

ECHANGES

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Echanges et Mouvement is, for a group of comrades sharing similar positions and in close contact with one another, a means of exchanging news on struggles, discussions and criticisms on all the struggles of all kinds carried out by those directly concerned for their own emancipation. It is therefore important that each recipient makes his own contribution to this end in exchange for what he expects from others.

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BROCHURES

- Mais alors, et comment? (But how?), some thoughts on a socialist society. Transl. from a brochure publ. by the Dutch group Act & Thought, followed by a discussion about the distribution in and contents of a socialist society. Available from E&M, price 10FF
- Revised edition of the last brochure on Poland Face aux ouvriers polonais. In french it will be available in some months, in dutch it is still available, orders to T.Sander, Steinbrecherstr. 16, D-3300 Braunschweig, GFR. The english edition will be, as we hope, available the end of July.
- Report meeting Osnabrück Easter 1981, the fr. + engl. edition will be send to all subscribers by the end of April. You can order the german translation from T.Sander (address see above).

Subscriptions

If you didn't renew your subscription yet, please do it NOW. Money also makes the Echanges world go round. Many thanks for your contribution to our cash-flow situation.

NEW INTERNATIONAL GET-TOGETHER IN OSNABRUCK:

Probable dates: 21,22,23 May 1982. Discussion theme chosen by a majority of Echanges comrades is theme II (see Echanges no.28): capitalist strategy and its possibilities and limitations. Examples will be taken from the motor-car industry in Italy (Fiat), France (Renault), England (Leyland) and USA (GM).

Some people preferred theme I (The Disappearing State) . We could discuss it at a meeting in 1983 and start exchanging ideas about it "off duty" this year during the meeting.

If you're interested to take part please write to T.Sander who coordinates the coming meeting.

New publications:

We received only two reactions after our question in Echanges no.28 on which publications you would like to see (re-)printed. May we conclude that there is no interest at all? If not and also when you have ideas about publishing something, then please let us know!!!

Printed Matter

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ANTI - WORK AND THE STRUGGLE FOR CONTROL

by John Zerzan

The debacle of the air controllers' strike and the growing difficulties unions are having in attracting new members (or holding old one - decertification elections have increased for the past 10 straight years) are two phenomena which could be used to depict American workers as quite tamed overall, or adjusted to their lot.

But such a picture of conservative stasis would be quite unfaithful to the reality of the work culture, which is now so untamed as to be evoking unprecedented attention and countermeasures.

Before tackling the subject of "anti-work", a few words on the status of business might be in order. Bradshaw and Vogel's Corporations and Their Critics (1981) sees enterprise today as faced by uncertainty and hostility on every hand." In fact, this fairly typical book finds that "latent mistrust has grown to the point at which lack of confidence in business's motives has become the overwhelming popular response to the role of the large corporation in the United States." An early '81 survey of 24,000 prominent students, as determined by Who's Who Among American High School Students, showed a strong anti-business sentiment; less than 20% of the 24,000 agreed, for example, with the proposition that most companies charge fair prices. Not surprising then is Peter L. Berger's analysis of recent attitudes. In the September-October '81 Harvard Business Review, his "New Attack on the Legitimacy of Business" is summed up, in part, thusly: "When people genuinely believe in the 'rightness' of certain social arrangements, those arrangements are experienced as proper and worthy of support, that is, as legitimate...American business once enjoyed this kind of implicit social charter. It does not today."

Within business, one begins to see the spread of work refusal. The December '80 Nation's Business strikes what has become a familiar chord, in its introduction to Dr. H.S. Freudenberger's "How to Survive Burn-Out": "For many business people, life has lost its meaning. Work has become mere drudgery, off-hours are spent in a miasma of dullness." Similar is Datamation for July '81 which carried "Burnout: Victims and Avoidances," because this disabling trauma "seems to be running rampant" among data processors. And Office Personnel Digest of January '82, which offers "A Burnout Prevention Plan."

