

"QUEEN OF THE BOLSHEVIKS": MARIE EQUI

RADICAL AMERICA

VOL. 17, NO. 5

\$3.50

STONEHILL COLLEGE
LIBRARY

MAR 1 1984

RECEIVED

IN NEW YORK
TRANSPORTATION
WORKERS
ORGANIZING
IN BOSTON

*Stop
Barr*

BUS

TAXI



Editors: Margaret Cerullo, John Demeter, Marla Erlien, Phyllis Ewen, Ted German, Linda Gordon, Allen Hunter, Joe Interrante, Susan Mitchell, Jim O'Brien, Donna Penn, Gail Sullivan, Ken Schlosser, Ann Withorn and Renner Wunderlich. Interns: Liz Westerfield and Deb Whippen.

Staff: John Demeter.

Associate Editors: Peter Biskind, Carl Boggs, Frank Brodhead, Paul Buhle, Jorge C. Corralejo, Margery Davies, Ellen DuBois, Barbara Ehrenreich, John Ehrenreich, Dan Georgakas, Martin Glaberman, Jim Green, Michael Hirsch, Mike Kazin, Ken Lawrence, Staughton Lynd, Betty Mandel, Mark Naison, Brian Peterson, Sheila Rowbotham, Annmarie Troger, Martha Vicinus, Stan Weir, David Widgery.

Cover: Drawing and design by Nick Thorkelson



Vol. 17, No. 5

September-October 1983

On newsstands: Jan., 1984

Radical America welcomes unsolicited manuscripts, but can return them only if sufficient postage is included. Writers may also send abstracts or inquiries to Manuscript Coordinator, c/o Radical America.

RADICAL AMERICA (USPS 873-880) is published five times a year (bimonthly except for a single issue March through June) by the Alternative Education Project, Inc., at 38 Union Square, Somerville, MA 02143 (617) 628-6585. Copyright © 1983 by Radical America. Subscription rates: \$15 per year, \$26 for 2 years, \$10 per year for unemployed, retired, or fixed income. Free to prisoners. Add \$3 per year to all prices for foreign subscriptions. Double rates for institutions. Bulk rates: 40% reduction from cover price for five or more copies. Distribution in England by Southern Distribution, 17 A Balfe St., Bldg. K, Albion Yard, London N 19ED England. U.S. distribution by Carrier Pigeon. Typesetting by Lorraine Cooley, *Gay Community News*. Typos and mistakes by Alfred E. Newman. ISSN 0033-7617.

Second class postage paid at Boston, Mass. and additional post offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to RADICAL AMERICA, 38 Union Square, #14, Somerville, MA 02143.

RADICAL AMERICA is available on microfilm from Xerox University Microfilms, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106, and indexed in *Alternative Press Center Index*, P. O. Box 7229, Baltimore, MD 21218. It is also indexed in *America: History and Life*, *Sociological Abstracts*, and *Women's Studies Abstracts*.

RADICAL AMERICA is a member of the Alternative Press Syndicate.

RADICAL AMERICA

VOL. 17, NO. 5

1983

INTRODUCTION	2
THE BUS STOPS HERE: Organizing School Bus Drivers in Boston Interview with Tess Ewing	7
The Recent History of the Bus Drivers Union Gene Bruskin	8
IN THE HOT SEAT: The Story of the New York Taxi Rank and File Coalition John Gordon	27
POEM Robin Becker	44
BRASS VALLEY: A Review Ron Grele	47
QUEEN OF THE BOLSHEVIKS: The Hidden History of Dr. Marie Equi Nancy Krieger	55
PAUL NOVICK: A Radical Life Paul Buhle	74

INTRODUCTION

The recent militance surrounding the Greyhound strike has, once again, brought the importance of the "trade union question" before socialists. We find ourselves asking old questions about how the left should relate to unions. Should socialists in unions be "open" about their politics? How much should they compromise with leadership, or even seek leadership themselves? Can unions be built into broadly based organizations which overcome the historic racial and sexual divisions within the working class? What are reasonable expectations for linking union politics with broader community, national and international concerns? These old questions are especially important today as management boldly attempts to break unions, on the one hand, and as many white male unionists place themselves in opposition to black and women workers in affirmative action cases, on the other.

RADICAL AMERICA has consistently attempted to trace the history and development of such issues. The inquiry has left us somewhat more skeptical of the radical potential for trade union activity than are some socialists, especially because of a repetitive pattern of downplaying racial and sexual concerns for the sake of a lowest-common-denominator class politics. Yet, we have always also recognized the potential of workplace organizing as a means both to achieve immediate victories and to build a more militant working class

consciousness. Indeed, Jim Green's recent anthology of RA labor articles (see ad this issue) attempts to highlight the critical approaches to trade union theory that we feel are essential to building a broader socialist/feminist movement.

In this issue we are pleased to present articles that examine the current problems and prospects for radical trade union work. Looking at the activity of a rank and file caucus in the New York City taxi industry and at the rise of leftists to leadership within a Boston bus drivers' union allows us to evaluate a number of important strategic questions. First, we can review these examples for suggestions regarding the effectiveness of a classic "caucus" strategy—where leftists challenge national and local leadership without taking on the burden of leadership themselves—as opposed to where leftists seek local leadership without direct challenge to national officers. Second, we can consider how the nature of work itself affects organizing strategy. In other words, how does the individualized, somewhat "marginal" nature of both taxi and bus driving influence the nature of the workforce and its responsiveness to organizing? Finally, both efforts allow us to consider the potential for a more openly political approach to union organizing. Because both embody an attempt to bring wider political consciousness to union work they raise important questions about the potential for radical union organizing.

The New York City Rank and File Taxi Movement was strongest during the early 1970s when it served as a serious challenge to the narrow, self-serving, white male leadership of the taxi drivers' union. The Rank and Filers were predominantly ex-New Leftists who attempted to bring an explicitly radical perspective to internal union debates, and to bring wider political discussion (around the Viet Nam war,

for instance) to the membership. Most importantly, they tried to struggle with issues of racism which were evident in the taxi industry because of the presence of non-union, "gypsy" drivers in black and latin neighborhoods. The frustrating story of how difficult it was to address issues of internal racism within the union, and the caucus, gives caution to any romantic notion of the automatic radicalizing potential of rank and file caucuses. On the other hand, the mere existence of a caucus did seem to permit access for left ideas within the union and to open channels for political debate and development among members which would not have been there without the caucus.

In addition, the efforts to organize within an industry like the taxi business, where work is so isolating, point to the importance of explicitly political activity. Here "normal" workplace encounters did not occur routinely enough to allow for a slow development of relationships and joint activities as a basis for activism. Leftists had to take the public lead by forming a caucus, setting up a newsletter and trying to create new ways for workers to interact and rethink their situation. Their successes, and failures, suggest that it may be possible for people in fragmented jobs to come together simply because a group of activists provide the opportunity. Additionally, the limits of simply organizing *against* a bad union are hinted at if the union is able to use racism to divide workers.

Compared with the taxi drivers, the Boston school bus drivers' union shows the different potential when leftists become involved from the beginning in building a union. Growing out of the heat of Boston's busing crisis, and attracting members at least progressive enough to drive school buses during that conflict, the local represented a broad cross-section of the city's racial and ethnic community. By carefully engaging in the on-going tasks of building a

union, leftists, especially women, were able to attain strong leadership roles without being primarily identified as members of the organized left. While progressives were never secretive about their politics, the issues which arose out of organizational struggles and work with other unions provided the opportunity to present left ideas and to uncover widespread acceptance of socialists and feminists as individuals.

The interview also highlights, however, how difficult it is to bring broader political consciousness to union work, even when leftists are in leadership. It takes a lot of time and energy to do the "business" of a union and such necessary maintenance activity can simply edge out attention to issues with more direct political impact. Many workers have "second jobs," either unpaid within the family or in other paid workplaces. The pressures of their daily lives sometimes can leave little room for broader political discussions or activity. In such a situation it is easy for democratic unionists to feel isolated from larger political issues and to make compromises to keep peace within the union.

But both experiences argue against the narrow self-censorship which populists often urge on radicals today. The taxi and bus drivers were both able to be open about their politics and be accepted by their coworkers. All suffered from overwork and frustration, to be sure, but they were not isolated or ineffective due to a socialist, feminist or lesbian identification. Today we face more open attempts at union busting than in the past forty years. Racism and anti-communism are directly used to divide workers. In such a climate the best stance is unclear. The examples presented here, however, suggest that it may be possible to tackle these hard questions directly and that immediate surrender to the narrowest trade unionism is neither necessary nor ultimately successful.

* * * *

Also in this issue, we feature another in our ongoing biography series. Unknown to many of us until now, Marie Equi was a committed radical during the 1910s, 20s and 30s. A physician for workers and their families, a suffragist, and a lesbian, Equi's professional, political and personal commitments moved her from the politics of gradual reform to one of revolutionary change. Her political development, which grew to be increasingly more informed by a class analysis, necessarily embraced a range of movements that included birth control and women's rights, anti-preparedness and anti-imperialism, radical labor and socialism. In reading this biography, one quickly recognizes an exciting spirit, an undaunted character, and many useful political lessons that serve as an inspiration to those of us involved in left politics today.

* * * *

Ron Grele's review of *Brass Valley: The Story of Working People's Lives and Struggles in an American Industrial Region* raises a couple of points worth mentioning here. In writing a history of the brass workers of the Naugatuck Valley in Connecticut, the authors sought, through interviews, to understand the interior life of a working class community, based on remembered experience of family and social life as well as recollections of the shop floor. Grele raises challenging questions about the politics of "people's history," especially when the political vision of the historians differs from that of the people whose history they are helping to recreate. Reading this in the midst of the Mel King campaign in Boston, Grele's questions of how to define community when popular definitions of community are exclusive, narrowly based, and racist, were especially provocative.

I HATE A SONG THAT MAKES YOU THINK THAT YOU ARE NOT ANY GOOD. I HATE A SONG THAT MAKES YOU THINK THAT YOU ARE JUST BORN TO LOSE. BOUND TO LOSE. NO GOOD TO NOBODY. NO GOOD FOR NOTHING. BECAUSE YOU ARE TOO OLD OR TOO YOUNG OR TOO FAT OR TOO SLIM

TOO UGLY OR TOO THIS OR TOO THAT. SONGS THAT RUN YOU DOWN OR POKE FUN AT YOU ON ACCOUNT OF YOUR BAD LUCK OR HARD TRAVELING.

I AM OUT TO FIGHT THOSE SONGS TO MY VERY LAST BREATH OF AIR AND MY LAST DROP OF BLOOD.

I AM OUT TO SING SONGS THAT WILL PROVE TO YOU THAT THIS IS YOUR WORLD AND THAT IF IT HAS HIT YOU PRETTY HARD AND KNOCKED YOU FOR A DOZEN LOOPS. NO MATTER WHAT COLOR. WHAT SIZE YOU ARE. HOW YOU ARE BUILT. I AM OUT TO SING THE SONGS THAT MAKE YOU TAKE PRIDE IN YOURSELF AND IN YOUR WORK. AND THE SONGS THAT I SING ARE MADE UP FOR THE MOST PART BY ALL SORTS OF FOLKS JUST ABOUT LIKE YOU.

I COULD HIRE OUT TO THE OTHER SIDE, THE BIG MONEY SIDE. AND GET SEVERAL DOLLARS EVERY WEEK JUST TO QUIT SINGING MY OWN KIND OF SONGS AND TO SING THE KIND THAT KNOCK YOU DOWN STILL FARTHER AND THE ONES THAT POKE FUN AT YOU EVEN MORE AND THE ONES THAT MAKE YOU THINK YOU'VE NOT GOT ANY SENSE AT ALL. BUT I DECIDED A LONG TIME AGO THAT I'D STARVE TO DEATH BEFORE I'D SING ANY SUCH SONGS AS THAT. THE RADIO WAVES AND YOUR MOVIES AND YOUR JUKEBOXES AND YOUR SONG BOOKS ARE ALREADY LOADED DOWN AND RUNNING OVER WITH SUCH NO GOOD SONGS AS THAT ANYHOW.

WOODY GUTHRIE



Lewis Morales



Boston school bus drivers during 1977 strike. Mark Hoffman photo.

• THE BUS STOPS HERE

Organizing Boston School Bus Drivers

Interview with Tess Ewing

Tess Ewing, president of the Boston School Bus Drivers Union, Local 8751, United Steelworkers of America, has a long history of activism in Boston, beginning with a community organizing project in Roxbury during the 1960s, she has also been involved in the antiwar movement, in early women's liberation and gay liberation movements, and in tenant and community organizing in the 1970s. She began driving a school bus in 1976, two years after busing began in Boston, because it was a part-time job that left her free to do political work. She was an organizer of the original union drive at Carroll's in 1976-77, a company which lost its city contract the following year. She went to work at the Hudson Company in 1977-78, the year the union was successfully organized. She was one of the fourteen Hudson committee members who went to jail for twelve days in the Spring of 1978 in the struggle for the first contract. In December 1979, she was elected president to fill a vacancy. In April, 1982, she was reelected to a full term.

This interview was conducted in the Spring of 1983 by four Radical America editors, Margaret Cerullo, Marla Erlien, Linda Gordon, and Ann Withorn.

RA: The bus drivers' union is well known in Boston partly because of the militance of

your organizing drive in the late seventies—with people going to jail and the buses not rolling for weeks. It's been highly visible because of its connection to court-ordered busing for desegregation. It's known on the left as a very progressive union, with a strong Third World and women's presence in both the rank and file and the leadership. In fact, when we were considering this interview one of our editors raised the question of whether your union is so odd and marginal that it doesn't provide lessons that are helpful for people doing more traditional trade-union work.

Tess: Actually, I think that's a very important question to deal with. I don't think it's true that we're an odd, marginal union. We are and we aren't. We are partly because we made it that way. It is true that we have a particular mix of people that makes it easier for us, that it's so

integrated and majority black. I think that's important—it makes it easier for us to be militant, to take the right side in the whole desegregation/racism issue, and to make alliances with the community. But, I think that a lot of times when people talk of us as being this odd, marginal union basically they mean that if a union has taken progressive stands and there are leftists in its leadership, therefore it's an odd union and you shouldn't listen to the lessons of it. It's a catch-22. If you win, you lose; if you win, you don't count!

RA: Maybe you could backtrack and describe the particular mix of people in the union, and how busing as a context has affected that.

Tess: One thing that's important is that because busing was for desegregation, the people who took the jobs mostly were not rabid racists or they wouldn't have taken the jobs in

Recent History of the School Bus Drivers' Union

Gene Bruskin

1974: Busing Begins in Boston

In 1974, after many years of community struggles against segregation and discrimination, the Boston School Committee was forced by the courts to desegregate the public schools through busing. As a result, the school busing industry was born. Hundreds of drivers, monitors, and mechanics came to work.

Driving in racially tense Boston was no easy task. However, the \$6.27/hour wage was the same as the MBTA drivers were getting and this made the job a desirable one. In order to gain job security and benefits, drivers soon began to organize, but without success. By June 1977, as

the original companies' three-year city contracts expired, there were no union contracts in force.

1977-78: The Birth of the Union

The new city contracts were awarded to three companies: Hudson, Brush Hill, and TMC (Transportation Management Company). Carroll Bus, the only company where a union had been voted in, was eliminated from the field.

The big surprise when drivers returned to work in September was that the state legislature had decided that the drivers were making too much money. After three years at \$6.27 an hour, and without a raise, pay was cut to \$5.39 an hour. Still there were no benefits, no grievance procedure, and no job security. Turnover was high and terminations common.

The drivers of Brush Hill and Hudson began organizing immediately in September 1977.

the first place. Which isn't to say they were zealous antiracists. There were a few people there who I know took the jobs because they thought that desegregation was important and they wanted to be part of that, almost as a political commitment. I'm not talking about leftists; I'm talking about mostly black people and even one white hippy guy who says that's why he did it. But, it was mostly that the real racist people just didn't want to take the job.

RA: How large is the membership and how does it break down by race, sex, etc.?

Tess: At this point the majority is black and Hispanic. And my guess is that somewhere between 25 and 35 percent are women. Earlier on, there was a much lower percentage of women—around 10 percent maybe. The thing about this job is that it attracts a very, very diverse group of people. Especially because it

tends to be a bit of a part-time job. There are a lot of people who have second jobs, like firemen, and there are retirees, old teamsters, etc. And, there are people like musicians, some of whom are from middle class backgrounds—not all, though.

RA: And the leadership of the union is progressive, mainly leftist?

Tess: It goes from people who are self-consciously leftists who started out as leftists and got into unions, through people who started out as bus drivers, not as leftists consciously at all, but who you would now have to call leftists—unconscious leftists! They don't necessarily think of themselves as leftists, but they have the same ideas. Finally, there are also people in the leadership who just go along because they're now in the leadership and so they go along.

RA: And the politics of the membership?

When Hudson fired one of the organizers, drivers walked out and forced his reinstatement within twenty-four hours. With the organizing drive now public, they decided on the United Steel Workers to represent them and very quickly signed up 90 percent of the 250 drivers. The company finally granted an election two months later (in December 1977) but only after drivers there struck again, this time for three days, and two drivers went to jail when a state court declared the strike illegal. With the school year nearing an end and a contract still not in force by April, the drivers voted to strike for a third time. A hundred and fifty citations were issued to drivers who refused to return to work and fourteen drivers, including the entire Hudson negotiating committee, were jailed for refusing to go back to work.

In each of these crises, drivers mobilized parents groups, in part by leafletting thousands of students on the buses, explaining to them and

their parents that the companies' irresponsible behavior had forced them into their position and emphasizing the safety provisions they were bargaining for. The Citywide Parents' Advisory Council released a statement condemning the companies' bad faith bargaining. The Boston Teachers Union, the Massachusetts Teachers Union, several AFSCME and SEIU locals in Boston, other unions, and the Boston Labor Council came out in support of the drivers. A well-publicized strike support march was held in downtown Boston. The strike was in the headlines every day. A settlement was finally reached two weeks later when the judge turned on the companies, ordering them to settle or face jail themselves.

1980-81: The Big Strike

The victories of the union in 1977-78 led Hudson Bus Company to decide to bail out of a

Tess: I think people are open, in different degrees, to seeing the company as bad, seeing the School Committee as bad, seeing the government as bad, seeing capitalism as bad, the system as bad, seeing all these things as screwing the workers. But, you know, in the general populace too, people don't trust the government, so it's not clear exactly what all this means. Every now and then some driver, who you wouldn't expect it from in the least comes out and starts talking about how the capitalist system is terrible and what we really need is socialism or something like that, just out of the blue. So people are open to that sort of thing to a certain degree. They're less open to it from somebody they perceive as being a leftist. Then they say, "Oh, that's just him and his group." But it doesn't *scare* people.

Busing and Race

RA: Could we talk directly about busing as a context and how that has affected you? As busing has gone through its various stages and reached the situation it's in now where a lot of people are feeling totally frustrated with the schools, does that affect your sense of role or anything else?

Tess: Mainly, just in terms of budget stuff. Less and less money goes to schools. And there's been this whole trend that's happened. When busing began, and until several years ago for that matter, the School Committee was dominated by white racist politicians. Traditionally in Boston the School Committee was a stepping stone to higher political office and more power and it was an important patronage

big chunk of their city contract, giving up almost 100 buses. ARA, a multi-billion dollar international conglomerate, moved in to fill the void. The city welcomed ARA with a sweetheart deal—a fleet of city-owned buses, a bus yard, and a 10 percent "cost plus" contract. ARA's job was to manage the operation for the city, and the city hoped there would be no union involved. In July 1980, the School Committee awarded ARA a 40-45 million dollar contract for the entire Boston busing operation. ARA's intentions were clear: break the union or render it useless.

After being back on the job for a few tense weeks, over 300 drivers met in early October and voted overwhelmingly for the third time in three years to strike—a wildcat strike over nineteen class-action grievances filed in September. Immediately nineteen stewards and Executive Board members were fired. Contempt citations were issued by the court to many drivers and six

union activists were placed in federal prison when they refused to return to work. Six others quit rather than go to jail. The company harassed and threatened drivers and began training "permanent replacements." To protect these scabs ARA imported over 100 armed, private, paramilitary strikebreaking security police from an antiunion security company in Baltimore. Despite enormous pressure, the drivers kept their strike pledge and refused to return to work until the nineteen leaders were rehired and other strike issues were resolved.

Union members from all over the area joined teachers, parents, students and drivers on the cold early morning picket lines. The 'goons' left town for another assignment and many frightened scabs refused to cross the swelling picketlines without their protection. The streets became unsafe for strikebreaking drivers. Public pressure mounted on the School Committee to force ARA to the bargaining table. As the

position. As the schools have become more and more minority—it's about 65 percent minorities who go to Boston public schools and there are now two black members of the School Committee—the School Committee no longer has the power it used to have. It's no longer an important position because the schools are no longer important—they don't get any money. The two things have happened together—as minorities have gotten into a position of power, the power has gone. So, the schools are falling apart. And we're part of that because the cutbacks come down on us. The cutbacks come down on teachers, on everybody. A lot of the drivers are parents and so they see it from the inside as well as from the outside.

RA: Has this context affected your relationship with other unions?

Tess: We've always tried to work with the

teachers' union and the other unions in the schools. And we still do. We try to make any kind of alliances that are not politically unprincipled. That can be a problem. Recently, the teachers took a suit to court about seniority. When the layoffs came, they were supposed to happen on a basis that reflected the racial composition of the workforce, and the teachers' union opposed that. It was seniority versus affirmative action, and they stood on seniority and took it all the way up to the Supreme Court. We've always taken the opposite position. We've never had an explicit falling out with them, but that was a little bit of a cooler on the relationship.

RA: What about alliances with the community?

Tess: One thing is I think we would have a much harder time in a more white union mak-

fifth week of the wildcat strike approached, ARA conceded. The settlement was a tremendous victory. A small united local, with labor and community support, had defeated a "Fortune 500" corporation.

1981-83: Layoffs and Reaganomics

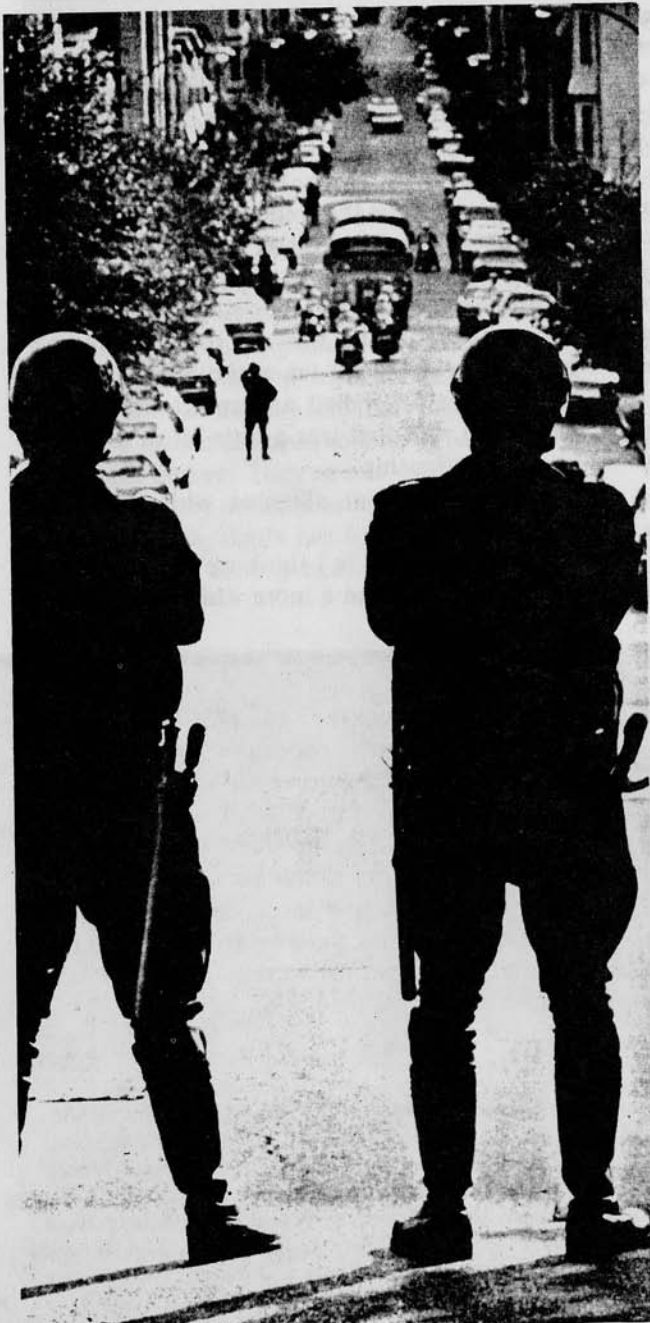
The 1981 school year began with substantially fewer (and more crowded) buses, as part of a range of problems facing the Boston schools as a result of Reaganomics and passage of the statewide tax cutting initiative, Proposition 2½. The local began resisting Reagan's policies by taking part in Solidarity Day in Washington, D.C., and a number of local and national demonstrations that have followed.

