UAW vice-president, tried to put the delegates in their place. He said: "We've been pretty liberal with you fellows. We've sanctioned all of your strikes even though we didn't know a thing about them beforehand." And Ed Hall, another official, complained at the bitter criticism of the proposed settlement that "we can't expect to get everything at once." They saw workers organizing and leading themselves and they didn't like it.

During the sit-downs workers who had not even been union members at the start organized a full community life; feeding, entertaining, and protecting themselves collectively with a self-discipline that far surpassed the imposed discipline of the corporations. They cooperatively determined the strategy to be followed and the means for putting it into effect.

In one of the struck plants, a strike leader was trying to get some sleep in a plant office. A worker came in to tell him that the boys were cold and wanted a fire. The leader, half asleep, mumbled, "O.K., build a fire." A few minutes later the worker was back: the men had

decided that a fire would be too dangerous. "O.K., don't build a fire." In a little while the worker was back again. "We figured out a way of building a fire in a steel drum that would be safe." And the leader again gave his O.K.

It was like this in most things. The leaders merely put their stamp of approval on what the rank and file workers were doing anyway.

At one point in the great GM sit-down strike a stalemate had been reached in the negotiations. It became clear to everyone that some new victory was needed to swing the balance in favor of the union. The strategy for this victory that turned the tide in the whole GM empire came from the rank and file workers in the Chevrolet plant in Flint. Chevy Plant 4 was a keystone in the whole GM setup. At that time it was the sole source of motors for all Chevrolet assembly plants throughout the country. It had worked all through the strike. The corporation was also conscious of the strategic importance of Plant 4 and it was heavily guarded by company police and thugs. The strategy for taking Plant 4 was very simple—the men had to organize a fake attempt to take a less important plant in order to divert the guards from Plant 4. The leaders of Plant 4 proposed this strategy to Walter Reuther. He opposed it bitterly as being foolhardy and impossible. When he was overruled, he denounced the Plant 4 leader and said he would have his neck if the strategy failed. When it succeeded, of course, he took full credit for it.

The strategy succeeded because it was carried out with the greatest discipline and care. Only a handful of men had knowledge of the details. The taking over of another plant was planned so that word would get to the company. While the company police were busy slugging and beating these workers, Plant 4 was occupied and the foremen thrown out in 20 minutes without a hitch. And the production of Chevrolet motors came to a stop.

Not only were relations between the workers and corporations challenged in the great CIO strikes, but the men themselves were changed. Talking to sit-downers, you learn of the tremendous discoveries they made of the powers they had that they didn't know about before, powers that were released when they were released from the immediate domination of the machine. Men who were unable to talk in the presence of more than a couple of people spoke to hundreds and thousands with ability and confidence. Men found they had organizing ability, or could do office work, or direct a military operation. Only in free cooperative effort with their fellow men could their own

powers and abilities be released and developed. It changed their relations with their families, their outlook on life, the very nature of their being. They felt, at least for a while, what it was like to be a *whole* man, not just one part that was needed to tend a machine. Countless numbers of women achieved a new equality in the home and in the factory—not from a contract clause—but from participation as equals in a collective struggle.

The women who threw bricks at the cops in the Battle of Bulls Run on Chevrolet Avenue in Flint were no less men, that is, free human beings, than the men who threw bolts from inside the plant.

The taking over of the plants of the corporations in the sit-down strikes was but a step removed from the action of Japanese transportation workers after World War II who operated a municipal transport system themselves during the course of a strike. Both are pointed at the complete control and organization of production by the workers themselves.

In the anthracite coal fields of Pennsylvania, when the depression of the 1930's saw the closing of many mines, miners returned to the pits and mined coal for themselves, making agreements with truckers to take their coal to city markets. The production of coal by the miners themselves lasted for years in spite of the attempts of the state police and coal and iron police to evict them by force.

### BATTLE FOR A MINE

An auto worker I know told this story of a visit to his wife's relatives in a Pennsylvania coal town. One morning his father-in-law invited him to "see some fun." They went a few miles to a hillside where a mining company was going to start a huge new expensive mining machine. Workers had been surface mining on their own and the company was figuring on restoring profitable operations. The two men stopped a short distance away. Surrounding the machine was a group of heavily armed coal and iron police. Scattered over the hillside behind cover were a number of miners with rifles and shotguns. Off to one side were some state police.

One of the miners came down to negotiate with the company manager. After exchanging threats and warnings, the miner was told the machine was going to be started up. He turned and ran like hell for cover, followed by the bullets of the coal and iron police. A pitched battle followed in which several men were killed on both sides. But the coal and iron police were forced to retreat. The state police remained

on the sidelines. After the battle they removed the dead and wounded. And then the miners started up the new machine and ran it off the edge of the hill, smashing it completely.

The basic character of the change they wanted was clear in the minds of many workers. A large number of secondary and even higher leaders of the CIO were members of parties that in one way or another claimed to stand for socialism. The entire leadership of the GM sit-downs in Flint, for example, was in the hands of known socialists and communists. This was carefully exposed by the press and yet the workers stuck by them. Members of the Socialist and Communist parties, Trotskyists, Lovestoneites, Proletarian Party members, Wobblies—all came to the fore during the strike wave.

The Communist Party of Flint in the year following the organization of GM had between 900 and 1000 members out of about 30 or 40 thousand workers. The Socialist Party had about 400. This is a phenomenal number of declared socialists and communists, a truly mass organizational response by the workers. While most of these members were lost in a year or two, it is clear where they stood in 1938.

The temper of the workers in those years is best illustrated by the action of a leader of the Buick Local in Flint in 1940. Following the split of Homer Martin from the CIO, a Labor Board election was required at the Buick plant to determine which faction represented the workers. The struggle for the election was marked with considerable violence, roving goon squads, raids on the union hall, and the like. The Martin faction had considerable strength on the surface. When the CIO won the election, there was quite a celebration and considerable consumption of whiskey. A member of the shop committee marched through the gates of the plant, past guards and secretaries, and into the office of the plant manager. He banged his fists on the desk and shouted: "Get the hell out of that chair you son of a bitch, we're taking over." The plant manager just grinned and said: "So you won the election." But what the workers felt the union meant to them was clearly there.

### WHOSE CONTRACT

With the rise of the CIO, it was no longer possible for the capitalists to control the men and manage production. A new force had arisen which challenged the control of capital at every step. Plant supervisors were unable to cope with it. The factory was no longer entirely their own.

Even more than the corporation executive, the labor leader feared and hated this power that he couldn't understand. No more than the capitalist could the labor leader conceive of workers organizing production and society themselves and throwing him on the scrap heap. From the very beginning, all his efforts were directed toward keeping the worker tied to the machine. And the labor leaders, because they came out of the working class, were able to reestablish some order and discipline in the factory where the foreman or superintendent was helpless.

What they feared most was the independent action of the workers to solve their own problems for that was too striking a sign of things to come. The leaders would promise anything, demand anything, provided the workers would let them go about it in their own way—while the worker kept his mouth shut and worked his job.

Wherever it was possible the bureaucrats tried to prevent any action by the workers in advance.

John L. Lewis spent more than ten years ruthlessly wiping out any opposition to his machine in the United Mine Workers. In doing that he ran the union into the ground. But it wasn't until he had total control of all the districts and national and regional contracts that left the locals out in the cold that he embarked on the organizing campaign of the early 30's to rebuild the union. The hundreds of thousands of miners that entered the union found an iron dictatorship in which all decisions were made at the top. Demands against the mine owners, strikes, all policies were decided by the International Union.

In the steel industry the CIO did exactly what it charged the AFL with doing—it refused to charter an international union until most of the industry was organized and all policies, contracts, and leaders were decided by the CIO officials. Philip Murray was put in charge of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee and its policies were determined by the top CIO officials. As a result, organizing drives were based on negotiations with company unions, peaceful secret negotiations, or, at the most, "legal" strikes. The fruits were an agreement with U.S. Steel in which the steel workers played no part at all and a catastrophic strike in Little Steel which was smashed with the murder and beating of steel workers who were kept in check by Murray's tight control of the union.

When the Little Steel strike was losing ground, mine union locals offered to declare a holiday and send tens of thousands of miners into the steel towns to turn the tide. But it was more important to prevent

the workers from learning their own power than to win the strike so Lewis prevented the plan from going through and the strike was lost.

The United Auto Workers was already chartered when the CIO was formed and it was impossible for Murray and Lewis to impose their policies on the new union directly. It took ten years of constant sniping and the help of the government before Reuther's machine could achieve complete control of the union. To this day, the auto workers, who saw what they could do in 1937, have not submitted to the kind of dictatorship established by Lewis and Murray.

Each union has its own history. But in each the action of the union bureaucrats is the same. Clamp down on any attempt of the workers to free themselves.

The basic means of doing this is the union contract. The workers were moving to organize production for themselves. The union leaders, in Ed Hall's words, said: "We can't expect to get everything at once." Let's stop and set down the gains we have made so far. By maneuvering, by lying, by outright fraud, the first contracts were imposed on the workers.

The contract is a contradictory thing. To begin with, it records the gains by the workers, the wages, the hours, the right to representation. Putting these gains in a contract makes them secure, or so it appears. But for every advance made in a contract a price must be paid. The fundamental cost was the reestablishment of the discipline of the company. The contract gave to the company what the workers had taken away—the right to organize and control production. The complete recognition of a grievance procedure meant the establishment of a structure of red tape where the worker lost his grievance. To end the constant battle over members, the union won the union shop and the dues checkoff—and paid by removing the union another step from its membership.

The more "victories" they recorded, the bigger and more technical the contracts became. The union militants of '36 and '37 began to drift away and the contract lawyers and porkchoppers and specialists took over. Workers stopped going to membership meetings because instead of activity and the chance to solve their own problems directly they were presented with debates on technicalities and the maneuvering of rival factions. The initiative was taken away from the workers and given to the officials.

A contract is a compromise. That establishes that, no matter what union gains are recorded, the rights of the company to manage



production are also recorded. And in the grievance procedure it takes the power out of the hands of the workers and puts it in the hands of the stewards and committeemen. The union officials become the enforcers of the contract and the union becomes the agency by which the worker is disciplined and tied to the machine.

### A STEADY GRIEVANCE

The heart of the contract is the grievance procedure. Through it is established a certain measure of control over production. An especially severe penalty against a worker may be lessened or a very unjust one eliminated. But basically the right to discipline remains. And that is cause for most of the friction, the humiliation, the dissatisfaction in the shop. It is a steady grievance. But, as the UAW magazine, "Ammunition," points out, "there is no remedy for most of the grievances a worker has in a plant." Not under the contract, that is.

A boss sees a worker standing around and says: "Grab that broom and keep busy." The worker has done his work but still he cannot say no. He asks for his steward. To protect the worker from a reprimand or a disciplinary layoff he must advise him to obey the foreman's order and file a grievance. In other words, as a normal feature of his duties, the steward or committeeman must stand by the right of the foreman to order people around. Most workers have seen many, many cases where, without the union representative, the foreman could not have had his orders carried out. How many times has the natural reaction of a worker to a foreman's order been: "To hell with you. Shove the broom up your —!" But the steward or committeeman explains to the worker what he can and cannot do and the worker picks up the broom.

The grievance can do absolutely no good. Even if it is won, all it does is establish that the foreman should not have issued the order. That is small comfort to the worker a month or so after it happened when he knows that the next day it can happen again and he will once again have to go through the same farcical procedure.

What happens is what happened to one worker who was moved to a job he didn't like. He consulted with the committeeman and the foreman and got nowhere. Finally, in disgust, he walked into the office of the superintendent and cursed him violently. The stakes are high in an action like that—it's your self-respect or your job. And the pressure of the machine and the discipline that ties you to it is tremendous to provoke such actions continuously. As it happened, the same day the man was put on his old job. Shortly afterward the men around him

asked him to run for committeeman: but he hesitated because he knew how little he could do with the contract even with the best will in the world.

More and more workers recognize the contract for an enemy every day. And with the contract, the committeemen and stewards who enforce it. Workers go out of their way to circumvent and ignore the grievance procedure or humiliate the union representative.]

At the AC Spark Plug plant during the last war a group of workers were plagued with extremely poor working conditions, dust and speed-up. After a few weeks of bearing this and griping among themselves, they decided they had had enough. They all stopped work. The first one over to get them back to work was the committeeman. He was very nervous, wanted to know what the trouble was, and told them to get to work and he would try to help them. They contemptuously refused to give him their grievance, treated him like an errand boy, and told him to get supervision. When he did, they negotiated directly with the boss and settled the matter in 15 minutes.

#### UNION FRIGHTENED BY WORKERS

[It is no wonder that union representatives are as frightened of the workers as the supervision. They have much more in common with the foremen with whom they bargain than with the workers who they are supposed to represent. Very often, when he gets in a jam with the men, it is the foreman who sends for the committeeman to straighten things out and put the men back to work.]

But can't the contract be improved? Can't the compromise get better and better over the years? The fact of the matter is that the contract can only get worse. It turns every gain of the workers into its opposite, a weapon of the corporations and the bureaucracy.

Holiday pay, for example. It is an important financial gain for the worker and recognizes his right to paid leisure time. It is put into the contract and it becomes a means of keeping the worker on the job. If, as sometimes happens, there is a four day holiday weekend, the worker finds it much more difficult to take the whole weekend off because he loses not just the pay for the work day, but also the holiday pay. From being a payment for a day off on Thanksgiving, it becomes a means of getting him back to work on Friday instead of the following Monday, if the company sees fit to work the plant that day.

One of the most important gains that workers have made is the establishment of seniority in the plants. It was necessary protection

against discrimination; against men being laid off and hired at the whim of the foreman; against having to get the foreman presents or doing work for him to keep your job; against being forced out when you get too old to suit them.

But at the same time, so long as capital dominates production, it is a means of keeping the worker tied to his particular job. He cannot go to another plant to try for something better because his seniority is too important to lose. It puts the younger worker at the mercy of the slightest change in the economic scene, subject to frequent layoffs and insecurity. It prevents the men from using their ability and even from gaining experience and knowledge.

The worker recognizes the contradictory nature of seniority and while he will defend it against any encroachment by the company he wants to organize production in such a way that the protection of seniority won't be necessary, that no protection will be necessary, since no one will be there to dominate him.

#### LEFT WING PORKCHOPPERS

The so-called left wing caucuses and unions that oppose the existing trade union leadership do not understand this. Some may be dominated by the Communist Party. Some are not. But they all propose only to patch up the old contracts here and there. Basically they want to substitute themselves for the porkchoppers in power. And that is why they have had such little success. When the workers decide to throw out the old labor leadership, it will not be to substitute these petty politicians who want to set themselves up as an alternative bureaucracy.

The union leaders alone could never have prevented the workers from achieving their objectives in the 1930's. But they had allied with them the whole machinery of the government and that huge structure of government agencies designed to control the workers known as the New Deal.

When the working class began to strike out on its own, throwing its shackles aside, the union bureaucrats sought to bring in an outside force to put on pressure for adherence to contracts. In this they had the willing cooperation of the more far-sighted members of the government, above all, Franklin D. Roosevelt. The main objective was to take the initiative away from the workers, to make them dependent on leaders, to keep them from using their own knowledge and their own strength.

To accomplish this objective a huge mass of so-called social legislation was put on the books. Just as in the contract, here, too, these laws recorded the gains made by the workers in struggle. Where the workers weren't strong enough to win them on their own, they didn't get them. But it recorded these gains in order to take them away.

Laws were passed to remove the sharpest stings of the system. Unemployment was slightly relieved through insurance, work projects, and direct aid—after organizations of unemployed had been formed that were marching on state capitals to *take* what they wanted. Laws were passed easing up on farm mortgages to keep farmers from defending their farms from the sheriff with guns in hand. Other legislation of the same kind was passed, all designed to make the worker dependent on government action rather than on his own action—because his own action meant that he was setting about to run things himself.)

Keystone of the New Deal structure was the Wagner Act, the National Labor Relations Act. In this law the workers were granted the right to bargain collectively, a right they had already won in practice on the picket line! The employer, if he was so benighted that he could not see that he wasn't getting anywhere the old way, was required to sign a contract with the union. And just in case the contract didn't hamstring the worker enough in red tape, or the employer was adamant, the law set up a grievance procedure that paralleled the grievance procedure in the contract. Only this one was better—it went all the way to the Supreme Court. Where a contract could tie up a grievance for months, the NLRB could keep one in the mill for years. Instead of a steward or committeeman to represent you—he may not have been any good, but at least you knew him and could put some pressure on him—you got a lawyer to represent you. That was a couple of years they could keep you working on your job (or fired from your job, if that was your grievance) when you could settle it in hours or days if you and the men around you had a free hand.

### “DON'T ROCK THE BOAT”

The whole set-up was carefully designed to show the worker how everyone was looking after his welfare—if only he wouldn't rock the boat. It was also designed to show the worker how inferior he was, how unfit he was to deal with such complicated legal and technical matters. He had best leave them to his union leaders, the government boards, and the corporation lawyers.

What started out as resistance to the advocates of the workers

under the New Deal was turned into an offensive against the workers under the War Deal after 1940 and then continued in the Fair Deal. During the war union bureaucrats and government bureaucrats clamped down on strikes or any other action by the workers directly. Or rather tried to, for they never succeeded in stopping the ceaseless activity of the workers in the plants. The UAW officialdom succeeded in passing the no-strike pledge in a union referendum to free themselves from some of the bitter criticism of the ranks. But the rank and file showed what they thought of the pledge when they struck and struck again during the course of the war.

Union bureaucrat and government bureaucrat came to depend more and more on each other during World War II. The union leaders would blame certain "bad" government officials for the straight-jacket that was being put around labor and the government would give the union leaders a few more miles of red tape with which to trap and tie the rank and file workers. The military arm of the government intervened openly in labor relations. In direct strike breaking, as when the government took over the North American Aviation Co., or indirectly, as in the activities of the infamous Col. Strong who infested Detroit and the midwest industrial region, injecting himself in every labor dispute, seeking always to stifle the initiative of the workers.

Today, with union official and government official preparing vigorously for war, the same thing goes on at an increasing rate. Reuther uses the Taft-Hartley Act to cut down any opposition to him in the union. Union administrations finger militant workers to the Army or Navy in plants that have war contracts—and they are fired. But the tie-up between government and union has reached its most advanced stage in the maritime industry. In the National Maritime Union, Joe Curran openly called on the New York Police Department to help him establish dictatorial control in the union. Police ringed the convention hall. They controlled the microphones. They threw out opposition speakers. They turned the names of opposition delegates over to the Coast Guard to lift their seamen's papers. On the West Coast the same situation exists. In the seamen's unions there the Coast Guard and union officials rule with an iron hand. The union leaders blame it on the Coast Guard, but the members know better. No one dares criticize official policy because it means getting tossed on the beach by the Coast Guard.

But basically the union official who uses the Coast Guard to throw a man off a ship is doing the same thing as the committeeman

who orders some men back to work in an auto plant. Both of them have become agents of capital.

When Reuther signed his five year contract with General Motors in 1950, the most popular phrase among GM workers was "Reuther's Five Year Plan." In this was shown the deepest understanding of what Reuther and the labor bureaucracy represent. Reuther was taking the place of management as the power that disciplines the workers and keeps them on the job. C.E. Wilson, president of GM, also recognized this in speeches all over the country praising the five year contract as the only guarantee of labor peace. But it is more than that. The "Five Year Plan" shows that Reuther is not merely willing to cooperate with management and the government in keeping the workers in their place. It shows that he is perfectly willing, if the opportunity and need arise, to impose the same type of total domination of the working class that Stalin and his five year plans have imposed on the workers of Russia.

#### WITH OPEN EYES

[The working class today recognizes the labor bureaucracy as an enemy, as an administrator of capital. They look to the union as a source of strength, as a means of keeping the gains they have made over the past years. But they do not look to the union for the next steps to be taken. They resent and oppose the domination and interference of the union bureaucracy.]

In the vote on the union shop in General Motors a few years ago, the sentiment in the shop was overwhelmingly against the union shop. To the worker it was just another means of strengthening the union bureaucracy. But the question was put in advance of contract negotiations in such a way that the union shop vote was made a test of strength between company and union. As a result the GM workers were forced to vote for the union shop against the company. But being caught in the middle between Reuther and GM only served to increase their hatred of Reuther.

The workers are conscious of the fact that the old days are gone. There can be no return to 1937. The union and the contract have outlived their usefulness. The union is no longer a place where the worker can express his views. The struggle between powerful caucuses, each appealing to the rank and file, as in the early days of the UAW, is a thing of the past. The worker may support one caucus or another, or, as is more likely, none of them, but he does not look to them to

determine his future. His view of the union bureaucracy, no matter what its program, is one of complete hostility.

The working class has already left the old road of simple trade unionism. It has turned its back on penny gains that change nothing. Nothing was more complete than the contempt with which the auto workers received Reuther's pension plans. The working class has left the old road and embarked on a new one. It has not given the new road a name. It is not fully conscious of what it is doing. But in its *actions* it has pointed the way.

A worker cannot remain a human being without fighting against the domination of capital, of the machine. It is this daily, ceaseless resistance that calls forth the repression of capital, of the labor bureaucracy, of the government. But none of it can keep the worker quiet. At every opportunity he bursts forth, exercising his human powers, seeking to develop them further. Bureaucrat is piled upon bureaucrat and the worker shrugs them off and continues to disrupt production.

### WORKERS ORGANIZING PRODUCTION

Somebody has to organize production. As long as the worker doesn't organize production there is going to be a bureaucracy. There is going to be a constant crisis because the workers won't let anyone else organize production at their expense. The only answer is workers organizing production. Not nationalization, not this scheme or that scheme. But that someone organizes production who is in a position to organize production—and nobody else is.

He wants to put an end to the whole nightmare of factory work as it is today. He wants to work in free association with his fellow men, to plan and organize production for society as a whole. He is showing the new society in his every action today.

In a department of the Dodge plant during World War II there was a girl who knew how to set hair. It became the regular practice for the girls to have their hair set by her during working hours. This became a cooperative enterprise of the whole department for when a girl was having her hair set the rest of the department chipped in and did her work and the work of the hair setter.

In the same plant a matron, who was able to enter and leave the plant more easily than production workers, would go around to the girls in the morning taking orders for various things that they needed. Then she would go downtown and do everyone's shopping. While she was gone all the girls would share her work, keeping the wash basins

clean and the floors swept.

In a department of the Buick plant in Flint it is the practice for a man who goes home sick during the day not to punch out. The men cooperate in putting out his production and then someone punches him out at the end of the shift.

Example can be added to example of workers organizing production to suit themselves within the limits that it is possible under capitalism. The corporations recognize this and attempt to break it up. When a group of workers gets along too well, have too good an understanding of how to beat the company, there is often an attempt made to transfer some of the people to other jobs to break the group up. Or some are put on jobs that keep them tied down.

But workers are constantly evading these limitations. Workers will keep a man's job going for an hour or two so he can visit friends in another part of the plant. Or they will cover up for him to the foreman. Very often the foreman, to maintain any kind of relations with the workers, has to go along with them and looks the other way.

Sometimes even higher management is forced to depend on the ability of the workers to organize production. They try to limit this as much as possible. But within these limits they often have no choice but to rely on the workers' organizing ability. When there is a model change in the automobile industry, especially when there is a major change, time study men will be kept away and foremen will leave the men alone for as much as a month or longer until production of the new model is properly organized. It takes more than engineers' blue prints and the power to discipline to organize production.

In an auto body shop, during a model change, an engineer came down to one department and told the workers that under the new set-up the line would be run the other way. One of the men told him he was nuts, it wouldn't work. Later in the day the superintendent came down to find out why the engineer got mad. The worker told him. And the superintendent said, "Don't worry about him, we'll keep him out of here. You and I will get production organized here." Of course, all the superintendent could do was keep the engineer away. The workers would have to do the organizing.

When the company doesn't leave the workers alone they get paid back in kind. A sub-assembly line in one plant was reorganized and the women who worked on it could see at once that it wouldn't work the way the foreman worked it out. As long as the foreman was around they followed his instructions to the letter—and really fouled up the



job. As soon as his back was turned they got the line running smoothly. But whenever he came around they went back to his plan of production, fouling up the job again. It was a long time before that company got any kind of production off that line.

Numerous other practices in the plants show the worker's desire to cooperate freely and fully with his fellow workers outside the direct process of production. The numerous collections for flowers or gifts for fellow workers and their families and especially the way these collections are systematized. When the collections are haphazard, workers begin to resent the fact that some receive more than others, depending on the number of collections during the week. In plant after plant they organize regular funds, often with bonded collectors, to insure regular contributions and the equalization of gifts.

### THE NEW SOCIETY

In all this the new society appears within the old. A society in which the workers, every one of them, takes his part in planning production, in carrying out the plan, in developing himself by helping his fellow men, in helping society by developing himself. It means the total reorganization of society inside the factory and outside the factory, a society of freely associated men under no one's domination.

It is this that the workers are driving toward today, in ceaseless struggle. It will take only the slightest spark to set off the tremendous explosion that will unite the small groups of workers buried in a thousand factories and mines, that will transform the million actions directed at one end into one action achieving that end. In this upheaval the labor bureaucracy will be the first to fall, unwanted and unlamented by people who have taken their destiny into their own hands—to a man.

## THE LEFT WING COMMITTEEMAN

For the first 18 months of its existence, *Correspondence* was edited by a worker of long experience in the labor movement. After 18 months, however, he found that he could no longer accept the principles on which *Correspondence* was founded and separated himself from the paper. The examination of this experience is necessary for us, not only because it was our experience and an examination of our past is a means of moving forward. It is necessary because, small as the experience may be, it illuminates important aspects of society today.

### THE WALL BETWEEN WORKERS AND BUREAUCRATS

Johnny Zupan got his apprenticeship in the great depression. As a result of the depression and the organizing activities of the workers there developed in him a deep hostility to the capitalist organization of production and with it the knowledge that the future of society lay with the workers movement. He became active in the union movement and during most of his life held union office of some kind, usually as a committeeman.

In talking about his experience, in 1952, he said, "The relationship between me and the workers that I have represented in Detroit this past 10 years is terrific. . . . There's a sense of isolation and an alienation . . . you just don't feel part of them. They won't let you feel a part of them. . . . The only time I ever experienced a sense of integration with them is during wildcats.

. . . In many ways they will show a terrific respect for me and an admiration. But then after two or three weeks it completely disappears and that wall comes up again."

This was a penetrating observation. It points up what we have called the problem of the age, the relation of worker to intellectual, the domination over those who work with their hands by those who do not work with their hands. The editor, on the basis of his experience and his intellectual and analytic qualifications, was in an excellent position to make a substantial contribution to the study of this key problem. It could have become a cornerstone of the paper.

Unfortunately, Zupan did not understand the meaning of what he saw and made no effort to try to understand it. He was opposed to any serious treatment of the question in the paper. He was opposed to publishing the Special Supplement to Issue 14, which contained a

serious article on this very question, "The Real Trouble—We Solve This or We Fail."

The reasons for this are not hard to find. The wall between worker and bureaucrat that he saw, he could not see as the social division that it is. The separation between worker and bureaucrat, between those who work and those who plan and lead, the division which today is tearing society apart, he saw as a difference in consciousness among workers. [He, the committeeman, was conscious of the needs of the workers and of society. The workers were not always conscious.] But from time to time, when they undertook strike action under his leadership, they reached his consciousness and the "wall" was broken down for a while.

### THE LEADER WHO CAN GET THINGS DONE

Zupan's whole life contributed to this conception. He started in the labor movement in a plant in a small town in western Pennsylvania. He talked often of his experience in this plant and it very obviously meant a lot to him. As he described it, the plant was organized by a European radical during the thirties, who remained president of the local union for many years. The president had very little confidence in the big union bureaucracies so he negotiated a contract with the company first and then took his local into the CIO. This was one of the few locals in the CIO which maintained its own contract with the company. The almost universal practice was to have contracts between the companies and the International Union, which of course subjected local unions to the policies and dictates of the top union leadership.

Zupan always thought that his first local president was very shrewd and wise in maintaining his local's independence. The president followed a very conscious policy of improving the conditions of the workers. He followed the trade and technical publications in the industry very closely. Whenever the price of the company product rose, the bargaining committee was at the plant office the next morning with demands for a wage increase to share the price rise. Whenever new machinery or methods were introduced into the industry, the bargaining committee would immediately demand that these be introduced into the plant to make the work easier.

As a result, the plant had the highest wages and best working conditions in the industry. Other unions in related industries would demand of the International Union that it crack down on the local because

it was making their contracts and conditions look bad to their members. This looked to Zupan like the result of the correct policies and organizing skill of the local president. And it went beyond conditions in the plant. At one point the president moved to intervene in the politics of the community. He carefully chose and trained workers from the plant and the town to run for political office in a long range program, starting with the school boards. Johnny Zupan was one of those he picked and ran once on the Democratic ticket. He did the same thing to develop new leadership in the shop, picking bright guys out of the ranks to become committeemen. Again, Zupan was one of those chosen and constantly pushed forward by his local president.

He could have become president himself, but at one point he left to look for greener fields.

He was attracted by Reuther and came to Detroit in 1942 and went to work for Ford at the new Willow Run plant. Within a short time he was a committeeman, and remained a union officer of some kind for almost all the time since.

#### THE UNION COMMITTEEMAN

The separation between worker and union official, which Zupan experienced almost from the start of his working life, was intensified by the Ford set-up. Ford was the last of the Big Three in auto to settle with the union. When the settlement was announced it was claimed as the biggest victory of all. Ford had the closed shop. He gave the union (not the workers) all sorts of concessions to establish the union bureaucracy as a special caste in the plant. Ford was the first to establish the full time committeeman in the shop. But although the practice in different companies varies, the essential character of the committeeman is the same everywhere.

The committeemen at Ford don't work. They're full time on union business. Each committeeman represents between 200 and 500 workers. The committeeman's only work is to service and administer the differences between the company's demands on production and absenteeism and the worker's resistance to these. He also has to see that paycheck mistakes are corrected and that the line doesn't run faster than the agreed speed.

Aside from that, they do nothing but sit in the committee room and have long discussions on unionism, radical politics and the "backwardness" of the workers. Every time a worker goes in there, that is

the atmosphere he finds. The committeeman's job is talk. Many workers refer to them as lawyers. But they don't win cases very often because the contract is their sacred document, what they live by.

An ordinary lawyer will try to do the best for his client under the law. That is not the case with the committeeman. He is more a cop than a lawyer. He enforces the law. Workers have often said that what they want to know from the committeeman is what they *can* do, not what they *can't* do. But what they get is a running lecture on what the contract doesn't allow. The committeeman is the key to enforcing the contract and maintaining discipline in the plants. This is often admitted openly. A committeeman will tell a foreman that he better make some concession to the union because he can't run production without the union.

The committeeman usually considers it his job to keep grievances from being written. At each stage in the grievance procedure the majority of grievances are thrown out by the union representatives. This is supposed to be in order to assure that only the best grievances are appealed so they can be won. But when the last stage, the "impartial" umpire, is reached, half of the few grievances remaining are lost anyway—that's what impartiality is supposed to be.

So essential is this practice to the whole union bureaucracy that the Flint Chevrolet local and its newspaper were taken over by an administrator for the sole crime of publishing a long list of grievances that the local had appealed and that were thrown out by the union's screening committee.

### A DIFFERENT WORLD

The committeemen can and do leave the plant during working hours, with the company guards looking the other way. They also get the top overtime that any worker in their district gets, because a union representative has to be present if just one worker is working. These special privileges, plus not working, give the committeemen their completely different outlook on life from the worker. This was Zupan's life. No matter how much he disagreed with the rest of the labor bureaucracy, living their life and not the workers' life made him one of them.

The different world of the committeeman is the administrative, legal, procedural world of the union contract. He thinks in terms of rights of the workers and proper procedure. All the while he has to placate the worker, keep him working and maintain the peace. Any idea of how the production worker feels, he gets in a distorted

second hand way, through the worker coming to him to settle a grievance and through the hostility shown to the committeeman.

This antagonism of the workers and the isolation of the committeeman from the workers induces a hatred and bitterness in the committeeman toward the rank and file worker. He finds that the workers keep to themselves. He finds that more and more he is "fighting" supervision alone. And the whole conception of the labor bureaucracy of the backwardness of the workers and the importance of "advanced workers" to get things done for the workers is enforced.

This whole process is one of keeping the workers in line for production and keeping order, and of doing favors for the workers. It adds up to the social worker mentality, which Zupan had in a modified form. He knows the workers better than they know themselves. He knows what's best for them.

It was this separation from the rest of the workers that molded Zupan's attitude to the workers. This was why, after the president of his local reorganized his district and he lost the election, he showed a marked bitterness towards the workers and started accusing them of becoming "bourgeoisified" when they worked overtime or two jobs.

### WILDCAT STRIKES

One of the things on which Zupan disagreed with the bureaucracy was the no-strike pledge during the war. He became a leader in the national Rank and File Caucus and editor of the paper that it put out for a few issues, the *Rank and Filer*. What characterized the caucus, despite its name, was that it was a small group of local union leaders, with no rank and filers at all. It wielded considerable influence at a couple of UAW conventions because its views were widely popular among auto workers, who were noted for widespread and constant wildcatting during the war. But the caucus had no relation at all to life in the plant. It was designed to educate workers and officials to correct union policy and to win convention votes on policy.

There was a peculiar contradiction in Zupan's policy on the no-strike pledge and no-strike clause in the post-war union contracts. For some years he was opposed to wildcats because "the cream of the working class would get fired out of the plants." He wanted an official strike policy, not the independent activity of the workers. The workers were concerned with the opposite. In a national referendum, the no-strike pledge in the UAW was carried by a two-thirds

majority. But the large majority of autoworkers nevertheless continued to wildcat, against the company and against the union. Later on, Zupan modified his views because it seemed to him that wildcats could be organized by lesser union officials with the undercover approval and protection of local union officers. But he could never see the question except within the framework of the union structure.

### FROM WORKER TO BUREAUCRAT

[Zupan's experience, and to one extent or another it has been shared by thousands of workers, is extremely difficult to overcome. To see yourself, or those around you, in positions of power and responsibility, with an experience or ability to do things that others can't, can easily make you believe that it is your ability to speak, or to negotiate, or to write a handbill that gets things done, independently of the workers themselves.]

In one of the last editorial meetings that he attended it was suggested by the chairman of the Editorial Board that he look through some of the articles that ordinary workers had written and perhaps consult with one or two of them in working on a lead article that he was to write. Zupan replied sharply and arrogantly, "I don't have to talk to rank-and-file workers to know what to write. You do because you are an intellectual. But I am a worker and all my instincts are a worker's instincts."

Unfortunately, the chairman contributed to his misunderstanding by replying, "Yes, you are right."

The workers who erected the wall between him and them knew better than he what the wall meant. The editor, who was opposed to all existing bureaucracies, whether Communist or capitalist, whether union or government, did not know that his was not the fundamental social opposition of the worker but the opposition of one program to other programs of the bureaucrat.

### THE CLASS STRUGGLE IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

The editor came to the paper as a man who was both experienced in the struggles of the labor movement and very firm in his opposition to the rule of capital over the lives of the workers. His editorship, his stamp on the paper, should have made the paper a weapon that workers could use in the class struggle. This did not happen. Or, rather, it happened infrequently and almost incidentally.

To Zupan, the class struggle was an abstraction. It was a struggle

between two abstract forces, capital and labor, for the management of production and society. And it was judged by another abstraction, his own program. As a result, the intervention of the editor was the most effective means of keeping the living class struggle out of the pages of the paper.

The realities of life in the factories and in society as a whole escaped his editorial eye. The different circumstances in which workers find themselves—shops that are organized and shops that are not; different types of industries such as auto, electrical or textiles; geographical and historical differences—the tremendous diversity of working conditions and the equal diversity in the methods that workers use in the struggle against these conditions, all this meant nothing. The activities of the workers had to pass the measuring rule of the editor's program.

The question of overtime is an example of his type of thinking. He was bound by the so-called principle of the eight hour day. Anyone who worked any overtime at all was giving in to the pressure of capitalist society. This was called the "proletarian attitude to overtime." In the shops this attitude is the view of a small minority made up entirely of ex-union leaders, radicals and ex-radicals. At the other extreme is another minority, consisting mostly of skilled workers, who are hungry for all the overtime they can get. The great number of workers in between do not share either view. Overtime to them is a subject of constant struggle with the company over the control of the working day. Sometimes the struggle is against overtime, sometimes it is for the right to work overtime. But fundamentally, it is a struggle over who will decide, the company or the workers. There is a lot to learn here, the answers are not clear by any means. But the attitude of the editor prevented any discussion and prevented the paper from becoming the place where workers could share their experiences and attitudes.

Week after week, in the discussions of the labor section in the Detroit editing committee, articles from Los Angeles or New York or elsewhere would be turned down because the activities of workers reported did not follow the pattern of auto workers or coal miners which Zupan was determined to impose on all workers. The activities of workers in different unions, in sweat shops, in unorganized shops went by the board.

Even in discussions of life in the Detroit factories, a profound abstraction tossed into the discussion by the editor about the class



struggle in general would effectively end the discussion and prevent the exploration into the living concrete class struggle that existed in the city.

The problem of automation is one of the major issues in the auto industry. The basic attitude, as reported by rank and file workers, is one of hostility to the automation being introduced by industry. The details of this attitude, what it meant in concrete life in the shop, was what had to be explored. But Zupan, no doubt remembering the introduction of new machinery into the plant by his first local union, could only see it from the point of view of the planner: the auto corporations were not putting more than a fraction of the money required into automation.

There is an important truth contained in this view. But it was small comfort to the thousands, particularly in machining operations, whose jobs were eliminated by the spreading automation. And the truth in the editor's view only served to prevent workers from saying what they were doing and thinking about automation. The truth of the workers' activity, more important and more profound because it was concrete, remained hidden.

### THE WORKER IN PRODUCTION

The editor had a remarkable insight into the role of production in society and the inability of the present managers to run production in the interests of society as a whole. He has made some profound contributions along these lines.

But here again his views were bound by abstractions. He saw the whole thing from above, as the need to replace those who could not manage with those who could.

To the editor the problem was very simple. The capitalists could not manage production. Therefore they should be given no help or assistance. They should be replaced. Anything which in any way contributes to production today is wrong. Anything which contributes to taking the plants away from the capitalists is right.

If that was all there was to it, the question of production and productivity would not be tearing society apart today, as it is all over the world. To the worker it is not a simple problem. Because the problem of production is contained within him, with its contradictions. The worker has the deep, ingrained hostility to the capitalist management of production. He can see (because he lives with it constantly) the waste, the stupidity, the brutality which is the nature of production today.

But the worker is not a theoretician who can look at the process calmly from the outside. He is a part of that process. He can see the waste and mismanagement and rebels against it because he knows machines and production intimately. He knows what machinery can do, a knowledge that comes from closeness and love. What the editor could not see was that without this love and understanding of machinery there could not be the rebellion against mismanagement. Or if there were rebellion, it would be blind rebellion, smashing of machinery, unqualified opposition.

What confidence can workers have that anything that replaces the present management of production would be an improvement? Why should they support one plan or program against another? There is no reason why they should. And workers know that. A new plan is merely a new promise, with the workers still at the bottom of the heap. The only basis for a new system of production, a system of free men, is the management of production by the workers themselves. And that has to be, not a promise to be carried out by a new set of leaders, but a fact, visible in society today.

That workers can run production is not a secret—except perhaps to Zupan. It is recognized by corporation executives and sociologists and is the basis for all the company suggestion plans. That these plans don't even begin to tap the knowledge and ability and experience of workers is a measure of their hostility to the oppressive nature of production today. Workers will not contribute their knowledge to the present managers of production. But they use that knowledge every day for themselves and against the managers.

It is precisely this aspect of production, the emergence of the new society, the new relations in production, today, under the very noses of the managers and directed against them that the editor could not see and would not look for. So long as workers do not control production it is necessarily a limited and restricted process. But it is universal. It is everywhere. The way workers care for their machines, the way groups of workers organize or reorganize production to suit themselves, the things that workers do that could revolutionize production in human terms if they did not have to be done secretly, these are the things which show the need for a new society because they show the fact of a new society appearing under the mantle of the old.

Under an editor who could see this, who could see the contradiction which is contained within the worker, which drives him forward, *Correspondence* could have played its rightful role. It could become

a place where workers share their experience, where not just the opposition but the positive aspects of the new society begin to appear. Merely making this visible as a universal experience and not as isolated and scattered occurrences would give ordinary people more confidence in themselves than a thousand plans or programs or cries against the mismanagement of the capitalists.

### PRODUCTION AND SOCIETY

The independent forms of the struggles of Negroes, what women and youth were doing to establish new human relations, the mass participation and concern with sports, entertainment, literature, all these escaped the editor completely. Everything had to be made subordinate to the needs of his abstract class struggle. If he could fit it in, it was fine. If not, the best that could be hoped for was a condescending tolerance. What resulted was an effective block against tapping the experiences, the feelings, the powers of people who did not happen to fit directly into production in a factory.

The editor participated in discussions on the Negro section. Time after time discussion was squelched by the introduction by the editor of his inflexible rule of judging articles: does it antagonize white workers? The Negro struggle was significant to him only so far as it contributed directly to the class struggle, a point of view which puts him in direct line of descent in a long line of liberals and radicals whose ultimate counsel is that Negroes have to wait until the rest of the world is ready.

Zupan's point of view on the Negro question was not merely a political position on a particular question. It was just one aspect of his political personality which, in its general form, can be described as arrogance or rudeness. This is not intended as a personal description. It is the characteristic of a political type: the bureaucrat. The arrogance that permitted him to lecture Negro workers on what they should and should not write about was visible in everything else he did and said. It was the conception that he knew and the workers did not. He was perfectly willing to discuss the weather or the best way of making some house repairs. But "politics" was reserved for those who knew about such things, intellectuals and "advanced" workers.

This rudeness is one side of the theory of a dedicated vanguard. The other side is a total lack of humanity or human relations with people. From time to time in the editing committees there was raised the question of human relations. If the paper was based on a new

society and on the idea that that society could be made visible in the thoughts and activities of ordinary people today, then somehow, it was felt, relations between people who worked together on the editing committees should reflect the new human relations to the extent that it was possible in a world dominated by bureaucracy.

But to Zupan, any attempt to live by human values today was impossible in capitalist society.

### WORKER AND INTELLECTUAL

At the beginning we said that the editor refused to recognize that he himself was an intellectual, a bureaucrat. But objective reality and appearance are often contradictory. In the editing committees, the editor was consistently hostile to the middle class intellectuals who took part, whether as members or leaders. This looked like the hostility of a worker to intellectuals. But in actual fact, the opposite was the case.

What characterized some of the intellectuals in the leadership of the editing committees was two things.

1. They were conscious that they were themselves intellectuals, in a natural position to dominate working people who are less facile with word and pen. They were therefore constantly conscious of the need to subordinate their views and opinions to those of the workers.

2. They were devoted to the idea that the resources for a new society, both in ideas and activity, would come from ordinary people, primarily working people. They therefore considered it their main responsibility to bring these ideas out, to encourage and develop the talent of rank and file people. Unique to our editing committees was the idea that ordinary people had something to teach. They weren't just there to learn.

The impression is not intended that all intellectuals managed this with unqualified success. Not by a long shot. But it was a guiding principle and it was worked at.

What characterized Zupan's hostility to intellectuals was that it was directed with the utmost vigor primarily at those who were looking most aggressively for ways to open up the knowledge, the experience and the feelings of working people. At one Editorial Board meeting, when it was suggested that the paper could overcome some of its difficulties by attempting to penetrate into deeper layers of the working class, the editor promptly replied that Denby and Whitney and Kegg were deep enough for him.

