15 YEARS OF RADICAL AMERICA: An Anthology

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Doug Blazek
Carl Boggs
Mari Jo Buhle
Aime Cesaire
Ken Cockrell
Guy DeBord
Diane DiPrima
Sara Evans
Phyllis Ewen
Stuart Ewen
Dan Georgakas
Martin Glaberman
Linda Gordon
Jim Green
Dorothy Healey
Allen Hunter
Noel Ignatia
C.L.R. James
Barbara Koppel
I. I. kryss
Ken Lawrence
Michael Lesy
d.a. levy
Staughton Lynd
Manning Marable
Herbert Marcuse
Mark Nash
Jim O'Brien
Harvey O'Connor
Fredy Perlman
Margaret Randall
George Rawick
Bernice Johnson Reagon
Lillian Robinson
Sheila Rowbotham
Daniel Singer
Jean Tepperman
E.P. Thompson
Dave Wagner
Stan Weis
Ann Withorn
AND MANY MORE!

edited by
PAUL BULLE
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INTRODUCTION

"The new sensibility...emerges in the struggle against violence and exploitation where this struggle is waged for essentially new ways and forms of life: negation of the entire Establishment, its morality, culture; affirmation of the right to build a society in which the abolition of poverty and toil terminates in a universe where the sensuous, the playful, the calm, and the beautiful become forms of existence and thereby the Form of the society itself."

Herbert Marcuse —from An Essay on Liberation, 1969

This special issue marks Radical America's fifteenth anniversary. It is fitting that the inspiration for this anthology came from Paul Buhle, the founder of the magazine. Paul selected and organized excerpts from almost fifty different issues of Radical America that fill these pages. He prefaces the selection with a personal overview of RA's first fifteen years.

RA's pages in many ways have reflected the efforts of the American Left to grapple with the decline, after the tumultuous events of the 1960s, of its immediate political strength. In attempting to maintain a perspective simultaneously historical and visionary, we have sought to shed light on this country's long tradition of social protest and radicalism, and to contribute to the analysis and direction of social, political, and personal revolution.

RA's gradual evolution, over the years, has produced some striking changes. Our early decision to move beyond a university base was two-fold: while respecting academic insights and scholarship, we sought to present material in popularly written and understandable language, and we realized that the movement itself was shifting from universities to communities and workplaces. With the growth of the women's and gay liberation movements changing visions and practice, further critiques needed to be absorbed. In response to such shifts, RA's vision has broadened to include a critique of everyday life in the shop, on the street, and in the bedroom. It has not been as easy or as complete as we would wish, yet it continues to evolve, in a spirit of hope that defies cynicism and dogma alike.

The selection of material presented in the 128 pages is a reaffirmation of our evolving vision, and an attempt to combat the reinterpretations of the sixties and seventies rampant among liberals and reactionaries: that the New Left was a chaotic and adolescent deviation from which the country and the world are still recovering, and that the 1970s were a rerun of the vacuous "Eisenhower" years. This anthology, we hope, will counter such interpretations and serve as a positive record of the movement and culture of the past fifteen years.

When Paul Buhle first approached the current editorial collective about a commemorative issue, our mutual concern was to avoid the synopsis syndrome of presenting the "best articles," but to present an historical record of continuity and growth. Our collaboration with Paul on this project, was, in itself, part of that process. It was he who initially brought the journal into being with the assistance of comrades and friends in Madison, Wiscon-
This special issue brings together fifteen years of *Radical America*. The excerpts printed here offer a sample of what the magazine has meant to its writers, editors, and readers. More important, we have tried to show how the magazine has reflected their lives through the 1960s student rebellions, the black power and women's liberation movements, the resounding crash of New Left expectations, and the long years of steady effort that have followed.

In a trenchant dissertation about RA's history, Italian feminist Roberta Mazzanti observed in 1977 that the cultural interpretation of class, race, and sex issues had allowed us to move beyond the familiar and reemergent dogmas of the Left. Not always by any means. And not comprehensively, for the elements of a new world-view remain in solution. But we tried to throw open the blinds on the darkened lumber-rooms of Marxist categories, welcoming the fresh air that the contemporary movements breathed into the Left. Such reinterpretation, in turn, permitted a "post-Leninist" (for want of a better term) understanding of organizational dynamics.

It would be premature and in any case pointless to claim historical vindication. We have sought over the years to show the capacity of ordinary people to seize control of their lives and develop direct democracy. In spite of setbacks, we and our like-minded comrades across the world have kept the faith in that capacity, in a future ruled neither by corporation, nor state, nor sexual nor racial hierarchy.

RA's attempt to integrate poetry, the photographs, and the sketches of artists and writers with the prosaic analytical message is perhaps best seen as our metaphor of the cultural-political process. We would need many pages and a rainbow of colors to show all the picturesque covers published, and a small anthology to reprint all the poetry we have loved. The format we have chosen highlights only a fraction of this work.

Radical history is where we began, a way for us to recast our understanding of how society got here. By the mid-1960s, a dissenting strain of radicals had popularized a view of American corporate elites dominating the state, directing anticommunist foreign policy, and drowning real democracy in empty ritual. *Radical America* reflected the next generation of scholarship, the impulse to relocate the hidden histories of resistance, the social sources of radicalism in factory conditions and community life. The New Left seemed, from this vantage-point, a great restoration of middle-American memories lost, a revival of the grass-roots democratic tradition that had somehow slipped from notice and been marked officially "No Interest" by the reigning professional historians.

It was, significantly, when RA turned its attention to the black liberation movements in 1968 that the immediate political relevance of historical analysis leaped to the surface. Not that our interest in the history of the student movement (to take the most obvious example) could be very distant from our own lives. But the black uprisings and the link to the industrial working class verified by the League of Revolutionary Black Workers in Detroit carried us toward visions of a far-flung alliance. Some of the League's militants had indeed been schooled in the doctrines of C.L.R. James, West Indian-born historian and revolutionary strategist who was then our own greatest influence.

Such a phenomenon as the League helped clarify the whole of working class history, and the necessity for a class analysis in the present. By placing black labor at the locus of the most socialized machinery in the nation, by sweating that labor to the extreme, capitalism had apparently placed in jeopardy its own successful cooptation of union leadership and even (to a certain degree) of the relatively well-paid white worker. As described by C.L.R. James, the conflict which had thrust worker against Communist Party in Hungary, against Socialist
or Communist leaders in Italy or France, against Labor Party functionaries in Britain, now seemed to define the rebellious American worker against the nexus of union bureaucracy. Or so we read the tense situation in Detroit where the United Auto Workers leadership responded frantically to the emergence of black militancy.

Our conclusion brought us close in spirit to the "extra-parliamentarists" abroad, to the May 1968 French events, the Italian "hot autumn" of 1969, and later uprisings in Quebec, Portugal, and Poland. As C.L.R. James had written of the Hungarian Revolution, such episodes showed a public groping beyond state-socialist and bureaucratic-capitalist forms. The movements failed because militancy within a single nation could be isolated, subdued, ultimately repressed. But even in failing, they had left indelible proof that not just "workers" in general but the most oppressed and subjugated sectors would throw themselves toward the leadership of the fray. And that the issues of sex and cultural emancipation would not remain upon the sidelines until all other questions had been solved.

Beyond documenting these struggles and adding a historical perspective on our own American past, RA's contribution might be described as "cultural." We saw around us (and took part in) the brief flourishing of a new local journalism, the underground press, combative in its style and often compelling in its political message for the young. The links between radical scholarship and youth culture may seem, fifteen years past, especially dubious. But to take examples from RA's own pages, Gilbert Shelton, the most beloved of underground comic artists, was a history graduate school dropout with a proud anarchism not far from the local temperament of Students for a Democratic Society. Some outstanding poets and RA contributors such as d.a. levy found themselves pushed sharply to the left. By the 1970s this was an old story with a mostly unhappy ending. The Woodstock Nation convened and dispersed in a matter of months. But when the mood had been fresh, the publication of a Radical America issue consisting entirely of underground comics, or of a supplemental series of poetry booklets utterly nondidactic in character, evoked no great surprise. We were all part of the same Movement.

It would be convenient to conclude that we graduated to further explorations like women's history (later gay history as well) and the development of world revolutionary struggles. The truth is somewhat more complex. RA had begun as a mechanism for SDS's internal education, grown and developed with the student movement's troubled search for suitable revolutionary doctrine and strategy. The disastrous internal split of 1969 made the magazine's very subtitle, "An SDS Journal of American Radicalism," doubly anomalous. SDS as we had known it ceased to exist. The slogan-ridden Marxism-Leninism of the competitors for the organization's legacy all but relegated the rediscovery of an American radicalism to the classroom and the scholar's study. Caught in a vacuum, Radical America flailed around quite a bit. During 1970 in particular it became a kind of continuing monograph series, with materials ranging from a Surrealist Number I paper from a Socialist Scholars Conference to Guy Debord's Society of the Spectacle to a C.L.R. James Anthology.

As the shakedown process neared an end, two or three themes emerged as our conviction and our editorial metier. Campus activity had begun to subside and, we judged correctly, no longer would occupy a central political focus. In one way or another, blue-collar America had to be an essential part of our future constituency. We followed with great interest the efforts by non-Leninist groups to engage in local struggles, publish independent agitational papers, and establish new fusions of rebellious culture and factory reality. We were not suited to become an agitational journal our-

"There is no liberation of women without revolution; and there is no revolution without the liberation of women."
Spanish wall mural, 1976. Photo by Jose Delgado-Guitart.
selves, any more than we aspired to the kind of Marxist theoretics which remained in one way or another a European import. We had one simpler and for us more obvious task: History.

What kind of history would be most useful, and how could we best present it? These questions have been central for a decade. Without the context of a large, thriving movement, any answer is bound to be sketchy, tentative, or self-prepossessing. The experimentation has, however, been very useful. In its very first issues, RA pointed to the importance of oral history and local history as paths back to the unknown, “inarticulate” radical rank-and-filers. The experiences of these activists fifty or five years previous demonstrate something that institutional ideological histories of radical movements and leading personalities rarely do: how radicalism is built and steadily rebuilt from the bottom up.

In this light, the Old Left can be reassessed: neither angels nor devils but ordinary people working within the constraints of their time. The message is, or should be, consoling. But the historical information also contains guarded warnings. American radicalism must not be either the tail to some international kite (like the Soviet Union or China), or, like the pre-1920 Socialists, largely indifferent to the effect of international race and ethnic divisions upon any domestic movement. To be internationalist without becoming abstract or distant from indigenous moods sounds easy enough. The reality has been and remains challenging in political, theoretical, perhaps most of all personal terms.

The New Left prepared us at least for wrestling with the “personal as political” on the historical plane. And the RA readership shared with its editors a zealous enthusiasm for the most obvious example, women’s history. The “Women’s Liberation” issue (February 1970) edited by Edith Hoshino Altbach was – aside from RA Komiks – the best-selling number to its time. “Women in American Society: An Historical Contribution,” a monographic essay published the next year, gained immediate currency as the most important single article we had published. Steadily reprinted for a half-dozen years or so, it also identified RA’s principal orientation for the 1970s, a feminism informed by history.

If the Madison, Wisconsin, of RA’s early years had been a center for American historical study (as well as student activism), the Boston we entered in 1971 was an early center of women’s liberation movements and ideas. Once it had become clear that, however useful, the spread of student radicalism to the factory and blue-collar neighborhoods offered no panacea for the collapse
of the New Left, the gradual confluence of politics and personalities around feminist concerns took place as a matter of course. Without ever losing a formal commitment to class politics, to internationalist perspectives, and above all to historical views of the revolutionary project, RA tended toward a reevaluation of every concern through a definitive feminist experience.

RA’s editors and constituency meanwhile remained themselves mostly on the fringes of university life, with one foot in academia and one foot out, trying to do the best with the situation at hand and awaiting some other development. Especially for those who taught in schools with a working-class to lower-middle-class student body, the learning process went both ways. RA may have been a bit too obvious at times for budding theoreticians, a poor spot to publish scholarly treatises, but sought with every breath to remain true to its activist roots.

The relevance of our orientation to a right-of-center American politics challenged by the Far Right remains, of course, to be determined. Analysis of the “New Right” utilizing the special insights afforded activists of the women’s movement inevitably became in recent years a central concern of RA. The threats posed earlier by racial tensions over the busing issue outlined the editors’ anxiety that the so-called “moral” issues (abortion and gay rights, for example) could be linked to race privilege so as to splinter any effective blue-collar response and set the stage for worse things to come. RA has resisted the impulse to see America as Weimar Germany because we are convinced that the New Right has feet of clay. Not that an authoritarian repression and even fascism can be ruled that. But the capacity of ordinary folk, the lessons drawn by millions from the 1960s-70s, remain an inestimable reserve.

The assertion of another America is perhaps the most subtle element in RA’s contribution. The fragmented truth of a “people’s culture” is difficult to pin down without risking romanticization. But the occasional moment of cultural attainment, in a documentary or popular film, poster, or poem, in a community group past or present, contains the promise of universality toward which our entire experience points. The aesthetic effort represented in RA’s pages is a tiny but (for us) not insignificant manifestation of a striving for wholeness, for the intellect and spirit joined together. If our own work for fifteen years meant nothing more than the creation of a radical history-and-culture magazine which returned the romantic kernal to the Marxist tradition — and placed human liberation upon the agenda as the imperative demanded by our scholarship and personal experience — we would have fulfilled our purpose.

*   *   *

Finally, we take this occasion to thank and apologize to all contributors whose work had to be squeezed in or even deleted, to financial friends (many of whom, by no means all, record themselves in our final pages), who kept us alive, to numerous comrades, lovers and allies who held our spirits aloft. And to remember some friends now gone — Joan London, Anna Louise Strong, Solon DeLeon, Walter Lowenfels, d.a. levy, Freda Salzman, Robert Starobin — and sorely missed. They, and the generations of radicals before them, would have wished our effort as a piece of living history. We dedicate it therefore not to any golden past we depart with nostalgia — but to the future.

Paul Buhle
Mayday, 1982

"BE REALISTIC
DEMAND THE IMPOSSIBLE"
—Wall poster, Paris 1968
Sex, Family and the New Right (Linda Gordon and Allen Hunter) 75¢ Anti-feminism as a political force: its origins and expression in the US.

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Counterplanning on the Shop Floor by Bill Watson, 25¢.

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Bulk discount for 5 or more of same title (20% for institutions, 40% all other).
I DON'T EAT THAT BREAD.
— Benjamin PERET

Collage by Franklin Rosemont
Real Heroes

W. E. B. DuBois

Du Bois saw the importance of history, economics, sociology, and other fields of study to understand the role of the Negro people. He believed that without this understanding, it was impossible to achieve a clear, consistent, and comprehensive view of American civilization as a whole. He insisted that only a Negro leader could do this injustice; it was done unjustly to the Negro people, to strike a great blow against a clear view of Western Civilization as a whole. (C. L. R. James)

Race and class; an American, a Negro; the centrality of race. These ideas have haunted and befuddled both American history and American Marxism. W. E. B. Du Bois spent his entire adult life writing about this subject; he wrote as a scholar, as an activist, and as a revolutionary. Over his long life, he changed in response to vast developments in world imperialism and to the necessity of black folks to react and understand the world. And the world did not make that task easy. White civilization has developed the most complete and thorough rationalization of its empires that the world has ever seen. Du Bois commented in *Darkwater* in 1920: “Here is a civilization that has boasted much. Neither Roman nor Arab, Greek nor Egyptian, Persian nor Mongol ever took himself and his own perfection with such disconcerting seriousness as the modern white man. We whose shame, humiliation, and deep insult his aggrandizement so often involved were never deceived. We looked at him clearly, with world-old eyes, and saw simply a human thing, weak and pitiable and cruel, even as we are and were.”

Paul Richards

To study Du Bois’s writings, then, is to attempt to break through these rationalizations. ... He began as a social scientist trained in the best institutions of learning that bourgeois society had to offer; by the 1930s he had embraced Marxism in all its essentials. The key to this transformation was his striving to uplift black folks and to achieve a “clear view of Western Civilization as a whole.”

* * *

Northern labor’s position toward the outcome pivoted on the question of land and the “American Assumption.” To the extent that northern urban labor had organized, it was given leadership by the skilled upper segments of the working class. For the bulk of such laborers, solidarity with southern black labor was not perceived as a possible solution to their problems; rather, they sought themselves to become small enterprises (as many did via craftsmanship) or to gain access to farm land. In this perspective the workers’ devotion to their “particularistic grievances,” which included their real and feared underbidding by black labor and potential monopolization of free land by emancipated blacks, brought them to battle capital on purely economic grounds while still remaining blind to the larger social issues. The National Labor Union gave organizational expression to these tendencies by forcing blacks to form a separate unit, the Colored Nation-

al Labor Union, in 1869. As Du Bois put it, northern labor had evidently placed the question of black labor’s problems below its own interests. At the same time, the plight of the newer unskilled white workers competing with blacks for jobs made the situation of the working class as a whole virtually prohibitive to trans-
racial unity.

The resulting Compromise of 1876 and the final withdrawal of the Federal troops had implications for the whole nation and every class grouping. For northern capital it meant firm allies in the South in the form of New Southern capitalists and landlords. The slave system was smashed and the former rulers became little more than a comprador class which followed the lead and interests of northern capital. For the abolition democracy, the compromise was the defeat of their belief in an equal, free, and educated work force in the South. Blacks were never given ownership of the land on which they had worked as slaves for centuries. Instead, they were tied by debt peonage to work the crops and land of others for as little as would minimally keep them alive. Their oppression was doubled by political disfranchisement and unequal educational and social opportunities.
The new literacy clauses and property qualifications on voting in the South worked to the detriment of the white laborers. In a larger sense, they had lost access to the only social experiment in the United States in which their class had acted in political and economic spheres in its own interest. Nevertheless the upper layers of the southern white working class gained some recognition and greater participation in economic and political life by means of a “coalition” with northern and southern upper-class elements at the expense of the disfranchisement and peonage of blacks. In the wake of the smashing defeat and the new coalition along racial lines, hopes for a class-conscious movement in the southern states collapsed.

The implications of the Compromise of 1876 were just as grave for northern labor. In turning away from political involvement for labor as a class in the outcome in the South, northern workers lost their fullest opportunity to develop class-conscious organization rather than thinly distributed privileged gains through economic organizations such as the American Federation of Labor. In spite of their own sharp struggles against their immediate exploitors, white labor acquiesced to racial oppression of blacks in the South as necessary for “stability” and “prosperity.” In the future, radical movements would pay dearly for this defeat and the compromise it brought, and the recognition of black labor as the center of the problem of American labor would become prerequisite to a fully developed class-conscious movement.

Black Reconstruction is a social history of the process which began the most important phase of the American quest for world domination. Du Bois placed the race question in the center of his story. While the worldwide ramifications of the failure of labor had been outlined in The Negro in 1915, it was not until 1939 and his book Black Folk, Then and Now that Du Bois returned to the world scene in an effort to expand his exposition of the centrality of black people to Western civilization. While this book covered the same ground as The Negro, it was entirely rewritten to take in the recent findings of anthropology and Du Bois’s fully developed world view. In 1939 the West still insisted that Africa had no history, so Du Bois wrote Black Folk, Then and Now to counter this misconception. Whereas in his earlier work The Negro he had spent a great deal of effort in simply describing the varied cultural life and history of Africa, Du Bois now undertook to accompany this description with an analysis of how Western capitalism had distorted the economy and folkways and monopolized the land of black people the world over. Black Folk, Then and Now included a brief discussion of slavery, emancipation, and Reconstruction in the US in which Du Bois capsulized his argument in Black Reconstruction.

Dusk of Dawn, published in 1940, was yet another attempt by Du Bois to extend his analysis of Western civilization. In this book he tried to place his own life into the movement of history as he had come to conceptualize it. He traced the development of his concept of race through the twenty-two years of his life and the immense changes that had occurred in the world. He felt that the meaning of his own life was not in what he had accomplished, but rather in how his life exemplified the age in which he lived. For instance, with his education at Harvard and the University of Berlin, Du Bois was not prepared to comprehend the world of the 1890s and 1900s. Yet the consensus of the age, the ideal of progress and the promise of bourgeois civilization, faded in his mind, as well as in the minds of so many other black thinkers, as the quest of imperialism for colonies became increasingly brutal and obvious, and as racism intensified in an increasingly educated world. In Du Bois’s chapter “Science and Empire,” he discusses how the world forced him to abandon the pretenses of modern social science to find social counterparts of natural laws that applied to social life. For in the oppressive world of black America, the only social law was historical change and the main truth was the imperative struggle to survive. Du Bois in his way, and others in so many different ways, moved toward the understanding that racism was no mere accident but a foundation stone of Western civilization.


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**Che Guevara**

Joel Sorman

In 1890 Paul, his wife, their sons Ivan, Alexander, Mieht and Anton and daughter Masha posed for a photograph in front of their home on Sandovo-Kudrinshaya Street in Moscow. These were the Chekhovs. Anton was a doctor like Che Guevara whom he also resembled. Chekhov was gentle, his passion aborted by humor and pathos; Che led a strange bourgeois life in mountains, forests and palace chambers in the interests of a continent’s liberation. It’s unjust to call his life bourgeois, though Chekhov’s sons Two bourgeois doctors each killed by a bacillus, coughing blood over two continents. 

*Italy Keats made an awkward bow; Pechorin, in the Caucasus, was political in his scepticism, and a fatalist like Che and all revolutionaries; Mignon, the romantic nationalist; Mozart the freemason: a tradition of sensual and moral chaos. Is the revolution going to be great? Will it be as deliberate and dignified as a mask? Ask Che at Vallegrande. They only possess his body.*

An attitude is something each of us can assume. This is all the past. There were revolutions in the past. Che is part of the past. The sense in which this past exists is experience. Experience is the future. All that’s left is the present.

From Vol. 3, No. 2 (March-April 1969)
C. Wright Mills

*The Power Elite* disclosed to him the goal toward which (under the celebration of affluence and Growth) one giant civilization was proceeding at accelerated pace — the cremation of the world. At the center of power he found, not so much greed or active evil, but emptiness, an emptiness which he named "crackpot realism" or "organized irresponsibility" — the rational, technologically expert, bureaucratically intricate realism of interest and inertia, without a higher will or directive reason. The compulsive drift toward war was sustained and justified by a permanent war economy, a "military metaphysic," according to which all other human priorities were subordinated to "a military definition of reality" and a permanent defensive ideology.

This ideology (he challenged his fellow intellectuals in the West) was sustained by their "default." Stricken by the disillusionments of the thirties and forties, the older generation projected their own sense of defeat into the future, where they could see only images of "sociological horror." Anticommunism in the West served often as the excuse for the abnegation of all responsibilities, all except peripheral defensive actions. Step by step they had opted for accommodations with the status quo, private self-immolations; some, indeed, had become celebrants of the general drift of negation. Among the younger generation he found too many of the "young complacents" — men and women who had surrendered (and without a struggle) their responsibilities into the hands of the bureaucracies of Government and business, serving simply as their "hired men."

It was not that Mills became "anti-American," or that he "sided" with the Communists against the West. It was exactly this trivial but compulsive vicious circle of ideology from which he sought to break free. He was, in an old sense, a socialist, and he sometimes referred to himself as a "Wobbly." The Wobblies (whose tendency was syndicalist) never fell into that most dangerous error which supposes that socialist endeavor achieves some consummation in State Power, whether "workers" or "People's Democratic" or Fabian-constitutionalist or however qualified. And Mills's study of Weber, Sorel, Simmel, Mosca, and Michels had served to confirm in his mind the wisdom which had come instinctively to the transport workers and lumberjacks of the old IWW. His notion of socialism entailed the decomposition of State Power.

E. P. THOMPSON

From "C. Wright Mills: The Responsible Craftsman," Vol. 13, No. 4 (July-August 1979)
Herbert Marcuse

If today unreason has itself become Reason, it is so only as the Reason of domination. Thus it remains the Reason of exploitation and repression—even when the ruled cooperate with it. And everywhere there are still those who protest, who rebel, who fight. Even in the society of abundance they are there: the young—those who have not yet forgotten how to see and hear and think, who have not yet abdicated; and those who are still being sacrificed to abundance and who are painfully learning how to see, hear and think. For them is the Eighteenth Brumaire written, for them it is not obsolete.

HERBERT MARCUSE

From "Epilogue to the New German Edition of Marx’s 18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon," Vol. 3, No. 4 (July-August 1969)

Your role in this process has been an ambiguous one. You bring the message of liberation, but another, older message as well. One can draw from you a justification for elitism, vanguardism, contempt for those we claim to want to liberate. Radicals reading you have drawn encouragement for their remoteness from real needs and fears, abstract intellectualism, being external, putting theory ahead of reality, and their insistence on the “objective” (?) historical meaning of people’s acts. After all, of all your writings, One-Dimensional Man and “Repressive Tolerance” are said to be the most widely read among activists. In helping us to get clear about our situation, they maintain the influence over us of some of our worst patterns of thought and feeling and action. But there is also the message of Eros and Civilization and An Essay on Liberation. To take the idea of liberation seriously means criticizing the other side of Marcuse and its influence. It means letting go of thought and politics as we know them and turning inward to face what we find there. Yes, you’ve given us tools and ideas for that, for becoming new men and women.

Is it too late in the day to ask this of the New Left? Has America’s resistance to change and resort to repression made my demand foolish? After all, Herbert, if I’ve explained your limitations by the historical situation, mustn’t I do the same with the movement? Does it harden as America hardens?

Nonsense. The historical situation makes demands and sets limits, but it certainly doesn’t decide how people must respond. You, for example, managed to keep alive a sense of opposition and liberation at the worst times, so that you have vital things to say to us today. The New Left too can rise to the full height permitted and demanded by our historical situation. Growing out of totalitarian America it can be a movement for liberation. After all, something new and profound is happening in America. Children seem to be growing up freer, more whole, less cowed than I was. A spontaneous coming together in reaction to all the oppressive forces I’ve discussed. Nourished by new currents, oppressed in new ways, the movement need not merely reinstate doctrinaire and external radical politics. Will it break into the open? The French revolution was tremendously encouraging. The Women’s Liberation movement seems to be growing. And much of the original liberating impulse remains in local SDS chapters. Time will tell. Am I forced to end with a characteristic Marcusean question mark?

RON ARONSON

C. L. R. James

Martin Glaberman

James was born in 1901 in Trinidad. His early interests were cricket, which he played and reported, and independence. He was the first to put forward in the West Indies the demand for complete self-government and has the status there of a founding father of independence. In the early '30s he wrote a biography of Captain Cipriani, a Trinidadian labor leader, and a pamphlet published in London, The Case for West Indian Self-Government.

In 1932 he moved to England, where he reported cricket for the then Manchester Guardian and became heavily involved in Marxist politics. He participated in the Independent Labour Party and joined the Trotskyist movement. It was during these years that he wrote his play (in which both he and Paul Robeson appeared on the London stage), a novel, and some short fiction. But some major works of the same period began to indicate the road ahead. He wrote The Black Jacobins, the history of the San Domingo revolution which established Haiti as an independent nation; he wrote World Revolution, a study of the rise and fall of the Comintern; and he translated into English Boris Souvarine's biography of Stalin. Theoretically and historically, he was fully immersed in both the industrial and the underdeveloped world.

In the middle '30s, George Padmore, who later became adviser to Nkrumah after the achievement of Ghanaian independence, formed the International African Service Bureau. Padmore was a West Indian whom James had known since childhood. James became editor of the group's periodical. A handful of black men maintained the African Bureau as the only center for the struggle for the independence of Africa through the '30s and '40s. Most of them were West Indians, but included in their number were Jomo Kenyatta and, later, Kwame Nkrumah.

In 1938 James came to the United States on a lecture tour and stayed for fifteen years. He had discussions with Trotsky in Mexico on the problems of American blacks and participated in the Trotskyist movement in the US. By the outbreak of World War II, however, the Marxist movement in general and the Trotskyist movement in particular was a shambles. Stalinism had descended to the barbarism of the Moscow trials and the Stalin-Hitler pact. Trotskyism had proved totally inadequate in understanding what was happening to the world. It was a period of crisis in the Marxist movement around the world, a period of defections and defeats.

James embarked on the task of reconstructing a viable Marxism adequate to the needs of the times. In this I think it is possible to see what his particular history and background contributed. Coming from a colonial country that had yet to make its history, James had escaped the deep-rooted pessimism of the European intellectuals who had suffered a generation of defeats culminating in slave-labor camps and death camps. At the same time, he had been thoroughly immersed in both the history and experience of the industrial world and of the Marxist movement.

Soviet bloc as well as in Western Europe, in the stage of the working class and working-class organization as well as the stage of capitalist technology and capitalist organization. That is, Marxism had to be a totality based on historical necessity or it became fragmented into a series of particular empirical analyses based on historical or national accident. (The latter development is richly illustrated by the French philosopher Louis Althusser.)

What characterizes the theory of state capitalism is its dialectical unity. There are other theories of state capitalism, but they are not theories of capitalist society; rather, they are theories of Russian society. There are other theories of state capitalism (or close to it) which document the growing statification of western capitalism but they do not document the growing revolutionary capacity of the industrial working class. In fact most theories of statification tend to assume the cooptation of the workers as a consequence.

Basing himself on the closest study, both of the real working class in the US and of the dialectical method, James was able to foresee, even if in abstract form, the new forms that were emerging. In 1948 he wrote in Notes on Dialectics: "It is obvious that the conflict of the proletariat is between itself as object and itself as consciousness, its party. The party has a dialectical development of its own. The solution of the conflict is the fundamental abolition of this division. The million in the CP in France, the 2½ millions in Italy, their domination of the Union movement, all this shows that the proletariat wants to abolish this distinction which is another form of the capitalistic division between intellectual and manual labor. The revolutionary party of this epoch will be organized labor itself and the revolutionary petty-bourgeoisie. The abolition of capital and the abolition of the distinction between the proletariat as object and proletariat as consciousness will be one and the same process. That is our new notion and it is with those eyes that we examine what the proletariat is in actuality" (pp. 46-47, emphasis in original).

"Hegel had followed his system to the end and established the faculty of thought (through his World-Spirit) as the moving principle of the Universe. Under this banner he had linked being and knowing. And he had made thought free, creative, revolutionary (but only for a few philosophers). Marxism followed him.
and established human labor as the moving principle of human society. Under this banner Marx linked being and knowing, and made labor and therefore thought, free, creative, revolutionary, for all mankind. Both in their ways abolished the contradiction between being and knowing. Now if the party is the knowing of the proletariat, then the coming of age of the proletariat means the abolition of the party. That is our new Universal, stated in its boldest and most abstract form ...” (p. 150).

Eight years before the event, the form of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 (and of the French Revolution of 1968 after it) is predicted, not as a matter of desire (as in the case of the council communists) but as a matter of dialectical development rooted in history.

