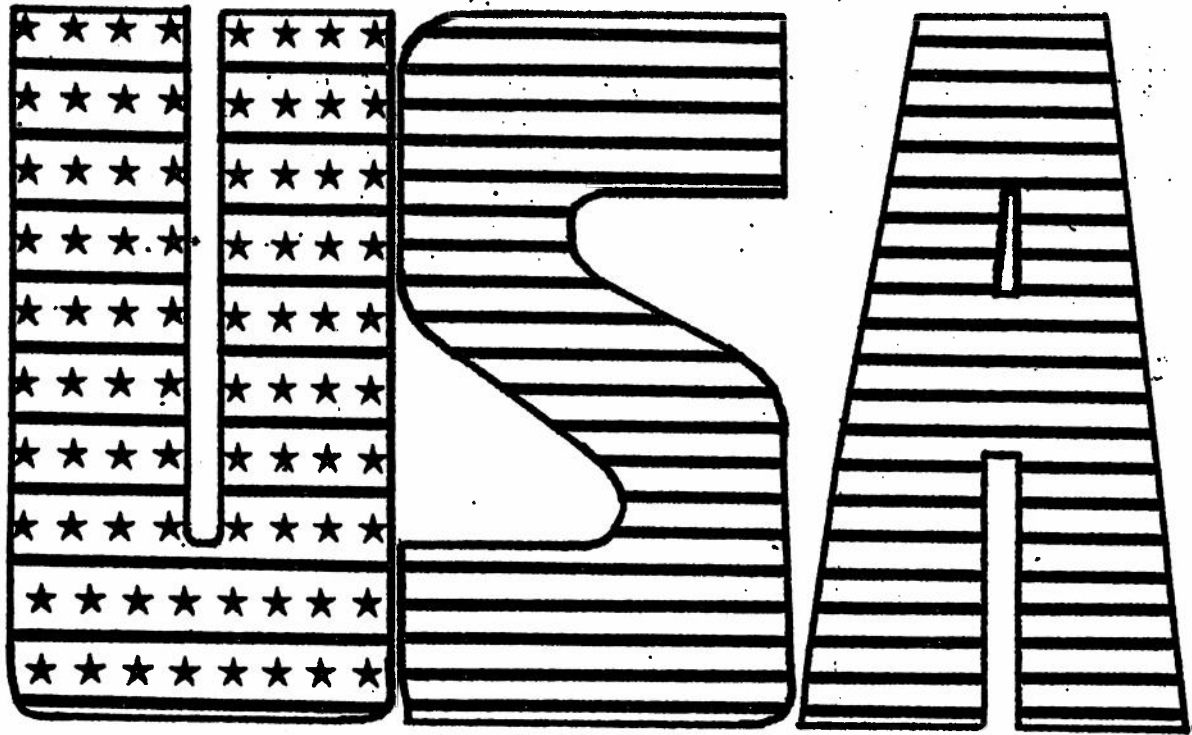


no 8



"What is happening is that the old ideas and assumptions which once made our great institutions legitimate, authoritative and confident, are fast eroding. They are slipping away in the face of a changing reality and are being replaced by different ideas and different assumptions which are, as yet, ill-formed, contradictory and shocking."

Prof. George Chabot Lodge,
Harvard School of Business

A changing **REALITY**

1977

CONTENTS:

- A GENERAL VIEW
- The Westinghouse Wildcat
- The Coal Miners Struggle 1975-'76
- Concerning Automation in the Press
- Notes on the Farm Workers Struggle
- Some Problems about the Unions
- The Use of 'Citizen Band' Radios and the Truck Drivers Strike
- Violence in Detroit
- THE USA IN QUESTION

**PUBLISHED
BY
"EXCHANGES"**

NOTICE

This collection of notes and writings is not an analysis (that will come later) but only some material for analysis. It is rather a gathering of impressions, of news, of texts collected mainly during a trip made by some French comrades to the USA last summer.

It is also only the beginning of the publication of other American books and articles, because we now realise that everybody, including ourselves, know very little about struggles in the USA.

Echanges, March 1977.

CONTENTS:

On the United States (a general view)

The Westinghouse Wildcat

The Coal Miners Struggles

Concerning automation in the press

Notes on the Farm Workers struggle

Some problems about the Unions

The use of "Citizen Band" radios and the Truck Drivers strike

Violence in Detroit .

The United States in Question (a critique of "Temps Modernes" special number on the USA)

Some groups and addresses in the United States

Even though this means that there are certain material defects, we thought it best to distribute this special number of "Echanges" on a wider scale. This is why, unlike other issues of "Echanges", which are only distributed internally (by subscription) this number will be exceptionally on sale publicly.

LANDSAT, the most profitable eye in the world (1)

NASA did a tremendous thing. Four years ago, they launched a satellite Landsat 1, equipped with a Multispectral scanner (MSS). This satellite scans the entire surface of the earth (except for the cloudy zones) in 18 days. The information collected by Landsat is infinitely superior to what can be gathered from classical photography: the scanner "observes the entire surface of the earth with such precision that it can isolate points 80 meters apart. Sensitive to two infra-red wave bands, it can also appreciate heat and humidity, which is enough, for example, to distinguish the type of vegetation, how far advanced crops are and thus too for seeing how big harvests will be. In this way, maps of agricultural zones are permanently available, each crop is assigned a particular color according to its "spectral signature". Better still, from one tour of the world to another Landsat can follow the evolution of a particular crop. The estimation of harvests throughout the world, even in countries like China and the USSR, which hide their information most jealously, is thus made possible. Landsat has profoundly changed the known facts of world agriculture and strengthened American "agripower". Each Friday at 3.00 P.M. at the Agricultural State Department, they have a conference where they go over the prevision of world harvests.

The financial implications are enormous. Thanks to this information, for one cereal alone, wheat, American agriculture will have realised a profit of 325 million dollars. For all cereals together, the profit will reach 600 million. Better still: Landsat allows them to act not only for the marketing of crops, but also for production itself. When perspectives are bad in the Southern hemisphere, producers in the Northern hemisphere can sow more crops because of the difference in the time of the seasons.

In the United States, the economy has reached a level unequaled elsewhere. Technical and scientific progress (the corollary of economic development) has created new techniques for rationalising the production and consumption processes which destroy and recreate the life styles these techniques impose.

But it is becoming more apparent today that this total control of time and space has provoked resistance, individual and collective refusal and that the crumbs of this scientific wealth, distributed in the form of consumer objects, are beginning to be weapons of this refusal.

The United States exports its new life styles to Europe when exporting its capital and its consumer goods. We receive them, normally several years after their inauguration over there, modified by the particular traditions of each European country. Americans have had to learn before us how to fight against the domination of objects and their power over life and how to fight against isolation.

On the other hand, forms of collective struggle inherited from the old European working class movement give rise to more radical situations here in Europe (occupations, sequestrations etc.). But this last difference is often built up into a hierarchy, making people think (including Americans themselves) that class struggle is the prerogative of the European proletariat, who are more combative and hence, more conscious. This seems so perhaps, because of the big "left" parties and the "mass" movements here, which shout louder than the individuals who struggle effectively over there.

The study of American struggles should show an understanding of forms which are complementary to those we already know. The contempt or ignorance of French revolutionaries of these struggles means we receive

(1) from "Quand NASA retombe sur terre" in the French review Le Nouvel Economiste

- 4 -

nothing more than details, artificially magnified and purely journalistic in style and content.

THE GROWTH OF THE AMERICAN ECONOMY

The post war economic boom contributed to the improvement of the American "way of life". The period of regrowth begun around 1963 and which culminated in 1969 led to an acceleration of high level mass consumption. New habits of work and of leisure were born at this time at all levels (students, workers, racial minorities, housewives, women in general, in the street, at the factory, inside peoples' heads) especially among the young. Malcolm L. Denise, vice-president of labour relations at the Ford Motor Company, described the phenomenon of resistance inside Ford factories at that epoch as follows (2): From 1960 through 1968 the absentee rate for our hourly employees more than doubled. So did the rate of disciplinary cases per 100 employees. And the turnover (3) rate went up two and a half times ... Such experience is not unique to Ford. It is shared by other employers with comparable work." On the average age of the workers, Denise added: "In 1968 the median age of hourly employees was 35.4. This is the youngest figure we have ever recorded and it is three and a half years lower than the median age only four years earlier. (N.B. In 1972, the average age at Lordstown was about twenty-eight) Denise described more precisely the spirit of revolt which seemed to reign among this new wave of workers: "These are people who almost habitually violate our plant rules. Although some of them do so with an attitude of open rebellion and defiance, in a great many other cases it is just a matter of the problem employee bringing with him into the plant the mores of his own background. He continues to live by the loose code he grew up with, he is generally indifferent to the standards of someone else's society."

This revolt of the sixties occurred at the end of a period of slowing down in the economy (1957-1963). The unemployment rate had risen at that time among the young born during the demographic boom years of the forties and fifties (1935-1957). In the second half of the sixties American capitalism tried to play the card of using a cheap labour force found among the young under 30, women entering into production for the first time (there is a fall in the birth rate and a rise in the average age of marriage) and blacks affected by unemployment or coming from the South, to stabilise profits and then even increase them. White male workers of over 35 years are the only ones who enjoy very high wages (on average nearly the double of women's wages) and security of employment, well defended for them by the Unions. In this period the development of education, of conscription of temporary and part-time work and the offering of vacancies at low rates of pay managed to produce a fall in unemployment: a fairly big fall among young whites and a much smaller one among young blacks (this same unemployment rate declined steeply among older white workers). The crime rate, addiction to hard drugs and mental illness all rose during these same years.

However, we cannot explain the individual and collective revolts of this period by a simple rise in the level of exploitation (as Joe Eyer tends to show in an article in the book "Root and Branch" from Fawcett Books. The facts given below come from this article.)

After the Second World War, new technology brought to the front new materials, new manufacturing techniques and new products. The environment changed at the same time as high level mass consumption developed; this led to a change in life style (the explosion of Rock 'n roll, the "hunger for life" of the young tended to oppose itself to the disappearance of life). The years 1950-60 were marked by the construction of a vast network of motorways covering the entire land, the development of truly mass automobile production, the development of "agribusiness" (the industrialization of agriculture operated to a large extent by the chemical trusts)

(2) Quoted by Stanley Aronowitz in "False Promises", McGraw Hill 1973

(3) Turnover means circulation of the work force. The movement of workers hired and of those who leave the firm.

reorganization of town planning and the improvement of public service. And so from the end of the sixties, the space and the time of every American was structured by the world of merchandise. As much outside as inside the work place everything was moving towards a greater separation and parcelling out of actions, a greater solid isolation. In such conditions unemployment and exploitation in the economic sense of the term, are clothed with a significance totally different from that they had, for example, in the thirties. In the 30's unemployment and exploitation meant fear, cold and hunger; today they mean anger at not being able to possess all the objects that can be seen everywhere and all the time, anger at feeling powerless while encircled by so much power.

As if to try and regroup those thus isolated by a type of "mass consciousness", the powers have developed in recent years a sort of "street morality" of a modern kind. As in China giant hordings remind people of the revolutionary morale with lots of quotations, so in New York you see many posters announcing that "Littering the streets is both filthy and selfish." In Nevada giant posters show two hands locked in handcuffs with the claim that in Nevada shoplifters are harshly punished and the added warning "Don't take risks!" On the highways (motorways) a few years ago there were signposts everywhere with only one word written on them "Think" Finally, everywhere giant hordings replace the old advice of "Uncle Sam" to Join the Army" by "Call your Uncle Toll free" (special rates for reversed charges, call collect etc.) or even "The Navy is not a job: it's an adventure."

The riots in the black ghettos between 1964 and 1968 have been called "commodity riots" by official American sociologists; they took place at a time when "commodities" were invading the world. The 1970's mark another stage of class conflict. Consumerism is now well established; on the whole there have not been any important changes in life style since the end of the total reorganization arrived at towards the end of the 1960's. From that time on, modern comfort became a feature of each detail of daily life: the large car complete with servo breaks, assisted steering, automatic gears, air-conditioning, radio, stereo-cassettes etc; free machines distributing cold water in most public places, public telephones at every street corner enabling people to telephone cheaply and easily in the middle of the country to people 3,000 miles away; the mobile house which can be moved by truck when the owners want to move to another region; air-conditioning in the office and cantine; the "click" of the beer-can which can be opened by one single, effortless gesture; the letterbox where you can post the mail without getting out of your car, the bank where you can cash a cheque without getting out of your car; the mass of credit cards etc., etc., etc. In general, what is sought after in consumerism is mainly objects or services which save effort or time to compensate people for the fatigue and time spent at work. The enormous expansion of "fast food" restaurants (you can eat here in 5 minutes! for example MacDonalld, Burger Chef etc.) can only be explained by this, since in addition everyone calls the meals served in such establishments "plastic food".