His opposition to intellectuals and to even raising the question of the relation of workers to intellectuals was in actuality the form taken by a conviction that the workers were backward. He couldn't see that we could learn anything from the deepest layers of the workers. What had they to teach us? Sooner or later they would rise to his level, they would accept his program and his leadership.

Who then was the paper for? It was for a vanguard, the advanced workers, of whom he considered himself one. He talked often of the 10,000 workers in the United States who were like him, who had the same ideas, who were ready to accept a paper like *Correspondence*.

It's obvious that this conception is in direct opposition to the principles on which *Correspondence* was founded. If ordinary people do not and cannot contribute today to the development of the new society, then we are back at the same conceptions which the members of the editing committees and much of society rejected—that the future lies with yet another elite, a new crop of leaders, another set of plans.

#### RIP VAN WINKLE

“The moment you think, or allow it to lurk in your mind that the workers are backward or deceived, you repudiate two or three decades of history and your concept contains as its opposite, Menshevism (the Socialism of 1917). You then fight a ghost. The British workers, the American workers, are not Menshevik, neither are the workers of Norway or Sweden. . . . What was vanguardism in Lenin's day is now an essential part of the whole population.”

Zupan, thinking he was different, thinking he represented something new, because he had his own particular form of the conception that the workers, or most of them, are backward, was fighting the issues and proposed a program that was adequate for 30 years ago. The result of a conception of workers that is 30 years out of date was the dullness of those articles and columns which the editor wrote. It was not lack of literary skill. It was the complete separation from the reality of today.

In the world today these conceptions are represented with skill and ability by men who have practiced their craft for years and have the power of governments and mass organizations to give substance to their words. These are the conceptions that identify the labor bureaucrat. Whether their names are Khrushchev or Atlee or Reuther, no matter how they are separated on questions of policy or program,

they have one thing in common—and it is the identifying mark of the age. They have a plan by which to govern society—for its own good, of course—and they intend to impose that plan, at whatever cost. They are prepared to replace the old democratic, capitalist rulers, who have been proved bankrupt. But to do this they have to suppress the desires, the abilities, the humanity of the people. That is the reason for the barbaric dictatorship in Russia and the one party dictatorship in the CIO.

Zupan believes that because he opposes Reuther's program he is against bureaucracy. It is the common belief of every bureaucrat who is out of power. Reuther made the guaranteed annual wage his objective this year. Zupan (like Stellato, who heads the Ford Rouge local) decided that it was not what the workers needed. The workers needed the 30 hour week.

And he missed the point completely. What worker is against either the guaranteed annual wage or the 30 hour week as such? What will prevent Reuther from making the 30 hour week his next demand—and send Zupan scurrying for something else to oppose to Reuther? Like the Trotskyists, when Reuther took slogans from their program like “open the books” and the sliding scale of wages, Zupan is reduced to the complaint, “He should have gotten more.”

But the opposition to Reuther's program in the shops, which Zupan never bothered to investigate, stems from something entirely different. It is that Reuther's great victories do not solve one single serious problem facing the workers. Each “economic package” becomes another millstone around their necks, another contract with which company and union impose their discipline on the workers in the factory. What workers are looking for is freedom from this domination, the means to determine their own destiny, in the factory and in society. And that can't be bought with a nickel or a dime or a quarter an hour—or with a 30 hour week.

Zupan believes that what is wrong with Reuther is that he doesn't ask for enough, that he is afraid to fight for the workers. That is the conception of the AF of L bureaucrat of 30 years ago. The bureaucrat of today—and in this Reuther is blood brother to the Russian Communist leader and the British Labor leader—is ready and willing to battle for complete and total power. The great restraining force, however, is the workers themselves. The bureaucrat does not dare to do anything which will put millions of workers in motion—for in the activity of workers lies death to bureaucracy.)

If all that was needed was a new program and a better plan to challenge the bureaucrats, *Correspondence* would never have been started. The futility of such an undertaking is adequately proved in the pitiful lives of the radical sects. What the editor could not and would not learn is that the only reason that *Correspondence* has for its existence is to provide a place and a means for the expression of the hostility to all forms of bureaucracy that exists in every section of society.



# “BE HIS PAYMENT HIGH OR LOW”: The American Working Class of the Sixties

## 1. ONE-PARTY UNIONS

One of the confidential management newsletters, of which American businessmen are so fond, predicted last autumn that “the U.S. labor movement is in for more and greater turbulence.” The reason for this is assigned to “a spreading rank-and-file revolt against union leaders.” This revolt goes deeper than gripes against union leaders and is “rooted in the impersonality of the factory assembly lines, the facelessness of modern life, the fear for one’s *individuality*.”<sup>1</sup>

Two aspects of this forecast are of special interest. One is that it views the American working class as infinitely more radical than any wing of American socialism or radicalism believes. Socialism in the United States has so committed itself to varying concepts of the backwardness of the workers that it is unable any longer to grasp the reality. The second is that this management view is in fact more conservative than the actual situation.

“Most of the present generation of union chiefs are safe,” said this report. Yet David McDonald of the Steelworkers is already in deep trouble and seems on the way out of office.<sup>2</sup> That he was challenged by his second in command, Secretary-Treasurer I. W. Abel, is indicative of both the widespread opposition to the union leadership and the difficulty of this opposition finding expression. In 1958 Donald C. Rarick, a local steelworkers leader, challenged McDonald for the presidency of the union. Although he seemed to have the overwhelming support of the big steel locals in the Pittsburgh area, he lost to McDonald by a vote of two to one. There was some doubt at the time whether Rarick had been voted down or counted down, since the election, by membership ballot, is supervised by the International Union. There seems to be a certain persistence to that doubt: the authority of the International Union in elections is exercised through the office of the Secretary-Treasurer and McDonald’s confidence in that office was so slight (when the Secretary-Treasurer was running against him) that he introduced a motion to the Executive Board for an impartial outside agency to run the election. The Board voted against McDonald and there are those who are so cynical that they believe he lost his chance for re-election then and there.

The Steelworkers Union never had a strong democratic tradition. The United Auto Workers, however, is generally believed to be the



most democratic and progressive of the large American unions. Yet even here the opposition is both general and distorted—distorted because the top union officers are practically untouchable by the rank and file (unless, as in the steel union, they fall out with each other). In 1961, in their hostility to the union's policies and contracts, the auto workers imposed the greatest turnover of local union officers in the history of the union. The significance of these local elections was not lost on those higher up. A top UAW official noted that "The rank and file couldn't get at us, so they took it out on the local union guys."<sup>3</sup> In 1963, once again, one-third of UAW local presidents were voted out of office.

That Reuther himself is untouchable and that a McDonald can be challenged only by an Abel is one of the facts of union life in the US. The days of vigorous union factions and a democratic internal life ended in the forties. What now prevails is the one-party state. A conservative professor of labor relations, Clark Kerr (he is also the President of the University of California who fought the Free Speech Movement at the Berkeley Campus and has served on the UAW Public Review Board) notes, without disapproval: "Unions and corporations alike are, with very few exceptions, one-party governments."<sup>4</sup> The only exception in the US is the International Typographical Union.<sup>5</sup> Does this description have the ring of Stalinist totalitarianism? The parallel is not at all superficial.

A study of seventy international union constitutions, the formal instruments that rule a membership of almost 16,000,000 workers, shows among other things that in most of those seventy unions power is generally concentrated in the hands of the international presidents, with few restraints placed upon them, that discipline may be enforced against union members with little regard for due process, and that opposition to the incumbent administration is almost impossible.<sup>6</sup>

This is, of course, not true of all unions. But where dictatorial powers are not granted by the constitution they are exercised anyway in crucial situations. Joe Curran was not averse to using the New York City Police Department to retain control of the National Maritime Union, nor the assistance of the US Coast Guard in keeping radicals off US merchant ships. And Walter Reuther did not hesitate to suspend the officers and place an administrator over the Chevrolet local in Flint, Michigan, for the crime of devoting a whole issue of the local

union paper to listing all the grievances (and their outcome) that were not settled at the plant level and were sent to higher bodies of the union for further negotiations.

But the problem goes much deeper than the problem of formal democracy alone. The hostility of American workers is directed not only at particular union leaders but at “the impersonality of the factory assembly lines, the facelessness of modern life, the fear for one’s individuality” which the unions have come to represent. Even among unorganized industrial workers where union shop elections, conducted by the federal government, used to mean automatic victory for the unions, attitudes have changed. In the aerospace industry not too long ago both the United Auto Workers and the International Association of Machinists were defeated in such elections.

A number of observers in the American labor movement have begun to recognize that the unions are incapable of solving the most crucial problems which workers face. One perceptive commentator, Paul Jacobs, notes that “Automation and the *particular* unemployment it brings to a *particular* plant are problems obviously beyond the capabilities of union-management collective bargaining.”<sup>7</sup> But that is only the smaller part of the problem. The heart of the matter is that the unions stand in the way of a solution to the workers’ problems.

Clark Kerr, in his defense of unions, put it this way: “The union is often viewed as a disturbing force in society; but it is also a disciplinary instrument. It sets rules of its own and joins with the employer in setting others.”<sup>8</sup> Paul Jacobs, delicately weighing both sides of the question, says essentially the same thing:

Once the resistance of the employer to unionisation ceases at the level of principles, the union, through its contracts, becomes part of the plant government, not only a force for justice but also an integral part of the system of authority needed to operate the plant.<sup>9</sup>

Daniel Bell says it more bluntly:

Less realized is the fact that, in the evolution of the labor contract, the union becomes part of the “control system of management.” He [the labor leader] becomes, as C. Wright Mills has put it, a “manager of discontent.”<sup>10</sup>

A committeeman at a General Motors plant in Detroit once told a foreman the same thing—to quit trying to discipline workers and to

let the union representative do it for him. (He won his grievance with that argument!)

With the stratification of production impinging on his consciousness, Jacobs takes his point one step further. "Since the war," he says, "the political and economic role of the unions has been one of continuous and unquestioning alignment with the national authority."<sup>11</sup>

A whole series of strikes and disputes had been interfering with production in the missile industry until Arthur Goldberg, the Steel Union attorney, became Secretary of Labor and was able to enforce a labor peace that the ordinary capitalist politician could not attain. (Perhaps it was for this service that he was elevated to the Supreme Court.)

## 2. "MODERNIZATION"

It should be clear that the problem does not lie in the inability of the unions to find a solution to such problems as automation. They have *imposed* a solution on the workers. The first to do it was John L. Lewis in the dying industry of coal mining. He collaborated in the mechanization of those mines amenable to it and ruthlessly cut off the majority of the union membership, not only from work but from the social benefits, such as hospitalization, which they had earlier won.

In the decisive coal negotiations of 1952 the Southern coal producers, owners mostly of smaller mines, offered to meet all the union demands if Lewis would order three-day production in the industry. The larger mechanized mines opposed this move since it meant higher overhead costs for unutilized equipment. Lewis, reversing a previous course, chose to line up with the large mechanized mines and their desire for continuous output. The decision meant higher wages for the men but a permanent loss of jobs in the industry.<sup>12</sup>

In the ten years from 1950 to 1960 the employment of coal miners fell by three-fifths to under 150,000. The bulk of those cut off from the mines make up much of what is known today as Appalachia. The union, however, gets richer because Lewis, with typical foresight, pegged the fringe and welfare benefits to productivity. Instead of the usual form of payment into welfare funds of so many cents per man-hour worked, he adopted the unique formula of basing company payments on the number of tons of coal mined.

The identical pattern was followed some years later by that other

notorious militant, Harry Bridges of the West coast longshoremen. He signed an agreement with the dockside employers allowing unlimited automation and mechanization in return for a large retirement fund and a guaranteed 35-hour week for so-called "A" members of the union. The second-class "B" members were left to fend for themselves. (They used some of their idle time to picket the union.<sup>13</sup>) The East and Gulf coast dockers, not so fortunate as to have the militant Harry Bridges at their head and belonging to what had only recently been one of the most gangster-ridden unions in the US, rejected this year, at least temporarily, a contract that only went part way toward the total disciplining of the workers and struck their ports for over a month.

In auto and other manufacturing industries the transition was not quite so blatant and abrupt. But the tendency was the same. The unions collaborated in the wholesale reorganization of production and imposed their own discipline of the grievance procedure. In the early fifties Emil Mazey, Secretary-Treasurer of the UAW (another well-known militant), threatened the Chrysler Corporation with the ending of all overtime work if they did not meet certain demands. In 1958 and 1959, however, with automation and a depression both hitting Detroit, when unemployed Chrysler workers picketed the plants and the union headquarters to end overtime while Chrysler workers were laid off, the company was able to end the picketing with a court injunction based on the union contract and its no-strike pledge. Workers off the company payroll, some for over a year, were prohibited from picketing or interfering with production because they were held to be bound by the union contract. The union had voluntarily relinquished the right of the workers to refuse overtime work.

The whole problem of automation cannot be gone into. But most of what has been written, from the right as well as from the left, is based on ignorance and misunderstanding. It is concerned entirely with the question of unemployment and has given rise to all sorts of theories about the imminent disappearance of the industrial working class or to theories of a new type of class struggle between the employed and the unemployed. All of this assumes that capitalism can automate at will and can overcome the falling rate of profit and the shortage of capital. The actual decline in the size of the working class in the fifties was reversed in the sixties. The increase in productivity has been greatest in utilities and communications (with substantial automation) and agriculture (no automation at all but a

great increase in mechanization, chemical application and biological sciences) followed by mining (mechanization rather than automation). The increase in productivity in manufacturing was slightly below the national average and even further below the increase in productivity that took place in manufacturing in the decade following World War I with the introduction of the assembly line and the endless-chain drive.<sup>14</sup>

The spokesmen for management argue that automation in the long run increases jobs. The spokesmen for labor argue that automation decreases jobs. And in this way both of them avoid any discussion of why capitalism, under any form of technological advance, produces, as Marx insisted, an ever-growing army of permanently unemployed. And what is more pertinent to this article, they avoid a discussion of what automation and other changes in the process of production do to those workers who remain employed. The workers take a much more practical view than the sophisticated engineers and sociologists. They do not assume that what is scientifically possible is therefore inevitable in the near future under capitalism. They have much less respect for the supposed technical efficiency of capitalism than that. They are fully aware, however, that what has been taking place is a profound qualitative reorganization of capitalist production, of which what is technically known as automation is only a part. Without the intellectuals' linguistic inhibitions, they call the whole process automation whether it involves computer operations, improvement in mechanical tools, transfer of work to other plants or simply speed-up. But the workers in the plants are as hostile to the process as a whole as the unemployed.

The favoured "A" workers on the West coast docks have found that their newly automated work "was converted into a continuous, almost oppressive stream."<sup>15</sup> In the Buick engine plant in Flint the workers had established sensible production schedules which the management had been unable to touch for years. That went by the board when Buick redesigned its engine from a straight-8 to a V-8 and built a new engine plant in 1952 (not yet automation but using more up-to-date machinery and techniques and retiming all the jobs). In plants where automation has been introduced the effect has been two-fold. The automated jobs are lighter physically but a much greater strain mentally. The un-automated jobs have been speeded up to pre-union levels to accommodate the increased flow of work. The great industrial concentrations, such as the Ford Rouge plant, have been reduced

or broken up with new plants built on a decentralized basis. Rouge is down from a war-time peak of 100,000 workers and a peace-time peak of 65,000 to under 35,000 but there are a whole series of new Ford plants built during the last ten years (and General Motors and Chrysler) within a 100-mile radius of Detroit and others in other parts of the country, south, east and west.

What is involved in industry after industry is not simply the replacing of men by automated machines but the discarding of men, the moving of others and the bringing of still others into the industrial working class and the reorganization of the work process. Huge masses of capital have been destroyed. In the auto industry Packard, Hudson, Murray Body, large corporations by any standard, have gone under because they did not have sufficient capital to stay in the race. Whole areas of clerical work have become proletarianized. Stenographers, clerks, bookkeepers in larger offices and in banking and insurance have been turned into machine operators. It is a common sight to see rows of typists at their desks, with head-sets fastened to one ear, typing letters, reports, etc. from dictaphone machines. They no longer see the executives who do the dictating—only the forelady who sees that their breaks are not too frequent or too long and that they don't dawdle at their work. Except for being cleaner and better lit it is indistinguishable from factory work.

### 3. NEW FORMS OF STRUGGLE

Automation or mechanization, any change in the process of production is carried out at the expense of the workers. The resistance to this process is indicated negatively by the increasing proportion of supervisors in American industry and by the increased disciplinary weight of the union, its contracts and its grievance procedure. And the resistance is to the process as a whole and therefore does not take the traditional forms of union factions or changes in union administration.

The first evidence of this came in 1955 when Walter Reuther won his precedent-setting demand of supplemental unemployment benefits (SUB) in which workers were compensated by the companies in addition to their governmental unemployment compensation when they were laid off. Like all of Reuther's great victories it was granted by the auto corporations in exchange for labor peace, that is, union cooperation in keeping the workers quiet in the face of automation, speed-up and reorganization of production. But the workers were having none of this. An unprecedented wave of wildcat strikes broke

out from coast to coast precisely when the contract was signed. All of them were directed at what was called "local grievances," that is, the assertion of workers' power in the plants, in the process of production. Reports in the press at that time (as well as reports during the 1964 strikes) indicated thousands of unresolved local grievances. That implies a total collapse of the union as representative of the workers in the day-to-day life in the plants. If the grievance procedure, in which the worker is represented by his union steward or committeeman, cannot settle grievances then what can it do, other than assist in disciplining workers? In these strikes the workers moved to settle the matter directly without the intervention of the union.

Reuther learned his lesson. In the following contract negotiations in 1958, 1961 and 1964 he tried to incorporate the "local issues" into the national bargaining. The technique is simple. A national agreement is reached and announced but it is not signed until the locals reach their own agreements. Instead of having the national power of the union behind them, each local is on its own. A number of widely scattered, small, weak locals sign quickly. Then the International Union brings pressure to bear on the more recalcitrant locals which find themselves more and more isolated. They are, after all, holding up the national agreement and keeping many thousands of workers out on strike. The technique works with only moderate success. And that could very well be why Reuther, the great negotiator, won practically nothing in 1958 and 1961—he could no longer guarantee labor peace to the capitalists. Reuther pretends that the settlement of local grievances during national negotiations is a traditional policy of the UAW, ignoring the fact that it was imposed on him by the workers.

Now the Steel Workers' Union announces a similar policy for the 1965 negotiations. They apparently learned something from the great steel strike of 1959. The union had put forward its traditional demands of higher wages and fringe benefits. All reporters noted a widespread apathy toward these demands by the workers. The steel corporations mistook this apathy for weakness and counterattacked with demands to weaken the long-established work rules under which the workers set the minimum size of crews, safety standards and work pace. The result was a long and bitter strike in which the workers defended their right to impose a minimum of control over the process of production.

American workers today have seen the great industrial unions of the thirties become the one-party states of today. They have seen the

seniority that was won to protect them against discriminatory firing and promotion become the means to keep the young and the Negroes out and to keep the semi-skilled from working their way up to the skilled trades. They have seen the union dues check-off<sup>16</sup> change from a means of organizing all the workers in a plant to a means of removing the union from dependence on the workers. They have seen full-time status for union steward or committeeman change from freeing the union representative from the pressures of management to freeing him from the pressure of the workers.<sup>17</sup> They have seen the union contract and grievance procedure change from the instruments which recorded the gains of the workers to the instruments under which workers were disciplined. They have, in short, seen the unions turned into their opposite, from representatives of the workers to an independent power that imposes its discipline over the workers in the period of state capitalism.

The result has been that the workers have rejected the unions as the means of any further social advance and have gone their own way. The 1964 auto contract strikes and negotiations are an indication of this. Reuther was aware that he finally had to make some gesture toward solving the problem of local working conditions, that is, workers' control. He hit upon the question of relief time for its headline-catching appeal. The union demanded 54 minutes of relief time in an eight-hour shift and settled for 36 minutes, a gain of 12 minutes over the previously established 24. The workers weren't sold. Relief time is only one of many aspects of working conditions. Even within the framework of relief time, the number of minutes allowed is relatively minor. Equally important is whether the company can make up the time by increasing the speed of the line. As important as how much is the question of when: the relief men begin making the rounds early in the shift. If a worker's turn for relief comes near the first or last hour of the shift or close to the lunch break it is of little use and still does not give him the time or the right to get a drink of water or relieve himself when he needs to.

There was general hostility to the contract—but it was considered “their” contract and the workers showed little interest. Among skilled workers at the Ford Rouge plant and at the Dodge plant in Hamtramck (in the Detroit metropolitan area) there were wildcat strikes. Dodge Local 3 rejected the contract. At the Ford Wixom plant (about 20 miles from Detroit) the local agreement was voted down. A little democracy, someone has said, is a dangerous thing, the cure being



more democracy. So the union held another vote. Obviously two votes are twice as democratic as one. But the workers again rejected the agreement. Well, the UAW is nothing if it is not democratic—so a third vote was held and this time the agreement was accepted by 150 members out of a total union membership of 4000. The workers had roasted the union over the spit long enough to give notice that it was “their” contract, let “them” live with it. The attitude was spelled out in a handbill distributed at the plant which concluded with the following in question and answer form:

Q: Do we have to accept this Local Agreement that we have voted down twice?

- A: 1. With four members of the Bargaining Committee having already signed our Local Agreements  
2. With our International servicing rep, Jimmy Watts, having signed our Local Agreements  
3. With the company saying they already have a signed Local Agreement and they are not going to plus it  
4. With the International UAW Solidarity House requesting their money back for the financial assistance  
5. With the majority of the Bargaining Committee saying,  
A) You have the best Local Agreement in the country;  
B) They don't know what they are going to ask for;  
C) They will not waste their time. Could you see yourself walking the street with people like that bargaining for you?

#### WHAT DO YOU THINK?

At American Motors corporation the last three contracts (1958, 1961, 1964) have seen at least one key local rejecting the agreement and holding it up until successive votes were held to ensure final ratification. The workers have no use for the contract and no illusion that contracts can be improved. They have turned to doing their own “negotiating” on the shop floor. If Reuther's 12 minutes of relief time do not mean much, the workers have found ways of making their own relief time. Assembly lines have a way of breaking down—and who is to say that the bolt which jammed the line was not dropped accidentally? Who is to know that the warning lights which signal the stoppage of the line were not burned out but merely unscrewed to add a few minutes to the time it takes to repair the line?

More and more, workers deal directly with supervision, either singly or in small groups, to settle specific problems without involving the union. To the extent possible, they determine their own production pace and force the foreman to go along. In a smaller plant in Detroit (not an auto plant) the management was aware of the fact that they did not really know how long it took to run any particular operation and they did not trust their foremen to tell them. So they introduced a system of IBM cards and time clocks for the workers to punch out at the completion of each operation. The company designated time for each job is set by time-study engineers (the workers call it the dart game—they ridicule the gross inaccuracy of the times set by claiming that it can only be done by throwing darts at a haphazard chart of numbers on the wall). In the past the bad times were averaged out by the good times and the company got a reasonable amount of work. Now, however, no one will cut short on the favorable time estimates (since that would inform the company) and so management knows less than it did before. Even the foremen play this game by taking cards for operations that are skipped (unknown to the engineers) and using them to cover up their mistakes on other jobs.

Workers, immersed in the cooperative labor process in the factories, form the groups and organizations, usually informal, to correspond to their needs. The radical reorganization of production over the past decade has resulted in adjustments by the workers. New workers are taught the realities of life in production by their workmates. New groupings of workers are formed. Workers find more sophisticated techniques to exercise a measure of control over the more sophisticated instruments of production. The wildcat strike remains one of the basic weapons in the struggle, a weapon that rejects the union by its very nature. In industries such as public utilities workers were faced with a substantial degree of automation. The telephone monopoly (American Telephone and Telegraph Co.) boasted that automation had made it strike-proof, that telephone service could be continued indefinitely with only a handful of supervisory personnel. The nature of the work and the job security tend to make utility workers among the most conservative. Yet, in response to the needs of the situation, recent strikes among telephone and gas company workers in the midwest have been attended by the destruction of company property—telephone lines cut, gas company installations dynamited. Utility workers still have in reserve that old weapon of the sit-down strike (against which no company is strike-proof)

which has been expanded and developed by the struggles of Negro Americans.

Miners in eastern Kentucky conducted a long violent war against scab mines. They were opposed by the mine operators, the government and the union and they went down to defeat. But violence has been a recurring element in certain kinds of strikes.

The workers are engaged today in a process of reorganization, corresponding to the capitalist reorganization of production, in a search for new forms of organization that are adequate for their needs. It is a process that bursts out regularly in wildcat strikes such as those at Chrysler and Ford plants which accompanied the 1964 contract settlement. It is a process that takes advantage of every weakness that appears in the union structure, such as splits within the leadership or the vulnerability of local union officers. It is a process in which workers are learning and testing themselves and their workmates in new conditions and new factories. Most of it, like the proverbial iceberg, is buried deep in the day-to-day life in the plants and mills and offices and mines and is not visible to any outside observer or even fully conscious to the participants themselves.

It would be simple to deduce from the nature of the workers' activities and demands that they are no longer seeking to reform the unions. As only one example: the mass turning out of office of officials of the UAW was not directed at Reuther supporters but at all incumbents, pro-Reuther and anti-Reuther alike. But such deductions are not necessary. One has only to listen to workers' discussions in the large shops to hear of the need for new types of organization, to hear the union rejected *in toto*. It should not be necessary to note that what is being discussed by the workers is not a retreat to pre-union forms but an advance to something new.

To place this process in a fundamental and international context it is only necessary to point out that it bears a marked resemblance to the activity of Hungarian workers in the summer of 1956, activity that proved to be the preparation for the revolution in October. The testing of workmates in short sharp struggles against local managers, the elimination of spies and provocateurs from particular factories, the struggle to determine more reasonable rates of production (much of it underground, some of it in the open) laid the groundwork for what became the Workers' Councils.

The impression is not intended that American workers are moving from victory to ever greater victory. Whether workers win a

particular struggle or are forced to retreat or manage to hold their own varies with time and place and the particular relationship of forces in each factory. What remains constant throughout, however, is the struggle itself and the search for new social forms.

The time the process will take and the form of the explosions to come cannot, in the nature of things, be predicted. Only its general outline can be seen from the nature of the workers' demands and the vast gulf that separates them from the union structure and leadership. It can only lead to the class as a whole imposing its own will on production and on society and casting off entirely the bureaucracy that stands in its way.

American workers are the highest paid in the world. They are also among the most exploited. They have built unions that are among the most cohesive and powerful in the world. In their industrial structure and in their industry-wide powers American unions have set a pattern that unions in other countries seek to emulate. But it is their very all-embracing nature that has sharpened the conflict between the unions and the rank-and-file workers. In their struggle to assert themselves directly and to remove what has become a burden perhaps the American working class will provide for the world a sign of its future.

1. *Research Institute Report*, 9 October 1964 (emphasis in original).

2. Since this was written the election in the United Steelworkers of America was held. Abel is generally assumed to have won but irregularities and charges and counter-charges of fraud have delayed the announcement of the result which is expected by 1 May. The final decision may be further delayed if either contestant challenges the results in the courts.

At the same time the re-election of James B. Carey as president of the International Union of Electrical Workers was shown to have been fraudulent after an election by the federal government. Carey was replaced as president by the opposing candidate, Paul L. Jennings, a member of the union's executive board. Carey had been president since the formation of the union in 1949 and is a vice-president of the AFL-CIO.

3. B. J. Widick, *Labor Today*, Houghton Mifflin, 1964, p. 91.

4. Clark Kerr, *Labor and Management in Industrial Society*, Anchor Books, 1964, p. 93.

5. See Seymour Martin Lipset, Martin Trow and James Coleman, *Union Democracy*, Anchor Books, 1962, for a study of the internal politics of the International Typographical Union. An interesting little periodical, *Union Democracy in Action*, published in New York by Herman Benson, devotes itself entirely to the exposure of undemocratic union practices and the defense of workers subjected to bureaucratic attack.

6. Paul Jacobs, *Old Before Its Time: Collective Bargaining at 28*, Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, 1963, pp. 17-18.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10 (emphasis in original).

8. Clark Kerr, *op. cit.*, p. 261.
9. Paul Jacobs, *op. cit.*, p. 14.
10. Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology*, Collier Books, 1962, pp. 214–215.
11. Paul Jacobs, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
12. Daniel Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 214.
13. See Harvey Swados, "West-Coast Waterfront—the End of an Era," *Dissent*, Autumn 1961.

14. "Productivity has been growing a bit more *slowly* in manufacturing than in the economy as a whole . . . In the entire postwar period manufacturing productivity has increased by 2.8 per cent a year, vs. 3.2 per cent for the private economy. There has been an acceleration in the last four years, to be sure, but the manufacturing productivity gains are still below those for the whole economy—i.e., 3.5 vs. 3.6 per cent a year. Furthermore, these recent gains in manufacturing are smaller than the gains realized in the decade following World War I, when technology was being revolutionized by the assembly line and the endless-chain drive. Between 1919 and 1929, output per man-hour in manufacturing increased by 5.6 per cent a year. The acceleration in over-all productivity growth since the 1920s has come about because mechanization and rationalization have been applied elsewhere in the economy—e.g., in finance, insurance, retail and wholesale trade." Charles E. Silberman, "The Real News About Automation," *Fortune*, January 1965, p. 222.

15. Ben B. Seligman, "Automation and the Unions," *Dissent*, Winter 1965, p. 40.

16. The check-off is the practice of having union dues deducted in advance from the pay check and turned over to the union by the company in a lump sum each month. It is usually associated with the "union shop," a clause in the contract which requires all new employees to join the union within 30 or 90 days of their employment, as a condition of continued employment. In the earlier years of the CIO unions, dues were collected by stewards in the plant directly from the members, which gave the workers a direct form of pressure on the union.

17. Union stewards and committeemen were always paid for the time they spent on handling grievances. Grievances are handled during working hours and the regular hourly pay of the steward, paid by the company, continues while he is off his job. The first Ford contract eliminated the need for committeemen to work at all. Committeemen were given office space in the plant and received the full rate of pay of their regular occupation, plus all overtime worked in their district. In some plants (such as Chrysler and the old Hudson Motor Co.) full-time was won by rank-and-file pressure without any contract provisions. In others (such as General Motors) the management have never acceded to full-time and contract clauses set the maximum number of hours per week available to stewards for grievance work. The original objective was to prevent the companies from putting pressure on the stewards through their jobs and to free them to be able to move around their districts or departments to check on conditions and contract violations. The practice has gone in the other direction. Freed from their regular jobs and from direct contact with the workers, stewards have become indistinguishable from foremen in their appearance, except that they are much harder to find when needed.

## AMERICAN WORKERS/ AMERICAN UNIONS

A Review of Kim Moody's *An Injury to All: The Decline of American Unions* (London: Verso 1989), 376 pp. \$16.95

The continuing decline of American unions is reflected in a growing literature documenting that decline and trying to explain it. Kim Moody's *An Injury to All* is an important contribution to that literature. It is a book that would be valuable to union activists and to those trying to understand *The Decline of American Unionism*. But it has some serious limitations.

Moody presents the facts and figures of union decline. He shows that the membership decline is greater than can be explained by the loss of jobs in unionized industries and that union concessions and "give-backs" have been much greater than could be justified by foreign competition. Much of the concession movement has been based on competition within domestic industries that do not confront outside competition, such as meat packing and trucking, but which have growing non-union sectors.

### THE STRUCTURE OF CORPORATIONS AND UNIONS

There are two parallel discussions that are important in understanding the status of unionism today. One is the massive change in corporate structures, the development of conglomerates and multinationals. These tend to give corporations greater flexibility in dealing with unionized workers. On the one hand, a smaller proportion of corporate income is based on particular industries. On the other hand, the enhanced financial power of such corporations makes them less susceptible to union attack. On the union side, changes in union structure, while appearing to follow the tendency toward "conglomeration," have, in fact, weakened unions and made them more bureaucratic. Major unions, while suffering significant declines in membership, have been unable or unwilling to organize the growing non-union sectors of their industries. Instead they have taken the path of mergers with other unions or of organizing workers in occupations totally unrelated to the union's basic industrial base. The United Auto Workers, for example, have university secretaries, nurses, and government employees (social workers) in their ranks. In the United Food and

Commercial Workers (UFCW), meat packers are overwhelmingly outnumbered by retail clerks and others. The old packinghouse workers who were 40% of the membership after a merger with the Amalgamated Meat Cutters were, by the mid eighties, only about 8% of the UFCW. This is one of the things that made it relatively easy for the UFCW to break the famous Hormel strike.

These structures do not contribute to union strength in dealing with any particular industry. But they do contribute to substantial bureaucratization. The membership is dispersed in unrelated occupations making workers much more subject to the manipulation of union officials. The process of union conglomeration also results in constitutional changes which hasten the decline of democratic rights of members.

The details of economic change, corporate structural changes and policy changes are important and valuable, but the book's underlying analytical framework is much weaker than its factual material. There are several important themes in the book which need to be looked at critically. One such theme is the replacement of social unionism by business unionism.

#### SOCIAL UNIONISM AND BUSINESS UNIONISM

"The CIO," says Moody, "espoused a modern version of social unionism, in which organized labor was envisioned as a force that would lead to the raising of living standards of an entire nation. This social unionism was half-formed and often contradictory, but it won the CIO respect far beyond its own membership." (p. xv) "Business unionism as an outlook is fundamentally conservative in that it leaves unquestioned capital's dominance, both on the job and in society as a whole." (p. 15)

This definition of social and business unionism seems to me to distort the historical reality. The early CIO *unions* left "unquestioned capital's dominance, both on the job and in society as a whole." CIO *workers* did not. The leadership of the UAW was annoyed that the great GM sit-down strike began without consultation with the leadership. John L. Lewis claimed that a CIO contract was a guarantee of strike-free labor relations. The problem that the union faced was that the bureaucratization of the union had not gone far enough for the members to be properly disciplined. It is necessary to distinguish between workers and unions and not to assume that because workers have no voice and unions do, workers are therefore more backward or less militant than union officials.

What Moody ignores is that the social unionism of the 1930s and 1940s meant overwhelming involvement in Democratic Party politics and dependence on the New Deal government of Franklin D. Roosevelt. The classic figure of social unionism was Walter Reuther. His plans at the beginning of World War II for the conversion of the automobile industry to war production; his plans at the end of the war for converting war plants to the production of housing; his demands in the GM strike of 1945–46 for wage increases without price increases, opening the corporations' books; and, later on, such things as pensions, health insurance, COLA, SUB pay, etc., were the essence of social unionism. But Moody isn't willing to recognize that because he is aware that Reuther is the leader who converted the UAW to a one-party dictatorship and the totally bureaucratized institution that it is today. What needs to be understood is that these two aspects of "social unionism" are not contradictory, they go hand in hand.

Social unionism was not new. It derived from—and enforced—what labor historians have called the "social contract," a relationship that goes back at least to the garment unions in the early years of the 20th century. The essence of the social contract and social unionism was the trade-off of discipline over the workers in production for financial and other benefits outside of production. This was expressed most succinctly by GM's C.E. Wilson when the company, to everyone's surprise, granted the union the cost of living adjustment in a five-year contract. Said Wilson: "We have bought ourselves five years of labor peace." In part, the ability of unions to win significant concessions from employers depended on their ability to enforce contracts, that is, to discipline workers.

To show that Reuther was the social unionist par excellence points up the weakness in Moody's analysis. He is unable to see that social unionism combined heavy involvement in politics (to be sure, Democratic politics), lip service to social causes, and fringe benefits to workers with the erosion of rights on the job and the erosion of democracy in the union. Instead he redefines where social unionism has led as "business unionism." The massive give-backs in job rules and working conditions of recent years were entirely consistent with social unionism. What was not consistent with social unionism was the failure of unions to get money and fringe benefits in exchange for the erosion of working conditions.



## BUREAUCRATIZATION

This misunderstanding of social unionism is reflected in another theme, the nature and causes of bureaucratization of the union movement. The study of bureaucracy in the labor movement goes back as far as Robert Michels's *Political Parties* in 1911. Moody cites Michels and several contemporary authors but rejects their view that bureaucracy is inevitable, a consequence of growing organizational complexity and other causes. "Far from evolving gradually and peacefully," writes Moody, "bureaucracy in the CIO had to be fought for and imposed against enormous resistance where it did not already exist, as in the UAW, and aggressively defended and expanded where it did, as in the Steelworkers." (p. 29) That misses the point. Of course, workers resisted. That did not make the bureaucratization of the unions, aided by government and employers, any the less inevitable. The source of this tendency is not in complexity (although complexity grows as a necessary accompaniment of bureaucratization) but in the nature of the union contract. If the contract grants to the employer the basic right to manage the firm (as virtually all of them do), and limits the right of workers to strike during the life of the contract, then it places on the union the function of enforcing the contract. This includes the good stuff and the bad stuff. The union enforces seniority (not always, of course, not when the union discriminates against blacks and women), the union makes sure that workers' pay checks are accurate, etc. But it also enforces a legalistic grievance procedure, the no-strike pledge, and so on. The inevitable consequence is that the old militant shop stewards are gradually replaced by shit-house lawyers who feel at home in a structure that excludes the rank and file worker.

Moody refers to the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) as an example of radical syndicalism. "But the IWW failed to achieve a stable, organized base." (p. 194) Exactly. The IWW did not sign contracts and wobblies never managed to become part of the organized, stable structure of American labor relations. I experienced an example of the reality of the contract many years ago in a GM plant. I was fired just before I completed my probationary period. The committeeman won my case and got me back on the job in a situation where I had virtually no rights as a probationary employee. I never forgot the committeeman's successful argument. He complained that the foreman had not called him earlier so that *he* could tell me that what I was doing was not permissible, so that he could straighten me out

and avoid the necessity of a grievance. This was the union at its best, telling workers what they could—and could not—do. While some unions are better than others and the differences are worth fighting about, it does a disservice to pretend that bureaucracy is the result of bad leaders and can be overcome. That is why workers are cynical about participation in union affairs and view many dissidents as alternative bureaucrats. Bureaucracy cannot be overcome in the institutions of a capitalist society. If it could, there would be no need to talk about socialism or a new social order.

Moody makes too much of what he calls “pattern bargaining,” defined essentially as wage patterns that cover whole industries and beyond. The kind of pattern bargaining that he talks about probably never existed. There was no such bargaining before World War II. The government imposed patterns during the war. The most famous pattern of the immediate post-war period was the undercutting of the UAW’s demands against GM by the Steelworkers and the Electrical Workers. That was in 1946. Then, as Moody notes, whatever pattern bargaining there was began to deteriorate in 1948. (p. 176) That doesn’t leave much of a pattern.

#### A LABOR PARTY?

Moody’s conclusions can best be described as timid. Occasionally through the book the term socialism is used. But the kind of development that is envisioned is an American equivalent to European social democracy, a movement of reform within the confines of the welfare state. There is no attempt at a serious analysis of European socialism, of workers’ parties that support imperialism, that support NATO, that support private enterprise. In part he misconceives the reasons for the fact that the United States tends to be about 20 years behind Europe in various social welfare programs. He seems to believe that a major reason is the absence of European type working class parties. A major part of the difference is the structure of the American state. As James Madison indicated in Federalist Paper No. 10, a major function of the Constitution was to prevent a majority from quickly having its way. Balance of power, checks and balances, federal vs. state, have effectively created a government structure under which it is infinitely easier to prevent laws from being passed than to pass significant social legislation. It is not accidental that over 100 years ago Marx called the American political system the most bourgeois of all the industrial nations, the forms of democracy notwithstanding.

Moody's proposal to overcome this is—a labor party. Apart from the need to examine the decline of labor and socialist parties in Europe, it is necessary to correct some misapprehensions about American labor politics. (The distortions of Mike Davis do not make this easier.) Moody says that, "The notion that labor should take the lead in forming a party of the working class arose in the 1880s." In fact, it arose in the 1820s (long before European workers had achieved the right to vote) and was so successful that these parties were almost immediately incorporated (coopted) into the bourgeois parties of the time, Whigs, Democratic-Republicans, etc. Perhaps it is unfortunate that working class political activity peaked so early, before the class was fully formed and before American political parties achieved their contemporary form. But this is not a sign of backwardness.

The same is true of working class voting patterns. In the nineteenth century Americans voted in essentially the same proportions that Europeans vote today—about 85% or so. The change in these voting practices is easily pinpointed. After a quarter of a century of massive class struggle from 1875 on, bitter labor struggles in the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s, equivalent struggles of farmers against the banks and the railroads, these struggles seemed to be embodied in the populist campaign of William Jennings Bryan, running as a Democrat ("You shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold") against the Republican McKinley. A vast outpouring of corporate money for McKinley contributed to the Republican victories of 1896 and 1900. The proportion of eligible Americans who voted immediately dropped by 15% and has declined continuously since, until it now hovers around 50% in presidential elections. The bulk of the non-voters are the poor and the working class. Most commentators treat that as apathy. I think that it can more properly be called sophisticated cynicism.

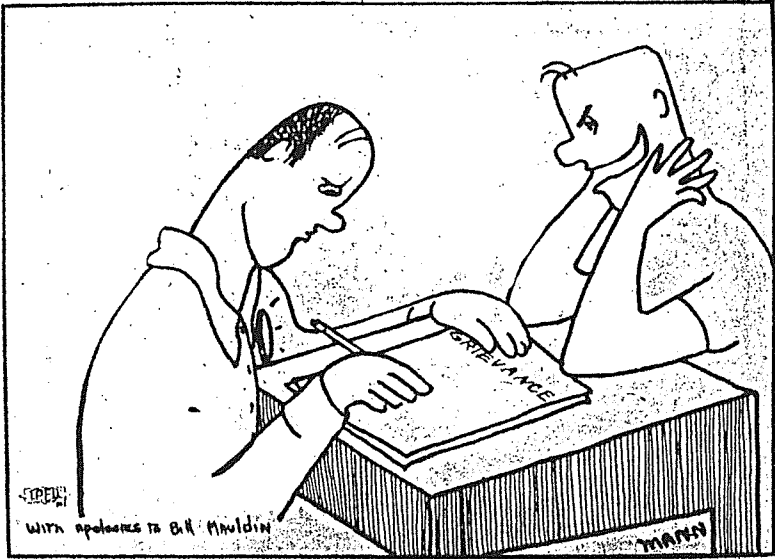
In any case, radicals should begin with the historical reality. The most significant changes in American society were not made through the electoral process. The massive labor struggles of the thirties, the civil rights movement of the fifties, sixties, seventies, took place in the streets. The government was forced to respond to extra-parliamentary actions. Analysis of the future of the American working class should start with that historical reality, not with the imposition of a political structure that arises out of an abstract construction.

In spite of the extensive criticism of some of the analyses in Moody's book, I believe that the book is important and useful. The

information, the descriptions of corporate and union tactics and the rest make this book extremely useful for those taking part in or concerned with the American labor movement. Workers will, in any case, work out their own analysis.

**The Needle**

by **Mann**



WITH APPOLOGUES TO BILL MAULDIN

"Drunk With Power, Joe?"

## THE LABOR MOVEMENT IS NOT DEAD

The starting point of this discussion has to be the past of the American labor movement. How did the union movement get to be in such a sorry state? The first problem is that we are dealing with unions in a capitalist society and it is naive to expect them to function ignoring the reality of capitalism. Above all, that means, as Marx put it, a society which is constantly being revolutionized. Continual technological change takes place most often at the expense of the working class. But confronting that change is a difficult process and takes time. The destruction of the union of steel workers when the Bessemer furnace deprived the skilled steel worker of his ability to control the work process has been repeated in many industries. The word processor which has undercut the printers' union, the steel belted radial tire that replaced the older technology of the bias tire and virtually destroyed Akron as a tire manufacturing center, are only two examples of a continuing process. The automation of the 50s and the robotics of the 80s are more general examples.

