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# RADICAL AMERICA

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# RADICAL AMERICA

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## *Editors' Introduction*

The history of capitalism and colonialism — of development and underdevelopment — are inextricably linked on a world-wide scale. Even on the North American continent, the growth of industrial capitalism has created, and been dependent on, large semi-colonial underdeveloped areas. In this issue we publish studies of the working class in two such areas: the American South and Quebec. Both of these areas have served as reservoirs of cheap labor, exporters of raw materials to the industrial centers, and importers of manufactured goods. But the structural parallels only highlight the political differences between the two and throw into sharper relief the crucial revolutionary question of working-class unity.

In "Southern Mill Towns" Harry Boyte details the necessary background for understanding the relative quiescence of the Southern working class in the key sector of textiles, and by extension throughout much of the rest of Southern industry. The exclusion of black labor from industry, and the concomitant insulation of white mill towns from contact with the rest of the Southern working class are for Boyte the central explanations for this relative quiescence and the grounds for anticipating future political upheaval: The racial integration of the Southern labor force that is now beginning is eroding the chief obstacle to the rising of the exploited.

Analogous to the American South, Quebec has historically offered British, Canadian, and American capital a low-wage, high-exploitation development area. But here the dialectics of class and ethnicity reinforce each other's revolutionary potentials. The working class was forced into unity by national discrimination; and the inherited culture of national-

ism has been separated by industrialization into recognizable class components. In the late '60s, a rising movement of national liberation coincided with quantum leaps of the workers' struggles: factory occupations, violent attacks on corporate offices, risings of whole company towns. Rupture with the tepid and reactionary nationalism of the clerical Right and rupture with comprador capitalism have been fused in mass mobilization. The study by the Black Rose writers of the once-Catholic, now-syndicalist Confederation of National (Quebec) Trade Unions reveals in miniature the radicalization transforming every institution of the Quebec working class.

The acceleration of class struggle in the most developed areas coincides with the explosion of national and class struggles in the underdeveloped. Just as the '60s were marked by blows to US imperialism abroad, so at home social peace began to crumble. In addition to more visible outbreaks among racial and national minorities, students and then youth generally, and women, there have emerged organized insurgent currents in the heavy industry of the North American heartland: new unionization, re-emergence of widespread inner-union reformist caucuses, the explosion of black industrial militancy, and construction of revolutionary industrial groups around papers and organizing projects in most major cities. Of varying revolutionary potential, all are representative of the same embryonic movement at the point of production.

The document from the Sojourner Truth Organization of Chicago evaluates the organizing experiences of one such revolutionary group. It is first a critique of current notions Sojourner Truth has found to be facile: the equation of individual acts of defiance with advanced class militance; the uncritical devotion to particular "objectively revolutionary vanguards" abstracted from the limitations of specific factory conditions; the vision of class struggle as a high-pitched constant of industrial production irrespective of political conditions at large. But it is also an affirmative argument that revolutionary practice is now and will be increasingly possible on a mass scale in the basic industry of this country.

The article by Ed George and Jeff Paul details in the specific situation of a small rubber factory many of the points argued by the Sojourner Truth document, particularly the limitations of a union-caucus political strategy. More broadly, the piece is one of a continuing "Work in America" series analyzing capitalist relations of production concretely in one factory. Though such signs are still imprecise, this effort is only symptomatic of the generalized re-emergence of a proletarian Left, after the Cold War repression, throughout North America.

## NOTICE TO READERS

We are presently trying to expand our network of Radical America contacts. Based on recent issues, we have had a growing response from people who feel close to our evolving working-class perspective. We now ask these people, and others, to get in touch with us more systematically. We want to find correspondents/associate editors who are interested in writing and/or soliciting articles, working on pamphlets, and discussing and criticizing our work on a regular basis. The variety of subjects on which we especially want collaboration are probably obvious to readers: the working class, especially of North America and Europe; specific sectors of the class — minority groups, women, youth — as centers of rebellion; the history of women and modern social relations; the dialectic between struggles in the industrial West and the Third World, culturally as well as politically. We are particularly intent on developing the series on "Work in America", analyzing production and political dynamics of individual work situations. If you are interested, contact us. There is much to be done.

The Editors

# THE TEXTILE INDUSTRY:

## Keel of Southern Industrialization

by Harry Boyte

The character of the South's political and social history since the Civil War has been shaped by the particular road to industrialization that the South traveled. And that road has been built directly in four states (and partially organized in the others) on the foundation of a surging textile industry. Thus the nature of the industry, the immediate social environment that it created, and the broader cultural myths to which it gave rise have had a major impact on the process of the South's entrance into the industrial era.

Recent writers, such as C. Vann Woodward, agree with early interpretations that the textile mills were made the "symbol" of the "New South" — the South developing along capitalist lines. And Woodward admits that profit alone "cannot account for the public zeal that...converted an economic development into a civic crusade inspired with a vision of social salvation." (1) But there has been no adequate explanation advanced for that conversion.

This paper will argue that it was precisely that conversion which played a major role in the later political and social history of the South. When Reconstruction ended, the Southern men of property confronted both a kind of existential chaos and economic opportunity. The slave basis of the South's social relations had been smashed by the Civil War and Reconstruction. Yet an economic momentum had begun to develop in the textile industry as early as the late 1860s. And, as will be shown, enormous economic opportunity for growth was opening. The skeleton of the future economic base had begun to appear.

At the same time, white leaders were much preoccupied with maintaining white predominance over blacks, a predominance which both the new class logic of capitalism and Reconstruction experiences seemed to threaten. And in the agricultural sector, a mass of formerly independent white farmers were now landless and impoverished — and constituted a spectre of increasing unrest.

Thus the South's rulers combined imperatives and opportunities of the economy with the particular set of circumstances and cultural legacy of the slave South to produce the textile campaign, and, as it developed, its particular social embodiment in the textile mill-village system. The campaign itself became the ideal expression of the "New South", the South's application for membership in capitalist America. And the ideology which developed was a transitional form of consciousness between the slave system and a modern bourgeois world view which maintained the forms of rigid hierarchy and paternalism in a new set of circumstances, but which redefined the content according to the new logic of class in such a way as to integrate white workers "safely" into a conservative, white consensus.

At root the myths of the mill village held that workers and owners were bound together in a "white family" closed off from the external world. The image of the mill community-as-family combined both the absolute authority of the owners and an assertion of the essential equality of all "members" — by advancing the mill owner as the model of "adulthood" toward which those who had had "less opportunity" could approach if they "improved themselves". And the institutions of the village reflected the myth, forming a total environment whose center was the mill itself. Finally, from church to school to welfare system, they constituted equally a set of institutions designed to "elevate" the poor white — by offering opportunities at every turn to learn the rules of success.

The system of ideas which thus came to dominate mill-village life, and the institutions which sustained them, functioned as a powerful stabilizer during the period of the South's rapid industrialization. Mill villages from the be-

ginning of the New South era absorbed large numbers of landless whites into an isolated white man's universe, shut off from potential alliance with dispossessed blacks. Indeed the mill's proclaimed function was precisely the employment of those whites who had "nowhere else to go". And as the village system developed, the owners' total control over the cultural and institutional life of the communities continued to truncate the workers' discovery of themselves as an independent class structurally opposed to those who ruled them.

During the '20s and early '30s, a gap began to appear in the social space between owners and workers, and workers responded with increasing militancy, organization, and self-consciousness. But the textile industry effectively "healed" the division, stabilizing the relations in the villages within the conservative consensus. And that stability has characterized the industry until the present.

The first stirrings of the Southern elite's awareness of the necessity to build the South on "new foundations" were visible at the conclusion of the War. In 1865 the Raleigh Sentinel, an influential paper in North Carolina, declared:

The manufacturing system... is the policy now to be depended upon to relieve our State of the evils that press upon her... It can be made our greatest means of wealth and prosperity, and, once rooted firmly among us, will flourish like a vigorous plant in its native soil. (2)

But such speculation proved premature: Reconstruction intervened for over a decade, bringing with it Republican controlled legislatures which were anathema to the major sections of the South's "best citizens". Nonetheless, the Federal Government and the Northern capitalist powers that stood behind it were never prepared to institute any thoroughgoing challenge to the power of the traditional ruling class in the South; after 1876, the men of property were able again to "chart their own future" — and that of the region. The words of the official public-school histori-



ans in North Carolina, written in the mid-'50s, nonetheless must articulate the consciousness of the elite at that time :

...after nearly a decade of troublous Reconstruction, home rule was established, Negro-Republican dominance was over, 'white supremacy' (sic) was triumphant, and the state government and most of the local governments were again in charge of the traditional ruling class of whites. The people of North Carolina looked forward to a happier and better future. (3)

The question in 1880 was not, in fact, whether to build in an industrial direction; the slave system was dead, agriculture was experiencing a depression, and at any rate the Southern leaders had begun to recognize the economic potential of industry, especially the textile industry. Indeed, a recent writer has found that many mills had been planned for the 1870s — only to be delayed by the panic of '73 and subsequent depression. (4) And the leading advocates of a new world disliked slavery, and were glad to see it past, precisely because of the restraints it had placed on industrialization. "The result of the introduction of slavery... turned the energies of the people almost wholly to the cultivation of cotton; it practically destroyed all other industries," proclaimed D. A. Tompkins, a man who was to play a major role in the textile campaign. (5)

In making the decision to industrialize around the skeleton of the textile industry, the Southern rulers entered an economic arena which was to ensure them enormous profits and opportunities for growth. At the threshold of the textile boom, the South was essentially an agricultural society. Figures for 1890, after the first 10 years of the campaign, show 64.6% of workers still in agricultural occupations for the 11 states of the Confederacy. (6) In North Carolina only 13% of the population lived in towns in 1890; 9.6% worked in manufacturing and mechanical industries and 69% were in agriculture. (7) Yet by 1920 the nature of Southern society had begun to change dramatically: For the 11 states, the

percentage of people engaged in agriculture had declined to 51.4, and those employed in manufacturing and mechanical industries had increased from 8.8% to 17.6% over 1890. From 1880 to 1927, the value of Southern manufacturing products increased 2300% compared to 1170% for the nation as a whole. (8)

In four Southern states especially (North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama), the new industrialization formed around the core of the textile industry. (9) In these states the conjuncture of a number of factors formed the fertile environment for the boom. The decision to embark on a manufacturing course with zeal crystallized between 1870 and 1880. Increases in the volume of cotton production and decreases in the price of cotton per pound meant less profit in the agricultural sector. Relief through tariffs was thought to be hopeless by Southern leaders, who felt on the margins of power in the Federal Government following the Civil War.

The existing textile mills were prospering in the South; the cotton exports were increasing, and Northern interests looked eagerly toward new markets for cotton goods opening in the East. At the same time, the prices of cloth in the world market seemed stable over the recent past.

In the broader economic environment, the concurrent development of the tobacco industry by James Duke released additional capital for reinvestment in the mills, especially in the Carolinas. At the same time, especially after 1910, it formed the capital for the spread of hydroelectric power with which to power new mills. A dramatic increase in Southern rail mileage, from 8,108 miles in 1880 to 20,305 miles in 1900, allowed further decentralization of manufacturing in general and textiles in particular across the South.

Finally the creation of the ring spindle for yarn, invented just before 1870, and the development between 1880 and 1900 of the automatic loom, made skilled labor unnecessary for the vast majority of the jobs in the industry. The new plants were thus able to open their doors to the Southern capitalists' chief economic advantage: the supply of cheap labor. (10)

As an apologist for the textile industry has stated: "There has never in the history of the industry been a protracted period when workers could not be replaced fairly readily." (11) In large measure, the industry's growth between 1880 and 1900 was based on a vastly expanding number of women and children in the mills, driven into the plants to supplement the incredibly low wages of men already working in the industry. From 1885 to 1895 in representative plants in Alabama, the number of men increased 31%, the number of women increased 75%, the number of girls under 18 increased 158%, and the number of boys under 18 increased 81%. In Kentucky, the corresponding figures were men 4%, women 70%, girls 65%, and boys 76%. In the four main textile states in 1890 men formed only 35% of the work force, women workers made up an additional 40%, and children between the ages of 10 and 15 made up 25%. The work week was about 70 hours. (12)

Wages in the mills not only were low, but also failed to keep pace with either the enormous profits in textiles, or wages in other industries. Adult male spinners in North Carolina made \$2.53 a week in 1885, \$2.52 in 1895. Women in Alabama made \$2.76 a week in 1885, and their wages had declined to \$2.38 by 1895. During the same period, wages in other industries rose slightly or held their own. (13)

At the same time, profits in the first years often were "phenomenal", according to the textile ideologue Broadus Mitchell. Profits in South Carolina mills in 1880 ranged from 18 to 25.5% on the average, and he reports one large mill in that year where profits were 50% on the investment. And that was just the beginning. Says Mitchell: "It was not unusual...in these years to make 30% to 75% profit." (14)

Thus the South came to have a distinct competitive advantage over the Northern textile interests. A study in 1927 showed that the South's cost of production per yard was almost three and a half cents less than the North's. In the South the tangible costs of production, which were mostly wages, were 25.67%. In the Northeast they were 35.38%. (15)

Beneath the surface of the rhetorical "total community" which was proclaimed to have created the mills, a clearly

defined community of men acted to initiate and to benefit from the campaign. That community indeed represented a significant shift of power from the rulers of the old slave South. It grew from the Piedmont region and was composed of a few former slave-owners and a number of merchants and rising professionals, surrounding a core of mill men which had existed for some time in the South. Its links were not primarily with the black belt, but with urban centers of commerce and finance in the South, and increasingly in the North as well.

Mitchell saw over time "a gradual evolution from the first projectors, who were really transplanted slaveholders, through a somewhat later group composed of business and professional men . . . ." (16) In North Carolina, according to Hugh Lefler and Albert Newsome, the "official historians" of North Carolina public schools for many years :

The prewar mills had trained a large number of textile workers and had created a small class of mill owners and managers who took the lead in postwar textile development. (17)

Lefler and Newsome further quote an analysis based on a Bureau of Labor Statistics study in 1900 :

Of 212 mills listed by the BLS for 1900, at least 130 had the personal supervision over a period of time of at least one man, and far more often of several men, who were brought up in the industry or who had gained experience with outstanding men who had been in the industry for many years. (18)

They judged that the "rapid development of the state's textile industry was due largely to reinvestment of the profits of the owners." (19)

Capital for the boom before the depression of the 1890s was largely from Southern sources, though a common practice was to raise part of the money locally and issue stock to Northern textile firms, commission houses, or machine companies in return for credit or machinery. (20) By the

mid-'90s, when a new wave of bankrupt white farmers left the land for the mills, millions of dollars of Northern capital was entering the Southern textile industry. (21) Nonetheless, the industry remained largely in Southern hands. By 1931 only 15% of the industry was controlled by 51 large non-Southern firms which had Southern plants. (22)

Given the favorable conditions, the industry did, indeed, explode across the Southern region. Textile investment in the South increased from \$17,375,897 in 1880 to \$53,821,303 in 1890 to \$124,596,879 in 1900. (23) The number of spindles in operation in the South increased from 1,200,000 in 1890 to 14,600,000 in 1923. (24)

A break in cotton prices in the early '20s led again to a movement of farmers into the mills. And in the years 1923 to 1925 there was another wave of Northern investment in the industry as well, a hundred million dollars according to one source. (25) During the '20s the textile industry was also increasingly diversified, adding finished materials to the unfinished products of the production of earlier years.

New capital was in fact attracted by the self-conscious effort of Southern communities. "The South has an abundance of native, white, contented, and un-Bolshevized farm tenants," became the sales pitch of chambers of commerce all across the region, anticipating a Northern bonanza. (26) Thus the industry, which had experienced a surge of profits during the First World War, greatly expanded its number of Southern plants throughout the '20s. Gaston County, the heart of the textile industry in North Carolina, declared its slogan to be "Organize a mill a week." (27) During the '20s the South passed the Northeast in number of wage earners. By 1923 it had greater value of products, by the same year it had more active spindles, and between 1927 and 1931 it had more looms. (28)

Again, workers did not share in the boom. The average wage in 1923 was \$12.35 a week, considerably less than the Northern wage rates in spite of an average cost-of-living higher than that of the North, even taking into account extra income "benefits" to Southern workers like cheap company housing. (29) And wages declined throughout the decade. Male loom fixers, the aristocracy of the work force, made

\$32.88 a week in 1920; with less work and lower wages, their average was \$8.38 a week in 1928. (30) Rates of profit during the period are hard to determine. One source maintains that they were often considerable. (31) Conservative sociologist Howard Odum was rebuffed by the owners when he asked to examine the labor turnover, apparently because it was the general policy of the mills to keep secret all phases of their operations. (32)

More recent studies show that compared to other industries textiles are still fairly decentralized, but the trend is clearly in the direction of both Northern control and centralization. (33) The basic unit, while remaining relatively small, has tended to increase in size over time. (34)

Textiles have come to play an enormously powerful role in the Southern economy, especially in those states where the textile crusade was most zealously undertaken. In North Carolina the number of wage earners employed in the textile industry increased from 80,085 in 1920 (about 42% of the manufacturing work force), to 97,575 in 1925 and 1926, to 263,477 in 1967. (35) In South Carolina the industry employed 147,205 workers in 1967, in Georgia 111,872, in Alabama 41,568, in Virginia 39,342, in Tennessee 31,653. (36)

Thus the question was not whether to build the foundations of industry; the question was how to proceed. Karl Mannheim (in Essays on the Sociology of Culture) develops an analysis of the principles of "modern society" which, despite limitations, is a useful yardstick to use in examining the assumptions of a capitalist order. (37) He asserts that two basic principles undergird the contemporary world — the conception that all humans are essentially equal, and the belief that the individual is a social unit, and that each individual in bourgeois society acts independently. Such assumptions were incompatible with the logic of the old South labor system — in which the slave's existence was held to be forever contingent upon the master's will.

And it is clear that the force of capitalism's new logic made itself felt with the first impulse of the "New South". In 1880, according to the articulate chronicler of the industry's rise, Broadus Mitchell, the future captains of the tex-

tile mills were much preoccupied with the question of the labor base for industrialization. (38) What quickly appeared was a consistent aversion of existing mill owners and those planning mills to the use of black labor. It was widely concluded that blacks were not the proper labor force because of their alleged "inferiority", described in various ways. "The Negroes' level of intelligence is so low that you cannot organize them," said one owner. (39) Said another: "The great trouble with Negro labor for the cotton mills is poor adaptability." (40)

But underlying such judgments on the "native capacity" of black labor, which were clearly contradicted by the experiences of the few mills in which black workers were employed, were the historical assumptions of the old South. Black people's enslavement had been too long justified by references to white people's "natural right" to rule, and the caste formulation of the class relationship under slavery had acquired a life of its own. Given the new logic of class under capitalism, to integrate blacks into the heart of the new industrial relationship would be to disturb the remaining sanctions of the rulers' power, and open the way for unforeseen consequences.

"The only trouble with Negroes is the mixing of races," admitted one owner. (41) Another commented that although blacks could be profitably employed, "his fellow manufacturers would want to hang him if they thought he expressed such a belief" in public. (42) And finally, an observer of the industry in 1906 opened a strikingly honest glimpse into the internal contours of owners' ideology when he commented: "It is a fixed belief . . . that the daily association in the same employment, under the same conditions, might make the Negro bolder and less respectful of the white man." (43)

Thus much thought was devoted to possible sources of labor for the mill campaign which was commencing. Originally there were a number of suggestions for the importation of white labor from abroad or from the North. A contemporary observer of South Carolina politics once again revealed the dilemma which lay behind the speculations when he commented in regard to the policies of State Commissioner Baskin: "Back of the efforts of South Carolina

...to secure immigration was the desire to get rid of the Negro and to bring whites to take his place." (44)

During the period another development that was to have a major impact on Southern history in general, including the emergent textile industry in particular, was eroding the major stability of Southern agricultural society: the agricultural sector of the society was experiencing the beginnings of that depression which was to lead eventually to the farmers' upsurge in the populist movement. An increase in the number of farms was accompanied by a steady increase in the number of sharecroppers, and even greater reliance on the one-crop system meant disaster for many former independent white farmers, as the price of cotton declined from an average of 11.1 cents a pound between 1874 and 1877 to 5.8 cents a pound between 1894 and 1897 (45). According to Mitchell:

Depressed conditions of agriculture during and preceding the early Eighties was in a large way a cause of cotton manufacture... (it) led to industry in two ways: by putting those able to initiate enterprise on the search for new investments, and by throwing out of a livelihood those unable to make new opportunities for themselves. (46)

Thus the South's "new foundations" meant in large measure a break with the symbolic and structural dependence on black labor. The mills were to be built in an entirely different milieu—the Piedmont area. "(They did not belong to) the region of the plantation owner, the Negro, and the 'poor white trash'; it was the South of the yeoman farmer, the white artisan and the professions" from which the mills emerged. (47) And another writer on Alabama industry commented:

(It was considered) a fact of tremendous significance in the history of Alabama that the agricultural and industrial forces conspired to transfer economic supremacy from the black belt to the



white Northern counties. The New Alabama was growing out of what had been the wastelands before the war. The political slogan of the white counties — 'This is a white man's county.' — was in a large sense as true of the economic life of the state as it was of the political. The Negro was playing a relatively insignificant role. (48)

The Southern Textile Myth:  
Ruling Ideology for a New Order

Southern (textile) industry is a moral venture. It is an adventure in the realm of human possibility... The pioneers of the Southern Industry... were the prophets of God doing what God wanted done.... These cotton mills were established that people might find themselves and be found. (from a speech given before the Textile Social Service Association in 1926. (49)

In the early 1880s, on the front pages of newspapers, from the pulpit, in public gatherings, announcement of a campaign "for the region's salvation" was broadcast to the Southern population. "The movement was comprehensive, embracing, in thought if not in deed, many departments of life," reflected one student of the period. (50)

Religious figures scrambled to give divine sanction to the new textile enterprises — indeed an occasional preacher would enter a mill on a management level. In 1880 Braxton Craven, president of the largest Methodist college in North Carolina, dedicated a mill to "Almighty God". Another minister wrote an account of the event to the Raleigh Christian Advocate, and the paper editorialized that "capital so invested should have divine blessing". (51)

And the leaders of the new crusade were seen as paragons of all that was good and decent, whose virtues were constantly reiterated by the moral leaders of the South. "Where such men control, you never hear of strikes and mobs.... They not only lift themselves up in the scale of being, but give life to all around," one finds in the Raleigh

Advocate in 1890. (52) "Far-seeing, public-minded, generous-natured leaders because lovers and servers, these have proved themselves true patriots," writes Broadus Mitchell, outdone by no one in admiration for the spirit of the times. (53) Even the harshest aspects of the mills were portrayed as almost sacred acts. "The use of children was not avarice then, but philanthropy, not exploitation, but generosity and co-operation and social-mindedness." (54)

At root, the myth that grew and solidified into a social force, lasting until the present day as the explanation of the mills' origin, functioned as the South's answer to Northern capitalism. The central assertion about the mills was that they were built from "pure" motives — dramatically unlike the coldly rational speculations which inspired Northern industry.