In 1976, many actions which are new or as yet inexistent here, have become banal in the States. The act of picking up a telephone and calling someone has become as "natural" as scratching your nose. Commodities possess a fetish-like quality, but this fetish has now become secularized, the idolization which surrounded the new consumer goods of the period of frenetic consumption in the 1950's and 60's has partly disappeared; the ideal car which takes 20 seconds to go from 0 to 70 m.p.h. stills exists in France while in the U.S.A. the ideal is already the comfortable car which only costs 2,500 dollars.

The less abusive way of looking at things has its true significance at a time when the technical means have become sufficient (this is particular visible in the U.S.A.) to enable the building of a classless society of abundance. Also, the means of fighting for this (including notably communications) exist in quality and number to an extent that people now are accustomed to handling them and are ready to use them to the best advantage. But this potential for collective action is not yet a movement and in this vast country that new methods of communication have reduced to the size of a pocket handkerchief, it seems that news gets round very slowly (even the most banal news!) and that struggles remain isolated more often than not. In short, the whole arsenal of new techniques remains still as underemployed as in Europe. The signs of the overcoming of this contradiction are, however appearing (see below on the use

of telephones) especially in the case of the use of the "C.B. radios" (see article further on on othis subject).

Commodity production has, however, succeeded, for the moment, in separating people from each other and in separating people from themselves. The old individualistic mentality is still very strong and when there is collective action, it is usually for a very local and particular problem. For example, neighbourhoodgroups for problems about school, against high rents or the building of a highway, for self protection against criminals, etc. An example of such individual action is that of a woman (the story appeared in a newspaper in Albuquerque, New Mexico) who was cut on the tongue by a glass chipping when drinking out of a bottle bought at a local supermarket. A few hours after this small accident she went back to the supermarket and demanded that they withdraw that brand of drink from sale. When the manager refused, she went to the factory which produced the bottles and explained that the whole production process should be replanned. Here again, she was refused, but, not discouraged, she continued for several months to complain everywhere to all the authorities. Finally, after having tried all means possible, she decided to picket alone in front of the store with a poster denouncing the product in question. Another example of local action, but this time collective, is quoted by Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello (in their book "Common sense for hard times" - Two continents, New York 1976). In september '68, the residents of Maverick Street, Boston, fed up with the 600 trucks which passed through their street, coming and going from the airport, decided to block the street with babycarriages (prams). A group of women and children blocked the street for a week. The police were called but sympathised with the demonstrators. Under pressure from the Mayor, the airport authorities decided to build a private road for the trucks on their own land.

Among these many struggles, there arise from time to time moments when a surpassing of the immediate becomes possible. A few months after the Maverick Street incidents, a struggle took place against the extension of that same airport. Inhabitants of several neighbourhoods coordinated their activities to block all tunnels and bridges leading to the airport. They used their own telephones with lines passing from tree to tree, thus enabling the inhabitants of different neighbourhoods to coordinate actions rapidly and effectively.

A great number of concepts divide people in the U.S.A., their ethnic origin (Wasp, chicano, jew, pole, black, indian, irish, chinese, italian, etc.), their religion, their age, the region in which they live etc., while fundamentally everyone belongs to the same social group and experiences the same imposed life style. As if to find a way out of this sad common lot, people talk a lot, they start up a conversation in the street with strangers quite easily, but often sink into a type of conversation marked by those many concepts which divide them from each other. The separation of individuals from others and from themselves results in an increasingly irrational daily behaviour; for many the alternative is between bottling things up inside themselves and finding individual solutions or exteriorising their feelings in violence. However, from the revolt of the 1960's a new consciousness has emerged; irrational actions are recognized and reproduced on purpose; people are less ashamed of being "abnormal". A young guy picked us up, while we were hitch-hiking between New York and Boston; after High School, having no trade, he had worked in several unskilled jobs with periods of unemployment in between. The next day he was to start another job: taxi-driver (at 140 dollars a week); he was pissed of with the idea of having to go to work and so, to forget, he smoked joint after joint; when we arrived at the toll booth of the freeway, (motorway), because he thought the girl who distributed the tickets was nice, he offered her the end of his joint. Se accepted delighted. But this "madness" also affects social groups higher up the scale for the inhuman nature of social relationships is universal. A 50 year old man we met in Vermont told us he had just sold his little transport business (four or five trucks); after the war he had begun on his own with one truck; later on he had taken on some workers, but he said "Nowadays you cannot ask workers to do anything". So overburdened with work and financial worries, he had had enough. He had sold the lot and was living off the money from the sale and had adopted the philosiphy "Beer for everybody and Good luck to them all".

Beside this "abnormal" madness is the official madness, that which we saw for example on a TV screen in Detroit. What we saw was a game, a simple game, stripped bare of all the cultural trimmings which usually

ask the true meaning of such TV quiz shows; the aim of the quiz game was to guess the price of the commodities whose images were shown on the screen. If the contestant gave several good answers, he could win an important consumer object, like, for example, that motor car turning on a plinth represented by a "glamorous" blond, who delicately stroked the length of the body work. The atmosphere approached collective hysteria. The audience shouted, roared; the contestants too. One contestant arrives on the stage with giant 3 to 4 feet leaps; another who wins a price shouts stamps his feet and almost cries. It would be difficult to do better than this!

Another aspect of this official madness is the ridiculous ends to which a fashionable ideology can be pushed. The feminist ideology, for example, has found an outcome in the delirium which accompanied the creation of a Women's Bank in New York in October 1975.

In August 1976 a parcel containing 10,000 dollars was left at the headquarters of the National Organization for the reform of the law concerning marijuana. The generous donators were other than a "confederation" of independent dealers. The photo of the leader of the organization counting the bank notes, which appeared in a Detroit newspaper, tells of the "hippy-left" (a variety of which has been recently introduced in France).

In opposition to these sad examples of "avant-garde" ideologies coming home to roost, we have the most beautiful example of true "proclaimed madness" that we met during our trip: a young black racing up fifth Avenue the wrong way on roller skates, propelling himself with ski sticks, wearing a woolly hat and carrying his things in a little knapsack on his back. The enormous frescos which cover the tens (if not hundreds) of subway cars, the work of so many unknown artists, who slip into the sheds where the subway trains are put in the evening, are also the most beautiful expression of collective "admitted madness".

FROM INDIVIDUALISM TO COLLECTIVE STRUGGLE

In the U.S.A. everything starts with the individual. According to the famous almost mythology, you get on socially by your own work, one is "self-made". American youth in the 1960's had other aims, but remained attached to the idea of individual self-realization. In order to fight against this completely inhuman society, one had to find the love buried deeply inside oneself and flood the world with it. This idea philosophies, and as opposed to the followers of numerous religious sects, only sought after new ways of being and thinking. In looking for the absolute, they were seeking the universal, the explanation of the world. Although this hippy movement has more or less disappeared, the ideas it produced, are still very alive today. The dominant ways of thinking are recognized by many as a break on the understanding of the physical and social phenomena. See the bestseller in the U.S.A. and Britain "Zen and the art of motorcycle maintenance" by John Pirsic or in a more detailed field "The Tao of Physics" by F. Capra (Berkely, 1975) which tries to get atomic physics out of the impass in which it finds itself, by the application of the principles of Tao. Stanley Aronowitz in his book "False promises" relates a conversation he had with a young worker at Lordstown in 1972: "(Charlie) would like to slow the line down, and experiment with the whole car without the intense rationalization of tasks characteristic of the American auto industry, but his critique goes further. He asks why cars are necessary. He wonders about Eastern philosophies. He thinks about reincarnation and how it would be to live without compulsion and arbitrary authority in another life."

In the same movement, the idea of knowing oneself, is surpassed in the concept of knowing in general and of acting; the non-self-realization recognized in wage labour pushes more and more people towards the acquiring of general and technical knowledge during their leisure time (the technical stuff could help to build a house, set up a car repair garage, build a radio transmitter, etc.) Young people coming from the margins of society (ex-hippies etc.) profit from the surplus of money overflowing in public and private funds (grants, aid etc.) to build an alternative micro-world (meeting and information centres, free clinics, free pregnancy testing, alternative education, new agriculture, handicrafts etc.) in which truly alternative aspects vie with the integrated "recuperated" alternative (which represent the general tendency). If, more and more,

most people are seeking knowledge; knowledge itself seems to have left its former home; students lost in their specialities no longer know anything, no longer want to know anything and let themselves be docily locked up in their prison-campus's where a comfortable alienation is created for them (with lots of gadgets: radio transmitters - not dangerous, since they have nothing to say, film and video material etc.).

Pragmatism leads to suspicion of high-flocon abstractions, of parties and groupes which are too rigid. This interesting aspect of American thought leads, however, also to a too localized and too "day to day" practise, accentuated by the lack of circulation of information. These conditions which foster immobility are modified by the economic movement which animates the country. The United States have the most mobile labour force in the world. Each year, about 8,500,000 people move crossing a State frontier, about 17,000,000 cross county boundaries within a state, and, if we count those who move within a county, about one person in six is on the move. So ideas are spread, even if only at the speed of the old jeep of an unemployed man we met in the middle west, who had left Chicago in search of a job.

The idea, for example, that the Unions have sold out is sufficiently widespread for the Union bosses to be the first attacked in many wildcat strikes; when some one is locked in by the strikers, it is usually a Union man who is the victim.

The ideas of the 1960's which suggested a life without worries, without taboos, a breakaway from old family traditions, the practise of smoking soft drugs, are all largely widespread among all social levels of the population. A former miner of 33 years old, at present working on a building site, showed us his marijuana crop, planted hidden in a field near his house; he had cut down the branches of the trees which stopped the sun coming in. And yet this "hillbilly" grew up and lived in an isolated region with little in common with San Francisco; his mates were those miners who had not hesitated to blow up mine company offices when there were widespread pit closures. At the Dodge factory in Detroit, there is a room "provided" for smoking soft drugs. It is known, the management tolerates it, but on the other hand they are on the look out for people under the influence of alcohol (studies made in Jarnacca show that the productivity of workers is higher when they "smoke"). More than the act itself, it is therefore, the symbol still attached today to the act, which is important in the act of smoking a joint, the symbol of a life without anxiety, which shows up in negative the anxieties suffered at work, at home, in everyday life, which over and above the somewhat exaggerated forms it sometimes takes over there, resembles the lifes of each of us.

Such ideas are spread less easily in certain regions; the South reactionnary accord to legend, is beginning to change, but its level of economic development creates different situations from those of other regions. Often, for example, industrial struggles take place to get a Union. A friend at Albuquerque, New Mexico, was working in a clothing factory (Pioneer Wear), counting 400 workers, mostly women and chicanos; the wages are very low (about 2,5 dollars an hour, which is the legal minimum: a detroit car worker earns at least 5 to 7 dollars an hour) and work conditions are hard. There had never been a Union and the most combative workers were often sacked. He had been fired himself a few months ago and this had evoked much reaction: from this a fight to get a Union began. One day a woman who had just been told she was fired started to shout through the whole factory and immediately everyone stopped working on their machines. The woman got her job back. Another day, some workers put on armbands with the word "union" written on it; the bosses said this was not allowed, so these workers gave up their armbands and then all the workers tore up pieces of cloth and put them round their arms. After several struggles of this kind, elections were finally held to see if the workers wanted a Union.

Surpassing all separation and differences, one common aspiration seems to obsess many Americans, that of working as little as possible. An inhabitant of New Orleans interviewed by the N.Y. Times in an enquiry on the "professional" unemployed, stated "Unemployment (compensation) creates a sort of Utopia. It lets people work for a year and lets them

on vacation for a year. Of course, you cannot live like a king, but it gives you a chance to travel around, and that is the American dream." Everything is, as if Americans are asking for a well-deserved rest after having built such a complex society. There was that worker, who had worked in several factories around Detroit, including eight months at Ford, who seemed proud of the great technological achievements of his great America, who spoke as if it all belonged to him. He was perhaps adversely affected by the Nationalist ideology pumped into him by the Powers that be, but he was not that far off the truth, if we consider that all this is his, or at least will be, one day.

* * *

SOME GROUPS AND ADDRESSES IN THE U.S.A.

There are a whole host of groups and publications everywhere in the States. Traditional marxist groups (various socialist parties, communists, Trotskyists, Maoists with as many varieties as in Europe) or Anarchist Internationalism - a parent group of Révolution Internationale in France, World Revolution in Great Britain etc. is a group derived from this tradition, like many others which are for workers councils. You also have a grouping around Anarchist Murray Bookchin, oriented towards ecology and technology, several of whose works exist in Britain or have been translated into French. Other groups are more difficult to class and concentrate on certain aspects of capitalist development or on pursuing particular paths (like the San Francisco group Upshot, in which John Zerzan participates). The groups listed below are those with which we have direct contact or which the comrades met on their trip to the U.S.A. If some of them are fairly close to us, this does not mean we necessarily agree with all they say, or that we "recommend" them. If you want to go further, you can write to them - or us - to have a more complete list of various groups and publications. (The numbers of the journal "Synthesis" - address given below - gives lists of non-traditional groups with a résumé of the preoccupation of each and is particularly useful.) We hope you can sort all this out for yourselves, remembering that the groups are not the struggle itself.