From this, from the belief in the inherent revolutionary capacity of the modern working class, stems the fundamentally democratic nature of the theory of state capitalism. It is antivanguard, anti-elite not simply because participatory democracy is nicer than manipulation but because that is where the proletariat has reached. These theoretical conceptions and James’s own experience as a colonial also contributed to his breakthrough on the theory of black liberation. The movement in the US in the ’30s and ’40s was sunk in the quagmire of “black and white, unite and fight.” In practice that denied the revolutionary capacity of black people and subordinated the black struggle to the working-class struggle for socialism. James pressed for a reversal of that view. As early as his discussions with Trotsky in 1938 he saw the independent validity of the struggle of black Americans and its integral part in the struggle for socialism.

In 1952 James was expelled from the United States. (He has since been permitted to return.) He left behind a body of ideas and a body of work which had become a total Marxist viewpoint. For most of the years that followed he lived in England. But on two occasions he returned to Trinidad. On the first occasion he became editor of The Nation and secretary of the Federal West Indian Labour Party and participated with the People’s National Movement (PNM) in the achievement of independence from Britain. Two developments brought that collaboration to an end. One was the defeat of Federation (the unification of the small new nations of the Caribbean) by the narrow manipulations of the middle-class politi-

cians of independence. The other was the turn of Eric Williams, prime minister of Trinidad, from an independent course of collaboration with American imperialism. James left Trinidad again in 1961.

In 1967 James returned to the West Indies to report international-test cricket. When he set foot on Trinidad, Dr. Williams put him under house arrest in an early use of the powers with which he is now attempting to destroy the anti-imperialist movement in Trinidad. The resulting outcry led to the formation by James of the Workers and Farmers Party which challenged Williams’s rule. After its defeat in 1967, James again returned to England. Two of the leaders of that party, the Indian leader Maharaj, and the head of the oil workers’ union, Weekes, have this year been jailed by Williams.

The political dimensions of James’s Marxism are extended by his writings on art, sport, and literature. Involved are several factors, in particular a respect for the audience as a significant factor in the development of any art. But this is not understood in any shallow populist sense. There is maintained at the same time a fundamental appreciation of the role of the artist as an individual of genius and especially his usefulness in understanding society, in telling us things about ourselves that formal social science cannot illuminate.

From “Introduction” to special C. L. R. James issue, Vol. 4, No. 4 (May 1970)

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**WHEN ONE LOOKS BACK OVER THE LAST TWENTY YEARS TO THOSE WHO ARE MOST FAR-SIGHTED, WHO FIRST BEGAN TO TEASE OUT THE MUDGEE OF IDEOLOGY IN OUR TIMES, WHO WERE AT THE SAME TIME MARXIST WITH A HARD THEORETICAL BASIS, & CLOSE STUDENTS OF SOCIETY, HUMANISTS WITH A TREMENDOUS RESPONSE TO AND UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN CULTURE, COMRADE JAMES IS ONE OF THE FIRST ONE THINKS OF.**

E.P. THOMPSON
Edward Carpenter

Sheila Rowbotham

The pub at Millthorpe, near Sheffield, was deserted with a "For Sale" notice outside when I went there with friends on a grey March day in 1976. Just down the road there was "Carpenter House," where Edward Carpenter had lived from the early 1880s until he moved to Guildford in 1922.

Visiting Millthorpe, Dronfield, and Totley was a geographical locating of a group of radicals, socialists, and feminists who had lived in the area or visited while Carpenter was there. I have been and still am struggling with the more complicated social, political, and personal placing of this group. They have had a curiously persistent fascination for me ever since I read a review of a biography of Havelock Ellis by Arthur Calder-Marshall when I was in my teens in the late 1950s. Carpenter, socialist and writer on sexual liberation, feminism, and homosexuality; Ellis, pioneer sex psychologist; and Olive Schreiner, the South African feminist author of Story of an African Farm, have all become important to me at different times — rather like the kind of closeness you have with old friends. There is the waxing and waning of intimacy with the security of knowing they are always around. The friendship is getting on for being a twenty-year relationship, which is longer than with any of my real friends.

I've slowly introduced myself to more and more of their circle until it has become like having an address book of the past. So as I walked on that foggy March day down the road to Millthorpe I had to pinch myself to remember that I wasn't going to find them sitting there. It is one of the sadnesses of history for me — this loving intimacy with ghosts.

... It was the book review which had started the whole process. I was certainly interested in sex, as I was in ecstasy and history, though unsure quite what it was. Perhaps this book would explain. So I purchased Ellis and the business of getting the book about him with great resolve. My mother, already accustomed to strange requests, bought me the biography for my sixteenth birthday. She did not know who Havelock Ellis was, but a friend of hers did, and the friend let out a squeal of horror at my mother's innocence in buying me such a dirty book. My
mother was a stubborn and thwarted lover of freedom and gave me Calder-Marshall's *Havelock Ellis* nonetheless. I read it, as I read everything then, searching for a total explanation of myself, life, death, and the universe.

In retrospect it is not a very good biography of Ellis, but at the time it was revelatory. There were funny things in it about the relations between mothers and sons, the connections between urination and sexual pleasure, about infant sexuality, and about lesbianism. It was the first time I realized that there was a psychological view of the world. Perhaps it seems remarkable that so many years after Freud it was possible to grow up in the English small-business northern middle-class innocent of Oedipus. But it was so. Later I found a paperback edition of Ellis's *Psychology of Sex* and laboriously toiled through it in some bewilderment.

The picture of Olive Schreiner when she met Ellis was recognizable. There was a mixture of physical defiance and submission. You could feel her body pressing against her formal Victorian clothes, with no choice but to accept this outer confinement. When I read about her I felt close to her. Perhaps it was her loneliness and spiritual travail, or her masochism or her idealism, or her vulnerability, or her will—I wonder. When I read *Story of an African Farm* I remember feeling floods of adolescent identification. Out there long ago and far away some one had felt like me and escaped. There must be others. Somewhere over the rainbow I might meet them...

You are fickle at that age, and I deserted Ellis and Schreiner for Kerouac, Ginsberg, and the Beats. I suppose I was rebelling by then rather than escaping because sixteen to seventeen is an eternity of a year, and the whole world changed when I left school. From seventeen to nineteen I was too busy to remember Ellis and Schreiner, and by the last year at university I was apparently matter of fact, settling the world as a Marxist, shedding the romantic chrysalis of ecstasy, but tending also toward dialectical loops of passion in the midst of order.

Edward Carpenter I had yet to meet, really. He hadn't registered at all. But I was beginning to read about the history of the socialist movement. Initially this was the way I could understand Marxism: as a relationship between me and people in the past. I wanted to know how all these people came to their ideas and what happened to them when they acted upon them. It's a terrible way to think; it means you are never satisfied.

From reading about Carpenter I knew there had once been a strange kind of socialism which had been different from that of the Bolsheviks. But that was as far as it went. I drew back from the more personal part of Edward Carpenter's life out of a kind of shyness—a restraint, I've come to recognize, on my desire to communicate immediately and directly all at once. It is partly a puritan suspicion of whatever most delights me; a fear of my own fascinations. It is also some knowingness about experiences I cannot stretch toward. Whatever the reason, I felt I had no business to be there peeping and prying...

Carpenter came from an upper-middle-class family in Brighton. His father was radical in politics and Edward Carpenter was brought up with the tolerant tenets of Broad Church Anglicanism. Instead of consenting to a conventional future, he left a safe position as a curate in Cambridge to go and teach in University Extension in the early 1870s. Carpenter had already questioned some aspects of Victorian society while he was still at university. He moved in radical and feminist circles, was influenced by republicanism, and was troubled by class conflict, by the Commune, and by the First International. Undoubtedly aware of the pressure for women's colleges at Cambridge, he was a believer in higher education for women on a wider scale. Like other radicals of his day, Carpenter was interested in land nationalization. But most immediately, Carpenter was unhappy about the social relations of people of his class. As a homosexual he was forced by the restraints of Victorian society to conceal his feelings. In the writing of Walt Whitman he felt a recognition of open, loving friendships. Carpenter wanted not just a political democracy but a personal democracy of feeling.

** Carpenter's eclectic quest made his thought something of a lucky-dip. It is easier to pull bits out than to understand the connections. But his struggle to make these connections was not merely theoretical; it was his whole life. The way he lived was a demonstration of what he thought, and the two are inseparable. It was his cultural stance, rather than his logic, that accounted for the considerable influence he enjoyed in his day. In the radical and socialist milieu that he represented, people were unhappy in capitalist society not only because things were unequal but because people were cut off from one another and from their own physical natures. His influence was at its height in the period before the First World War. It was international, going far beyond Yorkshire, Lancashire, and the Midlands. He was still read and discussed in the 1920s; but already in the 1930s, when his friends produced a collection of essays in his memory, his writing and ideas appeared a little dated. In the socialist movement he was remembered certainly until the Second World War, and the hymn-like strains of "England Arise" wafted around labor halls and pubs for some years after. I have not heard it since the mid-1960s, when the Young Communist League used to meet in the Dolphin pub at Kings Cross and "England Arise" could be heard along with the "Internationale" and folk songs.

I have become more and more curious about the diversity of Carpenter's influence, and also about the process by which it was dissipated. Finding out about Carpenter—and what became of his attempt to connect personal and sexual relationships and feelings to the struggle to change the external world—is part of a much wider search for a broken revolutionary tradition. I keep finding ways in which the old tradition is relevant to the feminist movement, to sexual politics, and to the evident weaknesses in our understanding of socialism. For instance, I've come across him and Ellis in reading about birth control and feminism; in the early twentieth century Carpenter helped find the British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology, and a determined young feminist member called Stella Browne gave a talk in 1915 on women's sexuality. Stella Browne, a friend of the American Margaret Sanger, was a campaigner for birth control and abortion in Britain who tried to connect women's sexual self-determination with ideas of workers' control. Both Ellis and Carpenter were read by other young radicals in Greenwich Village who were trying to live by a new morality. In the early twentieth century there was—however implicit—a connection between sexual and personal life and socialism. This connection became more remote after the First World War.

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be a socialist in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, before the Bolsheviks and before the Labour Party. I want to know what became of the desire to transform all aspects of relationships, and the preoccupation with living the new life in the present as well as the future. I want to learn about the emphasis on a revolutionary culture, that lost practice of socialism which still carried a connection between personal life and external change.

I can see that it was an idealist socialism, often denying the material reality of class and sex and obscuring conflict. It was a romantic socialism, nurturing the dream but having no strategy for its implementation. It was a gullible socialism, too ready to believe that the capitalist state was neutral and that if you waited long enough the Labour Party would bring you socialism. Where from indeed? It grew complacent in old age and took office, or it was forced into bizarre nooks and communes making socialism in one parish. It was fearful of power, so accepted it on the terms of the governors; or it fled. When anything nasty came along like fascism or Stalinism it did not know how to fight them or what to do. So it died a forgotten archaism, merely the occasion for an easy joke. All those voices raised in

"The long long night is over . . .
Arise O England for the day is here."

But the day wasn't and isn't; Carpenter would still be complaining we're being a long time about it. He and his friends may have become a little odd as the years went by. When political hopes splinter and part company the fragments appear distorted.

The rediscovery of Carpenter's socialism is nonetheless a reminder that many of our present concerns have a past. The old socialists sought not just redistribution of wealth, or a change in the ownership of production, not even just workers' control of production, but a transformation of all human relationships. Though forced into the cash nexus by capitalism, they realized that not all of what they wanted could be reduced to economics. They were against not only exploitation but the waste of human creative capacity which is the result of exploitation. So they did not dismiss artistic endeavor: they needed not only justice but beauty too. Socialism was to release the creativity and artistry in everyone. It was to heal the breach between the heart, the body, and the mind.

So they did not think that economics or politics had a priority over art and culture. They were without a strategy, which makes them utopian; and the absence of a strategy made it easier for them to be absorbed into the gradualist politics of the Labour Party. However, it also meant they developed a practice which has an increasing relevance today as modern capitalism invades more and more the personal, domestic domain. They understood that political commitment is not just a matter of education or even of experience through agitation. They saw socialism as an inner transformation which meant change in the here and now. They sought this new life in the everyday: in their stress on the warmth of fellowship and comradeship, in their clothes and furnishings, and in a network of associations from cycling clubs to Socialist Sunday Schools which could sustain them through isolation, hardship, and despair.

Carpenter was not alone in his desire to be more open with others and to live more simply and directly, closer to the natural rhythms that were being destroyed by industry and the city. Others shared his hope that

People should endeavour (more than they do) to express and liberate their own real and deep-rooted needs and feelings. Then in doing so they will probably liberate and aid the expression of the lives of thousands of others; and so will have the pleasure of helping without the unpleasant sense of laying anyone under an obligation.

We are rediscovering in a faltering way some of the understandings of this broken socialist tradition. We are doing it not from nostalgia for a cosy past, nor from an archaism which would lift their politics intact, but because the present movement of capitalist society is pressing hard on our private consciousness, forcing intimacy into politics. Slowly and laboriously I can open my eyes and peer into that intense world of long ago with recognition.

From "In Search of Edward Carpenter," Vol. 14, No. 4 (July-August 1980)
Sylvia Pankhurst

Three women of the Pankhurst family dominated the struggle for women’s suffrage in Britain. Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst married into a family with a history of radical and suffrage agitation and moved toward the socialism of the Independent Labour Party in the 1890s. The Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU) was founded in her front room in 1903 with the slogan “Votes for Women.” Christabel, born 1880, her favored elder daughter, was her fiery lieutenant in the suffragettes’ war of broken windows, slashed paintings, and burnt-out churches as the Votes for Women agitation reached its crescendo.

Sylvia, born 1882, middle, less glamorous and less well-known daughter, broke, painfully, from her mother and sister. Between 1912 and 1922 she attempted to remake the once-intimate connections between socialism and feminism, not in the industrial North where the women’s suffrage movement began, but in proletarian London. Sylvia Pankhurst’s political progress took her from the drawing rooms of nineteenth century Manchester radicalism to the cramped streets of East London in the First World War, from suffrage to revolutionary socialism, from the circle of William Morris and Keir Hardie to polemics with Lenin and Gramsci. And that attempt to do justice to socialism and feminism was, and is, a precarious, painful, and continuing effort.

My interest, affection, it’s hard not to call it love, for Sylvia Pankhurst has grown over the last five years spent practicing as a doctor not half a mile from her old home in the Old Ford Road. East London is different now, studded with tower blocks and fenced with corrugated iron. But curiously the same. Still solidly proletarian, still the sweatshops and street-fights and rent strikes and plenty of old lady patients who remember “our Sylvia” with a twinkle. Still the migrants, speaking Bangla Deshi rather than Yiddish, still the dole queues, longer now than ever. And still a revolutionary socialist minority, of which I’m part, spouting at street corners, dishing out leaflets, spreading union membership, occupying hospitals due for closure. Sometimes I feel Sylvia’s presence so sharply, it’s like a political ghost leaning over my shoulder to look with anger and compassion at the wheezy infants and coop-ed-up young mothers and panicky grannies who live in the council blocks [public housing — eds.] the Labour Council has had the nerve to name after Shelley, Morris, and Dickens.

DAVID WIDGERY

From “Sylvia Pankhurst: Pioneer of Working Class Feminism,” Vol. 13, No. 2 (March-April 1979)
Prefigurative Communism

Carl Boggs

A conspicuous deficiency of the Marxist tradition has been the failure to produce a theory of the state and political action that could furnish the basis of a democratic and nonauthoritarian revolutionary process. The two most widely tested strategies for advancing revolutionary goals — Leninism and structural reformism — provide no real alternative to the bureaucratic hierarchy, the power of the centralized state, and the social division of labor characteristic of bourgeois society. While Leninism did furnish a mechanism for overturning traditional structures, it has reproduced within the party-state a bureaucratic centralism that retards progress toward socialism. And structural reformism, as expressed in traditional social democracy and the Communist parties of the advanced capitalist societies, has led to the institutionalization of working-class politics into bourgeois electoral, judicial, and administrative structures. Both strategies have actually reinforced the growth of modern bureaucratic capitalism through their obsession with state authority, "efficiency," and discipline.

Because these models lack a conception of the particular socialist forms that would replace the established models of domination, and since both mirror and even extend some of the most repressive features of the bureaucratic state, they are never really able to escape the confines of bourgeois politics. Thus "Marxism-Leninism" and social democracy, which in the US have been the main strategic responses to the disintegration of the New Left, are actually two sides of the same coin. Despite their ideological contrasts, they rest upon many of the same theoretical (and even programmatic) assumptions.

It would be easy to attribute this phenomenon to the temporary aberrations of "Stalinism" and "revisionism," but the problem has deeper roots. It stems from the failure of Marxism to spell out the process of transition. Note that Marx thought communism on a world scale would appear organically and quite rapidly. One finds in Marx scarcely a hint of what forms, methods, and types of leadership would give shape to the unfolding socialist order; whatever strategic directions can be unraveled from his work are ambiguous and often inconsistent. At times he seemed to indicate that socialist transformation would resemble the passage from feudalism to capitalism, to the extent that changes in civil society would necessarily precede, and anticipate, the actual transfer of political power — but he did not set out to conceptualize this process or take up the problem of strategy.

The crude determinism that overtook European Marxism in the period between Marx's death and World War I did little to clarify this task. The presumed mechanics of capitalist development undercut the need for a conscious scheme of transition; "crisis," collapse, breakdown — these fatalistic notions propelled Marxism toward the most naive faith in progress. Since that capitalism was expected to disappear through its own contradictions (the falling rate of profit, crises of overproduction, concentration of wealth, immiserization of the proletariat), the transformative process was never viewed as problematic. The ends and methods of socialist revolution were assumed to be determined by the logic of capitalism itself, as automatic mechanisms that sidestepped the issue of political strategy and subjective intervention. Obstacles that stood in the way of this historical advance toward socialism — bureaucratic domination, the social division of labor, lack of mass socialist consciousness — were viewed as merely reflections of an outmoded production system. Attempts to confront such obstacles directly, or to specify the actual character of the transition, were dismissed as exercises in utopian speculation.

Leninism overcame this strategic paralysis, but its "solution" was an authoritarian and power-oriented model that only further repressed the democratic and self-emancipatory side of Marxism. In the past century, the most direct attack on statist Marxism has come from what might be called the prefigurative tradition, which begins with the nineteenth-century anarchists and includes the syndicalists, council communists, and the New Left. By "prefigurative" I mean the embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal. Developing mainly outside Marxism, it produced a critique of bureaucratic domination and a vision of revolutionary democracy that Marxism generally lacked. Yet, wherever it was not destroyed by the bourgeois state or by organized Marxist parties, it fell prey to its own spontaneism, or wound up absorbed into established trade-union party, and state institutions. These historical limitations, along with a powerful critique of Leninism and social democracy, are the legacy of prefigurative radicalism that commands renewed attention today.

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The idea of "collective ownership" remains a myth so long as the old forms of institutional control are not destroyed; the supersession of private management by state or "public" management poses only a superficial, abstract solution to the contradictions of capitalism. As Gorz puts it, "There is no such thing as communism without a communist life-style or 'culture'; but a communist life-style cannot be based upon the technology, institutions, and division of labor which derive from capitalism." Only when the workers themselves establish new participatory forms can alienated labor and subordination be eliminated. This transformation includes, but runs much deeper than, the problem of formal ownership — it penetrates to the level of factory hierarchy and authoritarianism, fragmentation of job skills, commodity production, and separation of mental and physical functions that grow out of the capitalist division of labor. These features, which are often thought to be necessary for
greater efficiency and productivity, can better be understood as a means of ensuring control of labor. The drive toward specialization and hierarchy comes not primarily from capital accumulation and technological development in the narrow sense, but from the need to create a bureaucratically organized and disciplined workforce.

Bureaucratization creates obstacles to revolutionary change that were only dimly foreseen by classical Marxism. The expansion of the public sphere and the convergence of state and corporate sectors has meant more centralized and total networks of power and, correspondingly, the erosion of popular democratic initiative. Bureaucratic logic, which enters every area of public existence, helps to enforce bourgeois ideological hegemony insofar as it diffuses a culture of organizational adaptation, submission, pragmatism, routine; it depoliticizes potential opposition by narrowing the range of political discourse, by institutionalizing alienation, and posing only "technical" solutions to problems. Once entrenched, bureaucracy tends to produce a rigidity that resists fundamental change. Marxist movements themselves have been repeatedly victimized by their own internal bureaucratization.

Yet this dynamic, even as it permeates new spheres of life, opens up breaches in the capitalist power structure; new points of vulnerability and new centers of resistance begin to appear. Not only production, but every aspect of social existence is brought into the class struggle. While prefigurative movements first appeared during the early stages of industrialization and bureaucratization, the explosion of popular insurgency in the 1960s -- the revolutionary Left in Western Europe, Japan, and elsewhere, the New Left, rank-and-file working-class struggles, oppositional movements in Eastern Europe -- demonstrated that they are still very much alive.

The institutional focus of prefigurative communism is small, local, collective organs of popular control -- factory councils, soviets, neighborhood assemblies, revolutionary action committees, affinity groups -- that seek to democratize and reinvigorate revolutionary politics. Generally an outgrowth of traditional structures that express some vague commitment to direct democracy (for example, the peasant collectives in Russia, China, and Spain, the shop-stewards organization in Britain, the trade-union grievance committees in Italy and France), they often become radicalized at times of crisis and produce broader revolutionary forms. The Paris Commune, the Russian and Chinese Revolutions, the Hungarian Revolutions of 1919 and 1956, the Spanish upheaval of 1936-39, the Vietnamese Revolution, and the 1968 Revolt in France were all catalyzed by extensive networks of "dual power."

Such groups, generally called councils, can generate a leadership organically rooted in the local workplaces and communities that is directly accountable to the population. They possess other advantages: for example, by collectivizing work and "management" functions, councils can more effectively combat the social division of labor; by emphasizing the transformation of social relations over instrumental power objectives, they can incorporate a wider range of issues, demands, and needs into popular struggles; by posing the question of ideological hegemony, they can furnish the context in which the masses would develop their intellectual and political potential -- where a sense of confidence, spirit, and creativity would begin to replace the fatalism, passivity, and submissiveness instilled by bourgeois authority; and, finally, by encouraging political involvement that is centered outside the dominant structures, the capacity to resist deradicalization can be greatly strengthened.

In the broadest sense, prefigurative structures can be viewed as a new source of political legitimacy, as a nucleus of a future socialist state. They would create an entirely new kind of politics, breaking down the division of labor between everyday life and political activity. As Cornelius Castoriadis suggests, "What is involved here is the de-professionalization of politics -- i.e., the abolition of politics as a special and separate sphere of activity -- and, conversely, the universal politicization of society, which means just that: the business of society becomes, quite literally, everybody's business."

The dilemmas of modern prefigurative movements came from the legacy of the entire prefigurative tradition, which in contrast to Leninism and structural reformism sought to affirm the actuality of revolutionary goals. In rejecting a vanguardism, they often ignored the state and the problem of power; in stressing the prefigurative side, they downplayed the task of organization. And like the organized Marxist movements, they ultimately failed to articulate a democratic socialist theory of transition. The instability and vulnerability of dual power necessitates rapid movement toward a broad system of nationwide revolutionary authority; without this, as history shows, local structures are unable to translate popular energies into a sustained movement that is both prefigurative and politically effective. What is required, and what the entire prefigurative strategy lacks, is a merging of spontaneous and the "external element," economics and politics, local democratic and state power struggles. But the recent experiences of radical movements in capitalist countries reflect a continued polarization between prefigurative and statist strategies that is harmful to such a possibility.

There have been attempts -- for example, in the Chinese Revolution -- to democratize Leninist vanguard strategy by combining the centralizing features of the revolutionary party with the localist elements of the prefigurative approach. Mao stressed the "national-popular" character of the party and the role of ideological struggle to counterbalance the primacy of the party-state. He envisaged a process rooted in grassroots structures of authority (e.g., revolutionary committees, communes) as well as the party itself. But the
Maoist alternative really constitutes a modification of classical Leninism rather than a new synthesis. Insofar as a fusion between Jacobin and prefigurative elements exists, the Jacobin side is clearly hegemonic, with the party-state directing the process of revolutionary transformation from above.

An alternative schema would reverse this relationship by asserting the prefigurative over the Jacobin. For the party is essentially an instrumental agency preoccupied with concrete political tasks rather than the cultural objectives of changing everyday life and abolishing the capitalist division of labor; it tends naturally to be an agency of domination rather than of prefiguration. Since emancipatory goals can be fully carried out only through local structures, it is these organs — rather than the party-state — that must shape the revolutionary process. Centralized structures would not be superimposed upon mass struggles, but would emerge out of these struggles as coordinating mechanisms. Only popular institutions in every sphere of daily existence, where democratic impulses can be most completely realized, can fight off the repressive incursions of bureaucratic centralism and activate collective involvement that is the life force of revolutionary practice.

From “Marxism, Prefigurative Communism, and the Problem of Workers' Control,” Vol. 11, No. 6 - Vol. 12, No. 1 (Nov. 1977-Feb. 1978)

American Radicalism Revisited

American Labor

Staughton Lynd and Harvey O'Connor

HONOR OUR DEAD

MURDERED by the Chicago Police for the Republican Steel Corporation on Memorial Day

Funeral Services

For Steel Union Martyrs at Eagles Hall, 9233 Houston Avenue

Thursday, June 3rd, at 2 P. M.

Stores Will Lie in State from 10 to 2 p.m. 9233 Houston Ave.

IN THE UNION JOIN THE PICKET LINE

For a Cause They Gave Their Lives For

STEEL WORKERS ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

Staughton Lynd:

I would like to say something about the kind of history we’re going to be doing here tonight. One of the songs from the 1930s is called “Talking Union,” and begins: “If you want to form a union, here is what you’ve got to do: You’ve got to talk to the fellows in the shop with you.” The song says that we all know from experience that organizing begins with talking. People talk together, then they act together. And after we act together we talk about what we did. We come back from the picket line to the union hall, and we evaluate our action. What happened? Sometimes, as you know, in a confused demonstration, each person sees only part of the action, and you have to wait until you’re all together again to be able to put those pieces together and be sure what really happened out there. What happened? Was it a success? Even if it was a success, how can we do it better next time? This kind of talk — talking together after an action about what that action meant — is history.

History is not something in books. History is people remembering together what they did. Everyone who has ever been in a strike or demonstration knows that the newspapers, even when they mean well, never tell it quite like it was. It’s the same way with history books. The point is that the people who know most about something are the people who personally experienced it, the people who can say, “I was there.” There are an awful lot of these
people — an awful lot of history — in this room tonight.

Now why are we doing this kind of history? One reason is this: I happen to be forty years old, halfway between the men and women in their sixties who built the CIO and the young people in their twenties who built the civil rights and peace movements in the 1960s. And maybe because I'm halfway between these two generations, I feel very deeply the anguish of the older people who can't quite explain to the younger people — often their own children — just what it was they experienced, and of the younger people who may know that their dads and moms were involved in putting together the CIO, but still can't quite explain to their folks the new type of movement they are into. And so young people grow up and leave a community like this one without ever really knowing the history — the tradition of struggle — of the community they are leaving.

I think we can't afford this particular kind of generation gap. We need to ask ourselves whether we can't find a definition of "what it means to be a worker" which includes both father and son — both the worker who is in the steel mill and the worker who is a teacher in school. We need to ask whether there is a definition of popular struggle broad enough to include both a student strike and a work stoppage — both a sit-down strike in a plant and the occupation of a building in a university. A kid who is thrown out of school for taking part in a peace demonstration and a worker who is canned for taking part in a wildcat have a great deal in common, I think.

Another reason that we need this kind of history is that labor is stirring again. Once again rank-and-file unionists are rejecting the so-called statesmanship of labor leaders. Once again idealistic young people are leaving the colleges and trying to lend a hand. Once again unemployment is rising and real wages are going down, so that working men and women feel that their backs are to the wall and that they're struggling simply to keep what they already have. Once again the president of the United States is using troops as strike breakers. Once again working men on strike have determined that there is a higher law than a court injunction and that the human rights to a living wage and a steady job are superior to all property rights. Once again the word has gone out to organize the unorganized.

Yesterday afternoon, not a fifteen-minute drive from here, I attended a meeting of working people, mostly older women, at Saint Margaret's Hospital in Hammond. Their average wage last year was $3,187 — $1,900 less than the average in Lake County hospitals, which itself isn't enough to live on. They want a union, they face an injunction, and they will probably go on strike. Once again facts like these kindle both an indignation and a spirit of solidarity, so that we begin once more to see workers in one industry on the picket lines of another.

And once again ordinary men and women begin to wonder why the coal and the oil and the open hearths should be sources of profit for men of power whom none of us have elected, or why schools are not better in a county of wealthy steel mills, or why some men of sixty work midnight shifts while others give dictation in air-conditioned offices. In so many ways the problems of the '30s, the spirit of the '30s, and even the songs of the '30s are with us again.

And so our forum asks the questions: "What was it that led four million persons to join the CIO and half a million to stage sit-down strikes in 1936-37? Why did that militancy fade away so quickly? How did rank-and-file groupings try to keep that militancy alive? What can we do to revive that militancy today?"

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Steel Workers Attention!

"The Company Union Is Illegal!"

Such is the advice of the Company Union Lawyer to Employee Representatives of the United States Steel Corporation. As has the United States which has no place in civilized America is declared officially dead be its makers.

The Steel Workers' Union Drive Has Killed the Company Union Now What?

The Forward March of Industrial Union for Steel Workers' Economic Security is on No Power in America Can Stop It

But no one in Hill Tribe is the flag of the Land part that once the amalgamated association of iron, steel and tin workers of North America is the soul. I join and for Steel Workers in the Country.

JOIN THIS UNION
JOIN THE FORWARD MARCH
STEEL WORKERS ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

Harvey O'Connor:
I really did like the way you started off this meeting with song. It reminded me that when I was a younger working in the logging camps of western Washington, I'd come to Seattle occasionally and go down the Skid Road to the Wobbly Hall, and our meetings there were started with song. Song was the great thing that cemented the IWW together. Wherever you had a Wobbly Hall you had people singing and enjoying themselves, and that song "Solidarity Forever" was of course a Wobblen song from way back: 1917-19, around those years. In the words of that song was condensed the philosophy of that organization. Later, of course, "Solidarity Forever" was adopted by the CIO as their official song, and in the Oil Workers it's the same.

