

WORKERS' RIGHTS AND LEGAL REPRESSION

# RADICAL AMERICA

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# **RADICAL AMERICA**

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## **Introduction**

In this issue we have brought together several articles about the situation of wage-earners in the U.S. with a review about migrant workers in Europe.

The article by Staughton Lynd, "Workers' Control in a Time of Diminished Workers' Rights," will, we hope, be directly useful to workers and those involved in workplace organizing. It offers an analysis of an important and somewhat under-emphasized aspect of the class struggle: the judicial repression of workers' rights. While the courts have usually been a part of the suppression of the working class, in the past the main thrust of judicial repression has been to strengthen the hands of employers. In his analysis of the current direction of court decisions, Lynd shows that one important strategy of the Nixon court has been to strengthen the power of the unions over workers. This has been done in part through attempting to make the unions legally responsible for the enforcement of contracts, while stripping workers of many of their rights within unions. Thus the historical subordination of workers to their union "representatives," which **RADICAL AMERICA** has explored in many previous issues, has now been incorporated into labor law. As the recent miners' strikes make clear, workers seeking greater control over their jobs will increasingly encounter not only their bosses backed with court-injunctions, but injunction-wielding union officials as well. On a more positive note, Lynd outlines a variety of legal and shop-floor strategies which workers have pursued to widen their control on their jobs, lessening management prerogatives and returning workers' representation to the shop floor. In this respect Lynd is pointing to an important, non-utopian, understanding of workers' control, in which it becomes part of the day-to-day struggle of the workplace.

In a unique oral history of a small electrical manufacturing plant, Dodee Fennell has reconstructed the collective experience of a group of workers. Tracing the history of the factory and its work force over three decades, Fennell focuses on how the community of workers, their networks of solidarity and their leadership, evolved as the factory changed from a small, paternalistic establishment, characteristic of the early stages of industrialism, into a part of a giant conglomerate. We would like particularly to call our readers' attention to Fennell's methodology here. Few oral histories have so far extended beyond the boundaries of individual biography. The author of this article, herself a former worker in the plant, used her personal knowledge and interviews to write a full history of an enterprise from the workers' point of view.

In the past we have printed articles which focused primarily on conflicts within the working class emerging from, and reinforcing, racial discrimination in employment, housing and education. It is of course equally important to bear in mind the structural origins of racism. In "Racism and U.S. Steel, 1906-1974", Ed Greer attacks the claim made by some that racial discrimination is supported only by the backward sections of the capitalist class, abetted by local interests and the aristocracy of white labor. Greer shows that the consistent practice of at least one corporate giant, U.S. Steel, has been to invent, reinforce, and maintain racial divisions among its workers. The company not only benefits from paying lower wages to black workers, but, as Greer shows, has been conscious of the importance of race divisions in maintaining management's control over production against the united action of workers.

For this issue we asked our associate editor Dan Georgakas to review John Berger's and Jean Mohr's new book, *THE SEVENTH MAN*, because so many of us were enthusiastic about it. The book is a study of migrant workers in Europe, particularly Turks in Germany. From our perspective its greatest strength may lie in its fusion of objective analysis of the role of migrant labor in the international economy with an exploration of the subjective experience of the male workers. This fusion of objective and subjective understanding is beautifully expressed in the balance within the book between text and pictures. The book is nearly half photographs, and we regret that we have not been able to reproduce more of them here.

On the subject of new books, we would like to call your attention to a book, just published, by our editor Linda Gordon, with Rosalyn Baxandall and Susan Reverby, all of whom have written for *RADICAL AMERICA*. They have produced a documentary history of working-class women in the U.S., entitled *AMERICA'S WORKING WOMEN*, published simultaneously in paperback and hardback by Vintage and Random House. It offers a socialist analysis of the conditions and struggles of working women, paid and unpaid, through all of U.S. history, and we think you may find it useful.

*The Radical America* editors



# **Workers' Control in a Time of Diminished Workers' Rights**

*Staughton Lynd*

In the United States as throughout the industrialized world, working people are beginning to demand to participate directly in the decisions which affect their working lives. The unrest at General Motors' Lordstown factory in 1971-1972 is one example. The struggle of soft-coal miners for the local right to strike is another. Too often such struggles are viewed merely as protests against "meaningless work." (1) Clearly workers are rebelling not only against the boredom of their work, but also against the arbitrary authority and lack of respect for human rights in the capitalist workplace: against harassment by foremen whom they did not elect and who know less about the work than they do; against a system which permits a worker to be fired for something a foreman can do with impunity, and makes a worker accused of shop-rule or contract infractions "guilty until proven innocent"; against a management which, in the event of an accident, first concerns itself with whether production has been disrupted and then attends to the injured human being. This incipient workers'-control movement is not inherently anti-union. In a given situation it may bitterly contest bureaucratic union procedures, or the readiness of union officials to compromise. But if a movement still so inchoate can be

said to have an ideology, the ideology of the workers'-control movement is a demand that the oft-proclaimed rhetoric of industrial democracy be made real in fact. At a minimum this means that workers' control is something more than "representation" by remote trade-union leaders. (2)

These struggles bring American workers face to face with the law. As workers seek to make new uses of the legal rights won in the 1930s, the courts have been trying to take those rights away. The law says to the discontented worker: You may agitate all you want to get union recognition, but then you must stop agitating. After you have a union, the courts add, you should no longer need to picket and strike. Implicit in American labor law is the belief that, in return for having a union, workers should be prepared to give up most of the rights by means of which they brought the union into being.

Recent court decisions have underlined the message. The following pages discuss the content and implications of these recent court decisions affecting workers' rights. It should go without saying that the law is only one of the considerations relevant in assessing how to move forward. In particular, I hope that brothers and sisters presently working in shops and offices will indicate whether what I have to say makes sense for their day-to-day organizing.

## I

As has been well said elsewhere, the most advanced reforms of the New Deal, such as the Wagner Act, "had a two-sided character: they were gains won by working-class insurgency, and they were state rationalizations introduced by the corporate ruling class in order to maintain their own supremacy at the least cost." (3) The primary purpose of the labor legislation of the 1930s was to stop strikes. But those who drafted and sponsored the Wagner Act reasoned that the best way to stop strikes was by encouraging collective bargaining, and therefore, "that to legitimize collective bargaining in order to prevent the occurrence of strikes requires the retention of the right to strike as an integral component of collective bargaining." (4) This explains why a law intended to stop strikes unequivocally affirmed the right to strike in the event of a bargaining impasse.

Nevertheless, the very first contracts between the C.I.O. and, for instance, the General Motors and United States Steel corporations contained clauses forbidding strikes during the life of the contract. (This fact is all the more impressive when one considers that these first contracts consisted of only two or three mimeographed pages, and were essentially only agreements to bargain.) During World War II, moreover, the unions (with the exception of the United Mine Workers) pledged not to strike for the duration of



the war. Despite wildcat strikes in unprecedented volume, the modern pattern of labor relations was firmly established during the war years. When a problem arose under the contract the aggrieved worker was told not to take direct action, but to "write it up." The problem then disappeared into a paper blizzard. Months or years later, a government board (after the war, an arbitrator) would make a binding decision.

After World War II, Congress and the courts moved to deter strike action in additional ways. The Taft-Hartley Act of 1947, amending the Wagner Act, permitted an employer to sue a labor organization for violating the contract between them. There was nothing inevitable about this step: in England, contracts were not legally enforceable until the passage of the Industrial Relations Act of 1971, and when unions refused to cooperate with the law, it was repealed in 1974. In the United States, however, not only may a union be required to pay damages for e.g. violating its contractual promise to arbitrate rather than to strike, but the Supreme Court has held that when it is unclear whether the promise to arbitrate covers a particular problem, the courts will impose a "presumption of arbitrability" (5) for the sake of labor peace.

The thrust of the Taft-Hartley Act as interpreted by the Supreme Court is that the law narrowly protects workers in their right to try to achieve union recognition, but after recognition, expects them to act through the union. The Court said as much in a 1967 case:

National labor policy has been built on the premise that by pooling their economic strength and acting through a labor organization freely chosen by the majority, the employees of an appropriate unit have the most effective means of bargaining for improvements in wages, hours, and working conditions. The policy therefore extinguishes the individual employee's power to order his own relations with his employer and creates a power vested in the chosen representatives to act in the interests of all employees. (Emphasis added.)

Justice Black dissented, arguing that the Court was distorting the intent of the Wagner Act because it believed "that too much freedom of choice for workers will impair the effective power of unions." (6)

This capsule summary makes it clear that the diminution of workers' rights under the Wagner Act is no simple melodrama of repression by Nixon appointees to the Supreme Court. The fact remains that since 1970 the Nixon Court, and lower courts responsive to its holdings, have determined that:

1. Federal courts may issue injunctions against strikes which violate a contractual promise to arbitrate. (7) This decision largely

repeals the Norris-LaGuardia Act of 1932 which prohibited Federal courts from enjoining peaceful concerted activity in labor disputes.

2. If a collective-bargaining agreement says nothing about the right to strike, but provides for binding arbitration, a no-strike clause will be inferred even if the strike is over health and safety and expressly protected by Section 502 of the Taft-Hartley Act. (8)

3. If there is an express or inferred no-strike clause in the contract, a worker who stops work in the belief that his or her life is in danger may be justly discharged unless the worker can prove afterwards that the danger really existed. (9) Thus if a miner hears the roof beginning to go, and leaves the mine, but the roof does not fall, the miner can be fired.

4. Workers who picket peacefully on their own time, without causing a disturbance or blocking access to the workplace, but who demand to talk with management, can be justly discharged. (10) This decision was handed down in a case where black employees of a San Francisco department store declined to process discrimination grievances one at a time because they wanted to negotiate with management about its policy of discrimination.

5. Picketing about a labor dispute outside a store in a privately-owned shopping center is not protected by the First Amendment. (11) Previously the Court had held that when private property is used so as to create a "public forum," speech should enjoy First Amendment protection.

6. Unless a union uses every weapon at its command including union discipline to end a wildcat strike, the employer can sue the union for his financial loss. Unlike the previous decisions summarized, this policy is still confined to the lower courts. In the leading Eazor case a Federal district-court judge awarded an employer \$512,001 in damages against Teamsters Union defendants. (The judge in this case was the same judge who upheld the 1973 no-strike agreement in the steel industry.) Another decision in April 1976 awarded more than \$1 million in damages against United Mine Workers defendants for 50 work stoppages between 1969 and 1973 involving the Carbon Fuel Company. (12)

These substantial inroads on the rights guaranteed to private employees by Section 7 of the Wagner Act to "engage in...concerted activities for the purpose of...mutual aid or protection" are paralleled by decisions eroding the rights guaranteed to public employees under the First and Fourteenth Amendments.

7. A public employee may be justly discharged for wearing sideburns longer than a prescribed length. (13) Although seemingly less consequential than decisions directly restricting rights of collective action, such a holding undermines the sense of personhood and self-determination which all strong collective actions require.

8. A public employee has no constitutional right to a hearing before discharge. (14)

9. Striking public employees may be fired, without denial of their due-process right to have the reasonableness of their conduct considered by an impartial decision-maker, by the same school board or other public employer whose bargaining tactics caused the strike. (15)

10. States and municipalities may not be required by Congress to pay the Federal minimum wage. (16)

It now becomes our task to determine what freedom of action still remains to workers.

## II

At first glance, there is a remarkable similarity between the pattern of recent court decisions in labor cases and the pre-World War I court decisions which sent workers to jail (Eugene V. Debs) or fined them (the Danbury hatters) when they attempted to picket, strike, and boycott.

There is (at least for the time being) one critical difference, however. Debs, the Danbury hatters, and other working-class defendants in the era of the injunction were punished for breaking the law. Debs was alleged to have interfered with the mails. The Danbury hatters were charged with conspiring to interfere with an employer's property rights through their boycott, and with violating the Sherman Anti-Trust Act. (16)

In contrast, the store clerks, miners, and truck drivers who have been ordered back to work, held to have been justly discharged, or fined in cases like Boys' Markets, Gateway, and Eazor were punished not for breaking the law, but for breaking their contracts. Modern American labor law is keyed to the enforcement of the collective-bargaining agreement. It tacitly assumes that management will be powerful enough to obtain through the contract the restrictions which might otherwise have to be enacted by law. The law says to the worker: You have a right to strike. But if you decide to give up the right to strike during the life of the contract, you have a right to do that, too. The right to strike can be "waived."

Thus modern American labor law regards the union contract much as John Locke conceptualized the creation of government by social contract. Workers have the right to picket and strike before union recognition, just as all persons have the right to defend themselves in the "state of nature." But to obtain the advantages of a union, the worker must give up some of his or her rights, just as to become part of a society where government protected property against theft, Locke required the property owner to restrict his freedom of action. In each case the fiction is propounded that the surrender of rights is voluntary. The worker, accordingly, is assumed by the law voluntarily to have accepted his or her union contract, even where (as in the steel industry) the contract is not ratified by the rank and file. If the worker exclaims "But I didn't

vote on that!", the law responds: "The contract was ratified in the manner defined in your union constitution. Had you cared enough to ratify contracts personally, you would have changed the constitution."

In this way, the familiar restrictive clauses of the typical C.I.O. contract have come to be conceptualized by the courts as voluntary waivers of rights by individual union members. The most important of these clauses are the management-prerogatives clause, the no-strike clause, and the clause for binding arbitration (which functions as an implied no-strike clause where the latter is absent).

For instance, in the General Motors contract, Paragraph 8 is the long-standing management-prerogatives clause. It reads:

The right to hire, promote, discharge, or discipline for cause; and to maintain discipline and efficiency of employees, is the sole responsibility of the Corporation except that Union members shall not be discriminated against as such. In addition, the products to be manufactured, the location of plants, the schedule of production, the methods, processes and means of manufacturing are solely and exclusively the responsibility of the Corporation.

As John W. Anderson, long-time U.A.W. militant, comments: "This paragraph makes a large percentage of the legitimate grievances null and void." (17) The no-strike clause in the General Motors contract is Paragraph 117, which reads:

During the life of this Agreement, the Union will not cause or permit its members to cause, nor will any member of the Union take part in any sit-down, stay-in, or slow-down, in any plant of the Corporation, or any curtailment of work or restriction of production or interference with production of the Corporation . . . . The Corporation reserves the right to discipline any employee taking part in any violation of this Section of this Agreement.

An important objective of a workers'-control movement should be to take such objectionable clauses out of collective-bargaining agreements. This struggle can proceed on three different fronts:

1. Where workers do not have the right to ratify their contracts, this is an essential goal. Amendment of union constitutions to permit rank-and-file ratification is the one thing which can reasonably be hoped for from union reformers like Arnold Miller and Ed Sadlowski. Miller has already sponsored such an amendment. Sadlowski has promised to do the same.

2. Except in public employment, and in the steel industry because of the Experimental Negotiating Agreement, there is no law,

court decision, or contract which prevents workers from striking at the end of the contract for changes in the next contract.

3. In the nature of things, workers sensitive to rank-and-file decision-making are more likely to be elected to local than to national office. And while local unions are heavily monitored by their respective internationals, especially in industries where there is national as well as local bargaining, activists should made a determined effort to liberalize the language of local union contracts. Thus a U.A.W. local might well want to strike for language such as :

Notwithstanding Paragraph 8 (the management-prerogatives clause), no member of this local shall be required to work overtime;

or :

Anything contained in this or the national contract notwithstanding, every member shall have the right in a situation which he or she reasonably believes to be dangerous to (a) stop work without loss of pay or other discipline, (b) identify ("red tag") any machinery reasonably believed to be dangerous so that no one else will use it till the dispute is resolved, and (c) discuss the problem with his or her union steward before discussing it with the appropriate foreman.

It may be objected that what counts, in practice, is not the language of the contract but the solidarity and aggressiveness of the workers involved. No doubt this is true up to a point. Nevertheless, so long as contract language purports to tie workers hand-and-foot in what they may do, then in confronting courts which assume that each worker has voluntarily agreed to everything in the contract, workers will enter every controversy with the odds against them. Eliminating restrictive language from the contract is certainly not sufficient to bring about a strong workers'-control movement. It may quite possibly be necessary, however.

It should be remembered, also, that if decisions like Eazor become the law of the land, moderate union officers with no independent interest in workers' control will have an incentive of their own for eliminating restrictive contract language. For the past thirty years, stewards worried about legal liability under the Taft-Hartley Act could ordinarily avoid it simply by being absent when a walkout was discussed, or by standing at the gate during a walkout and piously advising a return to work. If Eazor becomes general law, as seems likely, a union will be responsible for anything its members do unless it uses "all reasonable means at its disposal, both persuasive and punitive, to terminate the work stop-

page." (18) In effect, the union would be punished for what it did not do, by way of forcing its members back to work, as well as for what it could be proved to have done.