Black and Red: Box 9546, Detroit, Michigan, 48202 U.S.A. Publications: Hungary '56, Wildcat-Dodge Truck (June 1974), Revolt in socialist Yugoslavia (June 1968), The Incoherence of the Intellectual (Freddy Pertman, 1970), The reproduction of daily life (1969), Workers - student action committees (France, May 1968), Unions against Revolution, two essays (1975), etc.

Fifth Estate: the name of a monthly paper, whose members have a bookshop where most radical literature can be found: Ammunition Bookshop, 4403 Detroit, Michigan 48201

News and Letters: Name of a group and of a monthly paper which calls itself "Marxist Humanist" (!), presided over by Raya Dunayevskaya. Her address is: 1900 E. Jefferson, Detroit, Michigan 48207.

Root and Branch: recently reformed. Little information about them. Their address is: P.O. Box 236, Somerville, Massachusetts 02143.

Solidarity Newsletter/Synthesis: these two groups are working together. The first one's address is: Philadelphia Solidarity, Box 13011, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19101. The address of Synthesis is: P.O. Box 1858, San Pedro, California 90733.

A World to win: the title of a theoretical platform of a San Francisco group, intended to publish a bulletin soon. Their address is: P.O. Box 1587, San Francisco, California 94101. Their platform is available from Echanges.

At Albuquerque in New Mexico we have contacts with former members of a recently dissolved group. Write to Echanges for more details.

THE WESTINGHOUSE WILDCAT by Peter Rachliffe

(This article appeared in the American paper "Fifth Estate")

By the beginning of the second shift on Monday, July 12, 1976, the huge East Pittsburgh Works of the Westinghouse Electric Company was shut tight by a wildcat strike of production workers. This was the first plant-wide walk-out in twenty years, the last being a six month strike in 1956 which ended in bitter defeat and demoralization. While this re-emergence of mass-activity at this central plant (where some 9500 blue-collar workers manufacture gigantic turbines) alone makes these events deserving of analysis, the actual unrolling of the strike presents some patterns more than worthy of consideration by those of us who seek the destruction of capitalist society in all its forms.

BACKGROUND

The first thing which struck me upon arriving at the picket line was the relative youth of the strikers. Few of the several hundred present appeared to be over 35 years old. All were men and only a handful were black. None of the picketers were surprised by the composition of their ranks. I was quickly informed that the major division within the work-force at this plant was between the older and the younger workers. Some forty percent were over 50, had worked there for many years, and were seen by the active strikers as the passive, if not active supporters of the union I.U.E. (International Union of Electrical Workers). Because there had been little hiring at the plant in the 1950s, there were few workers between 35 and 50. The majority were under 35, with no buffer between them and the workers over 50. The older workers had experienced the initial organization by the U.E. (United Electrical radio and machine Workers of America) which had been tied to the Communist Party, the shift from the U.E. to the I.U.E. (accomplished in part by some skillfull red-baiting) in the early fifties, and the disastrous strike of 1956. Those older workers with whom I spoke often referred to that strike as something to be avoided, six months of struggle and deprivation which culminated in the forfeiture of mortgages, the loss of all savings, indebtedness and the introduction of measured day work, incentive plans and increased taylorization. The officers of the union had emerged in the early fifties from this social group and they remained wedded together through years of experience and social life.

The younger workers, on the other hand, had only second hand experience of that defeat. Surprisingly few of them came from families which had been part of that strike. Many of them were Vietnam veterans, residents of the many small industrial towns perched along the Monongahela River. Though they were young, none were new to the plant. Because of lay-offs over the past year, no one with less than three years of seniority was currently employed. Although many had made commitments to a "life" in the plant (through using their veterans' benefits to learn skills which enabled them to move rapidly up the job ladder) and though most of them held "skilled" jobs, few liked their work. Lateness and Friday absenteeism were frequent, and many of the pickets referred to disciplinary lay-offs they had received in the last two years for mouthing off to foremen or for getting caught smoking pot on the job.

The small number of black workers present at first glance was deceiving. Over the course of the week I saw quite a few black pickets, took note of the casualness of their relations with the white pickets and observed the respect accorded to several of them, a respect won in the early hours of Tuesday morning when a group of nearly a thousand of white collar employees tried to break through the picket lines and were physically repelled. I point out the role of the black workers for a particular reason, over and above the inter-racial solidarity it represented. Just a few years ago, there were several all-black walk-outs at Westinghouse, but none of the walk-outs were actively supported by their white fellow workers.

There were no women picketers (though later in the week some wives of strikers and friends appeared). I was surprised for the electrical industry is known as a major employer of women production workers. When I asked where the women were, I was told that very few of the production workers were women, and those that were were over 50, worked in an isolated part of the plant and had had little to do with any activity in the plant. There were a lot of women employees, but they were salaried workers and they were on the other side of the street every morning, seeking to return to work (more on this problem later).

According to the strikers, the union had had little presence on the shop floor. Each person I spoke with was able to recount his own tale of grievance filed more than a year ago (or even two years before in some cases) which had never been resolved. In the past two years, many had stopped filing grievances altogether and had turned to brief protest walk-outs. These usually involved fewer than a dozen men, who would walk out for any variety of reasons, march up the street to the union hall, where more times than not they found no one but the hired secretary present, and then return to the plant where they would receive three-day disciplinary lay-offs. Many complained that they were never able to draw out other workers, those who worked nearby but were not directly affected by the cause of the grievance. Uniformly, the union was seen as a laughing stock, totally irrelevant to their work-place problems and generally unresponsive to their wage demands at contract time. At one time or another, most had attended a few union meetings, but, often rebuffed in their attempts to speak their peace, few went any more. In the five days I spent at the plant gates, I heard much more anger directed at the union than at the company. Some workers also noted this fact, and often criticized other strikers for forgetting that the fight was against the company and not the union. But the vast majority of the pickets saw the strike was against both, and if a line had to be drawn, they were actually angrier against the union.

Anger at the union took many forms, both during the strike and in the years before it. Clearly, the vast majority of workers had simply ceased to participate in the union or to see themselves in it. But there were two reform groups within the plant.

The larger and more established was the "Members for Democracy", modelled after the movement ("MFD") which had propelled Arnold Miller to the presidency of the United Mine Workers (UMW). They were young, mainly veterans of the war, employed in the plant for 7-15 years and seen as "radicals" by many of the other strikers. From all accounts, they had distinguished themselves in the past by shop-floor militancy, numerous small walk-outs, and more than their proportionate share in disciplinary lay-offs. Some three years ago, they organized the "MFD", their main formal activity being the running of opposition candidates in shop steward elections. An "MFD" activist explained to me that they had not done terribly well in the elections, even though they had carefully selected candidates according to "electability". The "MFD" had no clear program to offer save for more "democracy" in the union and a more militant profile inside the shop. Many of the strikers were suspicious of the "MFD", though most got along well with individual members. The group had no particular presence on the picket line and played no leadership role in the strike itself.

The second, but smaller group, was the "Membership Group", which had been formed three years earlier, breaking away from the "MFD". The "Membership Group" had been begun by a few workers who wanted to run for steward on the "MFD" slate, but were turned down, largely for reasons of personality conflicts. They decided to run anyway, and organized the "Membership Group" to support their own candidacy. The "reform" vote was thus split, enabling the official union slate to win most of the steward positions.

Each group had had some success, however, electing a few stewards, who now, three years later, had become indistinguishable from the other stewards in the plant, but neither had any new ideas about what to do. They were dutifully preparing for the upcoming fall union elections, in which they now hoped to oust the established union officialdom.

Other strikers did have some ideas about what they might do. Some

circulated petitions to decertify the union and talked of switching to the U.E. (one striker said: "I heard they used to pull the whole plant on grievances, taking everyone down to the ballfiled until it was resolved.") or even the Teamsters ("Now there is a militant union," said another striker.). While some hoped that the union would make the strike official, others said that they would go fishing rather than picket once the strike received union sanction. A few thought that they might make a go of it without an official union at all, but most felt that the rank and file were so internally divided that this could never happen.

A final area which must be covered in this discussion of the background to the strike is the position and role of the white collar workers. They are in a separate union, open only to salaried employees of Westinghouse (seen as a company union by many of the blue collar workers). They are a very heterogeneous group, from female secretaries to male industrial engineers, with a huge number and variety of occupations in between. Many of them, especially the women, are related to the production workers (mothers, wives, sisters, cousins). They had never engaged in any actions independent of their union or independent of the blue-collar workers' union. The strikers felt that they had it easy, working in air conditioned offices and receiving raises every time the blue-collar workers did. The widespread original hostility was heightened during the strike, as masses of salaried employees lined up across the street from the main gate each day, looking for a chance to get through the lines. Interestingly enough, although the majority of salaried workers were women, the vast majority of those who appeared every day were men. As the strike wore on, it was this group which was to become the lightning rod for the strikers' hostility.

THE STRIKE

Following months of negotiations, the contract between Westinghouse and the several unions representing its employees expired at midnight on Sunday, July 11. Earlier that day, members of the I.U.E. had voted in a mass meeting that there should be no extensions granted to the company. The union officers agreed with the sentiments expressed and stated that they would abide by the strike vote. Westinghouse workers well remembered that three years earlier they had worked for weeks under a day-to-day extension, and then had been screwed out of retroactive pay increases. They were thus determined not to let it happen again.

To their surprise, newscasts on local television and radio stations at 11.00 P.M. that night announced that a day-to-day extension had been agreed to by both the I.U.E. and the U.E. The unions released statements informing their members that they were to report for work as usual on Monday morning. Most everyone did report as ordered but few worked. After two hours of discussion the men in the tool room decided to walk out. They went into the maintenance department (which was next to them) where a similar decision had been made. At 10.00 A.M. the workers from both departments walked out of the plant and marched to the union hall. There they were told to return to work. After all, they represented only a minority of the work-force, and the union represented everyone. The men returned to the plant, but not to work. They spread out and talked to other workers, most of whom were also discussing the situation rather than working. Within an hour some 800 angry workers left the plant and made the trek up the hill to the union hall. They too were told that there was nothing to do, that they should return to work. Furious, they went back to the plant, arriving just as everyone was breaking for lunch. Roaming throughout the cafeteria, they managed to pull out the majority of the first shift. Picket signs were drawn up, and when the second shift arrived at 2.30 several hundred picketers stood at the front gate. No one tried to cross. Some stayed to join in the picketing and discussions. For the first time in twenty years, strikers had succeeded in shutting down the entire complex.

While it is not surprising that the initial impulse came from the tool room and the maintenance departments (both departments are characterized by work that brings them into contact with many other workers in the course of the day, and both departments had had several small wild-

ts of their own in the past months), they were to play no particular role in the rest of the strike. While they had started it they were not to lead it. In fact no one (or everyone, depending on your perspective) led the strike, though some tried. There were no spokesmen, no picket captains, no leaders. People came to picket when they felt it was most needed and when they felt like it. Workers met workers from other shifts whom they might never have met otherwise. Spirits were high. One picket told me Tuesday morning, "You should have seen us last night, we owned the town!" Most were amazed at what they had done. Few knew what to do next. Many had some ideas, but there was little agreement and no meetings to work out plans.

On the morning of the second day of the strike there was quite a battle between picketers and some salaried employees who tried to cross the lines. They were knocked to the ground, and the white-collar employees on the other side of the street were pelted with eggs. (Picketers developed the tactic of waiting until a bus or big truck passed between them and the salaried workers, and then tossed eggs over its top.) Later that morning, a group of twenty or so left the lines, got in cars, and went to the union hall. They made no appeals to the union officers. Rather they walked in, announced that the officers had better get out, helped along those who were too slow in clearing out, locked the door, put up a hand-scrawled sign reading "union hall closed", and put a picket line around the building. Two car-loads returned to the main gate blowing their horns and shaking their fists. A loud cheer greeted their announcement of what they had done.

Meanwhile a group of stewards and activists sought to "organize" the strike. In the basement of a nearby bar, members of "M.F.D.", the Membership Group", and stewards who had been the official candidates sat together and mapped out a strategy. First of all, they needed a picket captain for every gate at every shift. No one asked why this was needed. A list of names was rattled off, some of whom were men who had yet to show on the picket line at all! Secondly, picketing would have to be arranged by shift, with strikers reporting to picket on the shifts they normally worked. Thirdly, a command center would be set up, which would remain in contact with all the gates via CB radios. Finally, the picketing of the union hall would have to stop. After all, the point had been made, the protest had been registered. Here obviously was the union-to-be, working out its plans, burying the hatchet, readying itself to take over.