But I'm here to tell you about the early days of the Rank-and-File Movement in the Steel Workers Union in Pittsburgh. I lived in Pittsburgh from 1930 to 1937, and it was one of my unforgettable experiences to have lived in Western Pennsylvania at the depth of the Depression. I suppose the Depression was worse in the steel mills than in any other industry, and was certainly at its worst in western Pennsylvania. I remember we lived on a hilltop in Pittsburgh, and the natives used to tell me you could see Pittsburgh for the first time in history. Usually, you know, it was bloated out with smog and smoke, but during the Depression not a mill was running. I would go out as a labor newspaperman to steel towns such as Duquesne and Homestead up and down the Allegheny, Monongahela, and Ohio Rivers. And I can never forget, at Homestead, good old Carnegie Steel, "the friend of the steel workers." The mills were shut down and there was no Social Security in those days, folks; there were no unemployment benefits; there was no nothin'. Except Carnegie Steel every Saturday had baskets for its employees. (If you could call them employees any more: I mean they didn't have no jobs.) There'd be a lot of moldy old bread and some sour old bacon and some flour with maggots in it. It was a lot of junk being handed out, out of the goodness of the heart of Carnegie Steel, to keep these people alive till the time came when they would be needed again. We couldn't afford to have them die on us, you know! They had to be available when the Depression was over.

There was a very curious labor situation at that time. There was an organization known as the Amalgamated Associa-
tition of the Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers, and one of its main locals was a horse-shoe factory in Buffalo which made not only horseshoes but also nails. This was about the extent of organization in the steel industry, aside from a few old tin mills. The gentleman who ran this union was named Mike Tighe. It was always said that Mike had a deal with Carnegie Steel and the rest of them not to organize, but to kind of lay off, and that there should be certain perquisites for them. They had a little hall in Pittsburgh for the union officers, but they had only a few thousand members. And during this horrible period when the mills were shut down, the union was pretty well shut down too. And I think maybe Mike Tighe went into hibernation during that period. He had nothing to do. He didn’t have much to do any-way, but he had much less to do when the horseshoe mill shut down.

So in 1933 along came the New Deal, and then came the NRA, and the effect was electric all up and down those valleys. The mills began reopening somewhat, and the steel workers read in the newspapers about this NRA Section 7A that guaranteed you the right to organize. That was true, and that’s about as far as it went: You had the right to organize, but what happened after that was another matter. All over the steel country, union locals sprang up spontaneously. Not by virtue of the Amalgamated Association; they couldn’t have cared less. But these locals sprang up at Duquesne, Homestead, and Braddock. You name the mill town and there was a local there, carrying a name like the “Blue Eagle” or the “New Deal” local. (If you can’t remember what the “Blue Eagle” was, that was the bird that took us out of the Depression.) There was even an “FDR” local, I think. These people had never had any experience in unionism. All they knew was that, by golly, the time had come when they could organize and the Government guaranteed them the right to organize!

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Out of this really anarchic situation that existed in ’33 and ’34 came, of course, the Steel Workers Organizing Committee. Somebody had to come in there with know-how to get the organization going. I must say the miners were perhaps the most important. They did understand unionism, even though they were poorly organized at the time. They had been organized in the past, and they were reorganizing all over the country. It was at that time that John L. Lewis decided the time had come to establish the Steel Workers Organizing Committee. And in order to build up this organization he had to appeal, of course, to these Rank-and-File locals that were scattered all over the country, and I suppose all around this part of the country. Around the Pittsburgh region, organizers came in mainly from the miners’ union.

There’s an interesting little sidelight on that. When John L. Lewis wanted to go into steel towns like Duquesne, Homestead, and Braddock, literally, as I’ve said, there were hardly any people in these localities who understood organization except for one particular set of people — the Communists. Now you may say: How come there were Communists around? Well, in the western Pennsylvania region there were all kinds of literary and dramatic societies based on ethnic groups: Hungarians, Yugoslavs, and so on. They had their dramatic and singing societies and the like, and in these societies there was a strong bond of unity and solidarity. And it was into these organizations, many of which were dominated by the Communists, that John L. Lewis went for organizers to help those miners who had come in. The miners didn’t know anything about steel, and so he had to have some steel people. And it’s one of the oddities, you know, of organization that John L. Lewis used the Communists to organize the Steel Workers Organizing Committee, and when he had it going pretty well he threw the Communists out! He was through with them. So that was some of the early history of the union.

From “Personal Histories of the Early C.I.O.,” Vol. 5, No. 3 (May-June 1971)
Communists and Blacks

Mark Naison

At no time in modern history have revolutionaries been faced with a more complicated problem of self-definition than in contemporary America. The New Left has grown, developed, and divided in the midst of enormous cultural and economic changes. Traditional notions of what it means to be a revolutionary have had to withstand the shock of a strong and independent black liberation movement, an increasingly powerful women's movement, and now a gay liberation movement, all possessing critiques of Amerikkan society that speak directly to the anxieties of day-to-day living. In addition, these movements have occurred in the midst of vast shrinkage in the labor market, expansion of political repression, and transformation of mass culture which has made drugs and music a central part of the experience of millions of young people whose parents were wrapped up in work and family life. For those of us caught in the middle of these currents, the experience has been as frightening as it has been liberating. With no stable links to our past, whether through a satisfying family life or through a solid tradition of revolutionary politics and culture, we have been vulnerable to freakouts - ecstatic but self-destructive escapes from the terrors of our daily lives. The Weatherpeople (mostly out of elite universities) and the hundreds of thousands of teenage junkies (out of poor and working-class families) represent tragically similar responses to the disintegration of the traditional social patterns - one "political" and collective, the other physical and individualistic. They dramatize a fate that threatens all of us unless we can apply a sense of stability and continuity to the revolutionary changes happening within and around us.

One of the major priorities of the moment is a reexamination of our history. As children of the 1950s, few of us were aware of the forces in our lives which made us radical, or very interested in where they came from. Many of us even seemed happy to be "born free" of the ideologies of the past, able to build our movement out of the concrete experiences of the present. But when the Amerikkkan crisis reached genocidal potential in the late '60s (in both Vietnam and the ghettos), significant numbers of us embraced traditional Marxism with the same naive abandon with which we had once espoused liberalism or populism. Factual struggles took place over obscure points of Marxist theory in organizations which had once espoused "participatory democracy," and Old Left parties which we had once benignly mocked (the CP, the SWP, and PL) became major forces in the movement. Through the subsequent nightmare of splits, manifestos, and purges, the dynamism of the mass movement was dissipated and its communal spirit was destroyed. We had learned the hard way the wisdom of an old saying: Those who do not know their history are destined to repeat it.

On no issue was our ignorance of history more destructive than in our efforts to create an alliance between black and white movements. When racial conflict emerged as a major contradiction in American society, black and white radical leaders tried desperately to define a strategy for revolution which took into account the central role of the black liberation struggle. Although much of the discussion dealt with contemporary events, the theoretical issues, especially in the white movement, were defined by Marxist-Leninist rhetoric that had not been seriously aired in America for over fifteen years. Leaders of SDS factions, many of whom knew little or nothing of black history or culture, offered confident and competing versions of the "correct line" on the black struggle, based on the pronounce-ments of Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin. While black students rebelled, black ghettos were aflame, and black revolutionaries were jailed and assassinated, white radicals argued bitterly about whether nationalism was "bourgeois," whether the Black Panthers were the vanguard, whether the white working class was privileged, and whether "self-determination in the black belt" was a viable mass line.

The development of a fresh theoretical approach to this issue is essential. I believe Marxism may be helpful, but only if we recognize that it does not dictate a firm and scientific solution to racial tensions in the revolution, and if we maintain a healthy skepticism about the conclusions of the "theoretical giants." The history of the Left's involvement in the black community, which this essay seeks to summarize, is in large part a tragedy, and its dimensions must be honestly faced. For the barriers dividing black and white in America, both culturally and economically, have been so great and complex that they overwhelmed all efforts to define an effective response in

Meeting of Farmworkers' Union in 1938
Marxist terms. Whether that failure is inherent in the Marxist method or is a product of its historical misapplications is something of which I am not sure, but it certainly should discourage efforts (particularly by white radicals) to project firm "political lines" on the black struggle. The complexity of this issue must be dealt with and our efforts at theorizing infused with new flexibility, new humility, and increased understanding of the connections between the cultural and economic dimensions of the revolutionary process.

* * *

The Onset of the Depression: Relevance and Power

The integrationist quality of the Communist Party’s internal life did not prevent it from playing a major role in the black community during the early years of the Depression. When the economic crisis drove millions of blacks to the edge of starvation, the Party’s theoretical clumsiness seemed less important than the effectiveness of the Party organizers in helping people to survive. For if Garvey’s genius was as a publicist of race pride and black self-sufficiency, the Communist genius lay in the organization of mass protest. The Party’s cadres were small, but they were highly disciplined and had unique experience in organizing across racial lines. In almost every city in which there was a large black community—Atlanta, Birmingham, Detroit, Chicago, Richmond, New York—black and white Communist organizers went to the black unemployed, organized them into unemployed councils, and fought to get them on relief. Spouting a strange ideology that combined “black and white unite and fight” with “self-determination in the black belt,” the Communists started civic authorities by bringing thousands of people into the streets and crossing racial boundaries in both North and South. For the Communists not only organized blacks, but also brought whites into the same mass organizations without sacrificing a public commitment to racial equality. Young Angelo Herndon was stunned when he attended an interracial meeting of the unemployed league in Birmingham, Alabama (!!!) and heard a white organizer tell those assembled why he believed in social equality:

You have been told that Reds are dirty foreigners and nigger lovers, but why have you come to this meeting today? Is it because you have been told that you must love somebody, or is it because of your desire to improve your living conditions? That’s why we Reds fight for political, economic, and social equality for Negroes: not because we must hypocritically express our love for anyone, but because the bosses have our backs against the wall and all of us alike will be threatened with the same danger of pestilence, hunger, untold misery.

The Party’s willingness to challenge white racism in the course of its mass organizing left a deep impression on many black people. Herndon told his friend: “He’s right. He does nothing but tell the truth. He’s the first honest white man I’ve ever seen.”

The Communists reinforced this initial feeling of trust in Black America with their legal defense work, particularly their handling of the Scottsboro Case. While much has been written about how the Communists “used” the Scottsboro Boys and their parents, my own interviews with people active at the time suggest that the Communists’ handling of this case did more than any other single event to make them respected by black working people. The Communists not only organized rallies throughout the black community, but also brought thousands of white workers and intellectuals out in defense of the Scottsboro Boys and made the case a subject of worldwide indignation. According to Adam Clayton Powell, this had a decisive impact. It was the first time since Populism that masses of white people showed their willingness to demonstrate to protect a black victim of injustice: “Coming at the very beginning of the Depression, it served as a great bulwark to hold the hungry, poverty-stricken mass together.” It gave concrete meaning to Communist appeals for black-white unity and brought thousands of black people into Party circles (if not actual Party membership) in large northern cities.

Through 1934 the Communist Party expanded this popular base. It linked its work with the unemployed leagues with massive campaigns to protect evicted tenants and victims of police brutality. It began a major cultural program in Black America, publishing a newspaper known as the Negro Liberator, encouraging young black writers to write for its impressive array of publications (the New Masses, the Communist, and the Daily Worker), and combining artistic events in the black community with its politics. Although it continued to push its line on self-determination rather timidly along with indiscriminate attacks on non-Communist black organizations, day-to-day organizing remained relatively free of sectarianism. In the course of its practical campaigns, Party workers allied themselves with almost every group active among the black poor, from Father Divine to the UNIA, and also showed themselves willing to follow as well as lead the revolutionary impulses of black people. When Party organizers around the Southern Worker received a letter from a group of black sharecroppers in Alabama threatened with eviction, they helped them to organize a union even though virtually no white tenants were willing to join. This organization, the Alabama Sharecroppers Union, enlisted almost 5,000 members around a program that called for extensive federal relief, redistribution of land, and total racial equality. It engaged in several major gun battles with local authorities which were instrumental in publicizing the crisis in cotton agriculture and the growing militancy of the black tenant farmer. Such activity, generated by local conditions, was symbolic of the Party’s work in the early years of the Depression; black and white organizers recall a climate of deep emotionalism and a relationship with the people marked by mutual respect.

By 1935, however, forces at work in the Party were to undermine much of this organizing. Russian leaders concerned about the growing fascist threat to their security instructed national CPs to subordinate their revolutionary appeals to the building of an alliance with social democrats (the United Front) and the liberal wing of the bourgeoisie (the Popular Front). American Communists campaigned against Landon in 1936, or in effect for Franklin Roosevelt; and before the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop
Pact in 1939, they enthusiastically supported New Deal antifascist or "progressive" measures at home and abroad.

In the black sections of the Party, this shift was reflected in an effort to tone down the "nationalist" elements in the Party’s organizing. The southern work of the Party, which had appealed primarily to black people, was significantly played down: The Sharecroppers Union was disbanded because it posed the threat of a race war, and its members were encouraged to join the more interracial National Farmers Union. In the North the Negro Liberator was discontinued as a paper, and Party workers were instructed to present themselves to the community primarily through the regular Party publications. And organizers in all parts of the country were told to make sure that whites were present in all meetings and demonstrations in the black community and in all black organizations in which the Party had influence.

These changes did not immediately cut the Party’s black following, but they helped change its base. Whereas in the early years of the Depression the Party consciously geared its appeal to the poor and alienated in Black America, the popular-front Party made its primary appeal to the (professional) black middle class and the stable working class, subordinating revolutionary principles to a vision of assimilation and reform.

The People’s Front in Harlem: Struggle with the Nationalists

From 1935 to 1939, the Party’s work in the black community closely paralleled its efforts to form a responsible left wing of the New Deal. Within the Harlem community, which Party leaders viewed as the key to black-white unity, Party leaders helped to organize a "reform" electoral coalition which linked the black community to its Irish, Italian, and Puerto Rican neighbors. The major product of this activity, the Harlem Legislative Conference, functioned as a mediator between the often hostile neighborhoods and helped elect Vito Marcantonio and Adam Clayton Powell to office. It took strong stands on many important community problems, issuing demands for more black schools and more black teachers, better recreation facilities, more public housing, and an end to police brutality.

The Party’s activity in the field of labor also reflected its politics of coalition and interracial unity. Throughout the middle and late 1930s the Party was engaged in a bitter struggle with local nationalists over the direction of the "Jobs for Negroes" campaign that the nationalists had initiated. This activity, begun by Sufi Abdul Hamid in 1934, focused on the numerous stores in Harlem that refused to hire blacks. It had won much support among unemployed youth and had brought a great deal of latent anti-white and anti-Jewish feeling to the surface. After spending a great deal of energy trying to discredit the movement — labeling Sufi Abdul Hamid a Harlem Hitler — the Party finally launched a competing campaign which directed its energies mainly against large enterprises rather than small merchants. Allying itself with a number of influential journalists and ministers (including Adam Clayton Powell), the Party tied its job campaign to the organizing drive of the CIO. The campaign won a dramatic victory when Powell and Transit Workers Union head Mike Quill forced the Fifth Avenue Bus Company to hire Negro drivers.

The local nationalists, however, were not easily discouraged. Some of the stores conceded to their demands, and they united into a single body called the Harlem Labor Union (which still exists) to continue to apply pressure. The ideological war with the Party persisted, with the nationalists attacking the CIO as a "white union" which refused to upgrade black workers, and the Party called the Harlem group a bunch of "labor racketeers." (Both charges contained an element of truth.) Each group finally established its own domain, with the nationalists organizing the small stores which the CIO disdained, and the Party trade unionists organizing the larger enterprises. "Negro-Labor Unity" had thus been maintained, but on a rather limited basis. The Party’s labor allies had no place for the thousands of unemployed and marginal black laborers who could not be organized within the framework of an industrial union. Culturally isolated from white society, disdained by the Left as being unorganizable, they remained a fertile base for nationalist agitation.

In the course of these conflicts (described in depth by Claude MacKay in Harlem, Negro Metropolis), the Party maintained an excellent reputation with "respectable" people in the Harlem community. The Harlem section had several thousand members in the late 1930s and was able to hold its meetings in the most prominent churches and assembly halls. Whites were active in all section affairs, and their presence generated both enthusiasm and tension. Many of the more educated blacks, according to MacKay, welcomed the "integration." They saw it as living rejection of Jim Crow. But the mass of the black people were more suspicious. One white organizer recalled that he "could never walk the streets of Harlem as if it were my community or stand on the outskirts of a meeting as another member of the throng. . . . I could speak from a platform with passion and feel momentarily a part of the people; but once the meeting was over, the sense of unease returned. . . . I could sense the glowing looks, the suspicion, the crowding of hostile faces." The Party’s insistence on the presence of whites in black community organizations (such as the black caucus in the Federal Writers Project) kept this tension alive, as did the large number of interracial marriages (black man, white woman) among the section leadership. Claude MacKay spoke for a good many poorer Harlemites when he complained that "Negro intellectuals imagine that they can escape the problems of their group by joining the whites as individuals."

The popular-front Party in Harlem thus had a mixed record. Its coalition for reform did achieve results: Blacks were organized into new unions and found openings in new job categories; reform candidates were elected to office; new schools and playgrounds were constructed; and progress was made in integrating blacks in city government. These gains produced substantial gains in black membership. But when one balances this against the Party’s campaign to discourage independent black organization and its failure to organize the most alienated and potentially most revolutionary people in the community, one realizes how far even the best Party work came from meeting the community’s needs. MacKay’s summary of Party faults was apt and prophetic: "Communists and Socialists prefer to agitate about Segregation and Race Prejudice in General . . . and avoid the fundamental issue . . . the stupendous task of engineering new jobs for Negroes. . . . It is this realization that has given form and drive to the comparatively recent movement of the Negro people toward greater self-development and community autonomy."
Communists and the Democratic Tradition

Maurice Isserman

What happened in the 1930s — what made the decade such a fruitful one for the CP — was that a new generation of Communists entering the Party after the collapse of the economy repeatedly pushed outward at the boundaries of political orthodoxy. They did not do so with a conscious sense of mission or strategy to reform Party policies — indeed, they were initially attracted to the CP rather than one of the other available left groups because of its public aura of resolute self-confidence, reinforced as it was by ties with the original and only successful socialist revolution. But immersed in mass movements like the unemployed councils, the campus antiwar movement, and the trade union movement, they instinctively began to “Americanize” their message and ... abandoned or downplayed the more sectarian aspects of the CP’s line when they could. Older Party leaders, schooled in the international factional battles of the 1920s and out of touch with any non-Party constituency, were often more concerned with how a leaflet or pamphlet would sound when read by a supervisory committee of the Communist International in Moscow than how it would go over with its intended American readers. Younger Communists, scrambling for position and influence in the American Youth Congress or the United Auto Workers, developed different priorities.

Party leader Earl Browder’s slogan of the late 1930s, “Communism is Twentieth Century Americanism,” has not fared well in the accounts of most historians. They have dismissed it as the low point in the Party’s attempt to adulterate its politics in an unprincipled, and unsuccessful, bid for respectability. Such accusations miss an important part of the story: the genuine enthusiasm with which younger Communists greeted the slogan and made it their own. Until the mid-1930s, foreign-born veterans of the previous decade held most of the secondary leadership positions within the Party and the organizations it influenced. After 1935, and for the next twenty years, these positions were filled by those who had entered the Party in the first years of the Depression. A majority of those who joined then and stuck with the movement were the children of Jewish immigrants. Like every second generation in the history of American immigration, they hungered for the full assimilation that had evaded their parents’ grasp. Had they come of age in less unsettled times they might have chosen another route, but in the early 1930s it seemed for a moment as if an American version of the October Revolution offered the quickest and surest path from marginality to influence and integration. Family ties to Russian socialist and Bundist traditions also influenced their decision, but rather than join the Socialist Party, which seemed unable to break out of a needle trades constituency/ghetto, they preferred the Communists, who claimed and sometimes could demonstrate support in the American industrial heartland. Becoming Communists brought them into an organization in which (in numbers admittedly unrepresentative of the country as a whole) they could meet and work with Connecticut Yankees, Georgia and Harlem blacks, northeasterly Finns, and midwestern Poles. For these second-generation Jewish Americans, the Party served as a bridge between the Russian origins and socialist beliefs of their parents and the “progressive” borderlands of New Deal America. It was not by chance that in choosing a Party name (a conspiratorial touch left over from Russian revolutionary tradition) so many young Jewish Communists chose the most common Anglo-Saxon names they could think of: thus Saul Regenstreif became Johnny Gates, Joseph Cohen became Joe Clark, and Abraham Richman became Al Richmond. One need not accept all the political choices the Communists made under the banner of...

“Twentieth Century Americanism” to understand why they were so strongly attracted to it.

The signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact in 1939 brought an abrupt end to the Popular Front. Many Communists were privately unhappy with the CP’s characterization of the conflict between Germany and the Allies as “the second imperialist war,” and with the CP’s break with the New Deal, but very few chose to leave the Party over these issues. Jewish Communists swallowed hard and grimly repeated the official line that there was “no lesser evil” in the conflict: English and American antisemitism, CP publications insisted, was every bit as vicious as the German variety.

For the next decade and a half two tendencies coexisted uneasily within the Party and within individual Communists. In bad times, like the twenty-two months of Nazi-Soviet rapprochement, and the years of Cold War and domestic repression following World War II, the Communists clung tenaciously and myopically to the faith in the Soviet Union that had brought them into the movement years before. In good times, like the four years between the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union and the final Allied defeat of Germany, the Communists worried less about remaining true to Lenin’s heritage and more about adapting their political life to fit in with American conditions. It was an unsatisfactory and unstable arrangement which, as the middle 1950s approached, began to show distinct signs of wear and tear.
The first signs of unrest and dissent showed up among the several thousand Party cadre sent underground in the early 1950s to preserve a skeleton organization in the event of the total outlawing of the CP. The ranks of the underground were reserved for the most reliable and experienced Party members. And yet, cut off from the day-to-day political life of the Party, with little to do but read and talk with other “unavailables,” Communists in the underground soon began to question many of the unexamined assumptions about the nature of Soviet society and the appropriateness of Leninist organization and strategy to American conditions that had shaped their outlook over the preceding decades. One former Communist, an Abraham Lincoln Brigade veteran who was the CP’s “unavailable but operative” district organizer for western Pennsylvania in the early 1950s, shocked his above-ground Party liaison when he expressed sympathy with the East German workers who were fighting street battles with Soviet tanks in 1953; that same year he remembers crying when he heard the news of Stalin’s death.

However hesitant the Communists were to break with earlier beliefs, the significance of these first criticisms should not be slighted. American Communists had not lost the capacity to learn from their political experiences: they had simply lacked the institutional means within the Party to develop and act on the lessons that were there to be learned.

The events of 1956 lent impetus to this internal reexamination, but also undermined it. When Red Army tanks rolled into Budapest, they forced the question of future relations with the Soviet Union to the center of Party debate. Of all the issues facing the Communists, this was the one offering the least possibility for compromise, and most reform-minded Communists decided that the prize — control of a decimated and isolated CP — was not worth the struggle. In the months that followed, they voted with their feet. Despite revelations about Soviet antisemitism that accompanied the 1956 crisis (including the murder in the last years of Stalin’s life of many of the most prominent Yiddish writers and artists), the older generation of foreign-born Jewish Communists in the United States tended to stick with the Party: the exodus from the Party was centered in the younger generation of non-Yiddish-speaking, native-born Jewish Communists.

Those who left the CP in 1956-1958 did so because they had taken the political slogans of the Popular Front years seriously, and had finally decided that an “Americanized” American Communism was not in the cards. What began as a series of tactical disagreements with William Z. Foster’s hard-line approach to political, union, and legal-defense questions in the late 1940s and early 1950s was transformed by the events of 1956 into a debate over fundamentals. The dissenters could no longer accept the Soviet model of socialism, and concluded that American socialism should be built on the foundation of the country’s democratic traditions and institutions and not, as they had earlier assumed, on the ruins of “bourgeois democracy.” In an article in Political Affairs in the fall of 1956, Daily Worker editor Johnny Gates argued that the “great lesson” that had to be learned from the revelations of the Soviet Twentieth Congress was that “the expansion of democracy is not automatic under socialism but must be fought for.”

The dissenters were united by a commitment to democratic political forms, both within the Party organization and as a basic component of their vision of socialist society. They were not united by much else. They could not agree on any common strategy for rebuilding the Left, let alone for proceeding to the transition to socialism. Unlike E. P. Thompson, Doris Lessing, and some of the other British Communists who broke with the Party in that period, most American Communists displayed little interest or insight into the questions of cultural and sexual politics that would soon be raised by the New Left. Those who quit the CP in the aftermath of the Khrushchev speech had traveled a long way between 1930 and 1956: they did not have all the right answers, nor had they even thought of all the right questions by the time they reached the end of that road. There are no timeless political blueprints hidden in the history of the American Communist Party.

My mother is talking to the radio
my mother is talking to her plants
there is a talk show on the radio
my mother is talking to the talk show
she’s angry and the talk show isn’t listening
the radio is also angry at something
(I can’t tell what)
people are angry
the host of the show is cutting people off
who want to say something
my mother is angry at that
she loves the talk shows
she talks to the radio
gets angry at crazy callers and the reactionary hosts
she tells me someone called up and said
“Joseph McCarthy was a great patriot, a great American”
my mother told me she once called up
and tried to say something about education in Cuba
“I saw it with my own eyes!” she told them
but the radio didn’t listen
the host said “Thank you for calling”
in a voice that said “I hate you”
and my mother is transplanting the plants
which have grown too big for little pots
and now need big pots
the roots are all bunched up
twisted around themselves a million times
my mother calls me in to help her
with a hammer she breaks the flowerpot as I hold
“Look at those roots!” she cries
my mother with a hammer in her hand
my mother is talking to the radio
my mother is talking to the plants
I don’t want her to be cut off
I want my mother to be heard
I want my mother’s roots
— twisted around themselves a million times
but still strong and surging with life —
to make their way
to make room
for her growth
my mother has had limbs chopped off
my mother had lived in a flowerpot way too small
this morning she described her life as a tiny circle
she traced the circle on the yellow blanket
she was sewing
her eyes looked so sad
my mother is the sad sculpture of pain she made
my mother is beginning to sculpt her own life
hammer in hand
at 61 my mother
is talking to the world!

— Bronx, N. Y.
February 7, 1977

From Vol. 13, No. 3 (May-June 1979)
American Marxism: A Few Propositions

Paul Buhle

A century since the first wide-scale attempts at working-class self-organization and the introduction of the Marxist critique in the United States, there is today no radical social movement of any importance. The most basic assumption upon which Socialism and Communism rested as movements — the centrality of a materially deprived white male industrial proletariat aided by other forces of essentially secondary importance — has been thoroughly discredited, but nowhere replaced with any new, comprehensive notion. Politically, we find on the one side the parties of the Left's past, living on ideological notions and exerting a certain deadening pressure upon social theory and practice, but finally irrelevant to the mass disaffection and motion opening up in front of us; on the other, the fragments of a Movement which collapsed without becoming part of a new revolutionary force or even understanding in world forces the meaning of its own demise. Clearly enough, the basic sources of our situation have not been understood and confronted.

The relative success of the bourgeois economic order and the complexities of intraclass alignments have permitted American Marxism no natural history. Rather, as a doctrine it has existed in a series of sporadic attempts by intellectuals to appropriate Marxist methodology and of ideological parties to justify their pathetically unworthy claims to inheritance of the body of thought and practice. For Socialists, Marxism had been a simple faith: a reassurance of capital's greedy nature and inevitable downfall, to be replaced in leadership by some representation of the proletariat. For Communists, Marxism was more complex, an internal knowledge which those outside the Party's upper ranks could not possess fully. While the proletariat moved forward, however, no greater numbers joined Left parties. Thus Marxism, born of Marx's conceptions of working class self-development, became in the view of the Marxists increasingly an understanding external to the working class and over it.

Marxist thought in the United States — as a concentrated form of Marxism's ills everywhere — has most of all lacked a critique of culture as the substance of social life, the mediation of understanding and response from classes toward the outside world. If one could believe the self-avowed left interpreters of the American proletariat, it lived on the job alone or vaporized at home between meager pay checks. Women and children existed less for these observers than for bourgeois society, which drew the lessons of women's subjection early in the century and began to provide a specialized function of socialization and reproduction, mediated through consumption. Similarly, the only vibrant indigenous culture in the United States — that of the blacks — was ignored or rejected by the Left until the Communist movement seized upon and defied its most assimilationist and non-revolutionary aspects.

The rise of student struggle in the 1960s building from and expanding on the sectoral disidence of blacks reflected the emptiness of contemporary life for the heirs-apparent to the bureaucratization of society. As blacks expressed in the streets of Harlem and Watts that no leadership or "representation" could ultimately meet their desires, so students in the institutions notoriously the quintessence of bureaucracy revealed in their growing hostility demands for direct participation in university and civil life. In tying black-support struggles to student aspirations, Berkeley pointed the way for a vast international Moment of renewed battles. For the first time, American society revealed itself in advance of Europe in the enormity of decay and in the creation of new forms of revolutionary activity.

The New Left in the United States showed itself to be the second Moment of American Marxism, in its apparent contradiction and implied resolution of the first Moment. The struggles of unorganized workers in the first period (1910-1920) and of students lay upon opposite sides of the Imperial apex, and reflected their understanding accordingly. If downtrodden immigrants battled for subsistence, students resolutely condemned the price at which abundance was to be obtained; if workers' understanding had in that period been merely particular, limited to the nature and function of work, students' understanding was abstractly universal, limited to an outline of the Empire's functioning; if, finally, workers could as a mass fight only an economic battle, students could approach no less than a total struggle which failed to comprehend the economic basis of itself and its potential allies. Purified in its isolation, the New Left's class struggle was a revolt of trainee technicians against their trainers and administrators, an impossible struggle which, however, in its generalized critique of bureaucratism, opened the way for its own supersession.
The cycle of the political New Left reveals a lengthy history, compressed into a momentary surge and dispersion. Marvelously naive, it became ruthlessly cynical; unconsciously aware of cultural disintegration, it finally joined the representation of that disintegration (which, it wrongly believed, was its overcoming) in Youth Culture; visionarily democratic, it formed personalities and cults with a speed never surpassed by Marxist political movements. The pace of the New Left revealed not, however, the innate incapacies of the youthful revolutionaries, but the impatience of revolutionary content toward outward forms in the last phase of worldwide class struggle.

The New Left experienced only a conscious glimpse of Marxism, but that was most instructive. Reacting against formal depiction of the industrial proletariat, its most advanced spokesmen offered a theory (the "New Working Class") which attributed special revolutionary characteristics to the technicians; unable to view socialism as the end of political society, it dissolved, or repudiated their entire past. Yet, too, the women's movement as a movement united into itself the dynamics of New Left organization and found the living activity of millions of ordinary and nonpolitical women far vaster than their supposed political representation in groups and agitational forms.

