the long report. The entire report was posted on a bulletin board for all to read who would. No warts were hidden; no needed praise suppressed.

As the consultants went about their tasks, they talked with many of the workers. They discussed their findings in some detail during weekly meetings, but hardly ever were there questions from the floor. At no time in their previous working lives had they been expected to talk as an equal to the "boss" or to a business consultant.

With permission from Bertie's board and the guidance of Bazemore, I arranged weekly informational meetings to 1) share with all employees openly what the "strangers" were doing in their midst and why; and 2) to provide a way for the workers to ask questions about the plant, their work, etc., but, in reality, to provide a forum, or first step, for democratic decision-making and involvement. The meetings were brief. Bertie timekeepers rang the day's final bell five minutes before regular quitting time. Reluctantly, the 100 or so sewing machine operators stayed over another five minutes before pushing the doors. We had ten minutes a week then to plant the seeds of workplace democracy in a factory faced with staggering debt and no real prospects for the future. So we planted seeds, not promises. The idea that workers would own and run their jobs was discussed. Elections were held to select a group of ten through which grievances or suggestions could be channeled. Throughout most of the meetings the workers sat or walked about the tiny space set aside for eating. They rarely said a word. Gradually, however, the smaller elected group got acquainted with its role. Opinions were increasingly expressed. Haltingly, they became an assertive force which encouraged fellow workers to clean up the rest rooms, stay longer for the weekly meetings with less grouching, and demand more sensitivity from the managers.

For Bazemore and the supervisors, too, learning to talk with outside resource people and with each other at weekly meetings was as vital to the learning process as getting their expert advice or their charitable money, although both were critically important. Meeting or talking with professors or foundation officers was seldom done in Bertie County. Meeting to talk about their work also was rare. No one got awed. Surviving life in Bertie or haggling with penny-pinching garment makers had prepared them for any eventuality. Besides, they knew what they needed from these resources, and why. Meeting these challenges served to enhance their self-regard as individuals and as a group.

As self-esteem increased, so did evidence of self-discipline. The toilet got cleaned up by volunteers. Overlong, surreptitious smoke breaks diminished. Individuals often could be heard talking over strategies for making production rather than bantering gossip. Some started setting their own quotas by attempting to surpass a previous good day's work or vie with a fellow worker. Supervisors, never a bossy lot so far as I could tell, started trying to figure out ways to up production without resorting to disciplinarian threat. Tim's ability to stall creditors refined; he got a lot of practice. His contract negotiations with other garment factory managers took on a flair. One respectfully dubbed him "the Mohammed Ali of the needle trades."

As people gradually learned from their own experiences and felt better about themselves as they did, a tentative, almost self-effacing willingness for self-governance surfaced. Once when a payroll couldn't be met the entire workforce

assembled to assess the situation and discuss the options presented by Tim. They sorted through some ways to solve the problem. As always when the payroll failed to materialize there was grumbling and anger, but as the entire workforce had been presented with the facts and involved in the decision-making process, disgruntled rumblings were muted.

This education process did not prevent Bertie Industries from bankruptcy. Pleas to re-enter the protective, sheltering wing of the Small Business Administration fell on hostile ears in the Atlanta regional office. Creditors refused to continue their restraint. A final blow came when the firm's major source of contracts closed down rather than face a union organizing drive. The doors at Bertie closed finally in August, 1979. Many workers went unpaid. The hard decision to shut down divided, embittered, and embarrassed the board of directors. As prideful black leaders, the loss of their business was a loss of face. Tim Bazemore, having invested nearly $20,000 in cash, was liable for a portion of the firm's unpaid tax debts. He faced the future uncertain about what he'd do: quit the needle trades for good, try to open his own sewing factory for profit in an attempt to recover his losses, or take up the idea of starting a worker's owned and managed sewing firm.

I left the experience convinced the workplace could be used as a learning place, a means through which people could gain control over their jobs, and to that extent, their economic destinies. Certain that I'd gained more than I'd given to the workers at Bertie Industries, I could only wait to see what developed. I wondered if any liberating ideas had been released.

III. GETTING DOWN TO WORK.

During the last week of September 1979, four people took possession of what once had been a prosperous auto dealer's showroom, repair shop, and used car lot three blocks away from Windor's business district. With little more than faith on their side, they started turning the building into a sewing factory. Everyone was contributing their time free. Tim Bazemore sold his hogs to pay for the wiring, and he was planning to sell his soybean and corn crops to pay wages and rent equipment until the group could obtain and complete some contracts.

By December thirty people, all but two of them women, maneuvered their cars or pickup trucks each day into a parking lot beside the nondescript building. In twos and threes, they stepped through the morning's chill into the building before a buzzer sounded at 7 a.m. to mark the start of another day. Each card punched signified that a precarious experiment in economic democracy had survived another night. There was no air of euphoria. Unique experiments didn't pay bills. No one knew how long their jobs would last, worker-managed or not. All knew Bazemore, the manager and driving force behind the idea, possessed little experience in the garment industry. And most of them had worked for him at Bertie Industries. Money to operate the place was short, too. Everyone knew that. The board of directors had been elected by their fellow workers, but they had never run a business.

For two weeks I arrived in Windsor each morning just as dawn broke, punched in like any other worker, and spent the day bagging and tagging, or doing other odd jobs which had not fallen anyone else's lot. Working "on the line" permitted me the