History suggests that at some point government repression of workers' rights produces a dialectical response, causing workers to abandon hope in reform from above and to rely on their own power instead. Government intervention in the Pullman strike, culminating in the imprisonment of Debs, was an important catalyst in the formation of the American Socialist Party. In England, the Taff Vale case, comparable to the Danbury hatters case in America, stimulated workers to form their own labor party. By analogy, one can confidently predict that the effect of the Supreme Court decisions stripping public employees of constitutional protections, such as a right to a hearing on discharge, will be to stimulate the formation of public-employee unions, seeking the same protections through collective-bargaining contracts. Similarly, in the private sphere, if the ostensible guarantees of the Wagner Act are increasingly set aside in favor of contract language construed in the employer's favor and rigorously enforced, (19) then we may well see a surprisingly broadly-based movement to eliminate the offending contract language.

A final point which needs emphasis concerns freedom of speech. At the same time that the courts have been restricting worker action, such as picketing and strikes, they have extended protection to worker speech. This may not surprise devotees of the theory of "repressive tolerance," for whom it will be one more instance of the toleration of speech when it is harmless. To brush aside the importance of speech protection for this reason, however, would in my opinion be a serious mistake. How are contracts to be changed, if not by agitation? Even if the reader disagrees with the thesis argued here, and considers the change in contract language irrelevant, how can any other workplace objective be pursued without some minimal security to communicate? I believe that the right to free speech in the workplace is important, and will conclude this part of the article by briefly describing it.

In the public sphere, the key decision is a 1968 Supreme Court case concerning an Illinois high-school teacher named Pickering. (20) Marvin Pickering wrote a letter to the local newspaper criticizing the superintendent of schools and the school board for certain financial policies and for creating an atmosphere in the school which Pickering described as "totalitarianism." Not surprisingly, he was fired. Rather more surprisingly, the Supreme Court reversed the Illinois Supreme Court and directed that Pickering be rehired. The Supreme Court observed that there was no evidence in the record to show that Pickering had in any way disrupted the operation of the school. Therefore, the Court reasoned, Pickering must have been fired because the school board "equated the Board members' own interests with that of the schools." (21) This

was unconstitutional, the Court went on. The questions raised by Pickering's letter were legitimate questions about a matter of public policy which Pickering, as a citizen as well as a public employee, had a right to help in deciding. The Court came close to enunciating the interesting principle that criticism of a superior is not cause for discharge unless it can be shown that work is disrupted.

Subsequent lower-court decisions have refined the principle of the Pickering case. If a public employee does his or her speaking (a) away from the place of employment, (b) at the place of employment but during non-working hours, as during lunch time, or (c) during working hours but in a silent form which is not disruptive (examples: wearing a black armband to protest the Vietnam War, refusing to salute the flag or recite the pledge of allegiance), there is presently strong support in the cases for the conclusion that the employee may not be fired for that speech.

Employee speech in the private sphere also enjoys (at least for the time being) surprisingly strong protection. In 1974, in a case involving the Magnavox Company of Tennessee, the National Labor Relations Board and the Supreme Court held that a union may not waive a member's right to leaflet or to solicit on company property during non-working hours. (22) Neither the Board nor the Court has explained why a union can waive its members' right to strike, but cannot waive their right to speak. Nothing in the Wagner Act, or its amendments, or the legislative history pertinent thereto justifies this distinction between striking and speaking. In fact, the Act expressly protects "concerted activities" in general and the right to strike in particular, (23) whereas the right to speak is protected only by inference.

Still, we should be grateful for small favors. The Board and the courts have interpreted Magnavox to mean that a union cannot bargain away the right of union members to distribute literature about:

1. an increase in union dues; (24)
2. a recently-negotiated collective-bargaining agreement; (25)
3. a forthcoming union election; (26)
4. right-to-work and minimum-wage legislation. (27)

Accordingly, Magnavox provides something of a shield for dissidents who wish to agitate for changes in the union contract and for the election of officers pledged to bring about these changes.

An overall assessment of recent court decisions about workers' rights requires a prediction about the future. Will the trend of judicial repression continue? For several reasons, I think the answer is yes. First, the recent repression has muffled insurgency about control of work by requiring workers to concern themselves with whether they will have work at all. As the economy revives, demands for increased decision-making and expanded rights will probably revive, too. (28) Second, there seems no reason to doubt that the pressure on industries like steel and auto to increase

"productivity" so as to compete with other capitalist economies will continue. The productivity push translates itself into issues of workplace control such as speed-up, disregard for health and safety, and job combination. Third, despite occasional decisions to the contrary, (29) the present Supreme Court has a firm majority which believes in restricting workers' rights. The speech-protective decisions do not disprove this generalization, for at least in the private sphere, the speech which the courts have been most concerned to protect is speech directed to replacing one union with another. This concern is entirely consistent with the underlying rationale of the courts' approach: there must be freedom of agitation until a union is chosen. It adds the corollary: after a union representative is chosen, the one kind of agitation which may continue is agitation over whether that representative should be replaced by another.

### III

So far, I've argued that an important objective of a workers'-control movement should be to take out of the contract such clauses as the management-prerogatives clause, the no-strike clause, and the binding-arbitration clause.

Plainly this will take a long time. Changing a contract is likely to be as slow a process as its political counterpart, changing a law. A workers'-control movement requires, in addition to objectives such as contract change, a consensus as to how to move in situations where the contract has not yet been changed. To say the same thing in another way: Workers are just as much individuals as are the members of any other group. Labor history is too often visualized merely as a succession of mass events. Whatever one's strategic perspective, there must also be a feeling for how to take small steps in a restrictive setting.

My personal experience along these lines is meager. However the organizers who shared their personal experiences with my wife and myself as we put together RANK AND FILE were experts in these matters. Generalizing their experiences, it seems to me that all sought to create an intensely democratic relationship between rank-and-file workers and their immediate representative, the union steward or informal spokesperson; that all also sought to settle problems at the "first step" of the grievance procedure where steward confronts foreman; and that the upshot of this approach was to continue bargaining in the form of the direct settlement of grievances. In the most democratic union, contract bargaining is necessarily carried on by representatives, and therefore, so far as the ordinary worker is concerned, vicariously. Grievance settlement, on the other hand, can give the ordinary worker a direct voice in decision-making when the steward or informal spokesperson is prepared to invoke the collective power of his or her constituents.



For example, organizers we interviewed routinely did some or all of the following in acting as stewards or informal spokespersons in the 1930s:

1. When a grievance was filed, they took the grievant with them to talk to the foreman. If it was a group grievance, work necessarily stopped when the group talked to the foreman, and this increased pressure for settlement.

2. After discussion of a problem with the foreman, they reported what had happened to all the workers concerned.

3. They held regular departmental meetings with their constituents.

4. They used the lunch hour to discuss common problems. Such discussions in which everyone was involved expressed obvious power, and often continued into the afternoon work time. (It was emphasized to us that meetings on company property during the work day were particularly important in involving women workers, who were less free than men to attend meetings after work.)

5. They met regularly with stewards in other departments. In this way there came into being a stewards' council, independent from the union although not antagonistic to it.

6. They put out mimeographed newsletters reporting to their constituents about the status of grievances, and other matters affecting the department.

7. During the negotiation and ratification of contracts, they collected demands for contract change from the workers to whom they were responsible, reported as best they could on the progress of negotiations, and insisted on voting on the contract "line by line" at local union meetings.

8. They pressed for meetings of all the locals representing employees of the same company in a particular area, e.g., a General Motors council in the Detroit area. In this way they assisted locals to relate directly to other locals, rather than relating only through higher levels of the union hierarchy.

9. They led direct action where necessary, especially in response to discharges and to health and safety problems.

10. They stimulated non-sectarian discussion of current events and labor history at local union meetings. (Frank Marquardt's autobiography, recently published by the Pennsylvania State University Press, gives a good picture of such workers' education in militant U.A.W. locals in the late 1930s.)

11. They encouraged involvement in community issues such as unemployment, race discrimination, and rent control.

12. They nurtured the organic growth of class consciousness through local labor parties and labor schools where workers from different occupations came together and discovered common interests.

My own impression is that the steward, or informal spokesperson, can ordinarily make modest progress toward increased rank-

and-file decision-making even within the confines of a restrictive contract. David Moberg's conversations with dozens of workers at Lordstown (30) showed that they felt more powerful and more in control of their struggle before they went on strike than during or after it. Pre-strike activity took the form of slow-downs and working by rule. A single worker, upon hearing of a problem in another department, or because of a more immediate offense, could affect the course of events by his or her acts. In contrast, the strike, when the international union finally permitted it, relegated the workers to the role of spectators. Symbolically picketing an empty plant, they became outsiders not only to the work process but to the conduct of the strike. Lordstown indicates how much determined co-workers can accomplish even without the right to strike.

#### IV

Everything proposed in these pages will make sense only if pursued in the context of a few, endlessly-repeated ideas. The attraction and danger of a workers'-control movement is that it can be effected in small steps. The attraction is obvious: anyone, anywhere can make a beginning; this is an arena where one person can count, as Rosa Parks counted in the civil-rights movement, or David Mitchell counted in the movement against the Vietnam War. The danger is also obvious: as with any program of incremental change, it is easy to get lost, become coopted, forget one's original goals. Clear, consistent ideas offer the best protection against this danger.

A workers'-control approach to socialism makes it possible to think of socialism as a change that would increase democracy. Workers' control is democracy applied to economic decisions. It is not, or should not be, an alternative to socialism, as some recent discussion in the radical press suggests. It must not be content with co-determination or participation schemes which give workers a minority, and therefore ineffectual, voice in decision-making: it must affirm that workers' control means that "the workers conquer rights of veto" over decisions like closing a factory or speeding up an assembly line. (31) On the other hand, the workers'-control idea gives one a chance of distinguishing this kind of socialism from the image of all-engulfing state control. I believe this distinction is essential if socialists hope to be heard by American workers.

But if the workers'-control idea is immediately attractive in a nation describing itself as a democracy, there remain restraints which cause workers to hesitate before embracing it. One is the visceral sense that the obstacles are too great and the other side is too powerful: stick your neck out, this voice tells us, and all that will come of it is that people will get hurt.

A more subtle restraint arises from the fact that work under

another's orders is a source of pain and humiliation. As Simone Weil long ago wrote about her own work in a French factory: "The first effect of suffering is the attempt of thought to escape. It refuses to confront the adversity that wounds it. Thus, when workingmen speak of their lot, they repeat more often than not the catchwords coined by people who are not workingmen." (32)

Andre Gorz has in mind the same thing when he writes of the "appalling silence which has fallen over working-class reality": (33) an absence not of descriptions about workers, but of language of, by, and for workers, by means of which abstractions such as workers' control might be grounded in daily experience. Working people often recognize that they know more about their jobs than the boss does, but also feel that they don't have the education and connections to run the plant. A workers' culture, such as Gorz calls for, is indispensable if workers are to overcome their sense of incapacity to manage.

Precisely because workers' control cannot be successfully advocated without encountering these emotions of class unworthiness, in pursuing workers' control there must take place the transformation of the actor, as well as the accomplishment of the act. Workers' control is beautiful, to paraphrase Bartholomew Vanzetti, because it can only come about by the creation of human beings capable of administering it. Small as our collective experience is, it is not so small that we have not experienced the rapturous moment when a group which, each doubting both self and others, has taken its courage in its hands and acted, returns to the routine of work exclaiming without words in every movement: "We did it. We did it. We can do it. And next time we'll do more."

#### NOTES

1. WORK IN AMERICA: REPORT OF A SPECIAL TASK FORCE TO THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE, p. 186.

2. Therefore, a law requiring corporations to negotiate with unions before ordering production changes, investing in new facilities, or buying another company (Sweden) should be viewed as workers' control only to the extent that rank-and-file workers have the final say in union decisions.

3. Introduction, "The Communists of the 1930s and the New Left," SOCIALIST REVOLUTION, January-March 1976, p. 5.

4. Here I am quoting from myself in "The United Front in America: A Note," RADICAL AMERICA, July-August 1974, p. 31. I have explored the legislative history of the Norris-LaGuardia, Wagner, and Taft-Hartley Acts in more detail in "The Right to Engage in Concerted Activity After Union Recognition: A Study of Legislative History," INDIANA LAW JOURNAL, Summer 1975.

5. The phrase occurs in United Steel Workers v. Warrior & Gulf Navigation Company, 363 U.S. 574 (1960). (Translated, this legal citation means: U.S. Supreme Court reports, Volume 363, Page 574.)

6. N.L.R.B. v. Allis-Chalmers Manufacturing Company, 388 U.S. 175 (1967).

7. Boys Markets, Inc. v. Retail Clerks Union, Local 770, 398 U.S. 235 (1970).

8. Gateway Coal Company v. U.M.W., 414 U.S. 368 (1974). Section 502 states: "N or shall the quitting of labor by an employee or employees in good faith because of abnormally dangerous conditions for work at the place of employment of such employee or employees be deemed a strike under this chapter."

9. Ibid.

10. Emporium Capwell Company v. Western Addition Community Organization, 420 U.S. 50 (1975).

11. Hudgens v. N.L.R.B., 44 L.W. 4281 (1976). (Translated, this legal citation means: LAW WEEK, Volume 44, Page 4281. This series contains recent decisions not yet published in the United States Supreme Court reports.)

12. Eazor Express Company v. I.B.T., 357 F. Supp. 158 (W.D. Pa. 1973) (liability), 376 F. Supp. 841 (W.D. Pa. 1974) (damages). (Translated, this legal citation refers to a series reporting Federal district-court decisions entitled Federal Supplement.) The Carbon Fuel Company decision is described in a recent issue of MOUNTAIN JOURNAL.

13. Kelley v. Johnson, 44 L.W. 4469 (1976). Related Supreme Court decisions in the spring of 1976 gave local officials power to regulate public employees' place of residence, and to retire them at any age.

14. Bishop v. Wood, 44 L.W. 4820 (1976).

15. Mortonville Joint School District v. Mortonville Education Association, 44 L.W. 4864 (1976).

16. National League of Cities v. Usery, 44 L.W. 4974 (1976).

17. The quotation is from an unpublished manuscript by Anderson dealing with events in his life subsequent to those he recounts in Alice and Staughton Lynd, ed., RANK AND FILE: PERSONAL HISTORIES BY WORKING-CLASS ORGANIZERS.

18. Eazor, 376 F. Supp. at 843.

19. The recent tendency of the courts to give contract language precedence over the language of the Wagner Act has been reinforced by a National Labor Relations Board policy of "deferring" decision of unfair-labor-practice complaints until an arbitrator has made a decision about the problem under the contract. Collyer Insulated Wire, 192 N.L.R.B. 837 (1971). (Translated, this legal citation refers to a series reporting N.L.R.B. decisions.) Ordinarily, after the arbitrator decides the Board accepts the decision without making a separate investigation of its own.

20. Pickering v. Board of Education of Township High School District 205, Will County, 391 U.S. 563 (1968).

21. Ibid. at 571.

22. N.L.R.B. v. Magnavox Company of Tennessee, 415 U.S. 322 (1974).

23. Section 13 of the Wagner Act, even as amended by the Taft-Hartley Act, states: "Nothing in this Act, except as specifically provided for herein, shall be construed so as either to interfere with or impede or diminish in any way the right to strike, or to affect the limitations or qualifications on that right."

24. McDonnell Douglas Corporation, 210 N.L.R.B. 280 (1974).

25. Massey-Ferguson, Inc., 211 N.L.R.B. No. 64 (1974). The literature was passed out by the U.A.W. United National Caucus.

26. General Motors Corporation, 211 N.L.R.B. No. 123 (1974).

27. Eastex Incorporated and United Paperworkers International Union, Local 801, 215 N.L.R.B. No. 58 (1974).

28. See "Worker unrest: Not dead, but playing possum," BUSINESS WEEK, May 10, 1976, which ascribes the unrest among young workers to an "irreversible" change in values brought about by the movements of the 1960s. Paul Rosenstein kindly called this article to my attention.

29. The Supreme Court made the following mildly pro-labor decisions in the spring of 1976: The states may not regulate concerted refusal to work overtime, although the employer may discharge employees involved if he has the economic power (Lodge 76, International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Work-

ers v. Wisconsin Employment Relations Commission, 44 L.W. 5026); a public employer may not discharge an employee because of mere membership in a political party other than the party in power (Elrod v. Burns, 44 L.W. 5091); and most important, an injunction may not issue against a sympathy strike not subject to arbitration under the collective-bargaining agreement of the sympathy strikers (Buffalo Forge v. United Steelworkers, 44 L.W. 5293).

30. The conversations are reported in David Moberg's unpublished dissertation for the Anthropology Department of the University of Chicago.

31. The quotation is from Ernest Mandel. "Bill Moyers' Journal: Why Work? Part II," WNET, March 28, 1976.

32. Simone Weil, "Factory Work," POLITICS, December 1946.

33. Andre Gorz, "Reform and Revolution," THE SOCIALIST REGISTER 1968, p. 134.

*STAUGHTON LYND is a long-time activist who has worked for several years with insurgent groups within the United Steel Workers. He now has a law degree as well.*

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# **Beneath the Surface:**

## *The Life of a Factory*

*Dodee Fennell*

### INTRODUCTION

The focus of the following essay is a small factory which makes electrical connectors. Situated in a rural community in the Great Lakes industrial belt, Electric Inc. employs some 400 industrial and 100 white-collar workers. The study is taken from interviews and discussions with men and women who worked or are working in this factory. While some of the history and many of the mechanical details of Electric Inc. were available without talking to the people who actually worked there, much of the history and all of the factory experience were unrecorded outside of memory, physical and emotional scars, and personal interactions.