The Marxism of the past may easily be distinguished from ours, for it unconsciously proclaims struggle toward parts of the new existence at the expense of achievement of the whole: the supposed fulfillment of class liberation against the no less universal liberation of race and sexuality; the supposed fulfillment of race and sexual liberation through another mediation than class struggle. Against the Marxists of the Past we insist that new forms of self-organization, undreamed of by them, will follow, that humanity can recover its self in history, and that the process is underway without their help, or it has already been lost.

WOMEN’S LIBERATION

Introduction to Women’s History

Through the growth of their consciousness, women across the country are etching a profound critique of daily life in modern society which traces power relations from the nursery to the schoolroom to the workplace. For radicals and for feminists, the most frustrating contradiction of this movement lies between the total revolutionary implications of an analysis which requires the total transformation of all social relations, and the essentially limited nature of the present demands such as childcare, abortion, and equal pay for equal work. Socialist women especially find themselves making the most painfully mechanical mediations between what can be accomplished now and what must be done in the process of social revolution. Committed to the Marxist proposition that the gap between consciousness and action is crossed in history and enabled by an understanding of it, Radical America is here publishing an exploratory study of women’s history.

“Women in American Society” was conceived as a response to the conceptual problems confronted by all who seek to comprehend the historically rooted sources of today’s oppression. As the authors argue, those who believe women have no history are poorly equipped to affect that struggle, and those whose alternative to a historyless past has been the exaltation of individual outstanding women are doomed to misunderstand the centrality of the lives of ordinary women upon whose destiny the fate of women as a group rests. Moreover, the most fundamental changes in society have been at all points mediated through changes in social and sexual patterns expressed by different classes, so that to misunderstand women’s history is to misunderstand American history as a whole.

The radical movement which was inspired in the sixties by a vague sense of “alienation” is now seeing its feelings documented with a staggering specificity. In the most “private” of experiences, inimate sexual contact, one suddenly finds the glaring presence of one’s family, and their families and their ethnic community, and the raucous voices of teachers, preachers, and aden. Lights on. Nature dissolves as the very sensations of the body are seen to be censored by sex roles. Personality itself becomes a historical phenomenon until we all appear ventriloquists speaking in the voices of those who went before us. To suggest an image: a world in a cage, and in that world another cage, and in that cage a person, and in that person yet another cage, and there all the other people who made the cage.

By raising personality as historical, the women’s movement raised the most total revolutionary goal, the creation of the possibility of a freed humanity. By raising the question of contradictions among men and women within the working class, the women’s movement challenged all limited forms of cultural revolution. Sex came to be recognized not merely as sexuality, but as a social relationship. Women repudiated their parents only to find the patriarchal system in bed with them. So much for liberated zones, for finding the solution to personal alienation through transcendent “sex,” transcendent “nature,” or utopian communities.

The women’s movement has revealed personal life as collective, as the proletarian had earlier revealed economic life as collective; yet the question remains how either movement will realize the totalizing potential of its collectivity to lead a social transformation. The full analysis of women’s historical background will lay bare the complex interactions of forces behind present social roles, allowing a view of the interrelationship between the rise of bourgeois society and the creation of a specific culture in family, education, and all social mores. The “class question” which is now tearing at the women’s movement may through this analysis cease to be a matter of moralistic castigation of “middle-class” attitudes and become, instead, the serious question of objective differentials in the working class which are the primary obstacle to social reconstruction in America.

As we examine how women’s class relations have been defined and have changed, we can begin to see the interaction of workplace and home, and begin to face the strategic priorities for the radical movement.

The women’s movement has been rebellious against all moral imperatives to revolution. Rightfully. Women have long been frozen in their compassion and are not about to displace it from their personal to their political lives. As the radical movement develops, alliances will be made around common problems, and historical consciousness can emerge as we understand the common basis of those problems. When that consciousness grows fuller and more self-confident, the particularity of the women’s movement will not be abolished but may be linked to the generality of the tasks ahead.

The Editors

From “Editors’ Introduction” (written by Jackie DiSalvo) to the Women’s History issue, Vol. 5, No. 4 (July-August 1971)
Women in American Society
Mari Jo Buhle
Ann D. Gordon
Nancy Schrom Dye

The rise and fall of concern for women's history has followed the intensity of organized women's movements. Not since 1920, when the suffrage movement ended, has there been the interest evident today. As women were forced back into individual lives, understood through the personal lens of psychological adjustment (a process examined in the last part of this article), history as a study of their collective experience over the centuries no longer seemed to explain their condition. Historians, always more interested in writing about the powerful, studied a history without women. Only social scientists documented the changing presence of women at fixed times in a variety of situations, but their fragmented analyses did not provide a way to understand the totality of daily life for women. Neither did these evaluations describe the overall changes in society. But today, women with renewed caste consciousness are returning to historical questions in a search for their collective identity and for an analysis of their condition.

Within the last decade, blacks have shown the role history plays in defining a social movement. The search to understand the collective conditions and the relation of the race to the dominant society has enabled black people in America to locate their strengths, their social importance, and the sources of their oppression. Further, this process has provided the analytical framework for recognizing their unity through their experiences, rather than simply through their racial difference from the ruling caste. Similarly, feminists of the nineteenth century looked to the past to describe their common bond as women and to explain their current situation. That inquiry supported their theoretical development.

Nineteenth-century feminist writers enlarged the perspective of their analysis by making explicit the connections between the lives of individuals and the social movement for their emancipation, thus offering women definitions of the changes necessary to alter their lives. They studied women who overstepped the boundaries of prescribed roles and made important contributions to society or to a redefinition of female possibilities; and they created the chronology and analysis of women's historical subjection to men. But this search through women's history basically described the limits on their lives without a sense of the changes which had occurred in their "sphere." They isolated a few women or the relations of women to men from the total history of civilization. These women were not aware, for example, that the current family structure was of recent historical origin. They ignored the history of what was closest to them and placed their hopes for change outside their own lives, in the industrial revolution or in the inevitable progress of democracy.

This feminist definition of women's historical role was challenged by Mary Beard in her book Woman as Force in History. Principally she addressed herself to the emphasis on an endless history of subjection. That stress, she argued, led to a misunderstanding by women of their own strength in the past. Women had internalized the "myth" of their secondary status and enshrined it in their analysis. By emphasizing only the obstacles to their fulfillment, women were prevented from understanding the power they had held historically in other avenues of social activity.

Mary Beard went on to propose an outline of a rewritten world history capable of describing the contributions women made to world civilization. At the base of her work and the source of her concern was her acceptance of the notion that women, in 1946, were about to cast off their chains and emerge as leaders in the advance of civilization. Because she accepted the inevitability of democratic progress, she conceptualized the reconstruction of women's history as limited to their role as a civilizing force. Without accepting her faith, we believe it is important to recognize and respond to her realization that women must come to a history which does not negate their activities in the past. Mary Beard believed that the real history of women's lives was more important than society's limitations of their activities.

Faced again with the task of defining women's history in relation to the reemergence of women as a collective force, we find it essential to define what we understand to be our past. Through a historical critique we can begin to transcend the imposition of contemporary institutions and values on our lives. Without such a critique, our view of daily life remains at the level of individual reaction to what strikes us as intolerable. Our analyses tend to document our feelings of subjection rather than the underlying historical conditions of the subjection of all women.

The forms of history familiar to the women's movement in the United States have reappeared with the addition of histories of that earlier movement. They expand our knowledge, but their limitations also must be examined. Documentation and analysis of the women's rights movement offers a tradition of struggle: We see that women in the past not only were aware of their oppression as a sex, but
also organized themselves and devoted their lives to changing the conditions they saw between themselves and freedom for their sex. The history of women who ignored social conventions and sexual restrictions serves both to probe the prescriptive roles imposed on them and to offer a sense of the possible to all women. But our advantage of hindsight over the earlier feminist assault and our overall perspective on the development of American capitalism necessitate a larger definition of our past. Our vision must mediate between the objective historical conditions and the changes in daily life. We cannot afford to locate the logic of our movement in apparently anonymous forces, such as technology, lying outside the lives of women, and measure our transcendence by our ability to respond masterfully to that external development. By doing so, we would accept the dominant ideology that the inner logic of "women's sphere" is too slight to examine and too slight to have a significant effect on the course of society.

That women have not had access to the means of social definition and have not lived and worked in the spheres of reward and recognition is obvious. They have lived in what Simone de Beauvoir has described as the historical anomaly of "the Other." The problem remains: As objects, do we have a history, properly speaking? As long as historical enquiry is constrained by equating initiative and mastery with life, the lives of women are, at best, a "situation," as Juliet Mitchell has noted. The seeming timelinessness of women's lives may describe one source of the lack of female consciousness through long periods; the processes affecting their lives are frequently slow and without immediate impact on their awareness. But to assume that their lives were, as a result, without time and without change ignores the role that the subjection of women has played in world development. Historians' chronic blindness to that fact prevents them from probing the fullest meaning of history. If we can succeed in defining the "specificity of their oppression," we will as well have moved closer to realizing the dynamics of all historical development — a necessary prerequisite for changing it.

From "Women in American Society: An Historical Contribution," Vol. 5, No. 4 (July-August 1971)
The Family
Selma James

We intend to give, first, as close a picture as possible of the women of the American middle class, for society does not consist exclusively or mainly of workers. No fundamental change in society can take place at all unless large sections of the middle class actively support it, or at any rate are in sympathy with it. And they will do this only because they feel that it opens a way out for them to rid themselves of burdens which are crushing them as members of the middle classes. More important, an examination of the situation of these women, free of oppressive laws, with enough money to rid them of economic cares, shows very precisely the stupidity of "the higher standard of living" philosophy and its uselessness as a means of understanding the crisis in society.

The young woman of the middle class has fought for and achieved in the United States the reputation and the actual status of great social, legal, and political equality. Not only has she had the vote for years, but divorce in many states takes six weeks on the grounds of mental cruelty or any other superficial grounds. Birth control is commonly accepted and easy to obtain. Some states award not only the children, but half the property to a divorced woman. Eighteen is the legal age of consent but it is not strictly enforced and in fact is not enforceable except in case of a scandal. She is born into a milieu and tradition which ensures her personal freedom and constant and uninhibited association with men. She goes to the university, often coeducational, to study what she is interested in. She is, as soon as she reaches maturity, her own mistress, traveling where and when she wants to travel and making her own way in the world. She decides on who will be her boyfriends and practices her own code of morals, which for her most often means sexual freedom.

Her wealth of experiences in social life and education lead her to believe that the future belongs to her. Aspirations of marriage and a family are for her new worlds and situations to conquer, to manage, and to control successfully. Nothing can conquer, manage, or control her; for her restraints are either self-imposed or do not exist at all. All new relations are for her relations to be modernized, tailor-made, to suit herself. She, with the cooperation of some modern young man, is going to create a modern relationship based on equality of the sexes and no compromise of that principle will ever be tolerated. . . .

People write reams about the "modern" family. In truth, the typical modern family is no family at all. The implication of all those who defend the existing society is that modern people want to live this way because they are modern. Neither they nor any-one else knows any such thing.

In practically all previous societies, the family consisted of grandparents, uncles and aunts, parents and children. The expanded family unit meant, along with the subjugation of the woman, a certain freedom for her. It gave her a community. There were aunts and cousins to look after the children and help to raise them. There were two or three generations of women to help in the house, and all household functions, though more physically tiring without the use of washing machines and electric stoves, were communal affairs. Today a woman is isolated and alone in her little kitchen or kitchenette, using her vacuum cleaner or washing machine, if she can afford one, in a silence and loneliness which is only broken by the noise of the machine itself, the ringing of the telephone, salesmen at the door, or the daytime soap operas.

So that in all our perspectives for the future and our examination of the present (they are one and the same thing), we must cast aside the statistical forecasts and envisage a genuine return to the communal family, but a communal family based on new relations. In time we shall learn to look with astonishment at the impertinence of the common view that a woman having to bear and rear a child, or three or four children, lessens her opportunities in her competition for equality with men in the affairs of the outside world. What kind of work does any man do and what is the sense of this competitiveness in comparison with the bearing of children? The whole conception is a monstrous stupidity which still moves around, first because it has been around for so many generations. And, secondly, because it can serve the purpose of those reactionary elements who wish to maintain things as they are. It is not impossible that the large family, not only in the sense of the actual children in the household, but a family based on numerous relations, may so enlarge the family until it is expanded to a new social, educational, and productive unit, the special contribution of modern technology to the long and changing history of the family in the development of society. At one stroke, individually and collectively, such family units could rid society of the monstrous bureaucratic growths which now strangle society.

All this is mere dreaming (or dangerously subversive doctrines) to the bleaters of a "higher standard of living." They have no conception that it is their organization of society which has forced millions of people into the contemporary mold. The list of their crimes is long, but not yet complete. Only the freedom which is being fought for will tell us whether these burdens and limitations which modern people have borne were not in direct contradiction not merely to the social, but the very biological needs of human beings.

Rise of the Women’s Movement

Many former activists in the civil rights movement and the New Left have attributed the rise of women’s liberation to the discrepancy within the movement between the goal of equality and the actual subordination of women within it. I have found, however, that the preconditions for female revolt developed in those parts of the movement which offered women the greatest space in which to develop their own potential and discover their own strength. In the process they also accumulated many of the tools for movement building: a language to describe oppression and justify revolt, experience in the strategy and tactics of organizing, and a beginning sense of themselves collectively as objects of discrimination.

The two most important incubators of feminism within the New Left were the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the community organizing projects of Students for a Democratic Society (the Economic Action Research Action Projects: ERAP), which were modeled on SNCC. By late 1965 an interconnected group of experienced female organizers had articulated an analysis of women’s oppression which focused squarely on the issues of sex roles.

The most important source for new self-images within the movement lay in the nature of women’s work. In contrast to the later mass mobilizations which placed a premium on public speaking and self-assertion in large groups, the vision of SNCC and of ERAP translated into daily realities of hard work and responsibility which admitted few sexual limitations. Young women’s sense of purpose was reinforced by the knowledge that the work they did and the responsibilities they assumed were central to the movement.

* * *

In SDS projects, a few men were good organizers, but most good organizers were women. The skills required by community organizing meshed with the social training of females: warmth, empathy, compassion, interpersonal radiation. Furthermore, community organizing tends to draw upon a largely female constituency. In northern communities, while male leaders futilely attempted to organize streetcorner youth, winos, and unemployed men, women successfully created welfare rights organizations, though their efforts received much less attention.

Female community leadership in both the south and the north provided new role models as well. In 1962 SNCC staff member Charles Sherrod wrote the office that in every southwest Georgia county “there is always a ‘mama.’ She is usually a militant woman in the community, outspoken, understanding, and willing to catch hell, having already caught her share.” The newsletters of ERAP were likewise filled with stories of courage in the face of hardship, of women who stood up for themselves against any and all authority. For many middle-class white women in the New Left, these women were also “mamas” in the sense of being substitute mother-figures, new models of the meaning of womanhood.

The opportunities to develop new strengths and a heightened sense of self were strengthened by the personal nature of New Left politics. The New Left con-
sistently emphasized the importance of building new kinds of human relationships, and the political import of personal choice. Jane Stembridge, daughter of a Southern Baptist minister who left her studies at Union Seminary in New York to become the first paid staff member of SNCC, put it:

Finally it all boils down to human relationship. . . . It is the question of . . . whether I shall go on living in isolation or whether there shall be a we. The student movement is not a cause . . . it is a collision between this one person and that one person. It is a I am going to sit beside you . . . Love alone is radical.

Three years later the SDS University Committee reported:

The free university is not defined by a particular structural arrangement, but by the questions the participants ask. . . . The central question of the free university seems to be "what kind of interpersonal relations allow people to treat each other as human beings?"

Within the student movement the intensely personal nature of social action and the commitment to equality resulted in a kind of anarchic democracy and a general questioning of all the socially accepted rules. "Let the people decide" and "participatory democracy" were the ideological passwords of SNCC and SDS. A spirit of moral idealism permeated the New Left.

The ideas and ideals of students in the New Left reflected the fact that they were in many ways engaged in a cultural revolt. The counterculture of the late 1960s grew from the perceptions of thousands of young people that suburban material "success" constituted a hollow promise and from their determination to build their lives around more meaningful goals. It was a natural extension for women to apply the same critique to sexual relationships. Casey Hayden and Mary King wrote in 1965:

Having learned from the movement to think radically about the personal worth and abilities of people whose role in society had gone unchallenged before, a lot of women in the movement have begun trying to apply those lessons to their own relations with men. Each of us probably has her own story of the various results.

According to Casey and Mary, however, such ideas could be discussed seriously only among women. Despite their own cultural rebellions, men in the movement clung to traditional notions of sexual relationships. The effort to create a haven, a "beloved community" of equality either racially or sexually, founded in a movement so deeply enmeshed in the very culture it set out to challenge. Feminism was born out of this contradiction: that the same movement which permitted women to grow and to develop self-esteem, new strength and skills, generally kept them out of public leadership roles and reinforced expectations based on woman's role as housewife, nurturer, sex object, unintellectual.

In the years after 1965 the movement became increasingly alienating for wom-

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A

In one way I'm less alone: I no longer see myself as a solitary tree, scorched by fire and frost, and split by storms. Rather, I form, with other women, a forest. Our trunks are separate, distinct, each with our own growth rings and our own scars.

B

But in another way, I'm more alone. Although I still long to be tucked in at night, I no longer seem to be looking for that mysterious stranger to inspire that mysterious passion. I neither want to be swept away nor melted down; I suppose I now see transformation as something I do, not something that gets done to me.

From Marcia Salo Rizzi, "Pictures from My Life," Vol. 6, No. 4 (July-August 1972)
en. Women were increasingly relegated to running the mimeograph machines, preparing and serving coffee, washing dishes, and being available for sex. Draft-card burning, mass demonstrations, strident oratory left women more and more alienated and secondary.

But women had developed along the way too much self-respect and too much organizing skill to acquiesce quietly. They rounded out the New Left focus on the personal nature of political work by asserting that personal life was in itself political. They drew on the analogy with black oppression in defining a complex of discriminatory attitudes (sexism, comparable to racism) which were backed by an infrastructure of discriminatory institutions and laws. They also understood quickly by analogy that women had internalized many of the negative things attributed to them and that mutual solidarity and support were necessary to wage a struggle that was at once internal and external.

When young women from middle-income families revolted against the replication of the housewife role within the new life, they did so with a sense of strength that allowed them to name and to politicize a dilemma experienced by millions of women. Where the public ideology of NOW had focused on legal inequities, the newer radical women’s liberation movement made a critique of family and personal life the cornerstone of its existence. It created a medium, the consciousness-raising group, through which individual women could develop a sense of the social nature and political import of deeply ingrained attitudes, habits, and assumptions.

Without their critique, there could have been no mass movement, only a strong feminist lobby. For millions of American women, only a movement which addressed their oppression as housewives — both in the home and in the outside workplace — could have generated the massive shift in consciousness which we can observe in the past six to eight years.

From “The Origins of the Women’s Liberation Movement,” Vol. 9, No. 2 (March-April 1975)

THE ANSWER

I’m so glad you came out alive with your ideas it’s always a good feeling and your saying I should check the facts, of course one should never write without facts. one should never write.

Or at least not expect it to mean anything curing sick bones they will break again and again. your analysis is complicity, yes, you heard me I am saying you are responsible yours are the words become jargon: the sadist police, big hinges on all those doors, the game : political, economic or how to love without giving anything.

over the high screech of your words I hear guevara say : I used to be a doctor.

Margaret Randall

From Vol. 4, No. 2 (Feb. 1970)
The Socialist Women’s Movement

Linda Gordon

Over the past few years it has become clear that there are at least two different women’s movements in the United States. One of them, a liberal feminist movement, an organic continuation of the late nineteenth century women’s rights movement, is very much alive. It goes further than the earlier movement in some respects, pushing for equalities far more substantial than mere legal rights: for equal work, equal pay, equal social status, even — do we dare suggest it — for respect.

There is also the women’s liberation movement. In using that word, “liberation,” the women’s liberation movement went far beyond equality. It raised the slogan and an image of the total liberation of half of humanity from all forms of exploitation. And few activists in the movement doubted that the liberation of women would require the liberation of all, which in turn would require the abolition of class society. If the movement did not usually describe itself as socialist, its reasons were not mainly timidity, but commitment to building a mass struggle. In that commitment women felt they were both opposed to and a part of the New Left. From ex-girlfriends of student politicians to women never before involved in radical politics, women shared bad experiences and critical feelings toward the New Left. From the very beginning of women’s liberation, women were anxious to avoid any of the New Left’s errors. Many thought of themselves as socialists before recognizing in political terms their own exploitation as women. This new realization did not merely add to, it completely transformed their vision of a socialist society and a socialist movement. They hoped other women who shared their new understanding of the exploitation of women would also come to share with them the realization that a socialist society was necessary to end that exploitation.

There is a sharp discontinuity, then, between the women’s liberation movement and the liberal feminism of NOW and Ms. magazine. The great resources that the liberal feminist leaders have at their disposal have helped them bring the issue of women to the consciousness of the masses, but it has not been raised in a socialist context.

This should not surprise us. On the other hand, the women’s liberation cause is still here, admittedly sectarian and disorganized, but still alive. All over the country there are socialist feminists working on specific projects — a health clinic here, a school there, daycare organizing, organizing women employees. And there are even more consciousness-raising and discussion groups of radical women. In a few places there are even thriving organizations. The apparent demise of women’s liberation is an image projected a lot by the disappearance of many radical newspapers, male and female, by the decreased attention given to the movement in the mass media, and to some extent by the decline of women’s liberation organizations. But that decline in most cases came from internal contradictions and immaturities that were present from the beginning of the movement.

Despite this, some have felt that the women’s liberation movement was smothered by the liberal women’s movement. Third, historically reform movements have often helped awaken expectations and consciousness and thus pushed people to the left. We must beware of letting fear of cooptation drive us to positions of isolation, or to a doctrine of “the worse the better.” Fourth, and most basic, the cooptation of women by liberal feminism is nothing compared to the cooptation of men by sexism itself. Sexism does far more than provide a reserve cheap labor force. It drugs men with privilege, and weakens the entire working class with divisions and false values. It may even turn out that some degree of equality for women will be a precondition for socialism in advanced capitalist countries, rather than an inevitable product of the socialist revolution. Certainly many of the problems of the existing socialist countries and socialist movements — authoritarianism, rigidity, lack of reliance on the masses — are influenced by the social and psychological patterns of male supremacy.

We do not mean to suggest that liberal feminism should not be attacked. On the contrary, liberal feminists should be constantly pushed from the left — with concrete demands and programs more radical than the liberal feminist elite can accept. Meanwhile the Left can also learn from them, for some of their successes have been earned by work, not just bought with money. For example, we would guess that a much higher percentage of working-class women identify with NOW and local liberal women’s groups than with the radical women’s liberation groups. In their reforming, issue-oriented, problem-solving consciousness, liberal feminist groups have developed concrete demands and projects that are understandable and sensible to many middle- and working-class women. They have launched campaigns that can be won, and that can make it possible for women in their organizations to feel more powerful than they have ever felt before.

The basic limitations of the women’s liberation movement, on the contrary, were precisely in these areas. Its inability to develop concrete programs (this does not mean long-range ideas but things that can be won) and ambivalence about establishing strong organizations had to do, no doubt, with its class basis. The middle-class college graduates who predominated in the movement could in fact find “personal solutions” to some of their problems — professional jobs, husbands with leisure to share the housework, money and the emotional security
about money that enable them to live without holding a steady job. Strong and militant organizations are almost always created by people for whom collective action is the only means of improving their lives, and for whom there are no individual solutions. But seeming inwardness, the much-talk-to-action style of large segments of the women’s movement was also a necessary phase of an important cultural transformation. The rebirth of feminism in our generation of women has required a transformation of consciousness as profound, if not more so, than that which created the New Left. This is because the women’s movement went beyond an abstract commitment to justice to fighting for our own liberation. Stunned by our new understandings about sexism — understandings that were not objectively new but had been suppressed extremely effectively in our culture and history — many in women’s liberation had to go through periods of deep personal change at the cost of tremendous amounts of energy. In “consciousness raising” it was necessary to invent new processes as well as elaborate a new content for our political work, because a feminist analysis had revealed how unsocialist much of the process of political work in the New and Old Left had been. This consciousness raising took a long time because so many women were coming into the movement who had no experience at all of political participation, who had to build their confidence and struggle against passivity; and also because many women, made cynical by arrogant and irresponsible leadership in the male-dominated Left, felt ambivalent about all leadership. The result of all this was often reducing the political-activity level of groups to the lowest common denominator.

Still, today we are far ahead of where we were four years ago. Large segments of the Left have been educated, at least on an elementary level, about sexism; thousands of women have begun to think politically about their own situations for the first time; we have thrown a new and potentially militant force into the general unrest in the society. If the middle-class base of the movement weakened it politically, it also gave us the tendency to underestimate our own achievements. It is good that women are increasingly concerned about the failure of the women’s liberation movement to organize more working-class women. But unfortunately many of the current discussions of that problem take an abstract form, going to extremes of self-condemnation and class baiting. This leads some middle-class women to forget that even a middle-class women’s movement, if materialist and militant, could make a great contribution.

However, there cannot be a revolutionary women’s movement unless it is built around working-class women. The failure to reach more working-class women came only partly from youth and class arrogance and more from the fact that it was hardly even tried! The ingroupiness of women’s liberation was legendary (although not more so than that of the whole New Left). With the exception of the increasing number of open lesbians, venturing out into hangouts like lesbian bars where there are always many working-class women, most women in the movement continued to make their livings and do their socializing and political “work” among college and professional people. On the other hand, where there are healthy women’s organizing projects in this country, we hear too little about them, partly because they often cling to their isolation as a protection against being smothered by other “movement” women.

Meanwhile, the decline of the organized New Left has taught us another painful lesson: that the women’s liberation movement was much more dependent than it had thought on being surrounded, so to speak, by a general, albeit male-dominated, socialist movement. We need a socialist-feminist organization that is part of a general socialist movement. But as it seems that we have neither, it is important to work on both. We think it is important to squeal any remnants of the fantasy that a women’s movement can make a revolution itself. It is equally important to squeal the apparent rebirth of the nineteenth-century male-socialist wish (it hardly deserves being called a theory) that the woman question can be dealt with satisfactorily by male leadership. At this period it seems absolutely crucial that the role of sexism be continuously analyzed and fought both in women’s organizations and in mixed ones. It is especially important, however, that the well’s politics that continue now be mass work.

From “Introduction” to the Women’s Labor issue, Vol. 7, No. 4-5 (July-Oct. 1973)

Feminism and Leninism

Sheila Rowbotham

So I don’t believe it is a matter of adding bits to a pre-existing model of an “efficient” “combative” organization through which the working class (duly notified and rounded up at last) will take power. You need changes now in how people can experience relationships in which we can both express our power and struggle against domination in all its forms. A socialist movement must help us find a way to meet person to person — an inward as well as an external quality. It must be a place where we can really learn from one another without deference or resentment and “Theory” is not put in authority.

This will not just happen. It goes too deeply against the way of the world. We really cannot rely on common sense here. We need to make the creation of prefigurative forms an explicit part of our movement against capitalism. I do not mean that we try to hold an imaginary future in the present, straining against the boundaries of the possible until we collapse in exhaustion and despair. This would be utopian. Instead such forms would seek both to consolidate existing practice and release the imagination of what could be. The effort to go beyond what we know now has to be part of our experience of what we might know, rather than a denial of the validity of our own experience in face of a transcendent party. This means a conscious legitimation within the theory and practice of socialism of all those aspects of our experience which are so easily denied because they go against the grain of how we learn to feel and think in capitalism. All those feelings of love and creativity, imagination and wisdom which are negated, jostled,
and bruised within the relationships which dominate in capitalism are nonetheless there, our gifts to the new life. Marxism has been negligent of their power, Leninism and Trotskyism frequently contemptuous or dismissive. Structuralist Marxism hides them from view in the heavy academic gown of objectivity. For a language of politics which can express them we need to look elsewhere, for instance to the utopian socialists in the early nineteenth century, or to the Socialist League in the 1880s, or to Spanish anarchosyndicalism. We cannot simply reassert these as alternatives against the Leninist tradition. There are no “answers” lying latent in history. But there is more to encourage you than meets the Leninist eye. We have to shed completely the lurking assumption that Leninism provides the highest political form of organizing and that all other approaches can be dismissed as primitive antecedents or as incorrect theories.

The versions of Leninism current on the Left make it difficult to legitimate any alternative approaches to socialist politics which have been stumbling into existence. These Leninisms are difficult to counter because at their most superficial they have a surface coherence, they argue about brass tacks and hard facts. They claim history and sport their own insignia and regalia of position. They fight dirty — with a quick sneer and the certainty of correct ideas. At their most thoughtful intensity they provide a passionate and complex cultural tradition of revolutionary theory and practice on which we must certainly draw. Socialist ideas can be pre-Leninist or anti-Leninist. But there is no clear post-Leninist revolutionary tradition yet. Leninism is alive still, whatever dogmatic accoutrements it has acquired. The argument is about the extent of its usefulness for making socialism now.

I know that many socialists who have lived through the complicated and often painful encounters between sexual politics and the Left in the past few years believe we must alter Leninism to fit the experience gained in sexual political movements. I have been edged and nuzzled and finally butted towards believing that what we have learned can’t be forced into the molds of Leninism without restricting and cutting its implications short. Moreover the structures of thought and feeling inherent in Leninism continually brake our consciousness of alternatives. I don’t see the way through this as devising an ideal model of a nonauthoritarian organization but as a collective awakening to a constant awareness about how we see ourselves as socialists, a willingness to trust as well as criticize what we have done, a recognition of creativity in diversity, and a persistent quest for open types of relationships to one another and to ideas as part of the process of making socialism.

On the Line for ERA

July 9, 1978: not a day of rage, but one of pageantry. A hundred thousand women, men, and children gathered in Washington, DC, demanding an extension of the deadline for ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. Organized by the National Organization for Women (NOW), the march and rally represented the largest demonstration either way of United States feminism has yet managed to produce. Choreographed and costumed by NOW to resemble the Suffragists' marches of earlier this century, the event was staged to coincide with the first anniversary of the death of Alice Paul, who first wrote and introduced the amendment in 1923. The vast majority of marchers wore white — white eyelet flounce and white painters pants, white frilly dresses and white funky t-shirts. Diversity was most apparent with respect to age and class; white skin also predominated.

What meaning does this grandest of all feminist spectacles hold for socialist-feminists and the Left in general? The march may well have contributed to its stated goal of urging Congress to grant an extension of the ratification deadline. However, even the progressive media has been slow to explore its full impact on the women's movement, and has failed to pose questions which assist us in a broader interpretation. Here I discuss the event in the light of tensions between socialist-feminists and the rest of the women's movement, touching on the limits of single-issue organization and on its meaning in a time of New Right ascendency.