During the 1982-83 school year the School Department tried to eliminate the union by awarding the 1983-84 contract to a nonunion vendor. A year of mobilizing community and

labor support helped Local 8751 members to remain as Boston's school bus drivers with a new and improved union contract.

The successful future of Local 8751 will depend on good leadership, the continued active participation of rank-and-file members in union affairs, and close cooperation with other labor and community groups seeking to improve conditions for working-class people in Boston and across the nation.

The "Recent History of the Bus Drivers' Union" has been revised and edited from a special 12-page issue of the U.S.W.A. Local 8751 Union Bulletin which was published in January 1983. Written by Gene Bruskin, the history was produced with help from Evie Frankel, Tess Ewing, Liz Casey, Mel James, Rick Laine, Peggy Sparks, Kendall Hale, Dave Slaney, Mark Erlich, Claudia Majetich, City Life and Donna Parris.



State Police outside South Boston High School as busing begins. *Christian Science Monitor.*

ing alliances with the community and I think that's real important—especially now for public sector unions, but for other unions too. I think that the black drivers—and it makes sense given the history of struggles over the years—have a better sense of the importance of allying with the community, so that's made it easier for us.

RA: Internally, was there an explicit struggle to establish antiracism as integral to the union's politics? Did people talk about racism as an issue in meetings, for example?

Tess: Not really, not explicitly. It was a question of a tone being set from the beginning by the leadership. The way things were said was, "Well, it's going to go this way—*naturally*." We'll have a delegation of bus drivers to go somewhere and *naturally* we'll want it to be representative of the workforce, i.e., some black, some white, some men, some women. It was just said in a way that didn't allow somebody to say something different. So that's the way it happened.

RA: Given that it was the leadership that made antiracism the norm, how enthusiastically do members support it? Hasn't it been challenged?

Tess: Well, of course, it's real important for the black drivers. There are a lot of black drivers who have been in other unions where they're totally discriminated against. For example, the firemen—some of the black drivers are also firemen. I had a conversation recently with one of our officers who's a fireman and who was saying how great our union is because it sticks up for people—not like the firemen's union. Apparently, the racism in the firemen's union is just overwhelming. And we've got white firemen and black firemen who are drivers, and apparently the white firemen, when they're in the bus yard, seem like normal nice people, but when they're at the firehouse,

some of them are really terrible.

RA: Are you saying that the standards and the tone that your union sets make these men actually behave differently when they're at your job than they do at the firehouse?

Tess: Exactly.

RA: That seems very important for thinking about how to deal with racism. Because if you set up a community where certain things just aren't acceptable...

Tess: That's what we've always tried to do and I think we've succeeded pretty well.

Female Unionism and Feminism

RA: The extent of women's activism and leadership is another striking feature of your union. How has that developed?

Tess: Women from early on made up a disproportionate share of the activists given that we were a small percentage of the workforce. At first, though, we really had a very hard time getting listened to. I could say the smartest thing in a meeting—of course, I always thought I said the smartest thing—and nobody'd pay any attention at all. They would listen to the guys. And, it took a long time—a lot of yelling and screaming to get beyond that, though I think we *have* gotten beyond it now.

RA: Why do you think more women were active in the union? Because that's unusual.

Tess: It was partly that it's a self-selected group. Women who go into driving heavy equipment in downtown Boston where there's racial tension and rocks get thrown tend to be a bit assertive and tough. That's my idea, anyway—we tend to be the kind of people who are ready to take on a fight and we jumped into it.

RA: Do the women who are active have families? Is that a factor?

Tess: When I think of the women who are active, the majority of them either are not

involved with a man or the man is also active in the union. There are also women who are mothers—women who have kids but who don't have a man. It seems like the kids don't keep them home as much as a man does.

RA: Use your own experience. How much time, energy, focus does it take?

Tess: A lot! Too much. It's still a problem if you have anybody at home.

RA: Were there particular ways in which people were conscious at all about encouraging women's participation—like where you had meetings, when, etc.?

Tess: There's always been a problem as far as meetings—it's always harder for women to be able to come. And it's always easier for women without families.

RA: Do people talk about the division between those women who don't have families and those who do?

Tess: Informally, it gets discussed. We talk about, "When's the best time for meetings? Is it better to have them right after work or is it better to have them at 7 to give somebody a chance to go home and cook and come back?" But it stays at that level.

RA: Do you have a sense of how women's lives are affected when they become active in the union? The women at Greenham Common, the peace camp in England, talk a lot now about the organization of "private life." The discussion began because local women would come to the camp and get involved and then they'd have to go home and cook and sneak back at night, and then they started to say...

Tess: "How come I have to do that?" Yeah!

RA: "He can't cook tonight?" It ended up being a whole discussion with the women who were camping—about how their lives were organized.

Tess: Unfortunately, it hasn't really happened that much with us. We did have another

problem early on, when we were first organizing, with the fact that we would invariably have our meetings in bars—and women got scared away. Race was always something we took into account—“Is this an area that blacks and whites both feel safe in?” more than, “Is this a place where women feel safe or comfortable in?” That was a real drag, but it doesn’t happen anymore.

RA: How did you go from a position of being disregarded as a woman when you spoke to becoming president of the union? Obviously people have a lot of respect for your opinion and judgment. Are you an “exceptional woman”? Or did things change for all the women? Why didn’t women just drop out of the union or union activity? That happens a lot—women start going to meetings, aren’t heard, and they stop going.

Tess: I wasn’t the only woman. There were a bunch of women from the beginning who did a lot of hard work and who stuck with it. At a certain point, people just had to listen. I think the basic thing was that progressive politics and feminism, or at least respect for women and anti-racist politics, have all prevailed because we were the people—and by “we” I mean progressive to leftist women, men, and black and white leadership—who just kept at it, just did the work. We were the ones who would be there, counted on to do the shitwork and to come up with the plans to carry out the struggle, the ones who had the analysis that proved right in the end, that won the struggles. And we were always available to take up people’s grievances, whatever they were, and so we did all the work and we ended up getting the respect. When more conservative people controlled the union things just didn’t get done as much, all those things didn’t get taken up, people’s grievances were dropped or lost or something. By dint of hard work and by the fact that we’re

right, basically, we understand how the society works and it turns out that you can put it into practice. . .

RA: But that broader understanding isn’t enough without a commitment to making it real in concrete ways. There’s the tradition of the leftists with the broader understanding who don’t want to spend the time on grievances, or on day-to-day issues—seeing that there’s a connection. It makes you wonder how much had to do with there being some strong women who are willing to see links between these daily things and the larger analysis.

Tess: You know, I think that’s true. Women are more willing to put themselves out for people on a human level and that was important. And dealing with issues like parking spaces or people’s seniority problems, not dismissing them, that was important, and I think women’s role was important there.

RA: Is there any forum for women’s initiatives, to empower women in the union, to deal with sexism? Like to raise not meeting in bars? Do you have a caucus? Or talk informally among yourselves?

Tess: Actually, a couple of years ago a woman who’s a leftist said to me that she was disappointed because she thought that when a woman was elected president that there would be all this stuff for women and there wasn’t. So I felt terrible and I immediately went out and tried to organize a women’s committee—but nobody wanted to be on it, so it didn’t work. I think this is something that has happened more informally. A lot of us wanted to see the women as a more conscious force, and have tried at various times to get together with small groups or big groups or caucuses or go out and eat or whatever. Now, there is a coalescing among certain of the women there who go to each other for support. There’s a sort of coalescing of gay women or woman-identified



Local 8751 officers: Lynn Garvin, Tess Ewing, Rose Nicholas and Liz Casey. Bill Hamilton photo.

women there, more so than women in general. And a lot of things that get done, the women tend to do them in order to get together.

RA: That's interesting, because it points to some of the lessons we've learned from feminism—about the role of social connections in terms of what hooks people into activism.

Tess: Here's another example. After I tried to get the women's committee going and it fell flat on its face, we had a bake sale for something—something to do with Central America, I think. And guess who baked? And guess who sold? It was the beginning of this little informal network of women that has sort of grown since then. It brought together people who'd been in conflict. Like these two women, a couple. One of them had been to jail during the first strike with us, but the two of them had scabbed on the second strike and there was real tension with

them. But they got involved through the bake sale and since then they've become active in the union, both of them. And it happened with other women, too. It has brought a lot of the women together.

RA: When you say that respect for women has prevailed in the union, could you give any examples? Are there any parallels to the anti-racist atmosphere you described earlier?

Tess: Actually, it's very parallel. That's another way in which the leadership—and strong women in the union—have set the atmosphere. To be sexist is unacceptable. Even guys who privately might be pretty disgusting can't get away with it at a union meeting or in public—it's just not the tone. There was this one guy a couple of years ago who came into the drivers' room with a bunch of *Penthouse* magazines. He was standing around talking to

people and passing them around. It was also almost like he was showing off. So another woman driver and I went up to him, took them out of his hands, went to the dumpster, and threw them away. Because we did that, he looked kind of stupid. People didn't come up to us and say, "Wait a minute, give them back to him, they were his" or anything like that—because we just went and did it as though, well *naturally*, that's what we would do, in a sort of authoritative way. In fact, I think he ended up coming back and apologizing at one point—or not apologizing, but trying to excuse his actions: "You know I don't read that kind of stuff, really, but somebody gave 'em to me"!

RA: A lot of people think they couldn't do something like you did, that they'd have to have an open discussion about it, rather than feeling the legitimacy to act.

Tess: Then they're not taking leadership. But I get in that hangup a lot of times, so I can sympathize with the position. I think it's almost an individual political thing what things you feel the confidence or the need to stick up for and what you don't. In that case, I did. And there are some other people who will *always* stick up for any feminist issue. One woman in particular. If anyone says anything out of line to any woman, she's in there ready to smash his head or something. I have great admiration for that, because there are times when I'll let something pass because I feel uncomfortable about it.

RA: Have you included anything in your contract about sexual preference?

Tess: Yeah, we did this time around. Last time some gay women got together to figure out what to try to get into the contract and a sexual preference clause was one of the things we wanted to get in, but we dropped it quite quickly—it wasn't forthcoming from the company and it didn't seem to be something we could

really rally the membership behind.

RA: How did you bring it up to the membership?

Tess: We *didn't* bring it up to the membership—which is how it got into the contract. We just got it in this time around. The company didn't put up a fight—they're going to fight us real hard on economic issues and because of that they've been real easy on language issues.

RA: Are you out as a lesbian in the union?

Tess: That's a good question. I'm not really sure what the answer is. I *think* most people know, but I'm not sure. Most people think that certain other people are lesbians, too, but it's one of those things where people never ask explicitly and usually nobody ever says explicitly, but nobody denies either.

RA: You never feel you have to tell a lie?

Tess: I have felt I had to lie sometimes. I don't want to minimize the problems. It makes a difference that I'm in the elected leadership. It makes a difference for the gay women there in general that there's a gay woman who's in that position. Earlier on, I was much more secretive about everything. Now, people don't ask personal questions a lot, so I don't have to answer them. People don't come up to you and say, "Hey are you a _____, whatever?"

RA: Is that because they know?

Tess: Because they know or because they don't care, or they can ask somebody else, or they know and they're used to it at this point. It's been a while. I also feel I don't want to be completely open there about being gay, not because of the drivers, but because of the company.

RA: What would happen if management did want to lesbian-bait you as a way of attacking the union? How would your rank and file respond to that?

Tess: I think at this point the rank and file would definitely back me up. That's why I feel

sort of confident in being sort of semi-open there in contrast to earlier on when I didn't at all.

RA: How does it work out socially? When you have your gatherings of the bus drivers, is there a cultural diversity?

Tess: Ha, ha! It's problematic. We have these wonderful Christmas parties that everybody loves, but for me they can sometimes be a drag. Last time, my girlfriend didn't come. I hung out with a woman whose girlfriend did come and we joked about dancing together on the slow dance, but that was joking. We couldn't actually be ourselves, openly.

RA: Do any of the gay women ever break the codes in these social scenes?

Tess: Well, people come with their girlfriends. I think some people are more or less obvious with the people they bring. I mean, to me it's obvious, I don't know whether to a straight person it's obvious or not.

Left Strategies

RA: We would like to move on to discuss how you see the meaning of leftists working in unions. One thing that is distinctive about your union is not only that self-conscious leftists are in the leadership, but that that fact is very evident. You're always endorsing leaflets and sending people to demonstrations on all kinds of issues. There doesn't seem to have been a fear that if you were upfront about your politics you would isolate yourselves.

Tess: I think leftists tend to see too much of a difference between themselves and other people. It's true that in this union we don't stick out like a sore thumb and in some places they do, and I'm sure that's very intimidating. But what I've learned is that a lot of times leftists think they are a different species of being—and we're not. Other people don't say, "Well, we're

all people, we're all diverse, some of us are black, some are white, some are Spanish, some are men, some are women, some are gay, and some are straight, but *those* are leftists and they're different." We all have various differences. Somebody else might be different because they live in a particular town. That might be more important to somebody than the difference that I'm a leftist. We magnify that particular difference and we shouldn't because other people don't. So, my opinion is legitimate. In fact, at this point my opinion is more than legitimate because I'm in the leadership.

RA: People in leadership who hesitate to bring up left issues explicitly talk about it in terms of a fear of being too far from the membership, staking out positions that won't make sense to people. Is this a kind of "hiding behind democracy"?

Tess: I think those fears are real, though. I believe in running things democratically. That doesn't mean I don't believe in taking leadership and pointing out what I think is a good idea and very often people go along with it, but I think it's important to not go off and say what I want to the point where I've snapped the bond between myself and others so that they lose trust. If people know that I'm going to come back to them for approval for things and that I do things democratically, then I can come to them with something about El Salvador and get some support on it, but if I go off too far on my own, and I come back, then I won't get the support on it, and it won't do anybody any good in the long run.

RA: If you're manipulative around a whole range of issues...

Tess: Then I'm not going to be trusted. So, it's always a tension, how far can you go. It's like a rubber band. You don't want to keep it slack because then nobody moves anywhere and you don't want to move so fast that you



break it, because then you're moving somewhere and they're not. You have to be moving at a point where it's always tense and you're bringing somebody along with you wherever you go.

RA: How do you figure out where that point is? Is it sort of intuitive within your head?

Tess: (laughs) Yeah.

RA: Is there some kind of collective within the collective? Or some people who try to sort that out?

Tess: No. At different points we've tried to have groups of people who would talk informally about where should we go about this or that, meetings of informal groups of people we thought were more in agreement, left sympathizers or something like that, but it never sort of jelled and what happens now I think is that if something comes up, oh, I'll call three or four people and bounce it off them and see what they think. And the same thing happens when an issue comes to somebody else. Then maybe we'll discuss it in the Executive Board before going to the membership. Mostly, these decisions get made now by whoever shows up at the E-Board meetings—which are generally open to all union members.

RA: Could we return to your rubber band analogy and ask you to give some examples? Times when you had to make a decision about how tight to pull it.

Tess: There was a march—I can't remember which one—and we got the membership to endorse it and then after that there was a question of subsidizing people's seats on buses to go down to Washington and we got the membership to pass that, too. Afterwards, I began to think that maybe that was a mistake because it turned out that people had gone down and they hadn't gone on the march but had gone to a bar instead. Complaints came around the fact that there wasn't proper accounting for all the money. That was partly the real issue and partly the real issue was that some people thought we shouldn't endorse the march. After that, for a while we had to pull back and be more careful about endorsing outside things and especially spending money on them. I think that was probably a case where we went too far. I'm sure there are a lot of cases where we didn't go far enough, where we were too timid, but it's hard to know on that.

RA: Is the membership ever a source for wanting to move somewhere else? Because the way you have it set up, so much comes from the leadership. . . .

Tess: Well, sometimes people from the membership bring something up. It's not real common but it does happen. For example, recently someone wanted us to support an ACORN event. She had gotten involved in ACORN outside the union and got us to support that. And there is a lot of enthusiasm from the rank and file about Mel King's campaign for mayor.

RA: Can you give us more detail on how you organize around passing resolutions about issues like Central America, or around mobilizing members to go to demonstrations? Don't



Drivers demonstrating in Washington, D.C.

people ever say, "So what's that got to do with us?"

Tess: Yeah, people say, "What's that got to do with us?" a lot. And, we explain what it has to do with us. That's something we're constantly trying to do—translate some issue into something that affects the bus drivers. You know, how does nuclear power affect the Boston school bus drivers? Or whatever. And sometimes we can do it quite well. We usually get these things passed. But the thing is, most of the people say to themselves, "Well, if it doesn't cost me any money, and the leadership wants it, let's do it." And then if we ask for money, it gets to be another problem. But then every time this happens there's some carping the next day, and we always hear, "How come we always bring up these outside issues? We're supposed to be having these meetings to talk about our own issues and not some outside

issues," etc. etc. But, usually we get them passed.

RA: You said before, or implied, that people vote for them because the leadership is pushing it, and they like the leadership.

Tess: Well, that may be partly it. Unfortunately, I think there is a tendency people have to go along with authority.

RA: Let's go back to El Salvador. How do you talk about it—or foreign policy generally? Do you bring up the history of the role of trade unions in the Vietnam era?

Tess: (laughs) No, we don't bring up the role of trade unions in the Vietnam area. Not at all. With any issue we try to bring up how it's related to the school bus drivers, as I said. For example, it's obvious to all the drivers how Reaganomics affects school bus drivers. So, most marches these days there's something against Reaganomics. So we can talk about cut-backs for example. And also drivers have families so people aren't just affected by what happens to us as school bus drivers, but as residents of Boston or as people whose sisters are on welfare or whose fathers are on social security, or something like that. People can usually hook in in some way or another around these economic issues. Also, though, on race issues—people understand that pretty easily. It's hard not to when you live in Boston.

Around El Salvador, we just bring it up straightforwardly—as, "It's obvious." In El Salvador, there's also a trade union unity coalition and 90 percent of trade unionists belong to it and it's with the FDR. So, we bring it up as, these are our fellow trade unionists in El Salvador, and *they* say: U.S. GET OUT; therefore, *we* say: US GET OUT. And we talk about the repression of trade unionists, about the repression in general, with a little bit of an added emphasis on the repression of trade unions, and how all the trade union halls have been blown

up and all this kind of stuff, so we bring it up on that level.

RA: What was the process by which you moved into leadership? Did it at some point become a self-conscious strategy for the left to become leadership?

Tess: Not so much a self-conscious strategy, it was more like, well, we're stuck with it because otherwise, things will fall apart. At first we ran this guy for president who had been active in the organizing drive and was a nice enough guy. But, it was too much work for him, he turned out not to be able to do it and when he was in leadership he became isolated and things started falling apart. A left analysis is really necessary to get anywhere, otherwise you get totally bogged down. There's such a tendency for people to look at it in terms of, "This is a crappy company; some other company's going to be good, but Kenneth Hudson who runs the Hudson Bus Lines is a nasty anti-union bastard and so we've gotta fight him"—and that gets you only so far.

At a certain point it gets derailed if there's not left thinking going into the leadership. I think that's what happened with the former president. It got derailed because he didn't have the analysis to say, "Fight for the people getting the most squashed." It was too much work for him because he didn't have that other motivation, and he didn't do the right work because he didn't have that broader understanding. A lot of people have been willing to put a lot of time and energy into building this union, but I don't know if they would have got it going without a left catalyst at the beginning.

RA: However it emerged, as a conscious strategy or not, a lot of leftists *have* moved into leadership in unions, local unions—as opposed to being an alternative caucus that's trying to challenge the national. Can you contrast these strategies at all from your experience?

Tess: I think one thing that happens is that you go around as a rank-and-file caucus criticizing the leadership and if you're at all successful you start winning people over to thinking, "Aha, the leadership is corrupt and not militant enough, and not taking up our issues; people in the caucus are right," etc., etc. And so they join the caucus, and then election time comes around and what do you do? Well, naturally you run the people in the caucus against the leadership and if you're successful, well, then you win.

There is another strategy that says you should always stay out of power, and in fact one guy in our union who's a leftist takes that other strategy and he has the freedom to always criticize from the outside. Lots of times I envy him because I think, "Gee, wouldn't it be nice to be on the outside carping?" But, people take you less seriously for that—they don't respect you. They say, "If you think they're not doing it right, let's see *you* do it right." They think you're not taking responsibility. I happen to agree with that. If you're going around saying there's a better way, but you're not going to take on responsibility to show how to do it right, then what does it mean? I'm not saying you shouldn't criticize unless you have the answer about how to do it right. I don't think that at all. But you lose credibility.

RA: Could you speak directly to what it means that in your union leftists are in the leadership? Besides passing resolutions and mobilizing people against the government on a range of issues, are there other ways in which you see your impact?

Tess: Actually, one thing that's key is that we frame all sorts of issues. I mentioned this earlier in terms of racist and sexist behavior—setting a framework and a tone where respect for women and black people is a given, and certain things just aren't acceptable. Another

example is that we take the attitude that we're all working together and *naturally* we pull hardest for the person on the bottom. That has come up recently because the van drivers get paid less than the big bus drivers and raises are always done on a percentage basis, which of course screws the people at the bottom. And so we got the membership to pass a resolution that we would push for a bigger raise for the van drivers. The attitude we take is that *naturally* we do this, and that puts the onus on somebody who wants to do it another way. They have to argue that it's good to screw the person on the bottom—and that's a hard position to take. So, by being in leadership, we've been able to shape *how* issues get raised, and I think that's very important.

RA: One of the questions that interests us—drawing on other people's experience—is how do you balance the political priorities you bring to this work with the day-to-day demands of union business? That's obviously one of the

reasons people adopt a rank-and-file caucus strategy.

Tess: That's a real problem because you get really bogged down with all the day-to-day stuff that you have to do, which is some of the most draining and horrible stuff. Getting the politics in can be really tough. I get bogged down mediating between people or dealing with problems that people have that are real problems but that keep me from doing anything political. For example, there has been an ongoing issue about where the drivers can park at this new place we're working at. It's a real problem—you need to park—and I keep bringing it up and trying to solve it, but it means I can't be doing anything that has any political import. Where people can park is important but it doesn't have any political import. These things are draining, incredibly draining. And they really take up your time, especially when it's things between the members, like, "How come X can park there and I can't?" Or, "How come the card players get all the tables in the



On the picketline: stopping the scab buses. Mark Hoffman photo.

drivers' room and there's never any tables for somebody who doesn't play cards?" That sort of thing.

RA: It's this maintenance stuff that has to be done. You're not credible if you don't do it.

Tess: And if you do, you can't do anything else.

RA: Or, you can deal with it through bureaucracy—the solution is more staff, so I can deal with the political questions, and then you build up a bureaucracy.

Tess: You don't build up a bureaucracy unless you can pay them and we can't pay them and so we can't have a bureaucracy. Instead, I do it for free, and so do a few other hard-working people. It's a real problem. Sometimes I feel like, "How can I live through these x number of years doing this incredibly hard work?" That's a lot what happened to the guy who was president before me. I feel a lot more sympathetic to him than a lot of other people do—he just couldn't handle all the work he got stuck with. He said he quit because it was too much work for him and I can understand that because it's too much work for me, too!

RA: Is there no way to change the structure of authority?