The next morning when I arrived at the picket lines, I was surprised to find no captains. What, I asked, had happened? One striker told me that there had been a mass meeting the night before where it had been decided by an overwhelming majority that there was no need for captains. A show of hands had demonstrated more than ample picket strength for each gate. Many feared that an injunction would be granted (which it was), and they felt that if there were no leaders, the cops would never be able to figure out how to serve the injunction (and they were right). The plans of the organizers had been thwarted. While the strikers still (and never really did) could not articulate what it was that they wanted, they had a good idea of what they did not want.

Bitterness grew over the next few days, replacing the elation of the first two days as the spirit of the picket line. More eggs were thrown at the white-collar employees. Eggs were also thrown at the members of the N.C.L.C. and I.S. who showed up to peddle their newspapers. (While a few strikers were suspicious of me and my friends, most were very open when we explained why we were there). Newsmen from channel 2, the local Westinghouse Broadcasting station, were also chased away. Each day, there were questions about what was happening elsewhere in the strike, as the wildcat had spread throughout the industry, hitting U.E. as well as I.U.E. shops. But no one suggested (let alone went to do it) that people should visit the lines at other Westinghouse plants, many of which were within a few hours drive at the most. No one suggested crossing the street to talk with the white-collar workers. Actually, we made such suggestions, but no strikers were interested.

On Friday, an attempt to serve an injunction met with utter failure. No one budged, and the cops failed to back up their words with action. This refusal to yield brought out the only cheer heard on the line after the closing of the union offices. Clearly, the mood had changed. The

strikers became pessimistic. Some said that the contract had actually been signed, and the union was only waiting for the opportunate moment to announce it. Others said that the strike would be made official on Saturday and then they would go home. Few recognized the objective accomplishment of their own actions - they had shut the most important Westinghouse plant; they had closed the plant for the first time in 20 years, other Westinghouse workers all over the state and the region were following their example, they had taken a giant step, which looked like a baby step in light of the uphill battle they felt they faced. After all, they reasoned, sooner or later, they would have to go back to work, and until they straightened out all this funny business with "their" union they could not really expect anything to change.

And so it was. On Saturday, the union made the strike official, new pickets appeared, new signs appeared, the old hand-painted signs disappeared. On Tuesday the company and the union announced that the strike had been settled. And the next day the men began to return to work.

CONCLUSION

Was the end of the strike a conclusion? Was it a beginning? Neither, I think. Rather, it was part of a long-term struggle, growing out of dissatisfaction, boredom, anger, and the series of short wildcats which had punctuated the recent past. At an opportune moment (the termination of a contract), these emotions and activities came to the surface publicly. The wildcat was a new step, for it reached the whole plant and all three shifts. The struggle will return to the shopfloor, perhaps encouraged by the wildcat. For most, little will have changed, though each will have had a little taste of that power which is theirs alone - to bring production to a halt once and for all, and to begin to experiment and seek out new ways to make the maximum use of our daily lives. Until that time, we all will continue to dance to others' tunes, to punch their time clocks, to follow their directions. For a week, a large group of men in East Pittsburgh said no. Their activity encouraged others to say no. They did not turn the world upside down, but they did start a small-tremor. Who knows when and where it will next erupt?

THE COAL MINERS STRUGGLES 1975-1976

THE MINERS UNION AND AMERICAN CAPITALISM

In 1973 a new bureaucracy was promoted to the head of the United Mine Workers Union (U.M.W.); its entire campaign for a "rank and file union" had exploited the rift between the shop floor and the old union bureaucracy caused by their contempt for rank and file demands ("grievances") in the employer-union contracts. Accidents and illnesses resulting from work in the mines (silicosis being the most frequent) are very frequent in the Middle East, a region which is - outside the mines - very poor. The miners were not fooled by the state of corruption and the role the miners union bureaucracy played. The old U.M.W. president Boyle, who was replaced by the new "democratic" Miller, is spending his retirement in a federal penitentiary for having ordered the murder of his closest rival for the presidency before Miller, Yablonsky (and all his family!). To save the unions reputation, it was best that this "president" be removed from his functions under pretext of "democratization" before being put away by capitalist "justice" which could not help itself.

The new more "democratic" bureaucracy did exactly the same things as the old one; the new contract it signed in 1974 more or less forbade the possibility of strike action to deal with daily problems of exploitation. The mine companies had obtained in 1970 a judgement from the Supreme court which authorised the employers to take out injunctions ordering a return to work in the case of walk-outs at the pits (with prison sentences for those who refused and fines). This possibility had been widely used, including and above all against reactions provoked by deliberate violations of contract agreements, especially as regards safety regulations. This agreement would last until December 1977, the end of the present contract.

The difficulties of American capitalism led to an increased pressure on the miners. (1) and in reaction to this there were many limited and local wildcat strikes - 1,400 since January 1st 1975. In one colliery, a company even took out an injunction banning all strikes until the end of the contract, under threat of fines of 50 dollars per striker per day of strike (\$ 50 is about £ 30).

THE 1975 WILDCAT STRIKE

On August 4th, the president of the U.M.W. local 1302 Roger Thomson was sacked for interfering with lay-off plans. The next day a strike broke out. The federal judge for that district, K.K. Hall ordered the men back to work. The strike spread to the 33 mines of Logan County, West Virginia. The union local was fined 6000 dollars. Sam Howze, the black president of the mostly white local 1454 was imprisoned for at least 50 days after having been given the choice of returning to work or going to prison. This only made the strike spread further into the whole of West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Illinois and Alabama. Miller as U.M.W. president tried to appeal to the violation of arbitration regulations to draw the movement back into the frame of the contract ... and the men back to work of course. The result was nil, rallies, mass meetings and flying pickets were organized by the rank and file. Among the most active in the strike have been the locals of districts 17 and 29 in West Virginia, who were among the only districts that voted by an overwhelming majority for the restrictive 1974 contract proposed by Miller. On August 29, 80,000 miners were on strike.

(1) The pressure is relatively even greater than elsewhere, since coal mining in the U.S.A. is no longer a sector in crisis. Coal production rose from 400 million tons in 1961 to 590 millions in 1973 and it is calculated it will triple in the next 10 years making the USA independent from outside for its energy.

To get round the fines and injunctions which hit the miners mines, a new tactic has been organized. The miners of one pit man the pickets of a totally different mine and are replaced at their own mines by miners from elsewhere. Thus the strike has caught on like wild-fire. A Virginia miner told reporters that miners from Pennsylvania said to the contingent "Where have you been? We've been waiting. Shut our mine down and we'll take care of the rest of the state."

On August 25th, after the arrest of Sam Howze, a demonstration was organized in Charleston: the roads were all blocked, there was considerable rioting and looting of the local union headquarters on which demonstrators placed a notice "closed for strike". The reply of judge Hall to the growing strike has been to increase fines against the U.M.W.: 500,000 dollars and 100,000 dollars each day the strike continued. But the U.M.W. can do nothing, Miller has ordered the presidents of the sections to give their members orders to cross the picket lines. A striking miner said at a mass meeting "We have got a foot in the door, and we won't stop until we're all the way in." Another said: "I worked hard for Miller three years ago, and I'm going to work just as hard to get him out." Such responses met with great applause. Despite the spontaneous spread of the strike, its strength and self-organization, articles in the "extreme left" press talk of the weakness of the strike, which according to them has no organization and liaison at a national level. By mid September, however, the miners talked of blocking all the transport of coal including in the ports.

It was nevertheless at this moment, the beginning of September, that the strike was to end without the miners having obtained anything at all. One of the ambiguities of the strike had been the demand for the "right" to strike for "grievances" (which came apparently from the union locals and local delegates, who saw in the right to strike demand a way of keeping their power in the local apparatus), while there was effectively a real strike already (which was rank and file action for a variety of demands)

The combined effects of the contract clauses and injunctions involving prison and fines finally won over the strike. The Union finished by acting "energetically", called upon to do so by a federal court judgement ordering it to act "promptly and efficiently, using all reasonable means to stop illegal strike picketing in work stoppages". The executive committee of the U.M.W. decided that "in urgent cases, it could take union members to court if their actions seriously threatened the union's integrity". They refused to defend miners imprisoned for participating in pickets at pits where they did not work and they refused to pay fines. They voted a 10-point resolution determining how stoppages should be carried out in future. In particular, they declared it illegal for the 2nd and the 3rd day shifts to strike automatically if the first shift walked out and they forbade the use of union funds to pay fines or expenses incurred during wildcat strikes.

The strike had unleashed an anti-red hysteria from the bosses, including union bosses, against strike leaders. However, apart from one or two more or less influenced by the Maoists, those most active in the strike committee were not linked to any group or party. Better still, the few strikers who tried to propagandize for their group during the strike, were soon jumped upon and some even beaten up by the strikers.

1976: THE MINERS AGAINST THE COURTS

The end of the 1975 strike was but an amistice in the unceasing fight of labour against capital. This time again, the conflicts was to reappear over an apparently insignificant detail - one of the many "grievances" - and not on a question of principle, where some would like to pla in the struggle. It began at Cedar coal field near Charleston (West Virginia), (2) when the miners demanded that a communications job recently set up by the management should be held by an experienced miner for safety reasons. The union local 1759 submitted this demand according to "grievance procedure"

(2) West Virginia produces 400,000 tons of coal daily, above all for the steel works.

is instituted in the 1974 contract. The company refused to name someone precise for the job under the pretext that it was a new job and therefore fell outside of the 1974 agreement. A first walk-out took place in June 1976 and following this, the management and the unions decided to submit the issue to federal arbitration. On July 9th, the arbitrator decided in favour of the company. A week later, district judge Knapp (3) slapped on the local union branches a 50,000 dollar fine (about £ 30,000) and 25,000 dollars (about £ 15,000) for each day the strike continued. The union's local branch only had 28 dollars (£ 17) in funds!

The union was bound by its own agreements and could not do otherwise even had it so wanted. But the miners did not have the same interest at all and were bound by nothing. On July 24th, the strike broke out - this time a real wildcat - begun in Logan County but spreading rapidly. A call was put out to all miners to denounce as scabs all miners working at a pit even if the pickets were temporarily absent. (4)

On July 27th, Miller appealed to the miners to go back to work at the moment when the strike had already reached four states - 60,000 miners in West Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky and Maryland. The railroad's began to lay off their drivers, because there was not anything left to transport. Miller declared "I think it is important for all members of the U.M.W. to understand that continuing this strike will not serve the aims we pursue (5) but can only harm them ... I call upon and order all union locals to put out an order for the next shift to return to work." The same day, to stress this ultimatum, 213 miners were charged with "contempt of court".

In reply to these threats, 60,000 miners out of 150,000 were still on strike on July 28th. Miller tried to get his way to Charleston on July 29th in front of 100 miners delegates from the strikers (probably in part at least rank and file union stewards); he could get a word in! It was complete deadlock. Miller said "We will begin negotiations once you have returned to work." The delegates replied "Negotiate first. We'll go back to work afterwards."

The strike spread still further to Illinois, Pennsylvania, Indiana and even Colorado. Miller declared that the union would be bankrupt if the strike continued (because of fines). He was speaking of course of the loss of his own position, very richly paid. 75,000 miners were on strike on July 29th, 100,000 on August 8th, although users said - especially the steel mills) they only had 3 months of reserve stocks. On August 9th, the union ordered an immediate return to work, threatening the expulsion from and shutting down of local union branches, if the strike continued. Miller was sternly taken to task by his own union bureaucracy for "badly fulfilling his functions": two wildcat strikes in two years. That's two too many for a union president. On August 1th, Miller was to talk at Charleston in front of the strikers' stewards. A picket was posted at the door of the meeting hall which was occupied by striking miners. Miller gave up the idea of talking.

However, during this occupation, one could see the emergence of a dual conflict: the miners had not only to confront the head of the union (as they had done since the beginning of the strike), but also the local union representatives - the stewards - who had supported and even helped the strike at first. The 100 local presidents decided to turn about face because 300 local union representatives decided they had had enough and voted (300 against 3) to return to work.

On August 12th, thousands of miners in Virginia went back to work. Only a few continued on strike until 213 of their mates on charges came up before the courts. A steward of local 1353 at Mount Hope - Doug Wriston -

(3) Knapp was given this job by Nixon and is strongly supported by the corrupt West Virginia governor Archie Moor.