Like many socialist-feminists, I do not see the ERA, in and of itself, as a particularly compelling feminist demand, its significance being greater if it loses than if it passes. This push for equal access to American inequity is, however, a necessary reform that becomes even more timely as the antifeminist backlash of the New Right gains steam. Yet, as a woman's health activist from Boston, I only attended the march because I learned of a national meeting of progressive proabortion/prochoice forces to be held immediately after the demonstration. That I (and most feminists I work with) had not seriously considered participating in the march on its own merits is significant. It points to our personal and strategic distance from NOW-defined feminism and to our vastly differing perspectives and experiences in regard to single-issue and electoral politics.

The socialist-feminist perspective — that the interrelatedness of women's issues demands a comprehensive approach — is clearly opposed to the current inviolable gentlemen's agreement among groups with a single legislative focus. For such groups a division of the feminist turf among polite, nonthreatening women's groups is viewed as the only successful way to bring social change. For example, I asked a Boston representative of the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL) if that group had challenged the NOW dictum of forbidding display or acknowledgment of other feminist issues (i.e., abortion, childcare, sterilization abuse). NARAL is the Washington-based, liberal, national prochoice lobby group which also represents many population-control interests and works on abortion rights as a single issue. The woman stated that neither she nor anyone from that organization was active in preparing the march, that she respected NOW's platform making the passage of the ERA top priority over "extraneous issues" and that she had no intention of attending the event.

For me, however, it was hardly "extraneous" to think that a march for women's equal rights would consider what was most on my mind: that two days before the march, Massachusetts had become the thirty-sixth state to effectively cut off Medicaid funds for abortions.

Both NOW's preparation for the march and the manner in which the event itself was conducted underscored NOW's perceived need for hegemony. NOW's process of mobilization, excluding as it did left feminists, did not simply reflect the common liberal-feminist assumption that our networks and grapevines would automatically turn us out for any demonstration, because in their view we are only concerned with short-term militancy, not "long-range" solutions and organizing. By seeing legislative, pressure-group politics as the only "mature and realistic" approach to change, liberal feminists create a built-in rationale for ignoring socialist-feminism. Knowing, also, that socialist-feminists would press for a broad perspective and for the need to go beyond the ERA, NOW seemingly wanted to demonstrate "unity" over "divisiveness" by not making a special effort to reach us.

Not only was the leadership guilty here, but this value was also internalized by many marchers. As I marched with the Coalition for Abortion Rights and Against Sterilization Abuse (CARASA, New York), we chanted and sang songs of pro-choice using civil-rights melodies. Organized groups of marchers then tried to drown us out by chanting "HO HO, HEY HEY, Ratify the ERA"! Not satisfied with oral control, NOW's permit for the Mall stipulated that only literature pertaining solely to the ERA was permitted in the assembly area. Thus hawkers for the Guardian and the Militant, as well as antinuke and abortion-rights newsletters were shooed off the grass and reprimanded for disruption. I knew I had to be there once I saw I wasn't entirely welcome.

Once there, however, I wanted, really wanted, to feel good about being witness to and participating in the demonstration. Upon viewing the thousands and thousands of earnest and jubilant white-clad marchers, I wanted to discard any exclusive notions of sisterhood and see beyond the apparent limitations of the action. I was interested in the words of one of the Washington, DC, nurses on strike against the city's principal public hospital. She, a black woman of about forty years of age (the greatest concentration of black people at the march was in the labor contingents), told me:

It's real important we're here. I've stood on plenty of lines — picket lines, unemployment lines and in demonstrations. Big and small, they're all important. I'm proud to be here.

For me the result of these confused responses was that I alternated between berating myself for cynicism and dismissing the event as lowest-common-denominator politics. One moment I would be aware that socialist-feminists have never mobilized such numbers with this (save racial) diversity. Yet in the next minute some new example of unnecessary control, of the unheeding denial of anything deeply feminist, would renew my critical judgment and I would once again wonder about the lessons of the experience for other participants as well as for the women's movement as a whole.

SHERRY WEINGART

From "Thoughts on the ERA Demonstration," Vol. 12, No. 4 (July-August 1978)
Danger from the Right

Linda Gordon and Allen Hunter

The inability of the nonfeminist Left to incorporate the successes of the recent women’s movement has produced a greater distance between socialist and feminist individuals and organizations than is healthy. A splintering of feminism itself into different political tendencies has of course promoted this separation. There was hope that the separation might be reduced by the development of an autonomous socialist-feminist tendency in the last five years, and in the long run it is the most promising development in the contemporary women’s movement. But in the short run it has not been able to offer much general leadership, and within socialist feminism there have been setbacks. One was the reassertion of a crude Leninist, reductionist view of the “woman question” that was essentially antifeminist, even though often coming from within socialist-feminist organizations. In reducing the question of sexism to a class question, and restricting the current program of women’s liberation to one of “democratic rights,” these Leninists tacitly accepted, at least in current organizing, the most conservative views of proper sexual and family behavior. At the same time many other socialist feminists, in their understandable concern to bring a class politics to their women’s liberation program, also avoided sex-and-family issues in favor of an emphasis on organizing women around labor-market and job grievances. This emphasis reflected an economistic tendency even among feminists, a tendency to neglect “quality” in favor of “quantity” issues. This mistaken emphasis sometimes leads to the undervaluing of two strengths of the women’s liberation movement: the understanding that the “personal is political,” and the development of organizational forms that prefigure socialist social relations. We would like briefly to reconsider these important feminist contributions, and to suggest that their value does not run counter to, and even supports, the building of a working-class socialist movement.

One meaning of the “personal is political” is that politics is not a “thing” external to people’s own inner lives. Political relations invade, shape, and help constitute inner life. For instance, the relationship between a worker and a boss — “labor and capital” — is not just one of wages, hours, and working conditions, but is experienced through actual relationships between workers and their “superiors,” relationships encapsulated in patterns of deference and domination, refracted through posture, tone of voice, dress, and influencing such “personal” qualities as self-image. Another meaning of the “personal is political” is that many personal problems have social, economic, and political causes, and their solutions require social and political change. If this is a truism, the Left is not acting on it. Personal problems, if they continue to be perceived as private, will be obstacles to political participation. By contrast, personal problems subjected to a radical analysis can reveal the pervasive power relations in society, and can encourage people toward political strategies for change. The fact is that access to political concerns is usually initially through direct experience. For instance, it is maddening that affirmative action is felt as more of a threat to many people than nuclear power plants. The reason, perhaps, is that affirmative action upsets traditional social relations and personal expectations, while nuclear power does not, at least not directly or immediately. Yet once people do connect deeply felt personal problems to larger political structures, they often go on to make political sense out of the whole society rather quickly. This is not merely hypothetical; many women in the last decade moved rapidly from complaints about sexual relationships to feminism to socialism.

This transition is of course not automatic. The transition is more likely to take place when personal experiences are collectively explored and politically experienced people participate in the process. Furthermore, saying that the “personal is political” does not deny individuals’ responsibility for their own lives. Not all personal problems necessitate political solutions, no can all be solved politically. But virtually all aspects of personal life have social dimensions, just as all political power relations have personal dimensions.

Another major contribution of feminism is the development of forms of organization and thereby of community in which new kinds of social relations predominate. The collective investigation of personal oppressions can lead to a clearer understanding that the social distribution of power affects everyday life, and that the elimination of oppression necessitates
new social relationships. Feminist groups, for example, have struggled to minimize internal inequalities and to create friendships and living communities in which all members felt valued and central. If feminist groups sometimes were idealist and attempted to create democracy simply by declaring it, that is no reason to underestimate the importance of struggle for democratic communities. In fact feminist groups have been able to create organizations that were far more democratic and participatory than most of what the Left had previously done. There is, however, an inherent tension between the struggle for political power and the development of community solidarity; between the drive to organize more people and confront those with power, and paying attention to internal group dynamics. We are not suggesting that the struggle for power through outreach, organizing, and confrontation should be sacrificed. But many on the Left are not attentive enough to how internal aspects of their own organizations tend to reproduce some of the very oppressive power relations, feelings of isolation, and passivity that maintain capitalist domination.

The women's liberation movement has not been alone on the Left in attaching importance to the "personal is political" and to prefigurative forms of struggle. But these themes are central to feminism. They have been most clearly expressed in two organizational forms: consciousness raising and self-help groups.

In consciousness-raising groups, people share their personal experiences, often about things which they have been previously ashamed to discuss. In most homogeneous groups, people have been able quickly to learn that even their worst shame and miseries were not so uncommon, were parts of social patterns, created by social relationships. There is a difference, however, between CR and support groups. Good CR groups should be supportive, through the enormously comforting gift of solidarity, but they should also challenge existing relations and defenses against change. The fact that many CR groups did create such challenges is illustrated by the fact that many dissolved after a year or two, despite deep personal commitments, because their members felt the need for larger and more action-directed political groups.

It is also important to note that CR groups were a particular form uniquely appropriate to women's liberation. "Men's liberation" groups have a greater tendency to become merely supportive, to reinforce existing patterns, and at worst to provide cover for backlash grievances against women's anger. But we are not convinced that CR groups are useless for anyone except women. Like any political form, they are not magic; they require clear political goals, structure, and leadership. But it seems to us that all political organizations ought to create some space, formal or informal, where people can talk politically about their personal lives.

Although "self-help" has come to refer mainly to gynecological clinics, in fact it denotes a more general organizational form in which people work collectively to help themselves deal with social problems. Perhaps the best way to appreciate the significance of these kinds of service projects is to contrast them with the more standard welfare-state model of rendering services as commodities (paid for either directly or through taxes) delivered by bureaucrats or professionals. Recently, the women's movement itself has brought many social problems into the open: rape, incest, wifebeating, for example. In response, institutions such as hospitals, police forces, judicial systems, mental health clinics and universities are intervening ever more extensively and deeply into family life. The well-known distaste with which most welfare recipients regard their social workers is an accurate indication of the attitudes that many service workers (including, unfortunately, many workers objectively in the working class) have been socialized into. But even well-meaning social workers only deepen despair because of the inability of the institutions they work within to offer alternatives better than even the most oppressive families and neighborhoods.

A further complexity in developing a left response to bureaucratic intervention is that we cannot simply denounce it. The feminists' power of disclosure, for example, went far beyond the capacity of the women's movement to deal with problems. A man's home is not his torture chamber, after all. There is a great deal that therapy and counseling can do to help unhappy people. Even the capitalist state can sometimes protect people from worse, or more pressing, evils.

Self-help groups cannot replace the state, but they can offer radical alternatives for some. Through projects such as rape crisis centers, alcoholics' groups, and shelters for abused wives, the victims of oppressive men and institutions are encouraged to change their lives with the aid of other women, often previously victims.

The model of collective self-help, while not in itself a socialist strategy, strengthens the connection between personal and social change. In the best of cases, self-help groups combine consciousness raising with material aid and an opening to a new community of people, thus providing not only the ideas but some of the conditions for adopting a less passive stance toward the world. The self-help model is a way of dealing with the fact that politics often becomes a part of one's life only when a political problem is directly experienced.

Of course there are wide variations in such projects, and the most famous of these — the gynecological clinics — are now frequently hierarchically run. Furthermore, self-help ideology has sometimes promoted an unqualified antiprofessionalism and disregard of helpful expertise. But the shunning of such work by socialists has also contributed to the low political level of many projects. Self-help groups are susceptible to all the political problems of service projects: attracting people with a client orientation toward the project, conflict of interest and energy between performing services and political outreach, bureaucratization forced by state licensing requirements, among others. But all political work has problems and we are not convinced that these are greater than the potential
benefits.

It is also important to keep self-help projects and consciousness-raising groups in mind when evaluating the current state of the Left. While many sectors of the Left do not seem active now, such self-help groups are spreading among working-class women. Indeed, a good part of the most dynamic political activity in the working class today is among women who have been changed by feminism.

Still, it is important to remind ourselves again that many working-class women are in the Right, too. We are alarmed at the growth of the Right, and think it should be answered. But our primary reason for arguing that the Left should make sex-and-family “personal” issues important in our work is not simply a desire to respond to the Right. On the contrary we have several more long-run and positive reasons for urging that course. We think that the development of a fuller socialist-feminist program on these issues would contribute greatly to a socialist program that would be attractive and realistic for our country. We think that many people, and perhaps especially working-class people, are troubled and looking for solutions to problems of personal tension, violence, and loneliness. We do not mean to suggest that this is a whole socialist program or even the basic part of one. But we think that family and personal instability is a weak spot in capitalism, and that socialists can participate in and develop political responses attractive to much of the working class.


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Organizing Against Sexual Harassment

Linda Gordon

The existence of this public meeting reflects the big victory we have already won. It is a great achievement of the women’s liberation movement that sexual harassment has been dragged out of the sanctum of tacit male privilege, with its disguise as harmless badinage and play ripped off, and recognized as a violation of women’s rights. Indeed, not only is sexual harassment now a violation of the law, but to many it is becoming apparent that it is even unjust. A decade ago such recognition did not exist. Indeed, a decade ago the phrase “sexual harassment” would have been unrecognized by most people in this country. The creation of a new vocabulary by the feminist movement is not a minor accomplishment. New concepts like sexism and sexual harassment, and new definitions of old concepts like rape, are the symbols of profound changes in consciousness. Such consciousness-changing is absolutely as fundamental a form of progress toward a better society as any material or organizational gains — in fact, probably more fundamental, since consciousness must be the basis of political struggle.

* * *

The main theme of all this is that an effective struggle against sexual harassment should not be separated from an overall fight against male supremacy. The stricutures laid out here no doubt are very demanding: We need to produce a strategy that respects civil liberties, that acknowledges the inevitable subjectivity of judgments without losing the claim to legal objectivity, that criticizes sexual harassment but not sexual flirtation (even when the latter takes forms that may be personally distasteful), and that educates people about the relation between sexual harassment in particular and sexism in general. But all these various goals flow organically out of our basic commitment, which is to make the world a better place for women. And with that as our main commitment, we really cannot afford to lose sight of these complexities.

We are unlikely to be able to keep all these things in mind all the time. And at some times our anger will and should simply explode. But I do think it is important for us at least to acknowledge the complexity of the task we are attempting, and to realize that we are the ones with the most to lose if campaigns against sexual harassment become single-issue reform drives severed from an overall feminist perspective on changing the world.

No matter how radical and ambitious our views of the kind of new society we would like, the starting point must be that sexual harassment is bad for women. It makes women uncomfortable in their workplaces and therefore encourages them to accept themselves as peripheral in the labor market; it keeps them stratified in the worst jobs, and keeps them subordinate to men in every way. Sexual harassment functions to keep women domestic, to reinforce the tradition that public spaces belong to men. It tightens the double bind we are all — especially heterosexuals — in: that to be a true woman we must look sexually attractive, but not too sexual. And it encourages blaming ourselves for not being able to meet these
double and conflicting expectations. Sexual harassment encourages women's internalized sexualization in a passive mode; it dooms us to reacting and receiving, never inventing and initiating, sexual (and also nonsexual) experiences. This passive sexualization discourages women from taking ourselves seriously in other ways. It is hard to function as a serious intellectual in a university when one is being addressed mainly in the form of compliments on our appearance. It is hard to do manual work with strength and skill when one is constantly made conscious of one's body as it is sexually perceived by others. It is hard to be politically active when one is not heard.

Sexual harassment is not a matter of manners, or style. It is a fundamental form of oppression, and one of the most widespread in our society. Tolerating it is absolutely against the interests of anyone committed to freedom and equality. The understanding of this issue and the struggle against it can only be effectively advanced within the context of an overall feminist analysis. Of course we need to use legal and administrative procedures against sexual harassment wherever they are available to us, but we must resist turning the power completely over to the state or other institutions. We need to hang on to the power to define sexual harassment; to understand that the only reliable protection for women will be the power of the women's movement, not the threat of official punishment. Therefore our primary goal should be to raise the consciousness of other women about the kind of treatment they deserve, and their capacity to defend each other's "individual" rights collectively.

From "The Politics of Sexual Harassment," Vol. 15, No. 4 (July-August 1981)
do you remember

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Roots

Historical Traditions

George Rawick

The black community was the center of life for the slaves. It gave them, marked off from the rest of society, an independent base. The slave did not suffer from rootlessness — he belonged to the slave community and even if he were sold down the river, would usually be able to find himself in a new community much like his previous one, in which there would be people who shared a common destiny and would help him find a new life.

The slave labored from sunup to sundown and sometimes beyond. This labor, which dominated part of the slave’s existence, has often been described but never in terms of its relationship to the slave community nor to what the slave did from sundown to sunup. Under slavery, as under any other social system, the lowest of the low were not totally dominated by the system and the master class. They found ways of alleviating the worst of the system and at times of dominating the masters. What slaves accomplished was the creation of a unified Negro community, in which class differences within the community, while not totally eradicated, were much less significant than the ties of blackness in a white man’s world.

While slaves were oppressed and exploited under slavery, they fought back in a day-by-day struggle which did not lead directly to liberation, but which in fact prevented that “infantilization” of personality that many historians insist took place. While there was, of course, an impact upon the slave personality of the institution, “infantilization” hardly describes it. In fact, what must be seen is the fact that the result was quite contradictory. On the one hand, submissiveness and a sense that one deserved to be a slave; but on the other, a great deal of anger and a great deal of competence to express this anger in ways that protected the personality and had objective results in the improvement of the slave’s situation.

* * *

In myth and folklore the slave not only acted out his desires, he accomplished much more than that. In his laughter and pleasure at the exploits of Legba, Anansi, and Br’er Rabbit he created for himself, out of his own being, that necessary self-confidence denied to him by so much of his environment.

We get another example, a most crucial one, of the relationship of the slave community to the slave struggle in the slave religion. The religion of the slaves not only provided a link with the most modern of naturalistic and humanistic philosophy, but also with the concrete day-by-day struggles of the slaves themselves. Slave revolts themselves were often related to what has been called in several accounts the “African cult meeting.” We have an overwhelming amount of evidence of regular late-night or early-morning “sings” and religious meetings held either in the slave quarters or in nearby swamps or river banks.

But, above all, for the period from the defeat of Nat Turner’s rebellion in 1831 to the Civil War, the African cult and its related community provided the basis for social life of the slaves. In these thirty years the Negro slaves retrenched, struggled to maintain a coherent culture, infused human dignity and human possibility into the day-by-day life of the slave, and above all built the Underground Railroad. The real Uncle Tom of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s book was the leader of the slaves on the plantation precisely because he was more courageous than all the other slaves as well as wise in the ways of protecting his people in their isolation. Also, Negro spirituals were the legitimate and necessary manifestations of this period. The slave personality was kept whole by the conscious and deep-seated realities of the Afro-American culture as expressed in the day-by-day and night-by-night life of the slave quarters. While the struggle was neither dramatic nor heroic in an epic way, it was real and successful.
Through the instrumentality of the African cult, a concrete expression of a philosophy most adequate to the task at hand, the Afro-American slave prepared the ground and built the community out of which could come the struggles of the abolitionist movement. Abolitionism was at all times dominated by Afro-Americans, not by whites. Every abolitionist newspaper depended upon the support of Negro freedmen for its continuation. And these black freedmen received their impetus from the struggles of their brothers and sisters in slavery. Rather than stemming from the New England Brahmin conscience, abolitionism grew from, and carried, the necessity of black liberation whatever the cost. And in liberating the black community, abolitionism transformed American society; it took the lead in creating a new America.

Although it will seem outrageous for those who think of movements as primarily organizations, offices, finances, printing presses and newspapers, writers and petitions, the heart of abolitionism was the slave community itself. The Underground Railroad, the efforts of the slaves for their own liberation, and their struggles’ impact on northern whites and slave blacks — these were the movement’s indispensable core. In the South, it gave the slaves the hope that enabled them to engage in the daily struggles that won for them that amount of breathing space which made more than mere continued existence possible.

With the defeat of Nat Turner’s rebellion, the slaves turned more and more to building their day-by-day resistance: to the Underground Railroad, to individual acts of resistance, to slave strikes. There were countless strikes among the slaves, strikes that were often successful. A group of slaves would, after some particular incident of brutality on the part of master or overseer, take off for the swamps, where they would hide out. After a period they would send in a representative to arrange for a conference, at which there would be “collective bargaining.” Sometimes they lost, of course, and to lose meant to be whipped and at times even more severely punished. But nevertheless the strikes went on.

Resistance of the slaves had its results. While the corruption of the master class and other whites in southern society has often been commented upon, the linkage with the activities of the slaves has never been made. The slaves themselves created the conditions for the inner corruption of the master class. While the rulers portrayed the institution of slavery as beneficent, the constant rebellion of the slaves made them know they lied. And when there is no way in which men can believe in the fundamental morality of a social system, even one they profit by, that system begins to die because the masters lose their ability to defend it.

From “The Historical Roots of Black Liberation,” Vol. 2, No. 4 (July-August 1968)

And this brings us to the point that’s the big problem in studying labor history as union history, which is that the bulk of the workforce of the South was not free white workers but was African slaves who were working on plantations. And they weren’t allowed to unionize legally. Nonetheless, the strike, which was not a very powerful tool in the hands of white workers — who could be threatened and replaced by black slaves — the strike was a very important weapon which was used very effectively by slaves. And throughout the period in the twenty or thirty years before the Civil War, there were slave strikes over and over again. The major demand of slaves when they struck was to replace the sunup-to-sundown gang labor system with the task system. The way they would do it usually was that all the slaves on a given plantation or several plantations would run off and hide in the woods or the swamps, and send one person in to negotiate with the overseer or the master, demanding that the slaves get the task system, which would allow them, after they had finished their assigned daily tasks, to tend to their own gardens, their families, or what have you. And they very commonly won this. The task system became the norm by the time of the Civil War. But of course none of that working-class militancy shows up in histories of unions because none of that was conducted by unions. And yet, there’s no question in my mind that it was the most significant, and certainly the most victorious, kind of struggle going on among the working people of the South at the time.

KEN LAWRENCE

Black History/Labor History

$100 REWARD.

Run away from my farm, near Buena Vista P. O., Prince George’s County, Maryland, on the first day of April, 1855, my servant MATHEW TURNER.

He is about five feet six or eight inches high; weighs from one hundred and sixty to one hundred and eighty pounds; he is very black, and has a remarkably thick upper lip and neck; looks at his eyes are half closed; walks slow, and talks and laugh loud.

I will give One Hundred Dollars reward to whoever will secure him in full, so that I get him again, no matter where taken.

MARCUS DU VAL.

BUENA VISTA P. O. MARYLAND.
MAY 10, 1855.

From “The Roots of Class Struggle in the South,” Vol. 9, No. 2 (March-April 1975)
Frantz Fanon and Western Civilization

Fanon said: In the nationalist revolution of the twentieth century, the people must be against not only the imperialists. Some of the people’s leaders who come forward to lead the revolution have nowhere to lead the people, and the revolution must be as fiercely against them as against the imperialists. He said that some of the writers, having learned all they could from Western Civilization, will join the revolution, but bring nothing positive and corrupt the revolutionary movement. The intellectuals will have to learn that they must dig deep among the mass of the population to find the elements of a truly national culture.

While one can find many mistakes in Fanon’s work, his greatness lies in this total devotion to the revolution, to wiping away everything but the mass of the population, to creating a new and revolutionary nationalism. Nothing else will do. And the book is, in its way, a hymn to the idea of revolution. Sartre says that Europeans have to read the book because the state in which civilization now is, demands on the part of “les damnés de la terre” — not only the colonial peoples but all who suffer the weight and bitterness of what Western Civilization has done — must feel all this totality of revolution and of what government is as Fanon felt it.

Fanon was swept away by a certain conception, the necessity to finish off what is bound to corrupt and pervert the development of a colonial population. And the value of the book is not only what it says to colonials. It is recognized more and more by Europeans that something of this spirit is needed to rid from Western Civilization the problems and burdens that are pressing down humanity as a whole!

Now I think that this is the final stage which we have reached so far. I don’t know where we will reach tomorrow. That is a consistent sequence that tells not only the history of the development of the Black intellectuals, but the history of the development of ideas which are of the greatest value to civilization as a whole. Fanon calls his book Les Damnés de la Terre; it is translated as “The Wretched of the Earth,” but I prefer “The Condemned of the World.” I want to end by saying this: the work done by Black intellectuals, stimulated by the needs of the Black people, had better be understood by the condemned of the earth whether they’re in Africa, the United States, or Europe. Because if the condemned of the earth do not understand their pasts and know the responsibilities that lie upon them in the future, all on the earth will be condemned. That is the kind of world we live in.

C. L. R. JAMES

From “C. L. R. James on the Origins,” Vol. 2, No. 4 (July-August 1968)

Origins of Negritude

I would like to say that everyone has his own Negritude. There has been much theorizing over Negritude. I have kept myself from joining in it out of personal modesty. But if I were to be asked how I conceived of Negritude, I would say that in my opinion Negritude is before all else a coming to consciousness that is concrete and not abstract. It is very important to recall the atmosphere in which one lived, the atmosphere of assimilation in which the Negro was ashamed of himself, the atmosphere of rejection, the inferiority complex. I have always thought that the black man was in search of an identification. And it has seemed to me that the first thing one had to do if one wished to affirm this identification, this identity, was to take concrete consciousness of what one is: that is, of the primary fact that one is a Negro — that we were Negroes; that we had a past; that this past contained cultural elements that had been very valuable; and that, as you say, Negroes had not fallen with the first rains — that there had been Negro civilizations that were important and beautiful. During the period we were in, the period in which we wrote, people could write a universal history of civilization without dedicating a single chapter to Africa, as if Africa had not brought anything to the world. Therefore we affirmed that we were Negroes and were proud of it, and that we thought that Africa was not some sort of blank page in the history of humanity; and, finally, the idea was that that Negro past was worthy of respect — that its values were values that could still bring important things to the world.

The song was not dried up. There were new fruits that could be borne in that song, if one made the effort to irrigate it with sweat, to cultivate it again. There was, then, this fact: There were things to tell the world. We were not dazzled by European civilization, and thought that Africa could bring its contribution to Europe. It was also the affirmation of solidarity.

AIMÉ CÉSAIRE

From “An Interview with Aimé Césaire, Vol. 5, No. 3 (May-June 1971)
Boston Road Blues

David Henderson

Boston Road is as wide as a boulevard
but lacks the classic grandeur of verdure
Tenements and bleacher-like stoops
line the cobblestone expanse through Mid-Bronx
the cars & trucks sound faster then they go
often
cobbled stone runs up into pink brick
of the Housing Authority’s stadium

ride a speeding Bonneville
along this main street
and you will see the Negroes waiting on either side
on stoops on dinette and aluminum beach chairs
like the retired
bop cap and sneakered Jews
of the Grand Concourse

at 149th st Boston Road passes perpendicular
under the El
then the Shadow Box Cabaret, Freddy’s, the Oasis,
Sylvia’s Blue Morocco, Paradise Club, Goodson’s
on to Crotona Park
where one summer of the fifth decade
the burning Enchanters bopped down
on the Crowns, the Bathgate Avenue Stompers,
and the Scorpions from PR
in rapid fury & succession
and now where the same adolescents
play softball for the Youth Board.

and the inlet to Public School 55
the swinging “Cadillacs” always took
Earl at the fishtail wheel
responding to ‘hey Speedo’ when in reality
his real name was Mister Earl
singing as he was
his teeth jumbled & contorted
the Cadillacs personnel tall and short
sundry and aloof
gleaming bemused hair
the only top to the convertible
the only road map to the sun.
parked in front of all-girl Jane Addams
their marijuana their argot their ornate auto
routed by a militant lady principal...
All the quartets sang louder
when the Cadillacs cruised Brook Avenue —

P.S. 55 is to integrate this Autumn
the Cadillacs have passed (Earl now with the Coasters)
and the Housing Authority has arrived
as influential as Jesus
as gigantic as the Tennessee Valley Authority.
1501 Boston Road is Bronx C.O.R.E.
(stompers haven risen to politics)
Herb Callender, Isaiah Brunson, knife riding

shit talking genius pacifist —
The road swirls until ghetto limits
where above two hundred street
it becomes too smooth single similar double
caucasian family homes
and Boston Road become Boston Post Road.

II
When I was a singer
I stayed on Boston Road

among the cabarets & the singers: the Dells,
the Mellotones, the Cadillacs...
our quartet calling ourselves Starsteppers
(perhaps to insure a goal
other than a ghetto)
evincen no concept of space save
where the cobblestone Road
and the bleachers-on-residence tampered to a point
where The Road became post-itself.

by twilight the clubs released their exotic lures
Sylvia’s Blue Morocco sheds blue light both neon & real
on sidewalk and cobblestones between Shabazz Beauty Parlor
& Denzil’s Fabulous candy store
Velvet Blue drapes hang ceiling to floor
and all to be seen inside is the spotlighted face
of the singer the dim blue faces of the music
the soloist the master of ceremonies — heads
truncated in blackness
puppeted by galloping Hessians from Scarsdale

And Freddy’s white enamel front white lights
all outward upward
harlem jazz exude bandstand tall
/mixing
with moth & mosquito insect-serendipity
all white light reflected spill over bleacher sitters
parked car residers, vigiliers, standee’s dispersed
and reassembled.

The tenements soar skyward
half white light half black dwindling to sky
stars dismissed by energy of mortals.

& for a moment Club 846 the combo in the window
(display)
sunday combination cocktail sips jam sessions
for bored number players 4pm to 8pm
after church and before chicken.

III
We Starsteppers
wore the same type cord suit blue
and as a rhythm ‘n’ blues singer my PAT BOONE endorsed
one afforded uniform discomfort as just reward
for being in a hurry in an 125th Street clothing store
(probably thinking the street was in Harlem)
black and red

Then one day I told Goodson, sir
the Starsteppers have a recording out now
and we are not accepting anymore club dates
on Boston Road, our managers have instructed me
to tell you.

ZAP!

Outside the “Little” club on the Road that last night
I watched the tiny attracter light
swung its eerie strobic beam twenty times yellow
a minute
to the street stones of steep 167th
long across Boston Road the island in front of A&P
through the trees catching the tenements high
then diffused and broken runs to re/wing
the tiny canopy of Goodson’s Little Club
then down 167th again

(which in the Bronx has a common level of understanding)
take Sunset Boulevard
to give a sense of dimension

Later
the higher forms of publicity
our managers had subsequently informed
Mr. Goodson of
consisted of giving all available copies
of our hit record to friends
occasional pilgrimages downtown
for pep talks about word-of-mouth
waiting days waiting nights

New York Radio stations New Jersey Stations
(WVNJ played it at six one morning)
JOCKO MURRAY THE K ALLEN FREED CLAY COLE
DR JIVE BRUCE THE MOOSE announcing to

boys & girls the new boss hit by the starsteppers
“You’re Gone” the flip side that you’ll wig over
“The First Sign of Love”

We were told
it often takes months up to a year
for a record to be picked up on
sometimes they start big on the Coast
we waited
six months a year
reading CASHBOX weekly
we waited (never to Goodson again)
we waited
and after a while
started singing to ourselves once more.