The crusade was not only described as a moral venture; it was said to embody the efforts and hopes of the region's entire white population — rich and poor alike. A "liberal" writer, reflecting New South historians' interpretations, could comment in 1966 that the Southern mill campaign differed from the industrialization of Russia and China in that "it rose from below, backed by all the force of the popular will." (55) And he states, on the basis of D. A. Tomkins's rhetoric, that "in a small town the ownership of the factory would be distributed among most of the inhabitants." (56)

That quaint illusion was indeed an important part of the textile myth. "They (the mills) were built from the combined capital of many of little means for the social and economic rehabilitation of the region rather than primarily for private profit," comments one recent writer. (57) And in fact schemes to "spread the ownership" by selling shares at cheap rates often circulated, proposed by men like D. A. Tomkins. They bring to mind more recent heraldings of a so-called "people's capitalism" that is said to characterize America's economy. But the myths of those days, like the rhetoric of today, were not intended to elucidate the actual conditions of the world; the evidence indicates that whatever the illusion, the mills were in reality overwhelmingly owned

and controlled by a small class of men who had been used to property and power for some time. (58) Interestingly enough, the commentator on the "capital of many of little means" goes on to add that "It does not really matter who possesses legal title to the textile mills that dot the Southeast from Lynchburg to Laurel." (59) The point for him is the common nature of the project and purity of the motives.

Finally, the campaign was proclaimed to be designed specifically for the "salvation of the poor white". (Again, it is worth noting that such rhetoric appeared after many mills had been planned, and after considerable thought had been devoted to the imperative to exclude black labor.) And here the image of the mill community-as-a-white-family, with workers the children who could potentially grow up one by one, is the only adequate organizing concept. Commentary on the villages has reflected considerable ambivalence about the role of the worker in the communities. On one hand, eulogists for the industry have often claimed that social relationships were characterized precisely by their egalitarian character. As one industrial-relations specialist has commented :

The managers of the early mills had a sufficient feeling of kinship with their workers to recognize not only the source of their sensitive pride, but also the importance and necessity of it...managers and workers alike were 'people'; the terms 'operator' and 'operative' were used merely to indicate that they had certain specialized functions as individuals. There was no implication, in the terms, of a master-slave relationship. (60)

On the other hand, a line of more critical observers have noted the absolute authority of the owners within villages. As Sinclair Lewis described :

The South more than any other part of the country retains the idea of the Gentry versus the lower classes — that is, the poor white trash, with the

Negroes not even in the social system. It does not take much to make you feel you are Gentry... But once you are in it you must fight, kidnap, kill, anything to keep from being charged with... sympathy for... the workers. (61)

But the ideas are not as contradictory as they appear, for the workers were portrayed from the beginning as potentially equal participants in the New South — whose “coarse” experiences had left undeveloped their innate worth. An observer in the 1890s described the “inner reality” of the workers with revealing clarity:

Under the vulgarity of the worst natures abide a gracious cordiality, an originality and a freshness that lift them above the smirch of ordinary disreputable vice... not the shallowest optimist... can be content with the benighted and unprogressive attitude of the poor white, when out of this seemingly unpromising material education, mental, moral, and physical, might evolve the highest order of humanity. (62)

Another writer defined the task of the owners by saying:

The pioneer mill owners of the South faced the Herculean task of taking an illiterate mountain and farming people and transforming them... The mill owners rendered a tremendous and necessary service by their paternalism. (63)

Such imagery does much to outline the transitional character of the New South ideology. The old South conceptions of hierarchy, the “paternal” role of the aristocracy, and the dependency of labor were here transformed: The authority and “benevolence” of the rulers toward their “children” retained its force, but in a new context — that promised “adulthood” itself to workers who effectively acculturated themselves.

Beneath the public rhetoric of the crusade, the owners' ideology reflected a certain degree of cynicism, but nonetheless retained the major themes. On one hand, they could on occasion express awareness of their total power with stark clarity. "We govern like the czar of Russia... we are monarchs of all we survey," said one man, for instance. (64) And many were apparently entirely clear about their own dominant motives. For instance, a "representative" owner told Liston Pope :

It is an insult to my common sense to ask me whether early mill builders built mills to make money or to secure social betterment... ninety-nine per cent of the motives of the early mill men lay in a desire for economic return. (65)

But the owners, on the other hand, also expressed startlingly vivid images of the workers as children. "The people we have are just as good Americans as any.... But they are like children, and we have to take care of them," proclaimed one man. And the owners were not shy about voicing the ways in which their "benevolent" concern manifested itself. "We look after their morals," explained one mill man. And another :

You know, my people have everything they need. Two years ago I decided they ought to have some flowers. Flowers are good for them.... It would never be good for them to be jealous of each other. So he (my gardener) bought the same kind of seeds for each garden. (66)

Always underlying the mill men's concern, however, was the fear that without the proper caretaking, the workers might "go their own way". When one owner was asked why the mill didn't sell its houses, he answered frankly: "We could not do that because we could not look after them." (67) And another replied to the same question: "We should lose control over them." (68)

Finally, the employers viewed the black mass outside the closed life of the mill town both as a threat, to be used to keep white workers "part of the family", and as a spectre, the potentially dangerous allies of their "wards". A Federal Industrial Commission report in 1901 found that mill owners viewed the blacks as a reserve labor force, to be used "to keep out much of the agitation of labor . . . the employer must have something to hold over the union organization." (69) And one eulogist of Southern industry vividly reflected the owners' consciousness of the role of race when he said:

The white laboring classes here are separated from the Negroes . . . by an innate consciousness of race superiority. This sentiment dignifies the character of white labor. It excites a sentiment of sympathy and equality on their part with classes above them, and in this way becomes a wholesome social leaven. (70)

When any suggestion of a coalition between black and white laborers emerged, the mill men rallied with ferocity. In the North Carolina election campaign of 1898, when the charge of race mixing was hurled at the Populists in a successful attempt to smash their party, the Charlotte Observer noted approvingly:

The business men of the State are largely responsible for the victory (of the Democrats). Not before in years have the bank men, the mill men, and the business men in general — the backbone of the property interests in the State — taken such a sincere interest. (71)

### Textile Villages: Class Integration Within a Closed Universe

On the surface the textile work force seemed to fit the characteristics of labor groups which industrial-relations specialists have noted are especially "strike-prone" and class-conscious. (72) Separated from the broader society,

homogeneous, and locked into unpleasant, routinized labor, textile workers in other settings have often led the development of working-class radicalism. Thus the relatively low class-consciousness of textile workers in the South and their continuing identification with the owners take on added interest. How were the owners of the mills able to integrate "their" workers so well into their own publicly proclaimed understanding of the world? Why did the workers acquiesce in their externally defined role? What were the factors that inhibited the sense of themselves as a "class apart" from those who ruled their lives?

From the exterior, mill communities fit almost exactly a description of a labor force apart. Listen to Mr. Stuart Cramer, president of the American Cotton Manufacturers Association, picturing the mill village in the early part of the 20th Century:

A comparatively small town, generally located outside the corporate limits of any municipality and often in the country, therefore self-contained and self-supporting, with its own stores, schools, public utilities, and churches, with its dwellings clustered around the mill buildings and all owned by the mill company. The citizenship is practically all native born of Anglo-Saxon descent... here is a definite concrete proposition... embracing the very large majority of Southern mill communities, and with slight modification typical of them all. (73)

Or Frank Tannenbaum sketching the inside of mill villages:

The mill village... has no life of its own. Its destinies are spun by the mill. One mill village is like almost every other... The houses are all the same. They are set at equal spaces. They are colored by the same kind of coloring. Each house is alike. Each street is just as wide and just as big as every other street. (74)

The descriptions are startling in their portrayal of the iso-

lation of the mill communities from the rest of Southern society, and in their descriptions of the homogeneity of the work force. And documentary evidence of these facts is not hard to discover: As late as the first decade of the Century 87% of all Southern textile workers lived in company-owned housing. By 1916 the figure was still 78%. (75) Further, the pattern of movement was overwhelmingly that of an exodus from farms into mills, and then rarely if ever out again. A study of mill workers in 1923 in North Carolina showed that 62.6% of the fathers of mill workers had been farmers, and 51.2% of the present workers had once farmed. While only 18.1% of the heads of families had been born in mill villages, 63% of the children from 6 to 14 had been born there, with the percentage steadily increasing the younger the children. Finally, 70.8% of the single workers, men and women, had never followed another occupation. And the population was singularly homogeneous: only one foreigner out of the more than 1,000 workers surveyed; and 94% of the workers from four Southern states. (76)

According to all studies, a large minority of the textile families moved frequently. One examination in the late '20s showed that 38.6% of the families moved an average of at least once every two years, and 21.6% moved at least once a year. But their orbits were circular; the overwhelming majority of families moved from village to village, remaining always within the sealed world of the textile industry. (77)

The evidence of the intermingling of the boss's and the workers' lives comes from a variety of sources. The common pattern was for the owner to know every worker by his or her first name; at times, workers would call the boss and supervisors by their first names as well. In at least the early mills, the pattern was for the house of the owner and the houses of the management to be near the mills, not separated from the workers' own homes. The boss and his wife would attend the same church and Sunday school that the workers attended. The wife was often active in church work, and the boss would sometimes direct the local baseball team. Finally, the owner's door would always be open; he would deal directly with the workers; he was the court of last appeal. (78)



It takes little probing into the realities of village life to find out the inner reality: Spreading out from the mill as the center of the community, the owner's control extended over virtually all aspects of the life of a village. The mill men dominated churches, schools, recreational facilities—indeed, they often built them. And their control functioned effectively to destroy any autonomous social space, any institutions which the working class could claim as their own—in which independent leadership could emerge and develop, in which popular traditions could be sustained, or in which workers could compare and analyze their experiences as working people.

The pattern of textile villages arose at first largely from the economic and geographical dynamics of development. Across the Piedmont, entrepreneurs constructed mills removed from urban areas, and the development of company housing and stores mirrored similar mill towns in the early days of the New England industry.

But such villages acquired a self-sustaining life of their own, precisely because they played a central social role in the emergence of the New South. Whether located in towns, in the countryside, or on the outskirts of urban centers, the mills' "beneficence" spread to penetrate spheres of life beyond the essentials, and to create communities encapsulated from the broader social environment. In the first period, between 1880 and 1900, it was almost universal for mill owners to build schools and churches in addition to the houses, and it was a widespread practice for them to build and run company stores as well—in fact, wages were often paid in the form of checks redeemable at such stores. (79)

That pattern of "total communities" was the consistent expression of the textile myth. The mills, it should be remembered, were not "mere money-making institutions". They were proclaimed to be communities—suffused with the owner's concern for his wards, indeed justified by the multitude of "elevating" opportunities offered to that mass of men and women whose potential had been "buried" under coarse exteriors.

After 1900 (until the First World War) company stores were built less often; in fact they had been one of the first

objects of workers' unrest. And with the building of mills in already-existing towns, companies did not build schools as frequently. But the pattern of company housing and other mill-sponsored institutions remained the dominant pattern throughout the '30s and even the '40s. The War brought some variation in the styles of building, and minor improvements to existing houses, but the striking homogeneity remained the central feature. (80)

A study of over 300 mills in the late '20s demonstrated the continuing intrusion of companies into diverse institutions beyond those (housing, churches, and the factory life itself) which were the primary bonds linking workers to management. In addition, various companies supported a wide variety of other activities: nurseries, medical facilities, community houses, parks, athletic activities. Of the 322 plants studied, 75 had run company stores — generally those that had been built first; in 1926, 35 of these stores were still operating. (81)

In a typical mill town during the 1920s, activity would begin at 5 am with the blowing of the company whistle, announcing the imminent start of the work day. Workers would emerge from their houses, which were little if any better than those many had left once on the farms. In 144 communities studied, out of a sample of 256, houses were without toilets or baths. Inside, the beds that the workers had just vacated had been filled with an average of 1.4 persons, compared to 1.24 persons per bed for white tenants, 1.49 for sharecroppers. In 98.8% of the homes, heat was provided by open fireplaces. (82)

The work week normally ran 65 or 70 hours. On Sundays the community's life would turn away from the mills themselves, and focus instead on the churches. Many of these churches had been built with mill money, and almost all received the financial help of the mills. And it would be virtually the entire community that showed up to hear the preachers talk about fire and brimstone, or the virtues of hard work and obedience, on those Sunday mornings, 72% of the married males and 83.9% of the married females attending churches. (83)

Variations from the theme of hell and damnation would hardly be those to disturb the existing order. On the contrary, the workers might discover their "good fortune" mirrored in the words of their pastors. "There does not exist in America a happier population than that of the mill village." was the view voiced by a leading Methodist journal in North Carolina. And according to another piece: "The very best labor and human ideals obtain (in the mill communities), and they obtain because we have over these mills great, true, Christian businessmen." (84) Whether consciously or not, the mill communities' churches performed considerable service themselves — for the textile owners. In the words of Liston Pope:

The churches . . . set out to mold transplanted farmers into stable, contented, sober citizens and industrial workers . . . methods used . . . consisted of the inculcation of personal virtues (and the) provision of a center of community integration other than the mill itself, and emotional escape from the difficulties of life. (85)

During the week, the workers' children might well attend schools built by the mills, whose teachers' salaries were paid for or supplemented by mill aid. And for those adults who cared to further "improve" themselves, the companies often ran night courses, which the mill owners considered valuable "in creating increased loyalty to the company which has thus provided opportunity for advancement," according to one not entirely unsympathetic observer. (86)

Finally, so that no niches of their lives would be entirely without the company's presence, the workers in many communities had a variety of other "opportunities" for their interests: If they had marital difficulties, a welfare worker might visit their home; if a man wanted to engage in some athletic events on his Saturday afternoons off, he could participate in the company baseball league; if a woman found time from family and work, she perhaps would be recruited into a sewing circle sponsored by the mill; if workers had

nothing else to do, perhaps they would wander down to a mill-built and mill-run community house. (87) The effort was made, with considerable success, to fuse the corporate and personal worlds. As one ideologue of the system wrote: "In the factory village, there can be little separation of private and industrial life." (88)

And how did this systematically constructed milieu "fulfill" the textile men's vision of their role of shearing away the rustic, degraded exterior of the workers and bringing forth the "real essence" — that was as good as anyone? It did so by carefully rewarding those workers who succeeded according to the rules:

Practically all of the overseers and superintendents came from the ranks...the men in charge of the various departments...represent that portion of cottonmill village population which has achieved success....(89)

according to one researcher who studied the personnel in some depth. He discovered during his examinations that the supervisory personnel had had little education. But it was other characteristics which were important: Most had begun work very early, at seven, eight, or nine years old; and 88.9% were church members, "a near essential to promotion...the officers of the church and the teachers in the Sunday school are usually composed of men who are in a supervisory capacity." (90) And their community leadership was "expected in other areas — both as the necessary prerequisite for initial promotion and as the continuing reflection of their character." In describing these men's membership in lodges, for instance, the observer noted:

These men actively support the secret order, not only because it gives them the opportunity to mix socially, but also because they believe the secret order increases their prestige... and... serves them in good stead when promotions are being considered. (91)

Finally, it is interesting, though hardly surprising, to note that it was men who were the real "children" of the story — those who had the opportunity to "grow up" and become like their rulers; women were in many respects closer to the mythic position of the Old South slaves — female supervisors, for instance, were rare despite the large numbers of women workers. It will be shown that such a reality had its effect on the consciousness of women workers.

A reporter for the Nation, writing in 1929 about the wave of textile strikes in South Carolina, painted a sharply drawn picture of the consciousness of the Southern mill workers: "At the core of the Southern mill workers' outlook... are the Sunday school, the Star-Spangled Banner, and personal friendship for the boss." (92)

Indeed, the conservative, patriotic character of the mill workers' beliefs was widely commented on by even those observers most critical of the villages and sympathetic to workers' independent organization. At its root, it revolved around the workers' sense of friendship and solidarity of interest with their boss — and the sense that they were under his tutelage. A writer in 1901, speaking of low-income whites' deference to their rulers, wrote that the operative accepted his situation "not because he felt them (the bosses) his superiors, not because of any claims of descent or of wealth, but because of his confidence in their wisdom." (93)

The outstanding fact in workers' consciousness of their job situation was the sharp separation they made between their conditions and their boss. While they might complain about wages or working conditions or stretchouts or life in the communities, they continued to view the boss as essentially "on their side". One reporter noted that when South Carolina workers went out on strike: "Many of them, when the strikes began, shook hands with their superintendents and managers as they filed out of the mills to 'make certain that there were no hard feelings'." (94) And a woman researcher, Lois MacDonald, who examined several mill communities in the late '20s, found many complaints about wages and conditions. In one community, she heard comments like: "Mill work will drag the spirit out of a body." "These here mills have the worst, hardest, lowest-paid

work in the world." "You have to work like a dog." — and enthusiasm for the management. (95) In another, again, she heard numerous complaints, and reported at the same time comments like: "This company and the boss is 'white'." "They ain't proud, and the Super goes to Sunday school all the time." "The boss knows everybody by his first name; he ain't above ordinary folks." (96) And in a third community: "The boss ain't stuck up and don't think he's better than other folks." "This is . . . just like a big family." (97)

Every Sunday workers went to church to hear "old-fashioned orthodox sermons . . . the terrors of literal burning hell . . . . The emphasis is laid upon the life to come." (98) And escape through fantasy was indeed the major outlet for workers' desire for a better life. Many observers noted that the common reading fare was spectacular novels or comics. Most workers, moreover, expressed desires for themselves or their children to eventually leave the mill-village life. (99) Such fantasies were tragically short-circuited, however, reflected in the endless round of moves from village to village.

To the rest of Southern "cultured" society, mill workers by the '20s were no longer "co-workers" with management in a great drama of reconstruction. On the contrary, the workers' passivity became an asset to many community leaders, to be described in vivid fashion for the enticement of prospective Northern industry. (100) And the workers themselves by the '20s felt a sullen sense of their isolation from the broader world, and the power of that world's contempt. One landlord explained to Tannenbaum why a worker had returned to the mills after a brief venture back to the farm by saying: "Even my tenant farmers would have nothing to do with him." (101) And a welfare worker recounted why two young women had "gone bad" after leaving the farm for the village: "It made no difference. They were mill hands anyway. They just felt that they had taken a step down . . . ." (102)

Given such a sense of isolation, lower wages, and the experiments management made with scientific management techniques, workers began to see the union as a potential instrument of protest against their situation — though not

generally as a reflection of their class organization. In one survey of a large number of workers a researcher found 43% of the work force openly in favor of unions and 27.1% opposed. (103) But there was a general feeling among the workers that a union which had once existed in a community MacDonald studied in depth "was not successful because it was in the hands of the 'Yankees and Jews' who came down from the North and who did not understand Southern workers." (104) And one reporter writing about the 1929 strike wave described workers he had talked to as seeing the union "as an instrument of protest rather than as an agency for long-range collective bargaining." (105)

Women's lives in the textile villages had been more oppressive and more hazardous than their male counterparts' since the beginning. A writer on Appalachian women in the 1930s captured much of the misery and hopeless acquiescence of their lives:

Browbeaten from childhood, women unaided never find their way to a sense of grievance. To prop male domination, the preachers have worked the Bible for all it is worth. Armed with the rib story, Eve's sin in Eden, and St. Paul's 'Let the women learn in silence and with all subjection' and 'Wives, submit yourselves', the men crush the woman with the conviction of her inferiority in God's eyes. One never hears a wife rebelling at her lot. (106)

Mill women's diets and heavy work caused a high rate of illness. Their own sickness and their responsibilities for taking care of others who were sick caused women to lose more than 30% more working time than did men. (107) And women died on the job at a significantly higher rate than males. (108)

Lois MacDonald found a generally passive attitude among women toward their lives. "The Bible says women should be in subjection to their husbands," said one wife. (109) Another commented: "I don't get time to take interest in anything, but it ain't a woman's place to do it anyway." (110) But MacDonald also gathered evidence of the anger which

simmered underneath the surface placidity. When women discovered she was single, they repeatedly advised her not to marry. "You are lucky," said one. "If you have got sense you'll stay your own boss." (111) When women did take action, moreover, for moments they smashed the myth of Southern women's placidity. Women took as active a part as any men in the 1929 strikes, and Pope describes women workers as the most militant and determined strikers in Gastonia. (112) On occasion women organized and formed the bulk of striking workers. (113)

But despite the longings for a better life and episodes of protest against specific grievances, the mill workers' consciousness remained tragically circumscribed, the prisoner of the same environment which had captured their lives so well. The workers generally reproduced the passivity of their social relationships in their perceptions of the outside. "It ain't much use to bother to vote," one worker told MacDonald. "Them what runs the country will run it just the same without me a-tellin' them about it." (114) An observer noted that socialist speakers in mill communities in the early 20th Century stirred almost no interest. (115)

And running through their thoughts was, moreover, a fear of those outside — the Yankees, the Jews, the Northern unions, and above all, blacks. Describing how black people wanted "everything", one worker voiced the sentiment of many when he declared: "They would take the mills too if they could get in...." (116) And MacDonald cited many other instances of the fear and hatred with which "outsiders" and blacks were regarded. "It looks like the country's in a bad way," said one worker. "It is them foreign notions brought back from the war." Another: "Keep out the foreigner and the nigger. It's the only way to keep the races from gettin' mixed." (117)

A number of other observers noted the racial fears of the white workers as well. Liston Pope described the mills in these words:

After emancipation...the status of the Negro was changed from that of a valuable economic asset to that of the poor white man's last outpost against



oblivion.... The rise of the mills represented to a considerable degree the economic triumph of the poor white over the emancipated black. (118)

And political observers believed that the race issue had been effective in keeping many workers (and farmers) tied to the Democratic Party during the populist era. (119)

For it was central to the image of the textile village as a family that the work force was white. And the workers' acquiescence to that principle from the beginning — indeed, several of the early protests had been against the employment of black labor — both facilitated and symbolized their integration into the owners' world.