The fact that union leaders have been unable and unwilling to deal with the problems of technological change does not change the fact that, at best, unions can only fight a rear guard action. They cannot change the system. The UAW has always accepted technological change, which might be why the changes have not been as sudden and devastating as John L. Lewis' acceptance of the mechanization of the mines in the 1955 contracts or the decision of Harry Bridges in the 60s to accept the mechanization of the docks (and to limit union democracy at the same time). In the coal industry, the new forms of strip mining in which a handful of skilled workers operate shovels that are several stories high makes the organization of much of the industry virtually impossible.

A second problem is the role of the state. Much has been written about how the American working class is far behind the workers of other industrial countries in the level of social welfare because of the absence of a labor party. That is greatly exaggerated and it ignores a much more complex reality. Having a labor party and a substantial union movement did not prevent the British labor movement from suffering substantial defeats at the hands of Thatcher's Conservatives. Among other things, having a labor party and a large membership did not keep the leaders of British labor from being as hidebound and bureaucratic (and pro-imperialist) as labor leaders anywhere. But what this

ignores is one element of the American situation which does distinguish the experience of workers in the U.S. from other industrial countries. The constitutional structure of the American government, with the separation of powers and the division between federal and state, accomplishes what the founding fathers wanted to accomplish. As Madison argued so persuasively in No. 10 of the Federalist Papers, a major aim of the Constitution was to prevent a popular majority from quickly or easily winning control of the government. It is that more than anything else which has kept the U.S. at least a generation behind the rest of the industrial world in social legislation. It is not an accident that Marx called the U.S. the most bourgeois of democracies.

I am not claiming that it would make no difference at all if a labor party existed in the U.S. But the difference would not be fundamental. And this whole discussion, of course, ignores the fact that American workers created labor parties in the 19th century long before British workers had even won the right to vote. That these Workingmen's Parties were coopted by the bourgeois parties may have been because working-class politics appeared too early, when the American working class was not yet fully formed. In any case, it is not evidence of backwardness of the American working class and it does not negate the significant influence that American workers have had on American politics and the American government.

But then we come to the question of what has made the union movement what it is today, a collection of bureaucratic, conservative, one party governments. Leftists have tended to view the question subjectively—the cause of bureaucracy is bad leaders. Elect better leaders and there will be better unions. Unfortunately, history does not sustain that analysis. In 1911 Robert Michels published *Political Parties*, in which he presented his explanation of the bureaucratization of working class organizations. His reasoning may have been wrong. But if the phenomenon lasts for 80 years, it is necessary to look for causes more objective than bad leaders. The answer, or at least the start of one, can be found in what labor historians have called the social compact. Dating back at least to the garment unions before World War I, this consists essentially in the trade off of wages and fringe benefits for work discipline and productivity. The union contract and its enforcement against rank and file workers by the union leadership provides the essential basis for bureaucratic unionism.

That, however, is not a simple deal between union leaders and employers. Crucial to the social compact is the fundamental militancy

and resistance to alienation and exploitation of ordinary workers. If workers weren't militant, employers would not be tempted into a deal under which unions help to control rank and file activity. But this needs to be taken a step further. There is a lot of talk about the need to abandon business unionism and return to social unionism. What is forgotten is that social unionism was simply the latest form of the social compact. Its most prominent practitioner was Walter Reuther. On the one hand, Reuther had the UAW fight for fringe benefits, higher wages and social legislation. On the other hand, he created the monolithic one-party state that the UAW became. Dissidents were expelled, locals were taken over by the International Union, elections and conventions were changed from yearly to tri-yearly, the rights of locals further infringed upon, etc.

For a while this worked. Unions supported American imperialism abroad, disciplined wildcat strikers, and so on. Why isn't it working now? A combination of continuing high unemployment, technological change, and an extreme right-wing pro-management Administration have combined to make the deal somewhat less sweet to corporate managers. There is no need to offer deals to unions to control their members if the same result can be obtained by shutting down plants, moving to open shop states, breaking strikes. Employers are helped by the kinds of technological change noted above, moving operations, where possible, to low-wage Third World countries—and by the element of time. Resistance to a new technology or a new plant cannot develop overnight. It takes time for workers to absorb the possibilities of the situation and to work out ways to counterattack. That has always been true.

The attempts of the UAW to organize Japanese-owned plants are a case in point. We start, of course, with the inherent conservatism of the UAW. But success would have been difficult in any case. The Japanese plants are new and growing. What workers in these plants see is that in the rest of the industry the UAW is negotiating (with not too much success) to reduce the rate of decline and job loss. The big three are burdened with the substantial cost of retirement benefits. The Japanese plants don't even have to worry about retirement for a while, and they are located in areas where they provide the highest wages around. Does all this mean that these plants can't be organized? Not at all. It simply means that it will take time for the alienation, the exploitation, the lack of safety, etc., to bear fruit. Then, even a semi-moribund UAW can win recognition elections.

This is one example of what I think is inevitable in the American labor movement. The place to look is not in the unions but in the working class. Workers have been through some very difficult times. Workers' standards of living are declining, work safety is declining, speed-up (in both union and non-union plants) is increasing, and so on. If you believe that American workers are stupid and backward and will take this kind of thing forever, then there is no future for American unions. I believe, on the other hand, that if one is not in a middle-class rush to reach the millennium tomorrow, resistance, which has never disappeared, even in the worst years, will grow and will produce the kind of upsurge which helped create the CIO, the IWW, the Knights of Labor, etc. And then, if capitalism isn't overthrown, the unions will rush to the head of the parade and once again offer their social compact—give our members the things that you have been keeping from them and we will see that they behave themselves, come to work regularly, work hard, etc. As John L. Lewis said in the heyday of the CIO, "A CIO contract is insurance against strikes." (It wasn't true then and won't be true in the future.)

What can people active in the labor movement do today? It is necessary to fight for as much democratization as possible. Fight against lousy contracts. Fight against the easy retreat. But avoid self-deception about the possibility of overthrowing entrenched national bureaucracies which have huge treasuries, large staffs, labor law and government involvement all on their side. (The only exceptions are the miners' and teamsters' unions where the criminality was so pervasive and so obvious that the government could not avoid intervening—and the results, in any case, are the creation of ordinary bureaucratic unions.) Above all, it is necessary to listen to what workers are saying and point to the existence of an alternative. Impatience and sitting in judgment on workers will not bring change any closer.

It is also important to be careful in judging the strengths and weaknesses of the existing union movement. Statistics can be very deceiving. The fact that a union like the UAW has added thousands of office workers, state employees, nurses, etc., to the membership rolls does not make the union stronger. As Kim Moody has pointed out, it makes the bureaucracy stronger. On the other hand, the fact that there is a declining number of auto workers, or steel workers, or electrical workers, does not make the union weaker if those workers shut down a crucial industry. Even the expansion of unions among government employees is a mixed development. Teachers and clerks add



only modestly to the strength of labor (although they add a lot by example). But municipal transportation employees, postal workers in major metropolitan areas, and similar types of workers can also have considerable impact on the economy and on society by their actions.

The bottom line is that if you think that American workers will permanently accept their place in capitalist society, that they will accept the conditions imposed upon them, then nothing militants in the unions can do will matter. But American workers have never accepted that indefinitely and there is no reason to believe that that has changed. Give it time. As we used to say in the early days of the CIO, take it easy, but take it.



## WALTER REUTHER AND THE DECLINE OF THE AMERICAN LABOR MOVEMENT

Review essay of Nelson Lichtenstein,  
*The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit: Walter Reuther  
and the Fate of American Labor* (New York: Basic  
Books, 1995)

Walter Reuther and John L. Lewis were probably the greatest labor leaders of the middle of this century. They were both trail blazers, Lewis in breaking from the old American Federation of Labor (AFL) and organizing the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), Reuther in pioneering the kind of fringe benefits that are now taken for granted in union contracts. They were both authoritarian figures in their own organizations, the United Mine Workers (UMW) and the United, Automobile, Aircraft, and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW). Both left their marks on the American union movement but both ended their careers in relative isolation. How much they contributed to the structure and politics of American labor and how much they were formed by forces that were beyond their control is a continuing question in American labor history. Nelson Lichtenstein attempts to deal with that question in relation to Reuther in his new biography, *The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit: Walter Reuther and the Fate of American Labor*.

This book has been widely reviewed and has attracted mostly favorable attention. *The New York Times Book Review* listed it in its 100 best books of 1996. Douglas Fraser, a former president of the Union, reviewed it favorably in *Solidarity*, the magazine of the United Auto Workers (UAW). It represents the viewpoint of what we might call "liberal labor," the orthodoxy of the official union movement and those academics and intellectuals associated with them. The recent attempts to achieve a new alliance between left intellectuals and the union movement, only partly successful, reflect the new stirrings in the labor movement and the limits that these new developments face. What those limits are can be seen in Lichtenstein's book.

The title indicates the contradictory character of the book. The subtitle, "Walter Reuther and the Fate of American Labor," presents the author's grand design, to show the impact of Reuther on the union movement and the objective nature of his legacy. "The Most

Dangerous Man in Detroit,” on the other hand, is a contentious quotation from George Romney which Lichtenstein uses to give a picture of Reuther which seems designed to feature a militancy that was very deceptive and which is not a valid picture of Reuther’s career. Romney made that statement, which related to Reuther’s role in the post-World War II strike wave, when he was the head of the American Automobile Manufacturers Association and his job was to fight the propaganda wars against the UAW. He did not make statements like that when he later became an auto executive at American Motors.

Much more balanced views were given by the Detroit press and auto executives later in his career and at the time of his death. Chrysler chairman Virgil Boyd said that “It’s taken a strong man to keep the situation under control. I hope that whoever his successor may be he can exercise equal internal discipline.” In 1967, after Reuther had ended an unauthorized strike at a General Motors stamping plant in Ohio, the *Detroit News*, which had always been opposed to union demands, asked the question, “What will happen when Reuther is no longer at the helm? . . . We hope Reuther will be around a long time as head of the international, but we are concerned about the future of union-industry relationships when Reuther’s special talents are no longer available.” These are very different assessments of Reuther’s role than Romney’s. Lichtenstein can obviously pick whichever view he wants to accept—except that the quotations which depict Reuther as a bureaucrat who can discipline the UAW membership do not appear in his book. Although the book documents the erosion of democracy in the UAW, the author’s choice of a title indicates an intention to write a political defense of Walter Reuther.

#### NEITHER RED REVOLUTIONARY NOR YOUNG IDEALIST

One of the most controversial episodes in Reuther’s career was the trip he and his brother Victor took to the Soviet Union in 1934 and their work at an auto plant in Gorky. They sent letters to friends in the U.S. that were totally supportive of Soviet practice. This was the period of draconian labor legislation, the Stalinist purges, the growth of the Gulag, and the consolidation of the Soviet dictatorship. “In what would become a celebrated and controversial document, the ‘Gorky letter’ dated January 20, 1934, and addressed to Merlin Bishop’s younger brother Melvin, Victor wrote that Walter and he were amazed to see workers voting and talking back to their department chiefs at shop meetings. ‘Imagine this at Fords or at Briggs. I tell you Mel, in

all the countries we have thus far been in, we have never found such genuine proletarian democracy. It is unpolished and crude, rough and rude, but proletarian workers' democracy in every respect." (Lichtenstein, p. 41)

Lichtenstein claims that "The Reuther brothers were not blind to the sinister elements in Stalinist industrialization." (45) Perhaps. But the author's tendency to use uncritically self-serving quotations doesn't help matters. Victor Reuther, writing three decades after the events, says that they knew. (33-4) There is no evidence from the thirties that they knew. Ultimately, it doesn't matter that much. Which is worse, not being aware of a brutal dictatorship that thousands of foreign workers knew about, or being aware of the brutality and keeping silent about it? In a fine study of foreign workers in the U.S.S.R. from 1920 to 1940, Andrea Graziosi notes that "between the early 1920s and the mid-1930s scores of thousands had written 'stormy letters' and articles about their experiences in Soviet Russia, returned to their own countries, reentered Western factories, and taken part in Western union and political life again." And later: "Those workers had in fact understood well ahead of their leaders the simple truth that socialism and the Soviet Union were not the same thing. . . ." <sup>1</sup> The Reuthers were not among them.

In past years friends and foes of Reuther used the Gorky experience to charge him with being a red revolutionary or defend him as a youthful idealist. Lichtenstein doesn't try to judge the experience—although he tries to put Reuther in the best light. However, I believe that a reasonable conclusion can be drawn. Reuther was neither a revolutionary nor a youthful idealist. The attitude that is most consistent and revealing of his later career is that of a generic stalinist. That is, he was most intrigued by Soviet planning and industrialization, no matter what the cost. In this he was not unusual. He became representative of a new generation of labor leaders who were essentially statisticians, who thought that they represented the best interests of the workers but who thought that the workers should be the passive recipients of their leadership.

As we shall see, this became the basis for Reuther's "militancy." As C.L.R. James, the late West Indian Marxist, wrote in 1950, "Already the tentative philosophy of the bureaucracy in the United States, its political economy of regulation of wages and prices, nationalization and even planning, its ruthless, political methods, show the organic similarity of the American labor bureaucracy and the Stalinists." <sup>2</sup>

Lichtenstein comes close to seeing this. He says, "An imaginative planner, [Reuther] would link power with government authority in what we might label today a 'corporatist' framework." (155) But he doesn't draw the necessary conclusions and he doesn't seem to realize that the appellation "corporate state" was applied to Mussolini's fascist regime. Corporatism is never defined in Lichtenstein's book.

There is a certain reality that emerged from World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II: massive state intervention in the economies and societies of the industrial nations. The result was state capitalism in various forms, welfare state capitalism in England, France and the United States; totalitarian state capitalism in Italy, Germany, and the Soviet Union. The Italian Communist, Palmiro Togliatti, who knew something about fascism, defined corporatism in 1935 as the structure and practice of fascism.<sup>3</sup> I am sure Lichtenstein does not want to call Reuther a fascist. But he is betrayed by his tendency to toss out half-thought-out words, phrases, and ideas that add academic glitter without substance to his work.

#### BUREAUCRACY AND AUTHORITARIAN RULE

Reuther returned to the United States in 1935 and plunged into the heady work of organizing the UAW. From the very start there was a fissure in the union between rank and file workers and the leadership. Workers went on strike, occupied factories, and so on and didn't bother to get permission from the top leadership. Leaders complained about this "irresponsibility." But they didn't have much choice but to go along with workers' militancy. The officers of the union did not have the power to discipline workers, most of whom were not yet even members of the union. Reuther, from the start, came down on the side of bureaucracy. "We want a disciplined organization," Reuther wrote. "We believe that in a union, as in an army, discipline is of first rate importance. There can be no question of that whatsoever." (111) In this, of course, Reuther was not alone. John L. Lewis, for example, announced that a contract with the CIO was a guarantee against wildcat strikes. This was more wish than fact but it indicated the thrust of virtually the entire leadership of the CIO. Philip Murray, head of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee, did not permit the union to convene a convention to develop its own constitution until after the contract with U.S. Steel was won and negotiating procedures had been established. It is very likely that this policy making from above contributed to the loss of the Little

Steel strike. The rest of the industry was not organized until the war years and there is evidence that there was greater militancy, including wildcat strikes, in the unorganized firms of Little Steel than in the plants of U.S. Steel. Little Steel was all of the industry except for U.S. Steel. It included major corporations such as Bethlehem Steel Corp., Republic Steel, etc.

Lichtenstein has great difficulty seeing the importance of rank and file militancy in opposition to stultifying bureaucracy. His description of the decisive General Motors sit-down strike of 1936–1937 is a case in point. In his description of the battle of Bulls Run he ignores the role of Genora Johnson in taking over the microphone in the sound car, overcoming Victor Reuther's timidity, and encouraging the men and women of Flint to break through the police lines. (77) He falsely credits Roy Reuther with a "large hand" in the taking of Chevrolet Plant 4. He doesn't seem to understand the fundamental importance of the tactic of taking Plant 4. To begin with, the tactic for taking the Chevy motor plant was devised by rank and file workers in the plant. They knew the importance of the plant. The strike had reached a stalemate and GM was still producing and selling Chevrolets elsewhere because Plant 4 was producing motors for assembly in other parts of the country. What was required was a diversion to get the plant guards and police occupied elsewhere while workers shut down the motor plant. It was definitely risky—and Walter Reuther derided the plan and called it insane. (78) The plan worked and shortly afterward, unable to assemble and sell its money-making mass production car, GM sued for peace.

One of the reasons Lichtenstein has trouble seeing the importance of that rank and file tactic is that he tends to exaggerate the ability of GM to construct alternative facilities to immunize the corporation from such strikes. (106) That is one of the reasons he prefers "labor statesmanship" to rank and file militancy. He does not see the limitations of corporate power. In 1995 significant proportions of corporate production at GM and Chrysler were shut down by small strikes. In 1996, helped by "just-in-time" methods of production, a strike by a few thousand brake workers in Dayton, Ohio brought virtually all of GM's North American automotive production to a halt. Changes in technology do not necessarily make it cheaper to build additional plants and no matter how wealthy a corporation may be it may not have the capital adequate to duplicate a stamping plant, for example.

## ALIENATION OF THE WORKER

What is missing in the book and is crucial to an understanding of Reuther's role is a clear picture of the reasons for the breach between leaders and rank and file workers. Lichtenstein has no sense of this and his understanding of the reality of work on the shop floor is limited. Workers moved to organize industrial unions in the 1930s for a number of reasons, including low pay, insecurity, and the authoritarian structure of management down to the lowly foreman. But most fundamental were speed-up and working conditions. Viewed from another angle that means alienation, the inability to control the nature and pace of work. Robert Blauner, in a book published in 1964, discussed alienation in industry.<sup>4</sup> He noted that the average job in the automobile industry took less than 60 seconds to do. When General Motors built its assembly plant in Lordstown, Ohio in the 1960s, the average job on the assembly line took 36 seconds to do. The time it takes to do a job varies considerably but whether it is half a minute, a minute, or two minutes, that time needs to be viewed in combination with another category of time, the rest of the worker's life. No matter how easy or clean or quiet that job might be, that job is intensely alienating and it should come as no surprise (particularly to academics who would not accept that kind of life) that workers resist; they resist individually and they resist collectively.

The fundamental problem that unions have is that they cannot deal with that problem in the framework of collective bargaining agreements. In return for recognition, pay increases and fringe benefits, unions offer a disciplined membership—or try to. Lichtenstein points out that “[GM] came to understand that the interests of the UAW's top leaders and of its constituent units were not always identical. Before the sit-down strikes, General Motors had sought to avoid negotiating with ‘outside’ unionists, whom it saw as a well-connected group of interlopers motivated by either left-wing ideology or the most cynical kind of business unionism. But once GM had signed with the union, it sought to turn UAW officials into allies in its effort to maintain control of the production process.” (109–10) With his concern for discipline, Reuther proved a willing ally, although he did not do anything more than the other leaders of the UAW and of the CIO were willing to do. But Lichtenstein is enamored of Reuther's grand schemes and plans and can't see reality on the shop floor. To him, workers' grievances are “parochial.” (212) He is surprised when,

after winning Supplemental Unemployment Benefits (SUB) at Ford in 1955 “more than one hundred thousand workers shut down scores of factories in the hours immediately after Reuther and Bugas [Ford industrial relations] posed for the photographers at the signing ceremony.” (294) The workers were not opposed to SUB. They were striking against the fact that at the end of the preceding contract thousands of grievances at individual plants were unsettled and unresolved.

### LOCAL GRIEVANCES

The importance of local grievances as a sign of workers’ alienation cannot be exaggerated. When the Flint Chevrolet local devoted an issue of its paper, *The Searchlight*, in 1954, to listing, without comment, the grievances that hadn’t been settled at the local level and had been forwarded to the national screening committee and what their status was, Reuther removed the local officers and put an administrator over the local.<sup>5</sup> Lichtenstein reports that Reuther “beefed up the union’s Engineering Department, where Robert Kanter . . . taught auto workers time-study techniques with which to counter company foremen and engineers.” (289) What he does not report is that workers learned very quickly not to call the union time-study people because they invariably confirmed the company’s time study. C.L.R. James set the problem in a broader context: “The bureaucracy inevitably must substitute the struggle over consumption, higher wages, pensions, education, etc., for a struggle in production. This is the basis of the welfare state, the attempt to appease the workers with the fruits of labor when they seek satisfaction in the work itself.”<sup>6</sup>

By the 1960s observers of the labor scene with disparate political attitudes were agreeing on the authoritarian nature of unions. Clark Kerr, defending unions, wrote, “The union is often viewed as a disturbing force in society; but it is also a disciplinary instrument. It sets rules of its own and joins with the employer in setting others.”<sup>7</sup> Paul Jacobs noted that “Once the resistance of employers to unions ceases at the level of principles, the union, through its contracts, becomes part of the plant government, not only a force for justice but also an integral part of the system of authority needed to operate the plant.”<sup>8</sup> Daniel Bell observed that “Less realized is the fact that, in the evolution of the labor contract, the union becomes a part of the ‘control system of management.’ He [the labor leader] becomes, as C. Wright Mills has put it, a ‘manager of discontent.’”<sup>9</sup> Lichtenstein seems to agree but adds the gratuitous disclaimer that Reuther could



not rule by fiat alone. Of course, no dictator rules by fiat alone.

The UAW was the most democratic of the large industrial unions although from the very start the union's constitution gave control over strike authorization to the International Executive Board. (That, of course, made all local strikes without the permission of the national leadership wildcats.) Lichtenstein blurs this fact by announcing that the UAW is the only major union that includes in its contract the right of local unions to strike on health, safety, and production standards issues. (292) He does not indicate that the International union is still left in charge and its permission is required for a local to be able to strike legally.

The reason for this democracy was clearly the existence of two major opposing caucuses which required union leaders to go to the rank and file for election and for contract approval. Reuther put an end to that with his victory and control of the Executive Board. The Thomas-Addes opposition was eliminated by being bought off with jobs at the CIO or the national UAW office, by red-baiting, and by the concentrated wealth and power manipulated by the leadership. Democracy was also eroded constitutionally by lengthening the time between elections to three years—justified by the argument that there was no point to having elections more often than contract ratifications. As the length of contracts was extended to multi-year terms, the requirement of annual elections at both the national and local level was abandoned, the time between national conventions was changed to three years, and local union officers found themselves protected from opposition candidates for the same three years. “The forms of democracy were never abandoned within the UAW, but by 1952 Reuther had so narrowed the limits of debate and the possibility of real opposition that he had crippled his union's capacity to mobilize its forces on behalf of even the political issues the leadership fully endorsed.” (308) And democracy was eroded on the plant floor by the consolidation of a committee system to replace the older steward system.

Lichtenstein writes that “The union eventually won its best contract at Ford.” (179) He doesn't see what Ford saw. The union was surprised to get full-time union committeemen and the dues check-off in the first contract, things it hadn't been able to win from other manufacturers. What Ford saw was that the contract created instant bureaucracy and, therefore, a more “responsible” union. Stewards represented relatively small groups of workers, worked alongside them, and tended to be very responsive to their needs. Committeemen each represented hundreds of workers, had offices in the plant, and

did not work on production. They earned their regular pay which included all the overtime worked in their district because they were entitled to be present as long as anyone was working. And, of course, they became more supportive of the union administration than of the union membership. At Chrysler and at the Hudson Motor Car Co., workers, through direct action, had won the right of shop stewards to spend full time servicing the membership. Eventually this was lost to the system of shop committeemen.

### WORKERS RESIST BUREAUCRATIC CONTROL

It is not surprising that Lichtenstein does not see the dangers in the first Ford contract. Virtually the entire left, myself included, thought it a total victory. The same was true of the early New Deal labor legislation which recognized the legal rights of unions, encouraged exclusive bargaining rights, union shops, and the legal enforceability of contracts. No one noticed at the time that making labor-management contracts enforceable in law enshrined the segregation of black workers. The National Labor Relations Board refused to recognize discrimination against black workers as an unfair labor practice until the passage of Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, about three decades after the Wagner Act.<sup>10</sup>

The New Deal "pro-labor" legislation had a particular origin and character which weren't examined closely at the time. In 1934 there were three major strikes, all successful, and all led by avowed radicals. The Toledo Auto-Lite strike led by A.J. Muste's socialists, the Minneapolis-St. Paul teamsters strike led by Trotskyists, and the San Francisco waterfront strike led by Communists raised the specter of uncontrolled radical unrest. A government which had no particular interest in labor legislation quickly changed its perspective. The government response to the radical strike threat was the Wagner Act which recognized the rights of unions to exist and to represent workers, to negotiate contracts which became enforceable in law, to have exclusive bargaining rights and to be protected from the most egregious anti-labor activities of employers. The price was what Lichtenstein calls shop floor jurisprudence. The point was to get workers out of occupied plants, off the streets and picket lines, and enmeshed in legal process instead of direct action. The result was a legalistic structure from which rank and file workers were excluded. They were replaced by representatives, by lawyers, and by judges. All of this put a premium on responsibility and legality. And it was made much worse in

time with anti-labor and anti-union legislation such as Taft-Hartley and Landrum-Griffin.

That radicals and militants accepted the dues check-off as a victory, together with exclusive bargaining rights, is understandable. The institution of industrial unions was still not safely assured. The assumption was that allowing other unions to share recognition would give a foothold to company unions and old AFL craft unions. The dues check-off prevented more conservative workers from getting a “free ride” while sharing in union gains. At the time, it did not seem significant that protecting the institution would make the institution less dependent on the membership. But after 60 years it is time to reevaluate the past and the dead hand it holds over the present.

The French unions which won significant concessions from the conservative government in 1996 are much weaker organizationally than the American unions. Only about 8% of French workers belong to unions, compared to 15% in the United States. About 20% of government employees are unionized in France. What made them so militant and so powerful? There is no dues check-off in France, which means that the union has to convince every member every month that the union still deserves its dues. There are three labor federations in France that compete with each other for members. There is no maintenance of membership and no exclusive representation. This gives workers tremendous power to pressure their unions.<sup>11</sup>

In the United States the measures deemed necessary to protect unions from management were turned into their opposites—they protect the leadership of unions from their memberships. The belief that the rank and file do not understand their own interests, that their grievances are parochial, and that wildcat strikes are “self-destructive,” leads to acceptance of bureaucratized unions. It should be obvious, given the authoritarian nature of unions, that the American practice is not likely to change and I am not proposing that it should. But what is possible is that American workers will ignore formal union structures and explode in other ways. In 1968 10 million French workers, in opposition to all of their organizations, occupied all the factories of France and came within a hair’s breadth of overthrowing the DeGaulle government.

There are other things beside formal structure or constitutional provisions that erode union democracy. In the auto industry contract negotiations of 1964, there was widespread opposition to the terms of the proposed contract, expressed in wildcat strikes. The Ford

Wixom plant (about 20 miles from Detroit) rejected the contract. Another vote was held on some excuse that the first vote wasn't representative enough. Again, the contract was voted down. Finally, a third vote was held. This time the contract carried—in a meeting of 150 members out of a local union membership of 4000. The result, of course, is widespread cynicism, the lowering of union attendance, and the increasing attitude among auto workers that the union is “them,” not “us.”

Another tactic is the strike directed against the union membership instead of the company. William Serrin discusses this in his book, *The Company and the Union*. In his book on the 1970 negotiations with General Motors, he quotes Emil Mazey, UAW secretary-treasurer, saying, “I think that strikes make ratification easier.”<sup>12</sup> According to Serrin, Leonard Woodcock, who succeeded Reuther as president of the union, helped explain it further.

“The [1970] strike was a political strike, a strike not to win agreement but to win ratification. General Motors would have signed the same agreement in September if the UAW had made known that it was prepared to settle.” But Woodcock is unsure whether the final settlement could have been ratified without a strike. He says, “You could have had the response, ‘Well, if it’s so easy, there’s got to be something else. . . .’ Eunice Williams, of the union’s GM national negotiating team, says, “If we had brought that sentiment to the rank-and-file on September 15 they would have told us to go to hell.”<sup>13</sup>

Once again, the cynicism at the top seeps down to the bottom and workers no longer trust their leaders, although they have very little choice about who those leaders will be.

This scenario was reenacted in 1996 in the Dayton, Ohio strike against General Motors. There was widespread resentment throughout the UAW that jobs were disappearing to outsourcing, working conditions were getting worse, and the union was doing virtually nothing about it. There was a new president, Steve Yokich, who had a reputation for being more militant than his predecessor, Owen Bieber, and Yokich had to make a significant gesture at the beginning of his presidency. There had been some short strikes at a couple of GM parts plants in Flint. But now the target would be the two plants making brakes in Dayton. Within days virtually all of GM's production operations in North

America were brought to a halt, presumably cutting into GM's profits for that year, and a settlement was reached.

"In the settlement, the company agreed to hire more than 400 workers, most of them during the next two years. However, approximately 300 of the plant's workers retire every year and GM is required by contract to hire half the number of those who retire. Thus GM would have been obliged, without a strike, to hire about 450 workers in the next three years. . . . Stewards [who were Youngstown teamsters in a class taught by Staughton Lynd] wanted to talk about Dayton. They were mystified that the strike had done nothing to change GM's intention to contract-out brake work to Bosch. Wasn't that the reason for striking?, they wanted to know. Why did the union settle?, they wondered. They viewed the strike as a defeat."<sup>14</sup> Is it any wonder that even Lichtenstein can write that "Manipulation of his own constituency had for so long taken the place of mobilization that a kind of institutionalized hypocrisy became second nature." (326)

The UAW, like other international unions, with a staff of international representatives used to campaign for the official slate in elections, control over the union press, constitutional powers and privileges for the bureaucracy, and the tacit or active support of government bodies, can make it virtually impossible for an opposition candidate to win national office. Entrenched union presidents have been voted out in only two kinds of circumstances. One is corruption so egregious that the government was finally forced to intervene. This was true in the United Mine Workers where the president was convicted of having a defeated opponent murdered. This was also true in the Teamsters Union, massively infected with mob control.

The other circumstance is a split within the leadership. David McDonald, president of the United Steelworkers of America, was defeated by I.W. Abel, the Secretary-Treasurer of the union in 1965. It didn't hurt that the Secretary-Treasurer's office counted the votes. Labor legislation, although presented as supportive of democracy, often contributes to the power of bureaucrats. For example, union officials had great difficulty controlling unauthorized strikes until the Taft-Hartley Act gave employers the right to sue for damages resulting from strikes that violated union contracts. It made it much more difficult for workers to strike in opposition to their union leadership when that strike might bankrupt their union.

Lichtenstein writes of the need for "trade union intellectuals." (114) Reuther's administration, flooded with "intellectuals," stifled

free discussion of political and economic ideas at union gatherings at Black Lake (the union's summer camp) and at local unions. Frank Marquart, long a Reuther loyalist, documented in his autobiography the transformation of discussions into lectures pushing the official union line.<sup>15</sup> As Lichtenstein points out, "the UAW summer schools and periodic classes became increasingly inhospitable to unorthodox discourse." (326)

Lichtenstein makes much of what he calls a "Faustian bargain." "If Reuther wanted the unions to make their presence felt in Washington's corridors of power, America's new warfare state expected from the trade union movement industrial discipline and orthodoxy." (177) That the "bargain" ultimately didn't work, according to Lichtenstein, is the fault of the Democratic Party and the government, absolving Reuther of his responsibility for a failed program. The clever catch phrase helps to hide the reality that there was no real "bargain," and that it wasn't Reuther's idea. He simply went along with what virtually all the other CIO leaders accepted. Fundamentally, it was the same deal that was struck with the auto corporations and was pushed by Sidney Hillman of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers who was a major labor adviser to President Franklin Roosevelt; Philip Murray, head of the Steelworkers Union and the C.I.O.; R.J. Thomas, president of the UAW, and George Addes, UAW Secretary-Treasurer.

Crucial to the situation was the rush by almost the entire labor movement to give the government a no-strike pledge at the beginning of World War II, without, of course, consulting their memberships. The pledge worked in the first few years. But as corporate profits skyrocketed and wage freezes tightened, wildcat strikes began to mount until by the end of the war there more strikes than at any other time in history.<sup>16</sup> The unions, especially the UAW, found it more and more difficult to control their members and became increasingly dependent on the government to maintain labor discipline. They also became dependent on the government to win union recognition in unorganized plants without the strike weapon. It was government pressure that resulted in union recognition in the plants of the Little Steel corporations, such as Bethlehem Steel, etc.

Since the same kind of "bargains" had been made earlier with the auto corporations, it is meaningless to call the equivalent deal with the government a "Faustian bargain." The labor leaders, including Reuther, were simply acting in conformity with their own political and organizational beliefs. The deal was based on the reality of working class

shop floor militancy which the union leaders offered to control. But since they rejected basing union policy on support of that militancy, they had nowhere else to go.

The same was true of the 1950 contract with General Motors that Lichtenstein calls "The Treaty of Detroit" after *Fortune's* appellation. "Charles Wilson [GM's president] had greeted Walter Reuther's consolidation of power in the union with a certain satisfaction. Reuther's larger social vision was clearly anathema to him, but nearly ten years of bargaining experience had convinced GM officials that here was a man with whom they could do business." (277) Clearly, GM was able to discount "Reuther's larger social vision" as mostly rhetoric. Lichtenstein seems unable to do that and he makes the so-called vision the basis for his defense of Reuther's legacy as a labor leader.

### REUTHER AND RACE

Reuther's social vision did not include fighting for equality for African Americans where he had the power—inside his own union. Lichtenstein's "handling" of the problem of race in relation to Reuther and the UAW might be compared to that of an acrobatic juggling act. But the author ends up in the net and not on the high wire. He writes: "Privately, and sometimes in public, Reuther questioned whether any blacks were 'qualified' to fill high UAW posts." (210) A spokesman for the Trade Union Leadership Council, an organization of black union activists in the UAW, Horace Sheffield, "denounced Reutherite hypocrisy, asserting that black unionists could no longer 'accept as adequate the fact that some of our international unions have a good public posture on the question of "civil rights and fair practices" while, at the same time, they resist with every means at their disposal any effort to change the "lily-white" character of their own international executive boards.'" (376) "When Reuther condescendingly announced, 'There will come a time when a Negro will be qualified and . . . at such a time a Negro will be placed on the board,' black unionists seethed with fury. . . . In a caustic reference to Reuther's . . . remarks, Sheffield told the convention that 'Negroes are sick and tired of the matter of qualifications being raised . . . because I think it is fairly evident to everyone here that it is not necessary to be a Rhodes Scholar to sit on the International Executive Board.'" (377)

Reuther used his influence in the top councils of the civil rights movement to push the movement in a conservative direction, to represent the interests of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, to

restrain and censor the more radical elements in the movement, such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). (383–5) In part Lichtenstein acknowledges this when he writes, “In the early 1940s the rise of a black insurgency within the automobile and agricultural implement industries had been organically linked to the growth of industrial unionism itself. A generation later, when a second wave of racial militancy surged forward, it crashed with full force against a shop-floor regime and a union structure of far greater rigidity. This was a contradiction that Reuther could never resolve or escape.” (372)

With this record of racism, how to explain reviewers, such as Alan Brinkley in the *New York Times Book Review* (12/17/95), who praise Reuther as a great civil libertarian, or Lichtenstein’s own judgments? In his Epilogue, Lichtenstein writes that “No matter how far-sighted the men and women of Reuther’s generation, their capacity to thwart American racism . . . was always constrained by time and circumstance.” (443) One wonders what capacity to thwart racism he is talking about. He thinks that Reuther belonged on the podium at the Aug. 28, 1963 March on Washington because “for nearly a generation the UAW had put more money and muscle behind the civil rights revolution than had any other trade union.” (310) William B. Gould, who was a member of the union’s legal staff and later a consultant to the EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission), concluded that on the issue of the UAW’s racial practices “the late Walter Reuther’s rhetoric did not comport with reality. . . .” He reported that, at the very time of the March on Washington of which Reuther was a leader, “hardly any black UAW members were to be found in the high-paying and prestigious skilled-trade jobs.”<sup>17</sup> An internal UAW study confirmed this conclusion.<sup>18</sup> Gould is now the chairman of the National Labor Relations Board.

Lichtenstein accepts self-serving statements and speeches at face value and avoids the most damaging evidence against his subject. He reports that “Reuther appointed himself codirector of the highly sensitive Fair Employment Practices Department. . . . Reuther was well aware of his limited support among black autoworkers; he therefore made himself a highly visible spokesman on civil rights issues—testifying before Congress, prodding local unions to establish their own fair employment practices committees, and pushing forward the UAW campaign to end discrimination within the leagues of the American Bowling Congress.” (252)



High visibility was definitely Reuther's aim, a visibility that concealed his almost total lack of interest in fair employment practices within the UAW. The basic point to his making himself co-chairman was not to leave a black in sole control of the department. He thought so little of it that his co-chair, William H. Oliver, didn't even have to report to Reuther—he reported to Roy Reuther and his main function was to defend the UAW and to warn the leadership of potential damage when problems became public. As Herbert Hill, former national labor secretary of the NAACP, wrote, "It was common knowledge in Solidarity House that Walter was not really 'co-director' and that this was for public relations purposes only. Oliver in fact reported directly to Roy Reuther, not to Walter. This is important because Roy was responsible for the union's external activities and suggests the real function of the Fair Practices Department."<sup>19</sup>

Lichtenstein tends to give credit where credit is not warranted. "Reuther also wanted an FEPC law in Michigan. Whatever the level of racism among white autoworkers, Reuther understood that by the early 1950s civil rights was one of the central questions by which liberalism defined its meaning and measured its progress." (315) This is nowhere near as benign as it seems and requires some explanation. The explanation is supplied by Herbert Hill, who spent many years fighting the UAW and other unions for racial equality, and who provided this writer with much of his documentation. (He also provided extensive documentation to Lichtenstein who refused to use it although he had requested this material.)<sup>20</sup> "Virtually every study of state fair employment practice agencies concluded that they operated on erroneous or inadequate assumptions, were unable to eliminate widespread patterns of job discrimination, and were generally ineffective."<sup>21</sup> Most unions found state FEPCs pretty benign. The most they were able to do in response to outrageous forms of segregation and discrimination was to arrange for some token adjustments while leaving the discriminatory patterns intact. Their support for state FEPC legislation resulted in good public relations for Reuther and other labor leaders without requiring very much from them.

However, these leaders found themselves in a trap which they did not expect. They assumed that federal FEPC legislation would accomplish just as little in forcing them to change their ways as state FEPC legislation. Title VII, the employment section of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, changed all that. The law itself was as difficult to enforce as they had expected. Federal bureaucrats were not particularly better than

state bureaucrats in pressing for racial equality. The difference was that the law came under the jurisdiction of federal courts that, as a result of the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, had a new perception of racial discrimination. This took the industrial unions by surprise. “A ‘Legislative Alert’ issued by the Industrial Union Department of the AFL-CIO in May of 1964 stated that Title VII ‘has nothing to do with the day-to-day operation of business firms or unions or with seniority systems.’”<sup>22</sup> Reuther agreed that the new law wouldn’t change anything. However, in the end, it was no longer possible to bury complaints by black workers in time-consuming red tape that ended, at the most, with a token promotion here or there. The federal courts took over direct control of enforcing the law. The result was that black workers began to turn from an ineffective union procedure to the NAACP and take their grievances to the federal courts. In this they found the NAACP, its labor secretary, and its legal staff a major support.

The consequence was continuing disputes between the UAW and the NAACP, and its labor secretary, Herbert Hill. Part of the use to which Reuther put the “money and muscle” that he contributed to the NAACP was to try to maneuver with other members of the NAACP board to get rid of Hill and to take control of the Association labor department. He was unsuccessful and, as a result, there is a massive legal record.

### RACIST SENIORITY STRUCTURES

The key issue was seniority. In many plants, especially in the South, there was not a unified, plant-wide seniority list. As a result, there was no way that blacks working in segregated departments could be promoted into better occupations. That this was true was familiar to the union’s Fair Employment Practices Department and to Walter Reuther. Before Title VII, if the problem was raised by black workers they were ignored or, when that proved impossible, they were allowed to win a token victory—the promotion or transfer of two or three workers into lily-white departments—while the racist seniority structure remained untouched. But the NAACP became increasingly successful in challenging this structure in the courts.

As the effort to remove Herbert Hill didn’t work, Reuther resorted to another approach. Acting on behalf of the UAW, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), and other unions that had come under attack for their racial prejudices, Reuther, starting in

1959, proposed an “NAACP Labor Advisory Committee” made up of representatives of the UAW and other unions “and that the association agree to refrain from acting on complaints until given clearance by the Advisory Committee.”<sup>23</sup> But this approach failed also as the association repeatedly rejected this proposal. After Title VII was passed the UAW had good reason to be concerned about its reputation as a liberal, non-racist union. Hill writes: “In the two years after Title VII went into effect on July 2, 1965, the United Auto Workers experienced a 300% increase in the number of complaints its members brought to the Fair Practices Department of the union . . . and throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the UAW continued to be a defendant in Title VII litigation.”<sup>24</sup>

So tangled and confused is Lichtenstein in trying to put the best possible face on the sorry record of Reuther and organized labor on racial issues, that he is not above outright distortion. He writes that “the trade union movement, both the AFL-CIO and the UAW, was primarily responsible for the addition of FEPC . . . to the original Kennedy bill.” (377–8) This statement, according to Hill, “ignores the legislative history of the Act, ignores the role of the civil rights movement on this issue and fails to note that the modified bill labor supported was limited to future discriminatory practices. Furthermore, it would have insulated established seniority systems, thus preserving the racial *status quo* in employment for at least a generation.”<sup>25</sup> In addition, Lichtenstein charges that a 1961 NAACP report by Herbert Hill contained a “blistering” attack on the ILGWU, although there was no such attack in the report.<sup>26</sup> On the contrary, the only reference to the ILGWU was one of praise for integrating its Atlanta units with the help of the NAACP. This is typical of the distortions Lichtenstein introduces in his book.

Lichtenstein deliberately ignored evidence, such as the Hayes Aircraft Corporation case, that “The UAW frequently violated its formal civil rights policy, especially in the South. In 1957, the NAACP filed charges with the President’s Committee on Government Contracts against the Hayes Aircraft Corporation and the UAW on behalf of black union members. During the eight-year period between this action and July 2, 1965, the effective date of Title VII, the UAW had ample opportunity to eliminate the discriminatory pattern at Hayes and at other companies under contract to the union. Not only did it fail to do so, but it repeatedly negotiated collective bargaining agreements containing discriminatory seniority provisions even after the Civil Rights Act became law. . . .”<sup>27</sup>

## AMERICAN SOCIALISM AND RACE

Lichtenstein falls back on two arguments to diminish the taint of Reuther's racism. The first is to place Reuther in the tradition of American socialism. ". . . the legacy of Reuther's Debsian youth provides a final insight into his approach to racial politics in the 1940s. The American Socialist tradition put the difficulties confronting black workers firmly within a class framework, perhaps too firmly. From Eugene Debs to Norman Thomas, American Socialists had seen the 'Negro question' as but a function of a larger class inequity." (210) The history of American socialism in relation to the struggle for black equality is not an edifying one. It was based on the principle that the "Negro Question" was subordinated to the class question. Therefore, the tendency was to leave the achievement of equality to a future socialist society. There were many leading socialists who were outright racists. Victor Berger, for example, the Socialist Congressman from Milwaukee, thought Negroes were genetically inferior to whites. But to place on Debs's shoulders the blame for Reuther's blatant racism is outrageous.