Tess: We try to run things on a committee basis but basically the buck stops at the president. It ends up that people have to hook into me if they want to get something done because I know and nobody else does—I end up being the nerve center. Even other people who work hard know the buck stops with me and so they can take a rest sometimes. There's also this ceremonial thing, this protocol thing, like if we have to go meet with the School Committee members or some other union, well the president has to be there or else they're going to take offense if we only sent our vice-president or chief steward. But the hardest issue—politically—is around who develops authority and

who develops confidence. This came out recently around negotiations. We had a committee of twenty people and I had to leave early one night and I was really encouraging them to keep on going. The company wanted to wrap it up, too. But enough people on our side didn't want to go on without me so they broke it up. This is a committee of the people who know the most, who are really strong people, who have worked on it for years and years. That's one level of the whole issue of participation. But, on another level, we're a pretty militant union. Partly, that's because we're young—only six years old. The process of organizing was, and is, a radicalizing experience. People really got swept up into it. We were very militant in the beginning. And we still tend to be militant compared to other unions that have been around for years and years. People have a lot of fight in them, and that's mostly good.

RA: You mean in relation to the company? Not putting up with things?

Tess: That's the good aspect of it. Whenever there's a struggle they'll usually come out and they'll fight. But the bad aspect of it is that you get into this headset: "I'm not going to take any shit," and sometimes that means that you're not going to take any shit from your fellow workers. It's always been a real problem for those of us in leadership trying to run a meeting. The question is how much do you want to squash that energy in order to get the business done and to get things really going and how much do you want to encourage it?

I hear from other people who are presidents of other unions that they're really upset about apathy in the rank-and-file, and sometimes I get upset about that, too. But sometimes we have the opposite problem—of people railing on and on about what's on their mind. That can be really frustrating. But when it happens I have to stop and think about how this is also



what makes us strong. These people are ready to go out and bust heads and if we could just direct it at the company's heads, or the city's, instead of each others', that would be really wonderful!

Another thing that comes from our "youth" is that we don't have to contend with a precedent of things being done in a bureaucratic way. We do things like grievances, for example, in a very unbureaucratic way. The standard grievance procedure is that after a steward files a grievance, there's a seven-day period for the company to answer it. Then a "step two" meeting gets set up, which is supposed to be between the steward, the representative of the company, and someone from the international. But what we've always done is to have one "step-two" meeting every month for all the grievances that come up, so there are maybe eight or ten stewards there. One of them is supposed to argue the case but the rest of them are sitting there looking menacing at management. Sometimes we've organized a whole bunch of drivers to go down and just mill around and show that they back us up or storm management's offices or do something like that. This gets more drivers involved in the grievance process, and hopefully intimidates management. So we have a

way of doing things which is not according to the rules. We think it's much more effective, and tends to break down the reliance on legalistic procedures but in a union where the precedent is the legalistic way, it's very hard to start instituting those things—if it hasn't been done before, everybody's going to just say, "That's not the way it's done." Or, people will say that it's only going to hurt the case. And nobody's going to want to do it that way.

RA: You really couldn't do this if you were organizing some substantial bloc of basic industry.

Tess: I don't think it's a matter of the industry but rather the newness. It's the experience of militance getting you somewhere.

RA: Then let's put it directly. You don't feel that the *kind* of work people in your union do—drive school buses rather than make steel—is an important distinction? In terms of who it is that you offend or fight—the Boston School Committee or, for example, U.S. Steel?

Tess: I think every place has its particular difference from every other place. I think being a quasi-public sector union does make a difference, and being involved in a hot political issue makes a difference. It has made it easier to bring politics—on the level of what's our relationship to Boston politics and government—into the scene. Our local has always had the strategy of making our struggles public, building alliances with the community, and that has meant trying to do stuff through the media. The Steelworkers were very leery of that at first. They wanted to see things in trade-union terms—us against the company, and everything else is irrelevant—but now I think they go along with us on it a lot more than they did because they've seen that it worked.

Working in private industry you don't have to deal with the public in the way you do if you're a service union. Service workers have to



Gathering of drivers. Liz Casey photo.

deal with the public and the consumer counts more directly than if you're dealing with a factory. And if you're dealing with a government agency, you can't ignore it. On the other hand, one difference about our local that can work *against* militancy is that we're all off driving buses by ourselves and not working together where we can talk to each other. Every job has something that's going to make a difference.

RA: Listening to you describe what it's like to be union president, all the work you have to do given how things are stacked against you, makes it seem that you almost need people who are leftists, who have some other reason to build a decent trade union. It's hard to see how people get motivated to do that who aren't impelled by some larger sense of what the work is about. If you think back to the thirties to the CIO and the roll of Communists in building the trade union movement what seems to happen is that the work leftists do strengthens the trade unions but it doesn't necessarily strengthen the left. It's as though leftists are necessary to keep the trade union movement going.

Tess: I've wondered about this a lot myself, and I don't know the answer. How do you build a commitment to a union and participation in it, not just support for good leadership? So you don't have this problem we're up against? How do you build something you don't end up having responsibility for for the rest of your life?

RA: Have we learned anything from feminism about organizing that addresses these issues?

Tess: I think we've learned some things. I think our union has come a long way. People respect each other there, and that's really important. But we haven't come that other length of the way. We've tried to do things in a committee way as opposed to a one-person way, but we haven't come far enough. We haven't come to the point where things aren't just all thrown on one person. That's the next big struggle.

RA: The way that regular unions get out of this is bureaucracy. They let their president off the hook by getting money and having complicated structures that are so deadening that it doesn't matter what anybody says.

Tess: You know, being a union president is so weird, because it makes me sympathize with the most horrible people sometimes. I can really understand how bureaucracies build up since there are so many times when I would like to have a bureaucracy. This again is where I think it's important to have a leftist consciousness because it would be absolutely impossible to be in this position, to be president of a local and *not* fall into a completely bureaucratic and anti-democratic way of running things if I didn't have a leftist consciousness. And enough people are around to remind me of it.

RA: This seems to relate to something the Eastern Europeans are talking about—how do you create socialism without bureaucracy? We

keep creating bureaucratic forms to fight bureaucracy!

Tess: It's just such a contradiction because on the one hand, we're talking about trying to get other people involved, to take some of the responsibility off me—or the chief steward, who gets all the shit from the other stewards, though then he passes it on to me. So you set up committees to try to get people involved who will take responsibility for some area, but then a committee means bureaucracy. It means a meeting when you don't want to go to a meeting rather than getting together because you want to get together or whatever. There are many times when we think it would be nice to have a paid person, but there *are* trade-offs.

RA: Isn't this connected to what we began to raise earlier about motivation—how much people are willing to put in, what draws people or keeps them away from union activism, what's inspiring, what moves?

Tess: I think it's real important to raise the issue of what people's lives are like—if you have kids or want to have relationships, you've got to figure all that in to what kind of energy you're going to have left.

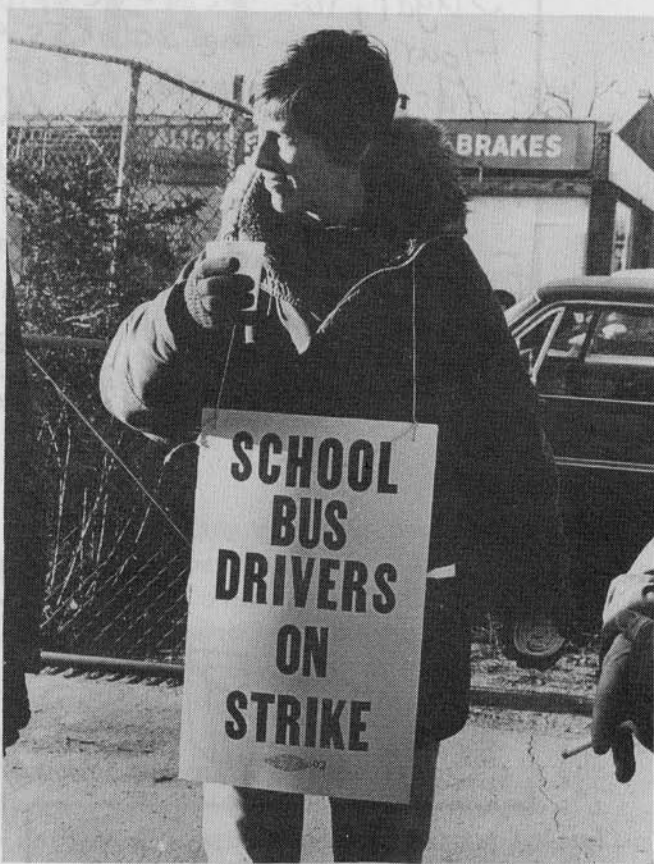
RA: Your experience is particularly interesting because you said that in 1976 you took this job because you wanted a part-time job that would leave you free, and now work is a main focus in your life, sometimes even overwhelming.

Tess: Yeah, it's a little ironic in my case.

RA: Can we return to the question we began with about the lessons of your experience? What would you most like people to take from it?

Tess: In many ways, the bus drivers as a group are similar to the "Rainbow Coalition" that was built here in Boston around Mel King's campaign for mayor. What both experiences point to is that it's possible for a diverse group

of people to work together and not only on the common issues that affect us all. It's also possible to bring up and fight against things that divide us like racism and sexism, without these things creating polarizations among us. In fact, dealing with these issues brings us together more.




On the line: Tess Ewing. Muffy Shumway photo.

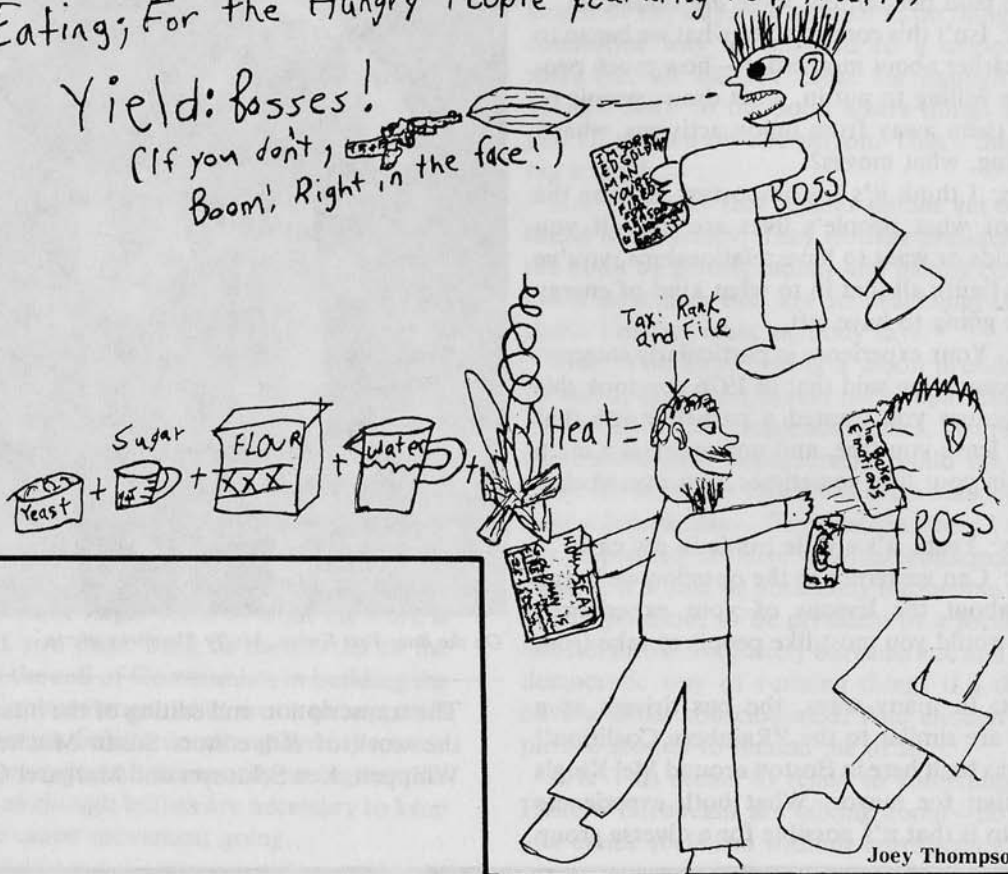
The transcription and editing of the interview is the work of *RA* editors Susan Mitchell, Deb Whippen, Ken Schlosser and Margaret Cerullo.

The Delicious Recipe

Yeast; for the workers, who will Rise;
Sugar; for the sweetness of liberty;
Flour; For the softness and starchiness of taxi
drivers to each other;
Water; for the bosses, who will drown;
Heat; For the intensity and heat taxi drivers feel, getting
ready to explode because unjust bosses exist
Eating; For the Hungry People yearning for liberty;

Yield: Bosses!

(If you don't,  Boom! Right in the face!)



IN THE HOT SEAT

The Story of the New York Taxi Rank and File Coalition

John Gordon

In the early 1970s insurgent rank and file movements sprang up in workplaces and industries throughout the country. Often combining roots in the movements of the sixties with earlier traditions of rank-and-file activism, they seemed for a time to represent an important step forward in the process of building a truly working-class socialist movement. While that hope remains, many of the insurgent organizations have died out, dwindled, or been coopted by union bureaucracies. One of these movements took place in the taxi industry in New York City.

The most organized expression of that particular movement was the Taxi Rank & File Coalition, an active force in the cab industry from 1971 to 1977. This article grew out of a series of discussions, held after the group disbanded, in which we tried to sum up and evaluate our experiences. One of the key issues that emerged in those discussions was the question of racism, especially in regard to how the Coalition had dealt with the "gypsy cab" issue in the first few years of its existence. The article focuses on those questions; although it has a definite point of view, it tries to remain true to the dialogue that developed there.*

*While many people participated in the development of this article, I particularly want to acknowledge the contributions of Paul Wasserman, Steve Mantin, John Garvey, and Kevin Connors—all former members of the Taxi Rank & File Coalition. Of course, responsibility for the overall perspective and conclusions of the article rests solely with me.

An Introduction

The early 1970s were a time of turmoil and change in the yellow cab industry. After a two-week strike in December 1970, the New York City Taxi Drivers' Union and the taxi fleet-owners came to an agreement that would decrease the starting commission rate for drivers from 49 to 42 percent, and take a dime off the top of each trip to pay for benefits previously paid for by the bosses. On March 3, 1971, the new contract was put into effect (without a vote by the membership as required by the union constitution) along with a 48 percent fare increase.

Overnight, the passengers seemed to disappear. This, along with "the dime" and "the 42 percent," cut deeply into drivers' wages. Mass opposition to the new contract arose. In April, union officials were literally driven out of the semi-annual membership meeting by thousands of angry taxi workers. And soon after, the Taxi Rank & File Coalition was formed to fight for a decent contract and a more democratic union.

The new group moved quickly to challenge the union leadership headed by Harry Van Arsdale, who was also president of the Central Labor Council. The Coalition, while unable to defeat Van Arsdale, did succeed in presenting a serious challenge to the union leadership and capturing the imaginations of thousands of taxi drivers throughout the city. In its six years of existence, the group ran in two election campaigns, both times receiving a sizeable percentage of the vote. Many of its members were elected shop stewards and committee men and women in their garages. It participated in a number of wildcat strikes and, in general, provided a pesky obstacle to the seemingly endless machinations of the union leadership.

While the Coalition maintained its initial focus on working conditions and union democracy, it gradually broadened its concerns to a whole range of other issues, including racism, sexism, and eventually socialism.

The movements of the sixties had a strong influence on the "Rank & File's" development. The women's movement and the antiwar movement especially contributed to an emphasis on internal democracy and a hostility toward dogmatic approaches to trade union organizing. The coalition was also characterized by what might be called a healthy disrespect for the trade union bureaucracy. This attitude often led to charges of being antiunion by other leftists, though very rarely by other taxi drivers.

In the early seventies, many fleetowners began to sell their cabs to individual owners in the form of "minifleets." Within five or six years, two-thirds of the fleet industry had been sold off, effectively wiping out the base for both the union and the insurgent movement. The Rank & File Coalition fought the process, but could not halt it. In 1977 the Coalition formally dissolved itself, although some rank-and-file activity continued and, in fact, continues to this day.

The Gypsies

Yellow cab drivers weren't the only taxi workers making news during the early '70s. While workers in the medallion (i.e. licensed) industry were organizing opposition to union president Harry Van Arsdale in the fifty or so garages around the city, a more violent struggle was being waged on the streets of New York's black and Hispanic communities. In Harlem, Bedford-Stuyvesant, and especially the South Bronx, the non-medallion, "gypsy" cab industry was fighting for survival.

The South Bronx, home of the city's largest Hispanic neighborhood, gradually became the



center of the struggle. Devastated by the social and economic policies of government and industry in the sixties, the neighborhood was looking more and more like a bombed-out war zone. Literally thousands of buildings had been burnt out and were abandoned by landlords. The banks redlined the South Bronx as a matter of policy, refusing to lend money for housing or business investment in the area. City services were slowly but surely being withdrawn. Unemployment in the city's largest "barrio" had skyrocketed, as had the number of South Bronx residents addicted to heroin. The drug addiction was especially serious. Besides destroying the lives of many of the community's young people, it was a major fuel for the growing crime problem in the neighborhood.

And increasingly, cab drivers were victims of that crime. Out there all alone on the city streets, often in deserted neighborhoods, with nothing between the driver and the passenger, a cab driver was an easy target. More and more cab drivers refused to pick up black and Hispanic people.

Cab drivers had been passing up black people for years, but by the late '60s the problem had reached massive proportions. If you weren't white and you wanted a cab, you probably had a long wait ahead of you. It was not uncommon to see five or ten empty cabs drive by a black person before one would stop. And if you wanted to go to Harlem or Bedford-Stuyvesant, chances were the driver would simply refuse.

In response to this lack of service and the

high unemployment among third world people in the city, the nonmedallion industry sprang up. Gypsies were allowed to pick up fares at their central base or by radio call, but, unlike medallion cabs, they could not legally pick up passengers who hailed them on the street.

Gypsies got a big boost during the bus and subway strike of 1966. Their numbers steadily increased throughout the rest of the '60s until by 1969 they numbered from three to five thousand (as compared to 11,800 medallion cabs).

The fleetowners, whose investment was threatened by this growth, began to attack the nonmedallion industry unmercifully. The leadership of Local 3036, the New York City Taxi Drivers' Union, gleefully jumped on the bandwagon. By 1970, they had jointly pushed a restrictive law through the city council, requiring all medallion cabs to be painted yellow and banning all nonmedallion cabs from using that color.

Week after week, only thinly disguising their racism, the fleetowners and the union leadership filled the pages of their newspapers with tales of gypsy drivers' crimes. The fleetowners' paper, the *Taxi News*, was particularly vicious. On December 15, 1968, to cite just one example, the *Taxi News* printed a front-page story that began like this:

Rape, robbery, assault, intimidation.

These are some of the references which gypsy drivers bring to their jobs. Apparently no other qualifications are needed.

The breakdown of New York into a

lawless jungle has been a boon to these vultures, who prey on unwitting victims. The vacuum in law enforcement has enabled them to terrorize the city with impunity, striking where they want when they want.

Many of the stories in New York's daily newspapers, cataloguing gypsy drivers' so-called "crimes against society," were planted there by the fleetowners themselves. One of their more frenzied attacks was reported in the *New York Times* on August 27, 1971:

A spokesman for the taxi industry charged yesterday that assaults this week in Harlem on cab drivers, one of whom was killed, were part of a pattern by which slum area militants attempt to terrorize drivers in such areas.

According to Arthur Gore, publisher and editor of *Taxi News* and a spokesman for the industry, the more than 1600 attacks on drivers this summer cannot simply be charged off to addicts and small time hoodlums.

Mr. Gore charged that militants, through constant "hate-whitey" campaigns, provoked direct assaults to protect gypsy cab operations in their area, and that they indirectly incited the "highly emotional" or the "feeble-minded" to make wanton, vicious attacks

But the residents of those "slum areas" apparently did not agree. Ever since the 48 percent increase in yellow cab rates five months earlier, the gypsy industry had been booming. Offering rates one-third lower, the gypsies were able to take over most of the business in black and Hispanic neighborhoods. The number of nonmedallion cabs multiplied rapidly (by 1973 estimates of their total number ran as high as 20,000). And the yellow cabs that began filter-



ing back into the areas they had previously shunned found that the situation had changed after the fare hike. Now it was the passengers who were doing the refusing. Most residents of Harlem, Bedford-Stuyvesant, and the South Bronx were choosing gypsies over yellow cabs, partially because of the lower cost, but also out of a deep-seated resentment felt toward the medallion cab industry. One member of the Rank & File Coalition, a white driver who drove a gypsy for a while before switching to yellow cabs, had this to say:

It was interesting to note how the people, especially in the neighborhoods where gypsies worked, related to me when I was driving yellow and when I was driving gypsy; and it was really different. Tips were better when I was driving gypsy. There were a whole lot more fares. Even now when I'm in Washington Heights, or in Harlem, or in any black neighborhood, you see a lot of people that you know they're waiting for a cab, but they're waiting for a gypsy. And I'm not totally sure whether it lies in solidarity with the gypsies for providing the service or the fact that gypsies are cheaper—probably some of both.

Union Elections: Confusion Sets In

As soon as the fleetowners and union officials realized how widespread the opposition to the new contract was, they stepped up their attacks on the gypsies, hoping to shift the responsibility for the low bookings and decreased wages away from themselves.

As the summer of 1971 wore on, it became one of their constant themes. Unionwide elections were coming up in November, and the Rank & File Coalition was mounting a strong challenge to Van Arsdale. Fighting for survival, the union leadership was bending every effort toward regaining some of its lost credibility. This passage from the union paper, the *Taxi Drivers' Voice*, was typical:

We cannot permit the gypsies to tear at the guts of the taxi workers and we consider anyone who at this time wants our union to relegate this fight to the background will be aiding and abetting the enemy. The leadership of this union understands very well the nature of the fight to stabilize this taxi industry and that is why our efforts are increasing daily. This fight requires the cooperation of all our members. Anyone who chooses to stand on the sidelines instead of participating only helps prolong this fight. We didn't build a union to give people a license to steal. We didn't build a union to allow law violators to deprive us of an honest living. We do not intend to stand by while law violators become legalized at the expense of honest hard working taxi drivers. When we march for justice, let us all march together.

A little slicker than the bosses, but the message was the same. And to a certain extent, the union was successful. Many drivers pointed to

the dominance of the gypsies in black and Hispanic neighborhoods and their widening sphere of operations as the cause of their problems. And as we saw earlier, the fleetowners (and the union) were quick to link the increasing number of robberies committed against cab drivers to the rise of the gypsies.

Within the Rank & File Coalition all this caused a lot of confusion. The group was trying to organize as many drivers as possible into its campaign against the still-unsigned contract. Many Rank & File members believed there was a chance to overturn it. Moreover we were planning to run a slate against the union leadership in the upcoming elections.

But there were divisions within the group. There were older drivers mainly angry about the contract and the lack of union democracy. There were younger white drivers, mostly new to the industry, many of whom had had experiences in the antiwar movement, civil rights movement, or women's liberation movement. There were also former union bureaucrats and hangers-on, who for one reason or another



were on the outs with the current union leadership. There were not many black or Hispanic drivers. All these groups had different perspectives on the gypsy question and on the direction the Coalition ought to take.

The meetings were large, public, and basically unplanned. Drivers who had been hacking for twenty years would stand up and vent their anger and frustration at the bosses and union officials. Discussions tended to ramble from one topic to the next as first one person, then another, would push their particular point of view. Each week five or six new people would come, participate, and often never come back. The situation demanded order, but no one wanted to reproduce the lack of democracy we had experienced within the union. So the group veered in the other direction, and a kind of chaos reigned.

But despite the chaos, the meetings were a source of strength. The emphasis on internal democracy and willingness to hear people out even if it took till midnight offered a sharp contrast to the union leadership and built trust among Rank & File members. It was, however, a difficult situation in which to work out a position on a controversial issue like the gypsies.

Paul: I remember the younger people, the people who considered themselves political at the time, really tried to stay away from the issue as much as possible for fear of alienating a lot of people. There was a whole lot of anger around the contract and nobody wanted to do anything to quiet that down. There were a lot of rank and file cab drivers who came to the meetings, who had picked up on the line that the union and the bosses had been feeding, and who said we gotta do something about (against) the gypsies—and I remember being very uptight everytime that was brought up, not wanting it to

come into the picture and fuck everything up.