### Rebellion and Its Aftermath: The Long Road to Self-Discovery

When textile strikes erupted across the South in 1929, and even more traumatically in the general strike of 1934, it appeared for a brief period to many outside observers, and perhaps to many of the actual participants, that the "New South" itself had died. But the change was more apparent than real; despite the catastrophe of the Depression and the changes that had taken place within the industry, the old pattern of class relations emerged from the upheavals basically intact.

Although the Southern textile industry had seen brief moments of union activity before, especially during the several years immediately following the First World War, workers' protests had generally taken the form of short-lived, ineffective strikes — angry gestures that focused on specific wage or work conditions but did not cohere into long-term opposition to management policies, much less develop into a systematic world view antagonistic to that of the owners. (120). In the '20s, however, several major developments functioned at a subterranean level to generate workers' bitterness and to drive an initial wedge into the bonds between workers and management.

Following a wave of Northern investment, and faced with the need to maximize efficiency in the context of a com-

petitive industry, a new generation of mill managers came under the "spell of the Yankee cult of the Great Executive", in the words of W. J. Cash, surrounding themselves with "flunkies and mahogany and frosted glass". (121) Teams of efficiency experts went from plant to plant suggesting ways to cut out unnecessary movement and above all urging an increase in the pace of work.

The old assumption of the worker that has maintained his self-respect and made him a part of the total organization of the plant — the idea that he was working with management in a joint co-operative venture — was completely ignored,

according to an industrial-relations expert. (122) Said Cash :

To be deprived of one's dignity as an individual and made into a sort of automaton...for these people...bred to the ancient Southern notion that each was a white man like any other...bred too to the heritage of knowing the masters of the mills on the old casually intimate terms — for such a people, that was well nigh wholly intolerable. (123)

In addition to the much-hated stretchout, other forces functioned to widen the division. Huge profits during the War had led many firms to comply with government war regulations by improving their property and raising workers' expectations. In the broader environment, development of other industries added new dimensions as well to workers' perceived possibilities of wages and living standards. Many mills, feeling increased competitive pressure, and prematurely assuming the stabilization of consensus, cut back on some of their welfare activities; by the '20s, for instance, company stores were largely relics of the past and schools were built by the mills far less often than in earlier years. Increased use of cars by a small but growing percentage of workers meant that the percentage of the work force living under the mills' shadow in company housing declined. And finally, as described above, workers' wages were sharply

cut back.

The surge of union organizing activity and strikes which followed the War had largely subsided by 1921, but other signs pointed to increasing unrest. Throughout the decade, union leadership found itself continually in the position of trying to restrain members' militancy. (124) On a broader level, textile workers during the '20s began to create autonomous cultural and social forms of expression, in part antagonistic to the dominant culture.

In Gastonia, North Carolina, Liston Pope found that the number of workers attending sect churches — breakaways from the established denominations — increased from 500 in 1920 to 4,000 in 1939. The sects were fiery, evangelistic religion at its most intense, and reflected, in Pope's words, "a rough indicator of the degree to which the mill workers recognize their cultural alienation". (125) Many preachers were mill workers themselves; the democratic character of the religious experiences was marked. And the sermons were full of eschatological references. "Big preachers and big professors...are trying to stop God's work," said one man, "(but they will be stopped) by the Second Comin' of Christ." (126) The institutions of the villages lost some of their forcefulness as well — established churches, for instance, were universally described as "cold". And finally, the "poor and downtrodden" were elevated from the status of misfits and outcasts to that of true "soldiers of God". (127)

Differences between strikes in 1929 graphically reflected differing social conditions. By far the most militant, most bloody, most divisive strikes occurred in precisely those places — like Elizabethton, Gastonia, and Marion — where the "social space" between management and workers had widened the most. All three of those strikes, for instance, involved huge plants; all were owned by outside interests. (128) In Elizabethton, where the plants were owned by Germans, the comments of one observer of the 1929 strikes clearly caught the importance of such distance. During the War, it was recalled:

...sacred motherhood, the American home, and God knows what else had been saved from the Ger-

man menace....It was, therefore, a simple psychological process for the Elizabethton strikers in 1929 to recall the unanimity with which a few years back America despised the very men who now sat in the factory office. (129)

The character of the strikes was on the other hand quite different in South Carolina, where, it will be remembered, departing workers "shook hands as they left to make sure there were no hard feelings." Workers concentrated exclusively on the stretchout and in fact in a number of places chased out union representatives who came to offer their assistance. According to one recent reporter of the events :

Both the union and the stretchout were defeated in South Carolina. Indeed the basic issue settled in the wave of strikes was (the decision to) retain the old system of industrial relations, with its emphasis on an intensely human relationship between the employer and the employees. (130)

But the end of the 1929 strikes, with the ambiguous exception of South Carolina clear defeats for the workers, did not restore tranquility to the mill communities. Unrest continued to simmer below the surface for the first years of the Depression. And in 1934 a mass strike which at its peak involved 420,000 workers shook the industry's confidence to its foundations. Bringing out almost 200,000 workers in the South, it appeared to inaugurate a new era of struggle in the region.

In general the Southern industry had weathered the Depression far better than the Northern, experiencing losses only in the years 1930-1932. (131) In 1933 the textile code that was formulated to comply with the National Industrial Recovery Act standardized working hours at 40 and set a minimum wage of \$12 per week. Although Southern industry expressed some disgruntlement at the insertion of federal authority into what had previously been their unchallenged prerogatives, the majority of Southern firms recognized the need to rationalize and control the output and competition within the industry. When the Supreme Court struck down

the NIRA in 1935, the majority of Southern firms pledged to continue to maintain the codes. (132)

But workers were not similarly satisfied with the guidelines. The NIRA had allowed continued stretchouts. And on May 22, 1934, the code authority proposed to limit operations for 12 weeks to two 30-hour shifts with a corresponding reduction in pay. Throughout the summer, bitterness among the workers continued to build. (133)

The United Textile Workers Union, which was to be the vehicle for the explosion that occurred, had years before articulated its philosophy of "struggle" — and it was hardly one to challenge the owners' hegemony. In 1929 a leader of a joint AFT-UTW organizing drive had stated in Charlotte:

If in this great southland we are permitted to function, we can make a distinct contribution toward the development of efficiency, of co-operation, and of understanding between employers and employees. (134)

But the pleas of the UTW impressed neither the owners nor the workers. The owners felt, undoubtedly, that they needed no help in their "common project", and the workers at the moments they broke out of the straitjacket of mill-village logic did so with a passion which could find effective expression only in more dramatic terms.

The strike itself, begun by 20,000 workers who walked out spontaneously in Alabama in July 1934, turned the Southern Piedmont for a brief period into a battleground of opposing class forces. After the strike's official beginning the first of September, workers' caravans spread out across the countryside from town to town to urge others to close their mills. But it was destined to be a brief assertion of class autonomy. The mill owners and state governments met the strike with equal fury. Seven strikers were killed in Honea Path in South Carolina on September 6 by the State Militia. National Guard units were stationed in 24 North Carolina towns, and martial law was declared in South Carolina and Georgia, where Governor Talmadge set up concentration camps in which strike leaders were impounded. (135) Em-

ployers' plans for reopening called for the use of 10,000 National Guards and 11,000 company guards. By September 20, although the first massive outpouring of strikers had subsided, 150,000 were still out. (136)

Union leadership, however, acquiesced in the face of the federal and state action long before more militant workers were willing to do so. On September 22 UTW Vice-President Frank Gorman announced acceptance of the Federal Mediation Board proposal for settlement — which merely called for a board to “study the problems”. Though Gorman called the outcome “one of the greatest in all labor history”, no one took him seriously for long. Union membership, which had risen spectacularly to 270,000 in August 1934, subsided to 60,500 by 1937. (137)

It is essential here to look more deeply at the dynamics of class during the strike wave and the process of reintegration which followed. The pattern of explosive outbursts followed by a reformation of previous owner-worker relationships had been established long before the 1934 strike itself. In the second village MacDonalld studied, for instance, a militant union had existed between 1918 and 1924. Over 80% of the workers had joined, and workers had struck five summers in a row. But this community, by the time she visited it, had changed considerably.

A local minister had “led” a “successful effort to improve the community”. (138) Workers there, as in the other villages she described, made a sharp division between the harsh conditions and the boss, who was said to be “white”, “a fine man”, and “not above ordinary mill folks”. (139) A sect church in the community had closed since the union days. And the workers, in remembering the union, revealed most fully their current self-doubts and the dependent character of labor's class relations: “Things aren't so prosperous as in the union days, but they are quieter.” “Workers are too hard-headed to get things done for themselves.” “We are gettin' along as things are now. The workers do not know enough to do for themselves.” (140)

During the bitterest moments of strike activity the bonds between workers and owners had never been entirely destroyed. In the midst of the Gastonia strike, a lay preacher

who supported the strike declared in an enraged speech against capitalism: "It is not the owner or operator of the mills (we are striking against), some of whom are fine men, but the conditions under which we do not get living wages. (141) And the pattern of MacDonald's village repeated itself across the South in the post-strike period:

These managements, when they became aware of the gulf (that had begun to open between themselves and the workers), did not want it there. They could have built a bridge across it with the unions... but this could not be an answer under the folkways,

according to an industry sympathizer. (142) He also stated:

In many mills the personnel section was moved out of the treasurer's office... and charged by the top management with the responsibility of compiling all sorts of information about the people... some of the most elaborate personnel dossiers that the writer has ever seen are in the active files of the Piedmont textile mills. (143)

Thus management was reconstituted "court of last resort".

Gastonia's Loray Mills was typical of many when it ran a full-page ad in the local paper after the strike, declaring the boss to be "the worker's friend" and continuing: "What makes the spirit of Progress?... Full co-operation of one man with another.... It is the intimate connection of the various units...." (144) Loray vigorously enlisted the aid of local ministers as intermediaries between the company and new workers, built a recreation camp, and kept out all "trouble-makers". (145) And toward the sects, the mills in Gastonia adopted a new attitude: "Little by little the newer sects are seeking and winning support toward mill management... more recently subsidies similar to those granted to the older churches are being granted to a few sectarian groups." (146)

A modified form of paternal relations was available to

the more "adventurous" companies, led by the larger and Northern-owned plants. Recognizing the need to stabilize the labor supply, no longer fearing unions that organized the industry as necessarily subversive, and perhaps aware of the maturation of the white consensus — and the parallel emergence of a work force that could become well integrated into the dominant values of the region by the illusion of its own choice, many of the companies loosened the most obvious form of their control over the workers. Beginning with Burlington in the mid-'30s, a significant minority began to sell houses. In preparation for the sales :

Local newspapers usually feature the sale with all of the company's carefully-formulated statements about the opportunity it is offering to its workers. The editor often adds his own comments on the virtues of home ownership. (147)

Finally, a researcher into the sales gathered many quotes to the effect that the old style of total paternalism was "no longer needed". The workers had at last moved beyond the "complete dependency" of "childhood" toward a kind of permanent "late adolescence".

Running through all the reasons like a refrain was the conviction that home ownership would make for more responsible citizens and better communities ... (and) property owning would stabilize workers and lessen labor turnover. (148)

But the relationship between classes was never to be that of "independent adults". Workers as a whole were never treated as "equal participants" in a fully bourgeois environment. For the paternal, close relationship between the owner and the workers remains typically an element in the workers' "adolescence" even now. A woman worker in Gastonia in 1970 reflected much of the same dependence that her ancestors had been taught 90 years before when she explained a sharp cutback in her hours by saying :

We've had to cut down on a whole lot of things ...



(but) the mill has been good to me. They gave my daughter a \$5,000 scholarship, and they've tried to look after the employees. It just makes me damn mad to think about the way they (government officials) do them. (149)

As will be seen, however, a new and disruptive element has recently been added to the textile "family" — employment of black workers may generate the long-delayed self-organization that a segregated work force never succeeded in sustaining.

The organizing campaign launched by the CIO in 1937 under Sidney Hillman demonstrated once again the obstacles to unions. Hillman had declared at the outset his commitment to "responsible unionism". The Textile Workers Organizing Committee spent over two million dollars in the campaign, and used 160 Southern organizers, but encountered enormous resistance from owners, who brought out their old arsenal of blacklists, thugs, firings, and preachers. (150) By 1939 TWUA claimed 20% of the 350,000 workers as "members", but the word was often meaningless — only 5% of Southern spindles were under actual contract. (151) In 1939 the CIO re-formed the Textile Workers Union of America, and Frank Gorman reconstituted the United Textile Workers, affiliated with the AFL.

The Second World War brought some increase in union membership, with contracts enforced by the War Labor Board. By the conclusion of the War, TWUA claimed that the industry was 20% organized. (152) From 1946 to 1953 the CIO once more engaged in a major drive to organize the South: Operation Dixie. The Southern Organizing Committee hired 85% of its staff from the South — again in an effort to counter charges of "outsiders". Phillip Murray in 1948 reported initial enthusiasm, and the CIO's position on race was certainly an advance over the earlier campaigns. Murray reported to the CIO executive committee that union meetings were always desegregated, and often chaired by blacks. In a moment of euphoria, he even declared that Operation Dixie was a "civil-rights program". But in textiles, with virtually no black workers, the rhetoric was hollow.

And the drive continued to be plagued with personality conflicts, stiff resistance from employers, and only episodic success among workers. From 1949 to 1951, TWUA won 48 and lost 63 of the elections it was involved in. In Georgia the union by 1954 had fewer contracts than it had had in 1948. TWUA had spent four million dollars between 1946 and 1948 alone — and gained 15,000 new members. By the conclusion, it represented 36,400 workers in the South — compared to 9,900 workers in 1939. (153)

The feud between the UTW and the TWUA continued after the merger of the AFL and the CIO in 1956, although UTW continued to be very small. In 1956 the TWUA attempted a drive among the giants (Burlington, Cannon, Pepperell), but made almost no gains.

A militant strike for almost three years in Henderson, North Carolina marked virtually the only outburst of militancy among the union's otherwise declining membership. In November 1958, more than a thousand workers struck Harriet Henderson 1 and 2 mills. For almost three years a core of workers fought the mills, the local businesses, and the forces of state government. The strike was at last defeated in June 1961, and four union officers were sentenced to prison under fraudulent charges of "conspiring to bomb". An illuminating sidelight to the Henderson story recapitulated the pattern of earlier years: The workers could not believe, when they struck, that the manager was at fault — they thought he had been duped by an anti-union conspiracy from out of state. Many workers told an observer of the situation that they had liked the man. (154)

By 1965, the Southern industry was 9% organized. But at the present time, the increasing employment of blacks is giving considerable encouragement to the union organizers. Black workers in recent elections have voted solidly for the union; the percentage of blacks in the industry has increased from 3.3% in 1960 to 13.4% in 1968. The president of a mill local in Erwin, North Carolina expressed the mood of many today, as well as the history of relations in the industry, when he recently said:

I think within the next few years we'll have many

more Negroes. Whites hate to organize. They want to 'get along' with management. But Negroes know it's not on their side. (155)

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The Southern men of power dealt with the chaos they found around themselves after Reconstruction with imagination and ruthless zeal. Facing a shattered economy, they rebuilt the South on new foundations which would guarantee them wealth and relative security for decades. Confronting the emergence from slavery of a previously pivotal sector of the population, they were able to re-assert the doctrine of white supremacy in the context of new, capitalist relationships — by pushing the black population to the margins of the new order. And discovering around themselves an increasingly restive, formerly independent white population that had developed an elan and spirit which prohibited passive acquiescence to the new order, the rulers of the South developed a mythology and an apparatus to implement those myths which served to integrate the heart of the new working class into a conservative, white, industrial consensus.

As this paper has attempted to sketch in outline, the core of their effort was the elaboration of the textile myth and the mill village which was its reflection in the sphere of social relationships. The fundamental feature, the essence of the relationship between the ruler and the ruled in these villages, was the product of the new logic of class. And the impetus for the industrial development had little to do with myths or visions: It was the outgrowth of special economic and social characteristics of the region. But the vision itself and the particular features of the environment in which it came to reside were the product of active, creative men attempting to discover a way to assert effectively their rule over a society.

What the rulers of the new industry did in fact develop was an elaborate system of relationships which preserved the illusion of the white workers' independence while in reality it maintained brutal control over all aspects of workers' lives. This control was enormously effective precisely because it was rarely overt at all. The very mechanisms through which it functioned were portrayed in myth as instruments which the workers had helped to build for their

own welfare. And the owners' rigid authoritarianism itself hid behind a mask of "concern" which pictured its practitioners as a little wiser, a little older — the model of what it meant to grow up.

As counterpoint to the creation of institutions designed to integrate and cohere mill communities, owners played upon and developed workers' fears of "those outside" the town — especially the black masses. There is much evidence that owners were entirely conscious of the importance of racial fears among "their" workers, and such fears were used to truncate workers' organization and strengthen white "solidarity" from the early days of the mills. Finally, the disdain the "mill hands" experienced from the broader white society further reinforced their isolation and sense of the village as "refuge". Thus the mill communities became sharply walled off from the rest of Southern society; in the confines of those villages, driven by the very wretchedness which the owners imposed on them, but lacking fundamental confidence in their independent capacity to fight back, the mill hands turned to those who professed to be their "kind" and their friends — the rulers of their lives.

Indeed, the workers of the villages continued to live in wretched circumstances, continued to be imprisoned by the village system, precisely because they were unable to articulate an alternative consciousness. There is considerable evidence that they did not entirely "buy" the village system — the activities (with the important exception of churches) designed for their "benefit" were rarely attended by the bulk of the workers. But the ultimate chain around their capacity to act independently was the mystification that resulted in the illusion that the boss was "on their side".

When workers protested their situation, they most often did so by focusing on specific grievances — as if to let the owner know that he had overlooked something. During the brief flourish of activity from 1929 to 1934, which grew out of the first real distantiation between workers and owners, they asserted the embryo of an autonomous consciousness.

But this independence too subsided, overtly because of the lack of any instrument through which it could generalize and sustain itself. The union which was their vehicle was

itself a prisoner of the myth of class co-operation.

In the long run, however, the independence and integrity of the workers' consciousness was truncated by the particular social features of the mill village. With fertile ground, revolutionary consciousness, no matter what its initial obstacles, will cohere and develop its own instruments of self-expression. But the mill villages lacked precisely what E. P. Thompson describes as the incubators of class consciousness during the industrial revolution in England:

The countryside was ruled by the gentry, the towns by corrupt corporations, the nation by the corruptest corporation of all; but the chapel, the tavern, and the home were their own. In the "unsteepled" places of worship there was room for a free intellectual life and for democratic experiments. (156)

In those mill communities of the South, there was no social terrain on which workers could establish independence. For no consistent, coherent self-image of the working class for itself could emerge when all niches of life were pervaded by the image of the other — the owner — and thus by his definition of workers as part of the white family.

And workers, developing no alternative and filled with fear of the broader society, were cemented into that sterile environment by their assent to the owners' judgment of those outside: Blacks came to be seen as threats to their jobs and their "special relationship" to the mill men; foreigners, Northerners, government, even unions were part of a threatening and incomprehensible world, the only alternative to which was the owners' embrace. In the absence of any space in which their independent consciousness could emerge, and in the stark light of fear which shut out the world beyond the village walls, the outbursts of revolt that workers did mount were short-lived episodes. In retrospect they seem hollow, bitter gestures — a kind of "early adolescent rebellion" — by men and women who had "nowhere else to go" within their understanding of the world, and who thus returned in the end to the "safe" milieu of the village, walled away from their potential real allies.

But the story of the mill worker is not concluded, for the South beyond the communities has changed with the passage of time. Growing increasingly indistinguishable from capitalist America as a whole, it experiences the tensions that are intensifying in the broader national environment. And, birthplace of the black movement which has so convulsed the broader society, the South faces yet another spectre: That movement is spilling into the once-cohesive world of the mill itself, the center of the Southern "white family". And its entrance cannot fail to shake and perhaps ultimately shatter the bonds which, holding worker and owner together, formed the pivotal stabilizer of the political culture during the emergence of the New South.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. C. Vann Woodward: *Origins of the New South* (Louisiana University Press, 1951), Page 133.

2. Quoted in Hugh Lefler and Albert Newsome: *North Carolina: The History of a Southern State* (Chapel Hill, UNC Press, 1963), Page 475.

3. *Ibid.*, Page 473.

4. Jack Blinksilver: *Cotton Manufacturing in the Southeast: Historical Analysis* (Atlanta, Georgia State College of Business Administration, 1959), Page 3.

5. Quoted in Broadus Mitchell: *The Rise of Cotton Mills in the South* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 1921), Page 26.

6. George Starnes, Abraham Berglund, and Frank Devyver: *Labor in the Industrial South* (Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 1930), Page 6.