The second defense Lichtenstein uses is to blame much of what the UAW leadership did or failed to do on the racism of the UAW membership. In this he is joined by many labor historians. But the argument will not hold up. I accept as a matter of simple fact that most American workers (like Americans of other classes) are racist. But so was Walter Reuther and so were the members of the UAW International Executive Board whom he gathered around him. There is no sign that the UAW was willing to act as aggressively against racism in the plants as they were against unauthorized strikes and rank and file militancy generally. The rank and file auto workers did not choose the national and regional staffs, which were overwhelmingly white, and they did not choose the candidates on the Reuther caucus slates. In addition, neither Lichtenstein nor most labor historians, show any interest in differentiating within the white working class the different levels of racism that exist, the degree to which that racism is encouraged by management and union leaders, and the rise and fall of racism in response to political, social, and economic conditions. The idea that white workers are a homogeneous mass, all rushing to participate in hate strikes, is simply not born out by the facts.

## DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

The record of Reuther's UAW in achieving equality for women was no better than its record on race. A symposium on Lichtenstein's

biography was organized by Nancy Gabin and appeared in *Labor History* in the Summer 1996 issue. Gabin's contribution to that symposium has some references to the status of women in the UAW that are quite inadequate. She argues that "Lichtenstein is able to situate women without contrivance, noting that the amalgamated character of Local 174 'helped energize and integrate women workers into the labor movement and the civic culture.'" (97)<sup>28</sup> That statement is a total non-sequitur. The idea that the women at the Ternstedt plant of GM were better off limited to an amalgamated local instead of being in greater control of their own fate in an independent local union makes sense only to Lichtenstein who quotes the local's newspaper, *The West Side Conveyor*, "An amalgamated local doesn't have all its eggs in one basket. When democratically run like the West Side, it can't be beat for solidarity and union power." (98) Lichtenstein accepts uncritically this self-serving boast of Local 174 which goes against all experience. Amalgamated locals in the UAW are inherently less democratic than locals based on single plants because too many of the members have no direct contact with the local's officers. An amalgamated local makes sense generally to bind together a number of small shops that are unable to sustain a meeting hall or other fixed expenses separately. The simple fact that amalgamated locals are scattered geographically makes contacts between members, campaigning for office, and similar activities much more difficult than if all the members worked in one plant or complex. All of this gives the officers of such a local a greater degree of independence from the membership. Reuther wanted an amalgamated local because it was his power base and the larger it was, the better, no matter what specious arguments were advanced to justify its existence.

But Gabin goes on to criticize Lichtenstein for abandoning the question of women workers in the second half of his book. This is intriguing because the explanation is supplied by Gabin in an article she wrote for the Winter 1979-80 issue of *Labor History* when she was a graduate student. She documented the contradiction between convention and executive board resolutions and the failure of the union's leadership to enforce them. The Women's Bureau of the UAW was put under the Fair Practices and Anti-Discrimination Department co-chaired by William Oliver who, as we noted above, had very little power to act on his own. In a report in 1947 the Fair Practices and Anti-Discrimination Department noted that "*The Fair Practices and Anti-Discrimination Department alone cannot solve all of these problems.*

... It behooves the International Executive Board to give serious consideration to this aspect of our internal discipline in order that democracy and fair play will be something more than window dressing.”<sup>29</sup>

How the practice worked is shown by the fate of a grievance filed by two women in Local 1020 protesting their discharge in violation of UAW policy. The chairman of the local Fair Practices Committee, William “McKenna acknowledged that the agreement [with the company under which the women were fired] was in violation of International policy but he was not at all certain that this was of any significance. ‘Exactly what is *insisted* upon and what is desired by the International,’ he asked.” Tom Nolan, the local president, challenged the International to act. “The International submitted the grievance against the company to an arbitrator selected by the American Arbitration Association. But it was Tom Nolan who presented the case for the women and the union. Not only did the appellants note his ineffectiveness, but so, too, did the neutral arbitrator, who said, ‘What am I doing here if the Company and the Union agree to lay off married women?’”<sup>30</sup>

Gabin cites a number of cases and concludes that “The regional directors, International representatives, local union officials and the UAW membership were, of course, all subject to the authority of the IEB [International Executive Board]. In failing to exercise its power ... the IEB, in effect, sanctioned discrimination against women.”<sup>31</sup> In one case in which the union won the reinstatement of four women, the company refused to pay back wages on the grounds that it was the union’s responsibility. “Leonard Woodcock [who was then on the International Executive Board of the UAW], chairman of the IEB Appeal Committee for the case, advised the IEB that it should close the case because the local union was liable for the lost wages of the four women and to force it to pay ‘would be just rubbing salt in the wound.’” And Gabin adds: “Woodcock did not extend his sensitivity regarding the local union’s injured pride to the economic distress of the four women.”<sup>32</sup>

All of this reflected the failure of leadership on the issue of gender discrimination by Walter Reuther. In a later book on the same subject Gabin notes that “The president of the UAW indicated his own ambivalence about women’s right to equal treatment by minimizing the significance of a section of a 1955 convention resolution on job security for female auto workers which instructed regional directors ‘to disapprove any contract that discriminates in any way against

women workers.' In response to a male delegate who wondered 'if we still retain our autonomy if the resolution is accepted,' Walter Reuther explained that the principle of gender equity might be sacrificed in 'a practical collective bargaining decision.'<sup>33</sup>

It is interesting that Nancy Gabin did not connect her earlier writing on women in the post-war UAW with Lichtenstein's failure to deal with that at all. She, like other commentators, tended to give Lichtenstein the benefit of the doubt. Perhaps he didn't know how Reuther's UAW failed to live up to its pledge to achieve equality for its members. However, Lichtenstein's omissions and distortions in his treatment of the racial policy of the UAW suggest a similar attitude toward the evidence regarding gender discrimination.

### FOREIGN POLICY

The foreign policy of the UAW during Reuther's presidency presents another problem for the biographer. Reuther, the UAW, the CIO and the AFL all supported the cold war against Communism. Reuther also supported the hawks in the Vietnam war to the bitter end. Lichtenstein tries to soften this blow to Reuther's "liberalism" by referring to his alleged "dovish instincts" (421) for which the author supplies no evidence. Reuther's total identification with the cold warriors of the Democratic Party raises the general question of the relation of Reuther's "foreign policy" to the labor movement. Reuther's support of the anti-communist crusade was not as crass or as crude as that of George Meany and the AFL. It nevertheless resulted in the support of two goals of American imperial foreign policy. It contributed to splitting the labor movement in the industrial countries of Europe and, therefore, weakening it. This was especially true in Italy and France. And it contributed to the support of military dictatorships in Latin America, Asia and elsewhere which suppressed unions and peasant movements as "communist" and created the huge areas of low-wage, super-exploited workers that are available to American corporations and to which they can export jobs.

### LIMITS OF UNION LEADERSHIP

Lichtenstein thinks that Reuther left a legacy that could be useful to the contemporary labor movement. The problem is that he thinks that legacy is the rhetoric of "social unionism." That needs closer examination. One part of the legacy is authoritarian rule. In this, of course, Reuther was not alone. John L. Lewis was a courageous

and brilliant labor tactician. However, before he reached that point he came close to destroying the United Mine Workers in the process of establishing his dictatorship. He expelled socialists and other dissidents and took over whole districts of the union until an absolute majority of the national executive board consisted of Lewis appointees. On one level, his rule was more absolute than Reuther's. But even Lewis's power had its limits. During the war when he acceded to demands of the government, the miners went on a nationwide series of unauthorized strikes. Lewis rushed to the head of the parade. He was not about to be left behind by his miners. However, he left an institution that was run by yes-men and hacks. When he vacated the scene the petty, tyrannical bureaucrats who were left in charge could think of nothing better to do than assassinate an opposition presidential candidate who had already been defeated. Tony Boyle, the union's president, went to jail for the murder. That was so extreme that the government had to intervene and it supervised an election. In most cases, authoritarian rule does not disturb the government—in the same way that foreign dictators don't disturb the government—it assures stable, responsible rule.

One of the things that neither Lewis nor any of the radical, militant union leaders could deal with was technological change. "In the decisive coal negotiations of 1952 the Southern coal producers, owners mostly of smaller mines, offered to meet all the union demands if Lewis would order three-day production in the industry. The large mechanized mines opposed this move since it meant higher overhead costs for unutilized equipment. Lewis, reversing a previous course, chose to line up with the large mechanized mines and their desire for continuous output. The decision meant higher wages for the men but a permanent loss of jobs in the industry."<sup>34</sup> In the ten years from 1950 to 1960 the employment of miners fell by three-fifths to under 150,000. The bulk of those cut off from the mines made up much of what became known as Appalachia.

The same thing happened in another way in the west coast longshoremen's union. Harry Bridges, notorious radical and hero of the great strike of 1934, agreed to allow the containerization of the docks. To insure acceptance of this blow to dockside employment, the contract guaranteed the jobs of the existing longshoremen but the union created a new class of B members so that the younger and newer workers would not have the vote or political power in the union. The problem of technological change did not have the same appearance in



the auto industry. The union has never challenged technological innovation, never attempted to achieve control over the technology or the workplace, so the changes came in lesser waves.

When the first form of automation occurred in the industry in the later 1950s, the result was the beginning of downsizing and the intensification of speed-up so that the non-automated jobs could keep up with the increased production coming off automated production lines. At the Dodge Main plant in Hamtramck, a predominantly Polish city completely surrounded by Detroit, there was widespread resistance in the form of small wildcat strikes. There was a joke going around Hamtramck that an optimist was a Dodge worker who took his lunch to work because there were so many departmental walkouts that would eventually shut the whole plant down that workers would be sent home long before the end of their shift.

What was happening, however, was not a joke. The company tried to break down the old production standards. A worker would be assigned a job and a higher production quota—which couldn't be met. The worker was sent home as a penalty. The department would walk out in support of the penalized worker. The company would fire 10 or 20 workers and discipline others with lesser penalties for striking illegally. The union would arrive in order to get the workers back to work, promising to deal with their problems. The strike would end, the union would get the firing of all but a couple of workers rescinded, and declare victory. However, in the process two things happened. The worker who had been penalized originally was no longer there and the new production standard was in effect. In addition, the leading militants, stewards or committeemen or rank and filers, were gotten rid of. After a few years of this, discipline was restored and the Reuther regime was secured. This, or its equivalent, happened in many plants around the industry.

### TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE

I do not want to imply that better union leaders could have taken care of the problems of automation and robotics. With greater militancy, however, some concessions could have been won instead of the total abdication of the labor movement. In any case, there are limits to what unions can do in a capitalist society. Karl Marx wrote in the *Communist Manifesto*, "The bourgeoisie cannot exist without continually revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production and all the social relations. Constant

revolution in production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones.”<sup>35</sup> The American working class has experienced this reality time and again in its history. Steel unionism was crushed for years in the great Homestead strike of 1892 at least in part because of the invention of the Bessemer furnace which eliminated the need for and, therefore, the power of the skilled steel maker. The computer put linotypers out of business. The steel belted radial tire decimated Akron as a tire manufacturing center.

The decentralization of the auto industry is obviously, in part, the result of the desire of manufacturers to move to low wage, non-union areas, such as the American South. The technological basis for this, however, is that the new technology cannot be placed in the old, multi-story type of factory. It requires huge, one-story structures, which simply cannot be contained in old factory towns. Detroit industry has been decimated, although a certain number of plants have moved to the near or far suburbs. The two exceptions, the Cadillac Poletown plant on the Detroit-Hamtramck border and the Chrysler Jefferson Ave. plant which now makes Jeeps, required huge government subsidies and the destruction of viable working class neighborhoods. Could unions have prevented the move to greener space? No. But they could have fought for greater control over those moves and they could have prevented or seriously limited the sell-off of parts plants to non-union companies. Or, they could have organized the parts industry which now makes up 60 or 70% of the auto industry.

There is now a stirring in what has been a moribund labor movement. The change at the top has been historic, at least because it is the first contest for the presidency of the AFL and the AFL-CIO in 100 years. That there will be fundamental change is doubtful. The new leaders have the same characteristics as the old leaders. John Sweeney made his reputation as a more progressive leader by his success in organizing janitors in his union, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). In the local that contributed to this reputation, Local 399 in Los Angeles, the janitors successfully challenged the old leadership in a local election and won every post except president—which they left uncontested out of respect for the old president. One of John Sweeney’s last acts as president of the SEIU was to put the local under trusteeship, remove the newly elected officers and restore the old leadership to power. Sweeney’s own home local, the janitors Local 32B-32J, is as corrupt as ever, where members have to buy jobs with

bribes.<sup>36</sup> The need for authoritarian rule remains paramount with the new progressive labor leaders.

Lichtenstein's confusing and ambiguous terminology does not help our understanding of these developments. Lichtenstein, who is a leading member of the Democratic Socialists of America, likes to put progressive unionism in a social democratic framework. What does that mean? Social Democracy is nowhere defined. Sometimes it seems to mean some kind of socialism; sometimes it seems to mean the so-called liberalism of the Democratic Party.

Lichtenstein was one of the leading organizers of the recent conferences designed to reestablish the collaboration of left academics and intellectuals with the leaders of organized labor. On one level, there has always been collaboration. Attempts to organize the most downtrodden, such as farm workers, health workers, university clerical staffs, etc., were always supported by academic leftists and liberals. There is a barrier that makes it difficult to go beyond that—the rejection of free, critical discussion by the labor officialdom. If they are to permit more than intellectuals carrying picket signs, they will have to accept leftists who support dissident movements, who criticize corruption, who refuse to be coopted by wealthy and influential organizations. Academics and intellectuals will do what they always do, come down on various sides of questions in dispute. In other words, there will not be a unified left intellectual response to the recent stirrings in the AFL-CIO.

Is the labor movement dead? I don't think so. The union movement has been based, at least since the beginning of this century, on a social compact—the union controls the militancy of its members and provides a disciplined workforce in exchange for better wages and fringe benefits and a certain amount of objectivity and fairness in the organization of labor relations. Why has this fallen apart in the last couple of decades? The control of militancy by anti-labor legislation and union discipline is no longer necessary, at least for now. A long period of high unemployment, the disruption of relations among workers by the current technological revolution, and the existence of a blatantly anti-labor government have accomplished a diminution in militancy which made corporations less dependent on a willing labor leadership.

The tensions that are growing in American workplaces indicate that that can't last indefinitely. Historically, explosive outbursts have taken place, such as the mass strikes of 1877, the formation of the

CIO in the 1930s and so forth. It generally takes a while for new circumstances to be absorbed by workers and responses organized. The great depression was in its fifth year before militant responses broke out in the great strikes of 1934. Success doesn't require great numbers, it requires strategic placing. Unions have never included a majority of the working class. Two small brake plants could control virtually all of General Motors' North American production. The French strikes of 1996 won major concessions from the government although a smaller proportion of workers are organized in France than in the United States and the unions are divided into several competing federations.

Although, according to the NLRB, the AFL-CIO declined by 100,000 members in 1996, the first full year of Sweeney's presidency, American unions will probably have some success in gaining new members. Whether that will give them strength is another matter. The UAW has organized clerks, social workers, and other white collar workers. That has not strengthened auto workers in relation to their managements. And the UAW has been unable to organize white collar workers in the auto industry. The solution which seems about to be put in place is merger. The UAW is planning to unite with the Steelworkers and the Machinists unions. That, too, will not lead to greater strength or militancy—except in the only area which seems to matter to the union leaders—influence in the Democratic Party, especially in local politics. Mergers, in fact, have weakened some unions. The United Packinghouse Workers Union was one of America's most militant and democratic unions. Declines in membership led to mergers with the Amalgamated Meatcutters and Butcher Workmen's Union and then with the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW). The result was a sell-out by the International Union and disastrous defeat in the famous P-9 strike against Hormel in Austin, Minnesota. Merged unions tend to be less democratic, because they are more divided into departments and divisions, than unions based overwhelmingly on one industry.

Reuther did not cause the decline of American unions. He was simply part of the process which led to that decline. Like John L. Lewis, he was brighter than most, more innovative, and more disciplined. He is usually associated with "social unionism." That is an ambiguous term and is based, just like business unionism, which doesn't pretend to be concerned about anything other than economic benefits, on the old social compact, a disciplined workforce in return for

monetary benefits. Most of the rest is rhetoric or it is dependent on a liberal Democratic Party and a welfare state. Of course, unions should be involved in politics. But in years of Democratic control of Congress and the Presidency, unions have not been able to win any relaxation in anti-labor legislation, right-to-work states, and the like. Reuther's legacy is essentially the same as the legacy of all of the leaders of the CIO—authoritarian unions dominated by career bureaucrats. Can the situation be improved? Yes, to a degree. But fundamentally the current crisis seems to be heading in a direction that cannot be contained by recruiting members, mergers, or putting more money into Democratic campaigns. The tensions in the society as a whole and the tensions in the workplaces of America seem to me to be leading in the direction of significant social confrontations. The labor movement will undoubtedly begin to grow once more and its services will once again be needed to control growing militancy. But it is more likely that new forms of struggle will emerge. They will make Lichtenstein's idea of going back to Reuther's "social vision" irrelevant.

1. Andrea Graziosi, "Foreign Workers in Soviet Russia, 1920–1940: Their Experience and Their Legacy," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 33, Spring 1988, pp. 49, 53.

2. C.L.R. James, *State Capitalism and World Revolution*, Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Co., 1986 (1950), p. 43.

3. Palmiro Togliatti, *Lectures on Fascism*, NY: International Publishers, 1976, p. 105.

4. Robert Blauner, *Alienation and Freedom*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964.

5. Martin Glaberman and Seymour Faber, "The End of Independence: A Case Study of Local Trusteeship," unpublished paper presented to the Third Conference on Blue Collar Workers and Their Communities, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, Canada, May 4, 1979.

6. C.L.R. James, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

7. Clark Kerr, *Labor and Management in Industrial Society*, New York: Anchor Books, 1964, p. 93.

8. Paul Jacobs, *Old Before Its Time: Collective Bargaining at 28*, Santa Barbara, CA: Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, 1963, p. 14.

9. Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology*, New York: Collier Books, 1962, pp. 214–215.

10. For details, see Herbert Hill, *Black Labor and the American Legal System*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985, Chap. 3.

11. See Bob Fitch, "Our Labor Leaders Need French Lessons," *New Politics*, Vol. VI, No. 1, pp. 44–54.

12. William Serrin, *The Company and the Union*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973, p. 4.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 298–99.

14. Staughton Lynd, "The Dayton Strike," *New Politics*, Vol. VI, No. 1, pp. 55–6.

15. Frank Marquart, *An Auto Worker's Journal: The UAW From Crusade To One Party Union*, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1975. Marquart was an auto worker who became a labor educator and worked for many years for the UAW International and for several union locals.
16. See Martin Glaberman, *Wartime Strikes*, Detroit: Bewick Editions, 1980.
17. William Gould, *Black Workers in White Unions*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, pp. 21, 371–2.
18. Memorandum from William H. Oliver to Walter P. Reuther, “UAW Fair Practices Survey—1963,” Jan. 16, 1964, Box 90, Folder 12, Reuther Collection, Archives of Labor History and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit.
19. Letter from Herbert Hill to Nelson Lichtenstein, Dec. 19, 1989.
20. Apparently the material conflicted with Lichtenstein’s distorted image of Reuther. The exchange between Lichtenstein is contained in the following correspondence, all in possession of the author: Hill to Lichtenstein, Dec. 19, 1989; Hill to Lichtenstein, Dec. 30, 1990; Lichtenstein to Hill, Oct. 11, 1994; Hill to Lichtenstein, Oct. 27, 1994.
21. Herbert Hill, “Black Workers, Organized Labor, and Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act: Legislative History and Litigation Record,” in Herbert Hill and James E. Jones, Jr., eds., *Race in America: The Struggle for Equality*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993, p. 273.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 272.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 281.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 277.
25. Herbert Hill, “The Problem of Race in American Labor History,” *Reviews in American History*, V. 24, No. 2, June 1966, p. 198.
26. Herbert Hill, “Racism Within Organized Labor: A Report of Five Years of the AFL-CIO, 1955–1960,” NAACP, New York, 1961, reprinted, *Journal of Negro Education*, Spring 1961, pp. 109–118.
27. Hill, “The Problem of Race,” n. 25.
28. Nancy Gabin, “Biography and the Social History of Labor in the 20th Century,” *Labor History*, Vol. 37, No. 3, Summer 1966, p. 334.
29. Quoted in Nancy Gabin, “Women Workers and the UAW in the Post-World War II Period: 1945–1954,” *Labor History*, Vol. 21, No. 1, Winter 1979–80, p. 12. Emphasis in original.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 22. Emphasis in original.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
33. Nancy F. Gabin, *Feminism in the Labor Movement: Women and the United Auto Workers, 1935–1975*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990, p. 174.
34. Daniel Bell, *op. cit.*, p. 214.
35. Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976, Vol. 6, p. 487.
36. See Michael Hirsch, “Job Selling at the Janitor’s Local,” *New Politics*, Vol. VI, No. 2, pp. 159–161.

## II. THE WORKING CLASS



## MARXISM, THE WORKING CLASS AND THE TRADE UNIONS

IN HIS ESSAY, "The Fate of the Unions" (*Studies on the Left*, Vol. IV, No. 1), Stanley Aronowitz continues the discussion of a theme that has been a concern of the new left during the past few years: the role of the working class as an agency for social change. On the one hand he lends support to the analysis of C. Wright Mills, at least to the extent that, presumably, the working class in the advanced capitalist nations has been de-radicalized in the post war years. On the other hand, in proposing certain tactics and "immediate demands" he puts forward the view that the "stabilization" of capitalism was only a temporary phenomenon and sees hope for some future radicalization of the workers.

The difficulty in the discussion so far is that it has not been a real discussion. The two antagonistic points of view have shared a fundamental conception of the nature of the working class and that has served to obscure the basic questions involved. Those who reject the view that the working class is *essential* to any fundamental social change under capitalism and believe that Marxism should be rejected or, at the very least, substantially modified, and the traditional defenders of Marxism have in common that they do not really discuss the working class at all but the unions and political parties that speak for the workers. The idea that what the working class is and does is equivalent to what the mass labor organizations are and do is, in essence, a variant of the idea that the test of how advanced or backward the working class may be is the extent to which it lends its support to *the* correct party and *the* correct political line; both views share the belief that the workers are backward unless properly led and organized.

I would like to pose the question, both theoretically and practically, in a way that would sharpen the discussion and perhaps make it more fruitful.

Marx's view of the working class was that its character and role were determined by its objective position in society, above all by its activity in the process of production. Marx was not the first socialist. But he was the first socialist to call his socialism scientific, that is, based, not on the desire for reform or ideal constructions of some future society, but on an analysis of the actual social forces and social relations under capitalism that would give rise to a class that could only



struggle against the system as a whole and that would determine the general nature of the new society to be established. "And if these material elements of a complete revolution are not present," he wrote, "(namely, on the one hand, the existence of productive forces, on the other the formation of a revolutionary mass, which revolts not only against separate conditions of society up till then, but against the very 'production of life' till then, the 'total activity' on which it was based), then as far as practical development is concerned, it is absolutely immaterial whether the 'idea' of this revolution has been expressed a hundred times already . . ." (*German Ideology*, pp. 29–30.)

What is involved here is a question of method. If the working class is rejected as the crucial instrument for basic social change, then it becomes necessary either to abandon socialism as a reasonable goal or to reject, not just Marxism, but any attempt to relate the struggle for socialism to the objective developments of the existing society. In the latter case, you have to concern yourself with such abstract questions as "will," "idealism," etc., and to base yourself, in a society in which capitalism controls the overwhelming preponderance of the means of communication and education, on the education of scattered individuals (that is, unrelated to social class) and the fusing of these individuals together in some form adequate to the reconstruction of society. That, it seems to me, is either idealist nonsense or putschism, and someone has yet to come forward to present such a point of view in a way that can be taken seriously.

But we have to take this a step further. What is the basis for the objectively revolutionary role of the working class? Misconceptions abound. Aronowitz proposes that "the central focus for a program of structural reform at this particular time must center on poverty and unemployment." (*Op. cit.*, p. 71.) Mills states it more generally in his criticism of Marxism: "Marxism is basically a politics of hunger. . . ." (*The Marxists*, p. 32.) Was that Marx's view, that it was hunger and suffering that would drive the working class to revolt? The crucial example always given is what Marx called the General Law of Capital Accumulation, that as capital accumulates, so does the misery and degradation of the workers. But examine, if you will, the words which Marx uses: "It follows therefore that in proportion as capital accumulates, the lot of the laborer, be his payment high or low, must grow worse." (*Capital*, Vol. I, Kerr edition, pp. 708–709.)

Be his payment high or low! Marx's description of actual suffering, hunger, misery, degradation in Nineteenth Century England, and

even the fact that sections of the working class in the United States and elsewhere do suffer absolute degradation and misery today, do not alter the fact that Marx was not talking only of wages or standard of living. He was also talking of the intensification of exploitation on the job, of the increased alienation and fragmentation of the worker in production, of the reduction in the worker's skills and power to control his own work process.

To understand Marx's theoretical conceptions of the working class does not, of course, relieve one of the responsibility of examining concretely the actual existing working class. But it provides a guide to where to look and what to look for. The books reviewed by Aronowitz, although partial and limited, all provide an indication of the separation between the rank-and-file workers and the labor leadership. In his *New Men of Power*, C. Wright Mills has also helped to dispel the myth that men like Meany or Reuther or Dubinsky or Macdonald in any way reflect the views of the membership of their organizations. These men are part of the elite that accepts responsibility for maintaining the status quo.

But where the myth is rejected in certain respects it is maintained in others because there seems no alternative—and the rank-and-file union members are pictured as, if not supporters of their leaders, then at the most an apathetic mass who offer no real alternative and therefore legitimize the claims of the labor leaders to speak for their organizations. This is implicit in Aronowitz's proposal that "it is necessary to raise immediate demands" (*op cit.*, p. 71), as if workers have to be agitated to know what their immediate needs are.

There seems to be little attention paid by intellectuals concerned with the labor movement to the actual, concrete, changing, American working class. It is ironic that the first documentation that helped to confirm Marx's conceptions of alienation in the United States came from such conservative sociologists as Elton Mayo and Peter Drucker. Consider, for example, how little has been reported of the 1955 strike wave.

In 1955 (with the automation of the auto industry underway) Walter Reuther won one of his great victories for the auto workers: the guaranteed annual wage. Well, not quite the guaranteed annual wage: supplemental unemployment benefits. But it was a real enough victory when the pattern was set with a contract with the Ford Motor Company. And yet, the representatives of the union and the corporation had barely finished smiling for the newspaper cameras, when the auto workers, instead of joining in the victory celebration,

wildcatted from coast to coast. This was unprecedented, for a strike to begin precisely when the victory was achieved. The workers were not striking against SUB (although they were striking against their union and its whole conception of what the workers wanted); they were striking for something that became known as local grievances or local demands which they counterposed to the national union-company agreement. This has been the pattern of all UAW contract settlements since that time although Reuther has attempted in every way he could to incorporate the local strike into the framework of the national settlement to stifle and side-track the local demands.

Now what are these local grievances that stand so modestly opposed to the publicity-getting national contracts? Their content would surprise all those who are convinced of the apathy of the American worker, of his support for an officially promulgated American Way of Life. The Detroit press referred to the existence of thousands of such grievances in single plants. They vary in some details from plant to plant. Their particular form, naturally, is determined by the concrete conditions of the plant involved. But a summary is very revealing. They dealt with the rate of production as a whole and the amount and type of work each man is supposed to do. They dealt with health and safety conditions in the plants. They dealt with the amount of personal time each worker was to have and how it could be used (for physical relief, for rest, or communication among workers). They dealt with the hiring, firing, layoff and recall of workers. They dealt with the building of new plants, the discarding of old plants and the transfer of work from plant to plant. They dealt with the hours of work and whether and how overtime was to be worked. They dealt with all aspects of discipline and what authority, if any, management was to have over the worker in the factory. In short, they dealt with every aspect of life in the factory, whether directly in production or not.

If we examine these "local grievances" as a totality, both in the range of subjects with which they are concerned and the consistency with which they are put forward whenever the opportunity presents itself, only one conclusion is possible. The auto workers are striving to substitute their authority and control for the authority and control of management in the process of production. The name for this, to Marxists, anti-Marxists and non-Marxists, is socialism. Without workers' management of production there is no socialism. And all else that is associated with socialism is essentially related to making possible, defending and extending workers' management of production

and of society as a whole. This was where the American working class had reached in 1955.

There is another example of quite another type and on a much smaller scale. There is a small auto parts plant in Detroit that remains unorganized in that union stronghold. There have been several attempts to organize this plant in the last 10 years by several unions, including the UAW and the Teamsters. All have failed. All of the workers there (the majority are women) have either worked in the major auto plants themselves or have close relatives working there. They are quite familiar with the union and conditions of work at the big plants. Their attitude is very sober. They believe that if a union came into the plant their wages would go up—they are now below the UAW level. They also believe that their working conditions would deteriorate. It is their considered judgment that they would rather have better working conditions than better wages and that as a small and isolated shop they would be forced into one pattern or the other. Most American radicals would call these workers very backward (while, at the same time, calling for the union leadership to organize the unorganized). I submit that it is the American radicals who are backward and that these workers (whether their decision is right or wrong is not relevant to this point) are very sophisticated people, much more aware of the realities of life in the process of production.]

It is impossible at this time to deal with further examples. Most unfortunately there is not sufficient space to go into the integral connection between the Negro struggle and the instinctive striving of American workers to reconstruct society. But the examples cited should at least be sufficient to make the necessary point, if not prove it to everyone's satisfaction.

For more than ten years a major revolution has been taking place in American industry, in the process of production. It is usually referred to as automation but it involves more than the new automatic and semi-automatic processes. Automation has been combined with an extensive concentration in management and control in industry and the elimination of smaller firms. At the same time, and for essentially the same reasons, there has been a widespread decentralization in the process of production with new plants of major corporations springing up all across the country. (An essentially similar process has been taking place in the Soviet Union since the 20th Congress of the CPSU and in other industrial nations.) This new revolution in the work process is of significance because it has served to break up

the ties, the methods of struggle, the forms of organization (formal and informal) and the ideas which workers have developed through practice and association over a period of years, The last ten years have been years of ferment, of reorganization, of regroupment, all taking place as a process deep within the working class.

This is the kind of thing that Marx would have recognized at once, for he was always looking for it. "The bourgeoisie cannot exist without continually revolutionizing the instruments of production," he wrote, "and thereby the relations of production and all social relations. . . . Constant revolution in production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life and his relations with his kind." (*Communist Manifesto*, International Publishers, 1932, p. 12.)

Aronowitz wants to go back to the strategy of the thirties and forties and to organize a rank-and-file opposition caucus, as if World War II, the atomic bomb, automation have left the working class untouched and unsullied. He is discussing a category, the working class, that has long been transformed. It seems to me that the first task for radical intellectuals is not to organize workers but to understand them.

The discussion of the role of the working class as an agency of fundamental social change is an important one. But there has to be a theoretical understanding of what is being discussed and the consequences, both theoretical and practical, of the respective positions taken in the discussion. And it has to be a discussion of a real, existing, that is, changing and developing working class, not of an abstract category that exists only in memory—and second-hand memory at that.

## UNIONS AND BLACK LIBERATION

A Review of *The Negro and the American Labor Movement*, ed. Julius Jacobson. Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1968. 430 pp., \$1.75 (pbk).

THIS BOOK HELPS TO fill a great void in material on a crucial area of American life, making considerable information on black workers and the trade union movement easily accessible. Its early chapters, devoted primarily to the history of the problem, are especially valuable: August Meier and Elliott Rudwick on black leaders' attitudes toward the labor movement, Herbert Gutman on the United Mine Workers, Ray Marshall on southern unions and Mark Karson and Ronald Radosh on the A.F. of L., provide very useful contributions to an understanding of the current situation. The anthology as a whole, however, and particularly those parts dealing with immediate issues and arguments, are marred by a traditional view of the struggle for black liberation. It is a view from before the time of Debs and, although it is somewhat modified here to remove the most glaring contradictions with current reality, it does not go much beyond the timeworn slogan of "Black and White, Unite and Fight."

*The Negro and the American Labor Movement* deals primarily with the organized union movement, which is a reasonable enough area of discussion but does not justify either the tendency to identify the unions with the workers as a whole or the distinctions that are made when the two are viewed separately. Jacobson, in his introduction, notes "that the efforts of the CIO leadership to raise the rank and file to its own level of equalitarian consciousness were inadequate." (p. 8.) The idea that the labor leadership (or any significant part of it) has had a more radical consciousness than the rank-and-file worker is a myth with widespread support. But when union leaders use a language that is constantly belied by their acts it seems much more reasonable to believe that their consciousness is reflected in their acts and that their language is a reflection of what they believe to be the consciousness of their constituents. The leaders uniformly use the harshest disciplinary measures against their members on such questions as wildcat strikes or violations of company-union contracts. When they begin to show as much regard for prejudice against Negroes as they do for prejudice against no-strike pledges, it may begin to be necessary to take them seriously.

White workers are shot through with prejudice against blacks. It would be difficult to imagine it to be otherwise after centuries of slavery and a system of education, entertainment and communication completely dominated by racist doctrines. But there have been occasions when workers have attempted to overcome this heritage and have been pushed back by their leaders. The Detroit auto plants during World War II are a case in point. Thousands of southerners, whites and blacks, men and women found themselves working side by side. Most southern whites, propagandized by years of stories of race mixing, were prepared to accept the "worst" when they came North. In many plants *social* intercourse across race and sex lines became common. By the end of the war, it was apparent that the basic characteristic of the union leaders' ideology was not equality but timidity, and the racism inherent in this society was quickly reaffirmed. Neither the union nor its leaders ever gave anything more than verbal allegiance to racial equality. The gains made were made by the direct pressure of black workers. When national unions, such as the UAW, moved against the overtly racist practices of some southern locals, it was not from any egalitarian consciousness at all but from the need to placate the powerfully-placed black workers in their membership in the North.

### UNIONS AS UNIONS

More fundamental than the "consciousness" of union leaders (best left to psychoanalysts) is the role of the union as such. Jacobson says that "the unions' right to organize, to bargain collectively, to improve the welfare of their members must be fortified constantly by progressive, democratic social and economic legislation. Similarly, the position of the Negro worker in American society, not merely as a worker but as a Negro with unique needs and interests, cannot be improved without a continual growth and application in life of democratic principles." (p. 22.) This is traditionally the objective basis for the Negro-labor coalition. The problem is the union institution and how it has changed in time. Old categories no longer apply and there is little point in talking as if this were 1938 instead of 1968.

Let us be specific: "The unions' right to organize, to bargain collectively," is no longer equivalent to "improv[ing] the welfare of their members." One could ask whose welfare was improved by John L. Lewis' right to bargain away the jobs of 150,000 miners in the 1950's by accepting unlimited mechanization of the mines; whose welfare was protected by Harry Bridges' notorious waterfront contract which

reduced the younger workers to second class status in the union and on the job; and whose welfare is improved by Reuther's contracts which steadily destroy the working conditions of the auto workers for trivial fringe benefits. These were among the most militant of the industrial unions. Most unions are much worse. It is not accidental that the right to organize and bargain collectively of the great industrial unions is strongly protected by the forces of law and order in most circumstances. (This, of course, does not apply to newer unions in peripheral industries, such as agriculture.) The basic function has become to participate in the administration of production and to protect the relative position of a favored few. This should be visible to anyone familiar with conditions in basic industry, whose head is not still back in the 'thirties.

[Under these circumstances the objective mutuality of interest between black and white workers has to be sought elsewhere. It can be found in the union only in the sense that the union has become hostile to the basic interests of both black and white workers.] It cannot be found on the simple questions of race, but rather in the fact that their conditions of life and work force black workers and white workers to fight the same enemy, an enemy which is not simply the abstract "system" but the particular institutions of this society that oppress those whom it dominates, including the government, the corporations, and the unions.

The need to struggle within the unions against racism and racist practices should not blind either the student or activist to a sense of historic and economic development. Battles over "consciousness" in itself have accomplished little here. Sumner M. Rosen, in his article on the CIO, notes: "Most advances secured by Negro industrial workers during the CIO's life time were due to dominant economic forces, specifically the acute and prolonged labor shortage which prevailed during the Second World War." Thus, economic forces will not secure advances without struggle, but struggle will not secure advances that have no relation to the specific historical conditions.

And it is the point of history at which the book is weakest. There is little recognition of the continuing, even growing, power and significance of the black industrial working class. On the one hand, blacks continue to serve as a "permanent reserve army of the unemployed," for a blue-collar sector in which the absolute number of jobs has risen in the last decade. On the other hand, they (along with the white industrial workers) continue to reside in a critical position for



the possibility of a successful socialist revolution, at the basic gears of the social order. The presence of black majorities in major auto plants, particularly Ford and Chrysler, is the basis for such developments as DRUM (Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement) which has shut down the main Dodge plant several times. Black workers do man significant segments of American industry from the inside. They can shut it down; they can transform it or destroy it.

The motion of millions of workers in the 'thirties to transform American society led to effective unity between black and white industrial workers and prevented the unemployment from leading to race wars. But the struggle for liberation was then, and is today, countered by the reaction. The growth of the Klan, of the Black Legion, of the movements of Coughlin and Gerald L.K. Smith attempted to counter the unrest and the revolutionary outbreaks. Their equivalents are everywhere evident today as a response to the struggle for liberation. The radical rejoinder must go beyond defense onto the offensive, based on the strategic strength of the black industrial worker and his ability to carry the white workers along with him. The greatest barrier to such a development is the notion that struggles of black and white workers have to take place within the framework of the labor unions.]

An example of this latter notion is Jacobson's defense of preferential hiring for Negroes (pp. 13-14.) He is forced to reduce the question to terms that are manageable within a union framework: isn't the graduated income tax preferential? etc., etc. In fact, of course, preferential hiring barely scratches the surface. If black workers were preferentially hired everywhere they would still be the last hired and, by seniority standards, the first fired. But the union has no choice but to defend the seniority system which discriminates against black people, young people and women. Its function in this society is to administer the rules by which its members are protected against capitalism's worst evils, and there is no way it can relinquish this function without ceasing to be a union. What is required is not preferential hiring (except as a modest local demand) but a complete reorganization of jobs. And that is possible only on the basis of a new society, one in which jobs are not dependent on the requirements of managers but on the collective decision of the workers. That may be a Utopian ideal or a practical possibility, according to how one sees it. In either case, it is in fundamental opposition to the unions as they now are or as they may conceivably become.

## BLACK CATS, WHITE CATS, WILDCATS: AUTO WORKERS IN DETROIT

**D**ETROIT WORKERS HAVE BEEN through many stages. From carriage production to car production to tank and plane production and back to car production. From prosperity to war to depression to war and back to prosperity and depression. From open shop to union shop; from democratic union to bureaucratic union.

Modern mass production is most closely associated with the introduction of the moving assembly line by Ford before World War I. The combination of relatively high wages combined with the most intense exploitation is also associated with the auto industry and Ford's famous "five dollar day."

Ford also provides the crucial turning point in the modern history of Detroit. In 1941, the year that Ford was organized, the transition was made from the organizing days to the period of stability and legality. After 1941 what was left to be organized was accomplished either by government fiat in the war plants or by NLRB election. The workers were kept out of it.

Just as important was the Ford contract, which was also intended to keep the workers out of it. Everyone was amazed that Ford, who had resisted the union to the bitter end, had granted concessions to the union far beyond what had been won at GM and Chrysler. Full time for union committeemen and the dues checkoff were the keys to the Ford contract. What it achieved was the incorporation of the union in the management of the plant.

The earlier contracts were simple documents which left the workers free to fight with any weapon they chose.

### NEW WORKERS

During the war years there was a tremendous influx of new workers into the auto plants. They were southerners, black and white, and women. The demands of the war and the shortage of labor combined to give workers substantial weapons in their struggles. Black workers fought for upgrading into production jobs (other than foundries). Women became production workers on a large scale. The union leadership attempted to surrender the bargaining powers of the workers by rushing to give the government a no-strike pledge. Union officials took places on government boards. There began the growing merger

of union hierarchy with the political power structure.

The resistance of workers to this process began to widen the gap between the rank and file of the union and the officials at the top. It was in Detroit that this resistance reached its high points.

A struggle against the no-strike pledge was carried on in the UAW against the major caucuses in the union. This reached its peak at the 1944 convention of the UAW when the top officials were chastized and embarrassed in front of the government officials they tried to serve by the defeat of resolutions to retain the no-strike pledge.

A curious example of the problem of working-class consciousness came out of that convention. The question of the pledge was referred to a membership referendum. In this vote by mail, the no-strike pledge was accepted by a vote of two to one. However, at the same time, in the Detroit area auto-war plants, a majority of workers wildcatted time and time again.

#### REUTHER'S CAREER

The Reuther regime in the UAW coincides with the major post-war transformation of the auto industry. The centralization of power with the elimination of the smaller auto companies (Kaiser, Hudson, Packard, etc.) was combined with the decentralization of production in the newly automated or modernized plants. Reuther continued the policies begun by old Henry Ford and followed by GM's C.E. Wilson. The five dollar day was superseded by the cost of living allowance as the golden chain that was to bind the workers to the most intense and alienating exploitation to be found anywhere in the industrialized world. No wage increase can compensate for the fact that the operations required of one worker on an auto assembly line never total as much as one minute.

In 1955 auto workers erupted in a wave of wildcat strikes that rejected the policy of fringe benefits combined with increased speed-up. They made it clear that what was at issue was the inability of the union contract to provide any solution to the day-to-day problems on the shop floor. In some plants, at the expiration of the three-year contract, there are literally thousands of unresolved grievances testifying to the need of the workers to manage production in their own name.

Ever since 1955 Reuther has attempted to incorporate the local wildcats into the national negotiations, with very little success. In the 1967 contract negotiations in auto it took one year, one third of the life of the contract, to wear down the workers, local by local.

## OVERTIME AND PRODUCTIVITY

From 1958 to 1961 the massive reconstruction of the auto industry led to a major depression in Detroit. It made visible the erosion of working-class power engineered by the auto union. Chrysler workers, some laid off for over a year, picketed Chrysler plants (and UAW headquarters) to prevent overtime work. Chrysler was able to get a court injunction against the picketers on the ground that they were in violation of the no-strike clause of the union contract.

## BEYOND RANK-AND-FILE CAUCUS

In the 1960's, also, the pressure of the black working class was constantly changing the level of employment in those plants that were within the reach of concentrations of black Americans. By the time of the Detroit rebellion of 1967 the majority of auto workers in the Detroit metropolitan area were black. These workers were a combination of older, long-seniority workers who had achieved power and stability in the plants and young militants who took what was there for granted and began the movement toward new forms of organization.

Black workers felt most intensely the exploitation and alienation of auto workers and they led the way in newer struggles. The Detroit rebellion of 1967 exposed the vulnerability of the auto corporations to the populations of the inner cities in industrial America. One year later the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement was organized which, with companion organizations in other plants, became part of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers.

What was crucial about this development was that it went beyond earlier black caucuses which were limited to pressure against management and the union hierarchy. And it went beyond earlier caucuses of all kinds in that it was not an electoral machine that functioned as a loyal opposition within the union. It was a direct, shop-floor organization that was willing and able to call strikes in its own name and fight against both the union and the management in a struggle to assert the power of the working class in production.

Tensions between black and white workers have existed in varying degrees since the earliest days in auto. Sometimes they have erupted into open struggle. Sometimes they have been submerged in major battles against the industry. Tensions exist today, especially in relation to the skilled trades, which can easily break out into battles between workers. But that is secondary to the fact that black workers are attempting to assert working-class control on the shop floor.