Beginning in November 1972, I worked in this shop for a total period of 14 months spread over three years, ending in July 1974, when I was fired for "absenteeism." I and many of my co-workers are convinced that the real reason for my dismissal had to do with my union and extra-union activities. During the latter two of my stints in the factory, I acted as shop steward for women in the aluminum-assembly departments on second shift. During this period I took advantage of every chance I had to find out about the history of the shop. I wanted to understand what lay behind the patterns

of social friendships and informal resistance to management that I saw around me. After my firing, I decided to continue my research and write it up. Besides doing more interviews, I sifted through seniority lists, union contracts and files, strike papers, shop memos, newspaper articles, tax and property records, and numerous other items which workers either saved and shared with me or pilfered for me. This article, with the names altered, is a condensed version of that history.

Even now when I reread my notes I am impressed with the quantity and quality of information workers have accumulated about the total operation of the factory, including its history. While being one of the most striking impressions, it is also one of the saddest. Except for the satisfaction workers derive from just knowing what is going on, it is precisely this knowledge, along with the creativity and ability it reveals, which has no place in capitalistic factory production. Of course to know what is going on is the first step to figuring out how to make it go better. But without the opportunity to apply their knowledge, it often becomes a source of bitterness and frustration.

### Clarence Long's Shop

The origins of Electric Inc. date back to 1927, when George and Leo Heilemann began manufacturing electrical connectors in their backyard garage in the nearby industrial city of Lakeside. Within the decade they moved their operations to an abandoned machine shop in Lakeside, and employed some 50 workers.\* In 1942, the Heilemanns began an experiment to cut production costs. They arranged for one of their foremen, Clarence Long, to transport and distribute the shop's assembly work to the homes of his friends and relatives living in a rural area some 20 miles south of Lakeside. Most of these home-industry workers were either handicapped persons, senior citizens, or women with children whose husbands had been drafted.

This putting-out system continued until 1945, when Federal inspectors investigated the operation. Home industry was regulated under the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, and Long's business violated the Act, which prescribed a minimum wage, regulated hours, required an operator's license, and outlined special provisions for the employment of handicapped persons. Rather than meet the standards, Long and the Heilemanns centralized the work of the home industry in an old garage located in Town, a rural

\*The experiences of these workers have been deleted from the article for reasons of space. Their experiences, however, are interesting and include trade-union activity with all three of the major electrical workers' unions between 1936 and 1964.



community some 20 miles from Lakeside. Former employees who were physically able came to work in the Town shop. According to Clarence Long, "even some of the children who had helped their mothers with the assembling and packing work at home" became employees, "when they were old enough to work in a shop." The original work force was composed chiefly of older women and men, who according to Long were "people too old to get work elsewhere."

In 1946 the Heilemanns leased their entire assembly department to Long, and he installed a few more machines and hired more workers. Production continued at the old garage until the floors began to sag under the weight of the machinery. Sometime around 1950 Long moved from this building to a renovated horse stable located just a mile from Town. Thomas Kyper, a handicapped worker, recalled that there were about 50 workers in the new shop, and "90 percent of them were local women." In most cases they were supplementing marginal farm incomes with factory wages.

Long played the roles of owner, president, chief mechanic, social director, and janitor. Over the years he developed what one worker described as "a very special relationship with his workers." Workers said he was fair about giving time off to farmers in the work force when farming chores had to be undertaken. Harriet Johnston remembered that,

Farmers were given time off to do haying, planting, harvesting. Women with children in school could come in late after they had gotten the kids off to school. It was one big happy family. Long worked right alongside of the workers.

According to Thomas Kyper,

Some of the workers borrowed money from Long. Often times he advanced pay checks. All holidays, birthdays, and departures were celebrated with parties held during shop time and gifts from Long. Mr. Long had an ideal relationship with his workers. He made coffee for the people in the morning.

Doris Blake expressed the recurring theme of discussions about the early period of the shop's history :

It was one big happy family. We were the happiest bunch anyone had known. Every holiday was celebrated or observed. Ham and turkeys for Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Jason Sheldon recalled that

Clarence was more on the ball than any other subsequent management. Long was a lenient employer, although his motives were not always pure. It was one big happy family

under Long. (He) socialized with the people in the plant . . . went hunting and fishing with them. They were all friends in the plant (who) knew each other's personal problems. Long was friendly with all his help. He visited the workers at their homes. If he arrived at suppertime, he would have dinner with them.

Relationships between Clarence Long and the workers may have been ideal, but working conditions were not. In 1950, wages were 30 to 50 percent lower than wages for identical work being done in the Lakeside shop. By this time much of the work done in Long's shop overlapped with that done in Lakeside. Production now included assembly work, machine tooling, packing, shipping, and chemical processing. At least one worker in Long's shop of the early fifties protested against unhealthy working conditions.

Helen Fields had gone to work because she had to support her family while her husband was bedridden with a serious illness. Her brother, sister-in-law, aunt and niece, many friends and neighbors also worked for Long. When Fields complained that the ventilation system in the degreaser room was inadequate and that the fumes were making her sick, Long showed her a recent state inspector's report which certified the system. Unsatisfied with this response, Fields quit her job and took Long to court, not for compensation, but to force him to install the proper ventilation system and to warn other workers of the potential health hazard. Although the court took no action, pressure from Long's insurance company achieved the same end.

Helen Fields explained her suit against Long by saying that she was "for the working people." She claims to have no grudge against Long. Rather she holds the state inspectors and insurance agents responsible for the bad working conditions. As evidence of her good feelings toward Long, she recalled an incident when she had defended him to some women who were complaining about Long and his work practices. To their complaints she told them to go and take "a look in that piece of glass (a mirror) over there. See those gray hairs. Now be thankful that there is a Clarence Long who would hire old women like us and give us an opportunity to earn a living."

To compensate for the low wages, which in 1952 averaged 50 cents per hour, there was "plenty of overtime," "good" health-insurance benefits, and handy and steady work. Throughout the shop's history, workers could recall only one slowdown; that was sometime in the fifties, presumably during the recession which followed the Korean War. But even this slowdown was not considered to be anything serious. Doris Blake recalled that during this time,

Mr. Long went around to the women and asked them if any of them wanted some time off to clean their homes or to get caught up on their sewing, or what have you...or if there was something they cared to do that they were behind in....

Doris Blake also recalled that many farmer husbands of the women workers took advantage of the insurance benefits to have operations for hernias, "which they had been carrying around for years." Other fringe benefits included the "good deals" on hunting and fishing gear Long could get through his connections with local merchants. And of no small consequence for the housewives and farmers was the very flexible work schedule, which could be altered at any time. Given these conditions it is not surprising that just about all the workers felt that they could best represent their interests as individuals.

United Electrical workers organizers who came "to talk to the workers" in Long's shop did not receive an enthusiastic response from them. At least three factors contributed to this lack of union support. First, there is evidence that the UE international representative may have been working for the FBI and deliberately sabotaging the union's efforts. Second, the late forties were hard times, and workers in Long's shop were in no position to risk their jobs. Third, Long did not want a union in his shop, and he talked against unionization. According to Long, "a union is hard on a small shop." Harriet Johnston, who never saw the need for a union throughout her 30 years of working experience, remembered that,

Clarence used to say (to his workers) "now I don't want a union in here... You get a union and I'll close the doors."  
Or (he would say) "If you get a union in here, I'm leaving, I'm not sticking around."

During the one informal "free election" the UE organizers held, Long watched while the workers raised their hands to defeat the union. Equally important, Long's shop already had something of an informal shop decision-making procedure. Harriet Johnston recalled the "big meetings" during company time when Long would ask for people's opinions and advice "on things." Mary Ellen Paulson remembered that the workers and Long "communicated."

He would hold shop meetings... He'd tell the workers that he had so much money to spend on wages and would ask how they thought it should be divided up. One decision which we made was whether to have longer breaks or extra paid holidays.

In 1955, Lucifer Dunlitz assumed ownership of both the Lakeside factory and its Town branch. He "retired" the Heilemann Brothers,

but retained Long as president of Electric Inc. Under Dunlitz's management, Electric Inc. moved from the horse stable to a recently constructed machine shop located on the east side of Town, just two miles from the old shop. According to Harriet Johnston,

most of the help went with Long. Some of the younger ones went to Westinghouse in Lakeside to get higher wages, but the older ones stuck with him, mainly because they couldn't get work anyplace else. They were too old. You know you get by a certain age and they just don't hire you anymore.

Shortly after this move, Dunlitz had a foundry built behind the new machine shop. According to Matt Conda, one of the first men to work in the foundry, the original foundry workers "were older men and they came to work at Long's foundry through friendships," even though wages were low and many of them drove some sixty miles round-trip from home to work. Conda recalled that these men left other jobs to work for Long, and he suspected that they hoped to find more relaxed working conditions than existed in other foundries in the vicinity. Electric Inc. had acquired a reputation for having lax work rules, and rumor has it that these original foundry workers took full advantage of the situation. Shop lore contains stories about Conda's frequent trips to local bars after lunch breaks to round up his crew for the second half of the day. It is also rumored that beer was a popular summer beverage in the foundry. Anyone who knows the heat, dirt and noise of the foundry will not find these rumors unreasonable.

Whether old, rowdy or intoxicated, these men were responsible for bringing the first union to Town. Unlike their counterparts in the machine shop, these men were neither marginal farmers, unskilled workers, local residents, or recipients of Long's benevolence. It took them less than a year to conclude that plant expansion and Dunlitz's managerial policies required them to organize. In 1960 they forced Long to recognize a union we will call the International Metal Workers, an organization already familiar to many of them. Rather than forming a separate local, the men at Electric Inc. became members of a Metal Workers' local in Lakeside. According to Long, the foundry workers were "men who had always known a union and who wouldn't work without one. They were tough cats."

Three years after the foundry went union, the NLRB certified the Metal Workers to represent production and maintenance workers in the machine shop. Of the 63 eligible voters, 45 voted for the Metal Workers and 12 against them. There was no other union on the ballot, although five or six employees already belonged to the Pattern Makers Union. From all accounts, it appears that Dunlitz and Long were more interested in having the Metal Workers recognized than was anyone else, with the exception of the Metal Workers district representative, Oscar Mucker. According to Mary Ellen Paulson,

the company or Clarence Long wanted the Metal Workers in the machine shop. Long went around and asked his oldest workers, who didn't want a union, to support the Metal Workers in the machine shop because he wanted them to.

Harriet Johnston remembered that,

They kept preaching to us "union, union." Clarence asked me to support the Metal Workers union coming into the machine shop. Before that, however, he had always talked against it.

Thomas Kyper recalled that,

when the Lakeside company decided that there had to be a union in the Town shop, Long was instructed to send his foremen around to tell the workers that they had to have the Metal Workers.

After the union election, Long "left the company." The details of his resignation are not known to me. Of course there are many opinions and rumors on the subject, and Long's own vagueness about it lends them support. Harriet Johnston thinks that "things just got too big for Clarence to handle. He didn't have the education to run a big company." Others thought that Long was involved in some shady deals. Still others said that Long was just mismanaging the shop and when Dunlitz realized this, he reluctantly asked him to resign. A year after Long resigned, Dunlitz closed the Lakeside factory and moved all operations to Electric Inc.

Subsequent managements have been unable to imitate Long's informal managerial style. From the beginning Dunlitz had the "wrong attitude" about the workers, best summed up in his remark that they were "dumb farmers." The most obvious reaction to Dunlitz's managerial policies can be found in turnover rates. During the 1960s turnover increased from "one or two workers every eight or nine months" to "sixty to eighty workers every month." According to Thomas Kyper, "many of these people would quit and be hired back. The company had some kind of unwritten rule that they would rehire at least four times." Either unwilling or unable to treat workers as individuals with unique personalities, problems and needs, Dunlitz tried to rule the shop through the union. Though the union was willing to co-operate, the workers were not.

#### The Union

Mary Ellen Paulson recalled that "it took about a year for people in the machine shop to discover that the Metal Workers was a company union." To earn this reputation, the union participated in management's efforts to formalize work practices and to establish a strict code of shop regulations. Everyone in the shop has a fa-

vorite union story. With bitterness disguised in cynicism, these stories reveal the intrinsic corruption in the union's bureaucratic structure, and the irresponsible trade unionism practiced by the Metal Workers. Union officers at Electric Inc. have acted as "hatchet men" for the company. They have "looked the other way" when the company ignored the union contract. They have talked down to the membership, without trying either to understand their grievances or to fight for their interests.

A typical incident involved Arthur Hooke, until recently a powerful union officer, and Doris Blake, a woman with 21 years seniority who was forced to retire. Doris Blake was old and the company considered her both a safety risk and expendable. Union officers remained silent while the company ignored seniority rules and demoted her from punch press to grinding, the worst department in the shop. At one point in this process, Arthur Hooke told Doris Blake that she was "too old to work." Though that was probably true, she did not think that her financial situation gave her the luxury of retirement. Doris Blake lost her job in 1973 and died two years later, a broken and bitter woman.

Until recently irresponsible men and women held union office because few workers bothered to vote in union elections. In the 1974 election for chief steward, less than 60 of the 400 workers eligible to vote cast a ballot. Union offices have been used as stepping stones to managerial posts. Four foremen, a personnel manager, a plant supervisor, and several other managerial employees formerly served as union officers. Although this union-company mobility represents a well-worn pattern, the problem is not one of personal weakness. Three-dimensional webs of officialdom, legality, bureaucracy, and established policy trap even the best intentioned union officer.

The union's eagerness to do the company's dirty work, and the ease with which the company snatches union officers to fill managerial positions, has discouraged the rank and file. What little support the union had in the beginning quickly dissipated. Less than 30 of the 63 workers eligible to join the union after the NLRB election joined on their own initiative. Initiation fees were automatically deducted from the wages of the others. Within a year after the NLRB election, the rank and file stopped voting in union elections and attending union meetings. Those workers who tried at different times to reform the union, and make it responsible to the rank and file, either ran up against brick walls or accepted managerial positions offered by the company. The union came into the shop from the top, and it never developed more than a perfunctory interest in the rank and file and their grievances.

Although wages were half the national averages for machine-shop workers, the Metal Workers have never called a strike. Workers walked out in 1971 and 1974 over the objections of both company and union. In November 1971, workers struck Electric Inc.

for the first time in shop history. Wages and the length of the new contract were the central issues. During the strike, which lasted three weeks, union officers negotiated with the company but ignored the strikers. The rank and file, however, remained solid behind their demand for a 26-month contract, ten months short of the usual contract length. Though both company and union opposed this demand, they were forced to give in before workers would agree to return to work.

Two days before Christmas, workers ratified the latest union-company offer by a slim margin. The wage settlement was the highest in the company's history, amounting to 18 cents per hour effective December 17, 1971, and 43 cents over the next two years. By 1974, this settlement put the average wage for a machine-shop worker at \$2.93 per hour, plus incentive and overtime. At that rate annual income was approximately \$6,500. According to US government calculations, in 1972, a moderate annual income for a family of four was \$11,000.

After a bitter and discouraging struggle, they had won something of a victory. But anti-union and anti-company sentiments were strong. "A few workers" expressed these sentiments by refusing to pick up advanced wage checks issued by the company on December 23. According to one woman worker, it was "like a slap in the face. We were serious about the strike, and wanted to stay out. Could have stayed out. We didn't need their (the company's) help."

Wages, extended benefits and a company-proposed Job Evaluation Plan were issues in 1974, when once again workers walked out over the objections of both company and union. Job Evaluation quickly became the key issue in this strike, which lasted a week. Replacement of the incentive system at Electric Inc. was necessary because workers were "beating it." Electric Inc.'s incentive system was especially "unsound" because it was a carryover from the Long era. Even though job operations had changed, workers ran production at the old rates and made sure that new workers did too. In order to beef up their ability to control workers' time and productivity, the company offered to buy the incentive system from the union for an increase in wages of 10¢ per hour. Without access to company books, it is impossible to compute the monetary significance of this offer with regard to wages. In my own case, however, it meant a loss of 20 to 50 dollars per week.

In the company's proposed Job Evaluation Plan, they stated that,

The Company reserves the right exercised reasonably, of revising, adding or eliminating any job classifications, as conditions warrant, including but not limited to changes in methods, equipment, speeds and feeds, material, new equipment, processes or techniques.