And I remember only two people speaking in support of the gypsies: I remember Leo standing up and giving that rap about how working people gotta unite with other working people, that's the only way we're going to win, and this and that. And I also remember Jack, from like the year 1 A.D., saying the gypsy cabs are gonna help us win against the bosses, we should invite them to come downtown and work while we strike. That'll make the bosses want to settle the strike and give us our money and get us back to work, 'cause it's their cabs and not ours. (Leo and Jack were both older drivers. Leo's comments were made at his first meeting.)

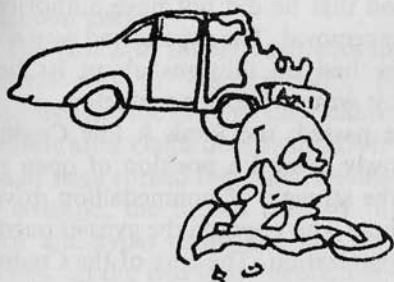
Along with being afraid of alienating potential supporters, there was the very real problem that we had no concrete proposals to offer on the question. Three years later, the Coalition came up with a proposal to municipalize the industry, which would eliminate the medallion system altogether and bring all taxis under one system. But in 1971 there was no such proposal, and most people felt that eliminating the distinction between gypsies and yellows would create chaos, especially given the beating the yellow industry had taken since the fare hike.

The election campaign took up almost all of our energies that fall. Van Arsdale had never received less than 85 percent of the vote before, but 1971 promised to be different. Everywhere we went, we found cab drivers furious over the contract, and most blamed it on the union leadership. Although the Coalition was new to the industry, and didn't have the resources of the Van Arsdale machine, we felt we had a chance.

The need to take a position on the gypsies seemed even more pressing, but the group

remained unable to resolve it. Week after week the union leadership hammered away at the issue, making veiled accusations that the Rank & File Coalition supported the gypsies. We, on the other hand, kept insisting that the gypsies were not the issue, that the union was only asking them to divert attention from the real issues—the contract and the lack of union democracy.

When the smoke cleared after the election, Van Arsdale and his cronies had 55 percent of the vote, Rank & File Coalition candidate Leo Lazarus had 35 percent, and independent Sid Binder 10 percent. The union bureaucrats were still in power, but most Coalition members felt the campaign had been a success. We didn't have much money, lacked an established set of contacts throughout the taxi industry, and we had been challenging a man who'd been head of the New York City Central Labor Council for twelve years. In fact, we were a group of relative unknowns. Yet we had gotten over a third of the vote, and we knew that over half of the fleet workers had not even voted in the election (partially because a spontaneous dues boycott had made many of them ineligible). Since the most common response that we encountered during the campaign was disgust for Van Arsdale and a feeling of complete alienation from the union, we figured most of the nonvoters were on our side.



No one was sure how much the gypsy issue had affected the outcome, although it seemed obvious that our refusal to join in the chorus of attacks against nonmedallion cabs had cost us some votes. Unfortunately, the group failed to make any systematic analysis of the election at the time. So whether the election hinged on the gypsy question remains an open question.

The Gypsy Struggle Comes to a Head

The gypsies were growing, in numbers and in organization, but with this growth came increased repression. In August 1971, two months before the union election, Michael Lazar, head of the newly created Taxi and Limousine Commission, announced that he was going to license and regulate the nonmedallion industry. Speaking of the need to ensure taxi service in the black and Hispanic communities, he stated that he would give legal status to a large section of the gypsy industry, while eliminating what he called "gypsy-gypsies," which he said operated entirely outside of the law. However, Lazar also made clear that he was going to enforce the regulations on the books which prohibited cruising for fares by gypsies.

This was apparently enough to convince some of the more well-placed gypsy owners, and a group of them agreed to help him frame new laws. But most were not convinced and ignored Lazar's offer. The conflict heated up all through the rest of 1971 and the beginning of 1972, as police harassment accelerated and the gypsies held demonstrations. By the middle of 1972, Lazar had about 1,500 nonmedallion cabs signed up in his voluntary registration program. The remainder (about 90 percent of the total) were refusing to go along.

Then in September of that year, Lazar announced that he was going to force the gypsies to take out their meters. All hell broke

what happened after that:

The savage beatings shocked the Puerto Rican community, it caused anger and the community realized that bricks and bottles are no match for guns handled by "legal assassins." On the evening of September 15th the community around 149th Street and Prospect Ave. prepared itself, wires on the light poles were cut; this time when the police came they were met by a darkened and armed community. Shots were exchanged, the police pulled out.

The next few days were tense, hundreds visited the funeral parlor where Jorge Gallardo's body lay in state. On September 20, a demonstration was called by the gypsy cab drivers, they were paying their last respects to Jorge Gallardo and at the same time expressing their determination to continue their just struggle.

Throughout the march the people expressed their support and encouragement, a clenched fist was a common sight on the streets of the South Bronx.

By October, the gypsies had created a new organization, the Association of Non-Medallion Drivers, and were planning more demonstrations. Then, on October 5, Lazar backed down. In a telegram read by the commanding officer of the 41st precinct to a meeting of the association, Lazar announced that it was not actually illegal for nonmedallion cabs to have meters, and that he did not have authority to order their removal. The gypsies had won a victory. They had no illusions about its being final. But it was a victory nonetheless.

As time passed, the Rank & File Coalition moved slowly toward a position of open support for the struggle of nonmedallion drivers. Most of those who opposed the gypsies outright left the organization. The core of the Coalition stabilized at about twenty-five primarily



loose. The gypsies called a demonstration on the evening of September 14 in the South Bronx. When a yellow cab was driven through the crowd, a confrontation developed which quickly grew into a police riot. Over a hundred community residents were injured and two were killed. *Unidad Latina*, the newspaper of a local Puerto Rican organization, El Comite, tells

younger, white drivers relatively new to the industry. The campaign against the contract lost its immediacy. And we began to realize that winning union democracy would require a long struggle.

The group's priorities and approach to its organizing started changing. Coalition members became less willing to submerge their political views and long-term goals to the needs of the moment. In May 1972, after a lengthy internal debate, the *Hot Seat* ran a full page article on the war in Vietnam. The article supported the people of Southeast Asia in their fight for "national liberation" and demanded "the immediate and complete withdrawal of all American military personnel and equipment." In the following months other articles on issues outside of taxi began to appear regularly. But the Rank & File remained silent on the gypsies.

It wasn't until October 1972 that the group took up the issue publicly again. In *Hot Seat*, our newspaper, underneath a large article about the killings of two yellow cab drivers, we printed a small article about two gypsy drivers who were killed while being robbed. The *Hot Seat* stated: "While medallion and nonmedallion drivers do the same job, take the same risks, and die for the same reasons, we are set against each other by the very people who profit off our labor: the bosses, [Mayor] Lindsay, Lazar, etc." It ended with a call for the two groups to unite with each other against the common enemy.

The *Hot Seat* finally dealt with the issue in a serious way in January 1973, fully twenty months after the birth of the Coalition and four months after Gallardo's death. Over a one-and-a-half page spread the paper discussed the gypsy struggle, the racism used by the bosses in their anti-gypsy campaign, and, in an attempt to link up the two movements, the harassment of yellow cab drivers by the Taxi Cab Commis-

sion. In an article entitled "Gypsies Fight Back" we ran down some history of the non-medallion cabs and their current fight against harassment. We said that the gypsies grew because there weren't enough cabs outside Manhattan, and that many drivers don't go into ghetto neighborhoods because of crime, money, and the "undeniable racism of some of us." Although the article was obviously intended to be in support of the gypsies, we seemed unable to come out and say that. It ended only with a statement that every yellow cab driver should become well informed about the gypsies.

Two issues later the *Hot Seat* carried a full-page interview with a member of the Association of Non-Medallion Drivers. But that was the last time the Coalition dealt with the issue directly in the pages of its newspaper. By the middle of 1973, nonmedallion cabs had won de facto recognition in the city's black and Hispanic neighborhoods. Although the fleet-owners continued their attacks, the city has not made any serious moves to keep the gypsies off the streets since that winter. For the last nine years, despite police harassment, the gypsies have worked in their communities, picked up fares by hail, and remained the principal source of taxi service in Harlem, Bedford-Stuyvesant, and the South Bronx. Looking back now, in 1983, it does not seem too much to say that the gypsies' establishment of their right to work the streets was the most significant victory won by any New York cab drivers in this decade.

John: When it came down to it, the issue became a key issue because it had tremendous community support. It was a struggle by third world communities of the city for better services, for basically equal services—for taxi service, which they weren't getting at least partially due to the racism of cab drivers.



We were very hesitant to challenge people about that. I can understand that. Here we were, mostly younger drivers, almost all white. And I think it was very good in a lot of ways that we were hesitant to go out and start calling all these older cabbies racists, who had been driving for twenty or thirty years, and had really paid their dues. But on the other hand, the solution we came up with was to just not deal with it at all. And I think it was a real opportunity that we missed.

Black Drivers in the Coalition and Some Thoughts on Our Approach to Racism

In the six years of the Taxi Rank & File Coalition's existence, perhaps 200-300 taxi workers passed through our ranks. Although the medalion industry was probably close to half black and Hispanic, all but a handful of those

200-300 Rank & File members were white. And of those nonwhite drivers that did join the group, most stayed active for only a short while.

There was Ellsworth, a young black driver who joined the Coalition in its early days. Ellsworth was young, interested in politics, and very enthusiastic. Whenever he got on a hack line to wait for a fare (instead of cruising), he'd jump out of the cab, start handing out the *Hot Seat* and rapping with other drivers. But Ellsworth never got too involved with the inner workings of the group and soon drifted away.

Then there was Scott, probably the most politically experienced of the black drivers to join the Rank & File. After only a few months Scott was chosen to be on the steering committee. This was a rotating position, but it was usually reserved for people who had been in the Coalition longer. Scott was very conscious of his role as the only black person in the group. More than once he criticized us for our racism. He also wrote the first major article in the *Hot Seat* on racism outside the taxi industry. The article, which dealt with the shooting of a black child named Clifford Glover by a white cop, was an important step forward for us. It condemned the attacks on the black community by the police without being wishy-washy as so many of our articles on racism tended to be. Unfortunately Scott too drifted away and soon left the industry altogether.

Eddie, on the other hand, had never been active in politics. His main interest was the taxi industry, and he threw himself into the Coalition's activities with an energy and enthusiasm that amazed us. However, after a while he got discouraged with our lack of progress (this was a particularly slow period for us) and he dropped out. Eddie remained personally close with Rank & File members in his garage, but never really got active in the Coalition again.

There were others who joined, but not many. And at no time, except possibly in the very beginning, did we have more than one or two black or Hispanic drivers attending meetings. More often than not, there were none.

The situation in the garages was a little different. In most places we had pretty good relations with the third world drivers. They tended to be relatively friendly to us as individuals, and, as a group, supportive of what we were doing. But, except in a few cases, they didn't get involved.

One exception was Meter, an overwhelmingly third world garage. In 1975 Craig, a white member of the Rank & File, was elected shop chairman. For almost a year there was a high level of activity at Meter, mostly around garage issues—firings, harassment of drivers for low productivity, the right to use the bulletin board, and so forth.

Another exception was Eden Garage, where the third world workers were, in Lester's words,

always the bulk of our support and the bulk of the activists in the garage. There was Tom and me [both white Rank & File members, ed.] who were on the shop committee, and the rest of the committee was black and Latin. And most of our supporters, our strong base, were the mechanics and other inside workers who were all Latin.

But even at Meter and Eden, the third world workers generally confined their activities to the garage.

The issue of racism was raised most dramatically at 55th St. garage, where an organization was built that included Rank & File Coalition members, other white activists not in the Coalition, and black drivers. The group succeeded

in sweeping the 1974 shop elections and establishing an "Action Committee," active around garage issues.

Threatened by this development the boss fought back. When the ax fell, it fell on a black driver named Morris, one of the most outspoken members of the Action Committee. Morris was fired twice. The first time he got his job back after a one-day wildcat strike and an arbitration. But the group was unable to build enough support for a strike after the second firing, and the arbitrator, perhaps recognizing our weakness, refused to reinstate him. Morris remained fired and was unable to get another job in the industry.

It was widely understood that the boss had consciously chosen to come down on a black worker. The first strike demonstrated that black and white drivers could unite to fight for a black driver. On the other hand, the fact that the boss did succeed in firing Morris and having him blacklisted echoed the perceptions of many black drivers throughout the industry that they were more vulnerable than white drivers, were less likely to be supported, and had fewer options if they were fired.

Why couldn't the Coalition attract more black and Hispanic drivers? We had lots of ideas, but few solutions. Eddie put his finger on one problem:

I tried to get some of the brothers who work in the garage to come down to Rank & File meetings. But they wouldn't have anything to do with it, because they saw the Rank & File as being against the union. Nobody wants to have anything to do with the union, even if it's opposed to the union. You know what I'm saying? Nobody wants anything to do with the union.

Donald, a black driver who never joined the Coalition, put it another way in a 1977 interview with the *Hot Seat*:

The union and that shit, it's just so much bullshit we deal with. That's the way I look at it. I got so much shit to deal with, got so much static, so many hassles, that we got to volunteer to be hassled with this? Somebody else. That stuff has got to be done. Maybe that's it. Maybe brothers have a few more hassles to go through than you cats. Even though it could help change a few hassles, the demand is greater elsewhere.

There were other problems. For example, the fifty or so taxi garages tended to reflect the segregated neighborhoods in the city. Most of us worked in garages that were primarily white. Also once the group had established a white identity, it was a very difficult situation for a nonwhite person to move into. To be the only black person in a room full of whites probably wasn't the most desirable way to spend an evening—particularly when it was not always too clear how much we were accomplishing.

But the points raised by Eddie and Donald seem crucial. Wouldn't most black workers who were interested in becoming active want to get involved in a struggle that was directed specifically against the oppression of black people and the institutions of white supremacy? At no time was this a major focus of the Taxi Rank & File Coalition.

Of course we were all opposed to racism, and we agreed that we should condemn it. But there were a lot of different ideas about how much it was connected to what we were doing. Was racism a central issue in the taxi industry? Should it be a major focus of the *Hot Seat*? What attitude should we take toward the refusal of many taxi drivers to pick up nonwhite people? How

much should we be raising issues that weren't directly connected to the job? Rank & File members were both divided and confused over these and other questions about the nature and extent of racism in this society.

Garv says that when he joined the Coalition he thought that

the primary thing to address was a class question. And, if anything, that racism was one of those evils of society, one of the fourteen or fifteen evils of this society that was going to be taken care of after the revolution. In the same way that we're going to get rid of pollution after the revolution... and have mass transit after the revolution, we're also going to get rid of racism after the revolution.

That was not something I had thought out. It was something I fell into kind of naturally. And I think that remained my basic position for the bulk of my time in Rank & File, until sometime in the last couple of years.

Steve felt that

within Rank & File, when racism was raised in a very urgent way, I usually felt it was being injected disproportionately. And I think that some of our self-apology and self-accusation comes from the feeling that we should have had something to offer, some sort of way of resolving it [racism], when I think the facts are that we could make a relatively slight contribution along those lines.

Ed, on the other hand, says that when he joined the Coalition he had "pretty strong worked-out ideas" about the importance of focusing on the fight against racism. But once in Rank & File, those ideas got pushed to the background, "either due to the frenzied atmos-

here, the day-to-day work, or just due to resistance" from other members.

A lot of these divisions were reflected in our literature. It just takes a glance at the *Hot Seat* to see that we dealt with the issue of racism sporadically, and that our thinking on the matter tended to be contradictory. Articles came in bunches. Sometimes we'd go for two or three issues without anything. Then we would run a couple of articles on racism in the same issue.

During the last few years we did deal with the issue more regularly, although generally the articles tended to deal with so-called outside issues, like independence for Puerto Rico, school busing in Boston, and so on. We generally avoided dealing with closer-to-home issues

like crime against cab drivers or the refusal of drivers to work in Third World neighborhoods. We finally tried to open up these two subjects in the last two issues of the *Hot Seat*.

One source of these disagreements lay in our roots in the antiwar movement of the sixties. As the student movement waned, many leftists turned toward the working class in the belief that it was the only group with a fundamental interest in overturning capitalist society.

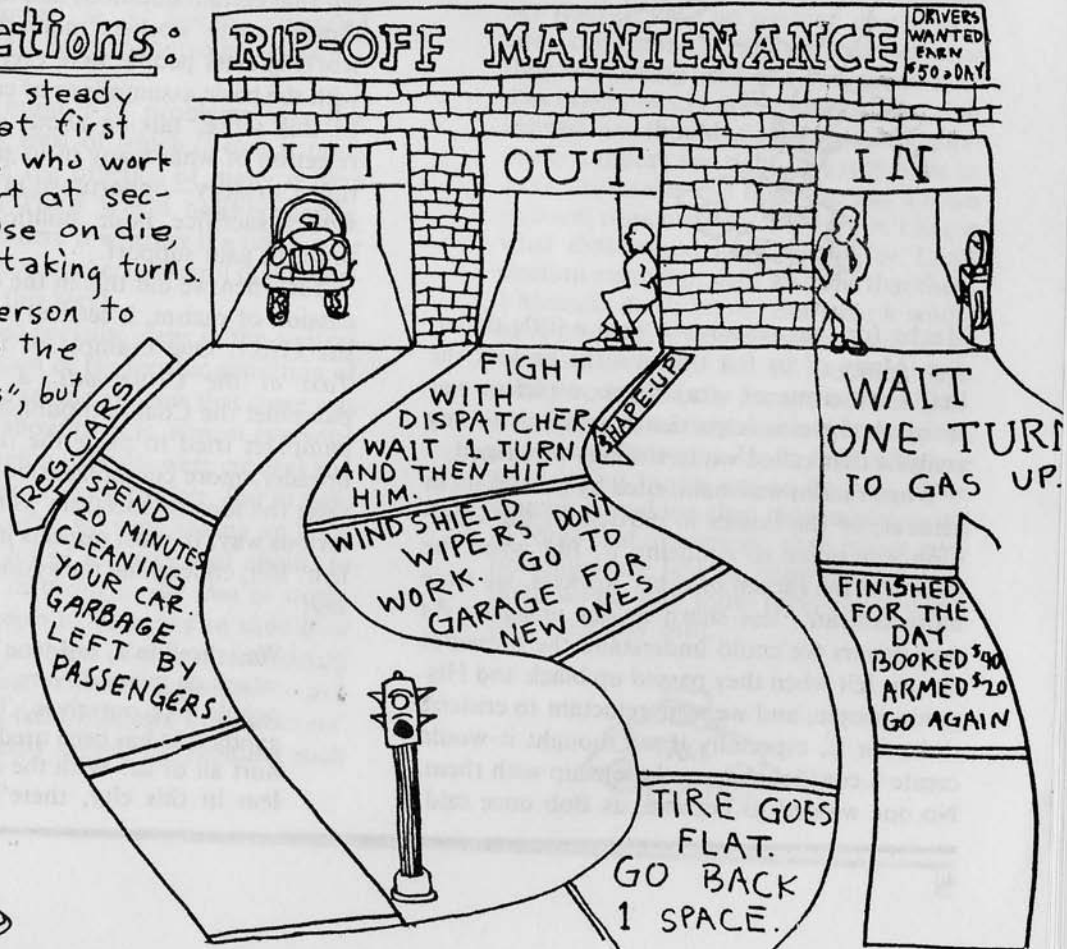
For some of us, the Rank & File Coalition was part of that change in direction. We were proud of the fact that we had been able to build a workers' organization with real support in its constituency (that is, among taxi drivers).

Instructions:

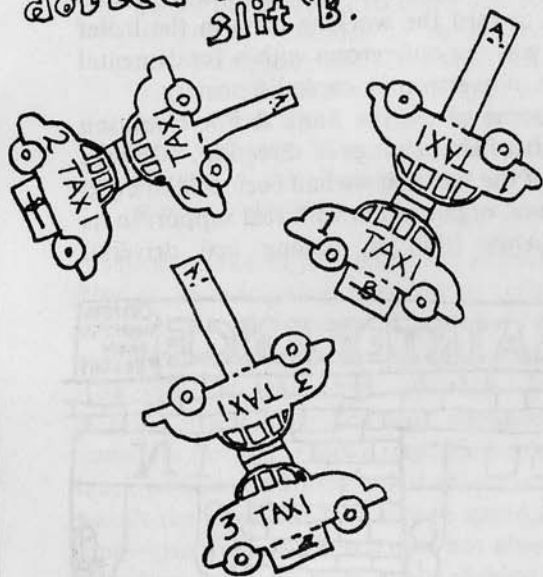
Drivers with steady cars start at first "out". Drivers who work any car start at second "out". Use on die, each person taking turns. The first person to get back to the garage "wins", but noone gets their dimes back.

RIP-OFF MAINTENANCE

DRIVERS WANTED
EVEN
\$50 a DAY!



These cars are the pieces. cut them out and fold on dotted lines. Put "A" in slit "B".



Maybe for that reason we were a little defensive. Many of us felt that a large part of the Left's criticisms of working-class racism was elitist. And we were particularly hostile to any analysis that called white workers privileged.

When racism was manifested by the system in general, or the bosses in particular, the Coalition was quick to condemn it. But when the issue was the racism of other workers, we were more hesitant, less sharp in our analysis. As taxi drivers we could understand the pressures drivers felt when they passed up black and Hispanic people, and we were reluctant to criticize them for it, especially if we thought it would create a conflict in our relationship with them. No one wanted to become, as Bob once said,

"the deputy corrector of attitudes" in the garage.

There was constant tension between our role as a group fighting for a decent contract, democratic reform of the union, and better working conditions and our role as people working toward a revolutionary transformation of society. In the *Hot Seat* we raised the question of socialism, or at least the class nature of our society, fairly consistently. In the context of an issue like union corruption or the condition of the cabs, this usually had the effect of sharpening the issue, or forcing people to consider questions they wouldn't ordinarily consider. It was a rejection of the urge to organize people around the lowest common denominator. We felt that certain questions had to be raised, even though some workers might be alienated, if working-class people were ever going to break with the basic assumptions of capitalist society. In this sense, talking about socialism was a rejection of what many of us saw as an opportunist strategy—opportunist in the sense that it would sacrifice basic political principles in order to gain support.

Yet when we did this in the context of a discussion of racism, it seemed to have the opposite effect. One example of this appeared in *Taxi at the Crossroads*, a thirty-two page pamphlet the Coalition published in 1974. The pamphlet tried to place the taxi industry in a broader, more comprehensive world view, and raise the idea of socialism to taxi workers in a serious way. In most respects it still seems excellent. But, concerning the gypsies, we had this to say:

We shouldn't fall for the boss/union attack on gypsy drivers. They are working people like ourselves. The racist propaganda that has been used against them has hurt all of us. With the crime/drug problem in this city, there's not way we're

going to eliminate robberies overnight. And with the fears and prejudices resulting from a society filled with racism, there's not way we're going to have every driver willing to work every neighborhood overnight. Gypsy cabs provide a necessary service in Black and Puerto Rican neighborhoods. The answer is not to deny that service.

The real issue is that everyone in the city should be guaranteed taxi service. And even more important, every taxi worker must be guaranteed a safe job. Yellow and gypsy drivers must get together with all transit workers to provide services for all communities in the city. Municipalization may begin to solve that problem. But we think that the only long-term solution is a worker-controlled industry in a worker-controlled society.

There are a number of problems with this section, not the least of which is that it practically condones the practice of many drivers not to work in Third World neighborhoods. But the question here is whether it's productive to raise the issue of workers' control in this context (or at least this way).

When we raised socialist ideas in the context of union corruption or the terrible condition of the cabs, we were taking an issue that there was wide agreement about (that is, almost everyone agreed that the union officials were crooks) and trying to take that one step further. But in talking about the gypsies we were taking an issue that there was a lot of disagreement about, to say the least. By throwing in the idea of workers' control we seem to be trying to slide over the very difficult problem of widespread racism among cab drivers. It seems important to ask whether the long-term interests of a workers' movement are really served by avoiding such questions.