Detroit, through its black workers, has again taken the lead in showing this nation its future.

This is an explosive and revolutionary mixture, the real Detroit Molotov cocktail, that the militancy of black workers, skilled and unskilled, employed and unemployed, has demonstrated in the past few years. This working-class militant today is more disciplined and better focused than ever before.

### NO BACKLASH, NO BACKTALK

In 1943, black workers fought white workers in the streets and kept peace in the factories. In 1967, black workers fought the cops and National Guard and not only kept peace in the factories but indicated they could control production. In 1943, white workers tried to discipline black workers through armed conflict. In 1967, the white working class did not lift a finger to aid the police and National Guard to suppress the black workers. Despite armed insurrection, the “backlash” of the white working class was nowhere evident, a fact which has disturbed sociologists and struck fear in the hearts of members of the Establishment!

If the progress from 1943 to 1967 has been in this direction, then the future becomes clear. We can see a militant, independent working class, black and white, organized separately, not necessarily giving up their prejudices and their angers against each other, but struggling against a common opponent.

## IMPERIALISM AND THE METROPOLITAN WORKING CLASS

*Revolution. Not before the  
day of its completion  
will men have faith in it—  
sublime success!*  
—I Ching

**I**MPERIALISM AND THE WORKING classes of the industrialized nations have received considerable attention in both political and academic literature. The relations between the two, however, have been largely ignored, except marginally, for many years.

The last to write with any degree of seriousness on this theme was Lenin. In his classic work, *Imperialism*, he wrote:

Imperialism, which means the partitioning of the world, and the exploitation of other countries besides China, which means high monopoly profits for a handful of very rich countries, makes it economically possible to bribe the upper strata of the proletariat and thereby fosters, gives shape, and strengthens opportunism. We must not, however, lose sight of the forces which counteract imperialism in general, and opportunism in particular, and which, naturally, the social-liberal Hobson is unable to perceive.<sup>1</sup>

In the United States, immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe are engaged in the most poorly paid jobs, while American workers provide the highest percentage of overseers or of the better-paid workers.<sup>2</sup>

Imperialist ideology also penetrates the working class. No Chinese wall separates it from the other classes.<sup>3</sup>

In the preface to the French and German editions (1920) he added:

Obviously, out of such enormous *superprofits* (since they are obtained over and above the profits which capitalists squeeze out of the workers of their "own" country) it is *possible* to bribe the labour leaders and the upper stratum of the labour aristocracy. And that is just what the capitalists of the "advanced" countries are doing, direct and indirect, overt and covert.

This stratum of workers-turned-bourgeois, or the labour aristocracy, who are quite philistine in their mode of life, in the size of their earnings and in their entire outlook, is the principal prop of the Second International, and in our days, the principal *social* (not military) *prop of the bourgeoisie in the working-class* movement, the labour lieutenants of the capitalist class, real vehicles of reformism and chauvinism. In the civil war between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie they inevitably, and in no small numbers, take the side of the bourgeoisie, the “Versaillais” against the “Communards.”<sup>4</sup>

What is emphasized in this analysis is a split in the working class. A part of the labor aristocracy is won over to support of imperialism and acts as agent of the bourgeoisie within the working class. What is less emphasized in this work but is a fundamental theme in all of Lenin (and other Marxist) writing is what he refers to as “the forces which counteract imperialism in general, and opportunism in particular.” That is, that the working class must play a key role in the overthrow of capitalism and, therefore, in the destruction of imperialism. There is nothing in Lenin’s analysis of the inroads that imperialism makes in the working class, materially and ideologically, which negates his fundamental view that the working class as a whole, or in its vast majority, remains a fundamentally anti-imperialist force.

It is in this view that a major problem lies, particularly with the left. (The supporters of capitalist society, whether conservative or liberal, do not have a problem since they cannot conceive of any overthrow or destruction of that society. [The rulers of capitalist society, as opposed to the supporters, do have a problem, because they tend to be more acutely aware of the social realities of the society which they dominate. But for them it is not a problem of social theory—it is a practical problem of social power.] The descendants of the old left, Communists and Trotskyists in particular, still proclaim lip service to the Leninist view. But they have no confidence in it whatever and, as a result, avoid doing the theoretical and empirical research that is required to keep a theory viable and up to date. [The new left which began to emerge in Europe after the Hungarian Revolution and in the United States after the emergence of the Black Revolt, has never had serious ties with or interest in the working class.]

Paul A. Baran and Paul M. Sweezy (who occupy a kind of no man’s land between the new and the old left) presented quite candidly the view that is probably most representative of the left of today.

In explaining why they avoid a subject which was central to Marx in their study of monopoly capital, the labor process, they noted that "The revolutionary initiative against capitalism, which in Marx's day belonged to the proletariat in the advanced countries, has passed into the hands of the impoverished masses in the underdeveloped countries who are struggling to free themselves from imperialist domination and exploitation."<sup>5</sup>

It is to this problem, the relevancy of the working class to any appreciation of imperialism, that this paper is addressed. A comprehensive analysis is not intended. Rather I would like to indicate certain directions that serious students could take and certain problems that need to be studied, which, in my view, might very well restore an older view of the revolutionary capacity of the working classes of the industrial nations. In the context of this paper, a precise definition of imperialism is not necessary. However, it is important to note that I do not define it as the *policy* of a great power. Rather, I understand imperialism to be the totality of the society of a great industrial power, the complex, developing relationships, internal and external, between social, economic, and political structures, institutions, and policies. The extended analysis that would be required to determine the status of lesser industrialized nations (such as Canada, Italy, or Israel) are not relevant to the specific purposes of this paper.

A major problem in dealing with this subject is that of methodology. The mythology of quantitative sociology, which deceives its practitioners into believing that what cannot be entered on IBM cards cannot therefore exist, is one of the great stumbling blocks in dealing with serious social questions. The complex interaction between activity and consciousness, characteristic of all revolutionary or potentially revolutionary movements, is not amenable to reduction to tables or graphs. Two examples should suffice. Suppose, with all the advantages of hindsight, that some sociologists sat down to design a questionnaire that would divulge the consciousness of industrial workers and their revolutionary potential. Suppose these sociologists went from house to house in the industrial suburbs of Budapest in September 1956 or, in the second example, in the industrial suburbs of Paris in April 1968. Does anyone believe that anything they could have asked would have indicated to them that one month later workers would have formed workers' councils and transformed the social structure of Hungary, or that ten million French workers would, in a few weeks, occupy the factories of France and bring the government of France to the brink?



These two massive post-World War II revolutionary events, of course, indicate more than a methodological problem. They indicate that revolutionary outbursts or massive resistance to a regime are inherently surprise events—even when there is advance preparation. But it is important to realize that these events are also surprises to the participants. That is to say, there seems to take place a rapid, complex, but obscure succession of events combined with (but not necessarily caused by) rapid changes in consciousness.]

There is an event in the history of the American working class which, although on a lesser scale than the European post-war revolutions, illustrates a fundamental proletarian reality. That is the struggle against the no-strike pledge in the United Auto Workers Union during the Second World War.<sup>6</sup>

Shortly after American entry into the war, the labor leaders, illustrating Lenin's charge of support to the bourgeois state, offered pledges not to strike.

In a radio broadcast on December 16, 1940, President Green of the American Federation of Labor made a strong statement in opposition to strikes. He said, on behalf of the federation, "We stand foursquare in support of the national defense program. We commit ourselves to avoid strikes, not only for trivial reasons, but for scarcely any cause unless particular conditions become completely unbearable." The next day Philip Murray, president of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, issued a somewhat less conclusive statement. He said, "It is not the intent nor has it ever been the purpose of our CIO organizations to impede, hamper, or restrain the continuity of operations or the constant flow of production where such collective bargaining agreements are in existence; nor has this been the result of CIO activities." Mr. Murray's statement may be interpreted as a restriction of the commitment of the CIO to those situations where the union is recognized and has an agreement.<sup>7</sup>

Green and Murray and the heads of most of the international unions making up the AFL and the CIO remained true to their pledge throughout the war. There were, however, some interesting exceptions. One was John L. Lewis and the United Mine Workers. That union conducted and won a massive strike against both the government and the mine operators in 1943. In Detroit and parts of the midwest a

small union, consisting mostly of skilled workers, the Mechanics Educational Society of America (MESA), led by an English immigrant, Matthew Smith, loudly proclaimed its refusal to give a pledge not to strike. It was subjected to vituperous attack in the Detroit daily press but provided an interesting example of working class militancy to auto workers who were largely sympathetic to the MESA and its policies.

The American union leaders were carrying out policies of support to the American government that had long been traditional to their kind.<sup>8</sup> The only startling exception was John L. Lewis, who was, peculiarly enough, a Republican. The CIO leaders' position was mildly surprising to superficial observers because it seemed to depart from the class war rhetoric which had become customary among them during the late thirties. Another surprising switch by a section of the labor leadership had been made six months before. After the invasion of the Soviet Union by Germany in June 1941, the Communists and their sympathizers went over to unconditional support of war production and opposed all strikes (whether related to war production or not) and, generally, all militancy which might embarrass the United States Government.

World War II has been called a popular war. Whether any war can be called "popular" does not seem to me to be a settled question. Yet, it is quite clear that the war and the government were supported by the overwhelming majority of the American people and of the American working class. Nevertheless, from the very start there appeared a contradiction between support of the war and support of the class interests of the workers. Militants in many unions resented and rejected from the start a pledge not to strike which tended to place the main burden of sacrifice for the war on the workers. Corporate heads did not pledge to forego profits or refrain from using the war to weaken or resist unions.

What was ultimately worked out was a tripartite understanding between government, business and labor under which unions were granted recognition and bargaining rights in most of mass production industry without the need to strike for recognition, while the unions, in their turn, were to maintain labor discipline in the ranks. In the beginning this arrangement seemed to work—although there were always exceptions in the ranks of management and labor.

In most unions, the resistance to the no-strike pledge was hard to see because the bureaucratic or dictatorial structure made open

expression of membership opposition to leadership policies difficult. In the United Auto Workers (UAW), however, the existence of major caucuses and an active opposition at that time, made the suppression of opposition views most awkward and in that union the battle over the no-strike pledge was openly conducted. The entire leadership of the union (the Thomas-Addes caucus, which included the Communists, and the Reuther caucus) supported the pledge. Opposition in the early years of the war was confined to small Trotskyist anti-war groups and numbers of unaffiliated militant workers. Even at this stage there were often contradictions in the secondary leadership of the UAW. Local union officials would often give lip service to the no-strike pledge while at the same time encouraging or supporting illegal wildcat strikes.<sup>9</sup>

However, as the war went on, the numbers of strikes in the auto industry increased and the opposition to the pledge gained support.

The strike wave exploded over the industry early in 1943 and quickly dispelled the public issue of the happy, contented war worker. During the first two weeks of January, front-page headlines in the *Detroit News* announced:

9,000 IDLE IN WILDCAT FORD STRIKE  
TANK ENGINE TIE-UP AT CHRYSLER'S  
ARMY ACTS TO PUNISH FORD STRIKERS  
1,300 WAR WORKERS IN WILDCAT STRIKE  
8 BOHN WILDCAT STRIKERS FIRED BY ARMY.<sup>10</sup>

Strikes increased in 1944 and soon reached a crisis point as Detroit became the "strike capital" of the nation. . . . A majority of auto workers participated in wildcat strikes. In 1944 alone, slightly more than 50 per cent of the workers took part in a strike. A conservative estimate would place the total number of auto workers who took part in a wildcat strike sometime during the war at 60 to 65 per cent.<sup>11</sup>

In 1944 a Rank and File Caucus was organized in the UAW, primarily to rescind the no-strike pledge. The leadership of the caucus was associated with a small Trotskyist organization, the Workers Party. The active leaders of the caucus, mostly local union leaders, included independent militants, supporters of the Socialist Party, and others. At no time did this caucus gain the support of more than a handful of UAW members. But on the issue of the no-strike pledge it spoke

for what the majority of the membership was expressing in its activity. One result was a remarkable political event at the 1944 convention of the UAW.

A major question before that convention was the issue of the no-strike pledge. Three resolutions were put before the convention. The majority report, representing the ruling Thomas-Addes-CP coalition, called for maintaining the no-strike pledge. The minority report, representing the Reuther caucus, called for rescinding the no-strike pledge only in those plants or parts of plants which were returning to peace-time production. The "super-minority" report, representing the Rank and File caucus, called for rescinding the no-strike pledge unconditionally. The Rank and File Caucus, as a caucus, never represented any significant number of delegates. In the convention politicking, hundreds of delegates would attend the meetings of the two major caucuses. Not more than a couple of dozen attended the meetings called by the Rank and File caucus. The delegates were tied to the major caucuses by complex combinations of programmatic agreement and the electoral struggle for positions in the union hierarchy. Yet, on the no-strike pledge, caucus lines were totally obscured.

The roll call vote on the pledge began late one evening and at the conclusion of that session, the "super-minority" report had been defeated almost two to one. The motion to rescind the pledge had the support of a little over 36% of the delegates.<sup>12</sup> At a meeting of the leadership of the caucus held late that night it was at first taken for granted that the caucus would throw its support to the Reuther resolution as the lesser of the two remaining evils. However, Max Schachtman, national secretary of the Workers Party, who was sitting in on the session, suggested that instead the caucus call for the defeat of both the majority and minority resolutions.<sup>13</sup> To the union activists who made up that meeting, the suggestion was instantly acceptable; and when the delegates came to the convention the next morning they found on each seat in the hall the Rank and File leaflet that had been printed during the night calling for the defeat of the remaining resolutions. It is difficult to say, however, whether that leaflet had any influence on the outcome of the vote.

The minority (Reuther) resolution was defeated even more resoundingly than the "super-minority," by over two to one. But then, miracle of miracles, the majority resolution also went down to substantial defeat. It is difficult to explain the convention's action. Apparently because of caucus loyalties, it refused to vote to rescind the no-strike pledge.

Yet, by voting down the motion to continue the pledge, it accomplished exactly the same thing—at the end of the vote the UAW was without a no-strike pledge. The bureaucrats sitting on the platform were speechless with rage. The delegates had humiliated them, not only in public, but in the presence of government officials and guests who were sitting on the platform. They had been unable to deliver their own union.

The following maneuver is a classic example of how democracy is foiled in a democratic union—by more democracy. The leadership could not let the convention vote stand. They therefore suggested that for a question as important as this, the whole membership should be permitted to vote. They then pushed through the convention a simple motion to reaffirm the no-strike pledge until the membership could decide the question in a referendum.

The referendum, which took place the following winter, was a quantitative sociologist's dream. Each member voted on a protected secret ballot in the privacy of his own home. (I have heard no serious allegations of fraud in that election.) The wording was a simple affirmation or rejection of the no-strike pledge. When the vote was reported, 300,000 auto workers had voted and had reaffirmed the no-strike pledge by a two to one vote. Taken by itself, that vote would make it possible to conclude that the American auto workers, one of the most militant sections of the American working class, had placed the foreign and military policies of the American government above its own class interests and that, in the context of this paper, the workers tended to support imperialism as earlier defined. Except for one slight problem: during the referendum vote, before the referendum vote, and after the referendum vote, the majority of auto workers went out on strike against, not only the wishes of their leaders and their government, but, apparently, against their own considered views.

It seems to me that any study of the relation between the industrial working class and imperialism must grapple with this remarkable fact.

My own experience indicates that what appears as a contradiction to outsiders does not appear as a contradiction to workers. In 1943 I worked side by side with workers at the Chrysler Jefferson plant who argued continually for the no-strike pledge. When a wildcat strike took place that spring, these same workers found themselves on the picket line behaving in most militant ways. I prodded a few of them, pointing to the evident contradiction between their beliefs and their

behavior. The inevitable response to the question, "Since you support the no-strike pledge, what are you doing on the picket line?" was, "Look what the company is doing to us." To the average worker this is not as contradictory as it may appear. To the outsider, workers cause strikes, since it seems to be the result of their decision and action that a strike takes place. To a worker, for whom strikes are at best a nuisance and at worst an economic disaster, workers do not cause strikes, bosses cause strikes. That is to say, it is the employer, by not raising wages to a reasonable level, or by not improving miserable working conditions, or by not doing whatever is involved in the strike, who causes the strike. It is *he* who puts class interest (profits) over the national interest and interferes with war production, etc. I would not pretend to be able to choose which side in this contradictory argument had the greater logic—logic is not involved. What is involved is an awareness of a working class reality, a mode of working class thought.

The fact of the referendum and the contradictory results make the struggle over the no-strike pledge during World War II especially interesting. That same reality, however, continues to exist: the willingness of workers to put their own class interest above what they consider to be the more or less legitimate policies of their government. This appears in its most acute form during war time. And it reappears during the Vietnam war.

There was a widespread, and unsubstantiated, belief that workers, more than their middle-class fellow citizens, supported the Vietnam war. Toward the end of the war, public opinion polls made it evident that in terms of *formal* support or opposition to the war, there was little to distinguish middle-class views from working-class views. However, there was some distortion in this resulting from the fact that the anti-war *movement* was essentially a middle-class movement, in which workers did not significantly appear.

But the contradiction that appeared in the 1945 UAW referendum did appear. More war production was interfered with by American workers carrying on their ordinary activities and struggles than by all the anti-war demonstrations put together.

A number of strikes, a few of which have been getting national attention, are indicating a new movement getting under way among American workers.

At the McDonnell Aircraft Corporation at St. Louis, Missouri, 17,000 workers went on an unauthorized strike for

several weeks and cut off the production of jet planes used in Vietnam and components for Gemini spacecraft. The strike began at midnight of Nov. 7 [1965] when the contract between McDonnell and the International Association of Machinists expired. The union, however, had agreed to an extension of the contract while negotiations continued. The workers rejected this union decision and indicated that their strike was as much against union policies and tactics as it was against the company. The strike ended when a new contract was accepted, although one-third of the workers voted against the contract. Before the strike ended it had caused concern in Washington because of its interference with military production.

The same union is involved in a strike of over one month at the Olin Mathieson Chemical Company plant at East Alton, Illinois. Here again the federal government is concerned because the plant is the sole supplier of gunpowder for rifle and machinegun bullets and 20 mm. shells used in Vietnam. And again, the strike is directed against both company and union. Four times the Machinists Union and Olin Mathieson reached agreement and four times the membership voted the agreement down. There are about 4200 workers on strike, of whom some 3600 belong to the Machinists Union. In this strike there is the possibility of the federal government getting a Taft-Hartley injunction to end the strike for 80 days.<sup>14</sup>

Over the last ten years similar strikes have taken place involving AFL construction workers on sites related to the space program, railroad workers on the Missouri Pacific and other roads, etc.

[The point involved is not that American workers are consciously and militantly anti-imperialist. It is the more modest hypothesis that even during wartime, when patriotic sentiments tend to be at their highest, American workers have often enough felt the necessity to place their own interests above the alleged interests of the nation. That is to say, the working class cannot be conceded to imperialism.] It is always there, even if only potentially, as a limiting factor, at the least, and as a deadly enemy at the most. The limits that working-class activity place on imperialist power often show up in surprising places. The following is from a small article buried in the financial pages of *The New York Times*.

## U.S. LINKS DEFICIT IN PAYMENTS TO BLACK UNREST

Basel, Switzerland, Nov. 17 [1969]. The United States, at a meeting here of central bankers from 10 major nations, has linked its continuing deficit in the balance of payments to the problem of black unrest in the country.

Central bankers from the United States have told their Western European and Japanese counterparts that the United States cannot accept the social cost implicit in getting rid of the balance-of-payments issue.

The most effective way to eliminate the payments deficit is by prescribing a recession, but the Americans argue that the first men to be laid off, according to traditional employment patterns, would be unskilled black workers. This they say, would produce an intolerable aggravation of racial disquiet.

The argument is not a new one, but it is unusual for it to be raised in international monetary discussions.

As the correspondent of *The New York Times* indicates, the reality is not a new one, its relatively public discussion is. At least it must be said that the demands of American workers (or any part of the class), whether economic or social or political or some combination of them, must regularly be taken into account and place limits on the functioning of American capitalist society. But the reverse is also true. Just as the activity and the potential activity of the American working class place limits on the freedom of action of American imperialism abroad, so the activity and the potential activity of those who resist American imperialism abroad place limits on the freedom of action of the American ruling class against its own working class.

There is an early example of this in relation to another nation. The winning of independence of the Belgian Congo forced severe retrenchment on Belgian society, a retrenchment, as always, made at the expense of Belgian workers. The strike was only partially successful but it indicated the limits of forcing the working class to bear the costs of imperialist difficulties.

American imperialism has experienced similar setbacks that, directly or indirectly, place it in conflict with its own working class. As one example, the Cuban revolution withdrew from American industry an annual revenue of two billion dollars, aggravating the problem of balance of payments and forcing the government, ultimately, to attempt to



transfer these costs to the workers. Most recently this has taken the form of devaluation, which places on the workers the overwhelming burden of improving the position of American capitalism in the world market.

A story that received national publicity at the time indicates another form in which the activity of the Third World exacerbates relations between American workers and American capitalists:

Iris Kwek will never sample the joys of those "golden years" on Anaconda's retirement plan. In 1971 some half-million dollars worth of Anaconda properties were expropriated by Chile; company earnings were affected, and a sweeping economy program was instituted.

One of the savings devised to help succor mighty Anaconda was the elimination of Iris Kwek. She was informed that she was being discharged at the end of August. Since she was not protected by any vesting provisions, she was to lose 30 years of accumulated pension rights.<sup>15</sup>

[The nationalization of Peruvian or Libyan oil, of Chilean copper or telecommunications, armed resistance to American penetration in Indo-China, these and a thousand other events, large and small, continually limit the ability of the American ruling class to bribe even a small part of the American working class.] Now we are even beginning to experience the limitations on consumer goods and consumer spending that once characterized the industrial nations of eastern and western Europe.

There are other other areas which have not been touched upon. The problem of alienation and work, the refusal of American workers to accept as final the technological and financial needs of American industrial production, continually impose higher costs on American industry and lead to continual conflict. The refusal to accept traditional discipline and working hours, the increasing violence in American factories, the inability of American unions adequately to restrain the tendency toward wildcat strikes, the increasing separation between rank-and-file workers and union hierarchies, all are indications that the subordination of workers to American society, and therefore to American imperialism, is by no means a settled question.

It is my own opinion that the potential for the kinds of explosions that took place in France in 1968 and Hungary in 1956 is present in the American working class (and, by extension, in the working classes

of the other major industrial countries, including the Soviet Union). But I will draw a more modest conclusion. The American working class, in its day-to-day struggles, is continually placing limits on the freedom of movement of American imperialism, at home and abroad. These struggles are, in turn, exacerbated by the irritations and defeats of American capitalism in other parts of the world. These struggles take place independently of the formal consciousness of American workers and will serve, ultimately, to transform that consciousness.

1. V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964, v. 22, p. 281.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 283.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 285.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 193-4.

5. Paul A. Baran and Paul M. Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1966, p. 9.

6. I was a participant in that struggle and have undertaken to document that struggle with the aid of research in the Wayne State University Labor Archives. However, an excellent paper summarizing the significant events and facts was written this year by Ed Jennings under the title, "Wildcat! The Strike Wave and the No-Strike Pledge in the Automobile Industry" (unpublished), and I have used that as my basic source for this section.

7. Sumner H. Slichter, *Economic Factors Affecting Industrial Relations Policy in National Defense*, New York: Industrial Relations Counselors, Inc., 1941, p. 83.

8. See Ronald Radosh, *American Labor and United States Foreign Policy*, New York: Random House, 1969.

9. I participated in one such strike at the Chrysler Jefferson plant (Local 7) in April 1943.

10. Ed Jennings, "Wildcat! The Strike Wave and the No-Strike Pledge in the Automobile Industry," p. 11.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 12. (Footnotes in original omitted.)

12. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

13. I was present at this meeting and sat with Schachtman in the visitors' gallery during this convention. He and I had been, since 1941, political opponents and he ultimately became a reactionary, right-wing Democrat supporting L. B. Johnson, Humphrey, and Senator Jackson against Eugene McCarthy and George McGovern. But at this session I had a glimpse of a man who displayed a remarkable sensitivity to working-class moods in mass struggle.

14. Martin Glaberman, "American Workers Move Again," *Speak Out*, No. 3, Jan. 1966, pp. 2-3.

15. *Detroit Free Press*, Mar. 19, 1972.

## WORK AND WORKING-CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

THERE WAS A BOOK published not too many years ago called the *Blue Collar World* edited by Shostak and Gomberg. It was a large volume, 600 or so pages. It had sections on blue-collar neighborhoods, blue-collar marriage, blue-collar education, blue-collar old age, and so on. When you got through reading the book there was one little area of blue-collar life that was missing—work. Working-class life can mean a lot of things from being born to dying but work was not one of them. That tends to indicate part of the problem. You assume work is what we find workers doing and it should relate to every aspect of the working-class consciousness or anything else that you want to deal with.

What I want to do in that connection is to indicate (rather schematically, given space limitations) some ideas on how to look at the problem of working-class consciousness and the sources of working-class consciousness which have to be, if not solely, at least significantly in the nature of work. There is not a simple formula that defines their relationship. If you will pardon old Marxian words, the relationship is dialectical, which means it is full of contradictions, it is complex, it is continuously changing, and it is developmental. It appears to show itself on various levels and you get reactions to those levels and interplay between those levels.

The first reality I think people tend to be aware of, but think of in different ways. Work is pretty miserable, one of the worst things that people can think of spending their lives doing. I am not talking about work as creative activity; I am not talking about work in terms of an artist or a businessman or a professional. I am talking about work in terms of the working class, which means predominantly, although not entirely, blue-collar work and, subordinately, the various kinds of routinized work that are classified as white-collar, clerical work, retail sales, and all that sort of thing. I do not think that there is simply a series of various kinds of work which add up to the totality of working-class occupations. The overriding reality, from which most other relations derive, is blue-collar work, physical work. This is something which is not simply a matter of capitalist society although we are concerned, above all, with industrial society. In most class societies, there is a separation between intellectual and manual labour in which there is a clear

relationship between the two: manual labour is for stupid people.

If you've got to work with your hands, it is because you're not bright enough to work with your head, even if working with your head means being a clerk behind the counter at the unemployment office. One of the fundamental realities of work which seeps into everyone's consciousness is that, if you are a blue-collar worker, you begin with a loss of self-esteem. A blue-collar worker is not good enough to do anything else, so that no one would consciously or voluntarily or willingly submit himself or herself to the kind of reality that blue-collar work represents in this society. Of course, there isn't a consistent reality. Clearly, certain kinds of blue-collar workers have another reality—the skilled worker, the tool and die worker, plumber, electrician, and so forth can get significant satisfaction out of work. I do not mean to imply that there is not a certain kind of satisfaction in any kind of work, only that there are differences. If you are confining your thoughts to the reality of this society it is a lot easier to get satisfaction out of skilled labour than non-skilled or semi-skilled or production work in this society. But the reality of most work, and that includes skilled work, but not as intensely, is that it is a miserable way to spend your time.

People are aware of part of the reality of the Lordstown plant of General Motors where the Vega is produced. It was the most automated line in the auto industry. Over 100 cars an hour ran off that line when it was in full production, and the average job on that line took 36 seconds to do. That is an interesting category of time. Usually it is claimed that the job has been made simple: all of the hard work has been done. You have automatic equipment, you have lifts, you don't have to strain yourself too much. Yet try to conceive of a situation in which every job takes 36 seconds to do, no matter how easy that job is. That means that job is rationalized to the point that on a hot summer day you can't get from your job to that wall and back to get a drink at the drinking fountain because a car will have gone by. You can't stop to light a cigarette, at least not too frequently, because, conceivably, a car will have gone by. And while that is not the reality of the work of everybody in society, that is clearly the objective: to rationalize work as much as possible until it reaches some kind of absolute minimum of time, absolute of rationalization. And the only thing that interferes with it in other kinds of work, outside of auto, is simply that the scale is not great enough to permit that kind of rationalization.

The function of the organization of work in this society—no matter what the descriptive phraseology—is designed to make it less and

less tolerable, beginning with a pretty miserable situation. I remember years ago GM built a new Olds plant in Lansing. It was advertised as the latest thing in industrial design and so on, and everything in that plant was built for the workers, which means, of course, that everything could proceed without interruption. I remember that they even painted the walls green because someone had said that that would be the most relaxing color for workers and wouldn't interfere with putting out Oldsmobiles. It is only in that sense that technology has been concerned with the workers. The purpose of technology, if it is not to eliminate workers entirely, is to subordinate them as much as possible to the job. And a contradictory thing happens. Work, as technology develops, tends to become lighter and cleaner to a certain degree: that is, you don't have to lift massive pieces of steel any more. You get hoists, you get cranes, you get automatic material transfer, and so on. But you can no longer stop the machine to go to the john because that line keeps going or that machine keeps working whether you are there or not. And you better be there, because if that red light goes on that says that the drill is broken, and the stuff begins to get scrapped, it is your job if you're not there to shut the machine off, or call the repairman, or do whatever your job requires.]

It seems to me that one fundamental reality in the life of the working class, or the average worker, is that the place where he spends the major share of his life is a pretty miserable place to be. And it is a place in which inherently in this society he is going to run into the perception that he is an inferior human being: he is, so to speak, a victim. But it does not end there. One element in the reality of work that derives from the fact that it is intolerable is that human beings resist it. No matter what anybody who answers a questionnaire says the reality is that people resist work. They resist work in many ways. Altogether, if they can. But if they can't, they resist in various kinds of struggle, individual or collective or some combination of the two, individual sabotage, absenteeism, taking a punch at the foreman. In Detroit in the last few years people have done more than take punches at foremen; people have gone home, gotten shotguns, come back and killed foremen. That has become part of reality in the Detroit auto industry. That might be somewhat lessened with the massive unemployment now. But the kind of tension that that reflects is not simply the result of the fact that work is miserable but that people don't accept it.

[So you have this contradiction in the workers' minds. They have the sense that society places them in an inferior position and considers

them inferior and, in a certain sense and in certain ways, workers tend to consider themselves inferior—they will tell their sons and daughters, “Go to school; you don’t want to work in a shop like me,” “Learn something so that you can get out of this damn place,” and that kind of thing. But at the same time it requires them as a matter of their daily lives to struggle because you can’t survive in that shop unless you do struggle against that reality. You have the kind of contradiction in which what appears at the outset as victimization, as inferiority, becomes transformed in reality to something which is the opposite of that, that is, a persistent guerrilla warfare that takes place in the process of production in modern industrial society, in any industrial country that I know anything about, of resistance to the reality of work where it is not possible simply to do away with it altogether. That means anything is possible, possible particularly in the case of younger people.

There is another reality which intensifies that deadly struggle. You begin with the conception of work which is oriented to reducing every single job to 36 seconds and completely tying it to the flow of production. But then there is the fact that the overwhelming majority of people in blue-collar work are aware of a second time element in their reality. That is, that they are going to be there the rest of their lives. Thirty-six seconds a job, not till school comes back in September, not during your summer vacation, not temporarily until their father gives them a position in his business. All those things may take place, but the reality of the working class is that that is where they will be for the rest of their lives. Try thinking about that for a while—36 seconds a job, when you are lucky enough to work, for the rest of your life.

So you get all kinds of contradictions appearing. Not only is the job intolerable, but it is intolerable to think about that. If you are going to be in this damn place for the rest of your life at this job or something roughly equivalent (maybe with 20 years seniority you will work yourself off the assembly line onto a machine—you will have a job that maybe takes a minute and you won’t have to follow the line, the materials will come to you), the differences in the range of possibilities are minimal. So you can’t really think about that, and you get a lot of what Marx called in *Capital* all the old crap: you get drunk on Friday and, if you can, you stay drunk until Monday morning, because you don’t want to think about going back to that damn place Monday morning. You get intolerable relations with your kids, you get intolerable relations with your wife or your husband or whatever. In other

words, one element of your reality is subordination of that reality to work. Family life centres around it. It depends on whether you're on days or nights, on a rotating shift, whether you're on days one month and nights another month. One of the fundamental differences between working-class attitudes towards child-raising and middle-class attitudes towards child-raising is that no worker is about to be permissive; he has to get up at five o'clock in the morning. The kids can make all the noise they want to out in the street; the old man has to get his rest or he won't be able to hack it the next day. There are a lot of other realities that relate to that, but you get this duality, subordination toward a process that you can't control, and continual resistance to it.

But the resistance leads to another level of reality, and the work itself leads to another level of reality. At the same time that you are imbued from childhood with a sense of your own inferiority you also begin to learn or develop a sense of, not of individual strength, but of collective strength, because that is the only strength that exists in the work place. And that strength exists in various forms: one form is simply to master the productive process. I think it was in Seymour Faber's article, there was reference to the fact that workers devise better ways of doing the job but keep those ways concealed, because if the company knew about it, or if the foreman knew about it, it would become incorporated into the productive process and would simply step up the rate of production. So they dismantle special fixtures or dies that they use. Or, if the foreman comes around, they suddenly get very clumsy and do things in a different way and do not display the shortcuts that they have developed through their own experience.

The other element is that workers tend to be aware of the organization of the production process and also how fundamentally important it is for modern industrial society. There is no equivalent in this society, although there are parallels, to the production of physical goods, which means, in the first place, food, clothing, and shelter. And the shelter may be lousy prefabricated housing, and the food might be white bread with all the vitamins taken out and then it is called enriched, with some of them put back in. But nevertheless, it is crucial to society that production and distribution—transportation—of physical goods takes place. And to be in that work gives workers a sense of power which they are not always aware of, at least they are not always thinking about it, simply because you can't, but which in crucial points in time they are very much aware of. An example which I experienced a number of years ago (and it is no exception—it is very

typical) was at a Chrysler stamping plant about 15 miles outside of Detroit, a wildcat strike. I talked to some men there on the first day of the strike. And they said, rather matter-of-factly, if they were shut down one day, Chrysler-Jefferson and Hamtramck Assembly and Lynch Road would be forced to shut down—those are the three main Chrysler assembly operations in Detroit. If they were shut down two days, then the Windsor, Ont. plants would shut down. If they were down three days, St. Louis, Missouri would shut down. And it begins to extend all over the continent and all over the world.

They are very much aware of the interrelation of what they do with the whole process of production. They are aware in that direct sense that tends to be a little more characteristic of the auto industry than of other industries, where there is no storage: production takes place on trucks and trains so to speak, where parts plants have just a few hours leeway in delivering to assembly plants and so on. But they are also aware of the more fundamental reality which is much more significant than that. They are aware of the mutual relation of railroads and trucking, for example, with production. General Motors workers are aware of the fact that when you shut down General Motors it is not simply General Motors that shuts down. Steel mills begin to bank furnaces—railroads begin to lay off workers. A whole interconnected network of production and transportation relates to this ordinary day-to-day process of production that people ignore and the workers tend to ignore in ordinary times or in ordinary day-to-day reality but in crucial periods are very much aware of. And there is a sense of strength that workers have as a collectivity which very few other sections of society can feel or see in any kind of equivalent way. I don't mean that groups of people can't have a greater impact on society, but it tends to be more limited. If a faculty or students go on strike and shut down a school, there might be a lot of political hassle, but the school has shut down and nothing else. The same thing is true in other fields like white-collar work, such as banking or insurance: a strike can shut down a big operation and mean loss of profits for the investors and so on, but only production, blue-collar work, and transportation have that integral relationship to all that takes place in society that gives workers a sense of power which is part of their reality which exists side by side with their sense of inferiority. That does not mean that all workers have the same power, obviously. In the auto industry, stamping plants seem to play a crucial role. If you're in a plant that makes automotive trim and there are a dozen



plants making the same thing, you are perfectly aware that if you shut your plant down nothing very much will happen: it might be embarrassing to the company, and you might win certain concessions, but it is not like a stamping plant. As an example the Mansfield, Ohio stamping plant of General Motors, sitting out in the farmland of central Ohio somewhere, went on strike for two weeks and two-thirds of General Motors was shut down. They achieved a temporary settlement, a pledge to negotiate, and they went back to work. They were not satisfied with the later settlement, so they went back on strike for another two weeks and again two-thirds of General Motors shut down, which means a quarter of a million workers, and all of the attendant and related occupations. This is five or eight thousand men, not really a huge industrial concentration like the Ford Rouge plant but just out in some little town in some modern stamping plant. But if you are not in that kind of work, clearly you don't have that kind of leverage or leeway. But the class collectively does and when it needs it, it has the sense that it does. One of the things that is crucial to understanding working-class consciousness is that consciousness is a reflection in large part of that reality.

Now, there is again some ambiguity. People define consciousness in different ways, and one of the real problems for people of the working class or any other section of the society is that intellectuals tend to define consciousness in intellectual terms, the classic case being the sociological survey. If you want to know what people's consciousness is then you go out and ask them. Should Red China be admitted to the United Nations? Yes, no, maybe, I don't know. Well, that is interesting on certain kinds of questions and it might give you a fairly accurate picture of what intellectuals and middle-class people in general are thinking. It tends to have very little reality in relation to the working class.

I have started on a project, a study of an event that I think is crucial because it is rare that it happens so clearly. It is a study of the struggle against the no-strike pledge in the United Auto Workers during World War II . . . .

So what was the consciousness of auto workers? Are they patriots or class struggle fanatics? Not an easy question to answer because clearly you can't exclude one or the other: you can't say it is only a matter of their vote or it's only a matter of the fact that they went on strike. By the way, there is one difference between the two elements. As is true of almost every single vote and is obviously true

of sociological surveys not everybody gets counted. The two-to-one majority that voted to reaffirm the no-strike pledge was not a majority of the membership of the UAW; the workers that went on strike were an absolute majority of the UAW. But, in any case, the assumption tends to be that if forty percent of the membership votes that it is an adequate representation of the membership and, by the way, the hidden assumption among the intellectuals is that the ones that don't vote are the more backward. They're not taking part in union affairs; they're not going to union meetings; and they are surely not going to vote against the no-strike pledge because they are the more conservative element in the union. In any case you have this intriguing contradiction.)

One element in this contradiction, it seems to me, is the matter of the definition of consciousness when you are dealing with the working class and, to some degree (I don't want to exaggerate the difference between the working class and the middle class in this respect) the society as a whole. That is, consciousness, if it is a serious category, has to mean more than verbal consciousness, it has to include activity. What people are prepared to do has to be defined as part of their consciousness, not simply what people say, partly because they do not always know, and partly because they are not always willing to tell you. You know some bright guy with a tie and jacket comes up to the door and asks, What do you think of things, and you tell him what you figure he wants to know, often enough, not necessarily consciously, but it doesn't really matter to you. The other element, however, is the element of the reality of work and what work means. The post-card ballot was filled out in the privacy of people's homes. You are a citizen: you're sitting in your living room or in your kitchen listening to the radio, or you're reading the newspaper, you're reading the casualty returns, and so, and it seems really remote to say in this kind of situation that people shouldn't work.

The other reality is that what people will think and do in the presence of fellow workers is not necessarily the same thing that they will think and do as isolated citizens—as one man with one vote. This is reflected in many aspects of working-class reality. It is reflected in certain kinds of wildcat strikes. Sometimes they take place without a ballot or, for that matter, without a vote at all. Some department has a grievance, somebody gets fired or somebody gets hurt, and the whole plant walks out. You see a bunch of people coming down the aisle half a block away and heading towards the time clock, you know

they are not going to the tool crib and they are not going to the toilet. So what happens is that you shut your machine down, wipe your hands and put on your jacket and leave, and when you get outside you ask, "What's going on? What's happening?" And then someone tells you. You find out, "Well, so and so got fired." You can react in different ways. You can say, "You mean I've got to lose three days of work because of this two-bit grievance?" Or you can say, "That's great, it's about time. We've been taking this kind of crap from the company long enough." The point is that it is not one man, one vote. It is not that you get 51 percent of the vote and you go out. You go out because of the collective awareness, a collective consciousness that relates to work, that together means something and separately doesn't mean anything at all. And there is an awareness of the fact that if that happened in your department and two or three of your fellows decided to do this you would expect the same kind of result, or you would sense when it was possible and when it was not. That is a reality that comes from work and the integrated, collective nature of the work process which holds true of all kinds of work in this society, including clerical work, but which is much more intense and much more real in blue-collar work, partly because of the nature of the work process and partly because the blue-collar worker feels himself at the bottom and he knows that he doesn't mean anything. He has been told that from childhood; he had been told that for a thousand years. If you work with your hands, you don't mean anything. So, unless you have solidarity with your fellow workers, you have no meaning whatever.

[This is the reverse of the way that most intellectuals look at the reality of working-class activity and working-class consciousness. Most people believe that activity is the result of consciousness. What I submit is that consciousness is the result of activity, or the result of your reality.] There is an interesting passage that nobody ever notices from Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology* in which they say approximately that to build the new society you need new people, and people can be transformed only in activity. And then they say that you need a violent revolution, not only because the bourgeoisie can only be overthrown in that way, but because only in a revolution can new people be created to create a new society which is a way of saying you don't need a revolutionary consciousness to make a revolution, you need a revolution to create a revolutionary consciousness. I am sure that 999 out of 1000 Marxists will tell you that Marx said the reverse, that you need consciousness to create the revolution. It seems to me

that that phrase, that paragraph out of *German Ideology* was a much more accurate reflection of the reality of working-class consciousness than any survey, sociological or otherwise. A simple verbal statement of belief on the part of workers or anybody else in the society does not give you significant information. It might tell what a worker thinks exactly at three o'clock in the afternoon, at the time he was asked; it does not tell you about anything else, what he would think five minutes later, a day later, or a week later.

I think that we can conclude with two major realities of the modern industrial world for which no other view of the working class or working-class consciousness has anything at all to say. Most Marxist theory derives from massive activity on the part of the working class. Marxist theory of the state is in part at least Marx's analysis of what Parisian workers did in 1871 when they created the Commune spontaneously. Marx wrote on the Commune and that became part of the theory of Marxism. It was followed by Lenin on the soviets after Russian workers in 1905 created a form of organization that nobody ever heard of, that nobody ever dreamed of. It was not Lenin that invented soviets, it was Lenin who saw them and said, Wow, what's this new thing? and wrote on them in *State and Revolution* and wrote about them in discussing the Paris Commune, and so forth. Well, the modern equivalents, it seems to me, are the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 when the entire working class in a totalitarian society took over the means of production and transformed that society and was defeated only by the invasion of superior power from outside of that society, that is, Russian tanks. And the other approximate equivalent—it is rather a neat balance, Eastern Europe and Western Europe—was France in 1968 where, after several weeks of student demonstrations, 10 million French workers took over the factories of France and the de Gaulle government was on the verge of collapse.

Let me submit a question. We know the events, we know what happened. We could sit down now and with the strength of hindsight devise a questionnaire. Can anybody conceive of a questionnaire which he could take to the workers in the working-class suburbs of Paris in March 1968, ask them anything you please, and find out that one month later 10 million of them would take over all of the factories in France? Or, could you go to the working-class suburbs of Budapest in October of 1956 and, asking any question, knowing what happened, find out that one month later there would be workers' councils, and that the Communist regime would be overthrown?

I submit that that is impossible: it is impossible in the nature of a major revolutionary event, and it is impossible in the context of what working-class consciousness and working-class activity are about. Unless you have that sense, what you continue to find out in anything that you do in research with respect to the working class is detail, detail which may be true in fact but deceptive either because it is trivial or because it is steering you in wrong directions or because—what is really underlying the whole thing—it assumes that the society is given. You are asking questions about how the society works and so you never find out how the society gets overthrown because that doesn't quite fit into that kind of question.