7. Holland Thompson: *From Cotton Field to Cotton Mill: Study of Industrial Transition in North Carolina* (New York, MacMillan, 1906), Pages 2-3.

8. Starnes and associates: *Industrial South*, Pages 6-7.

9. For the Piedmont region of the Southeast in particular the textile mills came to symbolize industrialization itself; and far beyond the four states most affected, they appeared as the symbolic embodiment of the new order. See Woodward: *Origins*, Page 131. For realistic discussion of the genesis of Southern industrialization, read Woodward: *Origins*, Pages 107-140. Also Blinksilver: *Cotton Manufacturing*, Page 3.

10. Ben Lemert: *Cotton Textile Industry of the Southern Appalachian Piedmont* (Chapel Hill, UNC Press, 1933), especially Pages 30-36.

11. *Ibid.*, Page 54.

12. Woodward: *Origins*, Pages 224-226.

13. *Ibid.*, Pages 225-226.

14. Mitchell: Rise of the Mills, Pages 263-265. Mitchell, it will be shown, experienced euphoria over the owner's altruism. Throughout this paper New South historians of the mill campaign are used as sources for the textile myth itself; indeed such historians played an important role in gathering the diverse strands of the campaign and cohering them into an ideology appropriate to the industrializing South.

15. Lemert: Cotton Textile Industry, Page 160.

16. Mitchell: Rise of the Mills, Page 273.

17. Lefler and Newsome: North Carolina, Page 476.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., Page 480.

20. Mitchell: Rise of the Mills, Pages 241-253. See also Woodward: Origins, Page 135.

21. Ibid., Pages 306-307.

22. George Tindall: Emergence of the New South (Louisiana State University Press, 1967), Page 76.

23. Mitchell: Rise of the Mills, Page 232.

24. Glenn Gilman: Human Relations in the Industrial Southeast: Study of the Textile Industry (Chapel Hill, UNC Press, 1956), Page 105.

25. Tindall: Emergence, Pages 111-112 and Page 76.

26. Paul Blanshard: Labor in Southern Cotton Mills (1927 pamphlet), Page 5.

27. Tindall: Emergence, Page 35.

28. Ibid., Pages 35-36.

29. Blanshard: Labor, Page 40.

30. Tindall: Emergence, Page 339.

31. F. Ray Marshall: Labor in the South (Cambridge, Harvard Press, 1967), Page 104.

32. Blanshard: Labor, Page 40.

33. Gilman: Human Relations, Pages 92-121. According to a 1940 study he cited, 84% of the textile workers were unskilled or semiskilled.

34. Ibid.

35. Harriet Herring: Welfare Work in Mill Villages: The Story of Extra Mill Activities (Chapel Hill, UNC Press, 1929), Page 24. The 1967 figures were compiled by E. Stanlope Dunn for the Employment Security Exchange Report in North Carolina, Volume 25, Numbers 1-4.

36. Ibid.

37. Karl Mannheim: Essays on the Sociology of Culture (London: Routledge and Kogan Paul Ltd., 1956). See especially Pages 176-228.

38. Mitchell: Rise of the Mills. See the discussion of labor, Pages 206-220.

39. Ibid., quoted from footnote, Page 218.

40. Ibid., quoted from footnote, Page 219.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid., quoted from Pages 249-250.

44. Ibid., quoted from footnote, Page 206.

45. Woodward: *Origins*, Pages 175-205.
46. Mitchell: *Rise of the Mills*, Page 144.
47. Gilman: *Human Factor*, Page 69.
48. Albert Moore: *History of Alabama and Her People* (Chicago and New York, American Historical Society, 1927), Page 636. According to one major study of black labor after the Civil War: "Emancipation of the slaves . . . shunted the major portion of black labor into agricultural and domestic service": Sterling Spero and Abram Harris: *The Black Worker* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1931), Page 30. With one-third of the Southern work force, blacks held 1.5% of the mill jobs, almost all of those in outside or janitorial work, according to Katherine Lumpkin: *The South in Progress* (New York, International Publishers, 1940), Page 57.
49. Quoted from a speech by John Speake in Lois MacDonald: *Southern Mill Hills: A Study of Social and Economic Forces in Certain Mill Villages* (New York, Alex Hillman, 1928), Page 17.
50. Mitchell: *Rise of the Mills*, Page 86.
51. Liston Pope: *Mill Hands and Preachers: A Study of Gastonia* (New Haven, Yale Press, 1942), Page 24.
52. Quoted in Pope: *Mill Hands*, Page 23.
53. Mitchell: *Rise of the Mills*, Page 104.
54. *Ibid.*, Page 95.
55. John Garrett Van Osdell: "Cotton Mills, Labor, and the Southern ind 1880-1930" (unpublished PhD dissertation, Tulane, 1966), Page 9.
56. *Ibid.*, Pages 13-14.
57. Gilman: *Human Factor*, Page vi.
58. For evidence of who owned the mills, read, for instance, Lefler and Newsome: *North Carolina*, Pages 476-480. Perhaps most interesting is the fact that Mitchell, for all his euphoria, does not begin to make such a claim. In his view the mills were clearly begun and sustained by the "leading citizens" of the South. See Mitchell: *Rise of the Mills*, Pages 232-273, for fuller discussion of the mills' genesis.
59. Gilman: *Human Factor*, Page vi.
60. *Ibid.*, Page 138.
61. Sinclair Lewis: "Cheap and Contented Labor" (New York, article pamphlet put out by United Feature Syndicate, 1929), Page 14.
62. Clare De Graffenreid: "Georgia Cracker in the Cotton Mill", in *Century Magazine*, NS, Volume 19 (February 1891), Page 498.
63. Blanshard: *Southern Cotton Mills*, Page 49.
64. Quoted in Tindall: *Emergence*, Page 328.
65. Pope: *Mill Hands*, Page 19.
66. Frank Tannenbaum: *Darker Phases of the South* (New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1924), Pages 50-51.
67. *Ibid.*, Page 47.
68. *Ibid.*
69. Lumpkin: *South*, Pages 159-160.
70. John W. Dubose: *Mineral Wealth of Alabama and Birmingham*,



Illustrated (Birmingham, 1886), Page 109.

71. Lefler and Newsome: North Carolina, Page 525.

72. See for instance Clark Kerr and Abraham Siegal: "Interindustry Propensity to Strike" in Kernhauser and associates (editors): Industrial Conflict (New York, McGraw Hill, 1954), Pages 191-193.

73. Tannenbaum: Darker Phases, Pages 50-51.

74. Ibid., Page 58.

75. Gilman: Human Factor, Page 150.

76. Jennings J. Rhyne: Some Cotton Mill Workers and Their Villages (Chapel Hill, UNC Press).

77. Ibid., Page 124.

78. See, for instance, Thompson: Cotton Field, Pages 200-202.

79. Ibid., Pages 161-171; Rhyne: Cotton Mill Workers, Pages 23-24.

80. Ibid., Page 35; Herring: Welfare Work, Pages 230-234.

81. See Herring: Welfare Work, Pages 26-31 for a summary of her findings.

82. Rhyne: Cotton Mill Workers, Pages 29-30; Herring: Welfare Work, Pages 230-234 on housing.

83. Rhyne: Cotton Mill Workers, Pages 166-179.

84. Blanshard: Southern Cotton Mills, Pages 87-88.

85. Pope: Mill Hands, Page 29. For an excellent discussion of the role of fundamentalist religion in instilling labor discipline, see E. P. Thompson: Making of the English Working Class (New York, Vintage Books, 1963), Pages 356-374.

86. Herring: Welfare Work, Page 77.

87. Rhyne: Cotton Mill Workers: Pages 54-59. Herring's book also goes into extra-mill activities in great detail.

88. Thompson: Cotton Field, Page 166.

89. Rhyne: Cotton Mill Workers, Page 157.

90. Ibid., Page 164.

91. Ibid.

92. Paul Blanshard: "One Hundred Per Cent Americans on Strike", in The Nation, Volume 128, Number 330, Page 554.

93. Thompson: Cotton Field, Page 187.

94. Blanshard: One Hundred Per Cent, Page 554.

95. MacDonald: Mill Hills, Page 136. MacDonald was clearly appalled at the passivity and fear which characterized the workers whom she interviewed. Her loyalties form a constant undercurrent throughout her work: She wished with some passion for the workers to overcome their conviction of the owners' benevolence and understand the "obvious" — that their wretched conditions were created precisely by those owners.

96. Ibid., Page 105.

97. Ibid., Page 74.

98. Thompson: Cotton Field, Page 28.

99. MacDonald: Mill Hills, Pages 111-112, and Rhyne: Cotton Mill Workers, Pages 198-199.

100. Gilman: Human Factor, Pages 191-200.

101. Tannenbaum , Page 66.
102. Ibid., Page 66. See also Mitchell : Rise of the Mills, Page 197.
103. Rhyne : Cotton Mill Workers, Pages 204-207.
104. MacDonald : Mill Hills, Page 85.
105. Blanshard : One Hundred Per Cent, Page 555.
106. Edward Alsworth Ross : "Pocketed Americans", New Republic, Volume 37 (January 9, 1924), Page 171.
107. Margaret Jarmon Haygood: "Mothers of the South : A Population Study of Native White Women of Child-Bearing Age of the Southeast" (unpublished PhD dissertation, UNC, 1937), Page 270.
108. Elizabeth Otey : "Women and Children in Southern Industry", in Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Volume 153 (January 1931), Page 163.
109. Quoted in MacDonald : Mill Hills, Page 144.
110. Ibid., Page 77.
111. Ibid., Pages 77 and 144.
112. Pope : Mill Hands, Page 258.
113. The militancy and self-organization of women are documented in a paper on the Elizabethton Strike of 1929 by Sara Evans Boyte, UNC 1970 : "Women of the New South : Elizabethton, Tennessee, 1929".
114. MacDonald : Mill Hills, Page 71.
115. Thompson, though a believer in the textile myths, was convinced that textile workers would eventually become class-conscious, and thus noted with much interest their reaction to SP speakers : Cotton Field, Page 189.
116. MacDonald : Hills, Page 72.
117. Ibid., Page 108.
118. Pope : Mill Hands, Page 12.
119. See, for instance, Thompson : Cotton Fields, Page 9, and John Clark : "Populism in Alabama" (PhD dissertation, NYU 1927) Page 173.
120. See George Mitchell : Textile Unionism and the South (Chapel Hill, UNC Press, 1931) for a summary of the history of textile unions until the 1929 strike wave.
121. W. J. Cash : The Mind of the South (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1941), Page 270.
122. Gilman : Human Factor, Page 182. See also Mitchell : Textile Unionism, Page 66.
123. Cash, Page 353.
124. See Jean Carol Trepp : "Union-Management Co-operation and the Southern Organizing Campaign", in Journal of Political Economy, Volume 41 (1933), Page 614; Mitchell : Unionism, especially Page 65.
125. Pope : Mill Hands, Pages 136-137.
126. Ibid., Page 128.
127. Ibid., Page 131.
128. Pope : Mill Hands, Page 145. See also Thomas Tippet : When Southern Labor Stirs (New York, Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, 1931) for a fascinating account of Gastonia and Elizabethton presented

by a Left-wing observer, and Lewis: Labor, for an eyewitness account of Marion.

129. Tippet: When Southern Labor Stirs, Page 59.

130. Van Osdell: Southern Mind, Page 138.

131. Tindall: Emergence, Page 467.

132. Ibid., Page 436.

133. See Herbert Lahne: The Cotton Mill Worker (New York, Farrar and Rinehart, 1944), Pages 225-231, for a good account of the strike by a union sympathizer.

134. Trepp: Union-Management Co-operation, Page 614.

135. See Tindall: Emergence, Pages 509-512, for information on the strike in addition to Lahne's account.

136. Ibid.

137. Ibid.

138. MacDonald: Mill Hills, Page 86.

139. Ibid., Page 105.

140. Ibid., Page 114.

141. Pope: Mill Hands, Page 275.

142. Gilman: Human Factor, Page 234.

143. Ibid., Pages 243-244.

144. Pope: Mill Hands, Page 318.

145. Ibid.

146. Ibid., Page 140.

147. Harriet Herring: Passing of the Mill Village (Chapel Hill, UNC Press, 1949), Page 113.

148. Ibid., Page 16.

149. Quoted in "Mill Life Is Tough Again", The Charlotte Observer, June 7, 1970.

150. Tindall: Emergence, Pages 518-520; Marshall: Labor, Pages 169-170; Lahne's description of owners' tactics in this campaign (and in earlier ones): "If discriminatory discharge, eviction, blacklisting, and yellow-dog contracts failed.... The mill owner brought out labor spies, troops, and deputies...and company unions." (Mill Worker, Page 254)

151. Marshall, Page 171.

152. Ibid., Page 246.

153. Ibid., Pages 254-268, for a liberal view of Operation Dixie.

154. The account of the Henderson strike comes from an involved and sympathetic observer of the events, Dr. Donald Roy, Duke University Department of Sociology. Dr. Roy is an invaluable resource on textile organizing in the 1950s. A major thesis of his is that the textile unions were successful only if they were able to offer a "total alternative" effectively. Material on Henderson from an interview January 4, 1972.

155. Quoted in Reese Cleghorn: "Black Breakthrough in Textiles", Raleigh News and Observer, November 9, 1969.

156. Thompson: Working Class, Pages 51-52.



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# The Radicalization of Quebec Trade Unions

*by Black Rose Books Editorial Collective*

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Confederation des Syndicates Nationales (CSN) (1) was founded in 1921 as the Confederation des Travailleurs Catholiques du Canada (CTCC), changing its name to CSN only during its secularization in 1961. The first Catholic union was founded in 1907 by Chicoutimi. By 1918 at least 27 confessional unions were in existence, and by 1921 some 220 delegates from 88 unions joined together in Hull to found the CTCC with initial membership of some 26,000 workers.

The CTCC was founded essentially by the Catholic Church as a fearful response to the growth of international unions. Labor organization began in Canada in the 1880s as a result of the initiative of the two US labor associations, the Knights of Labor and American Federation of Labor. Professional union organizers from these two groups crossed the border and created lodges or locals of the parent bodies. By their nature, these organizations were international and secular.

The CTCC was limited to Roman Catholics and founded to fight the influence of "American materialism" and "Bolshevik communism". In 1931 only 10.66% of the industrial wage earners were unionized. In 1932 the unionized labor

force was about 42,680, of which 25,000 (58.58% of the total) belonged to the CTCC. By 1951 32.15% of the labor force (259,950) was unionized, and 99,081 (33.88% of the total) belonged to the CTCC.

Each CTCC union local was run by an aumonier, a priest whose duty it was to educate its members on their Catholic duties in their role as trade unionists. The aumonier chose certain workers to participate in special study sessions for indoctrination, interpreted all labor legislation for them, and explained the application of papal encyclicals to daily life.

The only economic demand viewed as legitimate for the worker was simply that of a wage sufficient to support his family. Legal strikes were permitted only when all else had failed; sympathy strikes were considered immoral and thus were prohibited. In this authoritarian cast, the worker had no access to technical information to help him understand society, and he was prevented from developing any group skills.

The idea of the owner of a factory as a man set apart from the worker in terms of his interests, or the idea of class conflict, was violently denounced. Private property was justified by pontifical teachings.

A trade unionist's catechism was published, containing 39 questions and answers, and the first hour of each union meeting was devoted to the memorization of this catechism.

The paternalism, elitism, and cultivated ignorance of the social and economic realities; the belief in hierarchical authority; and the dependence on pontifical teaching to solve day-to-day problems of French-Canadians were reflected in the union's organizational structures and in its professed objectives. It was logical from this that the CTCC should be instrumental in the first provincial election victories of Maurice Duplessis (2) in 1933 and 1936.

From 1915 to 1936 there were 507 strikes in Quebec that involved 155,000 workers, of which nine involved the Catholic unions, implicating 4300 workers. Meanwhile the entire continental trade-union movement, beginning in the '30s, became increasingly militant, following the formation of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in the US

and its subsequent expansion into Canada. The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), the Canadian affiliate of the CIO, adopted a policy of political action in addition to traditional labor activities and allied itself with the social democratic party of Canada, the CCF (3). The more backward Trades and Labour Congress of Canada (TLC), affiliated with the AFL, reluctantly followed the lead of the CLC, but never went so far as to express support for social democratic socialism.

The effect of all this on the CTCC was a drastic drop in membership, which sank from 74% of the unionized labor force in 1935 to 28% in 1943.

The '40s were marked by violent conflicts between the three main labor organizations, the Federation Provincial du Travail (FPT), which was composed of craft and trade unions affiliated with the TLC and thus the AFL; the CIC-linked Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), a federation of industrial unions; and the CTCC. The international unions, FPT and CLC, attempted to organize Quebec workers so as to protect their members in English Canada and the US by achieving similar pay rates everywhere on the continent. The Catholic clergy on the whole viewed these unions as a dangerous influence which would destroy the solidarity of the working class. The clergy were correctly accused by many in return for their attacks on the international unions as collaborating with capitalists and with the repressive State apparatus of Premier Maurice Duplessis.

During this period the large international companies often recognized the benefits of dealing with the CTCC rather than with the more powerful and militant international unions. By agreeing to the initial demands of a CTCC local, and paying wages which were high for Quebec but far below the North American average, the capitalists succeeded in obtaining the loyalty of their work force. This type of benevolent paternalism was shown, for example, by the Aluminum Company of Canada at Arvida. By simply giving in to the inexpensive nationalist demands of the clergy and the CTCC this company was able to keep its workers docile and pay less than to its employees in English Canada or the US. But other enterprises, with less perceptive owners, preferred

to deal with the international unions. These Anglo-Saxon capitalists developed a racist aversion to dealing with the French-Canadian Roman Catholic clergy. They consequently preferred to deal with Anglo-Saxon-dominated trade unions.

When the FPT began to organize the workers at the Aluminum Company of Canada, the local clergy and the Jesuit Pere Genest fought against it. When the FPT's organizer was a Jew he was denounced; when he was replaced by an Irish Catholic, "foreign Catholics" were denounced from the pulpit. CTCC-affiliated unions were more often company unions, as at the Dominion Textile plant at Magog. Here the aumonier received a salary as chaplain of the company-supported hospital, and his father received a company pension after having successfully broken up a CLC-CIO organizing campaign.

At its annual convention in 1944, CTCC President Alfred Charpentier described the FTP-AFL as the worst enemy of the CTCC, an enemy which was not afraid to use any means to attain its end. At the same convention Bishop Douville of Saint Hyacinthe warned that support for international unions threatened French Canada's interests. He urged simultaneous development of workers' and employers' syndicates as "a prelude to the economic corporatism which we consider essential to the future of labor and employers as well." The clergy's campaign was much more than speech-making. Often the workers' wives would be warned by their priests that they would be deprived of the sacraments if their husbands joined international unions. But some change was beginning, and in 1943 the aumoniers were stripped of their formal powers with the unions.

When Duplessis returned to power in 1944, it was soon apparent that his antipathy toward organized labor had not mellowed during his years in the parliamentary opposition.

In 1946, the journalist Gerard Picard replaced the conservative Alfred Charpentier as president of CTCC. Picard aroused the bitter opposition of Duplessis and the large business interests by effecting a sharp radicalization of the CTCC policy. He succeeded in increasing the membership of the CTCC so that it reached 43% of the unionized labor force in Quebec by the mid-'50s.



Perhaps the most provocative aspect of this radicalization was a shift to radical Catholic thinking which emerged in Europe largely after the Second World War. The decision to support the recommendations of the encyclical "Quadragesimo Anno" by Pope Pius XI was one such step. The rationale of the encyclical was the idea of a partnership between labor and management: Workers were to share in the profits and participate in the decisions of industry. To achieve this and other traditional goals of labor, the CTCC abandoned its previous policy of considering the rights of the employer in favor of the broad-based strike actions that were breaking out. Following this change the CTCC became involved in more strike actions than any other labor organization in Quebec.

At a session of the Legislature in 1949, Duplessis wanted even more stringent methods to suppress growing labor-union activity than already existed in law. Bill 5, which was to establish a comprehensive labor code, was so reactionary in its treatment of the working man that the warring labor federations formed a commonfront to oppose it. Even the Church hierarchy publicly voiced its opposition, declaring several aspects of the code contrary to social justice. The Premier was forced to withdraw the bill, although he subsequently enacted it through piecemeal legislation. The early success of the commonfront resulted in a feeling of solidarity among the union memberships — a sentiment until that moment unknown in Quebec.

It was in this solidarity atmosphere that the illegal strike of the CTCC against the Johns-Manville Company broke out at Asbestos, Quebec. Duplessis publicly insulted the CTCC leadership and sent in his provincial police.

The union solidarity in opposing Bill 5 dovetailed into a common-front support of the Asbestos strikers. CTCC unions sent busloads of workers into the town in support from other parts of Quebec. They also brought in money to help feed and pay rent for the strikers and their families. The strike fund reached \$300,000 from donations inside and outside the CTCC. The CLC gave \$7700 and the FPT \$6500. Two AFL leaders from Johns-Manville Companies in New Jersey came to Asbestos to demonstrate their sympathy

with the cause of the miners. They assured the CTCC that the slowdowns in their factories back home, resulting from the strike, would be accepted as necessary to win the just struggle of the Asbestos workers. Even the newspaper of the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists in the United States (a Right-wing clerical organization within the AFL-CIO) commented on the strike and wished the workers well in their fight.

The strike was carried on amid police brutality, instructed judges, and complete support for the company by the Duplessis regime. Some elements in the Church, however, began to break away, siding with the workers. Archbishop Charbonneau of Montreal declared in a sermon delivered at Notre-Dame-de-Montreal :

The working class is the victim of a conspiracy which wishes to crush it, and when there is a conspiracy to crush the working class, it is the duty of the Church to intervene.

We wish for social peace, but we do not wish for the crushing of the working class. We are more attached to man than to capital. This is why the clergy has decided to intervene. It wishes that justice and charity be respected, and it desires that more attention cease to be paid to financial interests than to the human factor.