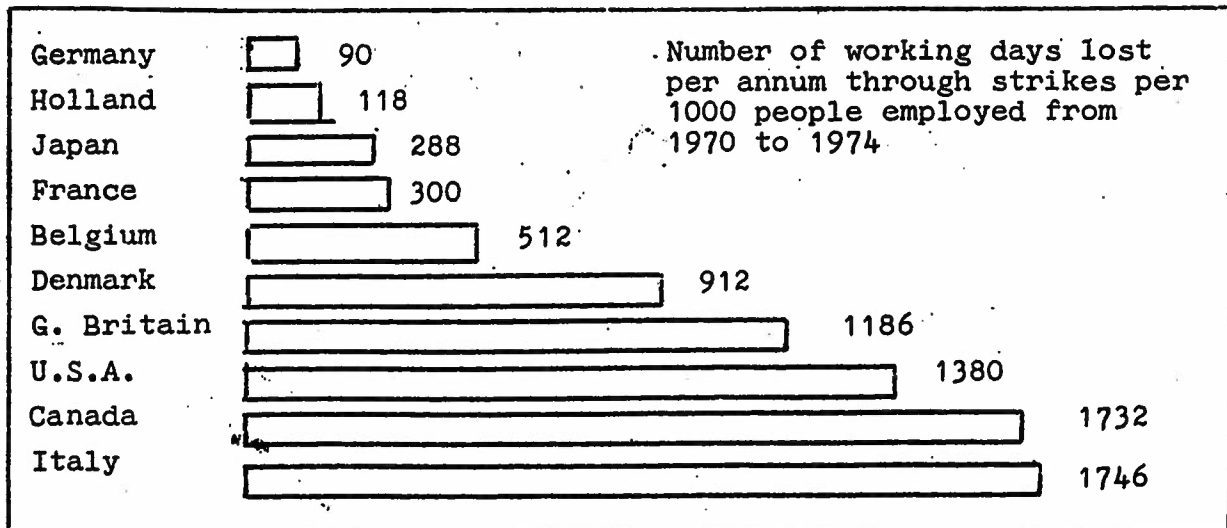
(4) This goes further than before, because a mine "picketed in principle" can be shut while no actual pickets are present!

(5) He is right. The interests of the miners and the unions are totally different

summed up the situation perfectly. "The vast majority of the rank and file supported the strike, but the threat of expulsion from the union was what made them go back to work. If we are beaten, we will go back to work, but we will organize and we will start again." (6)

This conflict reveals the complexity of relations between workers and unions in the U.S.A. on 3 levels:

- for the rank and file, the conflict is daily and constant for the defence of working conditions; the right to strike for grievances is not a principle, but a vital element, because all the complex procedures thought up in the contract is only a means of pushing aside everything which affects, specifically, safety. But all struggle on this ground immediately becomes doubly political. It directly hits energy policy and makes a gaping whole in the legal apparatus for the solution of conflicts. The conflict of power is expressed not only with the state, by the refusal to take notice of employers injunctions against the strikes, but just as much with the union apparatus, which in the 1976 strike brandished the weapon of expulsion, which for the individual miners could mean the loss of their job in regions where there are often no other jobs;
- for the local leaders, the presidents and representatives of the local union branches, what is important is to keep a certain autonomy for themselves as union representatives, vis avis the rank and file whose struggles they use as a means of manoeuvring against the bureaucracy higher up (at the beginning, because of the situation we described above they had no difficulty in doing this whose power of negotiation at the highest level and a well regulated arbitration procedure lead to the local representatives' virtual elimination (they are only the agents, transmitting orders). So the local stewards and "presidents" successively play off the rank and file against the union executive and then (when the executive threatens to shut down local union branches and also with the prospect of secret negotiation on the "devolution" of power) they play-off executives against the rank and file, in ordering men back to work without consultation;
- for the union bureaucracy, there are certainly conflicts between clans which find expression in the action of local leaders. But, above all, there is the necessity to continue to conserve the essential in the face of the employers i.e. to be a union organization capable of maintaining contact with the rank and file and capable of keeping its "troops" in order at all costs. The court injunctions in the 1975 strike are an opportune reminder that this is their function and that if they do not fulfill it, they can be held responsible financially. This explains their sanctions against the rank and file and the union locals.



(6) In an advertisement against the strike paid by the employers union (Bituminous Coal Operators Association) in the New York Times of 10th August, it is said that since 1974 there have been 4,355 wilcat strikes in the mines.

CONCERNING AUTOMATION IN THE PRESS

THE INTERNATIONAL TYPOGRAPHICAL UNION (ITU) AND AUTOMATION

(Extracts from an article written by a comrade who works as a printer for a San Francisco newspaper)

The agreement reached the end of July 1975 between the "Big six", the famous and important I.T.U. local branches and the Daily News and the New York Times, inaugurated a new era in the newspaper industry. The length of the contract (14 years) and its terms provoked considerable attention from those industries affected by automation. The I.T.U. has irrevocably turned a new page, some say the last page, in its history.

Those in the newspaper industry recognised for some time that a decisive conflict was inevitable, when the previous contract expired in March 1973. The New York papers are an anachronism in the industry. The Miami Herald (without an I.T.U. contract) printed twice as many pages as the N.Y. Times with half the personnel; led by their dynamic president Bert Powers, the New York printers had yielded little ground to the publishers during the last decades. The price was often a costly strike for both sides; the I.T.U. had always succeeded in getting substantial wage rises and in slowing down the development of automation. In 1970, the publishers solemnly declared that they were negotiating for the last time with a knife on their throats and in position of inferiority. They were decided to win back their liberty of action and they were carefully preparing the confrontation.

The newspapers most touched by automation - the Daily News and the N.Y. Times - first made a defensive pact. Then they secretly began to buy new equipment and to train hand-picked staff.

When Powers decided to strike, his positions had deteriorated. All the other unions had signed agreements with the publishers and declared that they would not support a strike by the I.T.U. which they considered unjustified. The national executive of the I.T.U. for its part, not wanting to get involved in a conflict whose result was doubtful, refused stubbornly to recognise the strike. Powers chose the Daily News as his target. Instead of using the normal tactics - the holding of daily and interminable meetings in the printworks - the tactic of lightning strikes was adopted and of go-slows. Several million dollars of advertisements were not published. The Daily News stepped up its preparations and delivered an ultimatum to the print workers: if no agreement was reached in a few days, the new equipment would come into operation.

New discussions were deadlocked. The ultimatum expired, three workers refused to handle the negatives produced by the new machines and were fired then and there. In a flush of raging, powerless temper, Powers got hold of an engraved plate and smashed it. Thrown out of the building, the print workers set up a picket which was ignored by other workers. With the aid of the N.Y. Times, the Daily News continued to appear and to improve its production with every day. To the extent that the Daily News claimed it was ready, under certain conditions, to open its door to the workers, the I.T.U. refused to consider the incident as a lock-out, thus robbing the "Big six" of strike pay ... A final effort at conciliation resulted in the end in an agreement in which each side made substantial concessions.

The new contract guarantees full employment for life to those already established and for temporary replacements registered with the newspapers before a certain date. No worker can be fired for any reason, but only suspended during the contract. To reduce members in the largely overstaffed print works, large bonus's - sometimes amounting to a whole year's pay - were offered to encourage the older workers to take an early retirement. In addition each worker has an additional six months paid holiday during the length of the contract.

The contract is the longest in union history. As far as wages are concerned, it expires in the fatal year of 1984. Generally, it is workers seeking job stability who want long contracts. At New York, Powers realis-

ed very well that the guarantee of a job for life could become a false security, if the print workers saw their wages effectively decline once automation was achieved. For example the guarantee of a job for life obtained in the San Francisco region is totally independent of the normal wage contracts. Independently from an immediate backdated rise, the New York printers will receive a "productivity" rise of 3% plus a percentage reflecting the rise in the cost of living. Discussions on wages could take place in 1978 and 1981.

The New York contracts, after the San Francisco agreements, has inspired other papers, although such good terms cannot be obtained in the smaller places.

In exchange, the union agreed firstly to abandon the practise of re-composing and then destroying advertisements coming from other papers and advertising agencies, months after their publication. In addition, the union gave up all control and all rights to interfere in the organization of production. The publishers had achieved their aim: complete freedom to automate the printing of newspapers. The contract illustrates the conflict between immediate and future, general and particular interests. It can appear quite legitimately to be a blessing for the New York printworkers, many of whom are getting on and have not much hope of finding work elsewhere. But its effects in the long term for the I.T.U. are far from entirely beneficial.

The I.T.U. has paid a heavy price, that of the survival of immediate advantages conceded to its members. Analysing meticulously the New York agreement, the N.Y. Times wrote in their 19th July issue that it was the I.T.U.'s "death certificate" and that the present contract showed a total change in attitude towards rational discussion and also represented the slow slide towards the forgetting of the typographers union to the extent that it had effectively condemned itself to accepting reality, i.e. that "Automation is indispensable for the survival of the newspaper industry."

The majority of last years' strikes in the Newspapers industry ended in defeat. Except at Pittsburgh, production of papers were not stopped. At Akron all the unions supported the press operators strike, but the paper continued to appear. After a week, the members of the other unions went back to work. The paper is now published with new staff, reduced by half.

This situation is pushing the unions towards the unification of craft unions into one industrial union... In fact the real obstacles to unification are the rival interests of union bureaucrats. After several failures, the I.T.U. leadership has proposed once again to extend the mandates of the Executive Council from 2 to 4 years. This it appears, in order to "favorise" unification.

The unification of printing and communications crafts appears to be a swindle, if it is gained at the price of yet more erosion of union democracy.

STRIKE AND SABOTAGE AT THE WASHINGTON POST

(Texts taken from Fifth Estate, Oct./Nov. 1975. The Washington Post -W.P. in the text - is a liberal bourgeois newspaper. The information comes from two of the strikers.

This action took place within the context of the renewal of the same type of contract as those described above, during which the W.P., like other papers, through the introduction of new techniques, tried to take back advantages, which it accepted previously as necessitated by old techniques.)

"In one of the most militant job actions in recent years, nearly one hundred press operators for the W.P. sabotaged and destroyed every piece of press machinery in the Post building, moments before going out on strike at 5.00 A.M. on October 1st. Since then, over 1500 Post workers have been on strike over the newspapers refusal to bargain on key issues in a new contract. Each of the Post's 72 units was destroyed in the action.

lant ton and a half paper spools and trash cans were thrown into the running presses. Delicate parts were intentionally destroyed and press locking mechanisms turned on while the press was in full run, destroying gears and making unlocking the machinery next to impossible.

'Everybody knows the machine they work on and knows exactly how to destroy it,' the typesetter continued. Damage was estimated in the millions and an insurance investigator said, 'I have never seen so much damage in my life'...

The Post described the sabotage as "wanton vandalism" but admitted it appeared to be "preplanned and synchronized". 'It would be impossible for those kinds of damage to be done in that short of time, without assigned tasks, and without people who knew exactly what they were doing,' a Post spokesperson said.

Only hours after the October 1st accident, the Post confirmed the union's fears by 'furloughing' (another word for lock-out) their printers, typesetters and other press craft union members. Picket lines were established immediately and a major shuffle broke out when one person crossing the picket line punched a picketeer."

(The strike continued with the appearance of scabs, private police, a court judgement ordering the limitation of the number of workers on the picket lines to 3 and the typset being lifted by helicopter to clandestine print works ...)

"As of October 13th, the Post reported that four of the major presses were repaired and that they were able to print a 24-page edition using Post presses. However, one of the presses worth millions of dollars was declared completely unsalvageable."

(This action did not stop the strike ending more or less the same way as other strikes described above; the union kept its position and function in the system by bending to the new demands of the W.P. for the setting up of new techniques of production.)

BOOKS

For those who read English, 3 books which could help in giving a critical approach to the condition of workers and to the New Movement in the U.S.A.:

Root and Branch - The rise of the workers movement, 1975, published by Fawcett paperbacks or from Root and Branch, P.O. Box 236, Somerville, Massachusetts 02143 USA.

Strike, by Jeremy Brecher, Straight Arrow Press 1972.

Working, by Studs Terkel, Avon Books 1975.

These books are easily obtainable from left bookshops in London and in Great Britain generally or directly from any of the American groups listed on page 7.

See also the article "A decisive conflict", organized labour versus the revolt against work, by John Zerzan, published by Telos, a magazine in Washington, and reprinted in England by Solidarity London, 123 Lathom Road, London E 6.

This was translated into French by "Echanges", who also intend eventually to participate in the French translation of certain passages of "Root and Branch" and "Strike" in association with the publishers of "Spartacus".

Echanges will also soon be publishing a translation of "Wildcat - Dodge Truck" of June 1974, published originally by Black and Red (for address see page 7) and reprinted by Solidarity London (address see above).

NOTES ON THE FARM WORKERS STRUGGLE

American agriculture is the most industrialised in the world, the most "productive" (1) and the most concentrated; except in certain regions (Vermont, some zones in the South East) there are only large private domains belonging to big monopolistic bosses (like the heads of chemical producing industries, fertilizer manufacturers etc.).