Some Concluding Thoughts

Garv: I think the way to look at the "gypsy issue" is not exactly what should we have done then. I think the possibilities for what we could have done then were very limited. But I think the way to look at it is what would we do now faced with the same situation.

And I'm afraid that there are two competing lessons. One lesson would be that faced with the same situation now, all of us knowing what we know, that some people would advocate that we should do the same thing again. That if the gypsies became that kind of crucial mass question in the industry tomorrow, that we should say that we have no position on the gypsies, condemn the racism and say that they were being used as a scapegoat. And that others would argue at this point that instead we should clearly and unequivocally support the right of gypsy cabs to work the streets and that that was a main political responsibility. Now I don't know what that would have meant for Leo's election campaign, had we done that then. I honestly don't know. But what it would have meant is it would have opened up an entirely different set of political possibilities, specifically around our relationships with black and Latin drivers in the gypsy cab industry. If, in fact, what we were trying to do was to be part of an emerging working class movement, trying to forge that movement, then [those relationships] are just as important as anything we do with those people who don't [drive a gypsy cab].





The issues discussed here surfaced again and again in the Coalition's debates over its six-year history. Some felt that we were a trade union group, that we should stick to "trade union" issues, and that we should do everything possible to throw out the union leadership, take over the union and make it more democratic. In their view, raising issues like the war in Vietnam, socialism, and the oppression of third world people in the U.S.—issues that didn't relate directly to the taxi industry—would only alienate us from other drivers who might potentially join in a struggle to make the union more democratic. Once we accomplished that, they held, we could begin to raise these issues. Furthermore, many critics both within the Coal-

ition and in organizations outside the industry argued that raising these issues was the task of a political party, not a trade union rank-and-file group.

Others in the Coalition felt that the historic weakness of the American working class was precisely because the Left and the labor movement had failed to take up these larger issues, because they had concentrated solely on the so-called "bread and butter" issues. They argued that this country's corporate rulers had been willing to trade off slightly higher wages to at least a portion of the white working class in return for support of the "American system," especially in regard to the oppression of black people and the war on communism. Many members of the group came to feel that it just wasn't possible to turn the union into an organization that really fought for its membership, because unions had become so completely integrated into the capitalist system. Some might fight more effectively than Local 3036 for a larger slice of the pie, but none would or could challenge the nature of the system itself.

These were two poles of opinion within the Rank & File Coalition. The majority found themselves somewhere in between. But in 1971 and 1972, these issues were only beginning to make themselves felt. Most of us tended to have feelings about them rather than worked out ideas. By early 1974, however, the group had decided to make a sharp break with traditional trade unionism. In the *Hot Seat* and our pamphlet *Taxi at the Crossroads*, we openly called for socialism and tried to develop the connection between our fight for a more democratic union and the long-range struggle for a worker-controlled, socialist society.

The differences over how to deal with racism didn't become clear until much later. Many members of the Rank & File had been politicized during the 1960s, when the struggles of

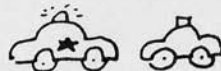
black people for justice, equality, and power occupied center stage in US politics. Now we were involved in a situation where the entire third world community in New York City had united in a fight for decent taxi service. On the one hand, we identified with that fight, and understood that the union's and the bosses' attacks on the gypsies were racist to the core. On the other hand the Coalition was basically motivated by a desire to overthrow an ugly, corrupt union bureaucracy, and many believed we had a chance to be successful, given the tremendous anger and frustration unleashed by the contract and the April union meeting. As Paul said, "No one wanted to do anything to quiet that down."

In terms of uniting with the gypsies, some members of the Coalition had problems with the fact that many gypsy drivers owned their own cars and worked for themselves. In fact, some people active in the gypsy movement owned more than one cab and leased them out, making them small fleetowners. El Comite, whom we quoted earlier, had no such problems:

The struggle of the gypsies is just one of the aspects of the total struggle of the Puerto Rican people, of the working class struggle against exploitation, capitalism and all of its consequences. The need for organization is immediate, the need to create an effective instrument of struggle is also immediate. The gypsy cab drivers must take the necessary steps to establish a forceful organization that will represent their interests as a group and the interests of the community, the same community that has supported the [gypsy] cab drivers from the beginning. Once this organization is formed, the future of the gypsy cab industry is guaranteed and we will have another example of the effectiveness of waging a united struggle.

It was a contradiction that the US labor movement has faced many times: a contradiction between the demands of third world communities for equality and the needs of a primarily white labor movement. Before and during the Civil War, a large part of the labor movement had opposed the abolition of slavery because they feared competition for jobs from freed slaves. The American Federation of Labor almost from its inception excluded blacks, thereby effectively shutting them out of the skilled trades right down to the present day. In 1968, when the black community in New York City tried to exert control over their schools as the only means of achieving decent education for their children, the United Federation of Teachers went on strike to prevent it. Many of us in the Coalition had supported the community in that struggle. Now we were face to face with a similar contradiction. Our union leaders didn't hesitate. They attacked the gypsies viciously. But the Rank & File couldn't resolve the contradiction. First we hesitated. Then we tried to straddle the fence. Finally we moved slowly to a position of support for the community. Yet, as I've tried to make clear, many of the issues are still unresolved. I believe the question of what attitude to take toward the struggles of third world people remains the most pressing question facing the general rank-and file movement today.

JOHN GORDON drove a yellow cab in New York City from 1971 to 1978. He now works as a mechanic in a factory in Brooklyn and is active in the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES).



THE CONVERSION OF THE JEWS

I sat stiffly in the car, resisting
Sunday school & the public school kids
who swore & did it with boys. I went
to a private school during the week,
but in the Sunday school the kids didn't know
anything. Anything. Like when the teacher asked
what the Old Testament was,
I knew it was a source book,
a real history book, but they thought
it was all Jewish miracles.

Their fathers belonged to the Brotherhood
of the Temple & leaned on cars waiting for their kids
to come out with their foul mouths.
Their kids were smoking & touching in the bathroom,
& sometimes the girls peered over the stalls, snickering.
My father bought lox & bagels; it was Sunday &
the table was covered with cream cheese & stinking fish.

On Monday, I'd go to the other school, where
in Religion class, Christ was so handsome & young.
Sure, he had more color, more attraction
than those old guys who, though very smart,
were only making history.
We had Joseph with his coat of many colors
& his brothers & the beautiful Queen Esther.
I'd line up all our guys against theirs,
but somehow Christ, hanging pitiful from that cross—
the nails & spikes sticking into his head—
he always won.

I knew I was on the side of the Old Testament,
but the other kids on my side were so mean
I thought of going over to the New. And it's true
I got a little scared in Debbie Lawson's bedroom:
suspended above her bed, a wooden crucifix
with him hanging & a dine store photo of Mary.
There was no way out of religion
until in 6th grade, my friend Annie Post said
Religion was the Opiate of the People.
All those stories, she said—Christ & Moses & Buddha—
everybody had them. Afterwards we had new words
& unshakable beliefs: atheist, agnostic.
Afterwards I felt superior & knew they believed
because they needed to, because they couldn't stand knowing,
as Annie & I knew, that it was really accidents
in space, all chemistry & vapors.

Robin Becker



Strike at Waterbury Manufacturing Company, 1946. (Waterbury Republican American)

BRASS VALLEY: A Review

Ron Grele

Brass Valley: The Story of Working People's Lives and Struggles in an American Industrial Region Compiled and edited by Jeremy Brecher, Jerry Lombardi, and Jan Stackhouse. Temple University Press, Philadelphia (1982). 284 pp. Index, photographs.

Brass Valley is a history of the brass workers of the Naugatuck Valley in Western Connecticut. It is also a history of their community and the relations between work, community, and struggle. It is based heavily upon oral histories and uses them to frame the interpretation of that history and community. It is by far the most ambitious, and in many senses, the most successful such effort.

I grew up in the Valley and reading this history and reviewing it places me, more than is usual, in the position of both insider and outsider to the experiences recalled. Memory and analysis are thus so closely intertwined in tension that to discuss one without the other, and without a personal digression, is impossible. In 1955 I was working first shift in the Naugatuck Chemical Company. On the 19th of August I rose as usual to be on the job by 6:30 a.m. Also as usual, I was dead tired because I had been out drinking the night before (which is, as the compilers of this extraordinary book tell us, what young workers in the Valley do after their days in the shop). It had rained heavily the last three days as Hurricane Dianne broke up over the Northeast. When I reached Main Street to cross the river, police barricades had been set up—the river was in flood. The Valley is narrow, the hills on each side rather steep, and the buildings of downtown blocked my view. Returning up the hill, I crawled on to the

roof of the Alcazar theater which while facing Main Street was built into the hill. From that roof I saw, literally, the life and industry of the Valley flowing out to sea. From as far north as Torrington, through Waterbury and Naugatuck where I was and then south to Derby the rushing water was gathering homes, the interiors of factories, lumberyards, people. It was tearing the guts from one of the most heavily industrial areas of industrial Connecticut.

Exhausted from the previous night and shocked by the ravage, I sensed then that the distance between me and the life of the Valley which had been growing since I had gone off to college (although I was then a drop-out) had somehow been symbolically defined and that I would never again return. To be sure I went back from time to time, mostly for funerals, but never again to live and be a part of that community. Later, in imagination, I envisioned a history of the Valley as my PhD dissertation. It was never done. The distance was too great, the pain too close. Now we have that history, and while *Brass Valley* takes me back to that time and that place it does so as an outsider both temporally and spatially. Time has passed, as have the prosperity of the fifties and the warm community one remembers from the forties. But also, I was never a part of the world of brass in the Valley. Naugatuck, my town, and the town which lends its name to the river of the Valley (and which does not even appear on the map of the region in the book), was, and is, a center for the rubber industry (Naugahide) and is dominated by US Rubber (now Uniroyal). Thus, while perhaps rooted in the world of labor described here, I am and always was an outsider to the major industrial focus of this volume and I cannot pretend to an intimate knowledge of the brass industry.

Why is any of this important? I don't know other than the fact that such experiences cannot

but affect how I read this book and how it affected me. It explains my response to its goals and ambitions, its descriptions and prescriptions, and above all to its people, whose testimony forms so much of *Brass Valley*.

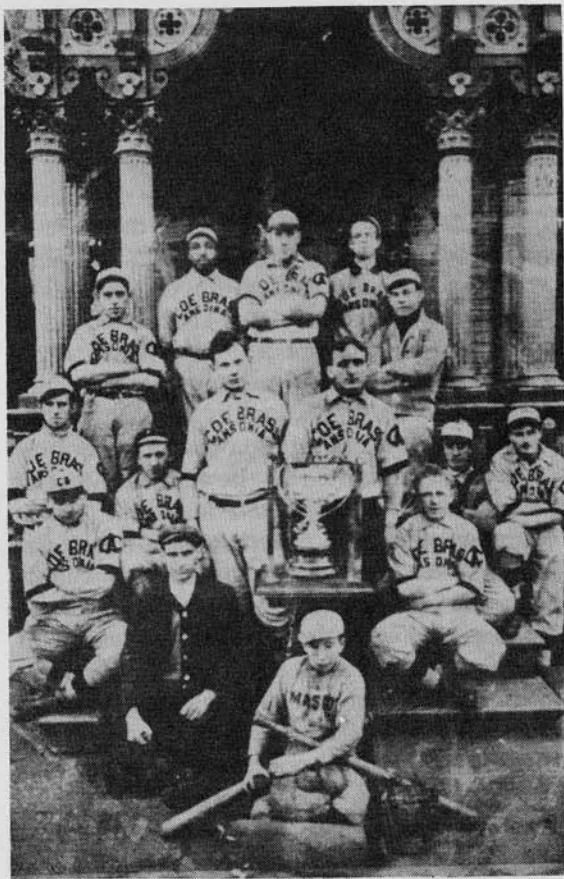
Brass Valley is a people's history based on the History Workshop ideal. It has been produced not only for the academy but also for the people of the Valley whose history has not been available to them. Its style, format, organization, interpretative framework, its politics and peculiar tension are determined by that fact. It is a people's history in that so much of it relies on the oral testimony of the people themselves and their memories. The documents used so profusely here are people. It is also a people's history because it brings to bear on the history of the Valley the concepts and tools, the assumptions and values, of the "new social history": *i.e.* the study of working class life from the interior of that life viewing people as actors in history and as bearers of their own culture; a history which finds the facts and events of the past in the intimate relations of the family, the shop floor, the civic organization, the bar. *Brass Valley* aims consciously "to introduce the basic themes of the new social history in formats accessible to the widest public audience." It is a dialogue between a people and their history; a dialogue between the Valley and the larger historical forces which shaped it. This fact—that this is a people's history mediated through the minds and skills of sophisticated social historians and prepared for two divergent audiences—is both the genius of the book and the root of its problems.

First its genius: I can think of no work, except perhaps Henry Glassie's recent *Passing the Time in Ballymenone*, that brings to bear so carefully and intimately the concerns and interpretations of the historian on the locality as it is perceived by its people; that is so sympathetic

to that history and so grounded in the people's vision itself. The history of Naugatuck Valley in *Brass Valley* becomes a microcosm of a larger, more general historical process whose meaning is derived from social history; and yet the book never loses its localness, its specificity, its specialness. The selection of photographs (other than the portraits of those interviewed), the statistical data presented, and above all the narrative passages (both written and oral) are so skillfully executed, their juxtaposition so pointed, that one sees in each specific the general processes, and in the general processes the specifics of life in the Valley.

Brass Valley also quite successfully evokes the sense of place, the rootedness of these "walking communities," a rootedness that lasted well into the 1950s; so long that even now as I recall it with colleagues and comrades I sometimes feel as if I am describing a scene where time stood still. The texture of life in the Valley—the special attraction in the words and photos of those who lived the experience of the brutality of a rapacious capitalism, and yet were able through enormous struggle to gain some control of their lives and create small pools of loving and caring people. Or as one of the most articulate informers says: "What makes good places to live probably is not all the time sparkling surroundings; it is a place where you can commune with other people; share common experiences, and somehow grow up, grow older, grow wiser. I think they destroyed all that" (p. 208).

For *Brass Valley* that last sentence is as crucial as the preceding insight. Life in the Valley was and is a struggle against the enormous power of corporate greed, and a history which sentimentalized that struggle would be half a history. *Brass Valley* does not. The ugliness of the area, while muted (more of which later), is not ignored. Nor is work in the mills (the vital



Coe Brass Co. baseball team, 1910.

core of the Valley and of this book) framed in nostalgia. The work of these people—my family, friends, and neighbors—was and is dangerous, dirty, exhausting, demeaning, and demanding. It takes an enormous toll and its rewards are slim: a few pennies an hour more, the sense sometimes of a job well done, the camaraderie of sweat and toil, and in prosperous times a certain security. The physical and psychic investment in work, heavy work, eats all one's human resources. It produced, and still does produce, great profits for others and gives minimal returns. It is a testament to

human capacity that so much was created on so little. In these pages three generations of workers confront their history with a directness and clarity beyond nostalgia.

With so much that is positive going on in *Brass Valley* it seems captious to point out problems. But we move from being members of a community to being observers of it, and while we can judge such a work as this on the basis of community memory, it must also be judged as an historical and political enterprise. *Brass Valley* raises important questions for community history in its vision, and its politics.

Problems of organization are, for the most part, openly discussed by the authors. Most of those interviewed are active in unions, if not union activists. The materials have been carefully selected for their resonance with what is logical, with what rings true for the historian-authors, and with the community's vision of itself. The other data presented has been chosen on the basis of how it illuminates the general themes of the work.

But the anguish, agony, and especially the anger of life is strangely missing. The Valley is a microcosm of American class relations. In every one of these towns on the west side (the prevailing winds carry the smell and filth of the mills eastward) are neighborhoods of compar-

ative wealth. In Naugatuck this area—containing twenty- to thirty-room mansions on large swaths of green—is called “Little Siberia” in honor of the near slave wages paid to the Italian contract laborers brought in to build these homes. In other towns it goes by equally interesting name such as “Country Club Road” or “Society Hill.” All of these are, of course, contrasted to “Coon Hollow,” “Little Italy,” “Cotton Hollow,” and the like. As Glassie points out, to name a place is to turn space into history. These names keep alive the class tensions of these “walking towns” where owners, former owners, managers, and vice-presidents until quite recently lived in some proximity to their employees.

Yet the people of *Brass Valley* presented here, aside from a few references to the ruling families such as the Sperrys and Gosses, do not compare their lives and communities to those of others. They seem singularly unreflective on class relations. Obviously, one does not expect a carefully drawn class analysis from each narrator; but as a fact of life, a part of one's daily existence, a knowledge of difference, a structure of privilege, one would suspect *some* reference to these themes. There is really only one long testimony (pp. 219-222) which comes close to articulating the pent up anger of the Valley and the referent here is sexism, not class relations. We do not know, and are not told, whether this is the result of gaps in the testimony gathered or a part of the editorial process. I tend to think it is the latter.

In presentation, the individual oral testimonies are often too brief, too repetitious, and strangely lacking in poetic punch. They rarely contain epic quality when compared to those collected in *Amoskeag*. They are flat. I do not think the workers of Manchester, New Hampshire, are more articulate than those of the Valley. I think this is a problem of selection, which



The button rooms of Scovill in 1879.



Typical cartoon from 1920s issue of Scovill Bulletin.

follows quite naturally from the style of the introductions to the narrators written by the authors. Each person whose testimony is included is introduced to us but described flatly, objectively, externally. We get no sense of them as individuals. Do they smile when they speak? Do they speak with resignation, anger, hope? Are they good or great storytellers? What is their idiom? We know their ages (roughly), their work histories, their migratory patterns, but not their humanness. Surely the interviewing process produced some thoughts about the character, personality, or special charm of those interviewed. Were we that dull? Not as I remember.

Thus the problem of vision. In attempting to reveal the history which has been "concealed" from people, in the words of those people, somehow they have lost the voice one would expect to hear. The words are here but not the tone, the ambience, the uniqueness of expres-

sion, the biases. In short, the interviews seem to lack the presentation of self, something which is so strong a component of the works of say, Studs Terkel.

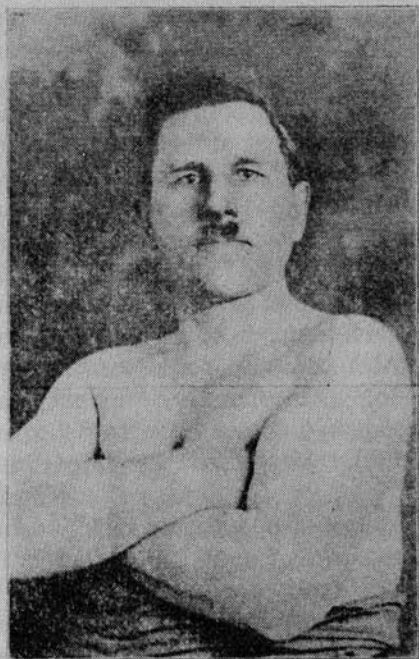
The authors state that "community history is inevitably a political process." Thus we must ask, what is the political point of *Brass Valley*? The answer seems quite clear. The history of the Valley, the history of brass and the history of struggle to secure, through unionization, some control of one's life is carefully articulated; so is the collapse of the industry and its integration into the international economic order. The takeover of American Brass by Anaconda, the subsequent merger of Anaconda into ARCO, and the consequences and meaning of such amalgamation for life and struggle in the Valley are especially well described and analyzed. Also carefully posed are the new problems faced by the unions of the Valley and the historical liabilities they carry from the past into the future: racism, sexism, a series of disastrous compromises limiting walkouts and imposing arbitration, a lack of rank-and-file control (especially the Steelworkers), and a failure to maintain past contracts.

But these unions also have reservoirs of strength: a historic connection to their communities, especially ethnic communities; a growing number of younger local leaders; and an increasing openness to coalition with community groups and associations. These strengths are revealed in the description in *Brass Valley* of the May 1980 strike at the Waterbury Rolling Mills, where such a coalition succeeded in its demands for better work conditions and against rollbacks. This victory is then juxtaposed against a recent failure at another mill, where such a coalition did not emerge. Since this comparison more or less closes the book, implied is the political point that a coalition of unions and grass-roots com-

PROGRAMAS BALIAUS!

Liet. Tautos Fondo 40 Skyriaus
26 diena Grudzio-Dec. 1919 m.

48 Green St. Waterbury, Ct. Pradžia 7:30 v. vak.



P. J. ALEKNA

Pirk Bony bus Lietuvoje duonos. Jeigu negali patsai kelioti i Lietuva
atginti priesus katric apgule musu Teyne, tai pasiuske savo doleri su ku-
ridomi apsarvuosi Lietuvos galinagai karivi ir kaiti n atai lenkus isvays
is Vilniaus.

Program of wrestling match at Lithuanian 48 Club, 1919.

munity groups can be effective in fighting back, checking the power of the corporate order, and seizing some control of the work process. Is this the case? Obviously, what is presented here is important and should be supported in whatever way possible, but it brings into question how even the most highly organized and militantly motivated local coalition can face down international conglomerates with no local ties or responsibilities—conglomerates which can simply close shop and move elsewhere, as they have

done in many such cases. Is not some other international perspective and apparatus needed? Call it socialism if you will. And here the pivotal events in the labor history of Brass Valley bear directly.

The brass mills, after many early struggles and failures, were organized in the mid-to-late 1930s by the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers, whose leaders envisioned one union covering the whole process from copper mining to the fabrication of brass. For many reasons (internal conflicts, redbaiting, the activities of the Roman Catholic Church, individual ambitions, wartime restrictions such as the no-strike pledge, and so on) the Mine Mill was ousted in a series of jurisdictional struggles in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The UAW in Waterbury and the Steelworkers elsewhere, in time, came to represent the workers of the mills. Whatever its failures (and they were many) the Mine Mill did speak an international rhetoric. It did see itself as part of an international working class, it was open to politics, and it did articulate a struggle beyond the Valley. All of this was lost in the 1950s. To be sure, one can question how deeply any of the Mine Mill ideology in reality penetrated the local culture; *Brass Valley* says “very little” and memory agrees. But it was there in time of crisis. It was available as an alternative explanation of the changes now occurring. Above all it is available as historical model or example. The rather evenhanded treatment of the internal struggles within the Mine Mill in the pages of *Brass Valley* does not allow us to raise these kinds of questions.

Thus, in the end, *Brass Valley*, which does so much in unveiling the history of the Naugatuck Valley, does little to move us beyond current views of that history. This may be a problem endemic to such local histories, and it might be useful here to point these out and distinguish them from those of *Brass Valley*.

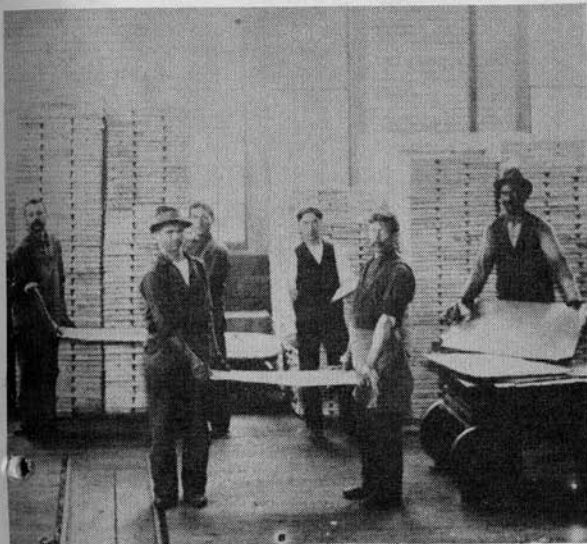
Obviously, one is beholden to one's sponsors. Brecher et al. are quite clear about the limitations posed by federal and union sponsorship. But beyond this are the far more subtle limits imposed by one's view of oneself within a community. How does a community historian express his or her political vision within the work created, especially if that vision is at odds with the vision, no matter how created, or how distorted, of the community? What if our conclusions about their lives are offensive to those with whom we have participated in our historical work? How do those factors affect the presentation of the material?