Archbishop Roy of the City of Quebec, Bishop Desranleau of Sherbrooke, and Bishop Douville of Saint Hyacinthe, although more cautiously, also publicly supported the strikes and authorized collections at the church doors in their dioceses after mass in aid of the Asbestos workers and their families.

The workers never won their cause. The strike was eventually settled, but the local union leaders suffered severe legal penalties and loss of employment. This strike, however, has had a profound effect on Quebec. A new intelligentsia had begun to emerge and to wield its influence in the CTCC through general secretary Jean Marchand. Working-class consciousness and solidarity was spreading all

through Quebec. The hegemony of the ruling power elite was shaken and confusion set in. Duplessis, aided by ultra-conservative Jesuits led by Bishop Courchesne of Rimouski, succeeded in having Archbishop Charbonneau exiled from Quebec. Although the power structure had never been more shaken since the days of the 1837 rebellion (4), they still wielded overwhelming power.

The CTCC led the fight against Duplessis, although there was a bitter division between conservative members and militants. In 1952, the CTCC formed an anti-Duplessis Political Action Committee, which succeeded in seating six Liberals although it provoked some conflict within the organization. The Political Action Committee was not renewed for the 1956 election in view of this dissension. However while remaining aloof from this election it refused to endorse candidates of either party.

The CTCC also organized many marches and demonstrations in opposition to the Duplessis regime, but for the first time they took up the strike weapon as their par excellence.

The CTCC unions were involved in many incredibly fierce and bloody strikes during this era of political darkness: Violent confrontations took place between the labor movement and the State. The strikes were mostly illegal: The Labour Relations Act required that labor disputes be submitted to a government arbitration board for a decision before a strike could be called. Because the workers were aware that Duplessis's admittedly foreign-investment-orientation regime would continue arbitration for well over a year at a time, and then probably hand down a pro-industry decision, they would often strike prior to arbitration in defiance of the law.

As in the case of the Asbestos strike, Duplessis would send in the provincial police, at the request of the company concerned, to "protect the employer's property", although legally the provincial police could only be summoned by the town council.

Another important development in the spread of class consciousness was the strike of a union affiliated with the CTCC against a traditional French-Canadian department store. The Dupuis Freres strike of 1954 taught many people

that all employers — whether Anglo-Saxon, American, or French-Canadian — must be judged on the basis of their policies toward their workers. The CTCC gradually was transforming itself into a militant labor union struggling to create an internal democracy and social justice for its members. It was Michel Chartrand (5) who pointed out at the time that the CTCC would break off relations with all French-Canadian “nationalists” who “defended the French language while starving those who used it.”

Other brutal confrontations exploded. In addition to Asbestos in 1949 and Dupuis Freres in 1954, Louiseville in 1952 and Murdochville in 1957 also developed into showdowns between the just demands of working people and the State power of Duplessis. The CTCC was involved in all of these movements of protest against the Duplessis State.

By the mid-'50s, the CTCC had grown to 90,000 members as compared to the CLC with 45,000 and the FPT with 130,000. The attempt at solidarity of the three union confederations during the Asbestos strike had been shattered when the FPT passed a resolution at its 1952 convention denouncing the CTCC's growing revolutionary mentality. It then made a pact with the Duplessis regime claiming that in this way it gained more benefits for its workers. But from 1956 on, the newly-formed Federation du Travail du Quebec (FTQ) (6) gave growing support to the CTCC. By 1959, the Quebec trade-union movement was more solidly united than at any time since 1949.

But the CTCC was only opposing a particular regime in power, not the State nor capitalism as such. Although it proposed some radical reforms, the CTCC was still prepared to work within the system.

The 1960s witnessed the emergence of a left-of-center nationalism on one hand and the beginning of a national liberation movement on the other. A new class composition had emerged over the years with new strata resulting from the industrialization generated by the war economy, and major population shifts into urban areas, especially Montreal. This was set within an international context that had experienced the establishment of Algeria and a new regime in Cuba.

The Liberal Party had come to power in 1960, replacing the Union Nationale of Maurice Duplessis, who had died a couple of years previously. Liberal slogans inspired hope that perhaps the Quebecois would finally be able to share in the riches of their country. But a growing disillusionment set in when it became obvious that the Liberals were as much interested in foreign investment as the Union Nationale was. The more things changed politically, the more they appeared the same.

Meanwhile in the CSN, Roger Mathieu succeeded Gerard Picard as president. Mathieu was followed by Jean Marchand, who in 1961 helped change the organization's name to CSN and officially secularized it. In 1965 the current president, Marcel Pepin, was elected. On October 13, 1968, Pepin presented a report to the congress of the CSN entitled "The Second Front". This represented a major transformation of trade unionism in North America. It was a giant step toward distinctly political activities aimed at going beyond collective bargaining and restructuring the "system", although the broad outlines of the capitalist political economy were tacitly maintained.

### The Originality of the CSN

A distinctive characteristic of Quebec society is the network of independent institutions which have emerged over the years to meet the demands of both survival and growth. These "corps intermediaires", as they are referred to in French, include the labor movement, people's banks, and other co-operative movements, as well as the different nationalist associations. Some of the impetus given to the "Quiet Revolution" (7) originated from within these groups. Most of these independent bodies are either completely separate from their Anglo-Canadian and American counterparts or enjoy a large degree of autonomy which allows for a certain freedom of action and creativity. The CSN is the largest and perhaps most dynamic of these "intermediate" bodies.

The existence of these institutions differentiates Quebec society from other ethnic and linguistic minorities in North





America. For example Cesar Chavez's organization of Chicano workers is on the whole dependent financially on the mainstream of the North American labor movement. Some militant black caucuses have been formed within the American labor movement, although black workers do not possess an instrument of power which reflects their collective personality and need outside the scattered civil-rights organizations. The CSN, then, offers the Quebec francophone worker a creative vehicle through which he can develop both his class consciousness and his culture.

It would be useful to take note of the uniqueness of the CSN on international questions and burning social issues of the day. Its opposition to the nuclear arms race came very early, as did its position on disarmament including its demand that Canada unilaterally renounce the possession and use of nuclear weapons. In 1966 the CSN national congress condemned the US government for its role in Vietnam. In 1968 the congress quoted the independent socialist American magazine Monthly Review in further condemning the role of the CIA as an instrument of American imperialism in Latin America. The CSN went on to note: "Quebec like Canada is a satellite of American imperialism."

By 1968 the CSN had adopted the Second Front position and joined a campaign to protect not only organized workers but also the unorganized, the unemployed, tenants, and consumers of Quebec. A year later it demanded the resignation of the Minister of Justice, Remi Paul, and the immediate release from prison of Charles Gagnon and Pierre Vallieres, leading advocates and writers for the 1966 grouping of the separatist Front de Liberation du Quebec (Quebec Liberation Front), whereas the FTQ simply demanded justice for the two FLQ activists.

#### Structures of the CNTU

The phenomenal growth of the CSN from 80,000 in 1960 to almost 250,000 in 1970 reflects the attractiveness of the new militancy to the powerlessness in our society. In 1964 the FTQ on the other hand lost 10,000 workers to the CSN.

There are now about 750,000 organized workers in Que-



bec. Of these 225,000 belong to the FTQ and 250,000 to the CSN. The remaining 275,000 belong to international unions affiliated directly with the CLC or AFL-CIO, while some are totally independent, like the powerful Quebec Teachers Corporation.

The structure of power in the CSN is largely horizontal. The biennial national congress is composed of 1500 delegates from the locals. The elected bureaucracy consists of (1) the confederal council, with 181 members (25 from the confederal bureau, 53 from the federations, and 103 from the central council), which meets three times a year and carries on the business of the CSN between national congresses; (2) the confederal bureau, with 25 members (5 from the executive committee, 11 from the federations, 8 from the central councils, and one staff member); and (3) the executive committee, which consists of the president, vice-president, general secretary, treasurer, and director general of CSN services.

The FTQ is a much less structured organization with a small budget; for it receives only 15¢ per affiliated member per month, while the CSN received \$1.65 in 1967 and receives more now. The legal status of the FTQ within the CLC and the AFL-CIO is tenuous, as recent developments have demonstrated; it is a provincial sub-unit of the CLC, which is itself a sub-unit of the AFL-CIO. All the decisions of the biennial congress must be ratified by the CLC, while the unions are required to have them ratified by their internationals first. The FTQ is based on powerful federations of local unions.

The CSN unions keep much of their own money at the level of the local. This increases the mobility of the union, as it loses little financially by switching affiliations. The structure consequently reflects a great deal of internal democracy, and certainly more so than the FTQ. This important exercise in democracy defies a common caricature of contemporary Quebec society as being devoid of deep democratic experiences and traditions. Union democracy like that of the CSN has allowed many people to develop the knowledge and skill necessary to use the democratic process to their benefit, and stands as a contrast to the lack of

democracy both in industry as a whole, and particularly at the workplace.

Free from the bonds confining the FTQ at the national and international level, the CSN's greater independence of action has propelled it to the forefront of labor militancy in the '60s. If one were to draw a curve reflecting militancy it would rise unevenly from the mid-'40s, and most steeply from about 1963, when the promises of the "Quiet Revolution" began to wear thin.

The bitterness of the labor struggles in Quebec in the last eight years has been extraordinary. These have included the strikes of La Presse, La Grenade shoe factory, the Montreal bus drivers, the liquor board employees, Seven-Up, the teachers, and the Daly Moun, and the struggle around the G. Lapalme truck drivers.

We mean by militancy in this instance the combination of tougher positions in the process of collective bargaining and contractual demands; well-conceived, strong, and frequent public stands on social questions; and the reflection in these public stands of a set of radical values and analyses.

## METHODS OF STRUGGLE

### Direct Action

The CSN has shown a remarkable ability to reintroduce direct-action tactics used in the early stages of the trade-union movement as well as to adopt struggle methods pioneered by community-action groups, blacks, and students. Sit-ins and occupations have now become part of the arsenal of tactics used by the labor movement here. The profoundly radical character and potential of these direct actions can be seen from the diversity of the actions themselves.

In the first action of this type, 200 workers, members of the National Union of Transport Workers (Lapalme boys), who had been involved in a long bitter strike against the Federal Government and the Post Office, occupied the headquarters of the CSN to protest the lack of militancy among the union bureaucracy and to mobilize the base of the whole

movement in their saga. They won a clear victory in a few days of sit-ins. This occupation was quickly followed by a similar action by the rank and file of an international union who demanded that their union either sever its ties with the international in Washington or provide better services. Following this, 2,000 unemployed workers occupied the institution where they were receiving job-retraining courses with demands that ranged from jobs to more democratic participation within the institution.

Other CSN unions have occupied and effectively paralyzed the courts, financial institutions, and the offices of various government ministries. Some of these actions were in cooperation with community action groups. The office of a construction company was taken over to protect workers against certain hiring practices, and finally union members staged sit-ins at several radio stations to protest against exploitative programming.

### Political Action

The CSN has always differed from the FTQ and the CLC, which have consistently supported the social democratic New Democratic Party of Canada. The CSN has always been against the direct support of political parties as such. This position is best summarized by sociologist Helene David in a paper given as part of a programme of worker political education :

Hostile for a long time to any links between the movement and political parties...the CSN threw itself into its first partisan offensive on a negative theme, during the campaign waged by Jean Marchand against the Social Credit Party (8) in 1962.

The necessity of intervening on a political level became more evident as the enthusiasm for the Quiet Revolution (which it never was) cooled and the confrontation between the CSN and the State revealed the true nature of the latter....

.... We can say that the non-partisan political ac-

tion of the CSN takes place on three levels or fronts as they are called: The First Front (the classical one) involves mobilizing support from the movement at large to reinforce the collective bargaining position of a union or group of unions; the most recent examples have been the campaigns in support of the union position in the public sector negotiations and in support of the La Presse strikers and Lapalme Boys.

The Second Front opens up the whole area of consumerism, the unionist as citizen who receives both goods and services. Action on this front is in the form of pressure groups as well as special interest groups (such as parents mobilized against exploitative television advertising aimed at children), the opening of co-operative food stores (such as COOPRIXs and other small-scale neighborhood food co-ops), and the campaign against the finance companies and their "cheap" loans of money. This consumer action is an exact replica of union action.

The Third Front is specifically political. Unionists, as workers, combine with other workers to form organizations which would constitute a power of opposition to the present power structure; action on this level has been almost exclusively municipal up to the present time.

#### Political Action by the CSN Montreal Central Council

Special mention must be made of the type of political action carried on in Montreal, which differs in certain respects from that of the CSN nationally (throughout Quebec). Helene David points out:

The Montreal Central Council also carries out its political action on these three different fronts. However what distinguishes its action from the majority tendency within the movement is that the Montreal

Council holds the position that the efficiency or success of action on the First and Second Fronts (which still retain their autonomy) is a function of the strength of the Third Front. That is, for example, worthwhile actions of different types in the consumer field would not have maximum impact, nor would they go beyond the immediate problem if they were not carried out within the context of a real political front (going beyond the municipal field, to say the least).

The Montreal Council has become the center of intense political activity and experimentation. In fact, however, the political activity has taken essentially two concrete forms: (a) From time to time the entire Central Council and certainly the president have taken ideological positions on all outstanding political and social questions of the day, such as national independence, the Parti Quebecois (9), and socialism. (b) A policy of organizational, financial, and moral support has been given to different political groups outside the trade-union movement.

A partially successful attempt to achieve a general mobilization of all workers affiliated with the CSN in Montreal was made by the Council in support of the La Presse newspaper strikes. Some 40,000 workers voted in a referendum of whom 75% were in favor of a supporting 24-hour general strike. The general strike was never called because the La Presse strike was settled and perhaps because of the new situation rapidly emerging as a result of the confrontation between the State and workers in the public sector.

Because we feel that the general strike vote represents a new and important tendency within the CSN and the Quebec labor movement, we have included at the end of this article a statement issued by Michel Chartrand, the president of the CSN Montreal Central Council, on the function of the general strike.

The Council is presently experimenting with yet another organizational form to carry out political education and action at the base which would allow it to go beyond the level of political statements. The GET groups (groups d'étude et

de travail — work-study groups) are composed of 8 to 12 "self-directing politically educated workers" from the same local or the same sector of the economy who meet regularly to study the functioning of the society "in which we live" and to work toward its transformation. The work of these GETs is co-ordinated through the Education and Political Action Committee of the Central Council. The GETs are designed to develop the level of political knowledge of the workers which will allow them to carry out their actions in a self-directing manner.

The preliminary results of this form of political education at the base have been so successful that the formula may be extended throughout the rest of Quebec.

### Cultural Revolution

The origins of the CSN, the equal distribution of its membership between blue-collar and white-collar workers, and the rapid evolution of Quebec society have contributed to the creation of a type of syndicalism which goes beyond collective bargaining and into the whole area of the transformation of society by the building of parallel institutions. The CSN has contributed both materially and intellectually to the creation of a large consumer co-operative chain (COOPRIX) which also attempts to change the buying habits of its members, and to the formation of a publishing co-operative which publishes the radical mass-circulation weekly newspaper Quebec Presse as well as books. In the area of artistic creation, the Montreal Central Council has financed the production of films with social content while offering its facilities for the official launchings of literary works with social and political significance.

### The CSN and National Liberation

The publication of "We can rely only on our own means" (10) and the debate it has provoked within and outside the CSN coincides with the maturation of the national question in Quebec and the development of economic nationalism in the rest of Canada. The CSN has had a direct influence on

both these developments.

The Quiet Revolution in Quebec and its aborted counterpart in Ottawa (11) have been greatly influenced by the CSN. Pierre Trudeau, Jean Marchand, and Gerard Pelletier were products of the old CSN, particularly the latter two persons. They represent the mainstream CSN thinking up to the end of the Quiet Revolution, Left liberal and Catholic. The CSN document "We can rely only on our own means" clearly illustrates how the present evolution of the CSN has been influenced by the problems and failures of the Liberal Party-engineered Quiet Revolution. It represents an attempt to renew the dynamism of Quebec society which was temporarily suspended with the victory of the Liberal Party in 1970. It also constitutes a dramatic alternative to Trudeau's anti-nationalist continentalism with its concomitant commitment to neo-capitalism; in short the CSN document is a major contribution in the attempt to begin defining a distinctive Quebec road to socialism.

#### Extra-Parliamentary Opposition and the Common Front

Both the CSN and its most militant faction grouped around the Montreal Central Council have consistently supported extra-parliamentary forms of social and political action. The CSN has participated in an extra-parliamentary opposition on all questions dealing with the issue of national liberation, the most spectacular of which was the opposition to Bill 63, which mobilized between 100,000 and 200,000 people in militant demonstrations. The syndicalist movement has recently formed a Movement for a French Quebec to force the government to enact legislation to ensure the development of the French language, and mass demonstrations are being planned as part of the campaign. The CSN Central Council of Montreal has supported more radical forms of extra-parliamentary action than the national body; it was one of the sponsors of the McGill-Francais demonstration, and it makes its services available to all opposition groups.

Perhaps the most meaningful and dramatic accomplishment of the Quebec labor movement thus far has been the

creation of the Front Commun (Common Front) of all government employees including those working for State-owned corporations. The Common Front is a grouping of 250,000 workers (about one third of the organized workers in Quebec) including teachers, civil servants, technicians, and blue-collar "skilled" and "unskilled" workers from the three labor federations, the CSN, FTQ, and CEQ (Quebec Teachers Corporation). The purpose is to negotiate a common labor contract with the Quebec government. The initiative for the formation of the Front was taken at the base of the labor movement: Groups of workers, members of different unions who were employed in the same sector or trade, decided to negotiate together from a common position. Other pressures for solidarity originated from a few regions where the different labor organizations had already formed common fronts. It should be noted that neither the union locals nor the parent bodies (CSN, FTQ, CEQ) have given up their autonomy, for the Common Front is based on the concept of union solidarity, not fusion.

The Significance of March 9, 1972

This date is perhaps without precedence in the history of the labor movement in North America. The workers concerned in the Common Front massively voted to reject the government offers while giving their leaders a mandate to organize any suitable type of action, including a general strike.

The significance of the vote and of the formation of the Common Front itself is the following

(a) The vote was in fact a referendum, an exercise in direct democracy which contradicts the practice of voting every four or five years as being the only legitimate expression of opinion. This point was brought home very well in the brochure published by the Common Front on the eve of the vote:

There are other types of voting, as well. Votes which are not based on promises, votes which are still meaningful. When elections take place, we are



asked to vote on anything, just to be elected, then they (the politicians) forget about everything for four years while they prepare their next set of promises.

The vote of March 9 will not be the same. People will be voting on things which concern them every day.

(b) The organizational ability displayed by the Common Front as well as the success and scope of the mobilization suggests the possible emergence of a parallel force to that of the State apparatus. The consultation was organized simultaneously across all of Quebec in the manner of a general election. The ability of the trade unions to organize this type of direct participation on a major issue may set an important precedent in their relations with the State.

Another indication of the challenge to the monopoly of State power is the fact that the Common Front contract proposals include a demand that the unions share in the decision-making process concerning budget priorities, and have a voice in determining the government's salary policy.

(c) Finally, the potential dynamism and self-confidence of the Common Front is derived from the fact that it includes those wage-earners who had identified themselves most strongly with the Liberal Party-initiated Quiet Revolution; the aspirations of teachers, young technocrats of all types, and even blue-collar workers had crystallized around the idea of the Quebec State as the liberating instrument of French Canada. The Common Front, then, is a product of growing class consciousness in opposition to that part of the Quebec power structure represented by the government of Bourassa (current Liberal Premier of Quebec), which has lost its elan.

It is very difficult to accurately forecast the direction or evolution of the CSN or of the Quebec labor movement as a whole at this time. A great deal will depend on the creative pressures released during the State-Common Front confrontation. Another major factor will be the results of the CSN congresses, the April congress of the Montreal region

CSN and the June congress of the national CSN. The following excerpts from an editorial written in La Presse (the most important Quebecois daily paper) by Jean Pellerin (a former close associate of Trudeau's) reflects the near panic of the establishment view of these events.

We are witnessing a sad spectacle. The Quebec labor movement is sliding more and more into a policy of aberrant radicalism. It defies all powers and authority. It goes beyond the bounds of prudence and discourages those who worked so hard to create it. This can only be explained by the infiltration of marginal intellectuals who have placed themselves between the membership and the executive. These people are using the union movement to further their ideological and political opinions in the same way the priests used religion to impose their obscurantism.

Quebec is unfortunate. It created the union movement at great cost, and now it has already gone astray. For a few years this movement, led by the CTCC - CSN, was a reasonable, sensible spokesman. Its documents and positions on public affairs were highly respected in political, journalistic, and university circles. Unfortunately this era has now come to an end. The CSN, as the FTQ and the CEQ are now using the language of extremists. It prefers to ally itself with the marginal forces in Quebec society instead of with a majority of its members. It espouses every cause and cannot free itself from the parasites who use its prestige and resources to organize actions around the most current and fashionable issues. The union movement is really in serious difficulty. (La Presse, Friday, March 10, 1972)

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(This article is an extract from the new Black Rose publication Quebec Labour, available from Black Rose Books, 3934 Rue St. Urban, Montreal 31, Quebec, Canada.)

## FOOTNOTES

(1) In English, Confederation of National Trade Unions (CNTU). Originating from the Quebecois Catholic trade-union organizations, the CSN is today committed to an independent and socialist Quebec.

(2) Right-wing Quebec clericalist who was provincial Premier of Quebec, with one interruption, from 1936 to his death in 1959.

(3) The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, based primarily in English-speaking Canada, particularly Saskatchewan; precursor to the New Democratic Party.

(4) Most important insurrection in Quebec history — against both the federal and provincial regimes.

(5) Revolutionary syndicalist labor leader in Montreal, currently the President of the CSN (Central Council of Montreal).

(6) In English, Quebec Federation of Labor; created following merger in the US of the AFL and the CIO, parent bodies to the FPT and the CLC in Quebec.