Although no one supported the company's right to "evaluate" jobs in this manner, there were mixed feelings over the sale of the incentive system. In a referendum election held during the strike, assembly workers voted against selling the incentive system, while the majority of machine-shop workers supported the sale. Many machine-shop workers stated that there "was too much partiality and favoritism involved with the distribution of incentive work." Under the system at Electric Inc., the group leaders, who are union members in managerial positions at the production level, had the authority to assign incentive work. Intentionally or not, incentive work could be used to intimidate or harass workers who had lost favor with the group leader. Often it caused arguments among workers in a department, especially if incentive work was not rotated so that everyone got a chance to "make some money." In general incentive systems are an insult to human dignity, and specifically they are a form of terror to any worker who cannot meet the standard rates and thus stands to be fired. Although machine-shop workers supported the sale of the incentive system, they did not support the company's Job Evaluation scheme. Just about everyone saw that for what it was.

During the 1974 strike, the Metal Workers surpassed their 1971 performance. They asked the more militant workers to betray the rank and file and endorse union proposals. The negotiating team worked behind closed doors and maintained an informational screen. In fact, at the union mass meeting to discuss the contract, Oscar Mucker said he would throw out anyone who asked questions. One woman then asked about the sagacity of selling the incentive system for a dime, and was thrown out. During this meeting, workers began to circulate a petition calling for the dismissal of Oscar Mucker. Over 100 workers signed this petition, even though success would have left them without a liaison between the International and the local in the middle of a strike. Just before balloting on the contract began, members of the union negotiating team stood before the rank and file and repeated company threats to close the shop if the contract was not ratified. Faced with this mess, workers agreed to go back to work, but only after the company agreed to a two-year contract and promised that Job Evaluation would not mean increased rates.

#### By-Passing the Union

How do workers at Electric Inc. defend themselves against company-union collusion and irresponsible trade-union practices? What is done but seldom said can be expressed in the following way: With the company and the union against us we can rely on only ourselves and the network of friendships we develop. The range of actions taken by workers relying on themselves covers the distance from simply demanding on the spot that a dull and therefore hazardous shaffering tool be sharpened, to secretly writ-



ing a letter to OSHA begging Federal inspectors to take action on a malfunctioning punch press which had already cost several fingers. Some have organized efforts to throw out the old union hierarchy or to throw out the Metal Workers altogether and replace them with the UE. Many workers say that friends and relatives have told them that the UE is a stronger and fairer union than the Metal Workers. While incumbent officers have been replaced, it is much harder to replace the union itself because of NLRB regulations which bar such an action except during the last thirty days of the contract.

These and other actions against the company are carried out by an informal resistance network of workers, headed by a woman in her forties who operates a turret lathe. Whatever the grievance, workers go first to the union; and when failing to get results, as is usually the case, they next see Esther Szabo. Although she claims to "have a poor memory," she can recall three-fourths of the workers by their first names.

Esther Szabo began to work at Electric Inc. in 1966. Since she was seventeen, she had worked in small, non-union shops in Cleveland and Lakeside. When she came to Electric Inc., she expected to earn higher wages and find working conditions similar to those in her former shop. From her brother and brother-in-law she had heard that Electric Inc. "was a nice place to work," a rumor contradicted by the fact that by 1966 "they were always hiring." She recalled that the two most frequently heard comments on the union were, "They just take your money," and "They never do anything."

One of her first confrontations with the Metal Workers involved the scheduling of union meetings. In 1966 union meetings were held in City Hall on Tuesday evenings, making it impossible for second-shift workers to attend them. To give herself the opportunity to participate in meetings, Esther Szabo suggested that meetings be held on Sunday afternoons. She got support from other workers for this demand, and the meetings were changed. But attendance, usually stewards and officers, did not improve. A few meetings convinced Esther Szabo that this poor turnout was not due to apathy but that workers were already fed up with the Metal Workers.

A detached observer would probably find these union meetings very entertaining. Minutes are improperly recorded and give little if any indication of what has transpired. Formality and Robert's Rules are invoked only to cut off a disgruntled speaker or a discussion which verges on mutiny. Officers use three-fourths of the meeting time to wade through administrative material. And, meetings end with a sigh of relief, saluting the stamina of those who endured the whole two hours. Esther Szabo remained silent when the Tuesday-evening meeting time was restored.

Less than a year after winning this hollow victory, she began a campaign to have a pay phone installed in the shop cafeteria. The seriousness of having no convenient means to communicate with

the outside world from the shop was underscored when a second-shift worker was stranded at the plant because her car would not start. The woman had to walk half a mile to Town at 2:30 AM to call her husband to come and help her. The women workers were especially concerned. They feared being stranded, but also wanted a phone so they could "call home during breaks and lunch times to check if everything was okay with their children." After this incident, Esther Szabo went to Waltz, the union president, and requested that a phone be installed for the workers. "Waltz wasn't interested," so she went to a foreman, but he too "wasn't interested." Finally Esther Szabo wrote a petition demanding that the workers get a phone, and "everybody signed it." She took it around to second-shift workers during breaks and lunch time, and came in early the next day to ask first-shift workers to also sign. Pressure from below forced the union to take up the issue, and the workers got a phone. Two months later the same procedure was used to get a dollar changer in the cafeteria.

In 1970, when the company ordered their foremen to stop workers from practicing their usual routine of quitting five minutes before the end of the shift to wash their hands, workers went to Esther Szabo. They had just assumed their right to wash off company dirt on company time, even though the union contract did not mention it. As far as the union officers were concerned, this attempt to alter established routine was outside union jurisdiction because "nothing was said about it in the contract." At the request of fellow workers, Esther Szabo launched a harassment and intimidation campaign against Waltz, still union president. She took every opportunity to convince him that they "deserved" the five minutes to clean up. She argued that the company had no right to change established work practices unilaterally. To silence this woman, Waltz agreed to do what he could. Meanwhile, workers supported Esther Szabo's actions by continuing to quit five minutes early. In face of such strong resistance, Waltz had to go to the company and tell them their plan would not go down with the workers. And the company backed down.

In March 1974, just one month before the union contract expired, the Metal Workers supported a company plan to unceremoniously fire several workers who had accumulated many years of seniority. "There was a rumor going around the shop that the company had made a list of twenty workers who were too slow and they were going to fire them." Furthermore, it was rumored that Bill Stewart, a handicapped worker with five years in the milling department, was at the top of the list. Although Stewart filed a grievance, the union hierarchy ruled there was "no case" and his grievance never went to arbitration. From the union, Stewart went to Esther Szabo, who was both fellow worker and neighbor.

As word got around the shop, workers were outraged — if not out of genuine concern for Stewart, then at least over the principle of the action, and the possibility that "they might be next on the

list." After some informal discussions with trusted friends, Esther Szabo started a petition supporting Stewart's right to his job. She explained that "people signed it because they weren't sure if they were on the list, and they realized that even if they weren't on this list, they had to stop this sort of company heavy-handedness or they could be next on some future list." Strong opposition defeated the company once again, and no one was fired. Workers interpreted the company's action on two levels. Taken at face value, it was a completely understandable, though unacceptable, plan "to get rid of the deadheads." More disturbing, however, it was a way of testing workers' reactions to across-the-board changes in work regulations, especially those affecting productivity. Rumors about the company's Job Evaluation Plan were already circulating throughout the shop, and workers connected this incident with the rumors.

Informal resistance networks at Electric Inc. are not crisis-oriented. Throughout the shop workers, acting either as individuals or in concert with others, restrict production. Even individual acts often succeed only because nearby workers "look the other way." Tools become "missing" or "broken." Machines "act up" or "break down" altogether. Sympathetic set-up operators "take their time" to set up machines. Job orders "disappear" or become illegible. Barrels, boxes and trays of parts and materials "get lost." Unofficial agreements are made to stint the work, and these are assiduously maintained. Despite protests and threats from foremen, time-study men and group leaders, workers co-operate to restrict production.

Until recently, workers also co-operated on a day-to-day basis "to beat the incentive system," now replaced by Job Evaluation. The fact that the company felt the need to abandon the incentive system is an indication of the workers' success. Under the old incentive system, as the union contract expressed it, time-study men used "MTM, time study, standard data, or other recognized tools of industrial engineering" to assign jobs a parts-per-hour ratio. Workers were expected "to make" these rates, and were paid incentives of one per cent above the base rate "for each per cent of production increase above the normal rate." Any job run consistently over 150 per cent of the "normal rate" was subject to be retimed. Thus workers agreed to keep production at or below 150 per cent.

Workers modified most jobs to slow the pace, but in doing so took the risk that the company would "catch on" and order the rate men to retime the job. If there was no "better way" to do the job, workers could either forego quality or falsify records. Also foremen, group leaders, and stewards were plagued with official complaints about "unreasonable rates" while workers made informal agreements to stint production below the set rate. In 1974 this activity was becoming increasingly widespread in response to the company's systematic effort to re-evaluate jobs and assign new rates.

When production could neither be stinted, reduced or "made," women in assembly exercised their option to assist workers on rate to "make it." This practice was more common in assembly than in the machine shop because rather than being separated at individual machines, women in assembly were often assigned to work in groups of two or more. The basic principle was that anyone on rated time received help. When the company began to crack down, machine operators were unable to fall back on mutual aid. Though the rates were "beatable," workers in the machine shop were among the first to recognize that "beating it" cost more than it paid; hence their eagerness to abolish the incentive system in 1974. They did not, however, vote to replace incentive with Job Evaluation, the company's latest scheme to increase productivity.

The obvious problem for the company is how to milk the workers' experience and expertise without undermining basic assumptions about workers and power relationships in the factory. Esther Szabo stated that "the company treats people like machines," with no concern for individual needs, problems, or abilities. Since "people can't gain anything" by doing their best, "they cover themselves" by producing at their "bad days" level. Esther Szabo explained that workers find "happy mediums" of production, somewhere between their "good days" and "bad days" output. "Most people feel they should produce something" but they are careful not to exceed "their bad days' production" by too much, lest the company demand it all the time.

Fighting back through an informal network demands both awareness and participation from the majority of workers. Esther Szabo explained her activities by saying that she "wants to help people," as long as "the problem is legitimate." She doesn't "fight lost causes." People come to her because she spoke out in the past, and she has continued to fight for a justice which she doesn't articulate. She "starts something" and expects people to back her up with whatever it takes to win. Petitions have been effective, and they are not taken lightly. To sign a piece of paper which could "get lost" as it travels through the shop and fall into company hands is a very serious and risky business. In spite of protective labor legislation, the company is still very much in control of hiring and firing, and can easily find grounds to dismiss a worker.

One pay phone, a dollar changer, and a Sunday union meeting, five minutes to wash up, a two-year contract and stinting production...the list is not impressive. The realities of the wage system, with its long hours, low wages, hazardous working conditions, speed-up, monotony, meaningless work, and wasted talent, continue to frustrate the workers at Electric Inc. Yet these realities should not diminish the importance of their victories. The informal network did more to threaten prevailing shop conditions than the fumbings of the Metal Workers. Because the network was confined only by a "contract" of what was understood to be fair and decent

treatment of human beings, their actions went beyond legality. In this shop, where the traditions of the "one big happy family" era collided head-on with business unionism, the result was the establishment of an informal shop network which maintained an identity separate from the bosses and the union.

### The Social Network

Clarence Long recognized the value of socializing with and among his workers, especially since he paid low wages and expected long hours and maximum output. According to him, "workers should be made to feel important. Even the lowest-paid worker is a human being." For their own reasons, workers at Electric Inc. have formed an elaborate social network which operates both inside and outside the shop. While this social network is the backbone of their informal resistance network, it is also a means to counteract the dehumanizing effects of tending machines and assembling parts eight or more hours a day, five days a week, fifty weeks a year for a lifetime.

Outside the shop workers find many opportunities to interact. They often drink together. Usually it is the men who frequent the local working-class taverns during lunch breaks and before or after work, but it is not uncommon to find women there too. Men and women from the shop bring their friends and spouses to pre-arranged get-togethers after work. Saturday-evening parties at workers' homes are also a regular feature of social life for many of these people. Usually these social groups cross race, sex, and age lines, along with cultural, educational, political and philosophical differences. People become friends and lovers who drink, talk, dance and sing together. While most of the workers enjoy singing and listening to country and western music, the more modern stuff generally favored by younger workers is also accepted.

On yet another level of interaction there are camping trips and shopping sprees, Sunday dinners shared with friends and relatives, and weekday visits to people's homes for coffee, conversation, counseling and moral support. Fellow workers act as surrogate analysts, marriage counselors, child specialists, educators, and other professional people. On a lighter scale there are occasions to bake bread, distribute surplus garden produce, exchange old clothes, especially those of children, swap mechanical and other expertise, and "just plain help out."

The amount of time spent in these off-the-job encounters and activities is limited by the forty-to-sixty-hour work week. Thus socializing continues on the job. Workers in assembly try to arrange their jobs so that they can converse, control the pace of work, assist other workers, and restrict production. Often workers try to make something special out of their lunch breaks, either by organizing a pot-luck shop dinner or, during the summer

months, by picnicking behind the shop. The company is trying to get in on this, and has offered to build a "picnic area" near the shop.

During working hours, people find time to discuss families, homes, news events, politics, personal problems, working conditions, and themselves. The intensity and extent of these discussions have a built-in momentum, grounded in desperation. They represent a chance to make something human, something meaningful out of the time which is already so distorted and circumscribed by the whistles of the shifts.

People find strength and support in these discussions to make minor but important changes in their lives. Faith left a husband who beat her. Dorothy took a job on first shift so that she could improve her family life by spending more time with her husband and children. Others began to fight for improved safety conditions. Still others took from these discussions the courage to fight back against endless assaults by group leaders who told them to work faster, or foremen who kept track of how many times they went to the bathroom, or personnel managers who ordered them to come to work 15 minutes before the start of the shift without pay.

The effects of these discussions and interactions are evident throughout the shop. Several years ago some of the young counter-cultural women brought in books and information about vitamins, health foods, wholesome living, primal scream therapy, yoga and human sexuality. They discussed these subjects with the older women workers in assembly and throughout the shop. As one woman put it, the older women "got hooked." They began to fix their hair differently. Some of them donned blue jeans for the first time. Throughout the department women were talking about how good they felt now that they were eating better, doing exercises, and taking vitamins. As a few women shared their personal experiences with others, people seemed to become more relaxed and willing to join in discussions, even discussions about those things which are supposedly "private matters" such as abortion, birth control, "free" relationships, and family troubles. From the shared experiences and wisdom of older workers, younger workers learned about restricting output, shop etiquette and survival, and "the good old days." Rather than a one-way flow of information from young to old or old to young, there were real exchanges of opinions, knowledge and experience in both directions.

On yet another level of socializing, a few people formed study groups to read and discuss Jack London's *THE IRON HEEL*, John Steinbeck's *IN DUBIOUS BATTLE*, Studs Terkel's *HARD TIMES*, and Alix Kates Shulman's *MEMOIRS OF AN EX-PROM QUEEN*. More popular reading material includes farming magazines and "futures" farm reports, *POPULAR MECHANICS*, astrology magazines, and train-yourself engineering and electrical publications. This, like all reading material, is prohibited in the shop. Of course

people ignore this rule. Miscellaneous reading material I passed around the shop and discussed with friends included articles in ECONOMIC NOTES and MONTHLY REVIEW, War Resisters League literature, and David Montgomery's "What's Happening to the American Worker?" Many of these pieces were relevant to a particular shop discussion, issue, or argument.

Throughout the shop, people engage in conversations with topics as varied and unique as the people themselves. As a worker in this shop I have listened to and spoken in discussions about capitalist economics, politics, foreign policy, wheat sales, workers' control, women's rights, shop issues, and the "futures market." There are many occasions to use the information one hears in these discussions. In December 1973, men in the second-shift automatics department walked off their jobs when they learned that the company had denied Muriel Pawlowski's bid for a job in their department. Their understanding of women's rights had been shaped for the most part by what they saw on television and experienced in the shop. From there they determined that an equal right to a job which a woman qualified for was "women's liberation and it was okay." Within an hour after the men had walked into the personnel manager's office, Muriel Pawlowski was awarded the bid. To date only the maintenance and tool-and-die department are all-male.

In addition to the interactions of small groups of workers, there are also social encounters which involve the whole shop. For second-shift workers the most frequent of these are birthday celebrations and going-away parties. Preparations for a going-away party begin about a week in advance of the worker's last day. Food lists circulate throughout the shop during working hours, and workers sign up to bring a dish or some other necessary item. Usually the women prepare something at home and each of the men contributes a dollar toward a ham or roast. But occasionally one of the men will cook something. The most famous such man was George Binns, a tool-and-die maker who always kept an electric frying pan in the tool room. On the night of the party, workers drop off their contributions in the assembly department, where half a dozen women "get things ready." When the eight-o'clock whistle blows, eighty workers line up behind the guest of honor and the feast begins. It is an incredible scene carried out at a pace that would have delighted Frederick Winslow Taylor.

When the whistle to return to work blows at 8:30, people mosey back to their departments and resume work. Foremen have gotten into the habit of leaving assembly a few minutes before 8:30 to avoid confrontations with those workers who linger past the last whistle. Women in assembly clean up the mess, and everyone returns at the ten-o'clock break to finish what's left and to have cake and coffee. Birthdays are celebrated in a similar manner, but usually on a smaller scale unless the person is well-known and liked. These celebrations are fun and interesting. They demonstrate cooperation and organization without formal leadership or structure,

the ability to feed eighty people in half an hour, and an unanticipated use of the factory.