But if you have a sense of historical reality and a sense of the working class and of working-class consciousness as being based overwhelmingly on the fact that a worker cannot live in this intolerable situation without struggling against it, then the one thing that you can be absolutely certain of—not the date, not the time, not the place, unfortunately—but you can be certain that explosions will continually take place because the working class cannot live in any other way, not without maintaining some shred of humanity. Not without saying, “OK, we surrender, we are all happy.” That hasn't happened in all the years of capitalism. There is no reason to believe that it is going to happen now. So that what you have is a way of looking at the world which simply is not subject to quantitative analysis. A lot of other things are, and much of quantitative analysis can be useful, provided it is subordinated to and fits into this totality of conception which then makes it possible to see the possibilities of social change, the possibilities of the working class as a force for social change. Then you can view a whole range of other questions, including the usual popular ones like racist workers who vote for Wallace and a lot of other reactionary stuff, all of which is part of the reality of modern society. It would be a miracle if it were not. In a society in which all means of communication, entertainment, education, and so on, are dominated by the ruling class—Marx's phrase is that the ruling ideas of any society are the ideas of the ruling class—can people see that class, or any class, sitting around until the socialists going around from door to door have 51 percent of the people? Obviously not. You lose before you start if that is the way you think of it, in terms of changing enough people's consciousness so that 51 percent say, “OK. Bud, we're for socialism.” It doesn't work that way. It works in spontaneous explosions, and these are not very controllable or predictable except in a very

general way.

One last thing in another connection. The struggles of labor have achieved a certain importance: this conference is an example. There has been an increase in the number of labor studies, books on labor history, conferences on labor with labor historians, radical historians, sociologists, radical sociologists. I think that it is good to be aware that this whole industry owes its existence to the workers, because if the workers were really docile, and workers really supported the system, we would be out of business. Nobody would be interested in studying the working class, and nobody for sure would give you a grant to study the working class. It's because these workers won't sit still that you have to deal with them and you deal with them in any way you can, industrial sociology, industrial psychology, labor history, social history, and so on. One part of the problem, and this takes us back to the beginning, is that the workers are not going to tell you the nature of their reality because they don't always know themselves. And they don't have a press—labor leaders have a press but the workers don't. And so we go through all this involuted business of finding out who the workers are and, curiously enough, finding out that they really aren't very much to worry about, that they tend to be backward, ignorant, and so on. This is, I agree, part of the reality. But unless you see the other side, you don't see the working class in modern industrial society, and that goes for the United States, the Soviet Union, England, Poland, Canada, anywhere.

## BACK TO THE FUTURE: THE CONTINUING RELEVANCE OF MARX (with Seymour Faber)

IN THE *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Marx and Engels wrote: “The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production. and with them the whole relations of society.”<sup>1</sup> Marx thought enough of these words to reproduce them in *Capital*.<sup>2</sup> Much of what has been written by Marxists since Marx has been to document that statement, but not always with an understanding of its total meaning. Some writers, of course, complain that Marx did not document the working out of his prediction a century after his death. What this position reflects is an unwillingness to understand and use Marx’s methodology, as Lenin did in his work on imperialism.

What needs to be understood is that “revolutionizing . . . the whole relations of society” includes the working class and Marx’s conception of the working class was dialectical and concrete. In the passage that provides a climax to volume 1 of *Capital*, on the general law of capitalist accumulation, Marx wrote:

[W]ithin the capitalist system all methods for raising the social productiveness of labour are brought about at the cost of the individual labourer; all means for the development of production transform themselves into means of domination over, and exploitation of, the producers; they mutilate the labourer into a fragment of a man, degrade him to the level of an appendage of a machine, destroy every remnant of charm in his work and turn it into a hated toil; they estrange from him the intellectual potentialities of the labour-process in the same proportion as science is incorporated in it as an independent power; they distort the conditions under which he works, subject him during the labour-process to a despotism more hateful for its meanness; they transform his life-time into working time; and drag his wife and child beneath the wheels of the Juggernaut of capital. . . . Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole, i.e., on the side of the class that produces its own product in the form of capital.<sup>3</sup>

Marx thought that the proletariat was revolutionary or it was nothing. Was this Marx's revolutionary proletariat? Where is the socialist proletariat? Most Marxists, writing in the second half of the twentieth century, do not understand Marx's dialectical conception of the working class. In *The Holy Family*, Marx and Engels say: "It is not a matter of what this or that proletarian or even the proletariat as a whole *pictures* at present as its *what the proletariat is in actuality* and what, in accordance with this *being*, it will historically be compelled to do."<sup>4</sup> This is difficult for intellectuals, trained in positivist science, to comprehend. But Marx and Engels carry it further in *The German Ideology*:

Both for the production on a mass scale of this communist consciousness, and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of men on a mass scale is necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, a *revolution*; this revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the *ruling* class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class *overthrowing* it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew.<sup>5</sup>

In other words, working-class consciousness is not a matter of verbal statements of belief, but of activity. Such things can be difficult to document but there is a fascinating example of the dialectical contradiction contained in working-class consciousness in the history of the American working class during World War II. . . .<sup>6</sup>

Hal Draper has made the point that "the proletariat is more than the sum of its individual atoms."<sup>7</sup> A worker sitting at home alone with his or her family is not the same as a worker at work, bonded together with other workers. There is another question involved. While an absolute majority of workers went on strike, a majority did not vote. Most left activists would assume that workers who did not participate in union activities, attend union meetings, participate in the electoral process are more backward than workers who do. The wartime referendum on the no-strike pledge belies that understanding. Workers who didn't vote but who were willing to stand up to the pressure of politicians, union leaders, and representatives of the military in the plants (risking being drafted into the army) are not backward in any serious sense. Often enough, both points of view existed in the same person. In my own experience, in a major wildcat strike



that shut down virtually all Chrysler plants in the Detroit area in 1943, I saw union members who consistently favored the no-strike pledge become militant participants in picket lines that kept plants closed.

How did Marx and Engels apply their methodology, based on their dialectic view of the working class? Engels pointed out that “[t]he communists know only too well . . . that revolutions are not made deliberately and arbitrarily, but that everywhere and at all times they have been the necessary outcome of circumstances entirely independent of the will and the leadership of particular parties and entire classes.”<sup>8</sup> They based their theories on the peaks of revolutionary working-class activity.

The Paris Commune of 1871 did not amount to too much. (Marx praised it for ending night work for bakers. A century later Wonder Bread was advertising “the bread that’s baked while you sleep.”) And the Commune was crushed. But Marx made it the basis for his theory of the workers’ state. Thirty-four years passed before Russian workers invented soviets in the 1905 revolution without the leadership of socialists or communists. The 1905 revolution was also crushed, but Lenin added the experience to Marx on the Commune and produced *State and Revolution*. He also learned from the experience to abandon the view he put forward in *What Is To Be Done?* that socialism can only come to the proletariat from the outside.<sup>9</sup> But most Marxists chose to ignore that and stuck to the discarded views contained in *What Is To Be Done?*

The point is not to belabor readers with quotations from Marx, et al. The point is that Marx had developed a theory of the proletariat that worked. But it was only partly understood by his followers in this century. In their influential work, *Monopoly Capital*, Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy said that they were conscious that their approach “has resulted in almost total neglect of a subject which occupies a central place in Marx’s study of capitalism: the labor process.” But then they went on to say: “Our neglect of the labor process does not, however, mean that this book is not concerned with the class struggle. . . . The revolutionary initiative against capitalism, which in Marx’s day belonged to the proletariat in the advanced countries, has passed into the hands of the impoverished masses in the underdeveloped countries who are struggling to free themselves from imperialist domination and exploitation.”<sup>10</sup>

Two years after this book was published, ten million French workers occupied all the factories of France and came close to overthrowing the DeGaulle government. That Baran and Sweezy did not

deal with the labor process would have been acceptable, except that they did deal with working-class activity: they dismissed it. Class struggle and the struggle against “imperialist domination and exploitation” in this context are ambiguous. Peasant revolutions and national revolutions, important and progressive as they are, do not substitute for the proletarian revolution which Marx, Engels, and Lenin assumed to be equivalent to socialist revolution.

Harry Braverman, in his important work *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, does not dismiss the working class or avoid the labor process. However, he says, “No attempt will be made to deal with the modern working class on the level of its consciousness, organization, or activities. This is a book about the working class as a class *in itself*, not as a class *of itself*.”<sup>11</sup> As a result it is mainly a book about the victimization of the working class. Both of these books leave the door ajar for narrow, empirical studies of the working class that find the working class backward and conservative. It is not that such studies would not have been done in any case. It is that a whole series of left academics can now find their work acceptable to renowned Marxists.

How to apply Marxist methodology to our world, the post-World War II world? What are the peaks that the working class of the industrial world has reached? In 1953 there was a working-class uprising in East Germany.<sup>12</sup> To make sure that it did not spread, the western powers, England, France, and the United States, and the West Berlin city government built a wall of police and military to prevent West Berlin workers from marching to join their brothers and sisters in the East. The East German revolt was crushed by Soviet tanks.

In the summer of 1956 working-class resistance was beginning in Poland, including the formation of workers’ councils, as a dispute between the Polish and Soviet Communist Parties began to escalate. Unrest in Poland was repeated in 1970–71 and 1980–81.<sup>13</sup>

Unrest in 1956 was also evident in Hungary. On October 23 a demonstration was organized by students and intellectuals. To show support for the Polish resistance, it was held in a square in Budapest graced by a statue of Joseph Bem, a Polish revolutionary who had fought in the Hungarian revolution of 1848. The Communist regime wavered but finally allowed the demonstration to take place. At the end of the meeting, not being sure of their next steps, the demonstrators decided to march to the Budapest radio station to try to get their demands broadcast. By this time it was late in the day and the marchers were joined by workers getting off work. In the square in front of the

radio station the demonstrators were met with gunfire from the secret police. The Hungarian Revolution had begun. Within 24 hours workers' councils blanketed Budapest. In another 24 hours all of Hungary was covered with workers' councils which had taken over all the productive facilities of the nation. The Hungarian army had disintegrated. Soldiers had either joined the revolution or had turned over their arms to the revolutionaries and had gone home. Even significant sections of the Soviet garrisons in Hungary defected. Ultimately much of the Soviet occupying force was withdrawn and replaced by troops from the Far East who had had no contact with the people of Hungary. On November 4, after two weeks of dual power, Soviet troops attacked. It took a week of fighting to crush the revolution, although resistance continued afterward. Nothing in Hungary could crush the revolution. It took an invasion of Soviet tanks.<sup>14</sup>

Since the beginning of the Cold War, Radio Free Europe and the Voice of America had called on East Europeans to revolt. After the Hungarian Revolution, the call to revolt was never heard again. The West provided a cover for the Soviet attack when Britain, France, and Israel invaded Egypt to conquer the Suez Canal. The western press consistently tried to diminish the significance of the Hungarian Revolution by emphasizing the question of refugees and the freeing of the Hungarian Cardinal Mindszenty. (Mindszenty had been freed from prison by several Hungarian army officers—and had then disappeared into the American Embassy and played no role in the revolution.)

In 1968 Europe erupted again. After a couple of weeks of street fighting between students and police in Paris, a sit-in strike at an aircraft factory in Nantes triggered a massive takeover of production by the French working class. In 48 hours, 10 million French workers occupied all the factories of France and came close to overturning the DeGaulle government. There were differences from Hungary. The element of national liberation that was evident in Hungary was absent in France. In addition, the cracks that immediately appeared in the military structure in Hungary did not appear in France. In both revolutions there was no evidence of any support by the traditional organizations of the proletariat. The French Socialist and Communist Parties and the unions they controlled fought bitterly to get the workers out of the factories and to limit the struggle to traditional union demands. They also fought to prevent significant contact between the workers and the students. As a result, the French revolt receded without the workers being defeated but with the winning of only limited demands,

such as wage increases.<sup>15</sup> Further working-class struggles took place in 1968 in Czechoslovakia.<sup>16</sup>

These are only truncated summaries of the highlights of the experience of the international working class in the last half of the twentieth century. But the history of working-class revolt presents us with some interesting questions. Why did the Left, on the whole, insist on ignoring these events? In 1963, Everett C. Hughes gave an important presidential address to the American Sociological Association. He raised the question of why sociologists, with all the research they had done on the question of race, could not predict the explosion of the civil rights movement. He wrote:

It is but a special instance of the more general question concerning sociological foresight of and involvement in drastic and massive social changes and extreme forms of social action. . . .

Some have asked why we did not foresee the great mass movement of Negroes; it may be that our conception of social science is so empirical, so limited to little bundles of fact applied to little hypotheses, that we are incapable of entertaining a broad range of possibilities, of following out the madly unlikely combinations of social circumstances.<sup>17</sup>

Do leftists suffer from the same limitations that Hughes attributed to sociology? It might be too much to ask why left sociologists, political scientists, economists, or historians failed to predict the Hungarian Revolution or the French Revolt. After all, these were, like all popular uprisings, massive spontaneous events.<sup>18</sup> (Spontaneity should not be thought of as rising with the sun one morning. A spontaneous revolt could not take place if it was not preceded by a generation or so of resistance, day-to-day struggles, both defensive and offensive, involving small gains, victories and defeats.) But it is not too much to ask why these events did not become the subject of intensive study and theoretical analysis.

There are two answers. One is that the events contradicted the received wisdom of the Left: proletarian revolution is impossible without the leadership of a revolutionary party, without a press and the ability to communicate, without a depression or other major crisis in society. Two, is that these events did not lend themselves to the limited empirical analysis which passes for science in the academy. Empirical research is the necessary foundation for any theory. Problems arise, however,

when the only theory is empiricism. Then it becomes easy to discover that revolution is impossible, that the working class is incapable of massive social change. There are any number of works, such as those by Mike Davis and Michael Burawoy, that show workers as essentially conservative and backward. They have plenty of evidence. The working class is divided by race, by gender, by age, by skill, by ethnic group, etc., etc. All true. However, if some social scientist had examined the workers in the industrial suburbs of Budapest in September of 1956, or the industrial suburbs of Paris in April of 1968, the same would have been found. There would have been no evidence of the coming social upheaval. How could there be? The workers themselves did not know.

Does anyone seriously believe that the Russian workers who invented soviets in 1905 or overthrew the Tsar in 1917 were free of bigotry, of anti-semitism, of sexism, of national chauvinism? Or the Hungarian workers of 1956? Or the French workers of 1968? (In France there had been considerable display of racism toward African immigrants, a racism that was significantly reduced for a while during the events of May 1968.) Were the Polish workers who created Solidarity in 1980 free of anti-semitism, sexism, the influence of the Catholic Church? What is missing in most of these empirical studies is the theory of Marx. They are based on the depths the working class has reached under capitalism, not the peaks. As a result, they are inherently conservative.

This is not to say that most empirical research is useless. But unless it is infused with the theoretical understanding of the nature of the working class integral to Marxism, it becomes quite limited. There are left academics doing fine work in analyzing working-class activity.<sup>19</sup> But that work needs to become part of a fundamental understanding of the capacity of the working class, the real, existing working class, to change society.

How does this relate to the United States? Can American workers do what Hungarian workers or French workers did? That cannot be answered. It should be clear that none of this assumes that radicals have to accept the divisions in the working class as an absolute. Working-class unity is a relative value. Radicals should support (and have supported) black struggles against white workers, women's struggles against male workers, and so on. Changes in the relationship of forces within the working class have been made. African Americans and women have penetrated the bastions of the white working class

to a considerable degree. What leftists should not assume is that all of these problems must be solved before substantial social change is possible. First, that is impossible. Second, if that were possible, capitalism would not have to be overthrown.

What made it possible for the French working class to take over all the factories of France in opposition to their leaders and their organizations? Why is hardly anyone interested in finding the answer? What made it possible for the Hungarian working class, male and female, blue collar and white collar, to take over all the workplaces of the country and run most of the towns and cities outside of Budapest? Why is hardly anyone interested in finding the answer?

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It should be remembered that what the Hungarian and French workers did was thought to be impossible. What can be predicted is that there will be another rising. Its time or place cannot be predicted. The fundamental source of working-class resistance to life under capitalism is alienation.<sup>20</sup> If someone can prove that alienation can be done away with under capitalism, that workers no longer resist their conditions of life and work, then we will be open to a theory that announces the end of the working class as a force for social change. All of the new names for the society in which we live—post-industrialism, post-capitalism, the information society, globalization—do not get rid of the working class. They simply make it easier not to think about the proletariat. But that is what we all have to think about—and Marx still makes that thought and study fruitful.

1. Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, New York: Norton, 1978, p. 476.

2. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, undated, vol. 1, p. 457.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 604.

4. Tucker, *Marx-Engels Reader*, pp. 134–35. Emphasis in original.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 193. Emphasis in original.

6. Martin Glaberman, *Wartime Strikes*, Detroit: Bewick Editions, 1980.

7. Hal Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978, vol. 2, p. 40.

8. F. Engels, "Principles of Communism," in Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976, vol. 6, p. 349.

9. See, e.g., Lenin, "The St. Petersburg Strike," *Collected Works*, vol. 8, p. 9; "Revolutionary Days," *ibid.*, pp. 154–55; and "The Reorganization of the Party," *Collected Works*, vol. 10, p. 32.

10. Baran and Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1966, pp. 8, 9.

11. Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, New York: Monthly Review

Press, 1974, pp. 26–7. Emphasis in original.

12. See Rainer Hildebrandt, *The Explosion: The Uprising Behind the Iron Curtain*, New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, and Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1955; and Arnulf Baring, *Uprising in East Germany: June 17, 1953*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1972.

13. See Informations Correspondence Ouvriere, *Poland: 1970–1971, Capitalism and Class Struggle*, Detroit: Black and Red, 1977; Henri Simon, *Poland: 1980–82, Class Struggle and the Crisis of Capital*, Detroit: Black and Red, 1985.

14. See Bill Lomax, *Hungary 1956*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976; Bill Lomax, ed., *Hungarian Workers' Councils in 1956*, Highland Lakes, N.J.: Atlantic Research and Publications, and Boulder, Colorado: Social Science Monographs, 1990, distributed by Columbia University Press; Andy Anderson, *Hungary '56*, London: Solidarity and Detroit: Black and Red, 1957; and Melvin J. Lasky, ed., *The Hungarian Revolution*, New York: Praeger, 1957.

15. See Daniel Singer, *Prelude to Revolution: France in May 1968*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1970; Patrick Seale and Maureen McConville, *Red Flag/Black Flag: French Revolution 1968*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1968; and R. Gregoire and F. Perlman, *Worker-Student Action Committees: France May '68*, Detroit: Black and Red, 1970.

16. See Vladimir Fisera, ed., *Workers' Councils in Czechoslovakia, Documents and Essays 1968–69*, London: Allison and Busby, 1978; and Robin Alison Remington, *Winter in Prague: Documents on Czechoslovak Communism in Crisis*, Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1969.

17. Everett C. Hughes, "Race Relations and the Sociological Imagination," *American Sociological Review*, vol. 28, no. 6, Dec. 1963, pp. 879, 889.

18. There was one Marxist theoretician who did see the possibility of events like the Hungarian Revolution. C.L.R. James, in abstract, theoretical form, prefigured what happened in Hungary in a study of how to apply the dialectic to an examination of working-class organization, in *Notes on Dialectics: Hegel, Marx, Lenin*, London: Allison and Busby, 1980 (1948), pp. 175–76.

19. I would like to call attention to a few whose work has not been widely acknowledged: James W. Rinehart, Ken C. Kusterer, and Tom Jurovich.

20. See Martin Glaberman and Seymour Faber, *Working for Wages: the Roots of Insurgency*, New York: General Hall, 1998.

## EGGHEAD



The proposed dues increase is a good thing. Soon the union will have more money than the company.

## EGGHEAD



That's awful of those fellers in Flint, with all the work Reuther has, making him take over their local too.



### III.

# REVOLUTIONARY MOMENTS



## STUDENT UNREST

THE VIEW OF THE latest stage of the student rebellion as ritualistic behavior provides certain perceptions. But it also tends to conceal what is most significant about campus confrontations.

Ritual implies forms of activity of relatively long duration which may have become separated from any objective reality from which the activity arose. It also implies students responding to each other rather than to the world in which they live or the educational institutions which they are confronting. Either aspect makes it difficult to place the student activity in a conceptual framework that can take it beyond the immediate and the superficial.

The rhetoric and activities of any particular situation should not be permitted to conceal the two most significant elements in the campus disorders. The first is that it is rooted deeply in objective reality, it is a response to a fundamental alienation. The student unrest has spread from the great universities to the community colleges. It has encompassed the major industrial nations, both of the East and of the West. It has torn apart Japan as well as France, Czechoslovakia as well as Italy, Germany as well as the United States. It has extended itself into the underdeveloped world. The Asian and African continents have felt its sting.

In these circumstances it is not helpful to think of student demonstrations as responses to the reactionary stupidity of Kirk of Columbia or the liberal sophistication of Gallagher of New York's City College. They will not be significantly modified by superior tactics on either side or by clearer or more moderate demands. To appear on so vast a scale for a period of years seems to indicate that the student rebellion is a response to what is most fundamental in the modern world and that the ultimate aim, which is only partially reflected in particular demands, is some kind of fundamental transformation of society as a whole.

In this context, the fact that here and there a confrontation is engineered by an unrepresentative minority is of less interest than that it represents a universal mood. The disturbances at Harvard were initiated by a minority group in SDS which had been voted down by the majority of that organization. That fact obviously gives sustenance to those who are hostile to rebellious student activities. But it does not explain the response in the student body to the confrontation or the vulnerability of the University's position.

Very often it is the extreme reaction which provides the protesters with their majority. The Paris police provided the students of the

Sorbonne with majority support. The American military does the same for the militants of Zengakuren. Governor Reagan rushes to fill the ranks of the radicals at Berkeley.

The universality of the student unrest overlaps the second significant element in the campus disorders. This is that they are revolutionary. That is, they are fundamental in nature and they are new. Precedents are little help in thinking about what is happening. Beginning with the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley and going through several stages, the student activities have posed new problems and attempted new tactics. In this context it becomes less significant that mistakes are made, that stupidities are uttered, that demands may be unrealizable. It is precisely in the struggle, in the confrontations, that a new road emerges. What that road might be is not yet clear but it is being charted in the concrete victories and defeats. To insist that aims and tactics be clarified in advance is to attempt to impose abstractions on a living objective movement. It also amounts to imposing on a revolutionary movement the bureaucratic methods of the educational institutions. It is only in trial and error and in conflict that what students want and what is possible and necessary will emerge. Which seems to me to guarantee that it will not be some new all-encompassing bureaucratic plan.

In its international scope and growing depth, the student movement cannot be counterposed to any liberal or intellectual tradition. Students in the United States have made a substantial contribution to the struggles of Black Americans in various stages. They have spearheaded an anti-war movement that has won considerable success. If they confront university administrations, that is because that is where they are, not because that is their ultimate objective. Students around the world have raised the major questions of our time, the questions of war, race and revolution. But even in the demands directed against the colleges themselves by American students, there is evident the need for a totally new conception of education and its relation to the community. At Berkeley it is a public park. At Columbia it is a gymnasium that borders on the Black ghetto. At City College it is the admission of substantial numbers of Negroes and Puerto Ricans without respect to academic standards. These issues have their counterparts in most campus confrontations.

I would suggest, for example, that the criticism that demands for Black Studies only perpetuate poorer quality education for Black students does not, in this context, even deal with the proper question, much less supply a reasonable answer. When the demand is for a thousand students to have the opportunity for higher education opened

up to them (or access to University facilities, or whatever), it is not especially relevant to insist that one hundred students do better work.

It is also necessary to avoid the assumption that the target of the student demonstrators is a few great Universities. What is involved is not a few institutions of higher learning and their accomplishments or traditions but the totality of higher education in this country (and others). Nowhere did the great universities seriously resist the inroads of McCarthyism in the fifties. Nowhere did the great universities begin a re-examination of either their policies or the society in which they function until it was imposed on them. Consider one critical aspect of American society today: American colleges of every level and description have produced the thousands of teachers who are almost totally unable to comprehend either Black or working-class students. American colleges, including those with the finest traditions, have produced the historiography of the American Negro which it is now taking picket lines and protests to overcome at every level.

What American higher education has done on the race question it has equalled on other questions. Universities still rush to get the grants and the gravy that incorporate them into the war machine. Clearly it is not a free intellectual tradition that is being challenged, but the lack of one. It is not the university as the repository of knowledge that is being attacked, but the university as the destroyer of knowledge. But more than that, it is the university as representative of its society that is being called into question. When a society is challenged by those who are being trained to run it, the alienation and rejection must run pretty deep. And the demonstrations, the dramatics, the demands, must be viewed as attempts to discover new social relations that can give meaning to human society.

In their activity, the students are representative of their age. They are not the isolated independent communities of the medieval university. They have at their disposal the latest in modern technology—above all a press in all its forms—that makes each incident and tactic the property of all within hours. That lends power to the student movement (as it does to any modern movement). Only superficially does the subjective role of newspaper editors and TV broadcasters alter developments. Their role is fundamentally technological. It is the immediate and universal availability of the facts that dominates.

That and the fact that from Tokyo to Berkeley, from Prague to Cambridge, Mass., from Paris to New York, a universal alienation brings forth a universal response.

## THE NEW LEFT

SURELY THERE WAS A typographical error in the title of Hal Draper's article in the last *New Politics*: In Defense of the "New Radicals." It very clearly should have read: "In Defense" of the New Radicals. But perhaps, since the misplaced quotation marks appear in three different places, the mistake was not typographical but in Draper's head. To coin a cliché—with such defenders who needs . . .

Draper does not think that the New Left is very new. And he does not think that it is very left. But the problem is Draper's, not theirs, because he cannot break out of the sectarian categories and limitations that he has held on to since the 1940's. He attempts to define the New Left more carefully but he succeeds only in defining it narrowly in terms of his own politics. Nowhere is there an attempt to define the New Left in relation to society and its objective development: always it is seen as an internal development of the radical movement. He *says* that each generation is new and that the old generation failed. By this he means what all old radicals mean: not that they were wrong, only that they were never able to make the revolution. And this is at the core of the difficulty of communication between the generations. Lip service to the young replacing the old is simply a form of patting a few precocious heads. The tests that are applied are still those of an older generation. This is made a little easier to do by dealing only with SDS, which has certain ties with the past, and ignoring such organizations as SNCC.

The New Left *is* new and to the extent that it differs from older youth movements it is more perceptive about our society, bolder and more revolutionary, and more sophisticated politically.

The organizations of the New Left are much more free of adult domination than the youth organizations that Draper and I were a part of. They are either completely independent (such as SNCC) of any "parent" organization (although they have ties to SCLC and other groups in particular activities) or they have a degree of autonomy that the youth organizations of the thirties and forties never dreamed of. This is both new *and* left. It has made possible the imaginative actions, the boldness, the revolutionary initiative which was so lacking in the youth movements of older generations in the United States. Even the organizations which are least independent are a reflection of the New Left because the roots of their recent growth

are not in the particular policies of these organizations but in the movement of a major segment of a generation toward revolutionary politics and activity.

The organizational looseness and fluidity of the New Left has no parallel in earlier youth movements. The ad hoc committee or action (FSM is the major example) is a widespread phenomenon. The willingness to experiment with organizational forms, the hostility to elitism which this reflects, the sensitivity to society and the forces in it and the ability to respond rapidly and easily to events, mark the New Left as both new and revolutionary. It is reflected in the use of the phrase, "participatory democracy." "My difficulty," says Draper, "is that I do not have the least idea what it means." Exactly. And he compounds this difficulty by confusing the concept with formal views of particular regimes abroad. This is simply because Draper can only see movements in terms of political lines. These are either true and revolutionary or false and reactionary. Participatory democracy, or direct democracy, is both a picture of the new society (soviets approached it; workers' councils achieved it) and a way of life for those participating in revolutionary struggles. It is integral to understanding SNCC and much of SDS. It has nothing to do with what these organizations, or parts of them, think of China or Cuba or Yugoslavia. It has to do with the fact that these organizations are not putting themselves forward as the new elite, the Vanguard Party, the saviors of the world. They are trying simply to help the masses, or those sections of the masses that they are in touch with, to organize themselves, to develop their own talents and abilities. This is alien to what Draper understands by politics which is, simply, a Vanguard Party (as large as possible, of course, but still a vanguard) and a Correct Political Line.

The New Left is more sophisticated and more advanced in political ideology than the youth organizations (or adult organizations, for that matter) of old. Draper considers them naive and primitive and anti-ideological because they do not have an all-embracing, correct ideology. As a Marxist, I have a tremendous respect for a fundamental ideology which makes it possible to view the world as a totality and to function in it in a revolutionary manner. It is one of the functions of a Marxist organization to continue and develop such an ideology. It does not follow from that, however, that everyone must be a member of a Marxist organization, or even be a conscious Marxist, to function as a revolutionary in particular struggles. Draper has only the test of the Revolutionary Party: if these organizations show no sign

of functioning as a mass political party with all the ideological trappings that implies, they are therefore non-ideological.

No one would insist that a false ideology is in any way superior to no ideology. What needs to be considered is not ideology vs. non-ideology in general but the particular ideology of the New Left and the ideology it is replacing. The old organizations that called themselves revolutionary believed in an elite party. The New Left, on the whole, opposes that belief. The old belief was wrong and a major reason that the old left failed.

The old left in the thirties believed that under the leadership of the advanced sections of the population it could prevent war. In practice, the overwhelming majority of the youth anti-war movement marched merrily off to the battlefield. The precise moment of their adherence to the war machine varied with their particular political line, but only a small minority (of which Draper was one) maintained their opposition to capitalist war. The New Left has no illusions that it can end war, but it has maintained its stand, as a necessity to itself, during the course of a war. I would submit that the anti-war politics of the New Left is superior to that of the old.

Draper ridicules the fact that the New Left tends to go to the lowest, the most exploited sections of the population, the slum dwellers. The criticism, in fact, would apply to the rural South as well, were it valid. But there is no need for involved criticism. Draper's statement: "The community in which the slum-dwellers live—the slum—does not provide a framework for socializing resentments and aspirations such as is provided by the integrating life of the factory; it atomizes," was blown sky-high by Watts. Of course, the factory is most important and a lot of young people today do not realize this. But they are not repeating the mistake of their elders of going into factories, pretending they are workers, to lead the proletariat to revolution. That is very practical—and revolutionary—wisdom.

What is very deceptive in this matter of ideology is that much that was accepted only by Marxists in the thirties is now accepted matter-of-factly by major sections of the population. After the Depression and the New Deal, World War II, the Bomb, the colonial revolution, that is, the domination of the world by both totalitarian and welfare state capitalism and the challenge to that domination, no one has to prove the need for national planning of the economy, for the international integration of society, for the need to end all war, for the integrity of the individual. These are integral to the ideology of the

New Left. And while that is not yet Marxism or a “total” view, it is a long way toward such a view and far superior to the rigid stupidities that most of us held on to in the thirties and forties.

In one sense, the difficulty in assessing the New Left is indicated in Draper’s treatment of the choice of “*permeation or left opposition.*” (This used to be known as *reform or revolution* but I suppose a New Left requires a new terminology.) Much of what Draper has to say in this connection is quite valid, particularly his attack on [Irving] Howe and the Establishment. What he does not see, however, is something that goes beyond the choice of reform or revolution—the conception that is evident in wide sections of the New Left that revolution should not be synonymous with isolation, that there is a revolutionary potential in the American population, that among Negroes, among workers, among the slum poor, among sections of the middle class, there is hostility to the existing society and that it should be possible for conscious radicals to make contact with broad layers of the society on a revolutionary basis. This is very different from the romantic vanguardism that characterized the movement in the thirties. And it is a more accurate and perceptive view of the American reality than the cynical nihilism of the old left.





## TOWARD AN AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVE

**T**HE CLASSIC COMPLAINT OF the American Left has been the political backwardness of the American people. The large Marxist and socialist parties which are taken for granted by European workers have never existed here. Except for the Socialist Party for a few years during the period of the leadership of Eugene V. Debs, there has been no American equivalent. The American representatives of the Marxist movement—communists, socialists, Trotskyists, Maoists, and their various splinters and dissidents—cannot be taken seriously as actual or potential candidates for an American revolutionary vanguard. While this situation cannot be divorced from the specific experience of American history, that history cannot be used to ignore the responsibility of the organizations of the left for their own fate. In the nineteen-thirties, when American workers were in massive motion, all sections of the Old Left had close contact with all that was potentially revolutionary in American society. In particular, there were spokesmen for each of the radical organizations in contact with a working class that was building new organizations and shaking the country. Despite all of the red-baiting in the press, workers accepted known Communists, Trotskyists, and socialists in positions of leadership in the new industrial unions. In addition, there were significant student and youth organizations that were under the influence, direct or indirect, of the radical parties.

The result of this close contact and intensive organizing was zero. By shortly after the end of World War II, whatever influence any of these organizations had had in the working class was gone. The idea that McCarthyism destroyed the American Communist Party is a fiction. McCarthyism was possible because the CP had already lost most of its influence among workers as a result of its conservative, pro-war, pro-government stand during most of World War II. But what is most significant is that having a militant anti-war position during the war years didn't prevent the same fate for the Trotskyists. The fact that there was more than one vanguard grouping in existence, offering the possibility of alternative policies, did not present a useful choice. Two (or three) parties prove as conservative in relation to revolutionary developments as one. It is clearly not differences in policy but the very nature of a vanguard party which is at stake.

When the American Left began to revive in the nineteen-fifties,

beginning with the Montgomery bus boycott, it found it necessary to ignore the Old Left completely. The basic reason for this was that the Old Left was wrong. It had made itself impotent by adopting a theory of the party which it falsely blamed on Lenin and which, in fact, was not a theory of the party but a theory of the backwardness of the American working class. It went substantially as follows: The objective conditions for revolution exist in the United States. What are lacking are the subjective conditions, basically, the revolutionary consciousness of the working class as embodied in "their" revolutionary party. Since the workers were not flocking to "their" party (meaning, of course, *our* party) they were not yet ready. The test of the revolutionary consciousness of the proletariat became the degree to which workers accepted the party program. By that test the workers were clearly backward (although no one would publicly use so crude a phrase). This then became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Workers refused to flock to organizations which manipulated them, condescended to them, patronized them—thus proving their own backwardness.

The problem of revolutionary organization, however, remains. And the most useful place to begin in discussing the role of the revolutionary or vanguard party in the modern world is with Lenin.

#### WHAT IS TO BE UNDONE?

Most people concerned with the subject are familiar with *What Is To Be Done?* and, in particular, the famous quotation from that work:

We have said that *there could not have been* Social-Democratic consciousness among the workers. It would have to be brought to them from without. The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own efforts, is able to develop only trade-union consciousness. . . .<sup>1</sup>

This is taken, particularly within the Left in America, as Lenin's last word on the subject. In fact, of course, it was only his first word and was considerably modified, beginning in 1903, the year following the publication of *What Is To Be Done?* In a short "Speech on the Party Programme," devoted mostly to the dispute about *What Is To Be Done?*, Lenin said:

I shall now go over to the disputed passage in my pamphlet, *What Is To Be Done?*, which gave rise to so much discussion here. . . . It is obvious that here an episode in the struggle

against “economism” has been confused with a discussion of the principles of a major theoretical question (the formation of an ideology). Moreover, this episode has been presented in an absolutely false light. . . .

. . . It is claimed that Lenin says absolutely nothing about any conflicting trends, but categorically affirms that the working-class movement invariably “tends” to succumb to bourgeois ideology. Is that so? Have I not said that the working-class movement is drawn towards the bourgeois outlook *with the benevolent assistance* of the Schulze-Delitzsches *and others like them?* . . .

Lenin takes no account whatever of the fact that the workers, too, have a share in the formation of an ideology. Is that so? Have I not said time and again that the shortage of fully class-conscious workers, worker-leaders, and worker-revolutionaries is, in fact, the greatest deficiency in our movement? Have I not said there that training of such worker-revolutionaries must be our immediate task? . . .

. . . We all now know that the “economists” have gone to one extreme. To straighten matters out somebody had to pull in the other direction—and that is what I have done. . . .<sup>2</sup>

The concluding sentence indicates one of the factors involved in understanding Lenin. It was an essential part of what might be called Lenin’s “style,” but what is in reality a fundamental political attitude, to take an idea to its limit. If this meant that he would on occasion have to retreat from an extreme position, it also meant that there was no deception (of self or others) as to the political consequences of a position, and no hedging qualifications placed around political ideas.

The major modification, however, began to take place as a consequence of the revolution of 1905, that is, of the giant intervention of the Russian working class in the political life of the country.

One is struck by the amazingly rapid shift of the movement from the purely economic to the political ground, by the tremendous solidarity and energy displayed by hundreds of thousands of proletarians—and all this, notwithstanding the fact that conscious Social-Democratic influence is lacking or is but slightly evident. The primitive character of the socialist views held by some of the leaders of the movement and the tenacity with which some elements of the working class

cling to their naive faith in the tsar enhance rather than lessen the significance of the revolutionary instinct now asserting itself among the proletariat. The political protest of the leading oppressed class and its revolutionary energy break through all obstacles, both external, in the form of political bans, and internal, in the form of the ideological immaturity and backwardness of some of the leaders.<sup>3</sup>

In the history of the working class there come to light contradictions that have ripened for decades and centuries. Life becomes unusually eventful. The masses, which have always stood in the shade and have therefore often been ignored and even despised by superficial observers, enter the political arena as active combatants. These masses are learning in practice, and before the eyes of the world are taking their first tentative steps, feeling their way, defining their objectives, testing themselves and the theories of all their ideologists. These masses are making heroic efforts to rise to the occasion and cope with the gigantic tasks of world significance imposed on them by history; and however great individual defeats may be, however shattering to us the rivers of blood and the thousands of victims, nothing will ever compare in importance with this direct training that the masses and the classes receive in the course of the revolutionary struggle itself.<sup>4</sup>

History, which the working-class masses were making without Social-Democracy, has confirmed the correctness of these views and the tactical line. The logic of the proletariat's class position proved stronger than Capon's mistakes, naivetes, and illusions.<sup>5</sup>

These selections are by no means exhaustive, as a reading of Volumes 9 and 10 of Lenin's *Collected Works* will easily demonstrate. This material, however, was never made as easily available by the publishers as *What Is To Be Done?*, which has appeared in many cheap editions, not because it was Lenin's thought-out position but because it suited the position of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.<sup>6</sup> It is unfortunate that the American Left did not take another of Lenin's major points in *What Is To Be Done?* quite as seriously—the injunction to devote major attention to theoretical work.<sup>7</sup>

The confusion over Lenin's conception of the party was aided to some degree by Rosa Luxemburg's contribution to the discussion.<sup>8</sup> She was never able to distinguish those elements of Lenin's position

that stemmed from the requirements of an underground organization functioning in the Tsarist autocracy and were not intended as a guide to revolutionary organization in general. Nor could she comprehend at this stage of the discussion that Lenin's emphasis on centralism and discipline stemmed, not from a conception of the backwardness of the workers, but from the reverse, the necessity of workers to discipline middle-class intellectuals. What is especially relevant to this is that Lenin's context was the assumption that the coming Russian Revolution would be a *democratic* and not a *socialist* revolution, a context which would place great strain on the party's ability to maintain its independence as a proletarian organization. Luxemburg did not seriously deal with this context. It is also difficult to detect from her discussion that Lenin, up to the debacle of 1914, took the *German Social Democracy* as his model for working-class party organization. (Nearly everyone did: Debs also functioned with the German party as a model, adjusting it to his view of politics and to the American experience.)

Even after the seizure of power, with the Communist Party in the leadership of the nation, Lenin continued to affirm the importance of his party being a working-class party. In 1922 he wrote two letters transmitting proposals on party membership to the Central Committee. He proposed that the probation period for new members be "six months only for those workers who have actually been employed in large industrial enterprises for not less than ten years. A probation period of eighteen months should be established for all other workers, two years for peasants and Red Army men, and three years for other categories."<sup>9</sup> Later he added:

There is no doubt that judged by the bulk of its present membership our party is not proletarian enough. . . . Our party is less politically trained than is necessary for real proletarian leadership in the present difficult situation, especially in view of the tremendous preponderance of the peasantry. . . . If we agree to a six months' period for workers, we must without fail, in order not to deceive ourselves and others, define the term "worker" in such a way as to include only those who have acquired a proletarian mentality from their very conditions of life. But this is impossible unless the persons concerned have worked in a factory for many years—not from ulterior motives, but because of the general conditions of their economic and social life.<sup>10</sup>

Workers, like all others coming into the party, were to be educated and trained. But it is obvious that the need for large numbers of genuine workers, and their shortened period of probation, is based on the necessity for workers to lead the party, that is, to give it direction and to keep it from abandoning its revolutionary track, rather than on the need of the party to lead the workers. The proletarian nature of the party had always been an integral part of Lenin's conception.

Apart from his insistence on the class nature of the party, Lenin's view was flexible. Organization was subordinate to politics and the requirements of organization had to correspond to the necessities of the situation. It seems to me clear that a vanguard party was needed in the Russia of 1917. However, a tentative judgment of Lenin's theory and practice leads me to believe that Lenin was mistaken in certain aspects of his developing position.

In the first place he underestimated the inevitable conservatism of the party as a political institution. One does not have to accept the ahistorical absolutes of Robert Michels to realize that he saw the inadequacy of the modern political party in advance of the collapse of the Second International in 1914. "For democracy," he wrote, "... the first appearance of professional leadership marks the beginning of the end, and this, above all, on account of the logical impossibility of the 'representative' system, whether in parliamentary life or in party delegation."<sup>11</sup> He is barely hinting at the fact that the internal life of a party, even under democratic centralism, is governed by the forms of bourgeois democracy.

In *On Revolution*, Hannah Arendt adds her insight, and further exposes the party, even the revolutionary party, as a bourgeois institution. The professional revolutionary of the vanguard party fares no better than Michels' "professional leadership."

While the part played by the professional revolutionist in the outbreak of revolution has usually been insignificant to the point of non-existence, his influence upon the actual course a revolution will take has proved to be very great. And since he spent his apprenticeship in the school of past revolutions, he will invariably exert this influence not in favor of the new and the unexpected, but in favor of some action which remains in accordance with the past.<sup>12</sup>

This conservatism of the revolutionary party is confirmed by the experience of the Bolsheviks. When Lenin returned to Russia in April

1917 he found the leadership of the Bolshevik party supporting the Provisional Government and rejecting the perspective of power to the newly created Soviets. They were governed by an old political analysis, rather than by the reality of the existing situation. Lenin's proposals to adopt a perspective of Soviet power were rejected by the leadership and he had to embark on a campaign to win the party to his views. The whole struggle over the so-called April Theses raises questions to which there are no final answers, but which, at the very least, raise serious doubts of the vanguard role of the Bolshevik party *as a party*. What would have been its role without Lenin? Would it have continued along the compromising path that it had begun? The events of April 1917 have always hung like a dark shadow over all the theorizing about the role of the party.