From Vol. 2, No. 4 (July-August 1968)
The Movement

The actions of the black community itself were destined to become the decisive political initiator, not only in its own liberation struggles but on the domestic scene in general. From World War II through the Korean War the urban black communities were engaged in digesting the improvements brought about by the end of the Depression and by the wartime job gains. Both bourgeois and trade-union leadership followed the forms of the New Deal-labor coalition, but the original substance of mass struggle was no longer present.

The destabilization of the whole agrarian society in the South created the conditions for new initiatives. The Montgomery bus boycott was to reintroduce mass political action into the Cold War era. The boldness of the civil rights movement, plus the success of national liberation movements in the Third World, galvanized the black communities in the major cities. At first the forms of the southern struggle were to predominate in prointegration civil rights actions. Then youth and workers were swept into the movement and redefined its direction toward black self-determination. The mass spontaneity in the ghetto rebellions revealed the tremendous potential of this orientation.


The Albany Movement

Bernice Johnson Reagon

The Albany Movement came about as a result of two Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee field secretaries, Charles Sherrod and Cordell Reagon, who came down to work in the Black Belt area. SNCC had decided to do voter-registration campaigns and they located the areas of this country that had more blacks than whites. Theoretically, if those people were voting they could run those areas. With that information Cordell and Charles came down.

I remember when Charles Sherrod came to me and said, "What do you think of Terrell County?" I said, "It's a little bitty town." Another man who was from Terrell said, "That's tombstone territory." After a few excursions into those surrounding communities they knew this—it was too tight, the fear was too great, they would be dead soon. So they thought they'd better center in Albany.

When the SNCC people first came to Albany, they began coming to our NAACP junior council meetings. This caused a clash with the NAACP. Because I was the secretary of our chapter, I went to the NAACP district meetings in Atlanta. They asked me, "What have you been doing in your community?" We had just picketed and done some other things. I thought things were about to happen and I thought I made a good report. They smashed into me and said I better be careful because these people come in and get you stirred up and leave you in jail and
the NAACP has to pay the bills and blah blah blah blah.

I was real upset; I didn’t know what was happening. At that point I didn’t have the ability to deal with “Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.” Those words had no meaning for me. I couldn’t pronounce them; I couldn’t even remember to say “Snick.” The NAACP might have been a different group, but it should have been the same from where I stood.

I said, “We’re working for the same thing, aren’t we?” What an answer I got! The Regional NAACP came down to a meeting of our chapter — Vernon Jordan, Ruby Hurley, and the junior district director — and blasted SNCC. These people thought it was important enough to stop SNCC that they came down to Albany to tell us how SNCC would lead us wrong. We had to vote on whether we would go with SNCC or the NAACP. I just couldn’t figure out why we were making that decision. I voted to stay with the NAACP because it was familiar, but I never went to another meeting.

In November, we decided to test whether the Interstate Commerce Commission would enforce its new ruling, that had come out of the summer Freedom Rides, that bus and train stations could not have segregated facilities. The NAACP chapter voted that one person would go into the lunchrooms, be arrested, and be bailed out; they would have a court case to test the ruling. SNCC decided that they would test the ruling, but the people would stay in jail.

Bertha Gober and Blanton Hall, students at Albany State, tested the ruling. At this point people were going home for Thanksgiving from the college, and the dean of students was going down to the station, making sure that Albany State College students went in the colored side. So what I’m describing is not a black against white situation per se. I’m describing a system that was held intact by almost everybody in it, including major people in the black community. Bertha was suspended from school right after she got arrested.

Bertha and Blanton were held in jail and when they came to trial we had the first marching and praying at City Hall. We announced the demonstration on campus and then we went through the halls trying to get people out. I remember one teacher we called “Ma Lat,” Trois J. Latimer, told her students, “Get out of here and go on and march for your rights!” “Ma Lat” was ancient, you know, but I remember her yelling at people to go. I remember Bobby Birch taking Mr. Ford and picking him up and moving him out of the way — just so we could get out of his class. We started from the campus and there were like just a few little people, and I said, “My god, I guess we failed.” We had to cross a bridge to get to the jail, and by the time we got to the bridge we couldn’t see the end of the line. It just kept growing. When we got to the city hall, we weren’t even sure what to do. We were saying, “Circle the block, keep moving . . .” We couldn’t decide whether to sing or be silent. Nothing like this had ever happened before in Albany.

At the end of that march, we needed to meet someplace. The Union Baptist Church on the corner near the college campus allowed us to meet there. Students did not have any place to meet in that city except in the black churches. NAACP meetings had been held in a
church. When SNCC began to do non-violence workshops, that was in Bethel AME Methodist Church.

Students had to go to other institutions in the community because we did not control the campus or the college buildings and we could not get access to them. I was in the student center when the dean saw Cordell and Charles Sherrod there and said, "Get off this campus!" It was like I was sitting with the bogeyman. They really said, "Get off or I'll call the police!" These men could not walk on campus. So the student movement could not exist except for the larger community.

In December, there was a further testing of the ruling by SNCC. A number of Freedom Riders came down on a train from Atlanta to support us. There was James Forman, Tom Hayden, Sandra Hayden (they had just gotten married), Bertha Gober was arrested a second time. After her first arrest, there had been a meeting. She'd gotten up and talked about spending Thanksgiving in jail. This time, with all the Freedom Riders present, I remember her standing up and saying, "Well..." It was like — here she was again. Julian and Alice Bond were there. Irene Ashby, who later became Irene Wright, was there. The main speaker was Dr. Anderson, who was president of the Albany Movement.

After the train riders were arrested, there were more demonstrations, and more arrests. I was arrested in the second group of demonstrations. Each time, as news of the demonstrations and arrests came out — newspapers and TV — black people came to the mass meetings from just everywhere. It seemed to break loose something basic.

The demonstrations didn't happen in a vacuum. The news, for over a year, had been full of these sit-ins. They had come behind things like Atherine Lucy and the Montgomery Bus Boycott and Little Rock, Arkansas. Everybody was praying for Dr. King when he got stabbed. It was like, "Oh, it's finally gotten here!"

So, Albany was not simply a student movement. There were just swarms of people who came out to demonstrate, from high school students to old people. And there was so much that you got from finding that some older people backed you and were willing to put up bail and things of that sort. That made the Movement much stronger. It was a mass movement.

A lot of the older people in the Albany Movement were entrenched in black Cultural traditional music and not as much into the black culture you'll find in colleges — rhythm and blues and arranged spirituals. A lot of the sit-in songs were out of the rhythm and blues idiom or the arranged spiritual idiom. Those songs, as they went through Albany, Georgia, got brought back to the root level of black choral traditional music. Albany, Georgia, in addition to all that it did in terms of a mass movement, also became a place where the music was so powerful that people became conscious of it. People who came to write about the Movement began to write about the singing and not
even understand why. They couldn’t understand what the singing had to do with all the other, but it was so powerful they knew it must have some connection.

* * *

There is a kind of singing that happens in church that is really fervent, powerful singing. And when people get out they say, “Ooh, wasn’t that a good meeting.” Ordinarily, you go to church and you sing but sometimes the congregation takes the roof off the building. Every mass meeting was like that. So the mass meetings had a level of music that we could recognize from other times in our lives. And that level of expression, that level of cultural power present in an everyday situation, gave a more practical or functional meaning to the music than when it was sung in church on Sunday. The music actually was a group statement. If you look at the music and the words that came out of the Movement, you will find the analysis that the masses had about what they were doing.

One song that started to be sung in Albany was, “Ain’t gonna let nobody turn me ‘round.”

Ain’t gonna let Pritchett turn me round,
I’m on my way to freedom land.
If you don’t go, don’t hinder me.
Come and go with me to that land
where I’m bound.
There ain’t nothing but peace in that land, nothing but peace.

There was a lady who sang that song who had a voice like thunder. She would sing it for about 30 minutes. She would also sing the song in church meetings on Sunday. The song in either place said — where I am is not where I’m staying. “Come and go with me to that land” had a kind of arrogance being in motion. A lot of black songs are like that, especially group ones. If you read the lyrics strictly you may miss the centering element, the thing that makes people chime in and really make it a powerful song. Singing voiced the basic position of movement, of taking action on your life.

It was also in the Movement that I heard a woman pray and heard the prayer for the first time. It was a standard prayer:

Lord, here come me, your meek and undone servant
Knee bent and body bowed to the motherdust of the earth.
You know me and you know my condition.
We’re down here begging you to come and help us.

We had just come back from a demonstration. The lines said, “We’re down here — you know our condition. We need you.” All those things became graphic for me. They were graphic in my everyday life but when I heard those prayers in a mass meeting, it was like a prayer of a whole people. Then I understood what in fact we (black church) had been doing for a long time. The Movement released this material, songs and prayers, created by black people, that made sense used in an everyday practical way and in a position of struggle.

From “The Borning Struggle: the Civil Rights Movement” (interview with Bernice Johnson Reagon by Dick Cluster, Vol. 12, No. 6 (Nov.-Dec. 1978)), from Dick Cluster, ed., They Should Have Served That Cup of Coffee, South End Press

The ruling class is caught in its own contradictions. It needs black workers, yet the conditions of satisfying this need compel it to bring together the potential forces for the most effective opposition to its policies, and even for a threat to its very existence. Amelioration of once-absolute exclusionary barriers does not eliminate the black workforce that the whole web of urban racism defines. Even if the capitalists were willing to forego their economic and status gains from racial oppression, they could not do so without shaking up all of the intricate concessions and consensual arrangements through which the state now exercises legitimate authority. Since the ghetto institutions are deeply intertwined with the major urban systems, the American government does not even have the option of decolonializing by ceding nominal sovereignty that the British and French empires have both exercised. The racist structures cannot be abolished without an earthquake in the heartland. Indeed, for that sophisticated gentleman, the American capitalist, the demand for black labor has become a veritable devil in the flesh.

From Harold Baron, “The Demand for Black Labor,” Vol. 5, No. 2 (Jan.-Feb. 1971)
Eric Perkins

With the establishment of DRUM (the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement) in the Dodge plant at Hamtramck, Michigan, in 1968, the white rulers and their infected proletarians got a taste of "a real black thang"! Wildcat strikes and electoral turmoil have characterized the automobile industry since. The League of Revolutionary Black Workers is indeed a timely response to the growing stagnation and alienation many of us now feel — black radicals and their frustrated so-called compatriots. Black labor has seldom been understood, and as Abram Harris remarked nearly half a decade ago, "An estimation of the role the Negro will play in the class struggle is futile if the economic foundation and its psychological superstructure from which issue antipathy or apathy are ignored." The League perfectly understands this — that racism is the result of a twofold process which involves economic inferiority and its internalization.

What is the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, and where did it come from? John Watson gives us the answer in an interview from the Fifth Estate:

The League of Revolutionary Black Workers is a federation of several revolutionary movements which exist in Detroit. It was originally formed to provide a broader base for organization of black workers into revolutionary organizations than was previously provided for when we were organizing on a plant to plant basis. The beginning of the League goes back to the beginning of DRUM, which was its first organization. The Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement was formed at the Hamtramck assembly plant of the Chrysler Corporation in the fall of 1967. It developed out of the caucuses of black workers which had formed in the automobile plants to fight increases in productivity and racism in the plant. . . . With the development of DRUM and the successes we had in terms of organizing and mobilizing the workers at the Hamtramck plant many other black workers throughout the city began to come to us and ask for aid in organizing some sort of group in their plants. As a result, shortly after the formation of DRUM, the Eldon Axle Revolutionary Movement (ELRUM) was born at the Eldon gear and axle plant of the Chrysler Corporation. Also, the Ford Revolutionary Union Movement (FRUM) was formed at the Ford Rouge complex, and we now have two plants within that complex organized.

Centered in the extremely important auto industry, the League has had an extremely wide and successful impact. It is now expanding its organizing activities to other areas — hospital workers and printers are now being organized, as well as the United Parcel Workers black caucus, which is one of the League's affiliates. Why this sudden turn from community organizing and the organizing of "street brothers and sisters," the black lumpenproletariat? The remarks of John Watson sum up the League's attitude toward this crucial and strategic shift in organizing policy:

Our analysis tells us that the basic power of black people lies at the point of production, that the basic power we have is our power as workers. As workers, as black workers, we have historically been, and are now, essential elements in the American economic sense. Therefore, we have an overall analysis which sees the point of production as the major and primary sector of the society which has to be organized, and that the community should be organized in conjunction with that development. This is probably different from these kinds of analysis which say where it's at is to go out and organize the community and to organize the so-called "brother on the street." It's not that we're opposed to this type of organization but without a more solid base such as that which the working class represents, this type of organization, that is, community-based organization, is generally a pretty long, stretched-out, and futile development.

From "The League of Revolutionary Black Workers and the Coming of Revolution," Vol. 5, No. 2 (March-April 1971)
the DRUM leaders laid down a heavy thing. They ran down how the union worked hand-in-glove with the fat corporation, the union's failure to address the workers' grievances, et cetera. Coming behind the irrefutable facts laid down by DRUM, Ed Liska, president of UAW Local 3, tried to defend the union using a weak pro-capitalist line. He ran a foul thing on how Chrysler provides a job for the workers and the powerful position of the company.

Charles Brooks, vice president of Local 3 and an Uncle Tom of long standing, tried to back up his boss by playing out of a "brother" bag.

Seeing that the meeting was futile, DRUM served notice that they were going to fight the UAW and close up the plant. They then upped and split.

Friday, the next day, at five o'clock in the morning, DRUM and its supporting groups turned black workers away at the gate. No attempt was made to interfere with white workers.

The first few workers to arrive were met by a handful of pickets without signs. The workers were not hip to the shutdown date. After the pickets ran it to them, one worker replied: "Shutting down this motherfucker, whatever the reason, is cool as far as I'm concerned."

From Vol. 5, No. 2 (March-April 1971)

Repression

What we say very simply is that yes, we can stand up and raise our hands and declaim mightily about the existence of honkies, that Black is Beautiful, and we can hang bullets around our necks and wear all kinds of dashikies, but that's not going to bring about an ultimate end to oppression. What really is going to bring about an end to oppression is doing very serious and very hard work over a fairly protracted period of time that is designed to increase the likelihood of the people's taking power. And we say that the League represents that kind of an organization and that it's important to talk about the League in that connection at what is styled a repression conference, because we say that the only means of ending that repression is to take power over that system you find yourself in. And that's how we relate to repression.

KEN COCKREL

From Vol. 5, No. 2 (March-April 1971)
Racism & the American 1970s

Black Workers, White Workers

All workers compete; that is a law of capitalism. But black and white workers compete with a special advantage on the side of the white. That is a result of the peculiar development of America, and is not inherent in the objective social laws of the capitalist system . . .

A black steel worker told me that once, when he was working as a helper on the unloading docks, he decided to bid on an operator's job that was open. All the operators were white. He had worked with them before in his capacity as helper. They had been friends, had eaten together and chatted about all the things that workers talk about. When he bid on the operator's job, it became the task of the other operators to break him in. He was assigned to the job, and sent to work with them on the equipment, and given thirty days to learn the job. It quickly became clear to him that the other workers had no intention of permitting him to get that job. They operated the equipment in such a way as to prevent him from learning how. Workers are very skilled at that sort of thing.

After two weeks one of the white workers came to him and said, "Listen, I know what's going on here. You work with me on Monday and I'll break you in." The person who told me this story agreed — at least there was one decent white worker in the bunch. Friday afternoon came around, and the white worker approached him. With some embarrassment, he admitted that he had to back down from his offer. "It's bad enough when all the guys call me a n---- lover, but when my own wife quits talking to me, well I just can't go through with it."

The man who told me that story never succeeded in getting that job.

What made those white workers act in the way they did? They were willing to be "friends" at the workplace, but only on the condition that the black worker stay in "his place." They didn't want him to "presume" to a position of social equality if and when they met on "the outside." And they didn't want him to presume to share in the better jobs at the workplace. Those white workers understood that keeping themselves in "their place" in the company scheme of things depended upon helping to keep the black worker in "his place."

They had observed that whenever the black people force the ruling class, in whole or in part, to make concessions to racial equality, the ruling class strikes back to make it an equality on a worse level of conditions than those enjoyed by the whites before the concessions. The white workers are thus conditioned to believe that every step toward racial equality necessarily means a worsening of their own conditions. Their bonus is cut. Production rates go up. Their insurance is harder to get and more expensive. Their garbage is collected less often. Their children's schools deteriorate . . .

There is no way to overcome the national and racial divisions within the working class except by directly confronting them. The problem of white supremacy must be fought out openly within the working class.

NOEL IGNATIN

From "Black Workers, White Workers," Vol. 8, No. 4 (July-August 1974)

Busing in Boston

James R. Green and Allen Hunter

In short, the issue in Boston today is racism. It is not only the institutional racism of capitalist job and housing markets and the hypocritical racism of the suburban liberals who control the state government, but it is also the well-organized racism of the Boston School Committee and its white petit-bourgeois and working-class supporters throughout the city. We have tried to point out that the racism of the School Committee is a direct outcome of the declining patronage machine which, through various exclusionary methods, is attempting to preserve the relative advantage of white workers over black workers in Boston's shrinking economy.

In fact, the kind of racism that holds center stage right now is organized racism in several of Boston's white working-class neighborhoods. Because these neighborhoods suffer from high unemployment, poor housing, and lousy schooling, it has been tempting for liberal journalists and leftists groups alike to explain away white working-class racism as a product of "lower-class frustration," "backlash," or "manipulation" of various kinds. But it is wrong to explain racism away by romanticizing the ethnic pride and community solidarity of neighborhoods like South Boston (which in fact contain real divisions), or by resorting to a conspiracy theory that explains away racism as a frustrated response to a ruling-class plot in the form of busing.

We have tried to show that busing is, in fact, the result of a determined civil rights drive fought on a
national level and an equally determined drive which Boston blacks have launched for better education on a local level. The racist resistance to the black battle against school segregation is no different from the ongoing fight to keep blacks out of white neighborhoods with decent housing or to keep Third World workers out of high-level white-collar and blue-collar jobs.

In Boston, this resistance has been mobilized largely through the remnants of the old patronage machine, represented by appendages like the Boston School Committee and allies like the exclusionary AFL craft unions. It is part of a hard-fought defense of the relative privileges of white workers over black workers. These privileges are more significant in the areas of jobs and housing than in education, but racist leaders realize that if schools are desegregated, the blacks will have won an important victory against institutionalized racism and will have set a dangerous precedent.

Although the old patronage machine has lost much of its power since Curley's time, it still represents the last line of defense against black encroach-
ments into the white world of Boston, into its segregated schools, jobs, and housing facilities. The Yankee capitalist class has seriously undercut the economic power of the old machine over the years, and the liberal Kennedy wing of the Democratic Party has deprived it of considerable power in the city, state, and federal government. As a result, the machine controls fewer jobs than ever before. In a metropolitan area with high unemployment and in a period of high inflation, the various leaders of the old machine, notably the Boston School Committee pols, have resorted more and more openly to organized racism as a means of intimidating blacks who challenge what control the old machine still has over jobs and public facilities in the city of Boston.

Busing has of course been a boon to these demagogic leaders of the old machine; it has enabled them to unite the white petit bourgeoisie of the city with large sections of its white working class around a defense of the various material benefits segregation has preserved for them. These racist politicians know that the desegregation of schools is but the first battle in a full-scale assault working-class blacks will wage for equality in jobs and housing.

As long as these racist politicians control the School Committee, they will be able to maintain considerable working-class support by dispensing patronage jobs and by favoring predominantly white schools, but the very existence of the School Committee is being threatened by various black groups who have the support of liberal political leaders in City Hall and the State House. In fact, the total domination of the Democratic Party by the liberal wing, led by White in City Hall, Governor-elect Dukakis in the State House, and Kennedy in Washington, may force the old-line machine politicians to make some kind of formal split. A Northern Dixiecrat movement of this sort, led by Hicks and Kerrigan, would probably play right into the hands of the proto-fascist American Party, which did quite well in working-class districts of Boston during the last election.

In any case, the defeat of busing would strengthen the beleaguered School Committee and its racist leaders immensely and would therefore prolong the existence of the old patronage machine in many white working-class communities. The Left in Boston, though not large, has made some inroads in working-class communities where the power of the old patronage machine has broken down. But the Left has been totally insignificant in segregated areas like South Boston where the machine is still strong and helps to mute class antagonisms.

The defeat of busing would be much more than a defeat of the latest thrust black people have made to improve education; it would also be a serious setback to the general struggle against the kind of racism which divides the working class. Furthermore, the im-
plementation of busing, as one means of breaking down an important form of segregation, is a victory not only for the black struggle for equality but also for the working-class struggle for unity.

First of all, the breakdown of segregation raises the possibility of black-white cooperation for better education, a phenomenon that has already occurred in more integrated sections of the city. In fact, there is already tangible evidence to show that the busing of white children to poor black ghetto schools has resulted in improvements within these schools which black parents were never able to achieve in the past. In other words, despite the obvious problems with this busing plan, it does create some limited possibilities for improving educational facilities for both black and white students.

The blow busing strikes at Boston's dual system of education also raises the possibility of the ultimate defeat of the old patronage machine and its overtly racist leadership. Although Hicks and Kerrigan, and others of their ilk, have received much national publicity of late (some of it quite favorable), they have failed to fulfill their promise to stop busing. This promise alone has accounted for much of their political appeal in recent years. And their political fortunes will probably suffer in the long run because of their failure to keep this promise. In fact, Hicks, Kerrigan, and other political leaders of the old machine have recently suffered defeat in their campaigns for higher office.

Although it is difficult to be optimistic about the short-term effects of the busing crisis in Boston, the following points should be noted: the racist defenders of segregation have suffered a major defeat; the powerful Democratic Party has been seriously divided and disrupted; and, most importantly, the solidarity of the black community in Boston has forced predominantly white community-organizing groups to deal seriously with the issue of racism for the first time and has encouraged some segments of the Left to organize what should be an important national mobilization and demonstration against racism in Boston.

Nevertheless, the immediate effect of the busing crisis has been to increase tension between black and white workers in this city. There is no way to deny this. No rhetorical calls for black-white unity around educational demands or broader political demands will erase this fact. White racism in Boston is a deep-seated and well-organized phenomenon, and it will not be uprooted easily. The only hope for working-class unity in Boston and other segregated cities lies in a direct assault on segregation in all its forms and in an organized defense against the racist attacks which segregation fosters.

From "Racism and Busing in Boston," Vol. 8, No. 6 (Nov.-Dec. 1974)
Black Prisoners' Poetry

Danny Holloway

Walking through Macy's on 34th St.,
I stepped into the men's room.
Like walking through Grand Central Station
at 12:00 noon,
All the spots were being used,
and people were waiting.
I got behind this white guy
since he seemed in a hurry.
Damn, thought he'd never finish pissing.
Almost pissed on myself standing there.
First time I ever noticed how long
it takes white folks to piss.
What the hell do they be doing?
I felt kind of funny finishing so fast,
figured I'd take a little extra time.
Thought I'd shake it a little longer
this particular time.
And there I went splashing the guy next to me.
Looked at me like I was crazy.
Felt stupid saying excuse me,
mentioned something about the plumbing.
And I was still the first one to finish.

From Vol. 6, No. 6 (Nov.-Dec. 1972)

James Beatty

i saw the sun today june 25
4 the first time
in 18 months 14 days
18 hours & 1 solitary minute
it was beautiful
seen through
the wire-mesh dome
up on the roof
of the tombs
i realize even though
i am an inhabitant
of this tomb
that i am
very much alive
when i return
2 the inner recesses
of this tomb
tired from this
game
of basketball
i'll make sure
2 remember
man
i'm still black
strong
& in prison
so what
right on
SUN SUN SUN SUN SUN SUN SUN SUN

From Vol. 6, No. 6 (Nov.-Dec. 1972)

Yusuf

Written on the departure of Maurice Jackson going to a Federal Penitentiary somewhere in Michigan — Sat. Morn. about 6:00 a.m. 11-29 (Terre Haute)
The crossroads of time
the intersections
all marked
ephemeral
yet
not half so
as the people
who meet
and depart
at those crossroads
yet the
span of the world
is as vast
as the span
of your mind
and the soul
is at every intersection
the soul of one
is the soul of the mass
and love and peace
the common bond of the revolutionary
become one man's onus
as another departs from his presence
yet
we know about
the crossroads and intersections
all marked
ephemeral

Dignity
dignity
is when
within the wretched confines
of a
cook county jail
in 98 degree weather
a brother
can stand in the middle of the dayroom
wearing
black on black in black
Jockey
nylon underwear
and
still maintain
his
folded arm profile
and
still talk
extremely slick...

From Vol. 5, No. 2 (March-April 1971)
The Black South in the 1970s

Manning Marable

A conservative political and cultural reaction has occurred since 1968. Despite the rhetorical triumphs of Black Power, the influx of blacks into economic and political positions of privilege, and the establishment of Black Studies curricula in southern schools, a retreat from the political logic of the sixties developed. Both before and after Martin's assassination, key members of SCLC and the NAACP who had worked closely with Martin for almost a decade privately refused to come to terms with his new political position. Many continued to praise the King legacy publicly but, as in the case of some of Malcolm's former followers, they privately denounced the international perspective and the antiimperialist analysis implicit within Martin's final speeches. The material realities of America had forced Martin to abandon his older reformist ideas for a higher form of social and ethical criticism; this was something which other leading integrationists could not or would not do.

A host of SNCC activists retreated under the cover of the "Black Power" slogan into local and state electoral politics, to build a political foundation. Black entrepreneurs like James Farmer and Floyd McKissick forged a Booker T. Washington-type alliance with the Nixon administration to establish black petit-bourgeois power.

Despite the successful voter education and registration drives of SNCC a decade ago and despite the successful organization of independent black political parties in Alabama and Mississippi, representative democracy between the races is actually at a standstill. Four million black southerners are registered compared with about two million blacks in 1964, but the civil rights movement fell far short of achieving equal political power for blacks. Black elected officials number 1,847 in the South, but that amounts to only 2.3 percent of the total number of elected officials in the region. Blacks constitute 20.5 percent of the South's total population and make up popular majorities in over 100 counties, yet only ten counties are effectively controlled by blacks. Only two black congressmen are from the South, and these persons represent the region's major metropolitan areas. This small, elected black elite represents, with few exceptions, the interests of the black petit bourgeoisie and maturing corporate interests within the New South. It tends to represent political philosophies to the right of their northern counterparts; e.g., Barbara Jordan's staunch and sincere defense of the character of John Connally at his milk fund trial; Andrew Young's solitary black vote endorsing the 1973 appointment of Gerald Ford to the vice-presidency.

Carter's ultimate victory — and the southern blacks' central role within that campaign — also constituted a reemergence of another "New South" onto the center stage of that tired drama which is American politics. There have been several New Souths at different stages of the nation's history — the New South of Atlantan Henry Grady and the Redeemer Democrats during the 1880s; the New South of the "Atlanta Spirit" and the neo-progressives of the twenties; the "moderate segregationist" South of the TVA-Maury Maverick-Claude Pepper mode. In each instance the black petit bourgeoisie played no major role of importance in determining the function of the state, the nature of "white democracy." C. Vann Woodward has observed correctly that segregation was the basic political reform of the Progressive South. The rapid rise of Barbara Jordan, Andrew
Young, Ben Brown, and other southern black moderates signifies a basic change from this tradition of whites-only politics: the southern white ruling class has decided that it can accommodate certain representatives of the Afro-American community. Jordan’s speech at the 1976 Democratic national convention and Young’s central importance to Carter’s candidacy represented the black petit bourgeoisie’s endorsement of the New South creed. Their successes represent a compromise of the real class interests of black people with the American political economy of exploitation.

* * *

The cultural, or superstructural, rationale for the state within southern society is subtle. There exists the need within civil society to provide legitimacy for the new directions the southern bourgeoisie have taken within the past decade — the acceptance of civil rights legislation, the integration of many public schools, the influx of heavy industry, and the demise of agrarian political influence in state legislatures. The New South’s creed is explained to the people through expanded educational institutions, through the promulgation of electronic media, cultural journals, new newspapers, and the arts. The New South’s aesthetics negate, or attempt to replace, the Afro-American cultural heritage and the weltanschauung of the new urban working class. Behind the rhetoric of reform the state expands its influence into every aspect of cultural life, solely to frustrate the protest impulse evident within many phases of Afro-American southern culture.

This cultural impact within black civil society has been equally reactionary. Despite the continued rhetorical use of the word “black,” most black social and intellectual leaders in the South have quietly accommodated themselves to the new capitalist realities and “New South” political leadership. On college campuses, radical black professors and administrators are being fired; Black Studies programs are abandoned; fraternity and sorority life has replaced an interest in political discussions. Clothing styles, manners of speech, and habits changed overnight. Afro hairstyles and dashikis are being rapidly abandoned for bleached hair, surreal clothing, and high heels. The blues and jazz, once an integral part of the political struggle of the sixties, are replaced by blatant sexism disco. Numerous black activist journals and community newspapers initiated in the sixties have been forced to close for economic reasons.

Perhaps the strongest single cultural change has occurred within the relations between men and women. The civil rights era in the South was a period of expanded sexual freedom. Women like Rosa Parks of Montgomery and Fannie Lou Hamer of Mississippi assumed leadership roles in desegregation struggles; black women of all ages ran for office, organized voter registration campaigns, gave political speeches, and raised funds for civil rights activities. During recent years, however, an overwhelmingly male black caste seized the newly available state and county political offices.

* * *

The history of humanity is no tidy series of predictable events, moving inextricably toward an inevitable social revolution or political upheaval. The civil rights movement as a series of political confrontations between black folk and an archaic social institution was predictable but not inevitable. The present period of reaction in the South, caused by many subjective and objective conditions, cannot be understood outside of the important positive achievements of black people in previous decades. Jim Crow will never return as it once existed, nor will its crude indignities which crushed the humanity of its master class. In spite of contradictory leaders, compromising politicians and an affluent petit-bourgeois strata, the black majority will never treat fundamentally from the very substantial gains achieved during the 1950s and 1960s. The old tradition of community organizing, picketing, boycotts, and rallying still exists, and many blacks who were too young to participate actively in the movement seem now to be interested in reestablishing its activist ethos, if not its original organizational forms.