It is not my intention to paint a rosy picture of the shop or to give a false impression about workers' consciousness. The shop is a monstrous place, and workers' consciousness is riddled with contradictions. What should be clear from the preceding discussion, however, is that these workers socialize on the job, and that their personal and shop lives overlap. Among these workers the personal has become political and the political personal.

### The Conglomerate Era

In 1974, as the economy began to wind down, the company began to crack down. The tightened discipline put a strain on the informal resistance network because "it was becoming more difficult to get to the bathroom to pee," let alone discuss problems in the shop. According to Esther Szabo, the network's effectiveness had been possible because conditions were relaxed enough that workers could "meet in the restrooms" or around the machines to discuss problems, make plans, and sign petitions. By 1975, one shift with a skeleton crew of less than 100 workers was operating the shop. Workers realized that they were losing their ability to affect shop conditions. Given this situation, the decision was made to take over the union. Although Esther Szabo had often been asked to run for union office, she waited until 1976, when conditions had defeated the informal network approach, and the other "right people" to run with stepped forward. (The other "right people" were workers who had exercised informal leadership in the shop for a long while.) Incumbent officers, including some who had held office since 1963, were defeated by the largest turnout for any union election in shop history. 144 of the 200 workers eligible to vote participated in the election. The union denied another 200 workers the right to vote because they were laid off. Esther Szabo lost the presidency by two votes to the candidate she supported and took the position of corresponding secretary, where she feels she can be most effective. This latest turn of events belongs to the conglomerate era, and needs to be connected to the relevant changes in management practices at Electric Inc.

Dynamo Inc. purchased Electric Inc. in April 1967 for an undisclosed amount of cash. Although Dynamo had only been incorporated since 1960, by 1967 it was one of the "major growth companies in the world." As a conglomerate engaged in

research and manufacturing of electronic systems, components and controls, tool and die steels, aircraft and guided missile systems, material technology, geophysics, and oceanography...

Dynamo qualified for government contracts, and in 1972 received contracts exceeding 70 million dollars. From 1960 to 1973, when



these contracts began to slack off, Dynamo acquired controlling stocks in hundreds of small businesses, including insurance and finance companies, and purchased others outright, as was the case with Electric Inc. Prior to 1973, the management of the Dynamo conglomerate showed little interest in Electric Inc. But without the guaranteed profits from government contracts and war production, Dynamo was forced to pay more attention to its non-military sector. To achieve a competitive market position with factories such as Electric Inc., major managerial and structural changes in the production process were undertaken.

To everyone's surprise, the old Electric Inc. management, including Lucifer Dunlitz, was systematically and indecorously fired and replaced by Dynamo men. These were young men who had gotten their managerial training in the corporate chairs of slick, gigantic, and modern "growth" companies where the work force was organized by "big labor" unions such as the United Auto Workers, Steel Workers, or Machinists. Replacements went all the way to the top with the dismissal of Dunlitz. At the bottom, Dynamo management launched an efficiency drive aimed at increasing productivity. The perimeters of this new efficiency drive can be seen in the institutionalization of foremen/worker relations, the replacement of incentive by Job Evaluation, and an unprecedented concern over the volume of scrap, absenteeism and "goofing off."

Along with structural changes, Dynamo introduced the latest fashion in paternalism. The theme of the new paternalism is the familiar one of "one big happy family," but the family has appropriately become a "TEAM." In a July 18, 1974 letter to "fellow employees," Richard Kraft, president of Dynamo Electric Inc., wrote the following message.

Dear Fellow Employees,

....  
One of my first objectives as your new President is to try to create for each of you the feeling that your job at Dynamo Electric is the best, most challenging and most exciting you have ever had. To accomplish this, we are working hard to improve conditions, to supply the needed tools and to further develop the friendly, businesslike atmosphere of the Company.

A Team Effort...all of us working together...is required to accomplish the job we have to do. There are many things we in management work on which we think are good ideas, or we feel you think are good ideas, but I would like to have a better feel of what is on your mind. For this purpose, I am having a personal mailbox placed in the cafeterias where you can write me a note directly, telling me your thoughts on how we are doing the job and what we can do to improve.

We need to work together, and we need to listen to each other. I hope this mailbox will help to accomplish part of this communication.

Clarence Long had been paternalistic, but this was something new. In place of owner-operator paternalism, where workers were recognized as individual farmers or housewives with special needs to be given special consideration, Dynamo introduced paternalism based on glamor and glitter. Workers are dealt with as machines, which can be manipulated with the proper formula of psychology, intimidation and style. Beneath management's new suit of understanding, consideration, confidence and concern, is dirty underwear. And it stinks.

One feature of the new paternalism has been the creation of a recreation fund to promote sports teams and annual company-worker get-togethers. According to Kraft, the rationale for this is that "during working hours we work hard to produce quality products at the lowest possible cost. When the working day is over, we deserve some recreation!" A host of personal touches have also been added. These include open-house parties for the workers and their families, a plant beautification program, a President's Suggestion Box which workers stuff with complaints, and a shop newspaper which issues some very entertaining blurbs from the "President's Corner." Inspired by the 1975 Christmas season, R. Kraft issued a message on "Electric Inc. Spirit," that "esprit de corps, others might think of...as dedication to a common goal or perhaps pride in accomplishment."

I can see it in the eyes of the people as I walk through the plant in the morning. There is pride on the faces and a joy in the eyes of everyone I see. I think it is a matter of pride in the work being done and the knowledge that important work is being accomplished with skill and craftsmanship. Believe me, I am proud and grateful to be a part of this Dynamo Electric Inc. family and to be swept up in this spirit. This is truly a great place to work.

One walk through this shop and anyone would be forced to conclude that R. Kraft suffers from an "If I say it, it is true" malady. Other messages have been more pointed. For example, to help "under-price our competition," R. Kraft suggested that workers ask themselves,

"Is my machine producing good parts every minute that it could during the day, or are there times when it could be producing more? Am I getting the most production out of my equipment? Am I using my time wisely or is there wasted motion? Are there some additional few minutes

during every hour that I could use more productively?" We must also watch waste. Are we wasting material? ....Are we wasting time? Let's give our job our full thought and attention.

Have the workers listened to these words of wisdom? According to Esther Szabo,

People at Electric Inc. are suspicious of the new treatment....They think it probably foreshadows something bad....There is lots of uneasiness and lots of rumors in the plant (as to what all of this means).

Taking over the union has been another response to this outburst of "fellowship." Workers are meeting the company's sophistication with their own brand of trade unionism.

It is too early to predict the outcome of taking over the union. Thus far, there have been both good and bad implications. In March 1976, the International forced the new union leadership to increase union dues from six to eight dollars per month. In a referendum election on the proposed dues increase, 90 of the 92 voters, out of 150 eligible to vote, wrote an unqualified "Hell No" on their ballots. In spite of this very clear expression of rank-and-file sympathy, the new leadership could only hold the increase at two dollars instead of the International's request for four. Esther Szabo feels bad about this and is trying to figure out ways to avoid the International and undercut its hold on the local.

She has begun an investigation of union corruption, including a review of income-tax records and the salaries paid to union officials, which at first glance look exceptionally fat. She is also checking out independent unions as a possible alternative to the Metal Workers. Her position as corresponding secretary of the union has given her the freedom to attend meetings of other locals in the area without arousing too much suspicion. She is currently acting as a liaison between workers at Electric Inc. and other workers in area shops who have similar grievances against the bosses and the unions. Realizing that any move to oust the union will require the support of local workers, she and others are searching for "the right people" to form committees in their shops. She feels that the union must become a rank-and-file organization, and that a break with the International is imperative to achieve this goal. According to Esther Szabo, "We're trying to do something from here (the union), just like we did something from inside the shop. If we're not successful, we'll try something else."

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# **Racism and U.S. Steel, 1906-1974**

*Edward Greer*

The development of structural racism in the American steel industry is illuminated by the employment practices of the Gary Works of the United States Steel Corporation. Its corporate elite bears the main historic responsibility for the elaboration and maintenance of a racially bifurcated work force in Gary. Contrary to the arguments put forward by some radicals, the evidence presented here will suggest that black workers became trapped at the bottom of the industrial economy not because of any historic inevitability, nor because of an ideological consensus or material self-interests shared among all whites, but because of specific policies adopted by the owners and managers of industry.

## I.

Construction of the Gary Works and the city of Gary began in 1906. In 1910 the Gary Works produced two million tons of steel and had already achieved international renown as the world's largest and most modern industrial complex. Until World War II (with an annual steelmaking capacity of five million tons) the Gary Works was able to produce an eighth of America's steel. Though now only

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the second-largest American steel plant, its current production capacity of eight million tons surpasses that of the majority of steel-producing nations.

For over half a century the majority of the men of Gary, Indiana have worked in the Calumet region's steel industry, mainly in the Gary Works of the United States Steel Corporation. In the early years of the mill, only a handful of those employed in the Gary Works were black. But during and after World War I the number of black employees rose rapidly to 10-15% of the total. Again, during World War II there was a huge infusion of black workers; by the end of the War blacks constituted a quarter of the Gary Works employees. Since that time, the proportion of black workers has gradually increased so that currently 7,200 of the 23,600 employees are black. As the racial composition of the Gary Works changed, so too did the city of Gary. Today it is a central city of 178,000 (of whom 92,000 are black). While it is only the 75th largest American city, it has the nation's 27th largest black community.

TABLE I

ANNUAL FAMILY INCOME IN GARY, INDIANA IN 1969

	Black	White
Under \$3,000	16%	6%
\$3,000-\$7,000	21%	15%
\$7,000-\$10,000	26%	20%
Over \$10,000	39%	59%

Gary is not a poor city. Because of the relatively high wages paid in the steel industry, in 1969 the median income of its white families was \$9,800, and that of its black families \$8,700. (See Table I.) Indeed, black median family income in Gary is the highest of any city in the United States. Nevertheless, there is a statistically significant gap between black and white incomes, and this gap is substantially determined by the fact that a black worker earns less than a white worker at the mill. In 1969 the median wage for blacks in this country's steel industry — and the Gary Works correspond to the national pattern — was 83% of the median wage for whites. In addition to their lower compensation, black workers are assigned to the more arduous and dangerous jobs; the accident rates of black steel workers are 30% higher than those of their white co-workers.



The U.S. Steel Gary Works typifies the twentieth-century transformation of rural, quasi-peasant black America into urban, working-class black America. In the context of a large and fairly stable working class, blacks have come — in a pattern common to earlier times and other places — to play a central role in industrial production far beyond their proportion in the total population. The one-third black composition of the Gary Works is certainly worthy of comment, since blacks constitute only a tenth of the national work force. But in industry generally, blacks are overrepresented by about a fifth; and in the steel industry this overrepresentation is even greater. Currently, in American heavy industry a full sixth of all basic production workers are black. Moreover, black workers are significantly more concentrated in jobs in the industrial oligopolies than they are in smaller industrial companies. And black workers are substantially more heavily concentrated in larger plants than in smaller ones.

This concentration of black workers at the point of industrial production parallels an earlier pattern in the history of the American labor force. In 1910 in twenty-one major manufacturing and mining industries, "new immigrants" from eastern and southern Europe composed two-thirds of the employees. Between 1890 and 1920 a fifth of the national work force was made up of immigrant labor. In the very largest cities as late as 1930 a majority of the working class were either foreign-born or the children of foreign-born parents. Moreover, the larger the city, the more heavily immigrant was its population (a relationship which actually increased as the century progressed). This concentration of immigrants in the urban centers was in large part the result of the cities being the focal point of manufacturing. The economic process by which adult male immigrants were drawn to American manufacturing centers provided a major impetus to this country's economic growth.

This process was particularly marked in steel. Wages, while munificent relative to the eastern and southern European rates — and about a fifth higher than in American manufacturing generally — were still too low for laborers to adequately support a family. Thus, many of the "new immigrants" were either unmarried, or had left their families behind in Europe. The arduous working conditions in the mills attracted only the strongest and hardest. A study in Gary in 1914 indicated that the immigrant steel workers were taller and heavier than the native-born Americans. Part of the arduousness was the result of extremely long hours. While the average manufacturing work week before World War I was 60 hours, the wage differential in steel was the result of a 72-hour week. Nevertheless, the economic conditions of the unskilled workers dipped very low. As late as 1919 two-thirds of the children of black and foreign-born workers of Gary had no milk, fruit, or eggs in their diet. Over half had no vegetables, and a third no meat.

Some 15% of these children were suffering from bone defects consequent to inadequate nutrition. The real wages of steel workers advanced only nominally during the 1920's and then actually fell off during the Depression. Massive poverty among the working class of Gary persisted until World War II.

Work in the steel mills literally killed the men. As Herbert Gutman put it :

A staggering accident rate damaged these and other men : nearly twenty-five percent of the recent immigrants employed at the Carnegie South Works [of U.S. Steel in Chicago] were injured or killed each year between 1907 and 1910, 3,723 in all.

Late in the first decade of the century, in response to growing public clamor, U.S. Steel instituted a safety movement which halved the industry's accident rate by 1920, at which time it was still double that of American manufacturing generally. Accident rates continued to decline during the 1920's and reached a new low in 1930. In that year only 142 steel workers were killed and another 1,200 permanently disabled. These grim realities explained why the popular expression of the period to describe the steel workers was "old age at forty." It was literally true. In contrast to the situation today, when the average age of steel workers is 43, in 1910 the average was 33. Among the foreign-born workers, 85% were below 44 years of age.

In 1912 three-quarters of the Gary Works employees were foreign-born: over half from Eastern Europe, a quarter from Southern Europe, and the remainder "old immigrants" or Canadians. A few blacks were also employed at this time. At least twenty-seven different ethnic groups resided in the city. None of them predominated in the population; the largest groups were Poles, Serbs, Croatians, Montenegrans, Italians, Hungarians, and Slavs. The population of Gary was two-thirds male and included few children. It was not until 1930 that the demographic profile of the local population approximated the nation's. Throughout its earlier years, Gary remained a polyglot city with a high proportion of "new immigrants." (See Table II.)

Apparently, the ethnic job distribution in the Gary Works was representative of the industry's. The hierarchy was such that all of the managerial and professional and clerical jobs were held by native-born, white, Protestant Americans. Native-born whites and English-speaking "old immigrants" held virtually all of the jobs as foreman, and almost all of the skilled craft jobs. (Only a tenth of the "new immigrants" held skilled jobs.) The vast majority of the "new immigrants" were employed in either semi-skilled or unskilled positions. The few black workers occupied a position intermediate between the "old" and "new" immigrants.

TABLE II  
POPULATION OF GARY, INDIANA

	1910	1920	1930
Total Number	17,000	55,000	100,000
Native White (of whom almost half had foreign-born parents)	49%	61%	59%
Foreign-born	49%	30%	23%
Black	2%	10%	18%

How then did this situation transform itself into the current one in which blacks have substituted for the "new immigrants" at the bottom of the occupational structure of the Gary Works? A long historical evolution had to take place. At the turn of the century the black working class was very small. With World War I, there was a rapid expansion of the black proletariat; and blacks began to be concentrated in the larger cities. (This process of urbanization only took on an accelerated and massive character during and after World War II.) As this process of concentration has developed during the twentieth century, it has done so in a pattern parallel to that of the foreign-born immigrants. The larger the city, the greater on the average is its proportion of black inhabitants. (See Table III.) By 1920 there were 960,000 blacks employed in manufacturing, and by 1930 there were 1,100,000. This growth was particularly marked in such major industrial cities as Chicago, which by 1920 had a manufacturing work force that was one-sixth black. In that year blacks constituted a tenth of Chicago's steel workers, and were the largest single group in the meat-packing industry. Not only in Chicago proper, but also in the nearby Gary Works, black employment approximated 10% by 1919.

Blacks were brought into American industry during World War I out of sheer necessity. A desperate wartime labor shortage compelled major manufacturing oligopolies to reverse their previous practice of virtual exclusion. In the Gary Works, for instance, almost a quarter of all the workers were drafted. In addition, almost 500 Serbs left Gary to fight for their national independence, and after the War more departed to return to their new country. While the demands of wartime production required more workers, the War cut off European sources of new recruits.

The steel industry's thrust to obtain black workers, even by sending recruiting agents South, continued after the War ended. Until 1923 the industry faced a labor shortage because native-born white workers were unwilling to do, and considered unsuitable for,

work under the harsh conditions. But once the labor crisis was resolved, steel management took momentous initiatives with respect to its new black workers. With these initiatives black steel workers came to be the especially oppressed stratum at the bottom of the industry.

TABLE III

PERCENTAGE OF BLACKS IN CITIES IN 1970

Size of City, 1970	Percentage of Population Black
Over 500,000	26.0%
250,000-500,000	19.6%
100,000-250,000	14.5%
50,000-100,000	7.8%

II

The manufacturing oligopolies actively responded to the growing block of black workers in their plants when the labor shortage of the War and early post-War years ended. Beginning in 1924 — the decisive year for the fate of the emergent northern black proletariat — managers of heavy industry determined to place both numerical quotas and job ceilings on black employees.