Deeper yet, how do we define community? Do we accept the definitions of those we work with, especially if they are narrowly based and exclusive, if not racist? Is there a larger, more dynamic concept we can bring to our work? Dedicated as we are to getting the history of our communities from those who lived through that history, can we intrude ourselves into and

become part of the ongoing dialogue of the culture? Can we offer to those we speak to, and for, other interpretations of their experiences? Are we ethnographers of working-class culture or citizens with other responsibilities? Can we be both historians and participants? With reference to *Brass Valley* it is easy now for one so removed from his roots to urge others in directions he never took, or if taken, took with a combination of foolhardiness and timidity. But in a work like *Brass Valley*, because it is so good, there is a tendency to want more answers to questions never asked.

This review has become rather long. It is long because *Brass Valley* is so important a historical project. It moves community history and the History Workshop ideal in the United States in all the right directions and it offers a model for other such efforts. Because it is so much better than anything yet produced it deserves careful reading and comradely comment.

RON GRELE is director of the Oral History Research Office at Columbia University.



Workers moving brass sheets at Ansonia Brass and Copper Co., 1879.



the Syracuse Cultural Workers Peace Calendar

Twelve uplifting images, many in full color, celebrating people's hope, courage and resistance. Artwork representing International Women's Day, The Weavers, Zimbabwe, The Pacific Peacemaker, Bread and Puppet Theatre. 14"x22" on your wall. Features full-color, wrap-around cover, "Patchwork Power" of squares sewn in honor of women's peace camps. By mail \$7.75, 3/\$20, 5/\$31. Bulk rates. SCWP, Box 6367, Syracuse, NY 13217 — (315) 474-1132.



QUEEN OF THE BOLSHEVIKS

The Hidden History of Dr. Marie Equi

Nancy Krieger

Now forgotten, Dr. Marie Equi (1872-1952) was a physician for working-class women and children, a lesbian, and a dynamic and flamboyant political activist. She was a “firebrand in the causes of suffrage, labor and peace, in Portland in the 'teens, '20s, and '30s.”¹ A reformer turned revolutionary, Equi earned the nickname “Queen of the Bolsheviks,” one which spoke to her often imperious character as well as to her politics. Equi’s political development was framed by intense and significant changes within the US economy and society and its role in world politics, upheavals which laid the basis for the many movements in which she was involved: Progressive, women’s, socialist, radical labor, and anti-imperialist. Spanning the period from the consolidation of northern industrial capitalism to the emergence of the US as the dominant imperialist power, Equi’s life serves as a chronicle of her times and illuminates how one person was affected by and sought to change world events.

How is it that Equi was once notorious and is now forgotten? And why is it important to remember her? According to Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Equi gained her reputation “as the stormy petrel of the Northwest” by being “among the most feared and hated women in the Northwest because of her outspoken criticisms of politicians, industrialists and so-called

civic leaders, and all who oppressed the poor.”² Equi has been forgotten, however, in part because few written records of her life or thoughts exist, in part because her later years were years of decline, but mainly because she was the sort of person traditional historians would rather ignore: a powerful woman, a lesbian, and a revolutionary and militant fighter for the working class. Yet it is precisely for these reasons that Equi should be remembered. Equi’s political development, her successes and shortcomings, and her rich and vivid life are sources of both inspiration and critical lessons for all who, like Equi, would act to rid the world of exploitation and oppression.

Equi’s Life: The Early Years

Equi’s political consciousness received its initial molding from both her immigrant parents and her childhood experiences as a worker in the oppressive textile mills of New Bedford, Massachusetts. Equi’s mother came from Ireland, fleeing economic stagnation and repression; she staunchly opposed England’s military and economic domination of Ireland.³ Equi’s father, a stonemason and activist in the Knights of Labor, had come from Italy where he had fought with Garibaldi to oppose papal rule.⁴ Together, they raised her to “abhor absolutism, monarchy and oppression.”⁵

Equi, born on April 7, 1872, entered the mills when she was 8 years old in 1880. At age 13, she developed tuberculosis. Equi recovered, unlike most who were stricken with TB, because she was given the opportunity to go to Florida for a year. Equi then left the US to live with her grandfather in Italy in 1886—the year of the first national strike for the eight-hour day, the first May Day, and the Haymarket massacre—and she remained there for three years.⁶

Finding Her Own Path

Equi returned to the US at the age of 17 in 1889, to a nation still rife with anti-radical and anti-immigrant sentiment. Rather than return to the mills, Equi joined the mass exodus of Americans seeking to create a new life in the West. Different even then, Equi did not homestead with a family but went with another woman, her friend Bess Holcolm, who had been promised a teaching job in The Dalles, a young city in the burgeoning state of Oregon.⁷ When they arrived, the school superintendent went back on his word and denied Bess her position. His refusal led to the first documented case of Equi’s flamboyant and fiesty personality, her passionate commitment to justice, and her determination to let no one stand in her way. As reported in one Oregon newspaper, Equi surprised the superintendent in the streets of The Dalles, and—with a horsewhip—“administered a vigorous lashing in the presence of a large crowd of people.”⁸ Needless to say, Bess got her job.

While Bess taught, Equi studied to enter medical school—a fairly unusual ambition for a working class woman (even though outright opposition to women entering medical school was beginning to wane by the close of the nineteenth century).⁹ Equi’s determination to be a doctor was inspired by her desire to help people. It may also have been fueled by her own bout with TB, her admiration for other women doctors, and her goal of having a profession in which she could have complete control of her work.

Equi entered medical school in 1900, attending the Physicians and Surgeons Medical College in San Francisco because the University of Oregon medical school did not admit women. When the University of Oregon changed its policy one year later, Equi transferred and grad-

uated in 1903.¹⁰ Still loyal to her working class background, Equi established herself as a physician for working-class women and children and became known as an expert diagnostician.¹¹ She developed a close network of friends with other professional and college women, relishing independent minds. Equi soon became an outspoken proponent of woman's suffrage and the need for women to be involved in social reform. She spoke on both topics at the 1905 National American Women's Suffrage Association's convention held in Portland.¹² Equi also organized Portland's doctors and nurses to go down to San Francisco to assist victims of the devastating 1906 earthquake. There, she "was given the rank of 'doctor' in the United States Army, the only woman ever so honored" up to that point, and President Theodore Roosevelt even gave Equi an award for her services.¹³

In 1906 Equi also became lovers with Harriet Speckart.¹⁴ Their relationship lasted over 15 years. Apart from their being lesbians, their living together—although unusual—was not unheard of. An increasing number of professional and upper-middle-class women were beginning to establish households together at that time, and in Boston such arrangements were becoming so common that they were called "Boston marriages."¹⁵ This rise in women-only households was in part a product of people being concentrated in large urban centers, and it was also a significant reflection of a fundamental change in women's position in industrialized societies: women as a group were beginning to be able to survive as independent wage earners, and were no longer tied by necessity to a family economy or a husband's wage. These conditions, in addition to the increased awareness of the need for birth control and the distinction for women between sex for procreation and sex for pleasure, also led to an increase in the viability and visibility of lesbian households.



Marie Equi, around 1910. (Oregon Historical Society)

Despite the gradually increasing public awareness of homosexuality, the vast majority of people thought homosexuality was unnatural and that homosexuals were sick and depraved people. Even for a person as self-confident as Equi, it would have been hard to ignore this dominant view. Moreover, the progressive opinion on homosexuality in this era also did little to build homosexuals' self-esteem. The fundamental assumption of these advocates of homosexual rights was that homosexuality was an incurable congenital condition (although it could be induced "artificially"), and that therefore homosexuals should not be persecuted by

anti-homosexual legislation, but should be allowed to live in peace.¹⁶ These advocates did, however, provide an invaluable service to homosexuals: they validated the existence of homosexuality and encouraged research on the reasons for its existence.

Although Equi apparently did not denigrate herself for being a lesbian and was open about it with her friends and political acquaintances, it does seem she harbored some doubts as to whether being homosexual was "normal." Years later, when she was in prison in 1921, Equi expressed in a letter her fears about being "queer," but was advised by her friend not to worry about her relationship with her "full-bosomed mate":

What you say about yourself being queer, well—I must convince you that you are not. It is a fact you have dared to do the unestablished thing, and therefore the unapproved, that you are looked upon as queer. So Marie D'Equi, be good, and take the advice of a friend: you are perfectly sane, though perhaps unusually out of the ordinary.... Continue to act, think, look as you have for years past, and somebody will be glad to see you unchanged when you get out.¹⁷

Wearing tailored suits and fedora-like hats, having intense affairs and crushes as well as her long-lasting and serious relationship with Harriet, Equi heeded this advice, and acted, thought, and looked as she wanted to throughout her life.

Equi's commitment to women and her personal experiences of discrimination led her to devote energy to women's suffrage, a campaign in which she played an instrumental role. At the same time, her working-class background and her experiences as a doctor compelled Equi to

become a vocal advocate for her patients. In both cases, her goal was reform through the legislative process, and she upheld the politics of the newly emerging Progressive Party, which sought not to challenge the fundamental property relations of capitalism but instead curb its excesses through legislation. In her suffrage work, Equi opposed not only men who were simply against women's suffrage, but also the liquor interests, which feared that women would vote for prohibition. In 1912, the year Equi led the Oregon "Votes for Women" march and women at long last won the vote in Oregon, Equi was on the executive committee of the State Equal Suffrage League as well as on the executive board of the Progressive Party, plus serving as president of the Women's Eight Hour League.¹⁸ Through these organizations, Equi met many dynamic and progressive women, some of whom became friends for life, such as Charlotte Anita Whitney, then a vice-president of the American Equal Suffrage Association and later one of the leading women in the Communist Party. This intense combination of friendship and political work was to occur many times in Equi's life, with friendships evolving or ending as Equi's own politics changed. At this point, however, Equi and all these women shared the Progressive notion of evolutionary improvement under capitalism. It was not until a violent cannery strike in Portland in 1913, led by the Industrial Workers of the World, that events changed Equi's mind.

Radicalization

The women who struck the Oregon Packing Company fruit cannery in July 1913 were primarily immigrants, the kind of people for whom Equi was both physician and advocate; it was one of Equi's patients who involved Equi in the strike.¹⁹ The main strike issue was low

wages. The women received \$2.50 to \$4.50 a week, far below the minimum of \$10 per week that the Consumers League of Oregon had found to be the pay Portland working women needed simply to survive.²⁰ The strikers' lot was fairly typical: the Consumers League had also discovered that virtually two-thirds of Portland's working women received *less* than this subsistence wage. Besides wages, other strike issues included long hours (which sometimes could span from 6:30 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., with the doors to the building locked so as to ensure the women remained the full shift) and unsanitary conditions.²¹

In the course of the strike, the newly created Industrial Welfare Commission, a product of the Progressive Era, ignored its own recently established law forbidding "the working of women or minors in any occupations for unreasonable hours, under conditions detrimental to health and morals, or for wages inadequate to maintain them."²² They did this by settling with the cannery owners for a wage of \$6 per week, without ever consulting the strikers.²³ Equi witnessed this betrayal and she also discovered that the right to free speech was only a relative right, one to be revoked by a mayor or governor when confronted by militant workers demanding better conditions. Finally, Equi also saw the police attack unarmed women strikers, and it was this brutality which caused Equi's decisive break with the Progressive movement.

Equi described the event that triggered her radicalization in an interview she gave a year later. Recounting one of the numerous free speech fights during the strike—a tactic that was a hallmark of the IWW, who needed to have the right to speak at street meetings to reach the unemployed, unorganized, and those on strike—Equi recalled that:

An Indian girl [Mrs. O'Connor] got on to

a box to speak. She was about to become a mother in a few months. The mounted police would leap from their horses' backs, hitting the heads of working men in the crowd. When they pulled that girl from the box—that was where I went wild. All the fighting blood rose in my heart. I got on the box and said things. They took the Indian girl to the courthouse. I followed and got in.²⁴

Once there, Equi made clear that her determination to see justice done and to free Mrs. O'Connor knew no bounds:

Deputy Sheriff Downey tried to restrain the infuriated woman [Equi]. She gave him a right arm swing in the jaw. Night Watchman Fifer, a meek little man, tried to remonstrate with Dr. Equi, but her ready fist caught him below the left eye. He grappled with her and threw her out bodily on the sidewalk, where she landed on all fours. But Dr. Equi was nothing daunted by these experiences, which she merely took as temporary reverses. Gaining entrance, she persuaded the elevator man to take her up to the jail on the top floor, where she opened up her batteries of vituperation on Sheriff Word and his deputies. She raked them fore and aft. While the IWW's peered over each other's shoulders, quite forgetting their arrests in their admiration for the gattling-gun qualities of vituperation, so that they had to be spoken to several times before they were booked. "You're a cowardly, atavistic creature! You're a primitive puppy! You beat your wife, and you would beat your baby if it cried at night so you couldn't sleep. You're a caveman, that's what you are." These remarks were directed at Deputy Sheriff O.N. Ford. . . . Mrs. O'Connor was not booked, but was allowed to depart from jail, escorted by Dr. Equi.²⁵

This attack on Mrs. O'Connor hit Equi at several levels: as a worker's advocate, a woman, and a physician appalled to see a pregnant woman attacked. Galvanized by this gross injustice, and her own experience in the jail, Equi threw herself into supporting the strike, creating more front-page stories. Two days later, at a street meeting called in defiance of a prohibition by the mayor, Equi was arrested; she stabbed the patrolman with a hatpin that the newspapers rumored was poisoned.²⁶ The police held Equi in jail and told her friends—including Harriet—that “they could have the choice of restraining [Equi] in a sanatorium, having her committed to the insane asylum, sent to the penitentiary, or removed from the state permanently.”²⁷ Equi refused to leave the state, and the police released her a few days later and never tried her; Equi claimed that this was because she would have testified about the brutal treatment she received in jail.²⁸

The events of the cannery strike fundamentally altered Equi's life. The strike radicalized Equi through exposing her to both police brutality and to the weaknesses of the politics of the Progressive Party. As Equi herself said:

It was my experiences during that strike that made me a socialist. . . . Previous to that time I was a Progressive. . . . Any betterment of conditions must come about by direct action, in other words, militancy.²⁹

Equi, confronted by the stark conditions of the class struggle, learned that legislated reform, though necessary and critical, could never by itself end the exploitation and oppression intrinsic to the capitalist system. The scope of her political vision broadened considerably, and she began to perceive how the different

struggles she had been involved in were framed by class relations. Equi also saw the state act forcibly to protect the interests of the ruling class. Thrilled by the militancy of the IWW, its commitment to organizing the unorganized, and its recognition—as stated in its preamble—of the “historic mission of the working class to do away with capitalism,” Equi underwent a profound change. She began to perceive the present as history, to see history and politics as the expression of class conflict, and to realize that with this understanding one can change history. Accordingly, Equi entered a period where her life became inextricably bound with the history and politics of her times.

The Radical

Having “declared war against the organized forces of capitalism,”³⁰ Equi the radical and socialist rapidly made a place for herself in virtually every progressive movement in Portland. Equi did not confine her work to purely economic or industrial issues, as the IWW often did. Bringing her class analysis to what she



viewed as short-sighted and single-issue reform movements, Equi argued that they would amount to little if they were not linked in the effort to end capitalism and create socialism, as she expressed in a 1914 interview:

Certainly I am a suffragist. But I am far from believing that woman suffrage is a panacea for every political ill. I am not a Prohibitionist, though I recognize the liquor evil is a great national curse. To my mind, the liquor evil, the social evil, unemployment and all the great social and economic problems that confront us are merely symptoms of the greater evil of capitalism.³¹

Having said this, Equi—a woman for whom words were a call to action—took up a multitude of specific issues, all tied to her strategic vision of how capitalism could be overthrown.

From 1913 to 1915, Equi worked mainly with the IWW, campaigning for better conditions for lumberworkers. Risking arrest, she participated in the IWW's national campaign to organize the unemployed during the severe economic depression of 1913, and succeeded in obtaining much needed relief, food and shelter for many of Portland's unemployed. In the spring of 1914, Equi traveled back East to meet with other activists, visit her family and get some rest.³² The content and complexity of her political work changed, however, with the outbreak of the imperialist World War I in August 1914.

Soon after the war started, Equi joined the newly formed American Union Against Militarism (AUAM), based on the belief that the US would eventually play a military role in the conflict to ensure its stake in the outcome. AUAM published anti-militarist analyses of the war, lobbied in Washington against preparedness and conscription, and also campaigned against



AGITATION WHICH DELAYS OUR WAR INDUSTRIES IS 'MADE IN GERMANY'

In the first seven months after America's entrance into this war for human freedom, enemy agitators in our midst caused 283,402 workers to lose 6,285,519 days of production. Our war industries were heavily handicapped by this unpatriotic strife.

LET US ALL PULL TOGETHER TO WIN THE WAR QUICKLY

US imperialism in Latin America and the Caribbean, seeking to impress upon the US public that the true reason for the war was economic profiteering.³³

Not one to lead a tranquil life, in the spring of 1915, when Equi became involved with AUAM, she and Harriet adopted a baby girl. The child, Mary, was born March 15, 1915; Equi at this point was 43 years old and Harriet was 32. For reasons that are not entirely clear, but which may have had to do with the adoption, Harriet temporarily married an IWW organizer, James F. Morgan, on March 18, 1915, and divorced him on May 29, 1915.³⁴ Morgan was not pleased with this turn of events, and complained bitterly to some fellow

IWW members about how “Doc stole his wife.” The daughter of one of these IWW members, later to become a friend of Equi’s, overheard this and asked her father what the word “lesbian” meant. Defending Equi staunchly, the father replied that anyone’s sexuality was the preference of the individual, and that “Dr. Equi was a wonderful woman and that this was quite well known in the labor world and anyone with any brains didn’t criticize it.”³⁵ His support for Equi, at a time when lesbianism was perceived as deviant behavior in the progressive as well as conservative sectors of society, is yet another indication of how well respected Equi was.

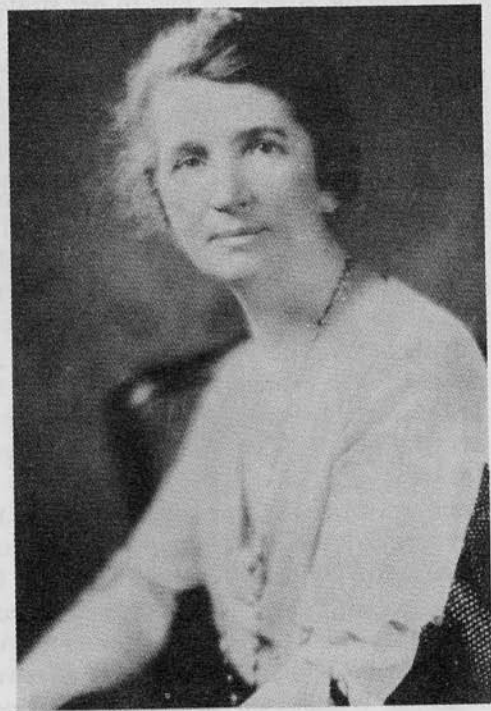
Within a year of Mary’s adoption, Equi had established herself as an outspoken critic of the war and the preparedness movement in the US. This put her at loggerheads with the bulk of Oregon’s predominantly conservative, white, and US-born population, its big businesses (particularly lumber), and its superpatriotic and jingoistic newspapers.³⁶ In April 1916, Equi spoke so forcefully at an anti-preparedness meeting that the organizers forbade anyone to follow her, for fear a riot would erupt.³⁷ On June 4, 1916—national Preparedness Day, a day on which 150,000 in Chicago, 120,000 in New York City and thousands in other cities marched for the war³⁸—Equi outdid herself by carrying her anti-imperialist politics into the heart of Portland’s Preparedness Day Parade.

Portland’s parade included 15,000 to 20,000 participants. At the request of the AUAM, Equi carried into this crowd a banner which read:

Prepare to Die, Workingmen, J.P. Morgan & Co. Want Preparedness for Profit. “Thou Shalt Not Kill.”

Not surprisingly, two nearby contingents attacked and tore the banner down, and the

police took Equi into custody.³⁸ Released later that day, Equi followed this protest with another one. Borrowing a pair of linesmen’s spurs from a friend, she climbed to the top of a telephone pole (having practiced weeks beforehand to pull off this stunt) and, while giving an antiwar speech, unfurled yet another banner. “Down With the Imperialist War.” She succeeded in attracting a huge crowd and arousing the wrath of the police, who could not get her down to arrest her. Totally frustrated, the police called the fire station to get the fire truck and ladder to get Equi down, but what they did not know was that the firemen were Equi’s friends, because the care she gave their wives and girlfriends. The firemen accordingly “took their own sweet time” to respond to the call, by



Margaret Sanger

which point Equi had finished her speech and the police had despaired of arresting her.³⁹

A few weeks after this incident, Margaret Sanger arrived in Portland as part of her national speaking tour on the need for legal birth control. At this point, Equi already had been providing abortions for years to any who needed them, based on her belief that women should have children only when they wanted them and were able to care for them.⁴⁰ Once Sanger came into town, Equi immediately became involved in her visit. In the first few days of Sanger's visit, Equi revised Sanger's pamphlet on birth control, *Family Limitation*, to make it more accurate medically. On June 19, when Sanger gave her talk, police arrested three men for selling the pamphlet on the grounds that it was "obscene literature"—though it was only *after* the arrests that the City Council hastily passed an ordinance to ban it as "obscene."⁴¹ Since Sanger had to leave town for a few days to give her talk in Seattle, Equi took over the defense effort, a task she gladly accepted because of her rapidly developing bond with Sanger. Passionate about her ideas, her work, her politics, and her friendships, Equi was quick to make friends with a woman who was equally passionate, equally involved in politics, and equally willing to put herself on the line. It was as if the isolation caused by being a political pariah in society at large could almost be compensated for by such intimate and sustaining friendships.

Once Sanger returned, a rally was held for the arrested men. It turned into a wild demonstration, and police arrested Equi, Sanger, and several other women. Their trial received much publicity, and supporters met them with signs saying, "Poverty and Large Families go Hand in Hand" and "Poor Women are Denied what the Rich Possess."⁴² The judge found all the defendants guilty, but fined only the men who

sold the pamphlets, and then waived the fee. Although Sanger's visit to Portland and the tumult that ensued may not have helped the birth control movement much in Sanger's estimation,⁴³ it did cement the friendship between Sanger and Equi. During the years that followed, Equi wrote many letters to Sanger expressing her deep love, admiration, and even passion for her, and Sanger responded with her deep feelings for Equi; there is no evidence, however, that the two were ever lovers.

Equi's commitment to ending the oppression of women, as demonstrated by her suffrage and birth control work, nonetheless was now framed by the overall class struggle, as epitomized by the war.