(7) The political opening of Quebec: After the "Great Darkness" of Duplessis from 1944 to 1959, the "Quiet Revolution" began with the election of the Liberal Lesage in 1960, and sparked both the rapid expansion of workers' activities and the birth of a new Left-wing separatist movement.

(8) Demagogic party of the agrarian Right throughout Canada.

(9) Left-liberal technocratic Quebec independent party.

(10) A CSN 1972 document condemning imperialism and advocating socialism, of which over one hundred thousand copies have been distributed throughout CSN membership.

(11) The current Liberal Federal Cabinet of Trudeau, Marchand, and Pelletier — all of Quebec origin, but deeply anti-independentist and pro-federalist.



*"Towards a New Power"*

*rally of the major trade unions of Québec in the Montreal Forum March 7, 1972*

## THE GENERAL STRIKE:

### An Interview with Michel Chartrand

"The general strike is the expression of the peaceful and democratic power of the people, without violence, without law courts, without police, and without armies. The general strike is also a sure way to make the bosses and their hirelings understand that employers and even governments can no longer juggle employees the way they juggle stocks on the Montreal Stock Exchange."

This is what Michel Chartrand declared to us in an exclusive interview in which he wanted to put his finger on the reasons why the CSN Central Council of Montreal, of which he is president, had launched the idea of the general strike.

"Because today it is no longer true that a conflict in an enterprise is an isolated event. Because a boss who wants to crush a group of employees is sure of support from the ruling political party in power, from the law courts, from the Montreal police, from the newspapers, and from the General Council of Industry, which is a group of bosses. Because the general strike gives to threatened workers a power comparable to that of the bosses and their hirelings. It's the only valid answer to the wholesale attack by the bosses and their hangers-on against the workers."

#### Against what?

"The general strike is the instrument of solidarity for the workers against the violence of the System. The general strike is the workers' instrument against the hypocrisy of the System, which pretends that each boss acts on his own, that the law courts act on their own, that the Montreal police act on their own, that the Liberal Party acts on its own, when in fact they are all in league together. Some bosses will say: Why do you strike against my factory? I've done nothing. Then we will tell him: You never said a word

against unemployment, or against the shut-down of factories, or against the epidemic of accidents at the workplace, or against the clubbings, or against the tribunals which used the law to break up groups of workers. You cannot claim to be innocent or ignorant. You are an accomplice of the 'superpower' which is organized to break up any group of workers in the employment of whichever boss."

#### Against whom ?

"A general strike hits the superpower: the alliance of men in politics and men in business. Inasmuch as the prevailing establishment power can hit groups of isolated workers without all workers reacting together, the powerful are in a strong position to play their games of practicing the violence they know so well: firings, injunctions, lockouts, return-to-work laws, clubbings, anti-demonstration laws. But with the general strike workers decide to stick together, peacefully refusing to work for, say, one hour. At that moment, the superpower is cornered."

#### For Whom ?

"The general strike, that's what is going to force the superpower to recognize the right of all workers to a reasonable existence, to recognize that the workers play a role of prime importance in industry and in the public services. The general strike, that's the ultimate collective action of the majority saying to the minority in power: Without us, you are nothing. Without us, you are on the street. We are at the beginning of the moment of truth and of concrete realizations (in Quebec). We want to be accountable to each other, we want solidarity one with the other. Capitalist society has wanted to divide us, making each jealous of the other. Working-class solidarity will breach these divisions. Working-class solidarity can resist all attacks. Nothing, nor any power, can resist the strength of working-class solidarity."

Michel Chartrand, interviewed by Gerald Godin  
in Quebec-Press, December 12, 1971

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# REFLECTIONS ON ORGANIZING: Selections

by

*Members of Sojourner Truth Organization*

The revolutionary potential of the working class flows from its role in a system of social production that requires interdependence and co-operation. This class role provides the social basis for workers to first sense, and then understand, that they have a position of power to use against their oppression. They have the power of being collective producers without whom there is no production. Individual actions, even those which border on the heroic, and most of the ones that we are considering are quite the opposite of heroic, do not make the workers more aware of this power. They manifest the fact of the workers' oppression without showing the possibility and the efficacy of collective action by the workers. Thus they can't be used to draw general lessons about both the necessity and the possibility of independent working-class organization. Since this awareness is vital to our perspective, and since it cannot be lectured into the workers, some experience of collective action, no matter how minimal, is the necessary social condition — the only real base — for our perspective.

The spontaneous individual actions at the point of production are separated into a few different categories. The practical reasons why none develop logically into collective struggle will become clearer. Three such divisions are logical: actions which damage the final product, actions which cut down on production, actions which challenge the authority of the management. Though in practice these categories of individual struggle seldom appear very distinctly, it is helpful to make the separation here in order to clarify different sorts of limitations of spontaneous individual struggle.

The first case amounts to either direct or indirect sabotage, and the end result of sabotage of the product is to the

benefit of the capitalist class in its role as the major consumer and taxpayer. Capitalism spends a great deal of effort to artificially maintain its profits by marketing unnecessary and shoddy goods. Sabotage by the workers only adds a statistically insignificant quantity to the mass of defective merchandise that capitalism produces deliberately. For example, it doesn't begin to compare with the deliberate pressure by the management to get the workers to work harder and faster. So long as the amount of workers' sabotage is fairly uniform across the economy, even individual firms can't be hurt very much by it. And in the event that such a variation exists for a while, at most it could only mean a few plant closures and company failures — minor readjustments for the system as a whole and of no advantage to the workers one way or the other.

Individual actions that restrict output and lower productivity do hurt management, and it will immediately take retaliatory action to change the situation. If we assume that the individual action is covert, that it does not involve a direct challenge to the authority of the management (a legitimate assumption since we will consider this aspect separately), then the management response will be to fix blame on a group of workers and take punitive action against the group as a whole. This can take many forms, but it usually means either that other workers will have to do the job of whoever is screwing around, or they will have to force him to do his share. Beyond this, such a situation is bound to bring down additional supervision, perhaps even undercover cops posing as workers, and jeopardize all the little ways that workers find to make the job more tolerable: sitting in the john, walking around and talking to other workers in slow periods, reading or eating on the job.

When a major disruption of production occurs, like the sabotage of an important piece of machinery as opposed to spending too much time in the toilet, the danger to other workers is even greater. They can be put in a position where their own job is in jeopardy, where they must choose between risking their job or fingering someone else. In any case, all examples of such covert individual actions involve risks for other workers that they haven't agreed to take,



not to mention putting extra burdens on other workers.

There is another factor at play. Both variants of individual action involve screwing up the work in one way or another, and this makes the time pass slower and the work more difficult for everyone. Most workers, especially the more conscious ones, take pride in being able to do their job well. If they choose to do it badly for a while, that is one thing; but if somebody else prevents them from doing it well, they get irritated. Since workers are hostile to these sorts of individual actions for partially justifiable reasons, not just company-sucking inclinations, there is no reason to think they form a basis for initiating organized struggle.

What about challenges to the power and authority of management—usually in the person of the foreman? On the surface it would appear that these are forms of individual struggle which would demonstrate to all workers the possibility of resisting oppression on the job in an organized way. Unfortunately it is not the case. Most of these challenges concern just one worker's particular area of competence and responsibility. And often this worker has some particular ability or some other peculiar feature that makes it possible for him to challenge the authority of the management while it is not possible for every worker to do it. Sometimes it is a question of a more experienced or skilled worker, sometimes a worker who is able to get another job, sometimes a worker who is white or male when most of the work force is Third World or female, sometimes a worker who knows that the union will support him. Any of these sorts of things can give an individual worker more latitude in defending his own interests than the average worker will have. And because this is the case, the average worker will not learn from watching such confrontations that he also has the power to stand up for his rights successfully.

Often these challenges are not really challenges with the management as such, but just with an element of it. For example, it is not uncommon for a worker, particularly an older one, to appeal over the head of the foreman to someone further up the management hierarchy, bolstering the illusion that the problem is that some people in management are "fair", but others are "chickenshit". A smart

manager from time to time will over-ride a foreman who gets too zealous just to encourage such notions.

In one way or another all of these individual confrontations are channeled away from any area where they might encourage collective action. You can yell at the foreman, but do it in the office, not out on the floor. When an attempt is made to use a confrontation as a means of organizing a struggle, the latitude that is normally allowed is quickly taken away. For example, a worker can refuse to work at a job because it is not safe, and it is likely that the foreman will just try to assign someone else to do it. But if the same worker tries to make an issue out of the unsafe condition and to get everyone to refuse the job, he'd better be ready for trouble.

The conception of the omnipresence of class struggle in "Call to Organize" (a 1970 manifesto by Sojourner Truth), although necessary to counter the widespread idea on the Left in this country that the point of production is a sea of tranquility, is too utopian to provide a firm basis for a plan to work. The spontaneous resistance at the point of production which has just been discussed has two features which both must be taken into account. It is action, struggle — but it is individualistic. This dual character means that any attempt to mechanically transfer such individual forms of resistance to oppression into a base for a coherent struggle against this oppression is bound to understate the real difficulties and to lead to a-critical submission to spontaneity or to silly attempts to provide "leadership" by providing "models of individual militance".

What are really important are the examples of collective struggles in the factory and the conditions for further developing these. Though this narrows the initial base, the base is still there, more evident in some factories than in others, of course. So the question is: How can a mass independent working-class movement be built from these elements of collective struggle? Where do we begin? How do we work? These are the issues I will deal with in the rest of this paper.

Almost all Left groups have standard advice for people

who are doing production work. It generally goes something like this: Learn the job and the grievances; single out the natural leaders and most advanced workers; make friends, but keep low until you have some time on the job and people will listen to what you have to say. Then try to get the advanced workers together, perhaps in a discussion group, so more general political issues can be raised; maybe at that time it will be possible to begin pushing a definite program, circulating some leaflets, and so on.

Usually this advice is put within the framework of the inner-union caucus perspective, but that isn't essential. Then there are variations depending on the Left-wing group involved. In the Communist Party the emphasis will be put on studying the contract, attending union meetings, and getting on a committee. Other groups will stress developing cadre through communist education as a pre-condition for mass work or involving the advanced workers in the "movement".

Depending on the conditions, any or all of these bits of advice can be all right. But they leave all of the real questions and all of the difficult problems unanswered. In the first place, any job has a number of more or less distinct groupings among the workers, not uncommonly with a good deal of hostility between them. Once a workers gets identified with one of these groupings, it is difficult to break that identification down. The reason it is important to be aware of this is that there are at least three or four social groupings which have the potential of providing an initial cadre of people to work with. There are the younger workers, the black and Latin workers, the various opposition groupings within the union local, and the de-facto leadership of various department struggles. Each of these social groupings presents specific possibilities and problems for pulling together a working cadre. This is not understood by most Left groups. Their tendency is to select one or another of these social groupings to work in, ignoring its limitations and the potentials elsewhere.

For example, it is very common to find Left people who argue that black and Latin workers are more open to struggle in general, and to revolutionary organization in partic-

ular, than are workers generally. The same basic argument is commonly extended to young workers. In fact, it is often claimed that the organizing potential in the basic industries flows almost exclusively from the influx of young and black and Latin workers into these jobs. The implication is that the experience which these workers have gained outside of the process of production — in the ghetto communities, in the schools, in the army — is what makes them potentially more revolutionary inside of the factory.

What does it mean to say that a worker is open to revolutionary ideas? Fundamentally it means that he is open to seeing that working people are a class that has the power to make a revolution (a socialist revolution, that is). Are black, Latin, and young workers more open to such an understanding? The answer is that they are more open to some aspects of it and less open to other aspects of it than most workers.

These workers have a relatively vivid experience of aspects of the capitalist structure where the contradictions are sharper and the crises more advanced than at the point of production. Certainly this makes them more aware that the only real answer to their needs and grievances is a revolutionary answer. But it does not necessarily make them more aware that the working class and only the working class can make the revolution. It is true to say that black, Latin, and young workers (not to ignore the differences between the three groups) are more open to general revolutionary propositions than are the masses of workers, but it does not necessarily follow from this that they are more open to the specific forms of revolutionary organization and action which are suited to the point of production.

In fact, it is quite common for such workers to define their revolutionary position in distinction to the non-revolutionary, or even counter-revolutionary essence of the masses of workers. This inevitably leads to sectarianism, avoiding the grievances flowing from the work process and the fight for the programmatic leadership of the masses of workers, and seeing the revolution occurring independently of any of this. Beyond this, many of the struggles that these workers have experienced have been in arenas where mass

mobilization was a tactic that didn't immediately raise the issue of power in the way it does at the point of production. Thus many of these workers don't understand the importance of mass participation in struggle, and are likely to counterpose various Leftist military or semi-military tactics and small group conspiratorial organization to a mass line and mass organization.

This is not to deny the tremendous positive impact on the consciousness and activity of workers that struggles outside the point of production have had—particularly the struggle for black liberation. Certainly it is a greater advance that a large percentage of black workers in basic industry consider themselves "revolutionaries". Workers have learned a lot from these struggles, but, to repeat, nothing they have learned will magically create the specific forms of revolutionary organization and action which are suited to the factory.

Wherever there is any life in the local union there will always be a number of individuals or groupings that make up more or less of a "Left" or militant opposition to local leadership forced to be "mature" and "responsible" by the terms of the contract and by the web of working relationships with the management that are a part of their offices. Since in most situations there is little alternative to the union for those workers who want to be active on economic issues, it would be foolishly sectarian to discount the possibility of recruiting some workers from this grouping into an initial cadre. This is particularly true since almost every older worker who has some contact with socialist ideas and many of the leaders in dealing with departmental issues and grievances will be in the union opposition.

But care is needed in relating to this grouping of workers. A lot of militant talk has got to be discounted as rhetoric, and a lot of activity has got to be examined for various opportunistic and careeristic motives. The local union leaderships are filled with people who were known for their militance and activism—until they were elected. That in itself should rule against taking such workers at face value. Two important tests when considering such workers as potential cadre are whether most of their work is organizing

against the management or whether that is subordinated to a fight against the union leadership, and whether the agitating and organizing that is done actually develops the involvement and participation of other workers and doesn't just build blocs for campaigns for union office. Most important, a communist should never get so involved with the inner union opposition that he or she becomes isolated from the workers who are cynical about union politics.

The last grouping from which members of initial cadres might be recruited is the leadership which develops in departmental or shop struggles. (Though sometimes this group is thoroughly mixed in with the union opposition, that isn't always the case, particularly if there has been a lot of job action.) At first it might seem that these workers are already engaged in direct struggle with the management and should easily see the importance of building independent organization. In fact, there are Left groups which argue as if the revolution would be successful already if various union bureaucrats and self-proclaimed socialist vanguards would just leave these militant workers alone. But that is just another brand of utopianism. Though these workers have a good sense of the power of collective action and the importance of unity, they lack any clear perspective which could take job actions out of the framework of reactions to oppression and incorporate them into an offensive strategy. This limitation of leadership is one of the reasons why virtually all job actions fail to develop a continuing momentum that can place a constant pressure on the capitalist control of the production process. And, as should be expected, the lack of any perspective for the activity on the job is paralleled by a confused and contradictory position on all general political issues.

In short, the initial cadre of workers must have a number of different characteristics which show up among different social groups in the factory. It must be open to a general revolutionary critique of capitalism; it must be aware of the importance of organization; it must be able to provide leadership for the struggles that develop on the job. Workers radicalized outside of the job are more likely to accept a radical critique than they are to see the possibility and

necessity of building mass struggle and organization. The trade-union opposition might want to get organized and even accept a few revolutionary propositions, but they won't see why this should go beyond a struggle for control of the union. The leader of job actions is likely to be great whenever a spontaneous struggle arises, but to have no idea of what to do in other situations or how to relate job issues to general political issues. Each of these limitations in areas of possible support for our perspective help spell out the sorts of political problems that are involved in implementing it.

The first goal of a communist in a factory is to become a political center so that his or her ideas and approaches are more than just talk, so that after a few months they have the force and prestige that ordinarily would come only after years of experience on a job. In the future it is likely that this will be easier because of the possibilities of identifying with known and admired struggles in other factory situations, as, for example, identification with the Flint Strike would have been possible and helpful in the early CIO period. Now, however, it is a difficult and delicate problem.

Still, there are a number of ways to approach the difficulty, any one of which may work depending on the circumstances. At this point also it is necessary to stress the fact that there are a number of different ways to achieve the end, because every Left group seems to have a favorite tactic which it puts forth as a necessary first step in factory organizing. Such fixation on a certain tactic is dangerous because it maximizes the chance of a mistake, and a mistake involves more than just wasting some time or even getting fired. It can mean polarizing the workers in the immediate area in such a way that no work is possible.

It is often argued that revolutionaries are obligated to make their positions known to other workers, to keep their "politics up front", as the phrase goes. This then, assuming that the proper politics are kept up front, is supposed to coalesce the advanced workers around the source of such wisdom. There is a little validity to this notion, but it shouldn't lead anyone to hasten to publicize his revolution-

ary credentials. Besides the clear danger of being fired before being prepared to make an issue of it, there is the greater danger of not being taken seriously by the more conscious workers, while being taken too seriously by the most backward workers. Then the potential base regards you as a nut while the opposition thinks that you are a real threat — and that's bad.

The stress on arguing politics on the job needs to be overhauled. It is a hangover of a movement that functioned primarily among students. This doesn't mean that it is wrong to confront political positions directly and that one should skirt around the edges of the touchy issues. It just means to use good sense. Don't feel obligated to challenge everything you don't like; don't confuse stating your own mind with changing someone else's; don't waste time arguing with lost causes; don't overestimate the importance of "winning" or "losing" arguments. It is a lot easier to win arguments, or even to make verbal converts, than it is to change the way the workers act. But the fundamental way that consciousness is changed is by changing social practice. Unless this is done, polemical victories and ideological converts are not going to be very meaningful. In fact, talking too much can polarize the workers over abstract or peripheral issues in a way that inhibits direct action.

There are no magic "raps" which can transform a new worker into a leader on the job, and there are no heroic actions which can accomplish this either. If a communist is so careful about risking his job that he takes a lot of crap from the foreman, other workers are going to have some questions about him. But on the other hand, getting a reputation for "not taking any shit" won't automatically change his status either. In the first place, that posture is likely to involve the political mistake of putting too much stress on the foreman or other low management figures. Then, most workers aren't impressed with confrontations which appear to be over pretexts rather than real issues, and a clever foreman can make this appear to be the case most of the time. In fact, the foreman can easily make it appear that what is actually wanted is preferential treatment. But, of course, the most serious drawback of the con-



frontation approach is the risk that your neck will get over-extended and you will get suspended or fired. Then that is the issue, and it is hard to organize around yourself, especially at the beginning.

Another common idea should be brought in at this point. Many Lefties begin work in a factory convinced that there are one or two issues which they must emphasize. These issues might be valid ones, for example the denial of equality to women workers and workers of color or the necessity to expose the role of the union, or they might be foolish. But assuming that they are issues of over-riding importance for a production organizing strategy, that does not mean that they must always be the initial or the most important tactic when the work is just beginning. Here again good sense is needed. There will be times when taking a clear stand on such issues, either in discussions or in a leaflet, either on the job or at a union meeting, will be absolutely essential. But this will not always be true. On this point as on all others, anytime a communist allows a sense of moral obligation to over-ride political judgment, a mistake is being made. That point has to be made, but it should not be allowed to obscure the fact that certain organizing issues do have a strategic importance, and the strategy must always determine the tactics. Any approach which evades these issues when they are relevant is opportunistic — and historically that has been the main weakness.

A traditional way to begin work is to attempt to take advantage of the union structure by filing a lot of grievances; or, perhaps, running for shop steward or trying to set up a department grievance committee. At times this sort of work can help, but it must be combined with more independent forms of activity, or no basis will be laid to explain the sharp break with the union structure that must occur relatively early in the work. Unless this kind of activity is undertaken very carefully, it can raise false hopes that basic changes in working conditions can be won through the grievance procedure. Then, when this illusion is shattered, the result can be an even greater cynicism and sense of futility. Two other implications of this approach should be recognized. It will involve a lot of reliance on the inner union

opposition — usually not a good idea — and it will make it more difficult to address all of the issues which cannot be directly attacked at department level, and these of course are usually the most important issues.

Perhaps the most popular initial approach to factory work is to "put out a leaflet", to begin distributing in-plant agitation and propaganda. Just the ability to lay out a more or less coherent line, put it in writing, and handle the technical problems of producing and distributing a leaflet or a newsletter will give a communist some political leverage, assuming, of course, that other workers know who is responsible. But this won't exist forever, and, more important, it can be effectively canceled if the material has bad or incomprehensible politics. But beyond the problem of bad politics that don't improve because they are written rather than spoken, there are several other issues involved in this approach.

The first is the problem of security. It is almost always risky just to distribute leaflets and newsletters, and it is even more so to let it get known by the management and union leadership involved in the preparation of them. But, on the other hand, if we want the written material to be of maximum help, it is important that the workers be generally aware of who is behind it. If this is kept secret, much of the political potential will be lost, particularly the possibility of getting support when the union and the management combine to suppress the material, as they almost inevitably will.

Since the function of leaflets and newsletters is not just general education or agitation, but to help create a base of independent organization, they must aim toward mobilizing the workers for certain specific struggles. It can easily happen that the literature can make threats, pledges, and calls to action that it can't back up with a base of real strength. This hurts. When something is put on paper, the authors are committed to it; and if they can't deliver, the credibility of their organizing work is damaged.

If written material is too heavily relied on, a few mistakes of this sort can lead to pulling back from a practical program toward more general and sometimes more "revo-

lutionary" propaganda. But then, instead of linking together a cadre of workers around a definite plan of action, the literature attracts a circle of contributors and readers who agree with its general stance on the issues but are not necessarily committed to — or even interested in — doing any organizing work in the factory. While the production and distribution of literature will definitely help to stir things up in the plant, by itself this work will not pull together the elements of an independent organization. Because this can often be the path of least resistance, it is necessary to be constantly on guard against the tendency to let the written work become a substitute for the other sorts of organizing work which are also necessary. Generally on this point it is important not to let the rhetoric get out of hand; to develop a practical program that flows from the general perspective; and to avoid letting the analysis outstrip the program or the program outstrip the actual base of support among the workers.