In northern industrial communities such as Gary, where the corporate elites exercised direct political hegemony, this workplace strategy was complemented by local political initiatives designed to segregate blacks into a separate and unequal place in urban life. Thus the 1920's in Gary saw the growth of "jim crow" housing, public accommodations, recreation, and education initiatives by United States Steel Corporation executives running both City Hall and the decisive community organizations to an extent unknown prior to the War.

In instituting racial job quotas, the steel industry followed its traditional strategy of encouraging ethnic conflict among its employees. As early as 1875 the superintendent of what was then the nation's largest steel works had written:

My experience has shown that Germans and Irish, Swedes and...young American country boys, judiciously mixed, make the most attractive and tractable force you can find.

The steel industry was also adopting the policy of Southern employers (including the Birmingham steel industry) of inciting racial conflict to prevent unionization. U S. Steel — through its southern

subsidiary, the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company — a leading employer in the Birmingham steel districts, had already long imposed ceilings on black manufacturing jobs and practiced a policy designed to exacerbate racial conflicts. Bringing this employment policy up north into the Gary Works simply involved focusing an old policy on a new target.

Thus it is scarcely surprising that when interviewed in 1937 the head of industrial relations at the Gary Works, W.S. McNabb, admitted that the proportion of black employees had been held constant at 15% beginning in 1924.

In the 1920's, steel-industry management was quite open about this policy. As the superintendent of one large Calumet-region steel mill asserted.

When we got [up to 10% black] employees, I said [to the employment manager], "No more colored without discussion." I got the colored pastors to send colored men whom they could guarantee would not organize and were not bolsheviks.

The employment manager of another Calumet steel mill asserted in explanation of their quota system that.

It isn't good to have all of one nationality; they will gang up on you.... We have Negroes and Mexicans in a sort of competition with each other. It's a dirty trick, but we don't have the kind of work that will break a man down.

In later decades, as the political climate of the country changed, industry executives became more discreet about public expression of such motives. But as late as 1945 St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton were able to find a Calumet steel executive who was willing to observe anonymously that :

Negroes are nice, simple people. I don't approve of using them for skilled work — not that they couldn't do it, but we have enough competition within the skilled groups. Let the Negroes scramble for the unskilled jobs.

In addition to imposing absolute numerical quotas, the steel industry also made it a policy to block black workers from advancing to the better jobs within the mill. Indeed, the fragmentary data it has been possible to assemble indicate an actual retrogression in the relative position of blacks in the Gary Works occupational hierarchy during the decade from 1918 to 1928. The proportion of blacks holding skilled or semi-skilled jobs declined from 30% to 20% during this period. The relative occupational advance for the "new immigrant" steel workers during the 1920's — in a rather stable job hierarchy — acted to limit the prospects for black and newly arrived Mexican workers.

Similar developments of the 1920's throughout American heavy industry meant that blacks and Mexicans increasingly did the unskilled work. By 1930, they did a full fifth of the unskilled steel labor in the United States. While the skilled jobs were still dominated by native-born Americans, the "new immigrants" began to make inroads in these positions. It thus seems that the containment of blacks at the bottom of the work-force hierarchy began to mean a modest enlargement of the relative opportunity for other workers to advance. For example, at the Gary Works, where in 1928 blacks and Mexicans constituted almost half of all the unskilled workers, they were only 2% of the skilled workers. In contrast, only a quarter of the white workers still held unskilled jobs, while half of them held skilled positions. (See Table IV.)

It was racial discrimination which consigned black workers in the 1920's to an inferior job status. Baran and Sweezy are wrong to assert:

It was of course inevitable that Negroes would enter the urban economy at the very bottom. They were the poorest, most illiterate, least skilled on arrival.

TABLE IV

GARY AND SOUTH WORKS OF U.S. STEEL, 1928 : \*

Percentage of Each Group Employed at Various Job Levels

	White	Black	Mexican
Skilled	47%	4.7%	1.8%
Semi-skilled	27%	16.2%	19.1%
Unskilled	26%	79.2%	79.1%

Percentage of All Employees at Various Job Levels

	White	Black	Mexican
Skilled	98%	1.6%	0.5%
Semi-skilled	85%	7.7%	7.0%
Unskilled	54%	26.0%	19.9%

\*Note: Both of these nearby plants were under the control of the management of the Illinois Steel Company Division of U.S. Steel, and apparently had common employment patterns. Of the total of 22,000 workers involved, 9,000 were at the Chicago South Works and 13,000 at the Gary Works.

The weight of the evidence is that the black steel workers were as well suited to modern industry as the "new immigrants" who were beginning to move ahead of them. In Gary, at least, they were as apt as the "new immigrants" to have had prior urban living experience and to have worked in modern industry; they were more likely to be literate (and probably had higher average formal educational levels); and they apparently maintained comparable turnover and absentee rates.

What seems to have occurred is that when the Immigration Restriction Act of 1924 ended the ongoing pattern through which heavy industry could assure itself of a continuous stream of fresh immigrant workers to serve its needs for common labor, decisions were made which effectively created a permanent stratum of urban black labor to perform this function. Simultaneously, the useful tradition of "divide and rule" was continued.

Despite the quotas, blacks continued slowly to penetrate more deeply into the fabric of American manufacturing. Their progress was limited by the restrictions placed upon them, and it was uneven both regionally and by industry. However, their modest advance was reversed with the onset of the depression. The depression was a disaster for all steel workers, regardless of race. The positive wage differentials with respect to other manufacturing workers continued, but were of small consolation under circumstances of widespread unemployment and across-the-board wage reductions. Even those who were fortunate enough to continue holding their jobs generally were only working part-time. It was not until 1937 that the average steel worker's week rebounded to as much as forty hours.

But black workers were especially hard hit. In industry after industry, black workers were differentially furloughed. Nationally the depression decade saw blacks lose a full third of their share of manufacturing jobs. Foremen continued to have discretion over lay-offs in steel, and blacks and Mexicans were the first to go. The proportion of blacks in the steel industry fell from 13% in 1930 to 10% in 1938. In industrial cities such as Gary, half the black population was unemployed. Needless to say, black steel workers who were employed remained at the bottom of the job hierarchy throughout the depression. (See Table V.) At the Gary Works, for instance, black workers in the blast-furnace departments were simply not promoted above semi-skilled positions. And it was in such arduous and dangerous jobs that the black workers were, by Corporation policy, concentrated.

This policy served the direct economic interest of U.S. Steel. Until the CIO succeeded in organizing the steel industry, the only production unit in which the wage differentials between skilled and unskilled were not declining was in the blast furnaces. The subordinate position of the black steel worker resulting from the racial division of the work force was already showing results: wages and working conditions in the blast furnaces lagged behind the rest of the mills.

TABLE V  
DISTRIBUTION OF BLACK MALE WORKERS  
IN THE IRON AND STEEL INDUSTRY

	1938	1969
White-Collar	-----	2.0%
Skilled	12.5%	10.2%
Semi-skilled	38.3%	56.9%
Unskilled	49.2%	40.0%

An even worse fate befell Gary's Mexican workers, who composed 6% of the mill work force (mostly as common laborers), and a sixth of the city's foreign-born. When the depression brought massive lay-offs, disease and malnutrition reached epidemic proportions in the Mexican community. In this setting the Gary Works management instituted a requirement of proof of citizenship, which the Mexican workers were unlikely to have. The Corporation also actively participated in the deportations of 1,500 Mexicans from Gary as part of a national movement which repatriated half a million Mexicans. As the historians of this period of Gary's history relate:

Horace S. Norton, head of U.S. Steel's Land Company and president of the Gary Chamber of Commerce, emerged as the major spokesman for repatriation, "The kindest thing which could be done for these people would be to send them back to Mexico . . . . They do not assimilate and they are unhappy here. They want to go back . . . ."

This desire to return to Mexico was induced, Vernon Fernandez, one of the Calumet Mexicans who experienced repatriation, had a different recollection of the process. After being removed from the welfare rolls, the unemployed were offered free transportation to Mexico: "So actually they weren't forcing you to leave, they gave you a choice, starve or go back to Mexico."

During the depression American workers developed two new sources of power. In industry the CIO was organized through a coalition of radical and liberal trade-unionists. In politics, there were close ties to President Roosevelt and the New Deal. As a Gary steel worker summed up popular attitudes in March 1937:

We're a New Deal crowd and we want what we voted for. We think this is our chance to get a real New Deal, and we are determined to get it.



The increased political activity of the working class, which resulted in the neutrality of the national government to unionization, in turn made it possible for the Steel Workers Organizing Committee to achieve hegemony among the steel workers.

The steel industry was one of the central grounds for the battle waged by American workers for industrial unionism. The outcome of that contest brought with it genuine and impressive gains. Wages made an unprecedented leap forward: by 1939 steel workers had improved their positive differential from a fifth to a full third over the national average of manufacturing workers. For the first time workers fully shared in the productivity gains of the industry; between 1935 and 1939 hourly earnings and output both rose by 27%. Moreover, there was no speed-up.

More impressive than the sheer size of the gains was their distribution. The CIO, with the core of its strength in the foreign-born and black workers, gave its highest priority to those at the bottom of the work force. In its wage increase of November 1936, the Corporation was forced to abandon its traditional policy of a flat percentage increase, and admitted that it was doing so in the face of the labor insurgency in its mills. With the recognition of SWOC in March 1937 came a second raise, which increased the average wage by 10%, but that of common labor by 19%. The biggest beneficiaries of this radically egalitarian policy of the CIO were the black workers in Gary and throughout the nation's steel industry. In the early days of SWOC blacks were substantially overrepresented on the union bargaining committees which negotiated these gains. In turn, this circumstance was in large measure due to the Communist Party, which exercised its influence to advance blacks into positions of local union leadership.

The relative pay of black steel workers rose between 1935 and 1938 from 79% to 85% of their white fellow workers'. Throughout the newly organized manufacturing sector black workers registered similar relative wage increases. Between 1930 and 1940 blacks rose from less than 2% to 7% of all trade-union members. One careful estimate calculates that the overall effect of the CIO was to raise the relative wages in 1940 of black compared to white workers 5% above what it would have been in the absence of unionization.

Another major achievement of the CIO was the institution of a seniority clause. The demand for the creation of a formal seniority system was raised by both black and white workers during the depression to reduce the arbitrariness and corruption which marked the existing system that left lay-off and work-assignment decisions to the foremen. For the black workers — who were differentially laid off and thus the worst victims of the discretionary system — the institution of seniority was particularly useful.

The expectations that this egalitarian thrust would lead to a struggle by the union to gain new promotion opportunities for blacks, a natural corollary of the other reforms, did not get put to

the test. For almost immediately after recognition of the union, a sharp business downturn occurred; and rather than new jobs opening up, existing ones disappeared. Between August 1937 and February 1938 steel workers' average weekly wages fell by 37%. It was not until World War II loomed that employment rebounded.

The extraordinary nature of these early CIO achievements can be appreciated by contrasting them with what followed. During and after the Second World War no further flattening of the occupational wage differentials in steel took place. Indeed, over the years an actual retrogression occurred in relative black wages: by 1969 they had fallen 2% to 83% of the white average. A similar retrogression took place throughout manufacturing as a whole. From 1940 to 1967 the relative wages of black workers fell by 1%. The steel industry's seniority system came to be elaborated in a racially discriminatory fashion; and the hours of work in the industry ceased their secular tendency to decline. This change in the CIO coincided with the destruction of the trade-union left and the hegemony of a leadership which rejected a strategy of militant struggle at the point of production.

As employment was stimulated by military spending preparatory to World War II, blacks and Mexicans found themselves the last to be recalled by the Corporation. In 1940 the Gary Works was operating at 90% of capacity. But although blacks constituted only one-fifth of Gary's population, they accounted for a third of the city's unemployed. Not until American entry into the War did the labor shortage become acute enough for black employment to rebound fully. As Harold Baron has indicated:

Military mobilization of much of the existing labor force and an almost 20 percent growth in non-farm employment from ...1940 to ...1942 were the pre-conditions necessary to enlarge the demand for black labor.

Indiana's total manufacturing employment doubled between 1939 and 1943. In the Calumet region between 1940 and 1943 steel-industry employment rose by a third. For Indiana's blacks, World War II created a historic opportunity. Their employment in manufacturing in the state rose by 50% in 1941 and an additional 82% in 1942. Exhausting local manpower reserves, the Corporation welcomed back the same Mexican workers it had been so eager to see depart a few years before, and even resorted to Puerto Rico for additional workers.

The labor shortage became so acute that beginning in mid-1942 large manufacturing concerns began to employ female labor on a large scale. (Two million of the five million women added to the work force during the War were employed by the war industries.) By 1944 a third of Indiana's industrial work force were women. A full tenth of the Calumet steel production workers were women.

They were mainly employed as laborers on the ore docks and storage yards, in the coke plants and blast furnaces, and in the rolling and fabricating mills. Where the labor was particularly arduous, as with loading, the steel corporations used black women. But as soon as the emergency passed, women were excluded from the industry. As one steel manufacturer succinctly asserted in the aftermath of World War II: "We have tried to rid our plants of female labor."

The overall effect of World War II was to bring about the most striking progress ever made by black labor. While the period 1939-1947 saw the real wages of American white workers rise by a third, the real wages of black workers during this period rose by 73%. The key advance took place in the war industries of the major industrial cities, where total black employment tripled between 1942 and 1944. In the Gary Works, out of 28,000 employees at the end of the War, 6,400 were black. With the end of the War, progress of the black workers in the steel mills ended as well. While generally full post-War employment meant that few black workers actually lost their jobs, the return of demobilized white workers who reclaimed their positions resulted in black workers finding themselves "bumped down" in the mill. The demands of the Communist Party that black steel workers be granted super-seniority at the end of the War were denounced as "racism in reverse" and rejected by the Steelworkers Union.

The period since World War II has seen some striking changes in the position of blacks in the American political economy. And in the steel industry, as elsewhere in manufacturing, control over employment patterns — traditionally solely management's prerogative — has been affected by both trade unions and government intervention. These developments, however, have had only a limited impact on the Gary Works.

Nationally, although the absolute number of white workers in manufacturing has been stable, there has been a continuing increase in the number of black manufacturing operatives, and both a relative and absolute advance among blacks in skilled craft positions; so that today a somewhat larger share of black than white workers are employed in blue-collar occupations. In short, the post-War period has seen a significant advance of blacks within the industrial work force. However, within the broad occupational categories, blacks continue to hold the inferior jobs. For any "typical occupation, the median earnings of black males were about one-fourth lower than those of white males in the same age group."

Numerous commentators maintain that blacks have made a qualitative breakthrough in employment in the post-War period and that their lot is gradually converging with the white population's. Two developments have made this celebratory idea plausible. One is the tremendous increase in white-collar jobs for blacks in the civil service. While total government employment doubled between 1940

and 1962, black government employment quintupled. In the 1960's this trend extended to the major private employers of clerical labor in the main northern metropolises: partly due to civil-rights pressures, but largely because employers found it difficult to fill these jobs with the diminishing pool of urban white females. By including this significant advance of black women workers — of whom only one-sixth are still employed in domestic service — the impressive conclusion is reached that while in 1940 blacks held only one-sixth of their proportional share of white-collar jobs, they had by 1970 achieved parity in such jobs. But if the employment of females in lower-tier white-collar employment is excluded, it turns out that the chances of a young black male being promoted into a managerial or administrative position during the 1960's was less than a third that of his white peers. And, even with women's income included, the median family income of blacks between 1945 and 1973 only rose from 53% of the white median to 58%.

TABLE VI

BLACK MALE STEEL WORKERS IN THE UNITED STATES  
AS A PERCENTAGE OF ALL STEEL WORKERS  
IN EACH JOB CATEGORY

	1960	1969
Managers and Officials	0.8%	1.7%
Professional and Technical	0.7%	3.3%
Sales	0.3%	0.2%
Clerical	2.4%	3.3%
Craftsmen and Foremen	7.0%	6.7%
Operatives	16.7%	19.7%
Laborers	27.7%	26.5%
Service	19.7%	19.5%

Not surprisingly, post-War developments in steel accord with the national pattern. Black male employment in the basic iron and steel industry was 5.9% in 1940. In 1950 it was 13.1% and in 1960 13.2%. But despite the large increase in the proportion of black steel workers, the relative occupational profile of these workers in 1969 showed only a most modest improvement over the pre-War situation. (See Table V.) It thus appears that the entire post-War period saw little in the way of major shifts in relative black jobs. (See Table VI.)

In 1966 the Gary Works employed 17,900 males of whom 5,200 were black. Among the 3,200 of the Gary Works employees with white-collar or foremen's jobs, only 100 were black. Thus, a quarter of the white employees held white-collar or managerial positions, as against 2% of the black workers. And among the blue-collar workers, the whites on the average held better jobs than did the blacks. (See Table VII.) The racial distribution of jobs in the Gary Works almost precisely corresponds to that of the Calumet steel district as a whole, and that of the steel industry generally. The past ten years has seen only modest changes in this situation. Thus, in 1974, the Gary Works employed 21,700 male workers. The proportion of minority workers had risen from 33% to 34%. Blacks now occupied 10% of the white-collar jobs — so the proportion of male black employees holding such positions had risen to 5%. But the racial distribution of the blue-collar workers remained very much the same. (See Table VIII.)