There is another weakness in Lenin's views which has even more relevance for today. Although he was most certainly aware of it, he did not always place sufficient emphasis on the role of the proletariat as initiator and inventor of new social forms. [It is crucial to understand that the working class, in spontaneous eruption, is the architect of the socialist society. Marx refused to discuss any details of his concept of dictatorship of the proletariat until, in 1871, the workers of Paris created the Commune. Then their creative act became the basis for his theory of the workers' state.] At a later stage, the spontaneous creation of soviets by Russian workers in 1905 and then again in 1917 became the basis for the continuing Marxist theory of the state. Hannah Arendt, coming from another direction, nevertheless documents the historical development:

No tradition, either revolutionary or pre-revolutionary, can be called to account for the regular emergence of the council system ever since the French Revolution. If we leave aside the February Revolution of 1848 in Paris, . . . the main dates of appearance of these organs of action and germs of a new state are the following: the year 1870, when the French capital under siege by the Prussian Army "spontaneously reorganized itself into a miniature federal body," which then formed the nucleus for the Parisian Commune government in the spring of 1871; the year 1905, when the wave of spontaneous strikes in Russia suddenly developed a political leadership of its own, outside all revolutionary parties and groups, and the workers in the factories organized themselves into councils, *soviets*, for the purpose of representative self-government; the

February Revolution of 1917 in Russia, when “despite different political tendencies among the Russian workers, the organization itself, that is the Soviet, was not even subject to discussion”; the years 1918 and 1919 in Germany, when, after the defeat of the army, soldiers and workers in open rebellion constituted themselves into *Arbeiter- und Soldatenräte*, demanding, in Berlin, that this Rätevetem become the foundation stone of the new German constitution, and establishing, together with the Bohemians of the coffee houses, in Munich in the spring of 1919, the short-lived Bavarian Räterepublik; the last date, finally, is the autumn of 1956, when the Hungarian Revolution from its very beginning proclaimed the council system anew in Budapest, from which it spread all over the country “with incredible rapidity.”<sup>13</sup>

This does more than limit the significance of the vanguard party. It defines the nature of the revolution itself. The new state is created spontaneously in the act of revolt. The old state is destroyed either by frontal attack or by being ignored and losing its armed defense. The old oppositions—reform or revolution, peaceful or violent revolution—are abstract irrelevancies. Unless there is the creation of a new state, starting at the bottom, in production, there is no social revolution. Anything less than that, no matter how violently achieved, is reform of existing, capitalist institutions. This process also defines the revolution as proletarian. It must take place at the point of production, that is, it must transform fundamental social relationships, or it is limited to street demonstrations, violent clashes, and the like.

There is an interesting, and much neglected, addition to this definition of social revolution by Marx and Engels:

Both for the production on a mass scale of this communist consciousness, and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of men on a mass scale is necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, *revolution*; this revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the *ruling* class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class *overthrowing* it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew.<sup>14</sup>

It need hardly be noted that this destroys the common view of the vanguard party, that it is needed to raise the consciousness of the



masses to make the revolution possible. In Marx's view, consciousness does not create the revolution—the revolution creates a new consciousness.

### STAGES IN SOCIETY AND ORGANIZATION

Whatever one may think of Lenin's theory of the party, it was not Marx's. This is not meant in any sense as criticism. It simply indicates that they lived in different times and faced different problems. There are two elements in their theories of organization that they share in common. One is the decisive significance given to the working class. The other is a dialectical-historical methodology. Neither one would have accepted any theory of the party as fixed and final. The idea of constant change in "all the social relationships" of capitalist society is a fundamental aspect of Marxist thought. . . .<sup>15</sup>

"All the social relationships"—how could that possibly exclude change in the nature of the working class and in the nature and requirements of working-class organization? In the context of such a perspective, of a changing conception of the working class and, therefore, of a changing conception of the revolutionary party, Lenin provides a guide. The Second International was destroyed by its capitulation to the great powers embarking on a world war in 1914. A stage and a form of organization had come to an end. Lenin sought the causes of the degeneration of the international, not in political differences or in subjective notions such as a betrayal. He sought the fundamental roots of betrayal in a new stage of capitalism. In his book, *Imperialism*, he defined that stage as monopoly capitalism or imperialism and he noted the change in the working class as the appearance, in response to economic and technological developments, of an aristocracy of labor which was no longer revolutionary and which dominated the thinking of the socialist parties.<sup>16</sup>

For all practical purposes (and theoretical ones, too) the succeeding stage of the Third International came to an end with Stalin's accession to power. But, however one wishes to date the stages, it would be quite remarkable if, fifty years and more after Lenin's analysis of imperialism, capitalist society, the working class, and the stage of working-class organization had remained untouched by such developments as world-wide depression, world war, the atomic and hydrogen bombs, colonial revolution, automation, and the intensified stratification of production. It would be remarkable, and a shattering blow at the dialectical methodology of Marxism. The problem,

basically, is to determine the stage that capitalist society has reached and the organizational consequences that follow.

The place to look in the post-World War II world is at the revolutionary upheavals that have taken place in the industrial world. Two stand out: Hungary in 1956 and France in 1968. In them are revealed the stage that society in general has reached and the stage that the industrial working class has reached. In both revolutions we see societies that are essentially state capitalist, totalitarian state capitalist on the one hand, and welfare state capitalist on the other. To state it simply, by state capitalist is meant that the state has become the dominating force in the economy and in the society in ways which did not exist when Lenin wrote *Imperialism*, and that the state represents a minority of the population which controls the means of production and exploits the majority and is therefore capitalist.<sup>17</sup>

The reflection of this new stage of capital within the working class is the appearance of a bureaucracy that is far in advance of the labor aristocracy of 1914. It is a bureaucracy of the working-class parties and unions—and of the state, when it has power in the state—which participates in the management of production and, therefore, in the disciplining of workers in production. The appearance of the bureaucracy varies in each nation. In the Soviet Union the bureaucrats appear as union and party functionaries and as managers of enterprises. In France they appear as officials of the Communist Party and the trade unions. In England they are union officials, Labor Party functionaries, and, at times, government officials and managers in nationalized industries. In the United States they are the members of the hierarchy of the union movement, especially in the major industrial unions.<sup>18</sup>

This new form of the labor bureaucracy relates to, and in part responds to, a new level of working-class spontaneous self-activity. The education, the experience, the technology, the means of communication available to Hungarian workers in 1956 were far in advance of the experience of Russian workers in 1917 and explain the differences in the forms created by their respective revolutions. In discussing the art of insurrection, Leon Trotsky provided the basis for the theory of the vanguard party:

To overthrow the old power is one thing; to take the power in one's own hands is another. The bourgeoisie may win the power in a revolution not because it is revolutionary, but because it is bourgeois. It has in its possession property,

education, the press, a network of strategic positions, a hierarchy of institutions. Quite otherwise with the proletariat. Deprived in the nature of things of all social advantages, an insurrectionary proletariat can count only on its numbers, its solidarity, its cadres, its official staff.<sup>19</sup>

What the Hungarian Revolution (and the French) demonstrated was that these “social advantages” remained with the ruling class only so long as the workers permitted it. The rulers had a press until printers and reporters took it over; railroads, until railroad workers took control; means of communication, until telephone operators, radio staff, etc., took over. Because of the relative backwardness of the society, Russian workers in 1917 could not take control of the society directly in their own name. They spontaneously formed soviets but these were essentially parliamentary bodies of a new type on which the workers are represented indirectly through the mediation of political parties. Lenin’s efforts to involve the workers directly in government “to a man” proved fruitless and very quickly the party and the bureaucracy became a power over the workers.

The contradiction between party and mass was solved at the very beginning of the Hungarian Revolution. The only party in existence, the Communist Party, was destroyed on the first day of the revolution and had to be reconstructed. The Workers’ Councils, directly representing all the workers, although obviously dominated by the manual workers, included all workers and took over both the management of industrial enterprises and the powers of government that were allowed to them in the brief period of revolutionary freedom.<sup>20</sup>

That this was not just an accident of the Hungarian situation but represented the conditions of a new stage of modern class society, and therefore of the working class and its forms of organization, is shown by two events, one practical, one theoretical. The practical event was the French Revolution of 1968 in which the basic forms of the Hungarian Revolution in the state capitalist society of eastern Europe were duplicated or approximated in the welfare state society of western Europe, and in which all of the existing parties of the working class, especially the Communist Party, played the role of saviors of capitalist society—not the most suitable development for a “vanguard.”<sup>21</sup>

The theoretical event was the preparation in 1948 of a study of the Marxian dialectic, derivative from Hegel, in relation to the stages of working-class organization, by the West Indian, C.L.R. James.

The development of the antagonistic elements *in* the labor movement is clear. Constantly higher stages, sharper conflicts of development between it as object and it as consciousness. *Increasingly violent profound attempts by the masses to break through this. . . .*

It is obvious that the conflict of the proletariat is between itself as object and itself as consciousness, its party. The party has a dialectical development of its own. The solution of the conflict is the fundamental abolition of this division. The million in the CP in France, the 2 1/2 millions in Italy, their domination of the Union movement, all this shows that the prol[etariat] wants to abolish this distinction which is another form of the capitalistic division between intellectual and manual labor. The revolutionary party of this epoch will be organized labor itself and the revolutionary *petty-bourgeoisie*. The abolition of capital and the abolition of the distinction between the proletariat as object and proletariat as consciousness will be one and the same process. That is our *new notion* and it is with those eyes that we examine what the proletariat is in actuality.<sup>22</sup>

Hegel had followed his system to the end and established the faculty of thought (through his World-Spirit) as the moving principle of the Universe. Under this banner he had linked being and knowing. And he had made thought *free*, creative, revolutionary (but only for a few philosophers). Marxism followed him and established human labor as *the moving* principle of human society. Under this banner Marx linked being and knowing, and made labor and therefore thought, free, creative, revolutionary, for all mankind. Both in their ways abolished the contradiction between being and knowing. Now if the party is the knowing of the proletariat, then the coming of age of the proletariat means the abolition of the party. That is our new Universal, stated in its baldest and most abstract form. . . .

The party as we know it must disappear. It will disappear. It is disappearing. It will disappear as the state will disappear. *That is the disappearance of the state*. It can have no other meaning. It withers away by *expanding* to such a degree that it is transformed into its opposite. And the party does the same. The state withers away and the party withers away. But for

the proletariat the most important, the primary is the withering away of the party. For if the party does not wither away, the state never will.<sup>23</sup>

We are beyond *State and Revolution*. I can summarize where we are in the phrase: *The Party and Revolution*. That is our leap. That is our new Universal—the abolition of the distinction between party and mass. In the advanced countries we are not far away from it in actuality.<sup>24</sup>

Here, in the abstract form necessary to a theoretical study, are foreshadowed the events of 1956 and 1968. Trotsky was right in saying that the working class required an organization. He was wrong in making that organization a fixed, ahistorical category, in making the vanguard party *the* organizational form of the revolutionary working class.

In contemporary industrial society, to use James' formulation, the proletariat has *come of age* by *abolishing* the party. It has done this in Hungary and it has done this (but with only partial success) in France. That this is not taken for granted by Marxists and other radical thinkers is simply a reflection of the rigid, non-dialectical categories of thought that have become general in the movement. The party as the consciousness of the working class has become an eternal verity. The result has been that working-class consciousness has been viewed as a variant of the formal, verbal consciousness of party programs, speeches, and journalism. Lost entirely has been the significance of consciousness as activity.

The consciousness of Hungarian workers in 1956 was based on a technology far in advance of Russia in 1917; a more educated working class; the world experience of almost forty years; and the fact, as Che Guevara once said, that the basic ideas of Marxism are now the general property of all mankind. That this consciousness cannot be documented by the sociological survey or the political scientist's public opinion poll points up the defects in the methodology of the social sciences, not the weakness of the workers' consciousness. One month before the events, the coming of the Hungarian and French revolutions were undetectable in the words and thoughts of Hungarian and French workers (even assuming that someone thought to look for such information). All that indicates is that changes of consciousness, like revolutions themselves, are massive spontaneous events.

What then does this mean for the United States? Is the United States an exceptional power that is immune from the development of world

capitalism and of world revolution? Or do these new forms need to be incorporated into the thinking of the American Left?

### AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES

In the early days of SNCC, a fifteen-year-old black activist examined his relation with an older generation:

It makes you wonder why your parents put up with what they did. I know they had to; but they had to for so long that they forgot about keeping on their toes to end having to. That's what happened, and I guess that's why it has to be us in high school and college that will break down this segregation. My father, he knows too many reasons why everything I want to do won't work. He's right—but only for *him*.<sup>25</sup>

What he was saying about a generation gap was exactly appropriate to the political gap between the old and the new Left. The Old Left knew it all and had a policy to fit every situation. But it was a policy based on *their* experience (only dimly understood, it should be noted) and therefore automatically out of date and conservative. They knew “too many reasons why everything I want to do won't work.” But suddenly things had become possible which in earlier years had been impossible. And that could be discovered, and new tactics and forms of organization worked out, only in groupings that were free from the stultifying influence of the old parties.

What is crucial is the forms with which a new movement replaced an old movement, forms which arose from the circumstances and the needs of the participants. There were no new political parties and there were no all-encompassing organizations. This was both a modern and an American experience. In earlier decades in the U.S. and, more especially, in Europe, if old organizations or movements proved inadequate they would be replaced by newer organizations on the same scale. Socialist parties, for example, were replaced by Communist parties as the representatives of the bulk of the working class. When the NAACP proved inadequate to the needs of the civil rights movement, however, it was not replaced by a new organization that represented the black community. It remained to perform its specialized functions. Instead, a host of new organizations appeared, some national, some local, some temporary, some permanent, some membership organizations, some loose coalitions and committees: the organization of the Montgomery bus boycott, SNCC, SCLC, CORE,

local committees, ad hoc groupings, regional formations, and the like. When particular organizations outlived their usefulness or proved inadequate or could not accommodate themselves to changes in the struggle, they disappeared and were replaced. When the struggle moved from the rural south to the urban north, organizations like the Panthers and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers appeared to reach a new constituency and to put forward new tactics.

The black movement has been the dominant influence on the American Left and its experience is crucial. But it is not unique. Similar phenomena appear in the student movement, the anti-war movement, and, most recently, the women's movement. This experience is clearly not the result of some secret strategy or some historical accident. It arises out of an objective situation and corresponds to the nature of that situation and of the times in which we live.

It is my thesis that, although the American struggles have not reached the revolutionary intensity or massive power of the Hungarian and French Revolutions, they correspond in all essentials to the new stage of revolutionary activity in industrial societies indicated in the European experience. The crucial concept is participatory democracy. No experience in history has been as participatory or as democratic as the Hungarian Revolution. Although the forms are American, the multiplicity of organizations and the ease with which masses or groupings of people can form them or abandon them, reflects the control of the movement from below. It has been impossible for any single organization to dominate the left and to force strategies and tactics into a single mold, a mold which thereafter acts as a brake on further developments. The looseness and freedom of organization, on the other hand, has made it possible for varying kinds of "constituencies" to enter the political arena with issues and organizations of their own choosing. Students or workers, urban or rural, middle-aged or young, whites or blacks, can participate in political activity without the necessity of subordination to some over-all political formation.

What is a release of political energy can also appear as fragmentation and give cause for concern. Doesn't this division weaken the movement? The fears can result from inexperience or they can be a legacy from the rigid thinking of the Old Left. In any case, they reflect a measure of distrust of what people can do when they are free to act. In 1917, when workers took power through the Soviets and through the political parties that represented them, they then had to impose their will on other sections of society in the most literal sense: the

takeover of buildings and institutions which were necessary to the functioning of the society. In 1956 in Hungary, each section of society made its own revolution and, although nothing was imposed from above, the revolution was total and affected every nook and cranny in the society. That is the new stage of self-mobilization of a modern industrial society and it is that, and not weakness or fragmentation, that is reflected in the experience of the American Left in the last fifteen years.

That is not to pretend that there have not been defeats, tactical errors and the like. One of the things that is involved in the new organizational forms is that defeats do not easily become disasters and tactical errors can be corrected. The movement as a whole is more flexible because any section of it is expendible. And the movement is more responsive to the needs of ordinary people because it is dependent on them, and not the reverse. But, above all, it cannot be understood as a matter of preference or of choice. The nature of the movement as it has been formed over the last years is conditioned by the stage that society has reached. There is little that would be more futile than to wait or search for the vanguard party to put everything neatly together and to make the arrangements for some coming revolution.

There remains, however, an area of considerable ambiguity. That is the question of the American working class. One of the reasons for the extraordinary theoretical confusion of the American Left and also the reason for the tendency to search for organizational short cuts is that neither the Old Left nor the new has ever had a serious conception of the role of the working class in American society. The view that stems from the orientation of the vanguard party is a view that is distorting because it is based on formal political programs and policies and not the realities of social power.

To begin with, the organizational forms of the struggle for a new society and the forms of that society itself can only emerge from the spontaneous eruption of the working class. If those forms are not created in the process of production, on the factory floor, they cannot come into existence. A "constitutional convention" can create propaganda. It cannot create a new social order. The question of the capacity of the American working class to make a major intervention in the society is therefore not a marginal one. It is crucial to the point at issue. . . .

There is, and has been at least since the sixties, a deep division between the rank and file of American workers and the official organizations of the American labor movement. This is concealed by the fact that



unions and leaders have a press and a voice and workers do not. It is easy to assume, under the circumstances, that when Meany or Woodcock or any other labor leader makes some pronouncement, he is speaking for his membership. In point of fact, the most general characteristic of the union movement is that workers do not participate and give it only marginal support, a support that relates to defense against corporate attack and to nothing else.<sup>26</sup> Workers fight independently through wildcats, violence, sabotage, and the more traditional forms of intra-union conflict, in ways that make clear their opposition both to their conditions of life in production and to the union contracts and union hierarchies that help to maintain these intolerable conditions. The alienation and exploitation of factory life far exceed the abilities of wage increases and fringe benefits to overcome. What is fantastic is that this has been documented in such business journals as *Fortune* and the *Wall Street Journal*—only the Left seems to have overlooked this phenomenon which remains today substantially as described by Marx.

The response to this alienation is constant struggle. Most often these struggles take place on a small scale and are nowhere recorded. Occasionally, they break out on a large scale and attract public attention. What is essential to understand about them is that they are continual and that no amount of monetary gain has succeeded in putting an end to them. . . .

It is necessary to make one final qualification. This is not an analysis leading to a doctrine of pure spontaneity. In point of fact, Marxists and others with serious political views and perspectives are organized into all sorts of groups, and have been for over one hundred years. This wide-ranging political and propagandistic activity is an integral part of modern political and social life. It is one of the reasons that basic statements of Marxism are generally known and, in various ways, widely accepted.

A distinction must be made between organization and party. If the vanguard party has outlived its usefulness, and if the source of the political organization of the working class is now the working class itself (as it has always been), it does not follow that there is no longer a function for a Marxist or other kind of revolutionary organization.

[T]he Marxist organization has no need whatever to justify to anybody its existence and its activities. In every country, in all periods of modern capitalism, workers and intellectuals have

felt the need to organize themselves in order to advance the cause of socialism. They continue to do so at the present time and will continue to do it as long as class society exists.

What is important is not whether to organize, but how to do it and in what manner. A Marxist organization of the totality of theory and orientation which is a real labor movement today. It can provide, through its various ways, the means of communication by which the particular organizations of struggle are exchanged and which provide the bridge between the different, and the various, which make up the movement.

But it can perform these functions. The first is that it is clear to itself and to the masses that it is to dominate the movement as a whole. It has its own program and policies. Its serious theory must derive from the experience of an organization to learn from the mistakes of ordinary people. Only then

1. V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 1, pp. 1-2. Publishing House, 1961.
2. *Op. cit.*, Vol. 1, pp. 1-2.
3. "The St. Petersburg Committee," *Be Done*, pp. 1-2.
4. "What's the Matter with Us?" *Be Done*, pp. 1-2.
5. "Our Program," *Be Done*, pp. 1-2.
6. The "Program of the Young Radicals," *Be Done*, pp. 1-2.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.
14. Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. 1, pp. 1-2. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1953.
15. Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. 1, pp. 1-2. Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1953.
16. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 1, pp. 1-2. Tradition within the proletariat and its being... The proletariat is the contradiction between capital and labor... Therefore any contradiction between the consciousness of the proletariat and the consciousness of the bourgeoisie is the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. C.L.R. James, *Notes on Dialectics*, p. 44. In 1948, this seminal work was circulated privately.
17. For a brilliant forecast of state capitalism see C.L.R. James, *State Capitalism and World Revolution*, pp. 426-28. Scientific, 1969.
18. C.L.R. James, *State Capitalism and World Revolution*, pp. 426-28. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1937.
19. Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, Vol. 2, pp. 1-2. New York: The New Republic, 1966.
20. See Andy Anderson, *Worker-Student Action Committee*, pp. 1-2. See *The Mass Strike in France May-June 1968*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1968.
21. See *The Mass Strike in France May-June 1968*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1968.
22. *Notes on Dialectics*, pp. 45-7. Emphasis in original.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 150. Emphasis in original.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 154. Emphasis in original.
25. *Thoughts of the Young Radicals*, pp. 75-6. Emphasis in original.
26. See Martin Glaberman, "Be His Payment High or Low," *The American Communist*, pp. 1-2. Detroit: Correspondence Publishing Committee, 1953.
27. C.L.R. James, *Facing Reality*, p. 90. Detroit: Correspondence Publishing Committee, 1953.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 265–66. Footnotes in original omitted.
14. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p. 87.
15. Marx and Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party,” in *Selected Works*, p. 38. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1968. The importance of this quotation is indicated by the fact that it is cited twenty years later in a footnote in *Capital*, Vol. 1, pp. 532–3. Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1912. The translation in these two places is slightly different.
16. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 22, pp. 193–4, 279–85. “How to grasp the contradiction within the proletariat itself, . . . the contradiction between its consciousness and its being. . . . The proletariat is not an independent organism. It is a part of capital. Therefore any contradiction in it will be a special form of the general contradiction between capital and labor. . . . The contradiction between the proletariat and its consciousness is the contradiction within the proletariat of capital and labor. . . . If the opposition, the contradiction between the proletariat and its consciousness were not a part, a form, of the contradiction between capital and labor they would not be serious.” C.L.R. James, *Notes on Dialectics*, p. 44. Detroit: Facing Reality, 1966. Written in 1948, this seminal work was circulated privately for many years as a typescript until its publication in this limited edition.
17. For a brilliant forecast of state capitalism see Engels’ *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, pp. 426–28 in *Selected Works*.
18. C.L.R. James, *State Capitalism and World Revolution*, pp. 37–46. Detroit: Facing Reality, 1969.
19. Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, Vol. 3, pp. 168–9. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1937.
20. See Andy Anderson, *Hungary 56*. Bremley, Kent, England: Solidarity, 1968.
21. See *The Mass Strike in France May–June 1968*, Cambridge, Mass.: Root and Branch, 1970; and H. Gregeire and F. Perlman, *Worker-Student Action Committees France May ’68*, Kalamazoo, Mich.: Black and Red, n.d.
22. *Notes on Dialectics*, pp. 45–7. Emphasis in original.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 150. Emphasis in original.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 154. Emphasis in original.
25. *Thoughts of the Young Radicals*, pp. 75–6. The New Republic, 1966.
26. See Martin Glaberman, “Be His Payment High or Low,” *The American Working Class in the Sixties*, Detroit: Facing Reality, 1966.
27. C.L.R. James, *Facing Reality*, p. 90. Detroit: Correspondence Publishing Committee, 1953.

## POLAND AND EASTERN EUROPE

Let's begin with the Polish Communist Party and the Soviet Union. There's a long history of the relations between Polish and Russian Communism. One of the leading thinkers of the left in this century, Rosa Luxemburg, came out of Poland, and ended her career working with the German Social Democratic Party in the German left, but her influence on Polish Communism was substantial. It was a continuing source of difference and antagonism—even before the Russian Revolution—between communism and socialism in Poland, and communism and socialism in Russia.

For example, one of the differences that Luxemburg had with Lenin over the question of national independence seems quite peculiar these days. Lenin believed, and wrote quite extensively, that subject nationalities had the right to independence whether or not they were socialist. It was a democratic right that needs to be furthered even in capitalist society, bourgeois society. Rosa Luxemburg was opposed to the idea of national independence. Her attitude was that if the regime was capitalist it didn't matter and, if the regime was socialist, then the real object should be the breaking down of national differences and national borders and not increasing the separation of one nationality from another. It would seem that today those views are reversed: the Soviet Union is the one that is insisting on imposing its rule on subject nationalities and the Poles, in considerable numbers, are insisting on their own national freedom and independence. But that strain of difference remained a continuing feature of Polish communism after the Communist International was set up. During the '20s and '30s the Polish Communist Party was always sort of a dissident communist party. It was called Luxemburgist although its ideas didn't particularly reflect those of Rosa Luxemburg any more.

### WARSAW REBELLION

In the last year or two of World War Two, the Red Army was marching across Eastern Europe reconquering territory and conquering territory. It was marching across Poland until it came to the Vistula River close to Warsaw. There had been a rebellion in Warsaw the year before, the rebellion of the Warsaw ghetto, where Jews in Warsaw kept German troops and armor occupied for a number of weeks, until the ghetto was entirely wiped out. They had some contacts with the

Polish underground but not very much. The collaboration between Poles and Jews in those years was minimal.

The following year, 1944, when the Soviet Red Army approached Warsaw, another rebellion took place. In this case it was the entire population of Warsaw, working class and others, rising up to greet the Red Army, trying to overthrow the German regime, as a sort of welcoming sign to the Russians. What the Soviets did, literally, was stop. They stayed put for two weeks, while the German occupation used its entire military might to destroy the rebellion. They did not lift a finger, they did not attempt to march into Warsaw. When the rebellion was crushed, the Soviet army moved in. The last thing the Soviets wanted was an active, militant, organized working class, pro-communist or not, it didn't matter. They wanted a submissive, beaten population that they could control, and their role in the Warsaw uprising in 1944 was an indication of that.)

### POST-WAR COMMUNIST RULE

This rule went through several stages. There was a rather bitter period in which communist regimes were set up. Very often it began with coalition governments in which the communists simply took the key ministries of the Interior and of Foreign Affairs, in other words, gained control of the internal police and foreign policy of the regime, and then used that to demolish or merge with the various dissident parties until they weren't dissident any more. Then there was a period, a more flexible period, in which some of the more liberal communists came to power. Then in the early '50s there was a period of extensive purges. A number of people who later were restored to power, like Gomulka, who in '56 became head of the Polish Communist Party, did time in Communist prisons as enemies of the working class.

In the case of Poland, there were some very specific developments which contribute to the reality that we see today. One is that Poland was literally moved 125 miles. The Soviet Union appropriated to itself and incorporated into the Soviet Union about 125 miles of Eastern Poland and turned over to Poland about 125 miles of German territory in western Poland. (The people were moved too: the Russians did not want another dissident minority.)

One of the things that did was give Poland an industrial strip, although a lot of it was in a state of destruction and disrepair. Poland was still an overwhelmingly agricultural society. But one of the

realities of Soviet rule was that from about 1950 until the early 1970's was a period of substantial industrialization.

So when we're talking about the Polish working class, we are talking about a relatively new class. We are talking about a society that was overwhelmingly peasant in 1950 and was overwhelmingly working class in 1970. By '56, the time of the Hungarian revolution, Poland already had a working-class majority and that continued to grow. You have a lot of people in the working class who are fresh off the farm, but you also have by now a second generation of young workers who were especially active in the formation of Solidarity, and are the descendants of the first wave of peasants who became proletarianized. So you have a society with a nationalist tradition, to some degree a communist tradition and a political left tradition, and with a relatively new working-class tradition.

### REVOLT IN EAST GERMANY

There was a rather famous revolt in East Germany in 1953. Construction workers in East Berlin began a strike which spread and became a revolt that covered most of East German society and was put down by tanks.

When the revolt began in East Berlin, West Berlin workers rallied in a mass demonstration in the center of Berlin to support their East German brothers and proposed to march into East Berlin physically to support the East German revolt. This was before the Wall was built. The last thing the West wanted was that these revolutionary activities spread. So with the assistance and on the insistence of the American occupying power, the Berlin government prevented that. The police used fire hoses to break up the demonstration and prevent the kind of unity between West German workers and East German workers which could have led to a very different development in the East German revolt.

### SOVIET CP 20TH CONGRESS

The next key period is 1956, which is a crucial period for understanding everything that follows. One of the things that happened was Khrushchev's famous speech denouncing Stalin. Because it was a secret speech, everybody wanted to find out about it. Anybody with any sense knew long before that Stalin was a totalitarian butcher, but a lot of people needed Khrushchev to tell them because without that they really couldn't know.

In that same 20th congress of the Soviet Communist party, Khrushchev gave a public speech to which nobody paid any attention. It had to do with the usual range of things: five-year plans, the new plan, the problems with production. (These speeches last for hours.) One of the points he made was that it was necessary to bring the Soviet working class under greater control. He complained, for example, that the general form of piece work which was common in the Soviet Union wasn't working. He complained that factory managers were not using piece work to improve productivity.

### SHOP FLOOR STRUGGLES

In fact, what was happening was something very familiar to anybody who has ever worked in a factory. It doesn't matter whether that factory speaks Russian, or English, or French, or German, or Chinese: workers respond in very similar ways. Soviet workers in informal shop floor organizations would, in effect, force the local management to agree to a higher level of wages through the use of piece work, and agree on fairly stable production norms, which workers would then not exceed. Those norms would be high enough to augment their wages with piece work differentials but not high enough to drive workers to extremes of speed-up. And the reason they were able to impose these norms on local managers was that one of the things which is common to all workers in all industrial countries is the ability to run production and, therefore, the ability to interfere with the running of production.

In order to preserve their position in the society, local managers tended to trade off for a level of wages and a level of production which, on the one hand, protected the workers from greater exploitation, and, on the other hand, protected the managers by more or less guaranteeing that the norms would be met. Khrushchev was hostile to the inability of the central administration to impose the use of piece work and other forms of pressure and intimidation so as to continually improve productivity and speed up Russian workers.

### WORKERS' COUNCILS IN POLAND

In June of 1956, there were mass demonstrations in Poznan, Poland, which were violently suppressed. The demonstrations were led by steelworkers, who went on strike at a time when there was an international industrial fair in Poznan, making it rather embarrassing for the regime because it couldn't keep the event secret. It was

immediately known throughout the world. The demonstrators marched on the central city administration and sent delegates to the central party administration in Warsaw, making certain demands. Then a very curious combination of events took place. The demonstrations were brutally suppressed, some workers were killed, a lot of workers were put in jail. But in the following months trials took place in which it became evident that the punishment would be minimal. This was very unlike what was usual in Polish society. So what that did was encourage people to realize that it was possible to win certain things from the bureaucracy.

In October 1956, the lid blew off. There was a confrontation between Poland and the Soviet Union. A man named Rokossovsky was in fact a Pole, but had spent many years in the Soviet Union. He was a Marshal of the Soviet army and a member of the leading committees of the Soviet Communist Party, so his Polishness was rather nominal. The Soviets demanded that Rokossovsky become commander-in-chief of the Polish army. Khrushchev himself, and others, came to Poland to consult with leaders of the Polish Communist Party. The Poles resisted.

What began to happen, beginning in a big auto plant called Zeran in a suburb of Warsaw, was that workers began to gather. They formed workers' councils; stayed in the factories; and were in constant communication with higher union and party officials. In essence, they demanded that the Polish Communist Party resist the demands of the Russians and pledged the support of the Polish working class to that resistance. It worked. The Russians backed down. And it worked even further than that. The rulers of the Polish Communist Party were replaced, and that is when Gomulka was restored as First Secretary of the Party.

Remember, the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 began in Poland. There was a circle of writers in Hungary, the Petofi Circle, and they called for a demonstration in support of the Poles in their confrontation with the Russians. Symbolically, the demonstration was called for a public square in Budapest where there was a statue of a guy named Joseph Bem. Bem was a Pole who had come to Hungary in 1848 to support the 1848 Hungarian Revolution. The Hungarians used that statue and that place to show they were returning the favor and supporting the Poles and their resistance to the Russians in 1956.

The demonstration got out of hand. The rest is history.



## BUREAUCRATIZATION OF THE WORKERS' COUNCILS

The first thing Gomulka did when he took power and when that particular crisis was over was to legalize the workers' councils. By legalizing them, he began to transform them from revolutionary instruments of people determined to organize themselves and to decide their own fate, into another bureaucratic institution. What does legalizing mean? It means you have rules for elections, right? You no longer spontaneously elect people in the heat of a struggle. Every year you have an election and people are chosen to represent the workers in that workers' council.

It took a while. It took three years, in fact. The workers' council became a bureaucratic institution on the shop floor, parallel to the other institutions. The party, the union, and the management were previously in control of the factory. It took three years before the workers' councils became totally meaningless institutions and Gomulka felt free to abolish them.

### "A LETTER TO THE PARTY"

In 1964 and '65, a very interesting document was written by two Poles, Modzelewski and Kuron, who were later among the founders of KOR, the Committee in Defense of the Working Class. In the mid-1960's they were members of the Communist Party. But when these ideas hit Poland the two were expelled from the party and did two or three years in jail.

The document is entitled "A Letter to the Party." The opening paragraphs say: "According to the official doctrine, we are living in a socialist country." It went on: "Government control is [supposed to be] equivalent to socialism." And then: "The concept of state property can conceal different social concepts depending on the class character of the state. The public sector of the national economies of the capitalist countries has nothing in common with social ownership, not only because private capitalist corporations operate outside this sector, but particularly because the workers in the state-owned factories have no real share in their ownership since they have no say in running the factories, and therefore, no control over their own labor and its products." There's more, but essentially what this pamphlet said was that Poland was not a socialist society but a class society and the bureaucracy under the leadership of the Communist Party was an exploiting class.

## 1968, 1970, AND 1976

In 1968 there were student demonstrations and resistance in Poland. Also in 1968 there was the Czechoslovak spring, and the “peaceful” invasion of Soviet tanks (mainly because there wasn’t military resistance).

In 1970, there were massive working-class struggles throughout Poland. The regime, led by Gomulka, apparently had learned nothing from the experience of 1956. The events followed huge price rises in most food items, price rises which were announced in December 1970 as a kind of Christmas gift to the population of Poland who were getting ready to buy hams and chickens and other goodies, all of which shot up 50%, 75%, 100% in price.

Again, there was brutal repression. However, again the movement made its mark. It overthrew the government of Gomulka and he was replaced by Gierek, who was presumed to be more responsive to workers’ demands and interests because he came out of a coal mining background in Silesia, in southern Poland.

In ’68, students and intellectuals had demonstrated and the workers hadn’t joined them. In ’70, the workers demonstrated massively in various cities, and the intellectuals stayed away. Then in ’76, they all joined together. Workers and intellectuals conducted mass demonstrations and strikes, once again with military repression as the end result.

## SOLIDARITY

All that led up to August 1980. Once more the trigger was price increases.

The price increases were insisted on by western banks, who by this time had happily involved Poland in the pleasures of international finance. There were huge debts which the Poles couldn’t repay, and the banks imposed on Poland the traditional solution that they impose on Third World countries or any other countries. “In order to repay us, you’ve got to take it out of the hide of your working class. You can’t afford to subsidize food and housing and transportation. You have to increase the prices.” The Polish regime had already had three major waves of unrest, riots, and organization of workers’ councils in response to price increases. This was simply another step in the same direction.

A lot of people know what happened next. Strikes began to take place in various parts of the country. The response of the regime

to strikes was to give way: not to reduce prices but, whenever anybody went on strike, to give huge wage increases to compensate for the price increases. The new price structure remained intact. In effect, the workers were given a wave of C.O.L.A. [Cost Of Living Allowance] grants.

At every point the government thought it was bringing the situation under control, it began to develop further. The price increases were announced at the beginning of July. About a month and a half later, in August, strikes spread to the northern coast. This area had been central in previous disturbances, particularly the shipyards of Gdynia and, as everybody knows, the Lenin shipyard in Gdansk. There were certain differences, however, between 1980 and past years.

### TAKING OVER A SHIPYARD

Instead of going out and marching and confronting police in the streets where they were at a disadvantage, the workers stayed in and took over the shipyard. They used the shipyard as a fortress. It became more than a fortress. It also became the place where delegates from all the other struck factories began to appear. What was created was called the M.K.S., the inter-factory strike committee.

This took on a quality that went far beyond the limits or the reality of trade unionism. First of all, the demands clearly went beyond that. It was a situation in which every demand was directed, not against the employer, but against the state since the state was the employer. There were political demands: freedom to present the views and demands of strikers over government-controlled radio, freedom of the press. Because of the range of the shutdowns, the strike committee became in effect an alternative form of power to the central government.

After a few days, for example, the decision was made that public utilities, food manufacturing, and health services should continue to operate. That was a decision not of the Polish government or of the Communist Party but of the strike committee. This is the first stage of what is classically known as dual power. It comes almost automatically when a city or an area is hit by a general strike. A general strike obviously means that certain things have to be kept going. The water supply, public utilities, and health services are natural. Milk production for children. And those decisions are being made by the strike committee. Very often, the next step is decisions by the strike committee on public safety, or taking care of public safety because the police will not do it. The police are only interested in crushing the strike.

## LIMITS OF BUREAUCRATIZATION

The regime had learned some lessons from past experience, particularly about how these things spread. One of its first actions was to shut off telephone communication with the rest of Poland. A second was an attempt to isolate Poland from the rest of the East European bloc. The borders were closed. Polish travelers and vacationers were no longer permitted to enter Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and the Soviet Union.

If Solidarity had survived in an institutional way, there's no reason to doubt that some kind of rapprochement could have been reached. Agreements would have been formalized. You could negotiate wage increases. Sooner or later party functionaries would have infiltrated the union leadership, because as the union becomes more bureaucratic the mass participation of the working class erodes. You would have begun to get small union meetings in which a handful of functionaries could easily take power.

The problem was that the Polish working class wasn't permitting it. Two or three months before martial law was declared, stories appeared about splits within the Solidarity leadership and the inability of Solidarity to impose a no-strike pledge on the workers of Poland. An agreement would be made between Solidarity and the government, and then some plant would blow up, some region would begin to blow up, transport workers would go on strike, there would be token strikes of half a day, all of which were extremely disruptive economically and even more disruptive politically.

Solidarity did not have the kind of control over its own membership, and in general over the Polish working class, which is a basic condition for the institutionalization and bureaucratization of a union movement. That takes time. The modern industrial unions in the United States were created in the '30s, and they didn't become instantly bureaucratized. It took a whole series of events, including World War Two, before they became stable bureaucratic pro-regime institutions.

In elections at a major conference of Solidarity, Walesa, who was one of the more conservative leaders, was reelected, but there was not a large majority. A very substantial number of dissidents (at least a third, probably more) wanted a much more radical posture on the part of Solidarity. Dealings with Solidarity weren't all that stable and, therefore, weren't all that profitable to the regime.

## A SERIES OF STEPS

In a series of steps it became possible to crush the Solidarity

movement.

The Catholic church, one of the major institutions of Polish society, offered support to Solidarity from the very first. But the church insisted that what was needed was not more strikes, not violence, but peace. This is one of the reasons that it was profitable to the regime to make deals with the Polish church. The church offered a place where, in the first place, workers could meet, but, in the second place, where workers could be restrained.

Next, Gierek was replaced by Kania, who combined a good proletarian background as a Silesian coal miner with considerable experience in the police structure. Then, when that didn't work, Kania was replaced by General Jaruzelski, who seemed to be a Polish general who would not let the Russians just wander into the country and do anything they pleased.

After the imposition of martial law you had a lot of stick and very little carrot. And now [1983], with the end of martial law, you have the replacement of Solidarity as a formal institution (with a constitution and so forth) with a very widespread underground communication network. A network of communications was set up over a period of a couple of years, some of which was ended by the police regime, but some of which survived. With the restoration of telephone service, communication is easy. During the period of martial law, underground papers and an underground radio were able to survive for months, which is an indication of widespread popular support.

### DEFEATS AND VICTORIES

Governments obviously have tremendous power. But I want to suggest that we be less concerned with the power of the bourgeois state (while remaining aware of that reality) and be more concerned with the possibilities of ordinary people determining their own lives and their own fates.

Most people who write about the Hungarian Revolution, most people who write about Poland, talk about tragedy: the tragedy of the Hungarian Revolution, the tragedy of Poland, the crushing of Solidarity. To me these events are among the greatest victories of civilization I can conceive. In a world which says that ordinary people can't do anything, they attempted to do everything. And as long as those attempts continue, there is some hope that maybe we'll beat the man with the button and transform society before modern civilization is destroyed altogether.

The crucial point is you don't have any choice. You see, if revolutions were really made by conspirators in basements with beards and bombs, you could say, well, don't do it. Don't issue a leaflet calling for barricades tomorrow at 3:00 p.m. The fact is that modern social revolutions take place as mass, spontaneous outbursts. What do you do, stand on a street corner in Budapest and say, you guys are making a mistake, go on back home? When it explodes, then the only choice you have is the old Kentucky miner's song, "which side are you on?"

There is a very good historical example of that. Marx talked and wrote for years about the dictatorship of the proletariat. People asked him what it was but he wouldn't respond. He'd make some crack about not making recipes for the cookshops of the future. In 1871 the Paris Commune came into existence. It was not led by Marxists, but by a lot of other groups. The Marxists were a tiny minority, and Marx didn't have much use for them anyway. Marx's response to that great historical event was very interesting. He had all kinds of criticisms of what the Commune did and didn't do. It didn't nationalize the bank. It should have done this, it should have done that. But all of these criticisms were in private correspondence. His public statement was his famous long pamphlet/short book on the Paris Commune which became the classic of Marxist theory on the state—and is virtually uncritical of the conduct of the Commune.

Marx said the great lesson of the Commune was its own working existence. And it seems to me that as a method of looking at great events, we have to imitate that. We have to see where the working class or society has reached the furthest that it has reached and adopt that as our own as the basis for our theory.

## THE MARXISM OF C.L.R. JAMES

When C.L.R. James came to the United States in 1938 he was a leader of the Trotskyist Fourth International. When he left the United States fifteen years later, he was a founder of an independent democratic and revolutionary Marxist tendency. The nature of James's stay in the United States obscured what he had done in attempting to make Marxism relevant to the middle of the twentieth century. What he had done in that period and the elements that made it possible are the subject of this essay.

In 1938 the Fourth International was newly formed by Trotskyist groups which had left socialist parties in several countries to strike out on their own. Trotsky was living in exile in Mexico. He had formulated for his movement a "Transitional Program," which was to lead it to become a major challenge to the Communist International for the leadership of the world revolutionary movement. But the Trotskyist movement and its American organization, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), very quickly began to confront crises they could not overcome. The most immediate were the Stalin-Hitler Pact of 1939 and then the beginning of World War II. These events put in question one of the fundamental tenets of Trotskyism—that the Soviet Union was a degenerated workers' state and had to be defended, albeit critically, in conflict with capitalist powers. An extensive and bitter discussion took place in the SWP that led to a split in 1940. A substantial minority, which included most of the youth, under the leadership of Max Schachtman, left to form the Workers Party (WP).

James was a part of this minority and became a leader in the WP. But the question of defense of the Soviet Union was a tactical question. The debate around that subject had postponed the more fundamental question of the nature of the Soviet Union. That became the overriding subject of the first post-split convention of the Workers Party in 1941. It was in this discussion that James formed his own grouping and began the development of his theoretical views. He was known in the WP as J.R. Johnson, a pseudonym (with a few others that he used) made necessary by the ambiguous nature of his residence in the United States. He had a visa of limited duration, which, probably because of the outbreak of war, the government ignored. In any case, together with Raya Dunayevskaya and a few others he formed the Johnson-Forest Tendency, also known as the Johnsonites. Forest was Dunayevskaya.

The majority of the WP developed the theory of bureaucratic collectivism, which held that the Soviet Union was a collectivist society of a new type that, though not socialist, was more progressive than capitalism. (Over the years, with Schachtman moving more and more to the right, bureaucratic collectivism became as reactionary as capitalism and, finally, more reactionary than capitalism.) Johnson-Forrest rejected the idea of inventing theories to suit tactical problems and returned to Marxist roots to develop the theory of state capitalism.