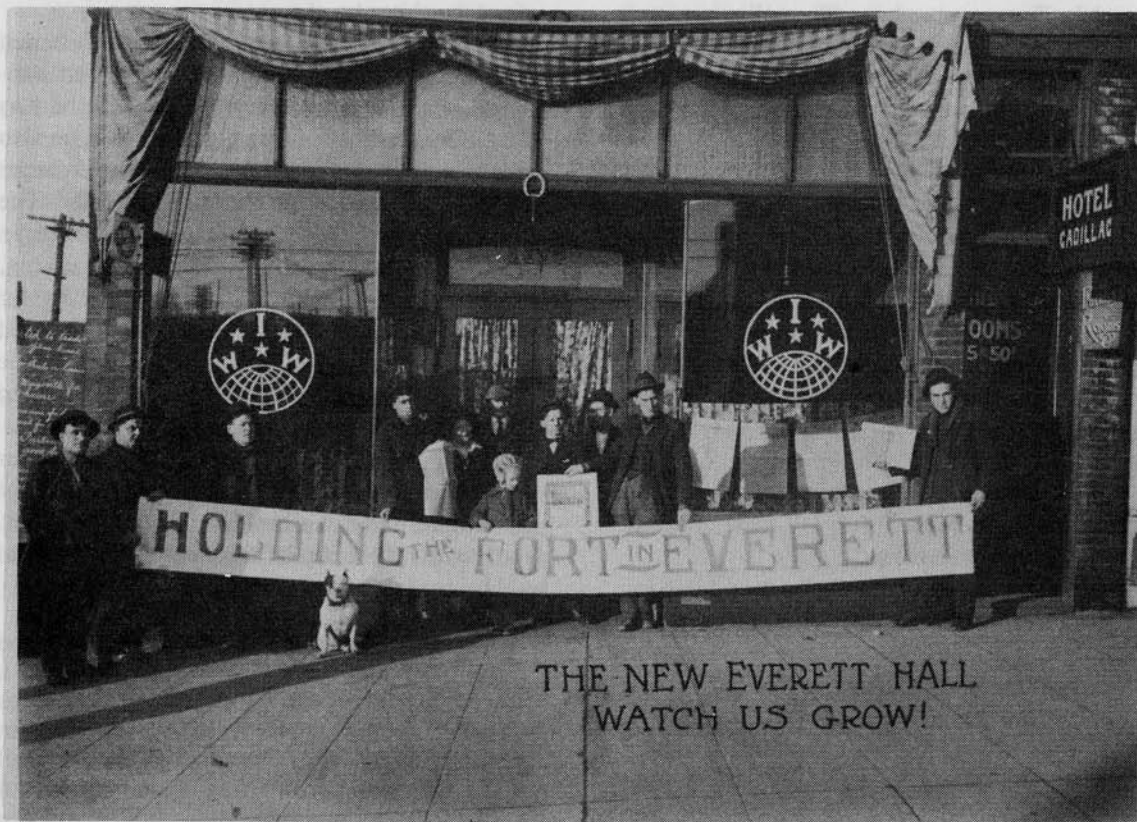
In the fall of 1916, rich Republican women campaigned for the Republican president candidate, Charles Evans Hughes, because he was pro-suffrage. They ignored the fact that he also supported US entry into the war. Those women toured the nation on a train dubbed "The Golden Special." When the train arrived in Portland, Equi greeted it with a banner asking, "Which Goose Laid the Golden Egg?"⁴⁴ Her point was to make clear that these women could afford to campaign for Hughes only because their husbands were wealthy and wanted Hughes elected. Equi followed this confrontation with another, by leading a street corner pro-Wilson demonstration which drowned out the Hughes rally in a building across the street. She vividly described this incident with great relish in a letter to Sanger:

Hey Beloved Girl! It sure has been a good Friday for me. . . . We sure did have a strenuous time—Put the Hughesites entirely out of business. I was arrested in the afternoon. Detained 1 hour. Bail \$100— an attempt was made to lodge an insanity complaint—am sending you the Portland paper with the picture of the

banner. We had 5000 people at 6th and Alder... Say it was the richest thing ever pulled off—and a complete surprise—even to the Democrats. I do not believe in either man but choose the lesser of the two evils... No football game here in the West ever had the rooting we pulled off. I stood on my little old table—and started the Wilson Yell... the reception that bunch of Wall Streeters got—they will remember it to their last days... Deliver a body of women over lock-stock-and-barrel to the Republican Party! Solidarity of women! Having me arrested was an example of it!⁴⁵

This incident also bore testimony to how much Equi had changed in the past four years. Before 1913, women's suffrage was virtually the be-all and end-all of her politics, but by 1916 she was at a new stage where she viewed that particular struggle in terms of how it was framed by the larger picture of class relations and class conflict.

A few days after this demonstration, Equi was plunged back into IWW activity by the November 4, 1916, Everett Massacre. Equi immediately traveled up to Everett and took charge of the wounded IWW members. She also investigated the deaths of those slain, and



I.W.W. hall in Everett, Washington, 1916.

testified that "with surgical attention there would have been more than an even chance of recovery" for one of the dead men.⁴⁶ Then, on November 19, Equi was given the honor of being the Oregon IWW delegate to release Joe Hill's ashes to the winds on the first anniversary of his execution,⁴⁷ as delegates were doing in every other state of the union (except Utah, where Hill had been framed and shot) and in "every country of South America, in parts of Europe and Asia, in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa."⁴⁸ The main theme of Equi's political work, however, remained her antiwar activism, one spurred on by the US's entry into the war on April 2, 1917.

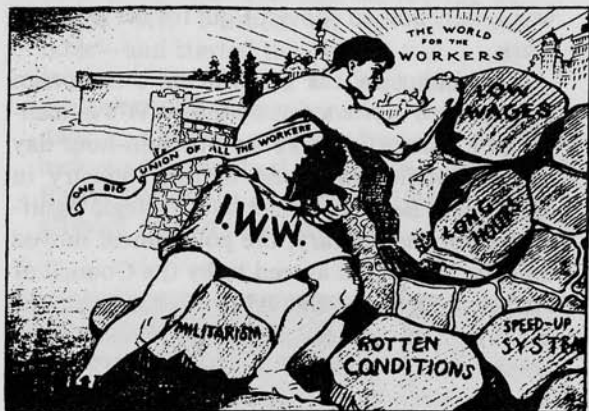
The War Years

As soon as the US government declared war, it took immediate steps to squelch domestic dissent. Congress rapidly passed the Espionage Act, which stated that "if anyone shall make or convey false statements with intent to interfere with the operation or success of the military or naval forces. . . he shall be punished by a fine of not more than \$10,000 or imprisonment for not more than twenty years or both."⁴⁹ This harsh sentence ensured that the government's version of reality would be the gauge by which to measure "truth." To build public prowar sentiment, the government helped create and promote the formation of "patriotic" societies to encourage citizens to inform on "subversives opposed to the war. The chief example of this was the Justice Department's American Protective League. By the end of 1917, it had units in 600 towns and cities with a membership of 100,000 (which would increase to 250,000 in 1918), and it claimed by the end of the war to have brought more than 3 million cases of "disloyalty" to light.⁵⁰ The government also cracked down on antiwar activists in numerous ways: for example, the Post Office confiscated mail and news-

papers by the ton, and a new "radical clause" permitted the deportation of aliens suspected of being IWW members.⁵¹ Under the banner of "national security," the government moved in to eradicate the IWW for once and for all, and it was through this attack that the government was finally able to convict Equi for her political work.

The timing of the government's campaign against the IWW was set by the IWW's launching of a successful strike for the eight-hour day in the Pacific Northwest lumber industry in June 1917. Because timber had strategic significance for the military, the government moved quickly. On a plan agreed to by the Council of National Defense, the Attorney General, the Secretary of Labor, President Wilson, the Department of Justice, the US Post Office and the American Protective League, the government launched numerous raids nationally on the IWW during September, charging most of its leaders and hundreds of its members with violation of the Espionage Act.⁵² In the forests of the Pacific Northwest, where Equi had close ties with the IWW, the government sent in 45,000 soldiers to act as timberworkers. It also created the Loyal Legion of Loggers and Lumbermen (also known as the 4Ls), a superpatriotic organization dedicated to the concept of "open shop" and the elimination of the IWW, with members willing to serve as strikebreakers and as spies on IWW members.⁵³ The intensity of the government's attacks on the IWW was also heightened by the success of the Bolshevik Revolution in November 1917. Despite the fact that the IWW was essentially an anarcho-syndicalist organization, and not Marxist-Leninist, the US government responded to the IWW as if it were the Bolshevik threat itself. In May 1918, the government passed the Sedition Law, an amendment to the Espionage Act, to finish off what little remained of the IWW and opponents

of the war. This new law forbade criticism of the US government, the constitution, the military, flag, navy, or uniforms, and it increased the length of prison terms and fines that could be imposed.⁵⁴ It was this new law which finally snared Equi.



Equi was arrested for an antiwar speech she gave at the IWW hall in Portland on June 27, 1918. Her antiwar agitation had reached the point where its effectiveness mandated that the US government attempt to silence her. Indicted secretly on June 29, Equi was charged with insulting the flag, soldiers, and the ally Great Britain—all for saying that workers should not participate in a war where they would be killing fellow workers at the bidding of their masters, and for praising the Easter Rebellion in Ireland.⁵⁵ The men who supplied evidence to the state against Equi were employees of the Military Intelligence Bureau, the branch of the US Army's Intelligence Department that had close ties with the 4Ls. It was these men who credited Equi with saying that military men were "scum," a charge Equi consistently denied, stating that she knew most soldiers were working-class youths without any real options and that she would not insult them; her target was those who profited off the war. Throughout her trial, Equi and others contended that

the lumber interests were out to "get" Equi on account of her work with the IWW, a charge that was essentially substantiated.⁵⁶ From the time of her arrest to the end of her trial, the Department of Justice also paid Margaret Lowell Paul to be a full-time informant on Equi. Paul met Equi through Kathleen O'Brennan, one of the main activists in Equi's defense campaign. Paul became friends with O'Brennan by pretending to know members of the New York City chapter of the Sinn Fein, an Irish revolutionary organization to which O'Brennan belonged. O'Brennan, in turn, had met Equi during her 1918 trip to Oregon to lecture on the Irish cause; shortly after meeting Equi, O'Brennan became infatuated with her and the two ended up having an affair.⁵⁷

After various delays, Equi's trial finally began on November 12, one day after the end of World War I. Lasting nine days, the trial consisted of a succession of operatives from the 4Ls, policemen, and "upstanding citizens"—some from the American Protective League—who testified to Equi's bad reputation for loyalty. Many gave evidence about acts Equi had carried out or remarks she had made regarding her opposition to the war prior to the US's entry into the war and the enactment of the Espionage Act; the judge allowed this testimony to be used as evidence, despite Equi's lawyer's protests. These charges were countered by witnesses who spoke on behalf of Equi,



ranging from assorted IWW members to physicians and other "respectable citizens." The highlight of the trial was the confrontation between Equi and the prosecutor; one newspaper commented that "from the first question until adjournment of court such a battle of wits was on as is seldom seen in a courtroom between a woman and a man."⁵⁸ After arguing with her lawyer as to the best way to proceed, Equi used the trial as a political platform:

Not even the warnings and protests of her lawyer . . . could tighten the break on her tongue. The woman would answer a question of the Government prosecutor with another question; she aired her views on industrialism, poverty, crime, the wage scale, child welfare, child labor, Liberty Bonds, militarism, vice, IWW songs, IWW principles, who started the war, and sundry and various topics.⁵⁹

At the end of the trial, the prosecutor launched into a vitriolic one-and-a-half-hour diatribe against Equi and the IWW. Attacking Equi for being an "unsexed woman,"⁶⁰ he stormed that,

"The red flag is floating over Russia, Germany, and a great part of Europe. *Unless you put this woman in jail*, I tell you it will float over the world!"⁶¹

Finally, he appealed to the Jury's patriotic sentiments "with a stirring comparison of the red, white, and blue flag and the red flag favored by Dr. Equi and ended with quoting 'The Star Spangled Banner,'"⁶² making crystal clear that the political purpose of the trial was to build consensus for the US's war and foreign policy, as well as to silence critics such as Equi. Within three hours, the jury concluded Equi was guilty.⁶³ Equi insisted the trial was a frame-up, and the long process of appeals began.

The judge sentenced Equi to three years in jail and a fine of \$500 on December 31, 1918. He stated that her crime was *expressing* her views, not simply having them.⁶⁴ The verdict and sentence demonstrated that US citizens do not have the right to effectively criticize government policy, despite the existence of the first amendment, when the overriding interests of the ruling class are at stake. When Equi left the courtroom after being sentenced, she got into a violent scuffle with William Bryon, the chief Department of Justice agent assigned to her case who, in his numerous reports on Equi, revealed his utter loathing for her on account of her being "an anarchist, a degenerate [i.e., lesbian] and an abortionist."⁶⁵ Equi asked Bryon if he was "satisfied" with the outcome and ready to go after another innocent woman. In response, Bryon hit Equi and shoved Harriet to the floor when she tried to come to Equi's aid.⁶⁶ Indicative of the support Equi still had in an overwhelmingly repressive climate, the Oregon State Federation of Labor unanimously passed a resolution condemning Bryon's actions and demanded that he be removed from Equi's case.⁶⁷

Equi spent the next year and a half appealing her case. It was a period in which the nation was gripped by a Red Scare of massive proportions, well captured by a phrase from John Dos Passos' novel *1919*: "To be a red in the summer of 1919 was worse than being a hun or pacifist in the summer of 1917."⁶⁸ Equi's case went to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco, which upheld her conviction on October 27, 1919.⁶⁹ In response, Equi gave a speech addressing the fate of political prisoners and stated:

We may think we live in a free country, but we are in reality nothing but slaves. When President Wilson recently said we are at war he spoke the truth for once. But

it is not a war against another nation, but a never-ending class war within our own country.⁷⁰

After yet more appeals and delays, Equi was finally ordered to San Quentin on October 19, 1920, her sentence commuted to a year and a half.⁷¹ Before leaving, she sent Mary to live with Harriet at Harriet's house in Seaside, on the coast of Oregon; Harriet remained in Seaside until her death in 1927, never to live in Portland or with Equi again.⁷²

In some ways prison was a relief for Equi. She wrote to Sanger that:

“When I left Portland for here it was as if I had dropped from my shoulders an outworn garment—all the bitterness—the hatred—that had been displayed towards me.”⁷³

While in prison, Equi corresponded with many personal and political friends, and Harriet wrote to her almost every day. For a period of several months, the Department of Justice copied all letters to and from Equi, and used this information to try to track down Kathleen O'Brennan as well as compile a memorandum on Equi for J. Edgar Hoover (one filled with inaccuracies). These letters reveal the deep ties that existed between Equi and her dear friends, and the support she received from IWW members and other radicals who had never even met her. They also reveal Equi's unwavering commitment to the abolishment of capitalism, her conviction that she had been right to speak out against the war, and her opinions on the need for prison reform.⁷⁴

Equi was released on September 10, 1921, only to face the lonely and arduous task of rebuilding her life and reestablishing her practice without Harriet or a progressive movement to welcome her. No longer the turbulent 'teens, the world Equi faced was relatively hostile to

her and her ideas, and revolutionary change in the US seemed further away than ever: The IWW had been effectively destroyed; the Communists, small in number, were only just beginning to gain influence; the traditional women's movement had virtually disbanded after women obtained suffrage in 1920; the birth control movement was more and more in the hands of the eugenicists; the anti-imperialist movement was muted; and the US economy seemed prosperous, still riding high on the profits made during the war.



Marie Equi in San Quentin Prison, Easter 1921. (Photo courtesy of Oregon Historical Society)

The Decline

Equi's decline as a political activist began after her release from prison. Attributable mainly to her age and the impairment of her health by jail, Equi's lessened activity was also a reflection of the general lack of revolutionary or even progressive political work in Portland, as also expressed by the rise of the Ku Klux Klan. With the exception of the Communist Party, which Equi apparently was not interested in joining, there existed no outlet for her revolutionary politics. Despite her own relative lack of political involvement, Equi did maintain her connections with other political activists. In 1926, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn moved in with Equi, having suffered a breakdown in the course of her strenuous campaign for Sacco and Vanzetti; Flynn, previously the key woman leader of the IWW, knew Equi through past

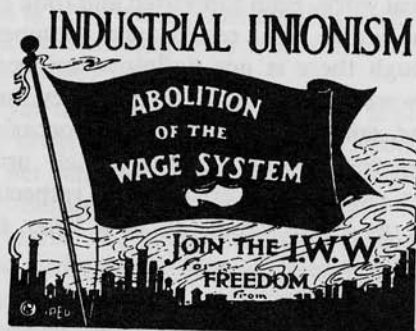
political work. Equi supported and took care of Flynn while she rested and recuperated. Although there is not definitive evidence the two were lovers, it is certain they had an intense, emotionally-involved and occasionally stormy relationship.⁷⁵ Despite their ups and downs, each deeply cared for and respected the other, as Flynn expressed in a letter to her sister:

[Equi] was not the easiest person to get along with, she had a high temper from her Irish-Italian origin, but she had a brilliant mind, a progressive spirit, and had been in prison for her opposition to World War I, and I admired her a great deal.⁷⁶

Flynn ended up living with Equi for ten years, from the midst of the "Roaring Twenties" to the middle of the Depression.



Elizabeth Gurley Flynn (center) on Montana mine tour, 1909.



In 1930, when Equi was 58, she suffered a heart attack, one that left Equi virtually bed-ridden for the rest of her life. Flynn now took care of Equi. In an attempt to keep in touch with the world, Equi invited the new generation of activists to her home. One activist recalled:

Whenever we went to visit her, she was always exhilarated...and talked and talked. She was fascinating to listen to... When she was in bed...she used to renew her life forces by talking—and she was a marvelous talker.⁷⁷

In the summer of 1934, Equi left her bed to make her last documented public political act, one which took place during the monumental dock strike, which tied up shipping on the entire West Coast. According to *The Hook*, the official union bulletin, after Portland police severely wounded four strikers,

An elderly, gray-haired lady, 62 years of age, walked into the office of the Longshoremen at the Labor Temple this afternoon. She said that she wanted to do something for the boys down on the line and more specifically, the four boys that are lying on cots in the hospitals of the city. She has donated \$250 to be used exclusively for medical and hospital attention.... We have Dr. Marie Equi to

thank for the above donation and also for the wonderful moral support she extended us.⁷⁸

Though Equi's days of political activism were over, she continued to call herself a Red and insisted that others call her a Red also. When the Portland police issued a Red List in 1934, prompted by Communist involvement in the ILA strike, and omitted Equi's name,

“Equi was absolutely livid with annoyance. She called up the chief of police and she threatened to sue the police department. She wanted it reissued with her name, ‘Dr. Marie Equi, Queen of the Bolsheviks,’ at the head of the list.”⁷⁹

It was Flynn, however, and not Equi, who was to become the leading woman in the Communist Party USA. In 1936, despite Equi's protests, Flynn left for New York City to join the party, and she soon became the first woman to sit on its national board.

Equi lived until 1952, her last sixteen years nowhere evident in the public record. During her last years, the McCarthy era raged on. This Red Scare was similar to that which had engulfed the nation after World War I. During the Korean War, the same Espionage Act under which Equi had been convicted was resurrected as the US entered a “state of emergency,” and the Espionage Act remains on the books to this day.⁸⁰



Equi died on July 12, 1952, at the age of 80, virtually a forgotten woman. She lived on only in the memory of her friends, who knew her as a "woman of passionate conviction, and a real friend of the have-nots of this world."⁸¹

Equi's life deserves to be remembered. It is clear that who Equi was and how she developed both personally and politically were intimately linked with world events. Equi traversed a route familiar to many who were galvanized to take up progressive political work on account of one issue, only to eventually arrive at the conclusion that all such issues are connected to the overall class struggle that shapes the development of society. It is to Equi's credit that she overcame the narrowness of single-issue reform groups and renounced her belief in gradual change. Making links between the different struggles going on about her, in her own life as well as in the world at large, Equi instead became an advocate of socialism and revolutionary change.

Equi's revolutionary politics sprang out of and were shaped by her passion for life. Equi's concern for others and her decision to be a physician and political activist were firmly grounded in her generous spirit, bolstered by the memory of her working-class origins, and were more than just an intellectual response to suffering and world events. Full of intense emotions and unquenchable curiosity, independent and headstrong, Equi was never one to be dominated in any manner, and words were always to be translated into action. Equi lived openly as a lesbian, and established herself in a profession where she was dependent on no one else for her livelihood. Through her medical and political work, Equi came into contact with other dynamic and progressive women, such as Sanger and Flynn, and established an integrated

fulfilling world of personal, professional, and political bonds. Motivated by her deep-seated desire to see justice done, sustained by her inner vitality, and capable of getting her way on account of her often domineering manner, Equi truly earned her nickname "Queen of the Bolsheviks." Her life stands as an inspirational and instructive account of how one person, conscious of her place in history, chose to link with others to create, in the words of the IWW, "a new world from the ashes of the old," free from exploitation, oppression, and human degradation.

Equi's life, and the broadness of her vision, stand as an impressive challenge to those in the many relatively isolated progressive movements within the US today. Her record, embedded in the sensational accounts of the cannery strike, her work with the IWW, the Preparedness Day March, the birth control demonstrations and earlier suffrage work, and her anti-imperialist activities and Espionage Act trial, speaks to all in the progressive, feminist, labor, and solidarity or anti-intervention movements. Her experiences with the Progressive Party are a challenge to those who maintain that socialism can be achieved solely through the electoral process or through economic measures only, and to those who minimize the deep-seated and violent nature of class struggle in our society.

Nancy Krieger is currently a student in the Graduate School of Public Health at the University of Washington. For the past three years she has been a member of the steering committee of SeaCosh (Seattle Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health), working on issues of reproductive hazards, shop steward rights and on solidarity work with occupational safety and health work in Nicaragua.

FOOTNOTES

1. *Oregonian*, 15 July 1952, p. 11. (Note: This newspaper will be abbreviated as "Oreg.")
2. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, *The Rebel Girl* (NY: International Publishers, 1975), pp. 197-98.
3. Letter from Equi to Sara Bard Field, 29 May 1921, in Department of Justice files. (Note: These files will be referred to as "DOJ files.")
4. Joe Lukes, letter, 6/19/81.
5. *Oregon Daily Journal*, 19 November 1918, p. 4. (Note: This newspaper will be abbreviated as "ODJ".)
6. Sandy Polishuk, interview, 3/31/81.
7. Ibid.
8. *ODJ*, 19 July 1913, p. 5.
9. May Roth Walsh, "Doctors Wanted: No Women Need Apply"—*Sexual Barriers in the Medical Profession, 1938-1975* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 179.
10. Sandy Polishuk, "The Radicalization of Marie Equi," unpublished paper, 1971. Note: This paper will be referred to as "RME").
11. Julia Ruutilla, interview, 6/6/81.
12. Ida Husted Harper, *The History of Woman Suffrage, Vol. VI, 1900-1920* (NY: J.J. Little & Ives Co., 1922), p. 149.
13. *ODJ*, 19 July 1913, p. 5; *New York Times*, 15 July 1952, p. 21.
14. Report of Agent Bryon, 19 September 1918, and letter from Equi to Harriet Speckart, 22 May 1921, DOJ files.
15. Oral presentation by Boston Gay and Lesbian History Project, June 1980.
16. Sheila Rowbotham and Jeffrey Weeks, *Socialism and the New Life: The Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis* (London: Pluto Press, 1977), p. 161.
17. Letter from Mark Avramo to Equi, 31 March 1921, DOJ files.
18. Inez Rhodes, letter, 4/17/81; *Oreg.*, 9 March 1912, p. 4; Polishuk, RME, p. 2.
19. Polishuk, RME, pp. 4-5.
20. *Report of the Social Survey Committee of the Consumers League of Oregon on the Hours, Wages and Conditions of Work and Cost and Standard of Living of Women Wage Earners in Oregon with Special Reference to Portland* (Portland, OR: Consumers League of Oregon, 1913), p. 20.
21. *Portland News*, 28 June 1913, p. 1.
22. *ODJ*, 19 May 1913, p. 1.
23. *ODJ*, 3 July 1913, p. 2.
24. *New York World*, 5 April 1914, Sec. M, p. 4.
25. *Oreg.*, 16 July 1913, p. 1, p. 3.
26. *Oreg.*, 18 July 1913, p. 5.
27. *Evening Telegram*, 18 July 1913, p. 1. (Note: This paper will be abbreviated as "ET").
28. *New York World*, 5 April 1914, Sec. M, p. 4.
29. *New Bedford Evening Standard*, 17 March 1914, p. 3.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Blanche Weisen-Cooke, ed., *Crystal Eastman on Women and Revolution* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 12-13.
34. Polishuk, 3/31/81.
35. Julia Ruutilla interview.
36. E. Kimbark MacColl, *The Growth of a City: Power and Politics in Portland, Oregon, 1915 to 1950* (Portland, OR: The Georgian Press, 1979), p. 139.
37. Polishuk, RME, p. 125.
38. *ODJ*, 4 June 1916, Sec. 1, p. 6.
39. Julia Ruutilla interview.
40. Ibid.
41. *Oreg.*, 8 September 1966, p. 36.
42. *ODJ*, 25 November 1971, p. 5.
43. Margaret Sanger, *Margaret Sanger: An Anthology* (NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 1938), p. 206.
44. Polishuk, RME, p. 25.
45. Equi letter to Sanger, 2 October 1916, Library of Congress.
46. Walker C. Smith, *The Everett Massacre* (Chicago: IWW Publishing House, n.d.), p. 94.
47. Inez Rhodes letter.
48. Philip S. Foner, *The Case of Joe Hill* (NY: International Publishers, 1965), p. 92.
49. James P. Foreit, *The Industrial Worker in the Northwest 1909-1931: A Study of Community-Newspaper Interaction*, Thesis, University of Washington, 1969, p. 138.
50. H.C. Peterson and Gilbert C. Fite, *Opponents of War, 1917-1918 (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), p. 19.*
51. Robert Tyler, *Rebels of the Woods: The IWW in the Pacific Northwest* (Eugene, OR: University of Oregon Books, 1967), p. 141.
52. Peterson and Fite, p. 62.
53. Charlotte Todes, *Labor and Lumber* (NY: International Publishers, 1931), pp. 141-143.
54. Peterson and Fite, p. 215.
55. Judgment Roll #8099, *United States vs. Marie Equi*, Registrar No. 7968, Indictment, 29 June 1918.
56. *Workers Unite: A Presentation of the Case of Dr. Marie Equi, November 1919, p. 1.*

57. *Report of Agent Bryon, 4 September 1918, DOJ files.*
58. *ODJ*, 19 November 1918, p. 14.
59. *Oreg.*, 19 November 1918, p. 1.
60. *ODJ*, 21 November 1918, p. 2.
61. Flynn, p. 252.
62. *Oreg.*, 21 November 1918, p. 2.
63. *ET*, 31 December 1918, p. 1.
64. Judgment Roll #8099, Judge Bean, Instructions to the Jury, p. 84.
65. Report of Agent Bryon, 9 September 1918, DOJ files.
66. *ET*, 31 December 1918, p. 1.
67. *Workers Unite*, p. 6.
68. John Dos Passos, *Nineteen Nineteen*, in *USA* (NY: Random House, 1939), p. 457.
69. *ODJ*, 27 October 1919, p. 1.
70. *Oreg.*, 1 November 1919, p. 9.
71. Letter from Equi to Sanger, 29 October 1920, Library of Congress.
72. Polishuk, 3/31/81.
73. Letter from Equi to Sanger, 24 November 1920, Library of Congress.
74. DOJ files.
75. Polishuk, 3/31/81.
76. Rosalyn Baxandall, "Dreams and Dilemmas: Introduction to Elizabeth Gurley Flynn's Writings on Women," unpublished paper, 1982, p. 30.
77. Julia Ruutilla interview.
78. International Longshoremen Association, "The Hook," Vol. 2, No. 11, 11 July 1934.
79. Julia Ruutilla interview.
80. Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (NY: Harper & Row, 1980), p. 357.
81. Julia Ruutilla interview.