To continue in this bibliographic vein, it is worth noting the sharp increase in scholarly articles like Kahn's "Work, Stress, and Individual Well-Being" (Monthly Labor Review, May '81), Abdel-Halim's "Effects of Role Stress - Job Design - Technology Interaction on Employee Work Satisfaction" (Academy of Management Journal, June '81) and Behling and Holcombe's "Dealing with Employee Stress" (MSU Business Topics, Summer '81). Studies in Occupational Stress, a series initiated in 1978 by Cooper and Kasl, dates the formal study of this facet of organized misery.

There is other related evidence of aversion to work, including this reaction in its literal sense, namely as a growth of illnesses such as job-related allergies and at least a significant part of the advancing industrial accident rate since the early 60s. Comes to mind the machinist who becomes ill by contact with machine oil, the countless employees who seem to be accident-prone in the job-setting. We are just beginning to see some awareness of this phenomenon, the consequence of which may be very significant.

And of course there is absenteeism, probably the most common sign of antipathy to work and a topic which has called forth a huge amount of recent attention from the specialists of wage-labor. Any number of remedies are hawked; Frank Kuzmits' May '81 Personnel Journal offering, "No fault: A New Strategy for Absenteeism," for example. Deitch and Dilts' "Getting Absent Workers Back on the Job: The Case of General Motors," puts the cost to GM at \$ 1 billion plus, and observes that "Absenteeism is of increasing concern to management and organized labor alike" (Business Horizons, September-October '81).

There are other well-known elements of the anti-work syndrome. The inability to get a shift working on time is a serious problem; it is why Nucor Corporation offers a 4% pay hike for each ton of steel produced above a target figure, up to a 100% pay bonus for those who show up as scheduled and work the whole shift. The amount of drinking and drug-taking on the job is another form of protest, occasioning a great proliferation of employee alcoholism and drug abuse programs by every sort of company. Turnover (considered as a function of the quit rate and not due to lay-offs, of course), very high since the early 70s, has inched up further.

All these aspects come together to produce the much publicized productivity, or output per hour worked, crisis. In the May-June '81 Personnel, Blake and Moulton ("Increasing Productivity Through Behavioral Science") provide some useful points. They recognize, for example, that the "declining productivity rate and the erosion of quality in industry have caused grave concern in this country" and that "industry is pouring out more money than ever before into training and development," while "the productivity rate continues to fall." Further, "attitudes among workers themselves" including, most basically, an "erosion of obedience to authority," are seen as at the root of the problem. Unlike many confused mainstream analyses of the situation - or the typical leftist denial of it as either a media chimera or an invention of the always all-powerful corporations - our two professors can at least realize that "Basic to the decline in productivity is the breakdown of the authority-obedience means of control"; this trend,

moreover, "which is one manifestation of a broader social disorder...will continue indefinitely without corrective action," they say.

R.S. Byrne (September-October '81 Harvard Business Review) gives a useful testimonial to the subject in her compendious "Sources on Productivity," which lists some of the huge outpouring of articles, reportsm books, newsletters, etc., from a variety of willing helpers of business, including those of the Work in America Institute, the American Productivity Center, the American Center for the Quality of Work Life, and the Project on Technology, Work and Character, to name a few. As Ms.Byrne notes, "One can scarcely pick up any publication without being barraged by articles on the topic written from every possible perspective." The reason for the outpouring is of course available to her: "U.S. productivity growth has declined continuously in the past 15 years, and the trend appears to be worsening."

The Augsut '81 Personnel Administrator, devoted entirely to the topic, declares that "Today poor productivity is the United States' number one industrial problem." Administrative Management for November '81 reasons, in George Crosby's "Getting Back to Basics on Productivity" that no progress can occur "until all individuals begin viewing productivity as their own personal responsibility." "How Deadly Is The Productivity Disease?" mulls Stanley Henrici in the November-December '81 Harvard Business Review. An endless stream, virtually an obsession.