In California, for example, the industry is a vast complicated business involving several billion dollars in which agriculture has become a "megalo-industry" using computers and with shares quoted on the stock-market. 6% Of the farms (industrial-agricultural domains) account for 75% of the entire cultivated surface. Well known industrial names are at the head of these big businesses: the Bank of America, the Butte Oil Co., Standard Oil (Esso), the Pacific Railroad and the Di-Georgio Fruit Co carve up between them the biggest slice of the cake and with the aid of their more modest neighbours they provide the American market with 90% of its grapes, fruit and vegetables.

If solidarity between workers is sometimes difficult to obtain, that of the bosses is already established and effective. Norman Chandler, director of Safeway (one of the biggest American supermarket chains) is at the same time owner of the Los Angeles Times, president of the Time Mirror company and, (on the side!) vice-president of a ranch of 67.200 hectares (about 170,000 acres) in California (2).

Working for this powerful group of bosses is a very large agricultural proletariat (nearly 10 million workers, only one third of whom is registered as regularly employed). The situation is therefore very different of that of France where out of an active agricultural population of two million (often small or medium size family farmers) only 350,000 are wage earners (including 100,000 part-time) (3).

During the whole American process of concentration and industrialization of agriculture, the workers have revolted against their working conditions (4), which are particularly hard. This was true of the blacks in the Southern cotton fields or in the orange groves of Florida, or of the farm workers in the great plains of the North working on arable land or with live-stock, or in the cornbelt of the center of the country. Repression however was always very severe, the more so, since these millions of farmworkers had never - until only 15 years ago - been able to really organise on a national scale. They were not even unionised during the great struggles of the 1920's and 1930's. This was due among other things to the fact that three quarters of them were still seasonal workers, itinerants travelling to where the harvests and the work were, changing bosses several times during a year and moving right across the country from East to West. In addition the vast majority belonged to minority ethnic groups of a sort of "subproletariat": mexicans, blacks, philippino's, indians, european immigrants from the poorer countries, etc.

For the last 15 years the farm workers have begun to fight, to organise on a wide scale and this movement was born chiefly in California. There for over a quarter of a century the cultivating of cereals has been progressively replaced by the cultivation of fruit and vegetables of all sorts, thanks to the irrigation of the vast plains and valleys of California. In this transformation, an important labour force was needed, more or less seasonal, which was recruited among immigrant mexicans and philippino's, who were often temporary and (especially the mexicans) illegal immigrants. They accepted work therefore, without being officially registered and without entitlement to social and health benefits, receiving low wages and working in appalling conditions: even in 1971 the average

- (1) At the price of incredible ecological destruction, see article by David Simpson "La Viande" in Review Les Temps Modernes of 1976.
- (2) In French "La longue marche des farmworkers" by Michael, available for 5Fr., his address is: B.P. 26, 71.800 La Clayette, France.
- (3) In French "Les paysans face à la révolution" in Revue La Jeune Taupe, no. 9810, Librairie Parallèle, 41 rue St. Honoré, Paris I.
- (4) see next page

age of a farm worker, was no more than 2,000 dollars a year (10,000 F.F. or about £1,200) and average life expectancy was 49 years; the infant mortality rate was twice the national average and the death rate through accidents 3 times as high as nationally (800 killed through poisoning by pesticides in 1972); a quarter of the workers are under 16 years old! 90% of the families had no sink in their houses and 97% no bath or shower in 1972 (these are official figures).

In the face of this shocking exploitation, the first great revolts broke out. More especially the philippino and "chicano" (Americans of mexican origin) workers began to organise local committees whose coordination gave rise to the United Farm workers (U.F.W.), spurred on by several strikes on the big ranches where several militants, like Cesar Chavez (current president of the U.F.W.) quickly became the leaders without at first dominating the movement (4).

The movement was also very linked to the revolt of the "minorities" en masse, especially that of the chicanos (4) and because of this was not only very quickly popularised and supported by minority town workers but led to an enlargement of demands and a challenging of the limitations of a simple struggle for the defence of the labor force. From the beginning the movement was animated by a "community spirit and practice" in the sense that what was important was that people should express themselves and manage to take affairs into their own hands and to organise: autonomous committees were set up in struggles, decisions were taken at mass meetings (the U.F.W. only gave its material aid, it did not give instructions or try to direct), generalised self-help was instituted, self-run crèches and day care centres, a school - the Huelga School at Delano -, a home for old workers, a hospital, a union meeting house were all set up. Town workers, students, teachers etc. all lent their help. A system of community health insurance was set up. (There is no national health service in the States, where treatment and medicine is very dear and the insurance trusts very powerful.) Another characteristic of this movement was the right of all to say their piece. This right did not only encourage male workers to speak, but women as well, whether they worked for the farm companies or as housewives (the wives of farmworkers). So in participating in the movement they fought at the same time against traditional male domination and the very special, but not less traditional mexican version! This same right also allowed workers in other sectors, who helped or participated in the movement, to express what they had to say directly through strikes, boycotts, strike pickets, demonstrations, propaganda, festivals, dances etc.

There had always been many dispersed revolts, individual or collective, but repression was always very hard and many were killed or wounded without counting thousands of sackings, aided by the fact that the administration (state, justice, police) were in the pockets of the "agribusiness" bosses. But in September 1965 a strike broke out in 34 ranches at the same time in Delano; the different strike committees were able to get together this time, to coordinate, unite and form a mass block. The strike was quickly popularised by the farmworkers, aided by groups of urban workers and in December a huge boycott was organised of all agricultural products produced by Schenley industries.

The next year Schenley industries was forced to recognise the farmworkers committees ... for the first time!

A second contract recognising the committees was signed with the Di Georgio company after a three month strike, also with a boycott. On April 10th 1966 10,000 farmworkers marched 480 km (290 miles) from Delano to Sacramento to get support for their movement and to get their "union" known. In September their union joined the National Union Federation (A.F.L. - C.I.O.) and became the "United Farmworkers Organisation Committee". In October the firm Pirelli-Minetti was hit by the strike and boycott. In July 1967 this firm was also forced to recognise the union and other contracts (very precise collective bargaining agreements) were signed with some of the other big firms (Christian Brothers, Almaden, Gallo, No. Vitiato, Goldberg Co. etc.) under pressure of general strikes on the

(4) from the article "Le reveil d'une minorité: Les Chicanos" and a bibliography on the question "Regards sur la Californie" P.P.S. 18.1. '74 from La Documentation Française, 29 Quai Voltaire, Paris 7. There are several very detailed documents on the U.S.A. in this government sponsored collection.

farms and boycotts in the markets, shops and stores by the consumers.

Since 1968, the farmworkers have launched wholesale boycotts of the products of all companies not wanting to recognise their right to organise and negotiate contracts (on wage rises, better conditions for hiring, better work conditions etc.). First came the huge boycott of eating grapes then of lettuces and finally of wine (the most famous of which were Gallo Wines). At that epoch you could see Nixon in front of TV cameras eating grapes whose trademarks were known to be boycotted, which made him a subject of contempt and popularised the boycott more than ever. These boycotts were so successful that they forced these firms to negotiate with the farmworkers stewards, because stocks of unsold products piled up higher and higher ... In 1969 for example Dockers in London refused to unload 70,000 lbs of Californian grapes. They were to do the same in January 1974. All unions of Northern Europe took part in a real blockade of Californian grapes.

At the same time, workers had to face a very strong repression: against armed cops of the companies and official state police. Two members of the union were killed, hundreds wounded and 4,000 arrested on the farms producing lettuces alone (The Alternative Newspaper October 1974) in 1973.

The struggle is far from over on the contracts issue. The workers are still fighting against the bosses and their police, and also against state and government, which once again has just refused the unions' famous "Proposition 14", a law which would guarantee the representation of the U.F.W. at union elections in each company and give permission of union members to enter farms to spread information about workers rights (Rio Grande weekly of 12 November 1976). But the election of Carter as U.S. president means that eventually this law will be accepted ("Carter says 'yes' on '14' was the title of the U.F.W. paper El Macriado in September 1976).

The U.F.W. has also a harsh battle to face against the Teamsters Union, which wants to profit from the employers fear of the U.F.W. to sign union contracts at "bosses" prices, involving lower wage rates. The teamsters would like the complete control of a sector through the total monopoly of representation of the workforce (the Teamsters Union is the most corrupt union in the U.S.A., linked to the Mafia. It has among their two million members already exclusively as members of their organisation the truck drivers, packagers of food and workers of canneries and food processing plants).

As of now (January 1977) the U.F.W. has succeeded in pushing back the Teamsters by winning more contracts (50) and implanting themselves elsewhere than in the West, especially in Florida. But the U.F.W. itself is becoming a bureaucratic organisation as it spreads out so wide and is forced into compromises and contradictions (as it becomes a sort of buffer between farmworkers and employers), that a fringe movement, more autonomous, of farmworkers could develop without necessarily falling into the arms of the "Teamster" alternative.

It is undeniable that the U.F.W. has been effective in its reformist aims and that it has awoken a class awareness among farmworkers, who have taken their own defence into their own hands. But the victories and the evolution of the U.F.W. need to be analysed more deeply as regards content and forms of organisation, as well as in the implicit and explicit perspectives of the movement. If the first strikes broke out and were organised in an entirely spontaneous and autonomous way, and this includes the birth of the U.F.W., the organisation of the struggle for demands in this sector, which is backward from a social point of view for historical reasons, is little by little falling into the mould of classical trade unionism. The union now has leaders, officials, professional organisers, its ideology and its power (the non-violent ideas of Chavez, who has often become an idol, still dominate the movement today) and its compromises with institutions. The modern bosses recognise they need the union which in turn has dealt with the more integrated unions of the A.F.L. - C.I.O., the churches (they have papal support!) and liberal politicians (like Governor Brown of California). These compromises necessitate others and the U.F.W. is in fact forced to stifle, put a break on or suppress (at the level of expression of even of struggles themselves) revolutionary and autonomous tendencies, which could be harmful for obtaining official support.

The U.F.W. is treading the path all unions have done before it... they are led to smoothing out the fundamental contradiction between the private property of the exploiters and the more and more socialised production of the workers and their efforts are to the benefit of capitalist structures. In the face of the progressive intergration of their first real powerful means of struggle, one cannot say as yet whether the U.S. farmworkers will create a more autonomous movement, like the one we can already see in the industrial sector (wildcat strikes, anti-union and anti-capitalist movements and tendencies etc....). But already contradictions are exploding inside the U.F.W. within a union practise which becomes more hierarchical and more deeply involved in compromise (Chavez supported the Democratic candidates in the presidential elections) and an ideology which was backed up, perhaps, at one time with effective struggle, but with which more and more farmworkers, especially the young, refuse to identify. This ideology is one of social catholicism, non-violence and persuit of legal reforms. It does not fit what the young want any more.

The strikes and movements of the Californian farmworkers, unionised or not, is not the only movement against American agribusiness (5) E.g. more and more young people from the towns, as in all industrialised countries over the past 15 years, have gone to live in the country. Some work for the traditional agricultural businesses, others in a more "autonomous" way, trying to find other ways of working the land, to draw from this a criticism of capitalist agricultural production and to try and to live other social relations between themselves and their neighbours.

This movement contains all the mixtures, varieties and ambiguities of "marginalism" and the backward looking ideologies which in part motivate this "back to the land" movement, but in the U.S.A. the influence of this tendency is considerable. It has local effects and on the more general level of protest, if very bitty and uncoordinated, it does illustrate the aberrant effects of capitalist agriculture. Most grow crops "organically", respecting the natural reproduction cycle, there are "libertarian" collectives for production, but also for daily living, hundreds of food cooperatives for consumption, many publications etc. (5)

This text is not intended to be a complete historical account nor a precise analysis of the situation of farmworkers in the U.S.A., but only a first look at a struggle almost unknown in Europe.

We ask American friends to send us more information and analysis which we shall publish in "Echanges".

(5) Radical Agriculture, Harper Colophon Books, New York.

SOME PROBLEMS ABOUT THE UNIONS

The image of U.S. trade unions is that given by George Meany, president of the National Confederation of Unions A.F.L. - C.I.O., who said in a speech in 1956 to the National Association of Manufacturers: "I have never taken part in a strike in my life. I have never given an order to anyone to start a strike. I have never had anything to do with a strike picket ... In the last analysis there is not much difference between my preoccupations and those of the National Association of Manufacturers."

A good illustration thus well defined of the function of unions in modern capitalism. We see this function firstly in the extremely frequent wildcat strikes in the U.S.A. A pamphlet "Wildcat Dodge Truck June 1974" (1) illustrates well direct union repression of the rank and file. To put it bluntly, the union organisations sometimes carry out themselves directly and physically what is left to the police elsewhere; no one in such cases would even dream of preserving the facade of a "workers" union without a stain.