Finally, I would like to thank Rosalyn Baxandall and Sandy Polishuk for their interest, assistance, and support.

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION (Required by 39 U.S.C. 3685) 1. Title of Publication: Radical America. ISSN 0033-7617. 2. Date of Filing: 10/31/83. 3. Frequency of issue: Bi-monthly (except for March through June, which is one issue). A. No. of issues published annually: 5. B. Annual subscription price: \$15. 4. Complete mailing address of known office of publication: 38 Union Sq., #14, Somerville, MA 02143. 5. Complete mailing address of the headquarters of publishers: Same. 6. Full names and complete mailing address of publisher, editor and managing editor: Publisher—Alternative Education Project, Inc., 38 Union Sq., #14, Somerville MA 02143. Editor—John P. Demeter, 38 Union Sq., #14, Somerville MA 02143. Managing Editor—Donna Penn, 38 Union Sq., #14, Somerville MA 02143. 7. Owner: Alternative Education Project, Inc., 38 Union Sq., #14, Somerville MA 02143. 8. Known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders: none. 9. Not applicable. 10. Extent and nature of circulation: First figure is average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months; figure in parentheses is actual no. copies of single issue published nearest to filing date. A. Total no. copies: 4,023 (4,060). B. Paid Circulation: 1. Sales through dealers and carriers: 1,243 (1,150). 2. Mail subscription: 2,200 (2,177). C. Total paid circulation: 3,443 (3,327). D. Free distribution by mail, carrier and other means: 188 (200). E. Total distribution: 3,631 (3,527). F. Copies not distributed: 1. Office use, left over, unaccounted, spoiled after printing: 208 (343). 2. Return from news agents: 184 (190). G. Total: 4,023 (4,060). 11. I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete. (Signed) John P. Demeter, Editor.



RADICAL HISTORY

Editors' Note: This is the first in a series of vignettes drawn from material in the files of the Oral History of the American Left, directed by Paul Buhle at Tamiment Library, New York University. OHAL has been specializing in recording the memories of the immigrant generations, and in collecting tapes made for the work of independent film-makers. The occasional *Newsletter* is free, and OHAL will publish a full catalogue in the Fall. Those interested, write: OHAL, Tamiment Collection, Bobst Library, NYU, 70 Washington Sq. South, New York, NY 10012.

Nonagenarian: Paul Novick

In April, 1982, Paul Novick celebrated his ninetieth birthday, and the sixtieth birthday of the paper he edits, amidst the warmth of several hundred friends and supporters at New York's Roosevelt Hotel. It was not an event covered by the *Times* or even the Left press. But for the present, the banquet with soulful tributes, the Yiddish-language soloists, constituted a mighty symbol. *The Morgen Freiheit*, founded with Novick as a young assistant editor, had survived almost a half-century of Communist affiliation, damaging line-changes, McCarthyite repression, a later break with the official Communist movement, and an agonizing reappraisal of the whole Jewish radical tradition. And all this in a language declared near-dead by Second International theoreticians and foremost Yiddish journalists three-quarters of a century ago! Such a story journalist Novick saw as he looked out upon retired garment workers, *shule* teachers, union and community activists of all kinds, now in their seventies, eighties, and nineties. A story that, with sufficient good health, he would record some years more.

Novick is a physically small man, and he seemed unobtrusive in the days when Jewish radicals broke off from a Socialist Party judged assimilationist-minded and con-

servative. He had been a young factory-worker active in the Bund, immigrated to the US where he gained journalist's tools, returned to revolutionary Russia and the factory and from there to the Yiddish journals of Eastern Europe. He found his way back to New York in time for the formation of the *Freiheit*, after a stopover at the *Groysser Kundes*, the famous Yiddish humor weekly. In those days New York had five Yiddish dailies already in the field, the reform-socialist *Forward* peaking at a quarter-million readers. The first *Freiheit* editor, Moissye Olgin, presided over the greatest literary lights in the contemporary Yiddish Renaissance. Poets, artists, feuilletonists flourished in the Left artistic latitude. And then came the crunch. Communist orders to place the "foreign language groups" under stricter discipline, fanatical attacks by Moscow upon Socialists and other non-Communist radicals, "proletarian literature" with a vengeance. *The Freiheit* lost most of its famous writers and probably half of its readership. The minority which stayed on felt itself frustrated by strictures against celebrating Jewish holidays, struggling to retain some special radical claim upon historic traditions.

Here, in retrospect, the Novick uniqueness began to take shape. When the Popular Front eased Party restraints, Olgin and Novick took the lead in turning antifascist sentiment into a popular, influential movement. Probably more effectively than any other ethnic activists, they linked the battle for militant unions with the elaboration of fraternal networks and cultural associations which brought shop and neighborhood together. They deceived themselves about the Soviet Union. But they made thousands look forward to a socialism in America as warm and sensitive to cultural issues as the Yiddish Communists. Many times over they suffered again, from the Hitler-Stalin pact to the Cold War. But after Novick took over the paper in 1939, he came as close to a pluralist, cultural socialism as possible within the limits of Party positions. When the Communist leadership went underground in 1953, anticipating imminent fascism, Novick resisted the impulse. By 1956 and the revelations of Stalin's crimes, Novick and his following opened a fracture which culminated in one of the few autonomous, formerly Communist constituencies outside Europe. Most other attempts, in the US especially, have been crushed by ideological pressures or failed from within when their leading personalities lost heart. Novick led his little crew step-by-step to reinterpret Jewish radicalism in the light of new developments.

The means he used to lead constitute a kind of laboratory case of how culture can reshape politics. *The*

Freiheit, now cut back to a weekly, looks like no other American radical paper. It takes deep pride in the handful of poets and critics who remain; but it no less militantly asserts the obligation of Jews to speak out against neo-conservatism, against Beginism and the Lebanon invasion, against the arms race and the breakdown of communication between blacks and Jews. The paper assails Russian anti-Semitism but without looking upon Russia as the world's main aggressor. Most of all, the *Freiheit* offers a dialogue between old friends in struggle, once neighbors in the South Bronx or Brighton Beach and now together or separated in Co-Op City, Los Angeles, Petaluma. Every week brings a death notice, and more *yortseit* memorials to fallen comrades; and every week promises a renewal of socialist hopes, of life, in a better society for future generations.

Novick stands astride this situation, working long days (like a factory operative, his friends say), raising from poor retired people sums of money that would be ridiculous if not absolutely necessary. He has abandoned his little humor column in recent years. But he still pens his burning and indignant editorials, writes general commentaries unexcelled in style or content anywhere in the Left press — what other editorialist mixes references to Russian and Yiddish literary classics, reminiscences from 1917, Jewish jokes, and demands for action? He still tours the banquet circuit where money is raised, delivering slashing addresses by the hour. Who know how long he and the movement can survive? However long, however little he may be remembered in the world outside this Yiddish-speaking Golden Age ghetto, Novick will have made a moral point of his own life. To the last day they struggle, and not blindly. You only have one life to live, an energetic veteran told me. And if something is important you want to keep it till the end.



DOLLARS & TRÄUME 8

Studien zu Politik · Ökonomie · Kultur der USA

Heft 8 SOZIALE BEWEGUNGEN IN USA

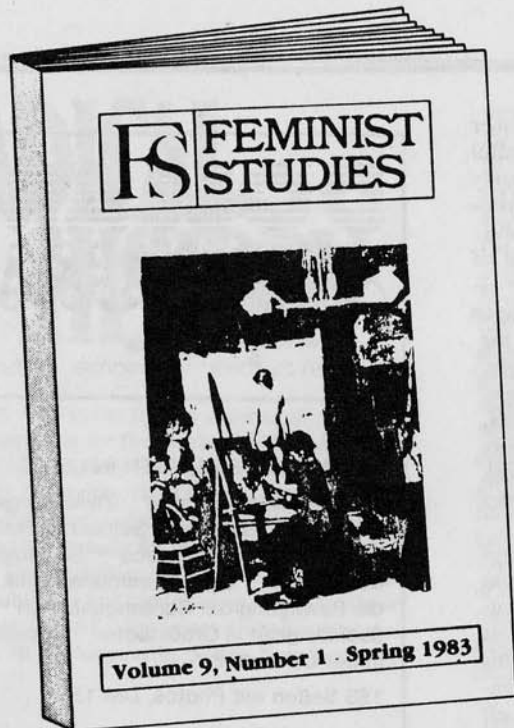
Die Friedensbewegung · Ziviler Ungehorsam · Rüstungskonversion · Schwarze Frauen · Gay Politics in San Francisco · Selbsthilfeprojekte der Indianer · Linke Kommunalpolitik · „9 to 5“: die Bewegung der Büroangestellten · Neue Obdachlosigkeit in Großstädten · Populäre Mythen in der US-Kultur

168 Seiten mit Photos, DM 15,-



Heft 7/1983:
USA UND DRITTE WELT 168 Seiten, DM 15,-

**Dollars & Träume im
JUNIUS VERLAG
Von-Hutten-Straße 18
D-2000 Hamburg 50**



A forum for
feminist theory
and research

**Volume 9, Number 1,
Spring 1983**

Linda Gordon and Ellen DuBois, Seeking Ecstasy on the Battlefield: Danger and Pleasure in Nineteenth-Century Feminist Sexual Thought.
Kirsten Drotner, Schoolgirls, Madcaps, and Air Aces: English Girls and Their Magazine Reading between the Wars.
Janice A. Radway, Women Read the Romance: The Interaction of Text and Context.
Bell Chevigny, Daughters Writing: Toward a Theory of Women's Biography.
Steven M. Stowe, "The Thing, Not Its Vision": An Experience of Courtship in the Southern Planter Class.
Bonnie Thornton Dill, Race, Class, and Gender: Prospects for an All-inclusive Sisterhood.
Phyllis Palmer, White Women/Black Women: The Dualism of Female Identity and Experience. FICTION by **Carol Ascher**. POEM by **Frances Jaffer**. ART: Self-images by **Paula Modersohn-Becker**, **Eleanor Antin**, **Joan Semmel**.

Three Issues Annually

	1 year	2 years	3 years
Individuals	\$15.00	\$27.00	\$40.00
Institutions	\$30.00	\$55.00	\$82.00

Foreign Orders

ADD POSTAGE
Surface — \$4.00/year
Airmail — \$14.00/year

Single Issue Rate

Individuals: \$6.50 Institutions: \$13.00

Mail Orders To:

FEMINIST STUDIES
Women's Studies Program
University of Maryland
College Park, MD 20742

The Berkeley Journal of Sociology

A Critical Review

Volume XXVIII 1983

Jean Cohen on **New Social Movements**

Vicki Smith on **Women and Part-time Work**

Linda Blum on **The Comparable Worth Debate**

Libby Bishop on **Family Politics and the Left**

Craig Reinerman on **Prospects for a Jobs Movement**

Reviews of Recent Books on Social Movements and Feminist
Theory

And More

Individuals: \$5.00
Institutions: \$10.00

Discounts on Back Issues
and Multi-Volume Orders

THE BERKELEY JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY
Univ. of Calif. 458A Barrows Hall Berkeley, CA 94720

New England's Energy Future
**Changing Demand
Demanding Change**

- A 45-minute slide show giving a radical perspective on energy and society
- Narration & Music

- **Contents:**

New England's energy sources: oil, gas, coal, electricity and nuclear
The effect of energy production on our health, the environment and our pocketbooks;
Who controls energy and what would a Flexible, Ecological, Efficient and Democratic alternative future look like?

- **Available for purchase or rental.**

Contact:

New England's Energy Future
P.O. Box 149
Somerville, MA 02143

Socialist Review

SR

THINK TANK FOR THE AMERICAN LEFT

Featuring: Feminist politics, democratic movements, labor struggles, organizing strategies and left perspectives on American economics, politics and culture.

SUBSCRIBE TODAY

\$19.50

One year
subscription
(6 issues)

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

\$22 Outside
of USA

CITY STATE ZIP _____

3202 ADELIN BERKELEY, CA 94703

The RED SUN PRESS

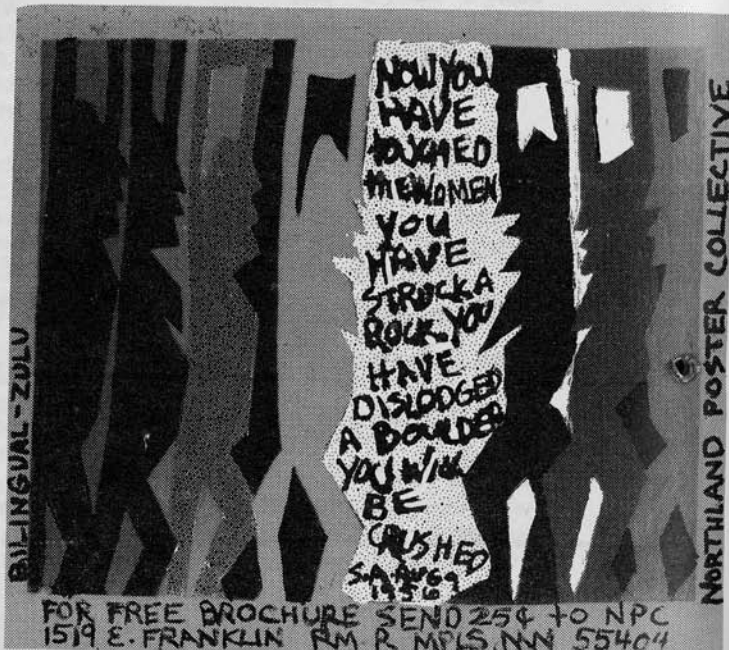
collective is part of the anti-capitalist movement for political, economic, and social change.

This July, Red Sun Press and Whetstone Press will be moving to the Redbook store's new location on Green Street in Jamaica Plain. At this time we ask our movement friends to support us by sending commercial printing our way. We do excellent quality work at a good price, and the more commercial printing we do, the more movement printing we can discount or donate.

Call for an estimate. Phone: 542-4821

Red Sun Press

502 Harrison Ave. • Boston, MA 02118



BACK ISSUES

RADICAL AMERICA

"RADICAL AMERICA: A 15 YEAR ANTHOLOGY" - Special retrospective with selection of articles that have appeared in RA since 1967: Black Liberation, Work-place Struggles, Feminism, Community Activism, American Left, Culture and Art.

Articles, commentary, poetry and art by C.L.R. James, Sara Evans, E.P. Thompson, Herbert Marcuse, Diane DiPrima, Ken Cockrell, Margaret Randall, Staughton Lynd, Manning Marable, Todd Gitlin, Mari Jo Buhle, Ann D. Gordon, Ellen Willis, Michael Lesy, David Montgomery, Aime Cesaire, Bernice Johnson Reagon, Sonia Sanchez, Dan Georgakas, Leonard Baskin, Gilbert Shelton, Edith Hoshino Altbach, George Rawick, Marlene Dixon, Mark Naison, Sheila Rowbotham, David Widgery, Ron Aronson, Harvey O'Connor, Lillian Robinson, David Wagner, Hans Gerth, Peter Biskind, Daniel Singer, Jean Tepperman, Martin Glaberman, Stan Weir, Dorothy Healey and the editors of Radical America. Edited by Paul Buhle.

"FACING REACTION" - Special double issue on the New Right and America in the 80s... Vol. 15, Nos. 1 & 2 (Spring 1981)...160 pages, illustrated.

Featuring: IN THE WINGS: NEW RIGHT ORGANIZING AND IDEOLOGY by Allen Hunter; THE CONTINUING BURDEN OF RACE: a review by Manning Marable; ABORTION: WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON? by Ellen Willis; THE LONG STRUGGLE FOR REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS by Linda Gordon; THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS: FEMINIST AND ANTIFEMINIST by Barbara Ehrenreich; RETREAT FROM THE SOCIAL WAGE: HUMAN SERVICES IN THE 80s by Ann Withorn; also THE NEW TERRAIN OF AMERICAN POLITICS by Jim O'Brien; ECONOMIC CRISIS AND CONSERVATIVE POLICIES by Jim Campen; DEMOCRACY, SOCIALISM AND SEXUAL POLITICS by the editors of *Gay Left*; and Noam Chomsky and Michael Klare on COLD WAR II and US INTERVENTIONISM IN THE THIRD WORLD. Plus, BILLBOARDS OF THE FUTURE!

"DREAMS OF FREEDOM" - Special double issue featuring "Having a Good Time: The American Family Goes Camping"... Vol. 16, Nos. 1 & 2 (Spring 1982)...180 pages.

Featuring: Interview with Carlos Fuentes; SPECIAL SECTION: Reviews of recent Radical History on women, blacks, rural populists, auto workers and responses to industrialization; POSTAL WORKERS AND SCIENTIFIC MANAGEMENT by Peter Rachleff; PEACE AT ANY PRICE?: FEMINISM, ANTI-IMPERIALISM AND THE DISARMAMENT MOVEMENT by the editors; SOLIDARITY, COLD WAR AND THE LEFT by Frank Brodhead; E.R.A., R.I.P.-BUT HOW HARD SHOULD WE CRY AT THE FUNERAL? by Anita Diamant; and, poetry, movie satires and more.

SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE: FACING REACTION

RADICAL AMERICA

Vol. 15, Nos. 1 & 2 Spring 1981
THE NEW RIGHT - FEMINISM AND ANTIFEMINISM
COLD WAR II - SERVICE CUTS - REAGANOMICS \$4



RADICAL AMERICA



\$4.00 (plus 50¢ postage)

SPECIAL BULK RATE AVAILABLE

SUBSCRIBE NOW TO



RADICAL AMERICA is an independent socialist-feminist journal that has published continuously since 1967. Articles feature the history and current developments in the working class, the role of women and Third World people, with reports on shop floor and community organizing, the history and politics of radicalism and feminism, and commentary and analysis of current socialist theory, popular culture, and social movements.

Name _____ Cut out this box and mail to: *Radical America*
 Address _____ 38 Union Sq., #14, Somerville, MA 02143
 City _____ State _____ Zip _____

- \$100.00 Supporting subscriber* ●●●●●●●●●● **SPECIAL OFFER** ●●●●●●●●●●
 - \$50.00 Sustaining subscriber* **SUBSCRIBE NOW AND RECEIVE ANY TWO OF RADICAL AMERICA'S RECENT SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUES FREE!** (\$8.00 value with a new one or two year subscription; issues detailed in ad in this issue.) Use this tearsheet.
 - \$15.00 One year sub (Six issues)
 - \$10.00 One year sub (Unemployed, retired rate)
 - \$26.00 Two year sub
 - Add \$3.00 per year for all foreign subscriptions
- PAYMENT MUST ACCOMPANY ORDER**
 Make all checks payable to *Radical America*
- Yes, send me "Facing Reaction"
 "Dreams of Freedom"
 "15th Anniversary Retrospective"
 OR "WORKERS STRUGGLES" \$6.50 (\$21.50)

*Checks for \$50.00 or more are tax deductible and should be made payable to *Capp St. Foundation* and sent to *Radical America* at the above address.

↓ see ad on next page!

Workers' Struggles, Past and Present

A "Radical America"
Reader

Edited by
James Green

Contents

Introduction by James Green

Part One: The Struggle for Control

The Demand for Black Labor: Historical notes on the Political Economy of Racism, *by Harold M. Baron* • Four Decades of Change: Black Workers in Southern Textiles, 1941-1981, *by Mary Frederickson* • The Stop Watch and the Wooden Shoe: Scientific Management and the Industrial Workers of the World, *by Mike Davis* • The Clerical Sisterhood: Rationalization and the Work Culture of Saleswomen in American Department Stores, 1890-1960, *by Susan Porter Benson* • Sexual Harassment at the Workplace: Historical Notes, *by Mary Bularzik*

Part Two: Organizing the Unorganized

Working Class Self-Activity, *by George Rawick* • Union Fever: Organizing among Clerical Workers, 1900-1930, *by Roslyn L. Feldberg* • Organizing the Unemployed: The Early Years of the Great Depression, *by Roy Rosenzweig* • The Possibility of Radicalism in the Early 1930s: The Case of Steel, *by Staughton Lynd* • A. Philip Randolph and the Foundations of Black American Socialism, *by Manning Marable* • Organizing against Sexual Harassment, *by the Alliance Against Sexual Coercion*

Part Three: Militancy, Union Politics, and

Workers' Control Workers, Unions, and Class Forces, *by Stan Weir* • Defending the No-Strike Pledge: CIO Politics during World War II, *by Nelson Lichtenstein* • The League of Revolutionary Black Workers: An Assessment, *by Ernest Allen, Jr.* • Beneath the Surface: The Life of a Factory, *by Dodee Fennell* • Where Is the Teamster Rebellion Going?, *by Staughton Lynd* • Holding the Line: Miners' Militancy and the Strike of 1978, *by James Green* • Shop Floor Politics at Fleetwood, *by John Lippert* • Tanning Leather, Tanning Hides: Health and Safety Struggles in a Leather Factory, *by Andrew Rowland* • Workers' Control and the News: The Madison, Wisconsin Press Connection, *by David Wagner and Paul Buhle* • The Past and Future of Workers' Control, *by David Montgomery*

437 pp.

Temple
UNIVERSITY PRESS

SPECIAL OFFER
for
RADICAL AMERICA
READERS
&
SUBSCRIBERS!

Selected from the pages of *Radical America*, one of the few New Left publications originating in the 1960s to survive into the eighties, these articles are a rare combination of labor and social history written by engaged scholars for a popular audience, as well as contemporary studies of labor movement politics and workplace struggles written by worker intellectuals and activist historians. Long before mainstream scholars of American history, the writers in *Radical America* were focusing on the work experiences as seen from the shopfloor and on the special issues of women and blacks.

• REGULAR PRICE \$9.95.
NOW ONLY \$6.50

with a new one-year (\$15)
subscription to RA
or a one-year renewal
to a present subscription
SEND \$ 21.50 BY CHECK
OR MONEY ORDER WITH THE
TEARSHEET ON THE PREVIOUS
PAGE