The next movement in the South must be grounded within Marxian theory if it hopes to successfully combat racism. Southern community organizers and black political activists have begun to realize the profound, historic, symbiotic relationship between capitalist economic development and white racism. A principled struggle against the residual structures of segregated society can become the basis for a deeper conflict against cultural underdevelopment and expanding economic exploitation. The future struggle against the causes of racism must be channelled through new, practical political institutions that owe their perspectives to a materialist analysis of southern life and labor. It seems probable that this depressing and immensely contradictory period will produce the foundations for an even more successful democratic movement against economic inequality in the next decade.

From “Reaction: Thoughts of the Political Economy of the New South Since the Civil Rights Movement,” Vol. 12, No. 5 (Sept.-Oct. 1978)
Attica

Most of the brothers
were prisoners before they came
survivors
of a war with no victors
and many deaths.

They hurt themselves
and those who loved them
trying to be men
and
failing

But there, with the cold ring of steel
and the loneliness,
the clouds began to lift
the pain made sense
and the mad visions sort themselves out
into dreams of rekindled life.

A thousand men,
who had fought alone all their lives
linked arms
invited death to chase the demons
and found a freedom
their captors never knew.

Mark Naison

From Vol. 5, No. 6 (Nov.-Dec. 1971)
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Best Wishes

IN THESE TIMES
1509 North Milwaukee Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60622
REAGANOMICS: Rhetoric vs. Reality
Frank Ackerman

This hard-hitting foray into the darkest outpost of the dismal science by the editor of the popular economics monthly, *Dollars and Sense*, provides an accessible analysis of Reaganomics and the current economic crisis. Ackerman begins by laying bare the historical underpinnings of the crisis and proceeds to dissect the two principal works of neo-conservative economics, Milton and Rose Friedman's *Free to Choose* and George Gilder's *Wealth and Poverty.* In successive chapters Ackerman weighs the social, political and economic impact of the major components of Reagan's program: regressive tax cuts, the attack on organized labor, and the deregulation of industry. He ends with suggestions for alternative approaches to solving our economic problems.

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—New York Times Book Review

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Scene 1: The Pentagon

Well, Death, I suppose you're wondering why you, a mere Sergeant, have been secretly called here?

General, sir, I can only assume it's something too big to handle through ordinary channels!

Alas, it's true! We have received reports through our so-called "intelligence" that the Red Chinese have developed an ICBM capable of vaporizing every man, woman, and child in America with a single, terrifying blast...

Those yellow bastards! Have they no respect for human life?!

This is no time for sentimentation, Death! A very delicate situation exists! The sensible solution would be to annihilate their entire country before they can do anybody any harm, but we are prevented from this logical action by...

...by our lily-livered European allies! I'll bet! Same old story!

But those missile sites cannot be allowed to exist and menace our great Nation, Sergeant. But...but how else to destroy them besides bombing or...or invasion?!

But invasion is against international law (snicker)!

I'll leave the legal hassle up to you, Sergeant Death, and the...

...Merciless Mayhem Patrol!
1960’s: “Underground Culture”

Walter Lowenfels and the New Poetry

A new poetry is amongst us — new in many ways: texture, insights, experiences, language. This new poetry doesn’t fit the “pattern” that “authorities” recognize or accept. I’m afraid this is true of all the arts as well as ways of living, philosophies, and religions.

The only alternative to this seems to be all black anthologies. Literary curiosities. An integrating of black poets & any other “type” of poet that doesn’t fit the conception, that hasn’t the right image, is a touchy thing. Everyone is very conscious of this matter now. Tokenism is readily recognized & trite, mediocrity art always has its peculiar dullness. I don’t think any editor has solved this problem yet, not even Lowenfels in his “Poets of Today” anthology a few years back. I think that when enuf black poets, freak poets, meat poets, whatever you call them, evolve an identity that refers back to themselves as individuals rather than ethnic groups, races, schools, etc., that the problem will tend to solve itself. But this doesn’t mean we should ease the toehold we’re trying to keep. Hell, try for a half nelson!

His eloquence & spirit are marvelous throughout the book — they are much more marvelous than either the capitalist system which he despises or the socialist system which he hopes will replace the other. To me it seems an incongruity, a painful one, to see a man’s macrocosmic sense of poetry having to be confined by a microcosmic systematizing of things. It is here that he says “politics as poetry saved my life.” Ah, Jesus saves! & now I question — in Lowenfels’ abandonment of cynicism, despair, violence, & death as permanent fixtures of his deliberations, has he not copped out to an emotional complexity that demands an intensity, a versatility of comprehension, & a total consciousness that is too much an over-load for him to handle constantly? He fears them blinding his perspective. He fears them being dominant. He fears being engulfed & finally destroyed by them.

& again I question, when one looks at the world point-blank, quickly eyeing the past & then staring into the future, is it a one-sided schema with all negative emotions amputated that will rebuild the world into a better place or is it a positive employment of doubt, cynicism, despair, etc., that will develop us into men who have come into our own as whole men, individuals with a voice blended with all substances?

In other words, it is the human personality & our environmental circumstances that must be dealt with face-to-face, as is. Reality can’t be pretended up nor can it be bent without bending the alloys that make people what they are. If Marxists or PL people or SDS’ers or Panthers want to change life for the better, it will have to be done by changing the human personality for the better & such changes evolve from within & emanate outward. Political adroitness only affects surfaces. This is why Lowenfels is a more effective poet than he is a politician no matter how hard he tries to meld the two together.

For this reason he is a perfect example of how a late 20th century revolutionary chooses his own unique weapons for maximum effectiveness. Revolution is no longer exclusively propelled from out of a gun barrel. The gun cannot force people to think, to love, to be merciful, to understand, to be beautiful, to be generous, to not misuse power. Such things cannot be forced. Nor does the gun serve as an instrument of self-exploration so that one can penetrate his psyche & correct his weaknesses. The gun is, as even the poem can be, propaganda for the doing of such things; but it cannot force results. & when I say “the gun,” I mean the bomb, the army, or just simple dictatorial laws as well.

If a poem is a gun, it will do nothing but set the clock ahead 360 degrees.

DOUG BLAZEK

From review of two books by Walter Lowenfels, Vol. 4, No. 6 (Sept. 1970)

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**THE NEW JERSEY — ROCKPORT**

the pasture on the road to rockport was home for a cow with a half-size fifth leg
growing nonchalantly from its left shoulder.
the other cows didn’t seem to even notice
and the birds sang their usual songs
and the green grass flourished
then swenson’s death.
then the auction.
a cow butchered for cat food.
a pasture seized by monsters throwing up
ugly wood/brick housing units,
so many 6th, 7th, 8th legs,
dumb clubs smashing down the trees
murdering the grasses
and sending our birds
into exile.

DAN GEORGAKAS

From Vol. 5, No. 1 (Jan.-Feb. 1971)
back home is where the war began

smalltown newspaper editors
met in the florida sun to
diagnose problems common to
small communities
should we hire a psychologist for the highschool? should we renovate the sewer system? should we place an American Flag in each classroom? kicked around between beers & clouds of cigar smoke until the editor of the gary indep. moved to adjourn & the small town men adjourned for an afternoon by the swimming pool with their fat varicose-hearted wives.

back home, the people read the big newspapers every page a bomb a tangled arm of print & steel sucking their eyes dry planting celluloid tears in their loins every page a free advertisement for the tin society

back home is where the war began where flowers were ceremoniously dedicated to lost consciences where god was worshipped in the churches but not in the conscience where the crimes of a nation were too big to bring into the confessional where the reality of selma & dallas & washington lingered only as a bad dream that did not pertain where boy scouts marched with cheese-cloth flags strung around their necks & veterans of the last war smiled from their brain, refrigerated visions bottled semen the truth timeblasted to the bottom of their withered pancreas

back home is where the war began in front of the television where death was a facile trick where freedom sat in cans on grocery shelves where poets survived only by the miracle of camouflage where love was restricted to movie sets

in the carpeted wasteland of fluorescent libraries where plastic words rattled in the overdue fine box where the mind was burned with every dollar squandered on new titles & you could check out with ten tombs of wisdom under your arm & the prophets were kept under key

back home is where the war took root in the little minds of men who worked to make themselves impotent who nourished their vision on intellectual foam-rubber who could not admit to a revolution of any kind who graduated from adolescence to obsolescence in a state of dream consciousness, & married little women & brought dead children into a dying world & died themselves of over-consumption

back home is where the war blows detergent into the eyes of its uncomprehending victims while editors play word games over private tables in florida hotels & all is right with the world so long as we can return to the past & bring back old failures & try them again, twist them into new positions of workability, so long as we can close the eye like strangulated chickens squinting at carnivals or newspapers, while the real war did not begin with a bullet it began with a thought bargained away from its owner

it began with the newspapers that brought the soul back into the living room it began when the truth about freedom of expression killed a high school sophomore

it began & is perpetuated everywhere by men in whatever position of small authority who spread the lie that words are magic, that their words, in particular, are sanctified by the nobility of their dreams dreams borrowed misinterpreted & stolen from the grave, dreams that will shape the death of america because there is no one left to shape his own dreams from the dreamless steroid mass imagination

no one left to dream new majiks write new newspapers destroy the column inch bring back the flowing circle

From New Majiks: Selected Poems and Rabbits of t. l. Kryss, Radical America pamphlet, 1970
d. a. levy

D a. levy's book, ubuntuuyrufunclitibak, is a monster mimeo edition of just about everything he wrote up to summer of this year. Anything I could say about it would be insufficient, since there's hardly any doubt that his poetry is of the strongest being written anywhere in the country today.

There are more than three hundred pages of writing which leaves the word "poetry" shuffling around in embarrassment like a disappointed kid who can't go along on a dangerous trip. levy has been busted twice by the Cleveland cops — not for drugs, but for reading his work out loud in a coffee house! Oh yeah, and he contributed to the delinquency of a minor by publishing a seventeen year old's poem on his mimeo machine. But the issue was never obscenity, though that's the pretense on which at least a dozen underground poets have been busted (and Blazed checked by the FBI). The real problem is that levy's poems are filled with Cleveland — how the power is distributed and used; what the minds of the cops, city bureaucrats, and bankers are like; what the stinking pollution of Lake Erie means to people every day — and that they are also filled with a vision of peace, love, and power which, if they are ever taken seriously, will mean the death of corrupt insanity.

It may or may not be surprising to some people (like the writer of the article in The Guardian called "Where Are the Poets?") that poetry has become dangerous, that there are poets up front taking chances, getting arrested and generally harassed — Steve Richards, rjs, levy, Ed Sanders — wholly for the sake of getting some meaning back into the gutter of "belles lettres."

Randolph Bourne saw "Culture as a living effort, a driving attempt both at sincere expression and at the comprehension of sincere expression wherever it was found." Today that definition goes down hard with American culture.

no picture is made to endure nor to live with

but it is made to sell and sell quickly as Pound put it. levy's poems meet Bourne's definition. There is no separation of thought and expression in his writing, no ornamentation or affectation.

DAVE WAGNER


Rectal Eye Vision #8 (excerpt)

AMERICA WAKE UP!
GOD DOESN'T WANT YOU TO KILL HIS ANGELS
if you knew the price you will pay prophecy for this
WAR ECONOMY NATION OF DEATH
STOP THE KARMIC MURDER PIE NOW
Worse than worshipping the golden calf you are killing for it
consider the weight of yr possessions
america, twice this weight you will carry when you die
for the innocent & pure of heart
i am raising the flags/ a warning of storms
Be Prepared to GO HOME LAMBS
i do not have the courage to say
this may be your last sacrifice
they will not weep on wall street
until it is too late & the tears have no meaning
there is no reason to play with death
this is not your country
when i smelled love burning/ i cried
& NOW i smell the horse of the Angel of Death
go home lambs
you are trying to build
a temple in a graveyard
YOU/have years to plan, my days are numbered
LAUGH at my fears & ignore my love
yet love & fear are the only wings to move on
when you have visited your own death
everyday is the last
GO HOME LAMBS
let yr children be born in the sun
"this country is insane"
GO HOME LAMBS
in the world of the spirit one does not lose what he has gained.

D. A. LEVY

From To Be a Discrepancy in Cleveland by d. a. levy, Radical America pamphlet, 1971
Youth Culture: A Critical View

Mark Naison

As the movement has begun to reach out beyond the campuses, no issue has generated more controversy than the political implication of "Youth Culture." During the past year and a half, great theoretical debates and factional splits have occurred over the question of whether youth culture represents a viable link between the movement and the working class. But to radicals with no factional attachment, the issue has been equally important. Every radical group in a working class community finds itself confronted almost daily with problems arising from the generational revolt: what drugs should it encourage people to use and what drugs must it fight; what music and dress and sexuality can it tie in to its politics without sacrificing women's liberation; what programs can it create to link the spontaneity of the street culture with a collective spirit and a respect for work.

After eight months of activity in a predominantly Irish-working-class neighborhood in the Bronx, the group I am part of (The Bronx Coalition) has not yet found answers to these questions. Youth culture has affected many kids in our community profoundly, but we are by no means persuaded that it represents the key to social revolution. In the street culture of the Bronx, "the youth revolt" has become so tangled and twisted with the values of the market-place that it presents no clear liberating message. With the help of the media, the communal vision of the hippies and the social mission of the movement have been sacrificed to an appearance of rebellion in which the individualism of Amerikanik culture still reigns supreme. The number of people who "dig" the movement is vastly greater than the number of people who will work steadily to build it.

An equal difficulty arises in connecting youth culture to women's liberation. Although the youth revolt has undermined many repressive attitudes (racism, patriotism, authoritarianism), it has not dramatically reduced the exploitation of women. Street women who have rebelled against their parents by smoking pot, or not wearing makeup, or going to demonstrations continue to feel pressure to be passive sexual objects from the men they hang out with. The "revolutionary spirit" in youth culture which has been glorified by radical men (Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin) does not appear so groovy to politically conscious women. Where men see sexual and personal freedom, women may see a new and more subtle form of oppression.

These contradictions have come out clearly in our group's short history. When we got our storefront in December, the Coalition was dominated by men who saw the long-haired street kids in our area as material for a white liberation army. All we had to do was use the right rhetoric, play the right music, and display a little bravado, and we could get thousands of kids in motion to ripoff draft boards, ROTA's, banks, recruiting stations, and other manifestations of the Pig Presence in the Bronx. We leafleted schools and parks, put out a newspaper modeled on Rising Up Angry, called rallies and marches (hoping they would spin off into "trashing"), and made plans for week-long offensives against the war machine in March (Anti-Draft Week) and April (Anti-Imperialist Week).

But during our first week of action in March, hardly anyone showed up. A lot of young people said they dug our leaflets and came to our office, but less than a hundred actually joined the demonstrations. This failure forced our group into extended self-criticism. Not only was it apparent that we had failed to create a youth liberation army, but we had created a dynamic which pushed women's issues into the background. The women in our group had played the major role in staffing our office, putting out our newspaper, and distributing our literature, but our emphasis on trashing and military-related issues placed the women's struggle in a distinctly subordinate position. The women presented us with an ultimatum: either the Bronx Coalition incorporated women's liberation into every aspect of its organizing or the men would have to leave the group.

From that point on, the Coalition ceased to consider "street cleaning" as its major reason for existing. As the women's group took leadership, "bread and butter issues" and community service programs assumed a far more important place in the organization's activity. We scrapped the plans for "Anti-Imperialist Week" and concentrated on developing programs to which the whole community could relate. We set up a draft-counseling and abortion-counseling service. We worked with local postal workers during the mail strike. Our women's group forced a local hospital to provide free cancer-detection examinations in our storefront and brought more than 150 women from the community in to be tested. Films and discussions on women's liberation were put on weekly. The office was cleaned and converted from a "youth hangout" into a place where a working-class mother might feel somewhat comfortable.

These changes did not mean we had given up on "youth culture." We continued to sell our newspaper, the Cross-Bronx Express (whose profits paid our rent), at the local high schools, colleges, and parks. We worked closely with radical students at local schools. And we gratefully accepted the "insulation" which the proliferation of long hair and hippie clothes gave us in our very conservative neighborhood. The fact that our storefront window remained unbroken when the women's group removed the boards was testimony to the degree to which the symbols of the movement, if not its substance, had penetrated our area.

However, the women's revolution did initially make our group more difficult for young people to relate to. As we began to emphasize programs over rhetoric, disciplined activity over "hanging out," the number of high-school kids and street kids who came into our office temporarily dwindled. The group reduced to a hard core of some twenty-odd people in their twenties and thirties with a group of high-school students on the fringes. The efficiency of our work greatly improved as did our reputation with local adults, but we felt ourselves getting increasingly isolated from the thousands of street kids who in many of us still saw an important force in the revolution. Our preoccupation with purging the group's chauvinism produced a puritanical atmosphere which made it difficult for kids to be

Joel Beck

GENERATION GAPS...

I WORK TO PUT YOU THROUGH SCHOOL!

I FIGHT two WARS TO PROTECT YOUR FREEDOM!

I PAY HIGH TAXES TO KEEP YOU SAFE AND HEALTHY!...

SO NOW YOU GROW UP!

AND WHAT DO YOU DO?
around us; we came on like teachers and parents and social workers who were trying to force them to conform to an alien culture.

The Cambodia-Kent State explosion helped dramatize (and ultimately reduce) this isolation. When the news of the invasion hit, kids in our community took to the streets in unprecedented numbers. At Clinton High School (half black, half working-class white) 3,000 students charged out of school, breaking windows and overturning buses, and marched over to Roosevelt High. Two thousand more kids came out to meet them and they charged the Fordham University campus, retreating only when the Tactical Patrol Force came at them with guns. Similar events occurred at Taft and Columbia High, other schools where we had worked. Kids who had previously been reluctant to hand out leaflets were now leading strikes at their schools and putting out underground newspapers of their own. The political level of the strikes was as impressive as the violence. In addition to demanding all troops out of Southeast Asia, the high-school strike committees called for the release of political prisoners, cops out of the schools, and student control of the educational process. For a week it seemed like the middle of a revolution; the students had acted on their own beyond our wildest dreams.

By the end of May, however, the schools had sunk back into apathy. Although ambitious proposals had been made about keeping high schools open as liberation centers for the community, the strike committees were unable to convert the violence into concrete programs. Students fell back easily into the routine of getting high, hanging out, and studying for exams. The level of political consciousness had been raised in the sense that more students were able to see themselves as oppressed (and therefore identify with the blacks and the Vietnamese) but new social and educational structures did not emerge from the struggle. Our paper sales and the number of people working with us increased, but we remained the only viable radical group in the community.

The strike experience was thus sobering as it was exhilarating. We had seen tangible potential for rebellion among white youth in our area: there was enormous pent-up frustration which could express itself through symbols and issues that "the movement" put forward. But at the same time, we observed an inability to work without immediate emotional gratification, and a preoccupation with a mystique of power and action which could be mobilized by an advertising campaign or a pennant race as well as by the Left. We found very little collective spirit. The kids related to politics as something that could give them a quick thrill in an emotionally barren life. Within the youth of our community, politics seemed to play precisely the same role as drugs! It was a substitute for human relationship in a society where basic institutions — family, church, school — were failing to provide meaning to people's lives.

This connection between social decay, politics, and drugs came through to us dramatically when we discussed the problem of dealing with the rapid growth of heroin addiction in our neighborhood. Almost every day we were out on the street, we came across working-class kids, once "hitters" and racists, who had begun to identify with the antiwar and black-liberation struggles. They had begun to relate their own oppression to that of Third World peoples and they could talk with great feeling about how the police served real and tangible; it creates a physical high, an orgasm of the whole body, a very beautiful feeling. If the restraints against taking it are breaking down, as they are in our neighborhood, and the satisfactions of family life and work are shrinking, it is a very difficult thing to give up. Youth culture only encourages the process. If the media tells kids that the revolution means enjoying themselves now without regard for the consequences, what better way is there to do this than shooting up? In terms of sheer pleasure, heroin makes you feel a lot better than a demonstration or a good fuck.

But youth culture should not be seen as the cause of the drug addiction. It is a related (and largely positive) response to an underlying sickness. Amerikkkan society is falling apart. There are almost no institutions that function successfully as stabilizers of human personality, no basis for community. The productive machine has been stripped of its meaning at the same time that its performance has been deteriorating, and people are being left without symbols with which they can identify. (The flag is a bad substitute for a successful economy and foreign policy.) The media are continuing to manufacture needs for sexuality and goods, while the opportunity for such satisfaction is decreasing. There is a cultural crisis so basic in the making that it portends mass psychosis. People need values and continuity as much as they need thrills. Either there will be a revolution and a new order of human community, or we will sink into a barbarism.

Our group in the Bronx has been forced to respond to this crisis cautiously, but we are not without hope. After unfortunate experiences in trying to engineer mass actions under our leadership, we have been concentrating on programs which provide services to our community while exposing the literal bankruptcy of the local power structure. Our summer program consists of self-defense classes, rock concerts in local parks, the Cross-Bronx Express, a daycare center, draft counseling, and a campaign for community control of health facilities and the construction of new hospitals. Our impact in the short run has been small but we are steadily increasing the number of people working in our projects and have begun to provoke conflict between the police and local politicians on how best to handle us. When the head pig in the Bronx denied us a sound permit for one of our rock concerts (claiming we were a radical group) ("Shouts Power to the People!"); we got one thousand signatures in a day from local residents asking the permit to be restored, and forced the borough president to overrule the pig! To many in the movement, this may repre
sent collaboration, but to people in our community, it represented POWER! As we implement programs which function and succeed, as we show we are in the community to stay until conditions genuinely improve, we will not only encourage people to get involved with us, but inspire them to take action on their own against problems they once thought insoluble.

The strategy is a long-term one. Some of the actions we would like to take, such as a war on the drug traffic, cannot be realistically attempted without far greater organization and community support. Stopping junk involves taking on the cops and the Mafia simultaneously, something one does not even contemplate without plenty of guns and a constituency for protection and defense. And at the same time we feel we are on a path which has a chance of reaching that point, and feel other radical groups in working class areas can reach it if they create a network of counter-institutions to back up their rhetoric.

This requires that the movement build upon youth culture rather than imitate it. Revolutionaries must probe beyond the primitive thrill of seeing working-class kids with long hair and militant rhetoric; they must look beyond a sense of frustration and hatred for the pigs. In every contact with the street culture, they should try to create institutions which bring out a collective spirit, which enable people to be revolutionary between demonstrations, which provide more satisfying ways of meeting basic human needs than the old structures. Coffee houses, experimental schools, cooperative stores and services, communal living experiments, community radio stations and newspapers, community health clinics, collective farms and retreats for drying out addicts are potentially viable forms which can be created in the vacuum that American capitalism has left. If the quality of working-class life continues to deteriorate, the need for new institutions will dramatically increase. The movement can reap the benefit. If we use youth culture creatively, we can open opportunities our predecessors always lacked; we can build a revolutionary culture which will make personal liberation an integral part of the struggle of socialism.

From Vol. 4, No. 7 (Sept.-Oct. 1970)
The Advertisers’ Culture

Advertising as Social Production

The reality of modern goods production and distribution called for a dependable mass of consumers. The advertising which attempted to create that mass often did so by playing upon the fears and frustrations evoked by mass society. Within a massifying culture, the ads offered mass-produced visions of individualism by which man could extricate himself from the mass. While on the level of ideological consciousness, man was being offered commoditized individuality, on the level of the marketplace his acceptance of that individuality means an entrenchment within the dependable mass of consumers that advertising was attempting to build. The rationale was simple. If man was unhappy within mass industrial society, advertising was attempting to put that unhappiness to work in the name of that society.

In terms of the self-conscious use of language by advertisers, the idea was to “hitch” concepts and feelings which were familiar to readers and link them to a new and profitable context, the marketplace. In an attempt to boost mass sales of soap, the Cleanliness Institute, a cryptic front group for the soap and glycerine producers’ association, pushed soap as a “Kit for Climbers” (social, no doubt). The illustration was a multitudinous mountain of men, climbing over one another to reach the summit. At the top of this indistinguishable mass stood one figure, his arms outstretched toward the sun, whose rays spelled out the words “Heart’s Desire.” The ad cautioned that “in any path of life, that long way to the top is hard enough — so make the going easier with soap and water.” In an attempt to build a responsive mass market, the Cleanliness Institute appealed to what they must have known was a major dissatisfaction with the reality of mass life. Their solution was a sort of mass pseudo-demassification.

During the twenties, civil society was increasingly characterized by mass industrial production. In an attempt to implicate men and women within the efficient process of production, advertising built a vision of culture which bound old notions of Civilization to the new realities of civil society. In what was viewed as their instinctual search for traditional ideals, men were offered a vision of civilized man which was transvaluated in terms of the pecuniary exigencies of society. Within a society that defined real life in terms of the monotonous insecurities of mass production, advertising attempted to create an alternative organization of life, which would serve to channel men’s desires for self, for social success, for leisure away from himself and his works, and toward a commoditized acceptance of “Civilization.”

STUART EWEN

From “Advertising as Social Production,” Vol. 3, No. 3 (May-June 1968)

Stuart Ewen, Billboards of the Future, 1980
The Spectacle Considered

11

To describe the spectacle, its formation, its functions, and the forces which tend to dissolve it, one must artificially distinguish some inseparable elements. When analyzing the spectacle one speaks, to some extent, the language of the spectacular itself in the sense that one moves across the methodological terrain of the society which expresses itself in the spectacle. But the spectacle is nothing other than the sense of the total practice of a social-economic formation, its use of time. It is the historical moment which contains us.

12

The spectacle presents itself as an enormous unutterable and inaccessible actuality. It says nothing more than "that which appears is good, that which is good appears." The attitude which it demands in principle is this passive acceptance, which in fact it has already obtained by its manner of appearing without reply, by its monopoly of appearance.

13

The basically tautological character of the spectacle flows from the simple fact that its means are at the same time its goal. It is the sun which never sets over the empire of modern passivity. It covers the entire surface of the world and bathes endlessly in its own glory.

14

The society which rests on modern industry is not accidentally or superficially spectacular, it is fundamentally spectatorial. In the spectacle, image of the ruling economy, the goal is nothing, development is all. The spectacle wants to get to nothing other than itself.

15

As the indispensable decoration of the objects produced today, as the general expose of the rationality of the system, as the advanced economic sector which directly shapes a growing multitude of image-objects, the spectacle is the main production of present-day society.

16

The spectacle subjugates living men to itself to the extent that the economy has totally subjugated them. It is no more than the economy developing for itself. It is the true reflection of the production of things, and the false objectification of the producers.

17

The first phase of the domination of the economy over social life had brought into definition of all human realization an obvious degradation of being into having. The present phase of total occupation of social life by the accumulated results of the economy leads to a generalized sliding of having into appearing, from which all actual "having" must draw its immediate prestige and its ultimate function. At the same time all individual reality has become social, directly dependent on social force, shaped by it. It is allowed to appear only because it is not.

GUY DEBORD

From the special issue Society of the Spectacle, Vol. 4, No. 5 (June-July 1970)
Sports as Spectacle

Mark Naison

The use of sports and sexuality as outlets for violent and guilt-provoking feelings is nothing new; they have served that function throughout the history of industrial society and probably much before. Violent games and rituals like rugby, hurling, boxing, wrestling, and cockfighting have been part of the daily life of European and American working men for centuries, as have prostitution and pornography in their various forms.

What is new in postwar America is the scale on which they are organized, their expression in nationwide media (some of which, like television, are new inventions), and their penetration by corporate values and relations. In the last twenty years, for example, the imagery of sexual domination and exploitation has become a major theme in the culture, dominating the consumer market, the film industry, popular music, and the agencies defining values for courtship, marriage, and the family (such as popular magazines and medical books). Women, once seen as the repositories of morality and civilized culture, have been projected as sexual beings whose new freedom offers men unimagined possibilities for sexual consumption. The advertising industry and magazines like Playboy offer a new and more hedonistic image of male domination to replace the declining authoritarianism in the family. With the help of filmmakers, psychiatrists, and progressive clergymen, they suggest that every woman should now provide what men once sought in prostitutes — a seductive but fundamentally passive sexuality that would affirm men's feelings of competence. Female sexuality is projected as a legitimate "catch-all" for male anxieties, a narcotic that eases the pain of daily existence. In both reality and projective fantasy, men are encouraged to find in sex and the experience of control (over women, over themselves) what is lacking in their economic and social life.

The success of this "sexualization" of daily experience is questionable. Despite the incredible propaganda campaign, women have resisted sexual objectification, and most men find it difficult to get their wives and lovers to play the roles defined in Playboy. Nevertheless, what is unattainable in relationships is made available in fantasy. The growing culture of pornography in America — topless dancers, X-rated movies, sex novels and magazines — represents efforts to provide a vicarious experience that meets male needs for sexual dominance. In daily life, women have thus won a kind of quiet victory. By their own self-activity, they have forced the most repressive aspects of the "new sexuality" out of the household, out of sexual encounters, and into compensatory fantasies, art and masturbation.

The growth of commercial athletics in the postwar period mirrors many of the same developments and the same struggles. The increasing coverage of sports in the national media, like the increasing use of sexual images and incentives, aims at the reinforcement of ideals of male dominance that are being undercut in daily life. The major commercial sports — baseball, football, basketball, ice hockey, and auto racing — allow women to participate only as cheerleaders, spectators, and advertising images, a situation which hardly mirrors the increasing participation of women in the job market and their growing influence in the family. Moreover, these games are not so much played as incidents of violence; they provide the spectators, when emotionally involved, with an opportunity to purge themselves of aggressive feelings. What is most distinctive about the way these sports are now presented is their penetration by corporate forms of organization and their suffusion with military and technological imagery. The man watching a football game on television not only sees huge men smashing each other in a way that he would like to do (possibly to his boss, his wife, or his kids), but the reduplication of military and corporate thinking. Elaborate offensive and defensive "maneuvers," discussions of "field generalship," and analyses of what it takes to win not only reinforce images of strong men running things, but legitimize the strategies by which America seeks to maintain its empire. From what was once a rather simple idolization of willpower, competition, and physical strength, spectator sports in America have begun to glorify strategic thinking and technological rationality as contemporary masculine values. The violence, the brutality, and the vicious identification are still central elements, but they have been appropriated for more sophisticated ends.

This "modernization" of the sports world has had a decisive effect on the life of the professional athlete. As professional (and college) sports have become bigger and bigger business (with television rights, advertising contracts, and huge arenas), athletes have been increasingly subjected to industrial norms and disciplines. From grade school, through high school, up to college and professional ranks, the "production" of star athletes has been systematized along superficially rational lines. Sports programs in most American schools are tracking systems designed not to maintain physical fitness among their students, but to select out potential stars for training. On each level, players are disciplined, skills are refined, and the best are selected to move on to the next level. Those who succeed in sports are often discouraged from serious academic concerns. Arrangements are made to provide tutors, term papers, and "gentlemen's Cs" so that intellectual labors will not interfere with athletic proficiency. In the great sports factories (Syracuse, Michigan, UCLA, and the like), many of the athletes in major sports do not actually attain their degrees.