Once a beginning is made and a group of workers begins to pull together around our perspective, then what do we do? Though this question raises a host of issues, this paper is basically concerned with just one: the role of direct action on the job. The "Call to Organize" placed a great deal of emphasis on direct action, treating it as the direct opposite of parliamentary legalistic maneuvering inside the union structure, which in turn was the essence of everything that we opposed.

There is a base of growing struggle, of direct action, in the factory, though as pointed out earlier the "Call" exaggerated this base. But this is a base of spontaneous struggle, and some attention must be paid to just what that word "spontaneous" means. A spontaneous action is not held together by a leadership which sees it as part of a general strategy for sharpening the class struggle. Lacking such leadership, its demands are seldom clearly stated and related to its tactics. Because it is not incorporated into a conscious class-struggle perspective, by a combination of some selective concessions and repression by the management and union working in tandem the action will be absorbed and its energy dissipated over a period of time. The

management seldom has to respond to spontaneous direct action, even when it reaches the stage of large-scale wild-cat strikes, with blanket repression: firings, suspensions, transfers, not to mention injunctions and police.

It makes a great deal of difference, however, when a conscious grouping is deliberately organizing direct action as a part of a strategy to supplant the union and make things tough for the management. The leadership of such direct actions can expect management to use all of its resources to isolate and crush it. "Direct action" organized as a part of a perspective will entail an entirely different risk-benefit calculus for the workers than the direct actions that occur spontaneously as a response to the conditions of work. It is clear that the risks will be increased enormously. This leads some people to argue that we can't afford direct action, or that we will only be able to afford it after we build a strong organization. But along with increased risks go increased benefits, so that direct action, while more difficult by far than the "Call" would lead us to expect, is no less essential than it claimed.

The following selection from Gramsci helps to lay a theoretical base for this argument.

Philosophy in general does not in fact exist: various philosophies and conceptions of the world exist, and one always makes a choice between them. How does this choice come about? Is it merely intellectual, or is it more complex? And does it not often happen that there is a contradiction between the intellectual fact and the norm of conduct? What then will the real conception of the world be: the one which is logically affirmed as an intellectual fact, or the one which results from real activity of a certain person, which is implicit in his action? And since actions are always political actions, can we not say that the real philosophy of anyone is contained in his politics? This conflict between thought and action, that is the co-existence of two conceptions of the world, one affirmed in words and the other explaining itself in

effective actions, is not always due to bad faith. Bad faith can be a satisfactory explanation for some individuals taken singly, or even for more or less numerous groups, but it is not satisfactory when the contrast shows itself in the life of large masses; then it cannot be other than the expression of more profound contradictions of a historical and social order. It means that a social group, which has its own conceptions of the world, even though embryonic (which shows itself in actions, and so only spasmodically, occasionally, that is, when such a group moves as an organic unity) has, as a result of intellectual subordination and submission, borrowed a conception which is not its own from another group, and this it affirms in words. And this borrowed conception it also believes it is following, because it does follow it in "normal" times, when its conduct is not independent and autonomous, but precisely subordinate and submissive. (Antonio Gramsci: The Modern Prince, Page 61)

The working class as it exists under capitalism has two conceptions of the world. One is essentially capitalist. It accepts private property as necessary; sees competitiveness, acquisitiveness, and selfishness as basic characteristics of "human nature"; and does not challenge the notions of right, justice, and freedom which serve to maintain the dominance of the capitalist class. As Gramsci says, this capitalist conception of the world is not just an intellectual fact. It is a pattern of conduct. The working class, in "... 'normal' times when its conduct is not independent and autonomous, but precisely subordinate and submissive..." acts as if capitalism would be here forever. But not all times are "normal" times. There are instances when sections of the working class move "as an organic unity", as part of a potential ruling class, and in the process demonstrate in action that class's "own conception of the world, even though embryonic".

When do workers act as an organic unity? Clearly, individual workers can, and do, participate in collective activ-

ity outside of the factory; as black or Latin people, women, consumers, taxpayers, students, or even "citizens". But even if these struggles are totally composed of workers in a sociological sense, they don't develop conditions where the participants in them become aware that they are members of a class that has the capacity to make a revolutionary transformation of the entire society. This happens when workers struggle in an area that is closer to their collective social role of producers.

The place where workers, as workers, can move in "organic unity" at this stage of the political development of the class is at the point of production. Does this mean strikes, for example? It does, and it doesn't. Some strikes involve mass participation in struggle, but most clearly do not. No alternative conception of the world is manifested in those strikes where the union and the management co-operate in the orderly closure of operations; where picketing is only a dull and tiring public-relations chore; and where the bulk of the workers just disappear till a new contract is signed. And this is the character of most present-day strikes.

It is in the course of the struggle of the workers themselves to gain some control over the large part of their lives which is spent at work where the alternative conception of the world is most likely to show itself. Such direct actions, as opposed to most officially sanctioned strikes, allow workers to directly participate in defining the problem, setting the goals, working out the tactics. This makes them a party to the various confrontations with the other side. And it is through such participation and confrontation that the "embryonic" alternative conception of the world manifests itself in changed ways that workers think, act, and relate to other workers.

While job action is the necessary basis for building a mass revolutionary movement, in itself it is not sufficient. Gramsci is very careful to use the adjective "embryonic" when talking about the new attitudes and relationships which materialize during a struggle. Like anything embryonic, these characteristics will not survive unless proper conditions for their survival are created. For present purposes, only one such condition needs to be mentioned. There must

be a conscious leadership that puts the lessons of the particular struggle into a form in which they can be understood and socialized—made into the basis for a new sort of “normal” behavior for the workers. Without such a leadership, both reason and experience indicate that the job actions will peter out and the routine of capitalist control over production will be speedily re-established.

If the direct action is not integrated into a revolutionary perspective, it will just buttress one or another aspect of false consciousness among the workers. Either it will support exaggerated reformist ideas about what it is possible to win (“if we just stick together”), or it will support cynicism and resignation (“the workers won’t stick together when the going gets rough”). Either direct action is integrated into a revolutionary perspective, or it is absorbed within the framework of capitalism. There is no other alternative.

Direct action at the point of production creates the conditions for the workers to begin to appreciate the necessity and possibility of socialism, but this lesson will only be learned to the extent that there is some grouping attempting to teach it. In the absence of such teachers, the various lessons that capitalism constantly beats into the workers (you get what you deserve, look out for Number One, take it to the union, nobody gives a damn about anyone else) will be the lessons that are learned. Any Left group which relies on direct action to develop an autonomous working-class consciousness and an independent revolutionary workers’ movement by itself, is going to wait forever.

Though this last position is present in the Left in this country, it is not a big factor. Perhaps this is because production organizing is in such a primitive stage here that most groups haven’t discovered all of the ways of relying on spontaneity in this area. However, the opposite position, that direct action is only one among a number of possible tactics and approaches toward building a mass revolutionary working-class movement, not an essential part of any such attempt, is very popular.

It is easy to see how conditions support this position. On one hand, it is extremely difficult to build a base of di-

rect action in a factory situation in a short time. Management repression is immediate and harsh. The issues at hand for such actions — departmental and shop issues for the most part — are often not the issues which concern the workers most. On the other hand there is a growing group of workers radicalized by experiences outside of the production process who are already open to revolutionary ideas and organizations. So it seems that the risks far outweigh the benefits, and that a revolutionary mass movement can be built without taking the risks involved in emphasizing organized job actions.

Without downgrading this process of radicalization at all, it is no substitute for the sort of collective experience involved in direct job action. A grouping whose individual members all regard themselves as "revolutionaries" is not necessarily a revolutionary group. This is the case, not so much because the individuals may be mistaken or hypocritical about their own politics, though that is far from uncommon, but because the test of whether a group of workers is revolutionary is whether it is able to find a programmatic link between the immediate needs of workers and the struggle for socialism. No amount of propaganda and education will build such a link by itself. It comes through the workers' experiencing in struggle their distinctiveness from the capitalist class; the weakness of the capitalist class; the possibility of working-class unity; and the possibility of constructing a society of freely associated producers — socialism.

But the argument goes even further. Direct action is also needed in order to develop a cadre of workers who can provide the skeleton of a future mass movement. Why is this true? Because we can't take an individual's politics at the value he or she places on them. A worker is revolutionary because he shows in action that he can act in the way necessary to create the conditions for making a revolution, not just because he is willing — or even anxious — to be called a "revolutionary".

Members of any sort of cadre group must be constantly tested, not by seeing if they can re-state the "correct" position on all of the major questions, but by seeing if they



can develop a revolutionary practice and provide leadership for the masses of workers. Everything said in the course of this paper means that this practice must involve developing and leading job struggles of masses of workers in ways which maintain and strengthen the revolutionary potentials that are manifested in such struggles. What should be thought of a worker who claims to be a revolutionary but who is constantly opposed to attempts to generate and lead struggles of the workers?— who always argues that such actions are “premature”, that “the workers aren’t ready”? We should think that it is best to look elsewhere for cadre, that’s what we should think. If the program doesn’t stress direct action from the outset, how can potential cadre be put to this sort of test? As was said earlier, it is not necessarily the case that the workers most ready to adopt a generally “revolutionary” political stance are also those workers most ready to act out a revolutionary political practice.

Up to now mass struggle, mass organization, and mass movement have been used loosely, but they are not interchangeable. We must consider the general issue of organization; what we mean and what we don’t mean by mass revolutionary organization; the relationship between mass organization and cadre groupings of revolutionary workers, and the relation of communist organization to both.

If all that was needed was a change in the leadership of the existing trade unions, a caucus of all those interested in fighting to reform the union and get a different leadership would be all the organization necessary. To expand the base of support for the caucus, communists would urge the masses of workers to participate more fully in the existing unions. It is quite conceivable that the goal would be to get revolutionaries into the union leadership, in which case the caucus would be limited to those willing to work on such a program.

However, it is necessary to do more than just change the leadership. (If more evidence of this is needed, consider the European labor movement where much of the leadership is composed of various types who would be indignant at any

suggestion that they weren't revolutionaries.) The problem with the unions isn't primarily bad leadership—and the solution isn't to replace it with good leadership. The problem is that the existing unions are more of a buffer between classes than an instrument of the workers, and this class collaborationism of the existing trade unions is so deeply rooted in their historically developed structure and function that organizations must be built that are a real alternative to the trade unions for the masses of workers, that are independent of the existing trade-union structure, and that aim at supplanting it. Such organizations will have two distinct characteristics: They will be revolutionary organizations, and they will be mass organizations. It is important to understand just what is — and what is not — entailed by each of these characteristics.

In the current movement virtually anything that appears to be worthwhile is called "revolutionary", so naturally the term is losing any distinctive content. In applying the term to mass workers' organizations, something more specific is meant here. Such an organization is revolutionary if it rejects the bounds and limits placed on the class struggle by capitalist legality, which is fundamentally based on the current requirements for maintenance of capitalist property relations. It is revolutionary if it sets its goals and determines its tactics according to what the workers think is necessary and not what capitalism says is possible. The other side of the sloppy popular talk about revolution is the revisionists' attempt to restrict its relevance to the direct struggle for state power, which, of course, is not presently "on the order of the day". That too conveniently eliminates any distinction between revolutionary and reformist methods of work in a non-revolutionary or pre-revolutionary situation. On one hand, everything is revolutionary; on the other hand, nothing can possibly be revolutionary.

To supplant the existing trade unions, we need a form of organization that struggles for reforms, but does not confine that struggle according to capitalist criteria of practicality and rationality. In other words, these organizations will not go along with the management-rights clauses, the labor-management harmony crap, and the no-strike agree-

ments; and that, in practice, will make them objectively revolutionary.

It is important to realize the significance of calling such organizations "objectively" revolutionary. It means that communists will be involved in a constant struggle inside such organizations with a whole gamut of non-revolutionary ideas and approaches, trying to prevent the revolutionary characteristics of the movement from being submerged. Beyond this there will be a constant struggle with various non-Marxist revolutionary as well as quasi-revolutionary positions.

Let me use the Flint sit-down strike to clarify my point. On one level the strike was a major reform struggle aimed at improving the wages and conditions of the General Motors workers and forcing GM to recognize the United Auto Workers as the representative of the workers. Most of the workers who participated in the strike did not see themselves as revolutionaries. Their goals were certain basic improvements of their immediate conditions. Even the strike leadership, many of whom were communists, did not see the struggle as a revolutionary one. In fact, GM was saying more about the revolutionary implications of the sit-down than the workers were.

But on another level, the Flint strike was a revolutionary struggle. The workers took possession of the means of production — not, it is true, to operate them for the common good, but in order to get some power over the work process. This was a challenge to the institution of capitalist private property that was clearly recognized as such by the capitalists. It was "illegal"; it went far beyond the permissible bounds and limits of labor organizing at a time when even picketing was of dubious legality. Beyond this, the way the strikers organized themselves — particularly their refusal to accept any external authority, even that of the local UAW leadership — foreshadowed the possibility of workers' self-government.

What happened was that the revolutionary potential of the struggle was lost in the wake of the attainment of some of its reform demands. As time passed, the UAW leadership

presented the struggle only as a dramatic tactic to win a reform victory, and no communist leadership tried to teach the workers the various ways that the struggle had demonstrated their revolutionary potential. The mass-participation characteristics that were developed during the struggle were gradually replaced by typical inner-union parliamentarism. But this happened not just because of the strength and resilience of capitalism, but also as a result of the choices, mistakes, decisions, policies of the workers and union leaders involved. There was no clear struggle between a reformist and a revolutionary approach to the activity and organization that was developed during the strike — and there certainly could have been. Of course, that possibility was much harder to see at a time when the right to organize unions hadn't been won in basic industry, and thus the limitations of trade unionism weren't such a clear part of the workers' collective experience. But now it is clear that such struggles create conditions to build mass organizations which move increasingly out of the orbit of capitalist hegemony.

This clarifies the notion of "revolutionary" organization, but we must also spell out what is meant by "mass" organization. Lenin argued that workers' organizations should be trade unions and that these should be open to all workers who understand the need to struggle against the management and the government, and that they should function as publicly as possible. That in a nutshell is what is meant by the concept of "mass" organization.

But isn't this a foolish idea considering that any attempt to set up such organization will immediately lead to repression by management and the existing union? Doesn't this situation require that the organization be much more secret and conspiratorial, and that membership be closely restricted? It is true that the labor contract for practical purposes makes this type of mass workers' organization illegal, if and when the management decides to take action against it. This is a fact that must be taken into account, but it shouldn't dominate the perspective.

The general characteristics of trade-union organization mentioned above were developed by Lenin at a time when

trade unions were totally illegal in Tsarist Russia. Even so he argued for organization as open and public as possible, saying that the problem of maintaining security should be met by keeping the movement "so free and amorphous that the need for secret methods becomes almost negligible so far as the bulk of the members is concerned". That should be the response now also. As the movement gains strength it will be able to win some de-facto legality and can use this to develop a more explicit organized form. But even while conditions prevent us from functioning in a completely public manner, the aim must be to utilize the possibilities that exist to the maximum in order to involve masses of workers and not just a small conspiratorial cadre. The reason this emphasis on the mass character is vital is that there is a major tendency to let the difficulties in functioning openly, the de-facto illegality of organizations of the type we aim to build, turn the work away from the masses of workers toward the development of a cadre group through internal education and so on.

Though the difficulties in functioning openly are certainly real, there is no alternative to using whatever possibilities exist and working to expand these possibilities as rapidly as possible. This follows from the absolutely essential role of direct action spelled out in a previous section of the paper. There is no way that direct action can be developed if a conspiratorial cadre grouping becomes a substitute for, rather than a means to, a mass organization.

It is true that generally a relatively small group of workers will initially accept the perspective and begin to try to implement it. These will be those workers with sufficient commitment and understanding to spend the time and effort needed to test out political programs and approaches in periods when the overall struggle is at a low level. In effect they will constitute a cadre group, and at times this cadre group will be the extent of the organization — perhaps even of the movement. As the struggle develops these workers will form the leadership and the backbone, the core, of a mass trade-union form of workers' organization. It is a political mistake to organize this cadre group as rigorously and conspiratorially as the party organization of "profes-

sional revolutionists". That would damage both the leadership role of the party and the autonomy of the workers' organization — not to mention undermining all of the work to establish more open organization. It is the cadre groupings that serve as the social basis for developing a factory organizing perspective and as a primary source of recruits for the party of revolution.

(This article is excerpted from an internal discussion document of Sojourner Truth. Other sections have already appeared in the industrial militants' newsletter Point of View — PO Box 8493, Chicago 60680.)

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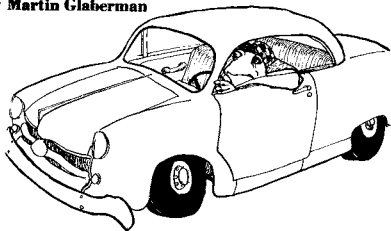
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by **Martin Glaberman**



## *Factory Songs of Mr. Toad*

ECOLOGY

Don't leave the finger  
on the floor  
The doc might be able  
to sew it on

And it could make the relief man  
uneasy  
being pointed at  
as if  
he  
tripped the fuckin' press

And the next man on the job  
might slow her down  
And then it would be my blood  
spattered on the floor  
turning slowly brown  
mingling with the butts and tobacco juice  
filling in the cracks  
without waste.

## REVOLUTIONARY CONSCIOUSNESS

He lost his hand in a bright new  
automated punch press.

Five digits now none  
Taken by a digital computer  
Witch  
Lo and behold  
Makes mistakes just like human beans

Humanized computer  
Computerized human  
Its all the same  
But it can't hold hands.

Neither can he.  
He took his other five digits  
and melted them down into a  
Fist.

*Mr. Toad*





## WILDCAT I

A most practical cat.

Walking silently on padded feet  
Unseen, unheard  
Power concentrated  
    in a compact body.

Lean, lithe, less  
    in appearance  
Than the explosive leap,  
    periodic culmination  
    of growing power  
    of growing hunger.

Amber, black, mottled, gold.  
All colors help to hide  
    its invisible path.

Slowly it climbs and waits  
    on limb  
    on cliff  
    on overhang.

All right, buddy,  
Let's not get romantic.  
Shut her down and let's go.

A most practical cat.

*Mr. Toad*

You are aware of it before you look up  
(perhaps it's the advancing quiet)

The catch of excitement as you see them  
walking toward the gate  
not hurrying

## WILDCAT II

Each man distinct. The group growing  
as the shop melts away  
behind them.

Washed clean  
by a single wave  
that leaves a few pebbles behind.

Foremen stand here and there  
not anxious to get in the way  
little eddies at their feet  
immobile in the mud.

Outside it is crisp and cold  
men waiting for the stragglers  
to get through the gate.

"What the hell's the matter?"

"They took off the helper on the big job."

"Where did it start?"

"Christ, that could kill you,  
working that job alone."

The men drift off  
No need to keep anyone  
out  
or in

*Mr. Toad*

A day to rest  
shop maybe  
do some repairs

We'll see tomorrow.

### WILDCAT III

The International Representative  
sits behind the local union president  
An occasional whisper  
keeps him firm against the rising anger

Why is it so difficult?  
Just stay out until we win.

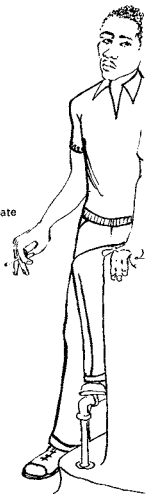
The simple repetition with growing heat  
proves too much  
for the president  
The whisper cannot carry over the roaring debate  
And the International Rep.  
brushes the president aside  
power now openly wielded.

"You are weakening the union . . .  
"How can we negotiate . . .  
"You are violating the contract . . .  
"Return to work . . ."

Why is it so difficult?  
Stay out until we win.

"You must back your union . . .  
"An administrator will be appointed . . ."

It's their contract . . .  
Let them run the damned plant.



*Mr. Toad*

# WORK IN AMERICA: The Rubber Factory

*by Ed George and Jeff Paul*

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to tell of the experiences of ex-students organizing at work in a small rubber factory. By doing this we hope to share our experiences with others who are now in shops, and to tell others who are about to leave the student movement and enter the blue-collar workers' movement what we found.

## THE COMPANY

The shop makes soles and heels, as well as sponge, so it is related directly to the declining shoe industry in the region. During the '20s the area was full of small rubber shops that began to go out of business in the Depression. The shop we work in came about as a result of other shops' folding. The man who started the business began as a junk dealer in the '20s. During the '30s he repaired and put to use some heel machines he bought from bankrupt firms. With these he started a small business which he ran until World War II, when he leased the place to the Army. They built most of what is the factory today. After the War, the owner bought the expanded factory and the new machinery from the Army. At that time the work force was about 1,000. Today, due to automation and runaway production lines, the work force has been reduced to about 400. But the company as a whole has expanded vastly into an international corporation with shops in Canada, Britain, and Latin America. The main difference between this company and the giants of the rubber industry is that it doesn't make tires.

The workers in our factory know that the company is profiting off their labor, that every new contract swindle

pays for a new factory. For this reason they feel the company is not going to move out on them. They know they could still get a large wage increase and the company would still be in good shape financially. Until recently, the last layoff here was 11 years ago and the last one before that was 35 years ago. Both times the number of workers laid off was small and they were quickly called back. However job eliminations and layoffs have begun again. The result has been upsetting to a lot of workers.

### FACTORY DIVISIONS

The factory building rambles. It was once only one building, but as the company grew it added here and there to the building until it occupied a large area. About 400 work in this funky old place. About half the jobs have two shifts, the others have three. There is a poorly-managed lunchroom that most people don't use. Instead, workers bring their lunches and eat at their machines, in the break areas, or in the bathrooms. This severely limits discussion among large numbers of workers. In addition to this, not all workers take their lunches and breaks at the same time. They have to be relieved from their jobs so that the production lines can continue to operate. Most workers feel isolated from one another and apathetic about any change. Each shift only catches a glimpse of the other.