TABLE VII  
 NUMERICAL DISTRIBUTION OF BLUE-COLLAR  
 EMPLOYEES IN GARY WORKS, 1966

	White	Black
Skilled	4,000	900
Semi-skilled	3,600	2,500
Unskilled	1,200	1,200

The Corporation continues to this day to exercise unilateral control over white-collar and foremen's jobs. Its policy has been to promote a significant minority of white workers into such positions, but only a handful of black workers are given these opportunities. According to figures released by U.S. Steel, in 1968 only 22 of 1,011 foremen in the Gary Works were black, and these supervised largely or entirely black crews. And the Corporation has systematically favored whites over blacks for promotion, even to the extent of promoting whites over blacks even when they have less seniority and less education. This is an industry-wide pattern. While for the Gary Works there has not yet been any judicial determination of such discrimination, a pattern of discrimination has been established in each law suit brought against an American steel mill under the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which has reached final adjudication. As the federal trial judge held with respect to Bethlehem's Lackawanna plant, that company :

admitted pursuing a policy of generally excluding Negroes from supervisory positions by basing promotions on essentially subjective determinations. Additionally, in some instances the Plant transferred white employees from traditionally white departments into traditionally Negro departments to assume supervisory positions. The practice restricted the number of Negro supervisory personnel.

TABLE VIII

NUMERICAL DISTRIBUTION OF BLUE-COLLAR  
EMPLOYEES IN GARY WORKS, 1974

	White	Black
Skilled	5,600	1,500
Semi-skilled	3,800	3,600
Unskilled	1,000	1,800

Similarly, the racial-assignment pattern of new hires is solely under management control. Here too there has been a consistent pattern in the post-War period, placing only white workers in the choice, well-paid craft jobs in the non-production maintenance and repair divisions. Even on the rare occasions when blacks are given assignments in such divisions, they are to inferior lines of promotion. The 30% higher accident rate among black steel workers is mute testimony to their differential assignment to the most dangerous production jobs. Throughout the country black workers are consigned to make up the large majority in the coke-oven jobs which are virtual death sentences: the lung cancer rates for these workers are ten times those of steel workers as a whole.

Finally and most decisively, the skewed original job-placement pattern of the Corporation is entrenched in a permanent pattern circumscribing the entire working life of the black workers through the steel-industry seniority system. The peculiarities of this system have been described in detail elsewhere. It is sufficient to understand that under this system, rather than operating on a plant-wide basis, seniority is in effect by department. This system essentially locks workers into a particular area, or "line of promotion," with extremely limited possibilities for transfer. Thus, once the black workers are tracked into inferior "lines of promotion," the departmental seniority system perpetuates that inferiority. The result is that black steel workers with equivalent years of service

earn less than their white fellow workers. Suits under the Civil Rights Act of 1964, even when successfully carried to resolution, have so far had limited effect in altering this system. For example, after the successful conclusion of five years of litigation at the Sparrows Point plant of Bethlehem Steel, fewer than 1% of the black workers actually succeeded in changing jobs. Since the federal agency responsible for handling such complaints is backlogged with 120,000 pending cases, there is little likelihood of a radical change in steel-industry employment patterns in the immediate future.

### III.

The course of development of racial employment practices in the Gary Works shows that the United States Steel Corporation (and not the workers) initiated and controlled the inter-related set of policies which has led to the current situation. It apparently did so for self-interested reasons. Prior to the organization of the CIO, this motivation was to split the work force to prevent unionization. And it also assured — by means of guaranteeing a marginal pool of labor — the existence of workers to undertake the most oppressive labor for relatively low pay.

The bifurcation on racial lines of the steel-industry work force has persisted in the period after unionization as well. In those spheres of employment not covered by union contract (such as in the choice of foremen) the Corporation's overt practice of racial discrimination has continued unaltered. The element of volition in its ongoing policy of racial discrimination is further evidenced by the vigorous resistance of U.S. Steel to judicial intervention designed to ameliorate the situation of the black workers.

And in areas such as the character of the seniority system where the Steelworkers Union jointly participates with management in the formation of decisions, U.S. Steel has — along with the current union leadership — continued to sustain the existing system. There is, in short, no evidence that the Corporation has abandoned its historic strategy of racially bifurcating its work force. The same reasons which led to the practice prior to unionization continue to hold in the post-War period. Internal racial conflicts among the Gary Works employees, even if they now occur within the trade union, weaken the Steelworkers in any confrontation with management. The specially oppressed situation of the black steel workers — and the unwillingness of the union to battle militantly on their behalf — makes it easier for the Corporation to avoid ameliorating the health and safety conditions in the mill. A vivid illustration of this factor is the atrocious conditions of the coke-oven workers.

It is of course difficult to quantify the degree to which internal splits among the Gary Works employees weaken the overall position of the workers. What the most recent period has seen, however, is a reversal of the secular decline in steel-industry accident rates and significant speed-up. The period from 1960 to 1970 also saw steel wages rising at only 1.3% annually, as opposed to

3.0% for manufacturing production wages generally. While such evidence is far from conclusive, it suggests that the posture of the current union leadership with respect to a broad set of issues, including the racial one, has been less militant. Indeed, emerging rank-and-file insurgencies within the Steelworkers are opposing the incumbent leadership on just such grounds; and one of their concerns is to redress the special grievances of the black workers.

This scarcely denies that the Steelworkers Union is responding to a genuine impetus among white workers in its active support for the current seniority system. With a limited number of jobs and promotions available, arbitrarily precluding black workers from obtaining them increases the likelihood of whites obtaining them. This is palpably evident to most white workers, and it provides a powerful material basis for encouraging their racism. Thus in 1974, if blue-collar jobs were redistributed to be racially equitable, about one-quarter of the white skilled workers in the Gary Works would have to drop down to semi-skilled or unskilled positions. (And about one-quarter of the black workers would move up from unskilled or semi-skilled status to craft positions.) (See Table VIII.) Thus, the degree to which white steel workers in the Gary Works support racism can itself be partially explained as a result of the success of the Corporation's strategy of "divide and rule."

On the other hand, this advantage to the white workers is limited. (For instance, all other factors being held equal, a racially equitable distribution of wages would lower white wages by 5%.) Indeed — as the experience of the early period of unionization indicates (and the rank-and-file insurgents currently argue) — this "white-skin privilege" is problematic. A multi-racial unified union might well win enough additional gains to over-balance the effect of achieving internal equity among white and black steel workers. The Corporation acts as if this possibility is a serious one.

In either event, it seems erroneous to compare the contradictory and limited interest and participation of the white workers in supporting the status quo with that of the corporate elite. For despite the union, it is management which remains hegemonic over the process of production and the place of working people within the manufacturing system.

It is therefore troubling to note the degree to which many radical analysts lose sight of the qualitative distinction between racism on the part of the Corporation and that of the workers. To attribute to past generations of white workers developments for which they bore no significant responsibility is one result of this confusion of disparate phenomena. For instance, if events in Gary were in any way representative of what was happening to urban blacks in the 1920's, Ira Katznelson is in error in asserting that :

the history of race politics in the cities of the North in the period of migration is the history of the translation of attitudinal folk racism into institutional racism.



Whatever else they were, the corporate elite of U.S. Steel were hardly just folks.

It is even more troubling to see radical theoreticians concur with those who say that the core of racial discrimination in America — that which occurs in jobs and income — is no longer to be viewed as emerging from the direct class interest of capital; and that instead racism is analyzed as being sustained by a diffuse social consensus among all classes of white Americans. For instance, Christopher Lasch asserts that: "racism . . . though it once furnished a rationale for slavery and other forms of exploitation, no longer has a clear basis in economic self-interest." Eugene Genovese makes the same argument:

American capitalism no longer needs or generates in the old way racial discrimination as an organized form of class rule. . . . [T] here is good reason to believe that the capitalists as a class and capitalism as a system would purge themselves of racism if they could. Racism, however, is so deeply rooted in American society that it cannot be torn up without fundamental changes in capitalism itself.

The most comprehensive formulation of this theoretical approach is that put forth by Paul M. Baran and Paul M. Sweezy in *MONOPOLY CAPITAL*. While granting that employers do benefit from racial discrimination, monopoly capitalists are lumped together with a variety of other social strata, including white workers, who "taken together . . . constitute a vast majority of the white population." All, regardless of class, are held to be the beneficiaries of racism. Baran and Sweezy also conclude their discussion by asserting that the corporate elite would — in following their own interest — be willing to eliminate racism (in order to increase America's social stability), but are stymied in that endeavor by the anarchic nature of capitalism. Other leading radical writers dealing with the position of blacks in the political economy follow this line of analysis.

Before the classical marxist notion that it is in the capitalists' interest to engender and sustain racism among its proletariat is abandoned, substantial evidence contrary to that presented here about the Gary Works would have to be introduced. So far, that evidence has not been forthcoming.

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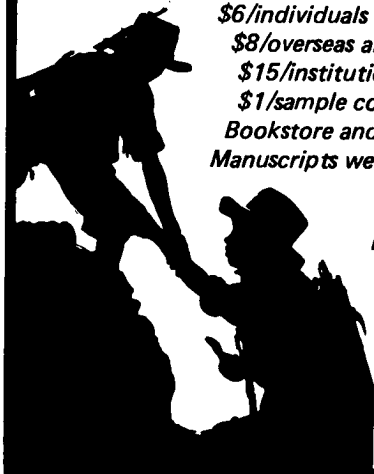
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# Europe's Migrant Workers

*Dan Georgakas*

A SEVENTH MAN, Viking Press, NYC, 1975, 238 pages, \$8.95  
Text by John Berger and Photographs by Jean Mohr

One out of every seven manual workers in Germany is a migrant, a worker from another country who comes to labor without any illusions about ever becoming a citizen of the host nation.

Migrants are a mobile army of the unemployed who can be exploited in a manner native-born workers no longer tolerate. They will accept the bottom wages offered, reducing both immediate costs and the general wage scale. The migrant takes jobs no one else wants. He does not expect promotions. He is easily deported when no longer needed or if he becomes troublesome. He can be separated from other migrants and from native-born workers by language, culture, and law. The migrant is willing to risk hazardous or disagreeable work with a minimum of safety or health precautions. He has no proper life in the host country, and thus makes no long-term demands on the system. In short, the migrants are the most exploited of workers, a reserve labor pool that can be shuttled from country to country like raw material; and in this case, they pay their own transportation. Finally, there is a side

*Migrant worker in Simplon Pass, Switzerland, by Jean Mohr.*

benefit to the system as a whole because migration takes pressure off depressed national economies which suffer from chronic under-employment and under-development. The migrant's major concerns become personal rather than social: Can he save enough money to make his expatriation worthwhile? Can he eventually re-establish a family life? Can his foreign wages break the cycle of domestic poverty? Will his health hold out?

John Berger brings considerable literary and analytical skills to *A SEVENTH MAN*, his study of the migrant workers in Europe. The book presents an impressionistic, transcontinental picture of the migrant experience rather than concentrating on any one national group, any single location or typical individuals, although, in order to give a sharper focus to his analysis, Berger has limited his observations to European-born males. He presents statistical data, personal testimony, poetry, diagrams, and anecdotes in a style that insists on a certain distance between its author and the subject matter and between the subject matter and the reader. The language is spare and abstract, the sentences are impressionistic, the paragraphs are brief. The advantage of such an approach is that it allows for many subtleties and can put meaning into the silences between words, sentences, and paragraphs. The lean and intellectual style is most effective in bringing a complex subject into manageable form within the space of a few hundred pages. It is particularly appropriate for registering the human alienation which is a major element in the migrant experience.

The book of 229 pages is about evenly divided between the text written by John Berger and the photographs of Jean Mohr. The photographs do not relate in a one-to-one manner to the writing, but they are arranged in Berger's pattern of "Departure", "The New Country", and "The Return". The parallel development of text and photos produces an effect which is more powerful than either the text or the photos taken separately. The photographs put faces and bodies on the ideas outlined by Berger, and they contribute significantly in showing the class and international dimensions of a problem that might otherwise be seen in strictly personal or nationalist terms.

Berger's most important contribution in this volume is his success in delineating the broad patterns of migration and their general purposes in the scheme of advanced western capitalism. Quite properly, Berger has pointed out that the migrant presents a challenge to the class consciousness of the national working class that generally has not been met. In most instances, the national unions, far from rallying to the plight of the migrants, have actually cooperated in their exploitation. In doing this, they have played into the hands of the bosses by exasperating problems within the international working class. The antipathy of native workers is often reinforced by racist and nationalist feelings which prove stronger than ideas about class unity. The failure of the formal socialist



and communist movements to aid the migrants or to deal with racism and nationalism is another illustration of the decayed nature of much of their Marxism. These movements demonstrate a clear inclination to identify with their national bourgeoisie or particular national aspirations rather than with the general struggle of the European workers as an international class.

A SEVENTH MAN is so sensitive to the powerful interests which manipulate the migrant that it sometimes falls into the error of treating the migrant as a victim of forces totally beyond his control or understanding. This interpretation stems from Berger's powerful account of the migrant during his first months in the new country. In his outrage at how capitalism callously uproots millions of individuals, wrenching them from their families, language, and culture to be used as expendable worker ants, Berger has overlooked some of the long-range adjustments and gains snatched back by the migrants. The relatively free social atmosphere of Western Europe often releases resentments and feelings of injustice the migrant has felt all his life. Returning Greek migrants, for instance, often speak of how they no longer feel intimidated by the local village hierarchy and how they feel it is silly and demeaning to kiss a priest's hand. More concretely, they begin to refuse a system in which inadequate school, health, and work opportunities have long been considered the givens of normality. Many workers who have spent five to ten years abroad (not necessarily consecutively) develop a working knowledge of the language and the social mores of the host country. Although based in their own national ghettos, such workers learn to reach out and touch the institutions and citizens of the host nation. Marriages are not uncommon. The migrant may resent the privileges of the native-born workers, but he does remember them, and back home he often begins to demand their counterparts on his native soil. The immediate things the migrant emphasizes are his material gains: his gifts, which might include a car, and the cash earmarked to permanently upgrade life. Changes in social attitudes have taken longer to assert themselves, but the difference between the villager who has worked abroad and the one who has not is fundamental. Complex social, religious, and sexual patterns can never be the same. The social unrest now so marked in Portugal, Spain, Greece, and Italy is partly related to the fact that these are the nations that have been exporting great numbers of workers for almost two decades.

A SEVENTH MAN is also weak in dealing with the self-mobilization of migrant workers. While this has not been the general tendency, there have been significant activities that Berger does not even hint at. The Spanish workers in Switzerland, for example, have formed informal labor federations at various times to promote their economic welfare. The Italian extra-parliamentarian movement has put a great deal of energy into work with Italian migrants, and the intra-national migration of Southern Italians to the

North resulted in the Southerners becoming the spearhead of the Hot Autumn of 1968 and the continuing nucleus of those within the factories who look beyond the politics of the traditional parties. The Greek migrant communities in Germany and Scandinavia were strongholds of anti-junta activity, and a rich political life still revolves around their working-class bars and social clubs. A few years ago in Germany, some 5,000 Turkish workers tore up an assembly line in fury over their treatment, and as this review is being written in mid-May of 1976 some 12,000 migrant workers are on rent strike in 20 state-operated buildings in France. Other actions might be cited as well. In omitting any formal discussion of such events, Berger has contributed to the myth of capitalist omnipotence.

The omissions and simplifications of *A SEVENTH MAN* are linked to Berger's style of intellectual overkill. His presentation of the general situation is always right on target, but his elaborations leave a misleading impression of hopelessness, a sense that the victim is not only helpless but devoid of even the desire to resist. At certain points, Berger sounds like a paternalistic do-gooder describing the plight of blacks to the enlightened good white folk back home. On Page 90 we are informed that "Peasants are hard, cunning, and often two-faced. In the dark, lest he be seen, a man plots — slowly, obstinately — his own revenge." Or on Page 118, in dealing with the difficulties of learning a new language, Berger remarks: "When he crossed the frontier every word spoken or written was meaningless to him. At first he tried to guess what words meant. Most of the words addressed to him were instructions or orders. If he guessed wrong he was in trouble. So he learned it was safer not to guess. He treated the sounds of the unknown language as if they were silence." One wonders if he would describe similar experiences of Irish, Scottish, or Welsh workers in such a manner.