Dissatisfaction with work and the consequences of this have even drawn the Pope's attention. John Paul II, in his Laborem Exercens (Through Work) encyclical of September '81, examines the idea of work and the tasks of modern management. On a more prosaic level, one discovers that growing employee alienation has prompted a search for new forms of work organization. This is exactly the point of D.V.Nightingale's "Work, Formal Participation, and Employee Outcomes," in the August '81 issue of Sociology of Work and Occupations. The December '81 Nation's Business, in fact, has located a new consensus in favor of "more worker involvement in decision-making," in its "Unlocking the Productivity Door" article. "Making America Work" by James O'Toole (1981) emphasizes the changed work culture with its low motivation, and prescribes giving workers the freedom to design their own jobs, set their own work schedules and decide their own salaries.

The productivity crisis has clearly led to the inauguration of worker participation, in a burgeoning number of co-determination arrangements since the mid-70s. The May 11, '81 Business Week announced the arrival of a new day in U.S. management with its cover story/special report, "The New Industrial Relations." Proclaiming the "almost unnoticed" ascendancy of a "fundamentally different way of managing people!" The authoritarian approach of the "old, crude workplace ethos" is definitely passing, aided "immeasurably" by the growing collaboration of the trade unions. "With the adversarial approach outmoded, the trend toward more worker involvement in decisions on the shop floor - and more job satisfaction, tied to productivity."

"A Try at Steel-Mill Harmony," Business Week, June 29, '81, recounts the labor-management efforts being made between the U.S. steel industry and the United Steelworkers "to create a cooperative labor climate where it matters most: between workers and bosses on the mill floor." The arrangements, which are essentially production teams made up of supervisors, local union officials, and workers, were provided for in 1980 contracts with the nine major steel companies, but not implemented until after early '81 union elections because of the unpopularity of the idea among many steelworkers. "The participation-team concept...was devised as a means of improving steel's sluggish productivity growth rate," the obvious reason for a climate of disfavor in the mills.

In a series of Fortune articles appearing in June, July and August '81 ("Working Smarter", "Rediscovering the Factory", "What Happens When Workers Manage Themselves," and "What's In It For the Unions?") the new system of industrial organization is discussed in some depth; the following quotations are from the series as a whole, which was chiefly written by Charles Burck.

"Shocked by faltering productivity," according to Fortune, "America's corporate managers have moved almost overnight toward the worker involvement approach (after long ignoring the considerable northern European experience), which "challenges a system of authority and accountability that has served through most of history." With a rising hopefulness, big capital's leading magazine announces that "Companies which have had the time to weigh the consequences of participative management are finding that it informs the entire corporate culture." Employees "are no longer just workers; they become the lowest level of management," it exults, echoing such recent books as M. Scott Myers' Every Employee a Manager.

The bottom line of such programs, which also go by the name "Quality of Work Life", is never lost sight of. G.T. Strippoli, a plant manager of the TRW Corporation, provides the guiding principle: "The workers know that if I feel there's no payback to the company in the solution they arrive at, there will be a definite no. I'm not here to give away the store or run a country club."

In effect in abiuot 100 auto manufacturing and assembly plants, the co-management method replaces the traditional, failed ways of pushing productivity. Auto, with virtually nothing to lose, has jumped for the effort to get workers to help run the factories. "As far as I'm concerned, it's the only way to operate the business - there isn't another way in today's world," says GM President F.James McDonald. United Auto Workers committeemen and stewards are Key co-leaders with management in the drive to

"gain higher product quality and lower absenteeism." Similar is the campaign for worker involvement in the AT&T empire, formalized in the 1980 contract with the Communication Workers of America.

The fight to bolster output per hour is as much the unions' as it is management's; anti-work feelings are equally responsible for the decline of the bodyguards of capital as they are for the productivity crisis proper. AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer T.R. Donahue has found in the general productivity impasse the message that the time has come for a "limited partnership - a marriage of convenience" with business. Fortune sees in formal collaboration "interesting possibilities for reversing the decline" of organized labor.