Another illustration of the unions' function is in the more day to day repression, more underhand, led by union and industry bosses against the refusal of (capitalist, of course!) work of all those who are exploited. The J. Zerzan pamphlet "Organised Labour versus the revolt against work" (2) tries to show how the unions join with management to try and form an barrage against the change in behaviour towards work which is causing the productivity of capital to fall dangerously low.

In the coal mines in 1975 and 1976 (see our article in this pamphlet) the union, the U.M.W.A., as bureaucratised and integrated in its function as any union, has still a certain "union" rank and file, because of the particular conditions of the trade (great geographical dispersion of miners, but a professional cohesion); the local petty burcaucracy knows how to juggle with this lever position very skillfully. It plays off rank and file against leadership and leadership against rank and file according to the situation. Other examples could be found in other unions.

The article on the farmworkers tells of another union reality. Unionisation appears to be end result of a harsh struggle by workers to limit gross exploitation. But the end result just as inevitable is the transformation of a mass union into a traditional one through its affiliation with the A.F.L. - C.I.O. and its stepping into line according to models described above. One can find situations and struggles which are identical with the same evolution where industries are transferred from the industrial North to the new booming South.

These examples help us to understand in a telescoped way how the union as a whole has assumed its functions, pushed forward by struggles against exploitation, and how those involved have found it impossible to escape the evolution towards traditional trade unionism, whatever the intentions of those in struggle.

These few examples, far from proving that there might be a possibility of changing the unions, confirm on the contrary that the unions cannot be other than what has been described above. The union no longer has to fight for its existence or impose itself on up and coming bosses like Ford in the 1920's. But it is threatened from another side, which is the very consequence of its integration and its function. In the newspaper industry a certain level of production technique is now leading to the unions' elimination, because it is becoming a useless and cumbersome cog in the wheel of capitalist profit. Elsewhere, gigantesque growth and automation make the unions' integration still more pressing for the capitalist machine; but at the same time, the union moves yet further from the rank and file as a consequence of these new techniques and in detaching itself from the union, the rank and file tends more to act for itself; i.e. the union is less and less up to fullfilling its essential role.

In the capitalist production machine, the union - through its cost as a part of productions costs like any other service - only has a meaning if

(1), (2) For details see booklist

It is "productive", i.e. if its cost is "profitable". If not, capitalist rationality leads to its suppression and replacement by something else more efficient. It was this principle which necessitated firstly repression of the unions and then their coming into power and transformation, all of which was ordered by the structural transformations of capitalism. On the whole, the unions' role was well mapped out, but in certain industries, it appeared to be less necessary because it was not clear that it was profitable, taking into account the level of production techniques. The same principle can today be just as decisive in determining the elimination of the union, but in a way which is totally different from that of the period when the unions came into existence, simply because workers autonomy makes the union inefficient as a cog in the wheel of the system as an intermediary for fixing labour costs. In our opinion, the attempts to "democratise" and to define a new union ideology (e.g. self-management) correspond to this situation.

We could ask these same questions when looking at a radical change in General Motors (U.S.) policy which it had hitherto pursued (to its great profit) during the last 40 years, of recognising and working with the unions (especially the United Automobile Workers - the U.A.W.). This occurred when a new factory of the trust was set up in Clinton (Mississippi) (3).

Up till now, G.M. recognised the U.A.W. as accredited intermediary for its 400,000 workers: the company and the union had constructed what was considered to be a model of industrial relations. G.M. refused to apply this model at its new factory, the "Packard Electric Division" at Clinton built two years ago. According to the general contracts with G.M. normally two unions - the U.A.W. and the I.U.E. (International Union of Electrical Workers) had the right to "organise" this factory. But the management unleashed a barrage of propaganda against the unions, using all the media, calling the union leaders "vultures" and "gangsters" who were using all means possible to stop the transfer of industry to the South to keep their strongholds in the North. And this corresponded only too well to the reality, a reality which the workers knew very well, which prevented the unions from mobilising its "rank and file" to try and implant itself as it had been able to do in the past.(4). The interest of G.M. to get out of the union agreement was clear: it paid the Clinton workers 1 dollar and 05 cent an hour less than in the North (5 F.Fr. or nearly 70 p.), but the 5 dollars and 10 cent an hour they earn (25 F.Fr. or about £ 3) is still much higher than wages paid generally in Mississippi (half the workers here are black - but this is practically true in the North as well).

A big campaign was launched by the union to "win over" the workers, using the same methods as the management to explain that with the union they would be better off. There were two successive votes to see whether the workers wanted to accept union domination on top of that of the management: 53% refused the first time, 68% the second time. In this campaign arguments were thrown back and forth as in any election, but the management backed up their case with a new wage offer of 62 cents (3,10 F.Fr. or 45 p.) an hour more. One of the workers said that he had better pay and conditions and that he was better treated at the new factory than he had ever been before, but he added that he would stay with G.M. only as long as he was well treated. Other workers agreed that G.M. had succeeded in making a great effort to improve and make more "personal" the way in which workers are treated in the new factory. One worker even claimed that G.M. had created a "sense of equality" which was lacking in the Ford factory in Michigan, where he previously worked, a factory dominated by the U.A.W. The Clinton management also practised a policy whereby "the door is always open" for workers wanting to talk over their problems.... The U.A.W. has stated for its part that it will try again to win back what it considers as territory it must dominate: the new G.M. factories in the South.

(3) The facts quoted are from the Wall Street Journal of 4-6-'76 in an article entitled "Conflict in Clinton" by John Emshwiller.

(4) At the entrance to the factory they put up a red disk "Rub here. If it turns blue union promises will come true".

One wonders whether this "anti-union" policy has been put forward only to reduce costs and increase the flexibility of the company's functioning, as the unions claim. Is it not rather that the changes in functioning and the development of new forms of struggle, the inability of the unions, absorbed by the system, to deal with this major problem of capitalist production, control of the workers, leads G.M. rather towards a more direct relation between capital and labour, in which the intermediaries have become not only useless, but a positive nuisance?

THE USE OF "CITIZEN BAND" RADIOS AND THE TRUCK DRIVERS STRIKE

Citizen Band (C.B.) radios are radio transmitters and receivers with a power of 4 watts (the legal maximum allowed). They were originally designed for short distance communication (up to about 8 km or 5 mls) through 23 channels graded around the 27 Mhz waveband. They are installed chiefly in trucks, vans, lorries and cars. There also some fixed C.B. radios in some transport cafés and some portable ones which are only sophisticated "walky-talkies". Although they have been around for a while, the C.B.'s have only been in demand on the market since 1973, when truck-drivers started to use them to get round police speed traps. In only one month, november 1975, 300,000 people applied for F.C.C. (Federal Communications Commission) licenses. About one truck in two and one car in twenty are at present equipped with a C.B. set. The F.C.C. estimate that 15 million vehicles will have one in 1979. (The license has been reduced from the equivalent of 100 F.Fr./£ 12 to about 20 F.Fr./£ 2,50 and you can buy a C.B. radio for about 500 F.Fr. (£ 60)).

In December 1973, about 3,000 trucks (according to the N.Y. Times) blocked the key junctions of the nation's highways: highway Interstate no. 80, the main motorway linking East and West and several routes linking Michigan, Ohio and Indiana. Most of the drivers were self-employed possessing their own trucks (there are over 100,000 such small trucking businesses in the U.S.); already overburdened with various taxes, they were reacting against the rise in the price of diesel oil (from 35 cents to 60 cents a gallon), the new speed limits of 55 m.p.h. (88 km p.h.) in certain states and the meanness of the F.C.C. in limiting the distribution of C.B. licenses. Before the start of this movement, many truck drivers had installed C.B. radios illegally in their trucks (because the F.C.C. granted few licenses); they used them to communicate with other drivers in the case of police traffic controls. In the 1973 blocade, the C.B.'s were used to organise the struggle. "All night long small groups of drivers clustered around a Citizen Band set in the Truck shop exchanging information, directing trucks to points to be blocked, calming down drivers who threatened to become violent with the authorities." (N.Y. Times) "Now they can talk to eachother on the road ... These radios undoubtedly played a part in organising the blocade," declared Tom Gwilt, Indiana Chairman of the Steel Haulers Association (an association of self-employed transporters) (U.S. New World Report).

There were three days of intermittent road blocks touching 12 states, scuffles with the national guard, some arrests, a few injuries, four of the drivers representatives went to Washington to negotiate with the head of the Transport Dept., among them the movement "leader" J.W. Edwards. At the end of this summit meeting Edwards (codename "River Rat" on the C.B. radios) was transported by helicopter to a very high-powered army C.B. transmitter, where he "broadcasted" to the drivers that an agreement had been reached and that the road blocks could be lifted. This way of using the C.B. as a mass medium was backed up by a true mass media campaign of publicity for "River Rat", exaggerating his so-called leadership-role. It produced the required result. Half of the drivers called off the blocade, others were removed by the national guard. This was the end of the movement, which had never had more than partial support; the C.B.'s were the instruments of its force and its weakness.

On February 2 1974, the shelves of the food stores and supermarkets of the N.E. states were empty. The spinal chord of American industry was

oken at 12 points. The truck drivers had started again since January 4th, but this time they were armed. The National Guard too: three drivers were killed in the shooting. Strikers fired on scab trucks. An independent truck driver heard on his C.B. that 1 mile away (less than 2 km) five shots had been fired at a truck; the driver went home straight away and did not budge from his home. Some were wounded by these shots. The "underground" paper Rolling Stone reported that one wage earner driver employed by a big transport company, when stopped by the striking drivers, explained that he did not want to work, but that he was forced to as his boss threatened to fire him, if not; the strikers began to look his truck up and down and smashed its windows. "Show your boss the truck", they said, "Tell him we said we'd kill you if you came out again." The driver thanked them and went back to his firm.

The blockade seriously disrupted the transport of steel, car parts, machine parts and foodstuffs (half of the Nation's food is transported by truck) Frank Fitzsimmons, president of the Teamster (wage earner truck drivers and others) union was cornered between the demands of his rank and file who had joined the road blocks and his friendship for Richard Nixon. The threat of serious shortages of food in certain towns and the closing down of workshops in some factories led the authorities to use more violent methods. Convoys of 50 trucks escorted by armed national guards appeared. Fitzsimmons warned the drivers against "taking the law into their own hands", the government put the army on standby alert and this caused the drivers to call off their blockade.

The 1973-74 truck strikes gave birth to a myth of the modern knights of the road, masters of the highways in their shiny machines equipped with C.B. sets; chart successes were made by records telling of truck drivers exploits using the C.B. slang and C.B. code names (one of these was played on British radio stations recently to the utter incomprehension of disc jockeys and audiences).

Today the C.B. sets are so widely used that at any time and any place even traffic is very light round about, a call by a driver on his set for information on where speed cops are posted will always get a reply. This adds a new dimension to driving. It breaks the isolation of being on the road which had only been heightened by car radios and stereo cassettes, even if the communication achieved is often illuSiory. The C.B. sets are used in the best and worst ways. The game with (against!) the cops remains the chief use and is carried out in the truck drivers own slang and in a code language known to professional drivers in order to get round F.C.C. restrictions about swearing "on the air" or using unauthorised wavebands. The connivance and inventiveness of C.B. users is very heartwarming. In August 1976 I was in a transport café where two "C.B.'ers" were chatting together over a beer, after having been on the same highway for several hours. The conversation was going well until two cops entered. The immediate joint reflex (an international one) was to immediately stop talking. Complete silence reigned in the entire café.

Outside of struggle, the information exchanged concerns mutual aid, "civic" action or information on better consumerism. Users communicate to each other where good, cheap restaurants are and where cut price gas stations are. Volunteer groups have been created to help drivers in breakdowns, accidents, attacks, thefts etc. ... "marginal" uses have been found too. Prostitutes use C.B.'s in order to solicit clients more efficiently, hitch-hikers use them to get lifts quicker etc. ...

The C.B. sets have certainly been used in other conflicts than the 1973-74 drivers movements. See the article in this pamphlet on the Westinghouse strike, where C.B. sets were used. Rachliffe shows in his article how bureaucrats, when they tried to get back control of the strike, when preparing their "plan", had a project to use the C.B. sets to "organise" the picketers. In fact we must add to this account that the strikers used the C.B. sets even before the bureaucrats' intervention. The Pittsburgh factory is the largest of Westinghouse plants. It is several miles long. There are 9 main gates some 500 meters apart, some 2 km (over 1 mile) apart. There was a picket at each gate and a car equipped with a C.B. set. A car parked in the factories central parking lot coordinated "broadcasts" This meant that all news could be immediately broadcaste if a suspect group was spotted at a gate, help was immediately sent. Word of mouth has it that the miners, as well, may have used C.B. sets during the August '76 strike.