The impressionistic movement of the book contains little evidence that Berger has taken the time to look at the community life of any of the migrants in depth or that he has had a broad acquaintance with different nationality experiences. Very often his comments and description of total cultural shock seem to apply mostly to the Turkish workers in Germany who are quoted more often than any other single group. This is at odds with his own statement that he wanted to focus on the lives of European-born migrants. The Moslem religion of the Turks and their origins in Asia Minor put their experiences into a pattern that is more applicable to the North African, Black African, and Pakistani migrants than to the Portuguese, Spanish, Italians, Greeks, and Yugoslavians who share a common religion and European orientation with their hosts. The Italians in particular are little discussed, and this contributes to the distortions in Berger's overall vision, as the Italians may be the most prototypical of all the European migrants. Berger also

seems to have based most of his conclusions on conditions in Germany and to have neglected events in France, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, and Northern Italy.

The major specific case study in *A SEVENTH MAN* deals with the building of underground sewers in Geneva, and in this section Berger is at his best. He vividly describes the hunger for work and the miserable working conditions which are the lot of the migrants. They are even denied the dignity of eating a lunch like human beings :

...nobody wants to eat in the tunnel. The air is stale. (Neither the water pump nor the ventilating system works properly, but they are patched up when word comes round that there is going to be an official inspection.) If the mole is drilling, a grey powder, fine as talc, lines skin, hair, nostrils, throat, lungs. The alternative of walking back to the pit bottom and climbing up the ladders to the surface would take too much time and effort. So the gangs work eight hours without a serious stop.

Further details concerning wages, hours, and conditions are followed by the observation that the major concern of the workers is that they might be laid off. Another concern revolves around the fact that the men work on nine-month contracts, at whose conclusion they have to return home. The great fear of the tunnel workers is that there will be a spot on the chest x-rays required on their return and that they will be denied the opportunity to work in the tunnels once more.

The arguments presented in *A SEVENTH MAN* would be greatly strengthened by more in-depth reports such as the one on the Geneva sewers, but Berger would probably be the first to admit that his volume is far from the last word on the subject. He has purposely left it to others to deal with the new development of the use of large numbers of female migrants, with the immense social implications that this could present to their native countries, which are the European bastions of the crudest forms of sexism. The equally important use of non-European migrants which represents yet a new variation of neo-colonialism is also specifically left for another work. *A SEVENTH MAN* does, however, begin the important task of opening a discussion of one of the major trends in world capitalism and making some fundamental comments about its basic function within that system. In addition, Berger's non-analytical style of writing and the powerful effect of Mohr's photographs make this work more likely to be widely used than standard scholarly treatments of the topic.

The use of migrant labor has clearly been of immense short-range gain to the system, yet the internationalization of the working class possibly foretells an even deeper crisis. The irration-

ality, waste, and cruelty of capitalism is underscored by the fact that even as Spanish workers go to France to find work, Tunisians and Moroccans migrate to Spain to work for wages and under conditions the Spanish would not accept. In Greece, where unemployment has been a national problem for half a century, the American-backed junta brought in cheaper African and Arabian labor to do work even the impoverished Greeks would not accept under the conditions offered. One wonders if the port cities of North Africa, which export more and more of their labor force, are importing cheaper replacements from the interior. Already certain French firms have recruited in the villages of Black Africa and have shipped migrants by non-stop train and ship directly to the French industrial heartland. One major scandal has arisen from this new slave trade involving hotel keepers in Paris who rented foul multi-bed rooms in eight-hour sleeping shifts to African workers in violation of dozens of French health and housing laws. Capitalism has begun to tap the bottom of the surplus labor barrel. The material and social expectations of millions are being raised to new levels, levels which cannot be realized within the established system.

The long-term consequences of the migrant-labor phenomenon may be the emergence of an international proletariat which will find it necessary to mount international solutions to end its exploitation. For the moment, however, the system functions primarily to the benefit of the ruling class. The migrant worker remains vulnerable to the whim of the employer and host state. Social protest and individual leaders can be dealt with by deportation rather than by costly class struggle. Working conditions, social change, and wage standards can be controlled more easily because of the pressure created by massive numbers of "guest workers" in any specific country. To quote from Berger's introduction: "To outline the experience of the migrant worker and to relate this to what surrounds him — both physically and historically — is to grasp more surely the political reality of the world at this moment. The subject is European, its meaning global. Its theme is unfreedom."

*DAN GEORGAKAS is an Associate Editor of Radical America and the co-author of Detroit: I Do Mind Dying.*

## Letters

*(Editors' Note: We would like to encourage our readers to send us brief (maximum: 1000 words) responses to our articles and comments on important political issues for publication in this section. We will print as many as we can of those which seem of general interest to our readers.)*

Dear Radical America:

The recent rise of Stalinist sects on the U.S. left has made the critique of Stalinism imperative. Russell Jacoby's article "Stalinism and China" was a useful contribution to this effort, but we find it unfortunate that his discussion does not go far enough. In particular, by contrasting Stalin to Mao, Jacoby may have unintentionally added to the current tendency of worshipping China. While it is certainly valuable to distinguish Mao from Stalin, we feel that Jacoby has been insufficiently critical of China. This is a serious matter because, in our view, neither Stalin's Russia nor Mao's China is an appropriate model for emulation by Western socialists.

For example, though it is clear that there was nothing comparable in China to Stalin's massive purges, it is highly misleading to use the "Hundred Flowers" campaign as an illustration of the way China deals with internal dissent. That the Communist Party invited criticism is noteworthy, but the really significant point is surely that the "Hundred Flowers" wilted in a matter of weeks and that dissent was once again prohibited. Jacoby's quotations from Mao at the outset of the "Hundred Flowers" leave us unprepared for the campaign's abrupt termination. Our vision of socialism — and we hope that of Radical America readers — is more than just brief interludes of democracy.

Or again, though the Chinese economy compares favorably in many respects to that of the Soviet Union under Stalin, it is hardly a model of economic democracy. Even sympathetic accounts (such as K.S. Karol's CHINA: THE OTHER COMMUNISM or the Committee of Concerned Asia Scholars' CHINA: INSIDE THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC) make clear 1) that local participation is carefully circumscribed, and 2) that whatever amounts of local participation do exist do not extend to national economic decision-making. Again, this is not socialism.

The left has recently begun examining Chinese foreign policy in light of events in Angola, Bangladesh, and elsewhere. This is a welcome development, but the examination must extend to China's domestic policies as well and to the connection between internal and external policies.

We raise these issues not out of a perverse sense of "socialist purity," but because we believe that a fundamental question for the left today — and what

must be communicated to the working class — is what we mean by socialism. Whatever admirable features there might be in current-day China, to term that society “socialist” will consign the contemporary left to the same impotence suffered by those in the thirties who considered Stalin’s Soviet Union socialist.

We urge Radical America to take up these questions as part of its continuing discussion of socialist theory.

Stephen Soldz  
Steve Shalom

June 21, 1976

Dear Radical America :

Russell Jacoby’s attempt in “Stalinism and China” to cleanse the taint of Stalinism from China just doesn’t wash. While one can easily admit to the divergence of “revolutionary” tactics and the details regarding industrialization within the Chinese and Russian experiences, Jacoby never comes to grips with what is the essential question — the nature of the Chinese economy. Since if it is, as I would contend, capitalism administered by the State, then the differences and peculiarities between China and the Soviet Union become only interesting, and not crucial, as Jacoby contends.

If state capitalism prevails in China (and it seems to — workers produce commodities for wages, surplus value is extracted by the State and re-invested in enterprises, commodities are exchanged, etc.), then revolutionary communists are only interested in activity that confronts daily activity and attempts to alter it. Jacoby’s attempt to “explain” it, simply affirms it. That the author would spend time trying to distinguish Mao’s cult of the personality from Stalin’s or the Chinese method of exploiting workers in industry from the Soviets’, seems fruitless and apologetic.

The real question for sinophiles is why do they give support for Stalin with his history of mass murder, his alliances with fascism that set the stage for World War II and his exportation of counter-revolution (not Comintern “errors”) from China in 1926 to Spain ten years later and into the modern era. .

Stalinism rules China, but with a paranoid schizophrenic madman as leader removed from the equation. China is an undemocratically governed police state, or more accurately, a garrison state in which political dissent is not allowed. To the extent that it arises in periods of readjustment of power relationships within the bureaucracy, such as the 100 Flowers campaign or the “Cultural” Revolution, it is allowed to flourish within the parameters set by the ruling clique and then extinguished. Mao and his friends may not be Stalin, but Chinese Trotskyists still languish in prisons, millions lost their lives during the period of consolidation following the revolution, and the suppression of the Hangchow workers’ general strikes last year certainly qualifies as a “little” Hungary.

Whereas it is encouraging to see RA announce its divorce from the current crop of stalinoid New Leftovers, Jacoby’s article simply moved away from a disreputable Stalinism to a more trendy one. A more essential move would be a rejection of Leninism in its entirety and the support for authentic proletarian activity.

E. B. Maple

Dear Radical America :

Russell Jacoby’s point that Mao Tse-tung has been anti-Stalinist in some ways despite his protestations to the contrary is good, and so is his article, but a few points should be made.

First, to say that for Mao, "the proletariat is minor, the peasantry an entire theory and practice" is simply incorrect. We all know by now that Mao chose (or was driven to) a peasant strategy of revolution, that it was successful, and that the guerrilla style has had profound implications for post-1949 government as well. But Mao has never abandoned the key Marxist-Leninist concept of a proletarian class at the head of the revolutionary forces, and this is visible in Chinese society today. As David and Nancy Milton put it in their recent *THE WIND WILL NOT SUBSIDE* (Pantheon, 1976):

Sometimes called the most bourgeois of Chinese cities because of its history of Western commercial influence, Shanghai is also the most proletarian in the classical Marxist sense. The Chinese Communist Party was founded there in 1921, and for the rest of that decade Shanghai was at the center of progressive intellectual ferment and working class struggles. That heritage of militancy remains alive. One could seldom visit a factory even before the Cultural Revolution without being introduced to honored veteran workers, who would tell their remarkable stories of highly organized trade union resistance to foreign entrepreneurs, local capitalists, the Kuomintang, or the Japanese. (p. 112)

This, of course, ignores Jacoby's point, which correctly cites Harold Isaacs' contention that it was the Stalinist Party of the 1920's that betrayed these people. But the real point is that Mao's commitment is to the entire working class, urban and rural, and when not blocked from working with and for proletarians by Party conservatives, he has insisted that they help define the progress of the Chinese revolution in proportion to their militancy and numbers. It is now probably simplest to regard the term *wu-chan-jie-ji*, usually translated as "proletariat", as referring to the entire working class, peasant as well as urban workers.

Second, Jacoby states, "much of the support for and success of the CCP stems from its assuming the mantle of nationalism following the invasion of China by Japan." It is certainly worth noting that the CCP's struggle against imperialism dates not from 1937, but from its very founding, and it was clear to the CCP (and others) that they could not liberate China without opposing imperialism. Jacoby cites Chalmers Johnson's tendentious work, which purposely gives the impression that the communists "cheated"; that is, they won China only because of patriotism on the part of the people, not revolutionary sentiment. By not explicitly puncturing this fallacy, Jacoby misses the opportunity to point out that it was the CCP and only the CCP which correctly defined nationalism and implemented an anti-imperialist struggle. He is right, of course, in pointing out that Stalin opposed this successful CCP policy. Perhaps Stalin knew his own regime had the potential to be regarded as imperialist by the Chinese.

Travelers to China in recent years have reported a certain kind of game-playing concerning contemporary views of Stalin. A cadre may privately, and with some (feigned or actual) embarrassment, admit that Stalin "made mistakes," but was "60% all right." And the fact is that the Chinese and their leaders are perfectly aware of Stalin's errors, but feel obligated to support the line of succession Jacoby mentions, from Marx and Engels through Lenin and Stalin to Mao. Jacoby notes that it was Mao's open opposition to Khrushchev which made Mao seem ultra-Stalinist, but I think I would make the point much more strongly that Mao feels that the legitimacy of his government rests partly on this line of descent, and that opposition to contemporary "social imperialism" is of enormous importance to the future of China.

Thus today's seemingly disappointing Chinese foreign policy stances. Jacoby again makes the correct point that no one need "mindlessly" defend Chinese foreign policy, but again he could more strongly stress the extremely high

stakes of the game as the Chinese see it. The domestic survival of the Chinese revolution, not merely its continued progress, is dependent on the thoroughness with which the Chinese people reject the Soviet model of society, according to Mao. Mao's rivalrous struggles with ten major opponents since the 1920's can be seen as ten crucial rejections by Mao of the Soviet style and line. This is important enough to Mao to make some sort of common cause even with Nixon and Kissinger, and oppose the MPLA in Angola. But the formal retention (and thus partial rehabilitation) of Stalin as a link in the chain of key leaders of scientific Marxism is important to Mao too. We need only be thankful it is less important to us.

Sincerely

Talbott W. Huey  
Assistant Professor of Politics  
University of Massachusetts — Boston

Reply by Russell Jacoby:

The belief in a seamless continuity between Stalin and Mao has been congenial to mutually antagonistic traditions in Marxism — Stalinists, libertarians, Trotskyists. Each, of course, evaluates this continuity differently, but each insists upon it. It should be possible to broach the question of the *discontinuity* between Stalinism and Maoism without immediately being charged with treason against Marxism (See "*Radical America: A Specter Haunts*," *Guardian*, June 23, 1976) or apologetics for a "trendy" Stalinism. Apparently it is not possible.

My intention, if it needs reiterating, is not to exempt China from criticism, nor is it to airily dismiss it as one more act in a Stalinist circus. Both these approaches have plagued left-wing analyses. One cannot do everything at once; but it seems to me that a proper understanding and criticism of China must begin — not end — with an examination of its relationship to Russia and Stalin. I plead innocent to the charge of aiding and abetting the worshipping of China. The very last sentence of the article reads: "In the past, much of the paralysis of the Communist parties was due to their mindless defense of the Soviet Union; this paralysis is not reversed by the mindless defense of China." Moreover, this article was an extract from a longer essay, "Stalin, Marxism-Leninism and the Left" (currently in press by the New England Free Press); once available this should lay to rest any suspicion that I am promoting unalloyed Marxism for western socialists and Marxists.

Two brief remarks on Talbott W. Huey's letter. It is completely unsound to maintain that the urban proletariat is central to Chinese Marxism by referring to their own pronouncements; on this score the Chinese are not anxious to admit their heresy. Nor is it evidence to cite two visitors who found that urban workers were feted and honored in Shanghai. Secondly, my reference to the Chalmers Johnson book was not unqualified; I explicitly mentioned Mark Selden's *The Yanan Way* as a rebuttal. As for Huey's final points: I fail to see how they elucidate the question of the Chinese defense of Stalin; they just restate it.

I hope this does not end the discussion on these matters. My article inspired — incited? — a spate of replies, which suggest that this fundamental topic has been ignored for too long, or even tacitly suppressed in deference to the sectarians. It would be a sign of health in the left if those who replied persist in keeping the subject alive.

Russell Jacoby



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*Summer, 1975*

*Portugal: A Blaze of Freedom*, from Big Flame (Britain); *Unions and Hospitals: A Working Paper*, by Transfusion (Boston); *Taxi at the Crossroads: Which Way to Turn?*, from the Taxi Rank and File Coalition (New York); and the first issue of *Cultural Correspondence*, edited by Paul Buhle and Dave Wagner.

*Autumn, 1975*

*Southern Populism and Black Labor*, by Vince Copeland; *Lip and the Self-Managed Counter-Revolution*, by Black and Red; *The IWW in Canada*, by George Jewell; and an issue of *Theaters, with Marxism and Popular Culture*, by Paul Buhle.

*Spring, 1976*

*Radical Perspectives on the Economic Crisis of Monopoly Capitalism*, by the Union for Radical Political Economics; and *Angola: The Struggle for Liberation*, by the International Socialists.

*Summer, 1976*

*Common Sense for Hard Times*, a new book by Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello.

It was with a tremendous sense of loss that we learned of the death of Harry Braverman on August 2, 1976, at the age of 55. Son of a Brooklyn shoe factory worker, Braverman became a journeyman coppersmith and later a master mechanic and steel layout man. In the 1930's he joined the Socialist Workers Party. He left the SWP in 1954 and helped found *The American Socialist*, a thoughtful independent journal, on which he worked until 1960. He was the author of an excellent critique of the Soviet Union, *The Future of Russia*, and director of the Monthly Review Press.

Harry Braverman was best known to us as the author of *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (1975), an important contribution to Marxist and socialist analysis of the development of the advanced capitalist working class. Unlike many who work within the Marxist intellectual tradition, Braverman looked at society from the perspective of working people and with a sense that these people form a class with a common experience and potential. Braverman drew a large picture, covering many groups within the U.S. working class. He was especially sensitive to the development of the role of clerical work. Using basic Marxist concepts for understanding capitalist labor processes, he creatively and carefully interpreted changes in the lives and jobs of working people. A discussion of some of the implications of his work, as well as some useful criticism, appear in a special summer issue of *Monthly Review* (August 1976) devoted to a symposium on *Labor and Monopoly Capital*.

We respected and admired Harry Braverman. His insistence on centering intellectual work in the experience and consciousness of working people was rare and important. We at *Radical America* mourn his loss and hope that his efforts can serve as a model for the type of intellectual work which this magazine would like to produce and encourage.