"Quality of Work Life: Catching On," in the September 21, '81 Business Week, observes that shop floor worker participation and the rest of the "QWL" movement is "taking root in every day life." Along the same lines, the October '81 issue of Productivity notes that half of 500 firms surveyed now have such involvement programs.

William Ouchi's 1981 contribution to the industrial relations literature, Theory Z, cites recent research, such as that of Harvard's James Medoff and M.I.T.'s Kathryn Abraham, to point out the productivity edge that unionized companies in the U.S. have over non-union ones. And David Lewin's "Collective Bargaining and the Quality of Work Life" (Organizational Dynamics, Autumn '81) argues for a further union presence in the AWL movement, based on organized labor's past ability to recognize the constraints of work and support the ultimate authority of the workplace.

It is clear that unions hold the high ground in a growing number of these programs, and there seems to be a trend toward co-management at ever-higher levels. Douglas Fraser, UAW president, sits on the Board of Directors at Chrysler - a situation likely to spread to the rest of auto - and the Teamsters appear close to putting their representative on the board at Pan-American Airways. Joint labor-management efforts to boost productivity in construction have produced about a dozen important local collaborative set-ups involving the building trades unions, like Columbus' MOST (Management and Organized Labor Striving Together), Denver's Union Jack, and PEP (Planning Economic Progress) in Beaumont, Texas. Business Horizons for January-February '81 editorialized about "the newly established Industrial Board with such luminaries as Larry Shaprin of DuPont and Lane Kirkland of the AFL-CIO" as a "mild portent" of the growing collaborative movement.

The defeat in 1979 of the Labor Law Reform Act, which would have greatly increased government support to unionization, was seen by many as almost catastrophic given Labor's organizing failures. But the economic crisis, perhaps especially in light of generous union concessions to the auto, airlines, rubber, trucking and other industries, may provide the setting for a "revitalization" of the national order including a real institutionalizing of Labor's social potential to contain the mounting anti-work challenge.

There is already much pointing to such a possibility, beyond even the huge worker participation/QWL movement with its vital union component. The 1978 Trilateral Commission on comparative industrial relations spoke in very glowing terms about the development of neo-corporatist institutions (with German co-determination by unions and management as its model). Business Week of June 30, 1980, a special issue devoted to "The Reindustrialization of America", proclaimed that "noting short of a new social contract" between business, labor and government, and "sweeping changes in basic institutions" could stem the country's industrial decline. Thus when the AFL-CIO's Kirkland calls in late '81 for a tripartite National Reindustrialization Board, a concept first specifically advanced by investment banker Felix Rohatyn, the recent theoretical precedents are well in place. One of the main arguments by Rohatyn and others is that Labor will need the state to help enforce its productivity programs in its partnership with management.

Thus would "spreading involvement" be utilized, but shepherded by the most powerful of potential arrangements. Wilber and Jameson, in their "Hedonism and Quietism," (Society, November-December '81, put the matter in general yet historical terms: "Ways must be found to revitalize mediating institutions from the bottom up. A good example is Germany's efforts to bring workers into a direct role in decision-making."

A change of this sort might appear to be too directly counter to the ideology of the Reagan government, but it would actually be quite in line with the goal of renewed social control minus spending outlays. Washington, after all, has been trying to reduce its instrumentalities because this giant network of programs is past its ability to coherently manage, just as its cutbacks also reflect the practical failure of government social pacification programs.

Meanwhile, the refusal of work grows. One final example is the extremely high teenage unemployment rate, which continues to climb among all groups and is the object of a growing awareness that a very big element is simply a rejection of work, especially low-skill work, by the young. And legion are the reports that describe the habits of teenagers who do work as characterized by habitual tardiness, chronic absenteeism, disrespect for supervisors and customers, etc. Which recalls the larger picture by F. Herzberg in his "New Perspectives on the Will to Work" (Personnel Administrator, Dec. 1979): "the problem is work motivation - all over the world. It's simply a matter of people not wanting to work."