VIOLENCE IN DETROIT

Detroit is a city planned for the sake of the motor car. Its town planning is marked by a geometrical spirit. Distances are enormous. There is an 8 mile road (13 km) and a 10 mile road (17 km). Like all American big cities (unlike cities in France for example) the interior of the town itself is left derelict or given over to the poorest part of the population (apart from "downtown" the neighbourhood reserved for offices and public buildings). The better off a person is, the further out in the suburbs he lives. Several highways and motorways surround and cross the city and lead to "downtown"; their construction is doubly useful. They break up the unity of certain neighbourhoods and create a direct route of access to the business centre of the town; they cross the town through underpasses and so the "middle class" only knows what goes on inside Detroit through the accounts of violence repeated daily in the local newspapers. Many of the workers live in the nearest suburbs touching the city, in housing estates of small detached and terraced houses such as those of Dearborn and Inkster built by Henry Ford (originally Dearborn was the white workers Estate and Inkster - from ink which is black - was for black workers).

The violence visible in the way in which such a city is planned is echoed by the violence of exploitation, of the War and of drugs. Many young workers, above all Viet-nam war veterans, are heavily addicted to hard drugs. This creates an individual violence which is directed sometimes unconsciously, sometimes negatively, sometimes positively, against the real and unreal causes of unhappiness; many foremen have been punched on the nose by irate car workers: "gangs" of young blacks have beaten up whites on the streets of Detroit.

More than 50% of Detroit's population is black and many of these live in the ghetto inside the city on the East side. On Sunday August 15th of last year, about 150 blacks - young people - went to Cobo Hall in Detroit where a "rock" concert was being staged with an audience of several thousands. They attacked police stationed around the outside of the hall, broke some windows, entered the hall, beat up several of the audience and it is even claimed raped a few women (Detroit Free Press, the main Detroit paper). The police did not intervene because they said they did not feel in a strong enough position to do so. Two days later Douglas Fraser, vice-president of the car workers union (U.A.W.), a great supporter of the city's Mayor Coleman Young, who nominated Fraser chairman of the police commission, declared in an interview in the Detroit Free Press: "I am very emotionally attached to this city ... I have been active in all kinds of committees and commissions aimed at helping the city of Detroit. But it all becomes absolutely futile unless we can regain our freedom as citizens and get crime under control."

The various local gangs contain about a thousand young blacks (15 - 18 years old) from the East side with a hard kernel of 200 who have already had dealings with the police; according to the Detroit Free Press, they terrorise their parents who do not dare to turn them in. They operate mostly in small groups about 20 strong, each group with a special name like "The Mad Dogs" or "The Black Killers". They are supposed to have "territories". They fight with the police, loot sport and hunting shops to get rifles and shot guns and carry out muggings which have occasionally proved fatal. But more often than not they only try to frighten people in the street, to extort money from them or simply for the fun of terrorising people, especially whites, but they also attack in the black neighbourhoods. A journalist of the Detroit Free Press was present during such an attack himself, a few days after the Cobo hall incident. At 11 p.m. (one hour after the curfew - see below) a gang of about 15 young blacks: - "Boys really, wearing suede shoes, satin vests and \$ 50 felt "Borsolino" hats are marching into the Burger King (restaurant) on Warren just east of Conner, with brazen nonchalance. ... They order large quantities of burgers and fries ad as they wait for their orders to be filled, they loudly proclaim their membership in one of east side's most notorious gangs: The Black Killers. They jostle patrons in the restaurants threatening to shoot

them and burn the place down." In fact they do nothing. They leave the restaurant, play about a bit at blocking the traffic and then go into another restaurant, the Top Hat, this time waitresses and customers are black. They begin to frighten them as in the previous restaurant: "Suddenly a gang member yanks the red metal top off a four foot high trashcan of the counter and throws it across the room. He then picks up the can, dumps its contents on the counter and heaves it at a terrified waitress. Hamburger patties, french fries and cooking utensils scatter as the can crushes into the store and fryer. A middle aged man, sitting at the counter starts to get up, but a gang member thrusts the red trash can's top into the man's stomach. Shouting "B.K.'s, B.K.'s", the youths ran from the restaurant."

The gangs have existed for a long time, but nowadays they seem to be spreading their operations further than the East side, without there being an actual open riot situation. The black Americans, who fought in the "commodity riots" of 1964-67 (10 to 20% of the black population was on the whole engaged in these riots) didn't let themselves be "politicised" by the Black Panther Party, who today participate in electoral tickets, sell clothes or proclaim their belief in God. It must be said, that the carnival atmosphere and intense joy which occurred at the beginning of these riots of the 1960's (according to the report to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence) did not go very well with the appeals for revolutionary order of the para-maoist Black Panther Bureaucrats of the epoch. On June 29th 1976 a gang of 25 blacks attacked two young whites coming out of a Gay Liberation festival; the woman was called a "white bitch". The theoretical and practical failure of the Black American Movement since the period of the last riots explains this return in strength to anti-white racism. The Black Panther Party had most of its members among students and young unemployed (more generally among the "lumpen" black population); black workers, little touched by Panther ideology, tend rather towards the abolition of racism, more or less in line with economic tendencies themselves towards integration.

Three days after the Cobo Hall attack, a curfew was declared by the city authorities, forbidding all young people of less than 18 years unaccompanied by adults to walk the streets after 10 p.m. with threats of fines and prison sentences for them and their parents, if the curfew was broken. 250 Police recently made redundant through lack of city funds were recalled, volunteers replaced "highway patrols" (motorway traffic cops), so that police thus made available could join the anti-crime-force. The papers talked of re-setting up the "stress squad" composed by "élite" forces whose aim was to wipe out the gangs. The method used in the past consisted in ambushing "criminelns"; a policeman disguised as a woman or old person walked about a "hot neighbourhood" to provoke the gangs. This system caused a massacre: several young blacks were killed. One of the squad's "élite", a certain Patterson, killed 8 young blacks alone. Each time he claimed he had been threatened by a knife. People were suspicious and an enquiry into Patterson's behaviour proved that the famous knife was his own. He was fired and the "stress squad" wound up.

If in Detroit, as everywhere in the U.S.A., the mass media exaggerates enormously the level of violence reigning in the town, it seems here that the authorities use this climate and keep it whipped up in order to experiment with police techniques. Since 1971 the police department has 6 helicopters, which are used to survey the town 16 hours out of 24. Perfected in the 1950's during the Corean War, helicopters are very efficient for surveying an area (and for attacking in case of riot!). A "happy" coincidence occurred at the beginning of the 1950's, whereby a disease killed off all the trees in the city, without the authorities taking any measures to stop it. Today Detroit is a wide, spread-out city with no trees and all low houses, in fact an ideal field for experimenting with helicopter surveillance. A helicopter can easily patrol a 5-10 m. (8-17 km) square zone, it flies at a speed of 60 - 80 m.p.h. (100 km p.h.) at a height of 300 metres and it takes about 75 seconds for it to get to a given point. So that pilots can find their way easier in the city, the authorities are at present urging people to write their street numbers in large figures on the roofs of their houses. For night surveillance the helicopter has a powerful projector (a neon lamp of 1600 watts) which can easily light up the equivalent of a football pitch; it is also equipped with loudspeaker to permit police to speak to eventual suspects. A comrade

from Detroit explained to me how they worked. One evening at 1 a.m. he was walking alone when a helicopter stopped dead several yards above his head (25 metres). He was first blinded by the projector, then the cops over the loudspeaker asked what he was doing there. He replied he was going home and the cops did not insist. Another time the same thing happened, but he was with a group of a dozen of friends. This time they replied with insults. And a police car averted by radio and then the helicopter arrived very quickly where they were walking.

The extreme provocation entailed in this system found a reply on New Years Day last year. Many people are armed in the U.S.A. On that day of general merry making someone fired on the helicopter patrolling those returning from New Years parties. The two policemen in the helicopter were killed.

THE U.S.A. IN QUESTION

A criticism of the special number of the French review "Les Temps Modernes" on the U.S.A., Paris September 1976.

This 446 page book contains about 15 articles. Over half of them contain a mixture of "populist" style and opportunism which finds it hard to get rid of the myth the Great America, that Mother country of the New World, where, for some, class struggle does not exist or has been "surpassed", where the working class has become "bourgeois", or for others (often the same ...) a new consciousness is being forged out obscure and minority revolts, which are particularly radical (Blacks, Indians, women's movement, community living etc.) Most of the observations made do not go further than a sentimental romanticism of European (or American) intellectuals fascinated by spectacular specific things or the exuberance of new cultures on sale from the fortress of modern capitalism, or by its leftist "stars" of the 1960's ...

In presenting these articles Elise Marienstras writes "Working class consciousness has long been hidden by particular conditions in the New World." This shows a complete ignorance of the real history of the American workers' movement and its numerous and constant struggles against the repression of joint bosses, union, state, police and army power, which has never hesitated in massacring inside as well as outside the U.S.A. (1)

The confusion of the first articles is underpinned by a leninist and paternalist conception of "class consciousness" and of social movement as a whole. An anti-dialectic conception based on a moral judgement of appearances or images magnified on the ideological market by the all-powerful mass-medias (and reproduced by European equivalents). This conception is not based on the accounts of workers' struggles, on their process, forms, and contents, which show progress of more autonomous organisation and a radicalisation of aims.

Leninism is clearly accompanying the spiritual and emotional efforts of Gavi in his confused and not very interesting articles on the "New American Left" which speak the future of the radical "stars" of the 1960's who have since become involved in localised or electoral actions. This "leftist" analysis prevents all serious analysis of a fairly new phenomenon which is in fact developing in the U.S.A., that of the emergence of thousands of little action groups, like the neighbourhood committees; they criticize by their action all sorts of organisations which have long since become hierarchical, subject to the conditions of local authorities which financially support them and recuperated by the production-consumption process, where a semblance of liberal participation is permitted. The old organisations are federations or consumer defence committees, producer and consumer cooperatives with professional managers. The new groupes which have existed for the last few years are created spontaneously by those

(1) Apart from books listed in the booklist, especially J. Brechers "Strike", see "The labourers" by Sydney Lens, 1973, New York; "Rank and file" by Alice and Straughton Lynd, 1973 New York, and loads of articles, pamphlets, books etc.

directly concerned, who decide to struggle for certain precise and limited ends and they wind up, once these goals are reached.

But the Temps Modernes lumps together in the same sack everything which is called collective or cooperative, so that this really new process is drowned in a flow of words whose basic criterion is what appears to be most spectacular is the most interesting.

There are some articles worth reading, however. That of Annette Lévy-Willard for example, on the Womens Movement, which shows how those in power have recuperated and adopted feminist reformism of which the famous "Equal Rights Amendment" is a good example. Despite this, the institution of the family seems seriously disrupted and the figures quoted here show that more and more women ... and men? ... demand more and more autonomy in all areas.

The article by Jean-Jaques Lebel is stuffed full of facts and important information (588 simultaneous strikes in 1974, the project for "total control of the population" etc.) but here also the author confuses the revolutionary movement and the self-proclaimed élites. He shows, however, that one power group can be demolished by another (through the famous "scandals" for example) without power itself being uprooted. One could even say that this allows power to change in strengthening the myth of its morality and usefulness. Nevertheless the 45% abstention rate at the recent presidential elections could mean that half of all Americans could not care less about choosing which of two power blocks should be their masters. Perhaps this is a question to be looked into further.

The articles by J. Zerzan on the refusal of work and trade union bureaucracies is reprinted here in the translation made by Echanges (2) I think it is probably the most interesting article in the book.

The texts which follow contain the title "Autonomous organisation of the struggles of the Black workers movement" which does not correspond to their contents. Nevertheless, the events described in Detroit are significant for the level of working class combativity, so often denied elsewhere in the book ...

David M. Gordon has an article on the "Present crisis in the field of production" and its consequences for those who work and their reactions, but his analysis is too economic and too brief.

The article by Robert W. Allen is supposed to be a balance sheet of the Black Liberation Movement. We understand clearly from it that this movement has produced élites, especially the Marxist-Leninist sects and that the state had to suppress those tendencies which challenged them too violently (at present the Black Panthers officially support the Democratic Party!) and encourage black representatives, congressmen and businessmen as well, while speaking of desegregation and equality. However, this article misses out the essential i.e. the autonomy that specifically black movements are capable of achieving, or also the autonomy of workers' struggles where more and more blacks, whites and those of other minority groups fight together, on an equal basis, by and for themselves.

The text by Philip Agee on the American secret service, especially the C.I.A., only gives more precise details on what has been published during the last few months in the official press. The reformism which underpins this text should not mask the fact that some precisions are given here on the American war machine.

To sum up, apart from the Zerzan article and a few snatches of analysis in one or two other texts, this book seems to me to be positive and interesting only in the amount of limited and concrete information it gives to the reader.

(2) See book list for details