Each department, though not surrounded by actual walls, is off limits for workers from different departments. Here is a case in point: During a lunch break one of us went into a department to speak to a couple of Latin workers about running for shop steward in their department. Although this was lunchtime, the department supervisor stopped the comrade and told him that he would have to leave the area. The reason the supervisor gave was that he had not been checked with. Another worker replied that this had happened to his friends but they had continued to do it anyway. The company couldn't stop them: Departments differentiate machines, not people. Most of the workers, though, don't know workers from other departments because of intimidation like this.

## DIVISIONS IN THE WORK FORCE

The shop is overwhelmingly male (about 80%). Partly because they are such a small minority, many of the women say the shop is not a main concern. They say their main concern is to be able to spend time with their families. To get out early, the women led two walkouts in the past year over patently false bomb scares. But that same tactic was also used this past winter to fight the in-shop problem of inadequate heating. Twice it was the women who organized walkouts that were then joined by some of the men.

Almost all of the women work on assembly-line jobs tied by collective piece rates. As a result, solidarity is tighter than for those departments with single-machine production and individual piece rates. As a result women's piece rates approximate men's. In some department's, the men's piece rate payments are dependent on the amount of material the women pass on — but rather than resentment, solidarity is greatest here. The most open sexism comes from men of those departments without women.

Racially, the shop is about 40% white, 30% black, and 30% brown. Most of the white workers, men and women, are of Polish, Italian, or Irish descent. Some of them immigrated here after World War II. Most of the black workers were originally from the South, and came up here in search of work. This is still going on. The Spanish-speaking workers come from Puerto Rico, Cuba, Guatemala, and Colombia. There are in addition some Haitian, Brazilian, Portuguese, and Trinidadian workers. The interaction of these groups is good.

In practice, racial and sexual differences are secondary to ideological differences. A worker who sells out to the boss does so not because he or she is white or brown or Polish or Cuban, but because of petty bourgeois attitudes such as individualism and acceptance of paternalism which separate him from the rest of the workers in the shop. The people who are isolated from other workers are so because of a privileged position they have worked individualistically to attain. They put the interests of the great majority of workers separate from their own self-interest as individu-

als. This shows most clearly with some of the privileged older workers.

Older workers with more than 20 years' service compose about 25% of the work force, younger workers with less about 75%. The youngest workers, under 30, work in the most oppressive departments. They make up the majority of the workers in such places. They are mixed in race and sex, and are the most receptive to Left politics, whereas the older workers are more interested in the shop itself.

Many older workers are affected by paternalism. As was stated earlier, the company is not very old. This shop is the first one the company owned, and the first owner stayed in this plant until the late '40s. Many of the older workers knew him personally. They feel his family wouldn't betray them for just that reason. They also feel part of the company, whereas younger workers feel less involved with the company and are more alienated from it. Time in service with the company is far more important than age. For instance, some workers over 50 who came here during the '50s do not have this paternalized view of the company.

Thus individualism and acceptance of paternalism seem to be the most important determinants of political behavior and stand above differences in age, sex, race, or ethnic background.

### PIECE WORK

Individualism is fostered by the type of payment. All the production is piece work. Some jobs are rate plus incentive but most are straight piece work. Average take-home pay, without overtime, is about \$100 a week. This set-up works for maximum production from each worker by the worker disciplining himself. He or she will work as hard as possible because each unit produced is more income.

Piece work survives in the company because it plays on the feeling that a worker can make it if he wants to. Most of the piece-work jobs are for one worker alone at one or two machines. However, teams of workers on a production line tied by a collective piece rate make up 30% to 40% of all jobs. These lines have from two to seven workers in a

team. Those departments with production lines tend to be the most unified. Production lines are overseen by operators who are union men; they receive the orders from the company and then act to complete the orders by organizing the production. The other workers don't look upon them as bosses because they see them as necessary to the operation of the line, whereas the foreman and the supervisor are not.

The action of each of the workers on the line determines the amount of money made by the line. An operator can only run a line as fast as the stock and the slowest worker will let him. On the production-line piece work, most people are capable of performing their functions in the allowed time. An experienced fast worker will get from a few seconds' to a few minutes' rest between runs, whereas an inexperienced or slow worker is constantly moving. On individual machines, piece rates are set above average workers. The slower or newer workers can't make the quotas and don't make much money.

A worker who is particularly fast can and does hurt the other workers. Exceptionally high productivity alerts the company that a better way of work has been discovered. Then come the time-study men. Then the company changes the rates or the job descriptions to add more work to the job. In this way any ideas a worker may have about making the job easier will work against him in the long run. An example of this is in the mill room. A worker found it was easier to load the mill by putting the rubber on the back of the mill rather than the front. After a while, the company found out about this, did a time study, and changed the rates of the job. This kills worker creativity.

### PRIVILEGES

Piece work is one of the economic bases of disunity. The other is privileges such as preferential overtime; guaranteed hourly rate—a de-facto wage—no matter what the output; or a soft job with little physical labor. Privileges are won by those who have individually worked for them. The worker who informs the company of everything hap-



pening in his department; the union official who fights the company until he is bought off; a loyal individual having the confidence of the workers in his ethnic group — such as an anti-communist Cuban distinguished by good command of English: Any of these wins the company's attention. The company co-opts willing workers who are individually aggressive, rather than randomly bribing unknown workers.

### REPRESSION

The reverse side of privilege is repression. The denial of overtime has been a key instrument of repression. Job classification and seniority are used as excuses for giving overtime to loyal workers and leaving out workers not in the bosses' favor. Considering the low pay in the shop, overtime is the only way people with families can earn a living. Any threat to this overtime must be taken seriously.

Layoffs and firings are the back-up threats. Seniority reinforces fear of being fired. The time involved in gaining seniority means a worker cannot risk having to go out and start all over again at a new job. So senior workers tend to be more cautious. At the same time, there is more defensive unity over seniority than over any other issue. Threats to senior workers are thus uncommon. As all workers see that any threat against one is dangerous for them all, support for a threatened worker is easy to build.

### THE NUMBERS RACKET

Another thing that keeps the peace is the "nigger pool" or "book" — the numbers racket. This is a small business within the shop. Its agents assume the values of small businessmen, and then spread these values among other workers. The company knows that it pays to let this racket go on because of the views spread by its agents. Even the union is tied in. In my shop, the bookie is the brother of the old union president. Keeping such types in union office gives the company union peace at the minimal cost of allowing a racket inside the plant. Of course a runner doesn't have to be a union official, but all the same has intimate contact

with most workers in the shop and therefore has a reactionary influence. But their time is passing. Refusing to increase taxes directly, many states are starting lotteries. This seriously cuts into the business of the bookies.

### UNION CORRUPTION

The local union leadership has a long history of corruption. Three of the four leaders in the last 25 years have fit this mold. The only exception served three years, and would have been re-elected, but died right at the time of the new elections, allowing the old guard back in once more.

The international, United Rubber Workers of CIO origin, has failed to pull together the locals around the city that work for this company. One attempt took place last year, and failed mostly because of the role played by our old local president. What this unity would mean is that we would be put in a position to better struggle for closer parity with the major companies in our industry. This would have cost the company money, so they used their tool, our old president, to break up this attempt at unity.

In 35 years this has been the only attempt at bringing the locals together. The reason is that the union wants the company to grow. This is a common practice of CIO unions — such as the ILGWU and the ACW in the garment industry. They operate under the idea that a bigger company means more money for the international. Thus the unions must justify capitalism to the workers by telling them that working under bad conditions and getting low pay helps them in the long run by giving the company a chance to compete with foreign imports. This is the implicit position of George Meany and the AFL-CIO leadership — and it extends to the URW.

The international is politically damaging in another way because it acts to take all control out of the hands of the workers themselves and to put it into the hands of a third party. This leaves the workers helpless — within the confines of collective bargaining — in the face of corrupt leadership and the oppression of the foreman and supervisor.

## THE STRUGGLES

This was the situation as we found it when two of us were hired last summer. We could see and feel how bad things were. The heat and smoke, the speed-up, and the general feeling of intimidation were everywhere. And the union was doing nothing about any of it.

The union election was coming up in the autumn, and people were getting interested. The union president then was Sal Carbone, a Mafioso type who with his brothers and a few assistants controlled the numbers, sold hot goods, and received higher rates than everyone else. Early in Carbone's presidency, a new union treasurer, Tony Francesco, came in and had the books audited. Ten to twelve thousand dollars was missing from the union treasury and Francesco reported it to the international. Carbone was implicated, blamed Francesco, and made some enemies among the white workers. But he had a reliable base among the workers who owed him favors. His election leaflets made the point that he had done many favors, like notarizing legal documents, typing bills of sale, regaining a revoked license, and fixing traffic tickets and warrants.

Other workers could see no progress as long as the corrupt incumbents ran the union local. We felt that getting rid of Carbone as president would not solve all the problems, but that it was an unavoidable struggle which we could not ignore without being sectarian. To do so would only serve to isolate us from the other workers and confuse their feelings toward us. Also, we met a loosely-organized group of black workers who had someone to run who they felt was a solid alternative. Their alternative was a 40-year-old black man named Johnnie Wilson who is politically progressive and open-minded, and tactically a clear thinker. When we met him, he told us about Carbone but asked very little about us. He knew we were radical, but didn't seem to want to know much about it. This changed as we met with him more often and discussed our mutual backgrounds, and as the union struggles became sharper.

A division of the work broke down according to our politics and backgrounds. For example, Carbone tried to rig

the election by disallowing our candidate from running. Wilson turned to the international for help, and we put out a leaflet. The two actions complemented each other, but at the same time revealed differences in our approaches.

Our leaflet attacked the old president as undemocratic, but, more importantly, said the attempted rigging only went to show how weak and afraid of the workers he was. It said that no one was crying about his action but that people were organizing against it. This organization was based on the general dissatisfaction with him.

There were at that time about eight people — six blacks and the two of us — loosely organized and more or less committed to the election. The two of us were the first to feel pressure because we had been the ones who put out the leaflet. Carbone used a direct threat of ,“trouble” (physical assault). This stopped when our fellow workers spoke out that nothing had better happen to us, and when we put in a grievance against the intimidation. One guy told me not to worry, as he had a gang there who would take care of any threateners. Another guy who had been with the Black Panthers in some way before came to me saying he would help any way he could. He also put on a button I had never seen him wearing before. It said: “It is in our blood to fight.”

This leaflet turned around the entire election. The fact that it was passed out inside the shop made people speak openly about the election. It became clear that the company couldn't take open oppressive action against us for passing out the leaflet. First of all, the anti-Carbone feeling was very strong, and the leaflet served to give it direction behind Wilson and his election committee. Second, to attack the committee would put the company dangerously close to Carbone and expose them to legal attacks as well as spontaneous direct action by the discontented workers. Thus the discussion about the election — and politics in general — was everywhere.

Interestingly, the union local election at the shop occurred at the same time as the Vietnam elections. Many workers made the observation that Carbone was like Thieu, in that neither invited competition and both were corrupt puppets of someone else — Thieu of Washinton and Carbone of the

company. People saw that Carbone was resisting a fair election because he could stay in office only by denying the democratic rights of the people.

Race was used as a phony issue in the election, obscuring the real questions. Carbone is white and Wilson is black. Carbone put out a leaflet reducing the issues to race voting and personal conflict between himself and the local treasurer, Francesco, who had long before brought up the corruption and theft charges. The leaflet argued that the black vote was combining as a bloc with the white support of the disgruntled union treasurer to win the election. By using this tactic to divide and confuse, Carbone avoided confronting the real issues in the election as raised by Wilson — honest and democratic unionism, better working conditions, and more pay.

The election resulted in a tie. Initially there was much disillusionment and confusion. We had felt that we could win easily. We had made the mistake of underestimating our foe and not fully mobilizing our own forces. We should have organized rides to the polls, but after discussing the idea we had dropped it because of the short time of four hours that the polls were open. Many people in our group took an attitude of anger toward other workers they knew who didn't come to the polls. We felt that our main mistakes were organizational, so we put forward the line that we were in good shape and had just learned a valuable if costly lesson. We once again declared our strength and said it had taken Carbone ten years to put together his organization, and we had been at it only six weeks. The tie showed the maximum limit of Carbone's strength and the base of ours.

The week between the tie and the runoff was as full of spontaneity as the Cambodia student strike. Lots of people who had been passive suddenly got active. Everyone was trying to come to grips with what was going on, everyone was involved. People who had held back now came to the front by organizing rides and talking to people. We won the runoff almost two-to-one.

The majority of our work has revolved around the union. The two of us will continue this, as conditions for working in the union are good. At the same time, we have been in-

volved over the past year in job actions on the floor. One took place around unsafe conditions in one of our departments. A young Portuguese worker came to one of us with the idea of shutting the department down unless the company acted to remove some dangerously piled stock. We agreed to see how the other workers on the line (about ten in all) felt, and everyone was willing to do it.

This done, the comrade went to the shop steward, who was very surprised, and these two then went to the boss. The boss had the stock moved immediately. But he also acted to enforce repression throughout the shop. This was done, not by disciplining the workers in that specific department, but by taking away some "privileges" of another small group of workers who go to a local bar at lunchtime. They were told that the comrade involved in this incident was the cause of their loss because he was a radical and wanted to play things by the book. The result of this was some sabotage to one of his machines designed to injure him, and some strong words almost resulting in a fight between an old Italian worker and himself. At the time, the workers were divided between blaming the boss and blaming the comrade. However when the comrade changed departments the repression continued, and all the workers came to see the boss as the real enemy. This is now the most militant department.

The other action took place in a department where a third comrade temporarily held down a job. He was working on the fastest machine in the department. The high speed of this machine caused it to break down often. Because of the way the piece rate is set up, a worker will lose money when his machine is broken down. After he had gone through a number of breakdowns due to high speed and poor materials, he refused to run the machine until it was repaired. His boss told him to start up, but he refused. Other workers in the department stopped work to see what was going to happen. His boss got the supervisor, who told him to start up. He again refused and started yelling at the supervisor about losing money and working too hard. The supervisor began to apologize and finally agreed to bring up mechanics to fix the machine. This was the first time anyone

had done such a thing in that department. A number of the workers expressed pleasure that something was finally being done to change things in the department.

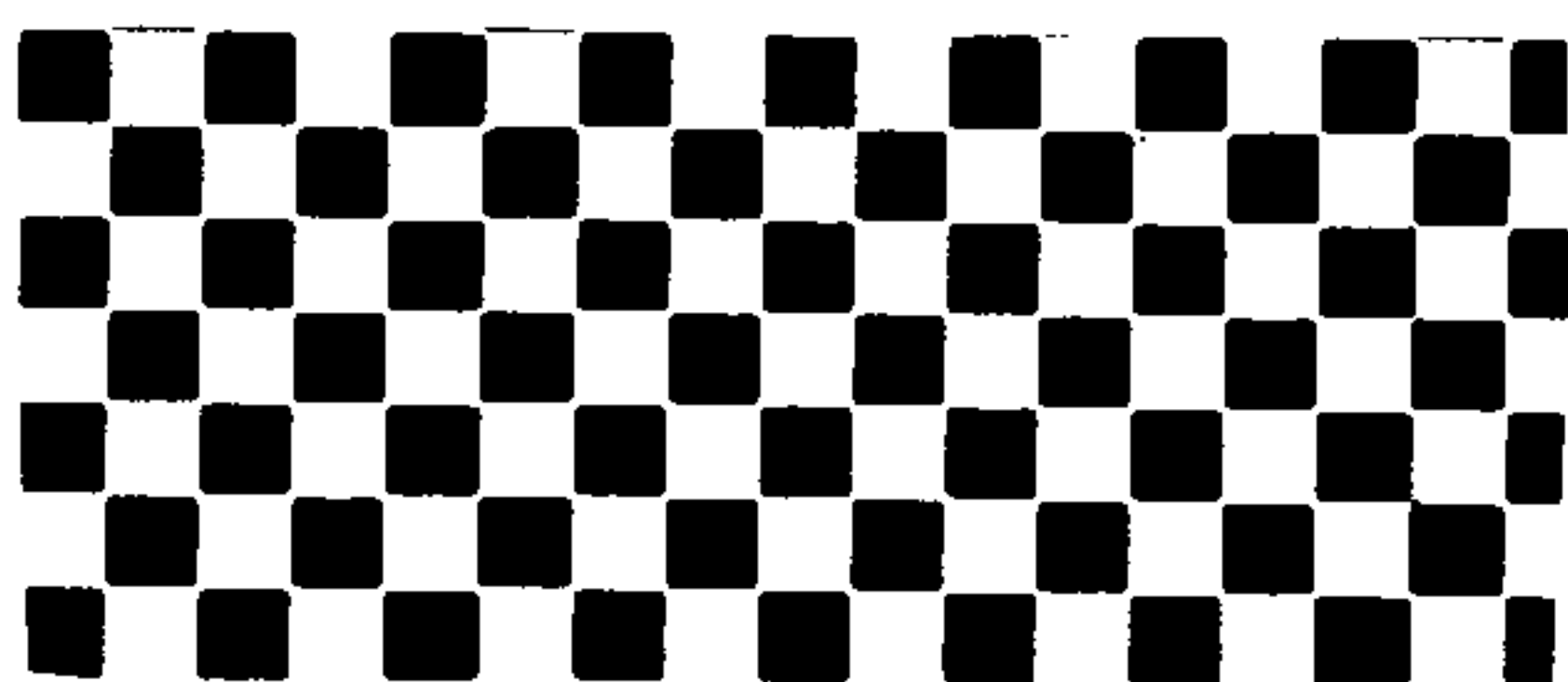
Up to this point we saw class consciousness as being on the rise. But after the election political advance stopped, and by the time of contract renewal negotiations one week later we were fairly isolated although still listened to. As the wage-price freeze was in effect, most people were uncertain about what to do. We were among this group. We told people we should only go for a one-year contract to give us time to figure out what to do. This was widely accepted by the workers as a sound strategy. But the international stepped into the picture and negotiated a three-year contract. Our suggestions went for nothing.

We had offered up to that point militant trade unionism as the solution to leadership that would not fight the company. We failed to consistently argue for socialism, and we downplayed basic theory. We failed to discuss how the decline of US imperialism will lead to economic stagnation, how continuing recession will mean less overtime and more speed-up and thus more struggles in the shop. But we didn't talk about a long-range perspective. We were involved in immediate and often undirected struggles without a strategic theory. After the defeat of the contract negotiations this had to change. We had to analyze the limitations of trade-union caucus work.

Our thinking about the union has changed sharply. Initially we thought that the union could be made militant — that we could use it for slowdowns, walkouts, and other direct actions. But we were continually blocked. Pushing through the three-year contract was only the first incident. Then we began to work on starting an agitational paper for the local. We got together people who were willing to write for it, gathered a few articles, planned the first issue — and then got vetoed by the official from the international. Finally, this spring we began talking about doing a Vietnam demonstration outside the gates when the weather warmed up. And though almost everyone in the shop is against the war, even this was squelched by the union. Today we see that the union is simply a machine for filing grievances. It will follow

these through now that it is rid of outright corruption. But it will not be a vehicle for our direct action.

We are now involved in trying to analyze the class composition in our shop, both the roots of reaction among a few workers and the progressive movement of the majority of workers. And we are determined to be more independent of the union. On the basis of these two points, we are going to continue working in the shop.



## *Support the Italian Revolutionary Movement*

A new phase of internationalism has emerged. The recent wave of struggles and the crisis of world capitalism demonstrate that the confrontation between the working class and capital has reached an international level. Capital's thrust toward international integration has given rise to a generalization of working-class struggles that crosses national boundaries. To the international unification of capital corresponds the international circulation of the working-class struggle. A red thread unites Detroit with Turin, Derry with Montreal. The struggles of black unemployed and workers in the US, May '68 in France, the "hot autumn" of '69 in Italy, and the Irish civil war have brought Vietnam to the citadels of capitalism, and laid the groundwork for an international revolutionary movement.

Today, it is on the international level that a revolutionary strategy must look for "the weakest link in the chain". This link will break not where capital is weakest, but where the working class is the strongest. Italy now seems to be this weakest link. By 1972, the Italian working class has experienced several years of intensified struggles. These were waged by a new generation of workers, who expressed their



total detachment from work, their total opposition to the capitalist organization of society, and their will to re-appropriate the wealth they produce. These workers' struggles exploded beyond the factory, reaching students, technicians, and the unemployed, independently of the control by labor unions and the reformist parties. Behind the "spaghetti in Chilean sauce", as the bourgeois press describes the situation, lies the open crisis of Italian capitalism — a direct confrontation between the working class and the State. At this point, the only objective for the working class is the struggle for power. The conditions have been created for the formation of an organization capable of identifying in each struggle those elements which point to the revolutionary process.

The only possible alternative for capital is the creation of inflation and mass unemployment, along with the repression of those organizations that in recent years have represented the leading forces of the movement: Lotta Continua, Potere Operaio, and Il Manifesto. The trial of the anarchist Valpreda, the assassination of the revolutionary publisher Feltrinelli, and the violent attack against members of Potere Operaio and Lotta Continua are the latest examples of the means employed by the capitalists to bring about a total suppression of working-class struggles.

We cannot let the capitalists regain the initiative in Italy, for this would mean a setback for the whole international movement. It is obvious that the best support for the Italian revolutionary movement lies in an intensification of international struggles; but at the same time, a breakthrough in Italy would raise the international struggle to a new level. Thus, a direct involvement in the Italian situation is imperative at this time.

A few things can be immediately done. Funds are needed to support the continuing publication of the revolutionary press. Spread the word, collect money, buy Italian revolutionary literature. Write to: Italian Committee,  
1878 Massachusetts Ave. Cambridge, 02140