Fundamental to the work of the tendency was the understanding that Marxism was not a party line and not a program. It was a methodology. And so, under the guidance of James over the following years, we turned to the study of Marxian economics and dialectics. We became notorious in the WP as the people who were always holding classes on Marx's *Capital*. Raya Dunayevskaya was especially important to the work on state capitalism and economic theory. It did not take much probing to realize that nothing in Marx or Engels or Lenin equated socialism with the nationalization of the means of production. Quite the contrary. Marx and Engels insisted that the ultimate tendency of capitalism was extreme centralization. "It was Marx in *Capital* . . . who stated that the only limit to centralization was all the capital in a single country in the hands of a single corporation. If that is not the economic form of state-capitalism, what is it?"<sup>1</sup> In *Anti-Dubring* Engels made his and Marx's views absolutely clear: "The modern state, no matter what its form, is essentially a capitalist machine, the ideal personification of the total national capital. The more it proceeds to the taking over of productive forces, the more does it actually become the national capitalist, the more citizens does it exploit. The workers remain wage-workers—proletarians. The capitalist relation is not done away with. It is rather brought to a head."<sup>2</sup> This was not an obscure statement. It was part of the three chapters of *Anti-Dubring* that were published as *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, a booklet that was translated into many languages and sold in millions of copies. The study of Soviet society by Dunayevskaya showed that the fundamental laws of capitalism, as presented in *Capital*, dominated the economy.<sup>3</sup>

But crucial to the understanding of James's Marxism was that his theory of state capitalism was not a theory of the nature of the Soviet Union. It was a theory of the stage of world capitalism. "The development of Russia is to be explained by the development of world capitalism and specifically, capitalist production in its most advanced



stage, in the United States.”<sup>4</sup> James was not prepared to accept any theory of Russian exceptionalism any more than he would accept a theory of American exceptionalism.]

What James had undertaken was to attempt to do for Marxism during World War II what Lenin had attempted during World War I. In 1914 world civilization and Marxism were both in crisis. World war had shattered any idea of advancing civilization. At the same time, the collapse of the Second International with the major parties supporting their capitalist governments in a war the Second International had sworn to oppose showed the depth of the crisis in the international socialist movement. Lenin in exile would not accept that a crisis of this magnitude could be explained subjectively by the “betrayal” of the various party leaders. It was also a time when he was studying Hegel and mastering dialectics—something he had not done in his earlier book, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. His conclusions were embodied in *Imperialism: The Last Stage of Capitalism*. He presented his view that capitalism had reached a new stage, imperialism, but that a new stage of capitalism implied a new stage of the working class. He held that the stage of imperialism, with the reaping of super profits from the exploitation of the colonies, made possible buying off an elite section of the working class and it was this section of the working class that provided the social base for social democracy and the acceptance of a role within capitalist society.

James took this as his model and attempted to apply the same methodology to the analysis of capitalist society during and after World War II. The crisis of world capitalism, once again embroiled in world war, was obvious. And the international socialist movement was confronted with the Moscow show trials, Soviet slave labor camps, the murder of millions of Russians, and, finally, the Stalin-Hitler Pact. The only alternative, Trotskyism, was unable to offer a way out of the crisis. In studying the mode of labor in the United States, James wrote:

A whole new layer of workers, the result of the economic development, burst into revolt in the CIO. The CIO in its inception aimed at a revolution in production. . . .

Because it was not and could not be carried through to a conclusion, the inevitable counterpart was the creation of a labor bureaucracy. The history of production since is the corruption of the bureaucracy and its transformation into an instrument of capitalist production, the restoration to the bourgeoisie of what it had lost in 1936, the right to control

production standards. . . .

[The bureaucracy must inevitably substitute the struggle over consumption, higher wages, pensions, education, etc., for a struggle in production. This is the basis of the welfare state, the attempt to appease the workers with the fruits of labor when they seek satisfaction in the work itself.]<sup>5</sup>

And then he made his leap:

This is the fundamental function of the bureaucracy *in Russia*. Already the tentative philosophy of the bureaucracy in the United States, its political economy of regulation of wages and prices, nationalization and even planning, its ruthless political methods, show the organic similarity of the American labor bureaucracy and the Stalinists.<sup>6</sup>

The new form of the labor bureaucracy implied a new stage of the proletariat in the industrial countries. The consequences involved a complex totality that included the forms of working-class struggle and the rejection of the vanguard party. As always, James and his followers returned to the Marxist roots. We were the first to translate into English the early *Economic and Philosophical Essays of Marx*. In his introduction to our meager (mimeographed) publication of these essays, James wrote:

It is a terrible emasculation, in fact a denial of Marx to believe that there was some science called economics and upon this, for decoration, Marx grafted humanistic sentiments. Every fundamental feature of his economic analysis is based upon the worker in the labor process and holds no perspective of solution except the emancipation of the laborer. It is a strange reflection of our time that this conception, that the solution of the economic contradiction of capitalism is the human solution, is opposed nowhere so bitterly as in the movement itself.<sup>7</sup>

James loved to repeat the thought of Marx that the proletariat was revolutionary or it was nothing. But, I suspect, it was this absolute confidence in the revolutionary capacity of the industrial proletariat as the rock-bottom foundation of Marxism that made James's ideas very difficult for revolutionary intellectuals to accept (and still does). In American sociology there is the myth that workers are plagued with the desire for instant gratification. In reality it is the petty bourgeois

intellectual who needs instant political gratification. If there is a year or two of relative class peace, the struggle is over and the working class is abandoned.

The alternative, which is still based on the conception of the backwardness of the working class, is the revolution made, sort of, or not quite, by the working class, but by some vanguard party. The absolute authority for this point of view is, of course, Lenin (who, being dead, can't defend himself) and the bible is the famous pamphlet *What Is To Be Done?* The seeming contradiction that James remained an admirer of Lenin to the end, yet rejected the doctrine for which Lenin was most famous, has often been commented on. But it is more apparent than real.

To begin with, after Russian workers asserted themselves and created soviets in 1905, Lenin retreated from his most extreme earlier statements.<sup>8</sup> (Of course, these later views are buried in the *Collected Works*. It was not in the interest of the Soviet regime to give them the circulation that was given to *What Is To Be Done?*) But more important was the concern for Marxist and Leninist methodology. It did not seem reasonable that the form of the revolutionary organization, which had been the First International in the middle of the Nineteenth Century, and then the Second International at the end of the Nineteenth Century, would be removed from historical development and become an ahistorical abstraction as Lenin's vanguard party. And so James embarked on the development of his theory of proletarian organization appropriate to the new stage of capitalism and of the working class. That development can be traced through much of his writing during the 1940s, although he was inhibited by his status as the leader of a minority tendency that was subject to the discipline of the majority. But the point of view of the James tendency received its most remarkable presentation in what became *Notes on Dialectics*.

This was originally a confidential document circulated privately among the Johnsonites in the SWP. It was an attempt to show the viability of dialectical materialism as a methodological tool at a time when the rest of the movement paid lip service to dialectics or rejected it as mysticism. It was the application of dialectics to a specific problem, the nature of the proletarian organization, and to those of us who saw it at the time it was a fantastic experience. . . . James knew that he was breaking new ground and noted in passing, "(I do not *guarantee* these interpretations. The point is once they are down we begin to get somewhere. I am not afraid of mistakes.)"<sup>9</sup> . . .

Those of us who read this in 1948 were only dimly aware of where this was going. Then, eight years later, these abstract categories came to life in the Hungarian Revolution. In forty-eight hours the working class of Hungary created workers' councils that took over the means of production all across the country and destroyed the old regime. Nothing in Hungarian society could stand in the way. The revolution was destroyed by the invasion of Soviet tanks. This happened in a country in which the working class had no party, no press, no independent unions, none of those institutions which radicals had always assumed were the minimum requirements of revolution. Then in 1968 the same process took place in France in the French Revolt, and in 1980 it was repeated in Polish Solidarity. These were the high points—there were stepping-stones in between.

No theory, radical or conservative, had accepted the possibility of working-class revolution in a totalitarian society. Only James and his small group were not surprised by the events that transformed postwar Europe. But that did not change the views of traditional Marxists. Article after article was written on the theme that the failure of the Hungarian Revolution was caused by the absence of a vanguard party. When Marx wrote about the meager accomplishments of the Paris Commune of 1871, he wrote only praise, saying that the main lesson of the Commune was its own working existence. When Soviet power had lasted one more day than the Commune, Lenin turned to his comrades and declared victory, although the survival of the revolution was far from assured. James is in the direct line of that revolutionary tradition. He did not sit in judgment on events and view them through the narrow focus of a party line or a party program. He was ever the revolutionary optimist, and he never departed from the oft-repeated statement that the proletariat is revolutionary or it is nothing.

His rejection of the vanguard party is based on a historical analysis of the development of the industrial proletariat. It did not apply, and he never applied it, to the so-called Third World. The seeming contradiction that he supported mass vanguard parties in Ghana, in Trinidad, and elsewhere is no contradiction. In agricultural countries, where there is no proletariat organized by the means of production and trained by experience in an industrial society, he had no problem seeing the need for a party to win independence and organize the emerging society. But, ever the democrat, he believed firmly in the need to base that party on the popular masses. He was quick to break with

revolutionary leaders who began to arrogate power to themselves over the masses.

His views on proletarian organization were ultimately embodied in the book *Facing Reality*,<sup>10</sup> which was based on the Hungarian Revolution. It was clear that the rejection of the vanguard party was not a rejection of organization. He believed that Marxists had the right and the duty to organize, to present their views to a wider public, to examine, to interpret, and to report the day-to-day activity of the working class, to look for the emergence of revolutionary possibilities, to participate in revolutionary struggles.

His own organization—the Johnson-Forest Tendency, then Correspondence Publishing Committee, then Facing Reality—was an integral element in the development of his ideas. On one level there was the sharing of work and the production of work that would have been beyond the capacity of any individual. Raya Dunayevskaya was crucial in the development of the ideas of state capitalism, in the study of the Soviet economy, in the understanding of Leninism. Grace Lee was a key figure in the study of Hegel, in providing translations from the German. James gives them both credit for their work in his introduction to *Notes on Dialectics*. Worker militants such as James Boggs, John Zupan, Morgan Goodson, and Simon Owen contributed their experience, their knowledge of shop-floor struggles, their understanding of the reality of the working class, and their words appear in much that James has written. But the significance of organization was far beyond the assistance of individuals. When James said he was not afraid to make mistakes, it was because he knew there was an organization that would sustain its members, would correct mistakes, and he encouraged the members of his group to take risks in the development of their ideas, secure in the knowledge that the organization would protect them from the worst of their errors. (Another aspect of James's Marxism was its profound humanism. The tradition in the old left was that you did not dare to make mistakes because they would surely be used against you in the next factional dispute.)

But an organization meant much more than this. It was the way to participate in class and other struggles. It was the way to see and meet and understand workers who were fighting the class struggle in their daily lives, blacks who were struggling for freedom and equality, women who were trying to transform the social reality of gender in modern society, young people who were battling the oppression and restriction of youth.

In 1970 the American organization Facing Reality came to an end. A second split in 1962 had reduced the group to five or six people. By 1970 the group had grown to twenty-five members, half in Detroit and the rest scattered around the United States. We began to publish a periodical and maintain a headquarters in Detroit. It became clear to me, however, that twenty-five people could not sustain the minimum activity required to maintain a serious political group. The group could probably last indefinitely but would inevitably become a sect, ingrown on itself, alienated from the real world. I proposed that the group dissolve itself to leave the members free to function politically as they would like. (I assumed that some would inevitably leave the movement.) This became a matter of dispute between James and me. There was a debate in the organization, and the majority voted to dissolve. That ended James's formal relations with an American organization, but relations with individuals continued to exist.

James took his view of the importance of the working class and of rank-and-file struggle seriously. As an individual he talked to people and always sought to find out what they thought and how they lived. Many of the ideas, phrases, and events that appeared in his writing came from workers and others he had talked to. But it was also a method he had taught to his organization. When his group became independent as *Correspondence* and founded a newspaper, it was to be a newspaper that did not lecture workers on the correct party line but reflected their ideas and interests along with ours. When the paper began publication, James was in London. The first few issues were very poorly done, and James responded with a massive correspondence—three- to ten-page letters every few days—which were circulated in the organization and, to some degree, helped improve the form and content of the paper. It is unfortunate that correspondence (which needs to be read alongside the issues of *Correspondence* to which it refers) is not accessible. Only two or three copies of the letters exist. We may hope that they will become available to scholars in some future archive.

His theories extended to other areas of social life and struggle, “non-proletarian” struggles, so to speak, and one element of that became an important part of his worldview. It began with his arrival in North America and his discussions with Trotsky on what was then called the Negro Question. The communist theory of the Negro Question had an ambiguous history. It began with a passing comment of Lenin that the Negro struggle was part of the national struggle. As everyone

knew, Lenin's view was that the struggle for national independence had a validity independent of the class struggle. American communists interpreted Lenin's remarks literally: national struggle meant struggle for land, and from that they derived their long-standing demand for self-determination in the black belt, those southern states and parts of states that had a black majority. Trotsky simply accepted the old communist view. Trotsky's American organization, the SWP, also accepted that view, but it was largely lip service. They were never very comfortable with it and, in any case, had no presence in the South and so never had to deal with it concretely.

James, in his conversations with Trotsky, began to move in new directions. He offered moderate amendments to the program for self-determination. In essence he said that it was a legitimate demand which Marxists should support—if it came from the black community. He had not seen too much of that, and so he was afraid that it might become a slogan imposed on the black community for ideological reasons. In addition, James proposed support for the idea of an independent Negro organization, in which Marxists would participate, but which would not be controlled by or subject to the Marxist party. That aroused a certain amount of interest, but virtually nothing was done about it in the succeeding years, at least partly because the SWP had no significant base in the black community.

But James's views, deriving essentially from Leninist methodology, proved prescient in significant ways. When the black struggle reemerged as a major factor in American life, it was in the form of independent black organizations in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. When the mass civil rights movement appeared, it was based on organizations formed to represent particular constituencies and not subordinated to any vanguard. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, the Panthers, and so on—each took its place in the struggle. It was not that these developments reflected his views of 1938. It was rather that his earlier views and the later development of his theories made it very natural for him to accept these developments and incorporate them into his theories in ways which other organizations of the old left found difficult. And his theoretical point of view expanded to accept the independent validity of a whole range of struggles which were not directly proletarian. The antiwar movement, the women's movement, the youth movement, just as the black movement, had an independent validity that did not

depend on their subordination to the working class. A good part of this had already appeared in the pages of *Correspondence*, well before the New Left, the anti-Vietnam War movement, and the contemporary women's movement had emerged.

There is much in James's Marxism, questions of organization, the practicalities of organization work, the nature of revolutionary journalism, and so on, that cannot be covered in an essay of this kind. Discussion of those and other questions will come in time. James's Marxist legacy lay buried because of its origins in a particular time and place. Access to it was further limited because James never was the head of a national state or of a powerful mass movement. But I believe that interest in James will grow. The destruction of Stalinism in Europe, the emergence of the new barbarism of American power, the failure of theories old or new to provide any guidance to these events, will only encourage the search for theories that point a way out of our current barbarism. This is not to say that James had all the answers or that he was always right. But he embarked on the most significant intellectual project of the twentieth century after Lenin, a project based on the heritage of Marxism, and there is no better place to begin the search for a road out of the barbarism of contemporary civilization. The revolutionary optimism of C.L.R. James will not disappoint the interested searcher.

1. C.L.R. James, *State Capitalism and World Revolution* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1986), p. 18.

2. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 25 (New York: International Publishers, 1989).

3. See Raya Dunayevskaya, "A New Revision of Marxian Economics," *American Economic Review* 34 (September 1944), and "Revision or Reaffirmation of Marxism? A Rejoinder," *ibid.* 35 (September 1945).

4. James, *State Capitalism and World Revolution*, p. 39.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 40–41.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

7. James, *At the Rendezvous of Victory* (London: Allison & Busby), p. 71.

8. See Lenin, "The St. Petersburg Strike," "What is Happening in Russia," and "'Our Father the Tsar' and the Barricades," in *Collected Works*, vol. 8. See also Martin Glaberman, "Toward an American Revolutionary Perspective," *Insurgent Sociologist* 4 (Winter 1974).

9. James, *Notes on Dialectics* (London: Allison & Busby, 1980), pp. 61–62.

10. *Facing Reality* (Detroit: Bewick Editions, 1958).



## REFLECTIONS ON MARXISM AND THE POLITICS OF C.L.R. JAMES

I have written about the Marxism of C.L.R. James. What I want to talk about today is the application of James's Marxism and methodology in dealing with major aspects and problems of society, particularly in relation to the United States, under the general headings of Race, Class and Consciousness.

### RACE

In dealing with race in the United States there is a huge documentation of exploitation, slavery, lynching, discrimination which hasn't ended to this day. That documentation needs to be continued.

But with James that would not be enough. He never thought that people were merely victims. He would be concerned with the ways in which ordinary people made history. And that is particularly what I want to talk about today: how people of African descent made the history of the United States.

It begins, like a lot of things begin, with the Haitian Revolution. It seems to be generally accepted and it's clear to me that the Haitian Revolution, among other things, contributed to the opinion of the French government and the king of France that they really did not have a future on continental America. And so France sold the Louisiana Territory to the United States when Jefferson was president and contributed thereby to a huge expansion of the territory of the United States and the beginning of the development of empire.

Another step is the Underground Railroad. There was a recent book by John Hope Franklin, the great African American historian, and Loren Schweninger called *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation*. It is a big book, a very fine book with lots of documentation, and the conclusion is that in spite of the runaways, and how many were caught and returned, how many returned voluntarily, plantations remained profitable.

Is that it? James would have shrieked at that. It meant a lot more than that. The meaning of the Underground Railroad cannot be limited to the dollars and cents of slave owners and slave plantations. One of the things for which the Underground Railroad has a substantial responsibility is the Civil War itself.

Why do I say that? People in the North were perfectly willing to allow slavery in the South, but not willing to have to deal with it

themselves, except, obviously, for business men who were involved in the slave trade, cotton, and so on. And so, in the history of the United States up until the Civil War you had a series of compromises. As the country grew larger it was divided. You can have this as a slave state, we will have that as a free state. That could have continued indefinitely. I'm sure slavery would ultimately have ended, but perhaps a generation later than the time that it did end, during the Civil War.

[What did the Underground Railroad involve? It involved the rejection of those compromises, because slaves going north and into Canada threatened the political structure of the compromises and of American society.] And so it became necessary for the slave section of the country, which controlled the national government, to insist not merely that their section remain slave but that the North participate in the return of fugitive slaves. The Supreme Court ruled that way: a slave was a slave even if he ended up in free territory. And that the North was unable to accept. So when Lincoln was elected, the South had lost control of the national government and decided to secede. Without the Underground Railroad, events would have taken a much different turn.

And then, at the end of the Civil War there is a very interesting statement by Lincoln. He said that if it weren't for the nearly quarter of a million black soldiers who took part in the Union Army, the South would have won the war. Historians accept that as a reasonable statement but they minimize its meaning. They say that it shows that black soldiers were brave, which I don't think requires any proof or justification.

What does it mean to say that the South would have won the Civil War? First, there was no way that the South could have conquered the North. In any case, all that the South really wanted was secession. So the United States might have ended up not as one great continental power but as two lesser powers. In addition, there was a possibility that the continent would have been broken up further. There was a book published very recently on the building of the first transcontinental railroad. And one of the points made there is that the federal government under Lincoln poured a lot of money into the building of the transcontinental railroad because there was a fear that if communication did not improve between the west coast and the eastern part of the United States, there was a possibility that the Northwest would secede; and there was always a possibility that the same might happen in the Southwest, which had been stolen from Mexico.

Let me put it this way: Less than a quarter of a million black

soldiers contributed to the development of the United States as a major continental power. Without them, America could have been divided up in the same way that Europe is divided up, into significant countries, but not like the United States as it is today, sitting astride the whole world.

A word on consciousness. Slaves didn't run away to start a civil war. Black soldiers didn't fight to preserve the territorial integrity of the United States, except in terms of ending slavery in the South. But what they did went far beyond their immediate concerns and created, very substantially, the United States that we see today.

I might say in passing that I believe American children should learn this in school. It's the history of their country. Do I think that will happen? No, not as long as there is capitalism in the United States, it is not going to be taught in American schools.

Finally, I want to deal with the civil rights movement, and again, with the question of consciousness and the question of unintended consequences.

The aim of the civil rights movement was to secure the vote for black Americans in the South, and to end the segregation of public facilities such as restaurants. Those were the conscious goals and they were won. But other things happened which were not not conscious goals. One of the things that happened as a result was what is known as the southern strategy of the Republican Party. When African Americans were able to vote in Democratic primaries, racists in the Democratic Party (which in the South was totally racist) moved over to the Republican Party. For the first time in a long time, the Republicans were able to gain control of the national government and of some of the southern states. A lot of the reactionary Republican Senators were reactionary Democratic Senators twenty years ago.

And there was one other consequence, to which not enough attention has been paid. The civil rights movement changed the makeup of the black community in the United States. It divided the black community much more sharply in terms of class.

What do I mean by that? Before the civil rights movement, the black middle class, the black bourgeoisie—doctors, lawyers, preachers, funeral directors, small store keepers—essentially depended on the black community. As a result, in the civil rights movement you had a pretty unified community.

What the civil rights movement achieved was the entry of educated African Americans into the corporate structure of the country. And one of the consequences, which is visible, and people don't know

why, is the blossoming of a bunch of conservative, right-wing, black Americans. Colin Powell, Clarence Thomas on the Supreme Court, Condoleezza Rice: where do they come from? They come from the civil rights movement. But what they represent is the ruling class of the United States. It is very common to say that they are Uncle Toms. That might be true. But what I think is more important is that they represent a different class.)

I think of Ward Connerly, the guy that goes around trying to put an end to affirmative action. There is a class basis in that. And it is also reflected in living arrangements. With less segregation, the black bourgeoisie can now move out into the suburbs. So when you go into the inner city of Detroit, it is overwhelmingly working class; when you go into Southfield (a Detroit suburb), it is overwhelmingly middle class. Again, I think it is a demonstration of the fact that consciousness can be a very contradictory and ambiguous term. Everybody does something consciously. What you achieve is not necessarily what you were conscious of doing.

### CLASS

A point to make the transition to the question of the working class. In the movement of corporations, foreign and domestic, from northern industrial areas to the South, in particular, or to the Midwest, corporations stay away from areas with large black populations. This has been documented in sociological studies. And the reason they do that is because they believe (and I believe the belief is valid) that black workers are more likely to join unions than are white workers. People should think about that. There is a certain kind of affinity between the black working class and the working class in general. It surely is not because black workers are ignorant of the racism of white workers or ignorant of the racist politics of American unions. Something more and something different is involved.

What about the American working class? I should say that the road to James leads through Marx. If people don't understand that, they won't understand James and in particular they will wipe out fifteen of the most productive years of his life, his first fifteen years in the United States.

Marx said that the proletariat is revolutionary or it is nothing. James used to quote that. Is this the proletariat, the revolutionary proletariat? Ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, and so on? Marx did not have a romantic view of the proletariat, and neither did James.

For Marx it was a question of what the proletariat was in actuality and in accordance with this being would historically be compelled to do. That's a concept which is very difficult for American academics, academics anywhere, intellectuals to grasp, because it involves a dialectical understanding of the nature of consciousness and the nature of human beings. Marx didn't say that the working class has to be educated to be militant socialists so they can make the revolution. Marx said you make a revolution and that transforms people.

James understood that. He understood it because he studied Marx. But more than that he understood it because he had contact with, discussions with, conversations with American workers. He'd come to Detroit and sit and talk to auto workers. He talked to workers in New York; he talked to workers in Los Angeles; he talked to workers in San Francisco.

Let me add a personal note. I was a college professor. Before that I spent twenty years working in Detroit auto shops and I learned a lot from that experience, something which my Trotskyist comrades did not learn. They were supposed to recruit workers to their point of view. If the workers didn't come, it was because the workers were backward. And they ended up, finally, giving up the ghost, going into middle-class occupations and so forth.

But with the help of James, I learned that one of my roles in a factory was to learn about the working class, not simply teach them what I knew. And there are a few things which people who have not had that work experience find great difficulty in understanding. About fifteen years ago, somebody wrote a book on alienation. And there are chapters on different industries. In the chapter on the automobile industry it notes that the average job in the auto industry took under 60 seconds to do. A few years later General Motors built a modern plant in Lordstown, Ohio, and bragged about the fact that the average job on the assembly line took 36 seconds to do. Picture two categories of time: 36 seconds, the rest of your life. You're not there during summer vacation, coming back to school in September. You're not there waiting to take over your old man's business. This is where you're going to be for the rest of your life.

People who think that workers like that can be bribed by high wages simply cannot understand the nature of the working class. There are a lot of things which ordinary social science cannot grasp. Hungarian workers did not know in September 1956 that the next month they would organize workers' councils and take over that society. If

you would have surveyed workers in Paris in 1968, before the events of that spring, there was no way you could have found out that a month later 10,000,000 workers would occupy all the factories of France and come within a hair's breadth of toppling the DeGaulle government. That is the revolutionary potential of the working class. And that, it seems to me, is part of the legacy of C.L.R. James.

### CONCLUSION

I want to end with two points, one minor and the other major. The minor one is that occasionally I hear that one of the problems with James is that he believed in small organizations. I have no idea where that comes from. We had a small organization: at our peak we were 75 people. At our lowest depth we had six people. James loved to tell us about the African Service Bureau which had even fewer people than we had, to encourage us, to say that no matter how small you are you can accomplish what you need to accomplish. That didn't mean that he preferred being small. And how many people did Castro have when he landed on the shores of Cuba to start his revolution? Fewer than we had. He made a revolution.

Finally—the major point—on globalization. I get the impression that most people discuss globalization as though it rose with the sun this morning. A Marxist, a Jamesian, a dialectic view must be historical. Marx wrote about globalization 150 years ago when he discussed the creation of the world market. A century ago there was a very common phrase, “The sun never sets on the British empire.” If that isn't globalization, then I have no idea what globalization is.

But globalization today is different. What's the difference? And what is the reason for that difference? The difference is that when the sun never set on the British empire, globalization consisted of colonies, in which sources of raw materials and markets were sealed off from each other to the benefit of European powers. What happened to change that? The colonial revolution, which put an end to the colonies and therefore put an end to the kind of globalization that was common 100 years ago. What did the colonial revolution do? It achieved the independence of the colonies. It also meant that the United States, which was the only country that came out of World War II undamaged, moved in where the old imperialist countries had been.

The United States moved in in a very interesting way. Back in 1947 we published a booklet called *The Invading Socialist Society*. James is one of the signatories. A lot of people know about James's

appreciation of American culture and the American working class. Listen to this language:

The United States now carries on open preparations [this was just after the war] against its rival [meaning the Soviet Union]. From end to end of the world its economic power supports the most reactionary and oppressive regimes, at the head of which list stands the Chiang Kai-Shek regime in China. America supplies arms and economic resources to aid France in the oppression of Vietnam, the Dutch in the suppression of Indonesia. It supports the reactionary regimes of Turkey, Iran, and Greece, even the fascist Franco. It maintains the tottering capitalistic regime in Japan. It is the support and ally of every counter-revolutionary regime in Latin America. It shares equally with Russia the major guilt in the drawing and quartering of Germany. . . .

That is also part of the James legacy, not just that he liked American movies and cartoons. He didn't like American capitalism.

What happened since then? More of the same: the assassination of Lumumba; support of the overthrow of Sukarno followed by a blood bath killing thousands upon thousands of militants; the buying and paying for mercenaries in Nicaragua who killed thousands of people; the overthrow of democratically elected governments in two countries of Latin America: Guatemala in which Arbenz was overthrown, Chile where Allende was overthrown; and the support or acceptance of torture, disappearance and murder to sustain the new regimes.

This relates to what happened on September 11 [2001]. I am opposed to extremist religious violence, whether it kills abortion doctors or takes the form of suicide bombings. I can understand why Americans, rightly or wrongly, rally after the devastation in New York City. But America comes to New York City without clean hands. The United States has supported and perpetrated more state terrorism since World War II than all of the Muslim groups put together.

During World War I, when most of the socialist parties decided to support their governments in the war after they said they would never do that, Lenin said, "the main enemy is at home." James would have agreed with that. I, as an American, believe that the main enemy is at home. The enemy is American capital, the enemy is the American state, but the enemy is not the American working class. That is the legacy of C.L.R. James.

## EGGHEAD



I don't know why the guys are so unfriendly to the committeeman. If you can't be sociable that makes it tough on everybody.

## EGGHEAD



I can't see why the fellers criticize the contract. Why it's so complicated they can't even understand half of it.



IV.  
SELECTED  
FACTORY SONGS OF  
MR. TOAD



## WILDCAT I

A most practical cat.

Walking silently on padded feet  
Unseen, unheard  
Power concentrated  
    in a compact body.

Lean, lithe, less  
    in appearance  
Than the explosive leap,  
    periodic culmination  
    of growing power  
    of growing hunger.

Amber, black, mottled, gold.  
All colors help to hide  
    its invisible path.

Slowly it climbs and waits  
    on limb  
    on cliff  
    on overhang.

All right, Buddy,  
Let's not get romantic.  
Shut her down and let's go.

A most practical cat.

## WILDCAT II

You are aware of it before you look up  
(perhaps it's the advancing quiet)

The catch of excitement as you see them  
walking toward the gate  
not hurrying.

Each man distinct. The group growing  
as the shop melts away  
behind them.

Washed clean  
by a single wave  
that leaves a few pebbles behind.

Foremen stand here and there  
not anxious to get in the way  
little eddies at their feet  
immobile in the mud.

Outside it is crisp and cold  
men waiting for the stragglers  
to get through the gate.

"What the hell's the matter?"

"Where did it start?"

"They took the helper off the big job."

"Christ, that could kill you,  
working that job alone."

The men drift off.  
No need to keep anyone  
out  
or in.

A day to rest  
shop maybe  
do some repairs.

We'll see tomorrow.

### WILDCAT III

The International Representative  
sits behind the local union president.  
An occasional whisper  
keeps him firm against the rising anger.

Why is it so difficult?  
Just stay out until we win.

The simple repetition with growing heat  
proves too much  
for the president  
The whisper cannot carry over the roaring debate  
And the International Rep  
brushes the president aside  
power now openly wielded.

“You are weakening the union...  
“How can we negotiate...  
“You are violating the contract...  
“Return to work...”

Why is it so difficult?  
Stay out until we win.

“You must back your union...  
“An administrator will be appointed...”

It's their contract.  
Let them run the damned plant.

## ECOLOGY

Don't leave the finger  
    on the floor  
The doc might be able  
    to sew it on.

And it could make the relief man  
    uneasy  
    being pointed at  
    as if  
        he  
    tripped the fuckin' press.

And the next man on the job  
    might slow her down  
And then it would be my blood  
    spattered on the floor  
    turning slowly brown  
    mingling with the butts and tobacco juice  
    filling in the cracks  
    without waste.

## FACTORY SONG

I look backward and inward  
twenty years in the auto shops,

Illuminated by politics  
the way the brights illuminate  
a foggy stretch of the Pennsylvania Turnpike.

The cold, gray grinding winter mornings  
warm the blood

The cast iron dust penetrates the skin  
and firms the spine  
(discolored by streaks of red rust)

The body is a tool to be used  
The broken arm and the gashed leg  
are calculated risks and  
damn all absolutes.

What is there to see inside?  
Only the reflection of a thousand men  
who touched you  
with their own bit of steel.

They are not you  
You are not them  
But the parts can no longer be told apart.

Was it worth freezing your ass off  
coming home from the night shift?

The rain cleans the asphalt  
And the street light adds a shine.

## FIST

He lost his hand in a bright new  
automated punch press.

Five digits now none  
Taken by a digital computer  
    Witch  
Lo and behold  
Makes mistakes just like human beans

Humanized computer  
Computerized human  
It's all the same  
But it can't hold hands.

Neither can he.  
He took his other five digits  
and melted them down into a  
Fist.

## THE COMMITTEEMAN

He came in the day after his election  
wearing a clean sport shirt.

Easy  
One of the boys  
Taking the traditional jokes pleasantly.

“Don’t get your hands dirty now.”  
“Visit us from time to time, y’hear.”  
“Don’t get too soft—we’re liable to put you  
back on a machine.”

The men started to work and  
he wandered around the department aimlessly,  
grinned uneasily  
when the foreman  
called his congratulations.

Lunch time he wasn’t at his usual place,  
He had business with the shop committee  
at the union hall  
And stayed outside the gates  
for a beer.

In the afternoon he was seen  
chatting amiably with the foreman  
and flirting with the Superintendent’s secretary.



## LUNCH TIME AT THE BLOWER

A Greek

who had fought in the underground

Two Poles

one was in the Home Army  
the other was too young  
and just got the hell out of there

A Nazi

genuine and bona fide  
big blond SS trooper who ran across Europe  
to be captured by the Americans

A Jew

which one was more out of place?

Three hillbillies

two Kentucky miners  
and a farm boy

Each had his own sum of ignorance

anxious to be rid of it  
pressing it across the makeshift plywood table.

The wisdom was not private but collective  
Joined together by the smell of machine oil  
(verging on roasted peanuts)

Cut short by the goddamned company man  
who couldn't wait to end the quiet.

## FOUNDRYMAN

I left the motor plant  
Crossed the yard  
Entered the inferno.

Moving cautiously I jumped  
at the showers of sparks  
ducked  
as the ladle of molten metal  
passed on the overhead track.

He saw me coming,  
looking through the hot dust  
while I was hemmed in  
by my circle of terror.

When I saw him he was laughing at my fears.  
We talked for a moment  
and then I made my way  
past the fiery dragons  
through the giant mushrooms  
around the witches' cauldrons

Back to the crankshafts  
which were only heavy  
and hard  
and dirty.

He had mastered hell  
And the world.

## FINDING FAULT

Whose fault?  
Faulty floor  
with asphalt patches  
    in the rough cement  
(many long ways from the great Trinidad lake)

Fill the holes  
but don't smooth the floor.  
Break your back on a hand truck  
    (some ass's fault  
    to save the money on a concrete floor  
    which you cover with plywood  
    or pay for with your feet.)

Asphalt

One factory floor's little share of  
the deep, all encompassing, earth girdling fault

Ass fault.

## DIRTY POEM

Dear Patsy  
I love you  
With poems picked up  
    from factory floors  
    dirty(

On a twenty-minute lunch  
There is time  
For a philosophical debate:  
What is Dirt?  
The country boys said it was  
    grease and oil  
The city boys said it was  
    sand and dung

)but  
nobody noticed that  
    the philosophy was dirty  
    (it thought its shit didn't stink)  
    but the dirt

Ah!  
    it lay there  
    full heavy pregnant  
    and all you had to do was  
    dig it.

## DRUM

boom

That's a helluva way  
to welcome a buddy

Boom

who's just a few minutes  
late

BOOM

trying to sneak by the foreman  
to avoid an argument

*BOOM*

banging on a steel skid  
with a steel hammer lead hammer copper hammer

*B O O M*

rhythmically, louder and louder  
all work stopped to escort me to my machine

BOOM

and when I get there  
it just as suddenly

*STOPS*

all except the memory of the foremen  
standing around looking stupid  
at something they can't control.

A LOVE POEM  
To Webb

He was a hillbilly  
up from Alabama  
to work in the Chevy plant.

He had a feel for things  
natural and mechanical,  
their use  
and their fitness.

He could rebuild an engine  
Or kill and skin a 'coon  
matterofactly  
to drive or eat.

(I was always in awe of his ability  
to handle grease  
with his hands  
or with his stomach  
As if it was his destiny in life  
To lubricate the world  
And himself along with it.)

He had a wife, two sons, intense pride,  
And deep inside he owned a  
sense of ignorance  
mainly his own  
Which he nurtured and reworked  
into a weapon  
that could stop an assembly line  
or harass a foreman.

It was all the world gave him to work with  
And he did the best he could  
But it wasn't enough

So he expanded his consciousness  
and sustained his pride  
with whiskey.

And with it  
He washed away  
    his wife  
    his two sons  
    his pride  
    and his ignorance.

Shit.

THE GRIEVANCE  
IT'S OUT OF MY HANDS

The shop was like a sweat box,  
The heat was ninety-three.  
I had a little grievance,  
As anyone could see.

I went to see the foreman  
And called to him by name.  
I asked him could he open up  
That nailed-down window pane?  
But my boss said,  
    "It's out of my hands."

I asked to see my steward,  
And the boss he did agree.  
But for two more days,  
    nor hide nor hair  
Of either did I see.

I finally caught my foreman  
As he was running by.  
He said my message was delivered  
To the proper guy.  
And now it was out of his hands.

The steward, when I saw him,  
Looked both shrewd and wise,  
And he told me how much more  
    there was  
Than seemed to meet the eyes.

He quoted certain clauses,  
Interpretations too.  
Said that writing up a grievance  
Was all that he could do.  
Then it was out of his hands.

The Committeeman next  
    came around,



Him I had never met.  
The rest is strictly rumor  
For I haven't met him yet.

But the story when I got it,  
At third or second hand,  
After many weeks of waiting,  
I was made to understand—  
It was out of his hands.

The next thing that I heard of,  
Through the grapevine,  
                    tried and true,  
It had reached the shop committee,  
They'd see what they could do.

The days were getting shorter,  
And fall was drawing near,  
When their long-delayed decision  
I finally got to hear.  
It was out of their hands.

I wish I could say  
That this ended my ditty  
But my case was referred  
To the Screening Committee.

I was told I was lucky,  
After months had gone by  
That my grievance had not  
Just been left there to die.  
But it was now out of their hands.

The Umpire considered  
And pondered and thought,  
He was honest and upright  
And could not be bought.

Of the one hundred grievances  
We lost ninety-nine.

But the one that was salvaged  
Turned out to be mine.

The window was opened  
On a cold wintry day.  
I shivered and shook  
Till I thought I'd give way.

I went to the foreman  
And called him by name,  
And asked him to shut  
That damned window pane.  
But he said,  
    "It's out of my hands."

## WORKINGMEN'S STORE

You hardly see a Workingmen's Store  
anymore.

Meager stocks behind grimy windows  
(nothing to see through the windows  
just the grimy factory windows  
across the way) anyway

chewing tobacco  
blue and red bandannas  
cotton work gloves  
striped denim engineers caps  
and  
of course

The Racing Form  
and some girlie magazines.

All no longer needed.

The company supplies the gloves  
and permits smoking  
The state runs a lottery  
and the cops protect  
the in-plant numbers  
There's a cheap go-go bar next to where  
the store used to be.

No longer do the men stand around  
shooting the shit  
'till time to dash for the clock

No longer are there a few minutes  
to socialize  
until the bus comes.

Take the car into the parking lot  
protected by chain link fencing  
shutting out the street  
and the grimy windows.

## THE NATCHEZ TRACE

It's a lovely drive on the Natchez Trace  
from Tupelo to Tougaloo.

There is a Visitor's Center north of Tupelo  
where a pretty young woman  
makes you welcome.

(How many died  
so a black woman  
can represent a national park  
in Mississippi?)

the Parkway is lined with historic sites

Well—  
not sites exactly,  
markers  
where sites once were  
of Choctaw and Chickasaw villages  
less visible now  
than the dead trees  
that still poke through the surface  
of the Ross Barnett Reservoir.

Only some burial mounds remain  
of ancient times and people

Hunting parties and pioneers  
Soldiers under Jackson  
Strength and suffering  
Struggles for freedom  
and for empire  
Beginnings of slavery  
all lie buried under  
asphalt and mowed grass  
and lovely trees  
and rolling hills  
and picnic tables  
and toilets

Without a trace.

## HISTOGRAPHY

Out Jefferson Ave.  
is a UniRoyal tire plant  
Chrysler Assembly  
a power plant on the river

To right and left  
are foreign lands  
but far enough out  
are the Pointes  
where the dirt is painted green  
and the money brown  
(not to be mistaken  
for smog).

Hamilton Ave. rises out of the ditch  
along which tanks  
were parked  
in 1967  
passes X-Cell-O  
to bounce across the tracks  
from the Ford Plant  
but makes it to  
Pontchartrain Drive  
where it lies down among the estates  
for a breather.

There is no way to avoid  
the trip back down.

Washington  
Adams  
Madison  
never made it  
out of downtown  
hotel/movie house existence.

Clearly the fathers  
    have foundered.

But Hamtramck—  
    there is a name  
    to savor.

## FOUND POEM

By M & E

Both for the production  
on a mass scale  
of this communist consciousness,

and for the success  
of the cause itself,

the alteration  
of men on a mass scale  
is necessary,

an alteration  
which can only take place

in a practical movement,  
*a revolution;*

This revolution is necessary, therefore,  
not only because the *ruling* class  
cannot be overthrown in any other way,

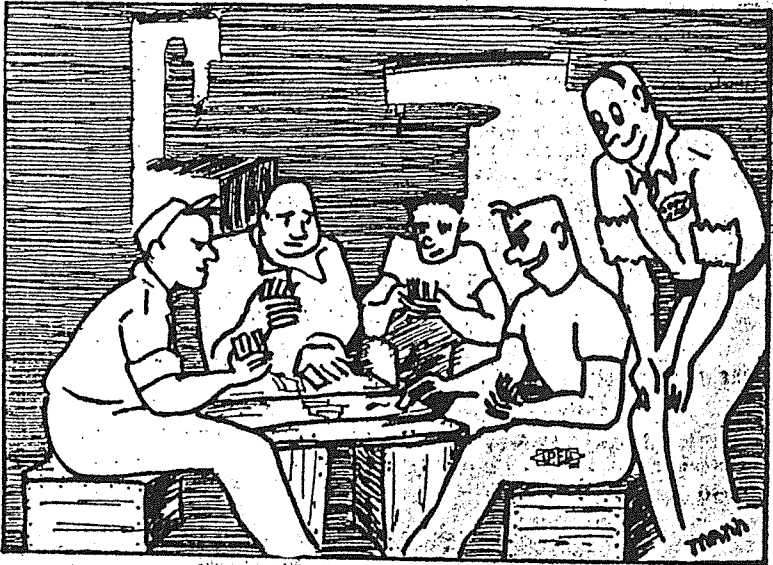
but also  
because the class *overthrowing* it  
can only in a revolution  
succeed in ridding itself  
of all the crap of ages

and become fitted  
to  
found society anew.

From *The German Ideology*

The Needle

by Mann



"Go represent Al for a while, Joe. I want to win for a change."



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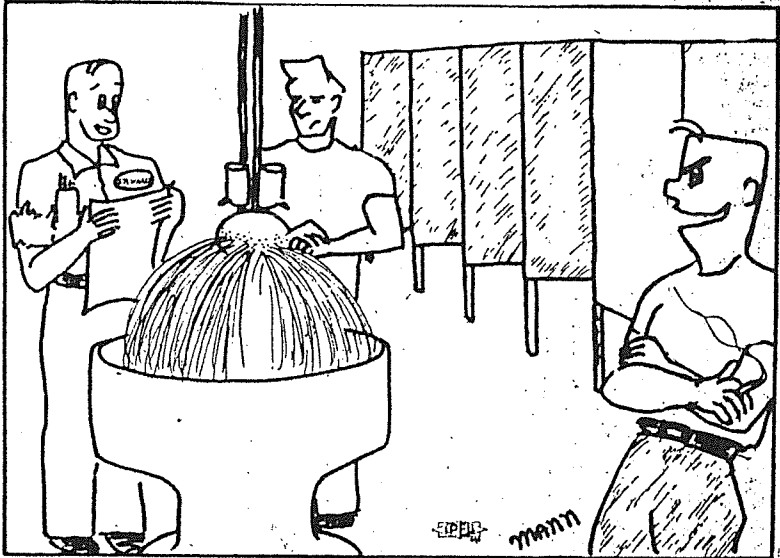
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The Needle

by Mann



"There's only one thing wrong with the contract, Joe. The paper ain't thin enough."



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