By the time a player "makes it" to the pro ranks, the pressure on him escalates astronomically. Pro athletes are given training regimens which refine their special skills, but can handicap them for life.
As Dave Meggysey points out in his excellent book *Out of Their League*, professional football players are forced to strain their bodies beyond physically tolerable limits in both training and games and are given amphetamines to increase their energy level and steroids to help them put on weight. The most famous football coach of modern times, Vince Lombardi, was renowned for insisting that his players perform with sprains, viruses, and broken bones. One of his favorite players, Jerry Kramer, was nicknamed “the Zipper” because he continued to play after many serious operations. Even in sports like baseball and basketball, which have a lower level of violence than football, players continue to play with injuries that leave them nearly crippled (Mickey Mantle, Tony Oliva, Gus Johnson, Willis Reed), and many are only injured to existing with constant pain. The average professional “athlete” is probably less physically healthy than a normal person his age, and considers himself lucky to finish his career without permanent physical and mental damage.

However, the irony of this situation (not to say its brutality) is lost on the American sports fan. Every weekend, tens of millions of men sit before their television sets and in stadiums and arenas, rising with their victories, falling with their defeats, and emerging temporarily purged of their anger, their frustration, their feelings of impotence. Some of them, if they have the energy, go out to the playground and with each jump shot, base hit, or cross body block put flesh onto their fantasies. This strange, this sad, this painfully self-deceiving network of rituals is part of the basic fabric of American life — a safety valve for aggression and a crucible for social values organic to modern capitalism. It is a central stabilizing element in American culture: organized and financed by the corporate elite, but supported by millions of men because it provides an outlet for overwhelming inner needs.

However, there is growing resistance within the sports world to many of its most repressive cultural and political patterns. Both inside and outside professional sports, the credibility of the sports establishments’ values, images, and business practices is being questioned and challenged. This counter-struggle cannot as yet be called a “movement” — for it has been diffuse and self-contradictory, and has thus far failed to project an alternative vision of athletic activity and organization. But it has forced political conflict and economic struggle into commercial athletics in a way which has undercut sports’ ability to reinforce corporate values and serve as an “escape” from the anxieties of daily life.

From “Sports and the American Empire,” Vol. 6, No. 4 (July-August 1972)

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**SPEEDUP**

**CLASS COLLABORATIONISM**

**SHARPENING CONTRADICTIONS**

Hollywood

Once we recognize that Hollywood films did contain “Communist” propaganda in the sense HUAC meant it (for “brotherhood” and “equality,” against “success” and “big business”), then HUAC’s strategies become clear. People were forced to name names simply because this was a good way to sever them from their old comrades and irrevocably divide the Left. For the origins of this strategy, we need look no further than Arthur Schlesinger’s The Vital Center, that Whole Earth Catalogue of corporate liberalism. The informers were the domestic counterpart of the Third Force, the Non-Communist Left (NCL), the “responsible” elements of Europe and Third World countries that had to be identified, wooed, and wedded to the center. The rebellious dissident community had to be divided into two factions. One faction was absorbed by the center; the other was expelled. And the best way to guarantee the loyalty of the former was to force them to betray the latter.

We repeatedly find this strategy at work in the movies of the period. Consider a “liberal,” pro-Indian western like Delmer Daves’s Broken Arrow (1950), applauded at the time as an adult, human tale from the B-westerns in which Indians were regularly mowed down like nine pins. When the film begins, Cochise (Jeff Chandler), at the head of a united Apache nation, is engaged in a protracted struggle with the US government which the narrator calls a “bloody, no give, no take” war. Force has failed to bring Cochise to heel. The problem, then, is how to make him make way for American history. Enter Jimmy Stewart, as the Indian-loving liberal hero. He learns to speak Apache, defends the Indians against the white racists (the film’s villains), and even goes as far as to marry an Apache maiden. Stewart persuades Cochise to make peace, beguiling him with offers of “foreign aid,” in this case, free cattle courtesy of Washington. But not all the Indians go along with Cochise, and two factions develop: good Indians and bad Indians, Cochise and Geronimo — who emerges as the leader of the dissidents. The difference between the good Indians and the bad Indians is, of course, that the former accommodate themselves to the “realities” of the American move west, while the latter resist. Cochise and the good Indians are the Third Force, the “responsible” elements within the Apache nation, while Geronimo and the bad Indians are “irresponsible,” “immature,” “unrealistic” reds.

Not only does Cochise agree to make peace but he, not the whites, polices the bad Indians. In defiance of a three-month armistice, Geronimo’s rebels attack the stagecoach at the very moment Stewart happens to be riding alongside it. While the driver and passengers are pinned down in a hail of arrows, he rides off for help. For the cavalry — as in a conservative John Ford western? No — for Cochise! After the good Indians have chased off the bad Indians, the driver, shaking his head in disbelief, says, “Apaches protecting Americans! And I’ve lived to see it.” Indians killing Indians for Americans. They called it Vietnamization in the sixties but the strategy was devised in the fifties.

Only a liberal like Stewart could have factionalized the Apaches and turned Cochise against Geronimo, whereas the conservative generals who employed force only succeeded in uniting the Apaches against them. . . . Cochise is the friendly witness and Geronimo is the unfriendly one.

The Cochise/Geronimo pattern appears again and again in films of the fifties. In On the Waterfront, Cochise is Marlon Brando, who sings to the Crime Commission, while Geronimo is the waterfront boss Lee J. Cobb, who keeps mum. In Blackboard Jungle, Cochise is Sidney Poitier, the hood who sides with teacher Glenn Ford against hard-core punk Vic Morrow, Geronimo. In Rebel Without a Cause, Cochise is James Dean, who returns to the bosom of his family at the end of the film while Geronimo is Sal Mineo, who has to be shot. In all these films the social-control figures, the people who mediate between the authorities and the dissidents and persuade the friendly faction to betray the unfriendly one . . . are seldom cops. They are liberal professionals instead: the priest in On the Waterfront, the teacher in Blackboard Jungle, the juvenile officer in Rebel Without a Cause.

This, in a way, is the solution Navasky finds to his moral detective story. The liberals did it — collaborated in their own destruction, sacrificed their friends to the witchhunt lest they be crushed themselves. We knew all this before, of course, but like many detective stories, the great interest of Naming Names lies in the hunt, and the subtle complication of the plot, not the solution. Naming Names is a very fine book, and a real contribution to our understanding of repression.

PETER BISKIND

A Donald Duck Interview

David Wagner

Originally we had made no plans to interview Donald Duck, whom we frankly considered to be representative of the worst petit-bourgeois tendencies in American popular culture. We were aware of rumors from a number of sources that Duck was the only Disney actor whom Huac had planned to call to its hearings, and that in order to avoid embarrassment he agreed secretly to reveal the names of leaders in the Disney studio strike of 1939. Only on the urging of a fellow actor, who claimed to be one of Duck's few political intimates during those harried years and who insisted that the rumors were false (that in fact Duck had played an important role in the political debates of the period), did we decide to break in on the elusive actor's semi-retirement.

We met by appointment at his spacious split-level house near the Santa Barbara suburbs in Goleta, next to a freeway and separating two all-night shopping centers. Greeting me at the door was the famous thin-billed, large-eyed duck, standing exactly two feet high in a cutaway blue middy blouse. He gave me a confident smile, shook hands, guided me without a word into a large den where he indicated that I was to sit in an overstuffed chair opposite his smaller one, and after offering me a drink, asked that the interview begin at once. I switched on the tape recorder:

Q: I guess that voice you used in the cartoons wasn't real after all?
A: Of course not. That was ordered by one of Disney's men after he overheard me doing my imitation of Mel Blanc. There was never any question that it was a silly device, but my director felt it went along with the kind of character I was playing at the time. You know, the hair-trigger temper, the tantrums, and so forth. I never felt entirely comfortable with that business in the cartoons. The moment I got into the comics with Carl Barks we got rid of all that, the garbled voice and everything. It just got in the way of the story.

Q: I wonder if we can be more specific about your idea of what all of you were doing in those stories. I mean, what sort of character were you playing? Sometimes you seemed weak-willed and ordinary, and at other times you were capable of courage and insight. It was rather complicated.
A: It was complicated, naturally. We were trying to do something difficult. In some ways I think we succeeded, but there are times when it seems like we never accomplished much of anything. Barks got dispirited fairly often in the late '50s and didn't take as many risks. I guess the rest of us, without his leadership — which was always decisive, by the way, very strong in the background — the rest of us just drifted when he did.

But in the early days, and especially between '48 and '53, we took care of a lot of important matters.

Now in regard to the character I was developing, it was supposed to rise realistically to the level of complexity of the ordinary guy on the street. Old "un-ca" Donald was able to move through the whole keyboard of emotions: sometimes he was pessimistic and hard-headed, sometimes a naive dullard. In the long stories he could even be heroic, and in those moments he was Everyman — cast in the form of a duck to show that he, like the rest of us, even in the midst of heroism, was only a step from the comic, from the absurd continuity of contemporary life. He showed what supposedly ordinary people are capable of when they are freed from the banal process of reproducing everyday life at work, at home, in the roller-skating rink, wherever.

On the other hand, Barks sometimes just used us as vehicles in the service of a didactic plot. In those stories we just played along, reacting in predictable ways to formulaic fantasy situations. All we did in one of the ten-pagers in 1957, for example, was register a range of "gee whiz" expressions. I was sitting in Gyro's imagination machine and took the kids (Huey, Dewey, and Louie — DW) to planets and stars that looked exactly like earth but were geometrically vast in scale. That was just Barks showing kids how huge the macrocosm really is, and how small our place in it.

Q: Do you mean to say that fantasy had become critically inoperable — lost its negative punch, so to speak — and that the social crisis demanded a kind of realism?
A: Not at all. As I indicated earlier, it's the distance between fantasy and everyday life that's important. Fantasy speaks for other possibilities, and in that respect it is a critical exercise. But the best fantasy, in my opinion, consciously approaches the real social experience of people, presenting it from a position outside it — as it were, in relief. What we were trying to isolate in laughter was that element of recognition that told us our audiences saw something of their own experience in the violence inflicted on us. It's a technique that's been drawn out to its last implication in R. Crumb's recent Funny Animals book in which chickenoid cartoon characters are horribly brutalized and remain brutalized. If he were to "dispense justice" to these figures, as Adorno prefers, he'd be serving the interests of illusion, not fantasy. The relation between fantasy and real life is inverted in Crumb, whose irony, as it is in the best of this tradition, is relentless and nearly fanatic. It is the distinction between personal and social fantasy we are dealing with here, and the lesson is this: One may as well accept the society of ducks and chickens as suffer these enormities.

Q: What you are suggesting, it seems to me, is not only that Adorno has missed the point here, but that he has read the entire physiognomy of mass culture somehow backwards.
A: Certainly in the sense that he is observing my own acting, for example, and the mask of mass culture at large through the eyes of a man who refuses to abandon the best of the bourgeois tradition. Where he watches what the masses watch, I see the masses themselves, albeit only as an audience. Nonetheless it is a critical dis-
tinction. He says in the preface of the book that, “It is a critique of philosophy, and therefore refuses to abandon philosophy.” He could as easily have written, It is a critique of culture, and therefore refuses to abandon Culture in the upper-case sense of the word.

I’m afraid, however, that it is Adorno who is abandoned, in no small part because he systematically pushed his categories forward to the point where his critique of mass fetishized relations can now be turned upside-down. In attempting that, we discover for the first time the possibility of seeing those relations inverted, stripped of their fetishism as they are overturned by mass revolutionary action. We are all bound to the task of discovering the submerged movement of mass revolutionary activity which has not stopped since the first crude appearance of industrial capital, and as an indispensable first step we attempt to break away from Adorno’s pessimism.

One tries to take a philosophical step that parallels and prefigures the direct action of the masses. In saying this, I am aware that we are only at the beginning of a specific philosophical task, and not, like Adorno, at the end of one.

What is best in Adorno and the critical school generally is their description of the “total integration,” in Adorno’s phrase, of modern society — “the false identity of the general and particular.” It is the identity of the masses’ concrete daily activity and their aspirations for the universality of total freedom which, under bourgeois ideology, can find expression only in the arena of the commodity, as buyer or seller. And since that is the case, it must be clear that mass activity toward self-liberation has no choice but to find its expression in alienated forms. That’s what we have to look for. What new forms would mass activity take if it were unleashed from its alienation? It’s a matter of seeing the signs through the veil of barbarism, of seeing both tendencies in the same phenomena.

There is an admonishment from Lukacs to the effect that the proletariat must “substitute its own positive contents” for the bursting forms of bourgeois culture and beware of the imitation of its “emptiest and most decadent forms.” It is a caution toned on the hour by the critical school. Yet where are these substitutions? That is more difficult, almost impossible, for them to speak of, and it is a vagueness that undermines the utopian commitment.

But it is not incomprehensible why an impasse of this sort would conclude the work of intellectuals who represent the best, last strain of critical Enlightenment thought in its European dress. What we’re after, however, are the uses of this body of thought, among others, for American mass workers.

Q: The inference here is that you and your animators have none of the vagueness you just described. Your utopian claims are no doubt far-reaching and exhaustive?

A: I see I must shrive myself of any show of excitement. But since you press the matter — yes, there are a few last comments in order.

The first is that, of course, the revolutionary pessimism of these thinkers may in the end be absolutely justified. There may emerge a barbarism so integrated and so perfectly welded at its tiniest points of stress that the end of human history is in sight. I agree that it is a question increasingly posed in absolute terms as a race to the death: socialism (in the classic slogan) or barbarism.

What has to be kept in mind, however, is that in this period like every other it is the masses of workers who create the conditions both of their oppression and of their liberation. When we enter the period of monopoly capital, there may be very few signs of free activity on the part of the masses; they may not even be visible if they are there. But it is still necessary to understand how the process of self-liberation is continued as much in the culture of the masses (which it creates for and against itself) as it is in production.

There is the same urge for universality displayed negatively on every hand — in comic books, in the mass organization of food distribution in supermarkets (that name alone has mystified its possibilities as an unleashed chaff dump dedicated to pleasure), in Coney Island as erotic architecture, in the Brooklyn Bridge as promenade into imaginary space, in bathrooms and movies as invitations to prehistorical laziness.

I am merely suggesting that human beings concretize their ongoing demands for universal freedom in their own daily activity, even when it is consistently turned against them. One searches for the focal points of the coming reversal, the nodes in which the invading socialist society is half-disguised with the veil of a barbarism which may just as easily cover over the last hope of an awesomely patient humanity.

Q: Would you conclude this interview with an observation on the counter-culture of the ’60s? I assume that it is less than a node, as you call it, of the coming reversal.

A: No, it’s simply part of the larger process, the most recent burst of energy in the continuing struggle to create a real revolutionary culture. In its demise as a movement, it too makes the contribution of its insights to the battle at large, and indeed some aspects of it (like this joint I am about to light) I admire very much. But it just can’t last into the dying light of capitalism.

It takes more of us than that, and more different kinds of us.

People's Culture

Beauty Parlor: A Women's Space

"I don't go for that coeducational bit. I have nothing against men having a permanent, but they should have their own place for doing it. Women do tend to talk a little vulgar, more than they would at a social tea with a man present. With a man in the salon we wouldn't say some of the jokes we say to each other, we'd be watching ourselves."

—Peggy Ciolfi, 45, Rockland, Maine

Entering a beauty parlor I am aware of crossing into a special kind of territory; one that is overwhelmingly female. The pace, the talk, the movement and gestures all define a women's space. For all its commercialism, it retains traditional elements of women's culture, and as such, is an important social institution. It is especially important as it provides one of the few places where women of all ages may meet. The parameters for social interaction may be set by forces outside of our control, but the space becomes inhabited by people who transform it into their own. It is more than a place where images are created. It makes time for social interaction and personal space.

It is a place to find out what's been happening in the community, to analyze political events, to discuss childrearing, birth control, sex, and work. Recipes are exchanged, advice offered, confidences shared. The relationship between many women and their hairdressers is often of an intimate nature: long-term and trusting. In a small beauty shop on the block where I live, women sit with their neighbors over coffee, children play, members of the local girls' basketball team plan strategy, and people leave messages and packages for one another. Like the grocery store on the corner or the playground across the street, it is a neighborhood hangout.

Caring for other people is the daily routine for most women. Time spent at the hairdresser's is an opportunity to be taken care of in turn. It is a cure, a laying on of hands. The sensual pleasure of having one's hair washed and set, scalp gently massaged, hair brushed and combed, treated with lotion or henna. Time under the dryer may be the only time a woman has to sit, read or relax with her thoughts. It is a time for giving up control, for being receptive, for being touched. This time is a brief escape from adult responsibility, a respite from the reality of day-to-day hard work, a trip back to childhood and being mothered. It is a reminder of the nurturing of adolescent friendships among girls. It is a holdover from the time when women cared for the community's health needs; delivered each other's babies.

The beauty parlor is a space in which to unwind; a space to fantasize or reminisce, to dream.

PHYLLIS EWEN

From "Beauty Parlor - A Women's Space," Vol. 11, No. 3 (May-June 1977)
Community Murals

Community murals have a distinctive relationship to social change: they are concrete public expressions of a community's values, problems, or goals; they are created with intense community involvement and they may be seen as a form of political praxis.

To some extent the possibility of developing a genuine people's art is verified by the types of criticism emerging directly from the communities in which today's murals are created. Criticism occurs daily in a variety of ways, becoming more astute as the wall nears completion. Neighborhood people's close observation of a mural in process, of the changes an artist makes and the reasons for them, develops their sensibility to craftsmanship, symbolism, and imagery. The creative act is demystified, and people come to respect the hard work and skill involved in mural painting. Involvement in the creative process opens up their responsiveness to art and sharpens aesthetic sensibility.

One would be less than honest, or realistic, to claim that all community muralists succeed in controversial areas, or even desire to work on sensitive subjects. Nor have all muralists successfully managed their participation in community affairs. It would be equally naive to think that the public artist in today's world can remain free from controversy. In many cases the artist is not just a leader, or medium, or facilitator; but also an organizer, if not an agitator. As such, one finds it necessary to improve one's own political education and to relate responsibly to various community organizations and to people of different backgrounds. Inevitably, this has raised points of friction and/or confusion with political organizations of the Left.

Community muralists often find themselves working together with left-wing organizations on community issues, even though most muralists do not belong to political parties, nor do they have their minds made up on one "correct line" or another. Many muralists have helped left-wing causes with banners, posters, signs, etc., as well as with their murals. But far too often the "politicos" have failed to understand that political art is more than simply propaganda. They have been oblivious to the aesthetic demands of art and the importance of creating a genuine people's art with artistic as well as political validity. While some "politicos" see only the propaganda dimension of art, others dismiss it as "entertainment." If art entertains, and there is no reason why it should not, it also enlightens — often more directly than speeches. To treat people's artists — whether singers, muralists, sculptors, poets, actors or whatever — as merely entertainers, rather than as political educators through art, is very shortsighted. Rather than treating a people's artist as an unpaid commercial artist for the political movement, the Left might better respect the need of artists, like that of other workers, to develop their craft in the fullest and most useful way possible. Similarly, in spite of the frequency with which people have responded to a mural with urgent appeals for more such art works in their neighborhoods, schools, or workplaces, the Left has not been particularly sensitive to people's needs for art in their daily lives.

The desire people have for culture goes far beyond the immediate tactical horizon of the organized Left. Our experience has shown us that most people want a partisan culture, but one that is expressive as well as agitational. Art is a weapon to the degree that it is rooted in people's struggles and daily lives. The reappropriation of culture by the people is about the restoration to the people of a fully human image and creative possibility.

JAMES D. COCKCROFT
EVA COCKCROFT

An Interview on “Harlan County U.S.A.”

Barbara Kopple

political things I believe in. To experience and learn but also to bring that experience back and share it with other people. We wanted a film that workers everywhere would be able to look at. What we were trying to do with the film was make it honest, from the rank-and-file people. Trying not to manipulate it. Letting them speak. That’s why there’s no narration in the film. We didn’t want narration with rhetoric or some heavy imposed thing that didn’t naturally come out of where the people were.

I filmed in the coal fields for three years. Making the film was a day-to-day process. The only thing I was concerned with was being able to continue for another day. It was a life-and-death struggle down there, and we just wanted to continue working. If you stick with people long enough, you can see clearly in which directions they are moving. That’s why I think staying in a place over a long period of time is really necessary when you’re trying to do some kind of in-depth study of what’s happening. Three years isn’t long enough, but we were able to get a glimpse of the changes taking place.

This kind of film can only happen with a small group of tightly knit people who know how to work and move quickly in different situations. The crew had to be politically motivated so we could have discussions after every few days of filming and taping, analyze what we were getting, and figure out where we were going from there. Like what it meant to watch grown men crawling in twenty-three to twenty-nine inches of space in the mines, or that if a man works fifteen years in a mine you can presume he has black lung.

Q: What kind of relationships did the film crew have with miners, their families, the sheriff and company representatives?

A: Well, when we first arrived at Brookside it was about four in the morning. It was foggy and misty. And there they were. State troopers with clubs; women with sticks. We figured we couldn’t just get out of the car and say “Hello, we’re New York filmmakers and here we are,” so we got an organizer we knew to introduce us to the picketers. At first they didn’t trust us, they didn’t tell us their real names. The women said they were Martha Washington, Florence Nightingale, and Betsy Ross.

A week later we got in a very bad car accident. They have incredible mountains there with no lights and no guidelines, and we were pushed off of Pine Mountain by some strikebreakers. We rolled right over the mountain. The car landed on the hood, so we all crawled out of the windows, took our equipment, and walked all battered and bruised to the picket line because we promised the people that we would be there. After that they realized we really cared about them, that we were dedicated. So we lived with the miners in their homes for thirteen months.

During the last couple of weeks of the strike they used to shoot up the miners’ homes at night. We took mattresses to put them around the small homes, and we’d be sleeping on the floor with a kid here and a dog there. The men had porch duty at night taking turns sitting with shotguns. There wasn’t any indoor plumbing, so at night we had a buddy system. One night my friend and I were going to the bathroom. He had an M-1 and I had a .357 Magnum. We could hear the gunfire down below. And suddenly there was a rustling in the bushes and we both pulled out our guns and a dog ran out of the bushes. That was the kind of terror we were living with. There was no one there to help us except the coal miners and their families. We owe our lives to them; they protected us and supported us.

I guess we kept down a lot of the violence by being on the picket line. Even if we didn’t have any film we would go out there and pretend to be filming. The gun thugs at that point really didn’t know who we were or where we were from. We’d also stop the scab caravan every now and then and try to ask them questions. Anytime Hart Perry, the cameraman, would ask a question, they would walk away. Whenever I asked a question they would talk to me in a very patroniz-
In the courtroom scene we were really lucky. I used to use a wireless mike, and whenever I thought I wasn’t going to be able to film, I would mike somebody ahead of time who was going to participate. In the courtroom scene a lot of miners and women were confronting the judge — who was a coal operator — for putting them in jail for being on the picket line. The woman I had put the wireless mike on happened to be the one to speak. She’s the one who said, “The laws aren’t made for working people.” For filming in that situation, we opened the doors of the courtroom in the back, “pushed” the film two f-stops, and shot.

Q: Do you think you’ve been changed by the experience of making the film on Harlan County?

A: The main thing I learned is that if you stick together you can win. The film would not have happened without a lot of committed filmmakers and friends playing a lot of different roles. In Harlan the strike wouldn’t have happened nor have been won, and probably more people would have died, if there weren’t a lot of committed people working together united with the same ideas. That’s really important, particularly now in a country where people are sometimes afraid to change things. In Harlan, people who were totally oppressed in every kind of way were courageous enough to take their lives and their destinies in their own hands and fight to change things.

The Haymarket People’s Fund is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization under the Internal Revenue Service Code. Though there are disadvantages in obtaining such recognition from the IRS, it is important in fund-raising because large donors rely on this for tax-deductions.

To maintain this status, Haymarket must follow the IRS guidelines for public charities. Though these guidelines are broad, there are still many groups the funding groups would like to support that may not fall within the regulations of the IRS. In fact, it’s clear that some of the most significant political work we’ve seen may not be eligible for tax-exempt status.

It is then important that you consider contributing to Rank and File, Inc., so that there are enough funds to cover nontax-exempt groups. This ensures that money goes to groups that have demonstrated merit and political need, regardless of whether they have been recognized by the government as tax-exempt. If you do not need a tax deduction, please give to Rank and File. Make your check payable to Rank and File, Inc.

During our last funding cycle, Rank and File distributed $42,000 to...

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Working Class Self-Activity

George Rawick

The history of the American working class is a subject obscure to the Old and New Left alike. For the most part, academic labor scholarship has been institutional history focusing on the trade union, and like all institutional orientations has been quite conservative. "Radical" labor history has similarly been little concerned with the working class because of its concentration on another institution, the radical political party. Marxists have occasionally talked about working-class self-activity, as well they might, given that it was Marx's main political focus; but as E. P. Thompson points out in the preface to his monumental Making of the English Working Class, they have almost always engaged in substituting the party, the sect, and the radical intellectual for class self-activity in their studies. As a result of this institutional focus, labor history from whatever source generally ignores also social structure, technological innovation, and the relation between the structure and innovation.

* * *

The American working class did change American society, despite the fact that American capitalism was very powerful and had often indicated clearly in the 1930s that it would resort to any means, if allowed to do so, to prevent a radical transformation of society.

We can estimate most sharply the power of the American working class if we look at its accomplishments comparatively. In Italy the crisis of capitalism of the decade of the Bolshevik Revolution and the World War produced fascism as an answer to the bid of the Italian working class for power. In Germany, the crisis of capitalism produced first the Weimar republic, which did nothing to alter the situation, and then naziism; the consequence was the worst defeat any working class has ever known. The German working class was pulverized — unlike the Italian working class, which was never smashed to bits under fascism and in fact survived to destroy fascism itself. In France essentially the same pattern as in Italy was repeated, with the difference that full-fledged fascism came only as a result of the German military advance, since the French working class had managed to defend democracy throughout the 1930s, often over the heads of the radical parties.

In the United States the situation was different. Throughout the 1920s the working class found its organizations weakened; but in the 1930s the working class struggled and created powerful mass industrial unions of a kind never known anywhere in the world, unions that organized all the workers in most major industries throughout the nation. The working class of America won victories of a scale and quality monumental in the history of the international working class. Only the capture of state power by the relatively small working class of Russia — a state power it did not retain — has surpassed the magnitude of its victory in the thirties.

The full organization of the major American industries, however, was a mark of the victories, not the cause of the victories, of the American working class. The unions did not organize the strikes; the working class in the strikes and through the strikes organized the unions. The growth of successful organizations always followed strike activity when some workers engaged in militant activities and others joined them. The formal organization — how many workers organized into unions and parties, how many subscriptions to the newspapers, how many political candidates nominated and elected, how much money collected for dues and so forth — is not the heart of the question of the organization of the working class. The statistics we need to understand the labor history of the time are not these. Rather, we need the figures on how many man-hours were lost to production because of strikes, the amount of equipment and material destroyed by industrial sabotage and deliberate negligence, the amount of time lost by absenteeism, the hours gained by workers through the slowdown, the limiting of the speedup of the productive apparatus through the working class's own initiative.

* * *

The full incorporation of the unions within the structure of American state capitalism has led to very widespread disaffection of the workers from the un-
ions. Workers are faced squarely with the problem of finding means of struggle autonomous of the unions. ... As a consequence, workers struggle in the factories through wildcat strikes and sporadic independent organizations. Outside the factory, only young workers and black workers find any consistent radical social-political expression, and even the struggles of blacks and youths are at best weakly linked to the struggles in the factory.

There is often a very sectarian and remarkably undialectical reaction to these developments. Some historians and New Leftists argue that it demonstrates that the CIO was a failure which resulted only in the workers’ disciplining. This argument ignores the gains of the CIO in terms of higher living standards, more security for workers, and increased education and enlightenment. Clearly, the victories are embedded in capitalism and the agency of victory, the union, has become an agency of capitalism as well. This is a concrete example of what contradiction means in a dialectical sense; and it is part of a process which leads to the next stage of the workers’ struggle, the wildcat strike.

There are two characteristics of the wildcat strike which represent a new stage of development: first, through this device workers struggle simultaneously against the bosses, the state, and the union; second, they achieve a much more direct form of class activity, by refusing to delegate aspects of their activity to an agency external to themselves.

When the wave of wildcat strikes first began to appear as the new form of working-class self-activity and organization, it was hard to see (except very abstractly) where they would lead. But after glimpses of the future afforded by the workers’ councils during the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 and the French uprising of May and June 1968, the new society which can only be fully realized and protected by revolution will clearly revealed: workers’ councils in every department of national activity, and a government of workers’ councils.


PUNCH’IN’ TH’ CLOCK

by Woody Guthrie

Think of the snow that could once have fallen on your grave
even before you died
Think of the highways laughing in and out of the empty eyes
asleep in New York
the bottles of words which you hurled through the silent glass
of solitude
the water too deep to touch
the calendar too far away to mean anything
the door that kept swinging open
the dog that kept howling
the roads that kept leading nowhere
the world had no beginning for you
but it ended all the time
If I were you I’d have laughed at them
set their horses free
made them walk
the white clown dead in the moonlit street
a horse trampling a glass accordion
midnight is something more than a razor slicing an owl in two
something more than a blind man eating an orange
You knew this you tried to tell us
The helpless arson of your eyes
sets fire to the past
every word you wrote makes mirrors useless
You lived on what you grew in your black garden of tomorrows
The sleepwalker dies in the middle of the street
The streetcar covers its lips with blood

and says hello
A passing girl
her eyes closed
throws away a glove
without a word she speaks of tigers
of darkness
of a folding fan and a strawberry made of stone
and she too dies
In the violet rain that falls on the beckoning hands of shadows
In lithographs of flame and canaries
In the medieval wind that settles in cracked mirrors
In the scarlet leaf of gold that nails laughter to a wooden fence
You redefined the parts of speech
in terms of cutlery and heat

To be free
You fled everything you could have been
preferring to be free
In jail the crocodiles slept in unopened envelopes
You wandered across the verbal sand
tyi sh red ribbons to oblivion
Balancing rocks in the black velvet wind
every word every promise shipwrecked on the shores of a dream
too far away to reach without going mad
You knew this too it is the risk one takes
the closed gate the stupid smile the blue hair
There are no wings on the enameled laughter
of dead trees
But in the quiet blood of deserted streets
blind falcons close their speechless eyes
wave their immovable hands
surrender like paper pigeons die like iron fleas
The rebel wheat of stone burns like a violin
in the white and voiceless sea
It is the night rocking to sleep its terrors
with songs themselves too terrible to sing alone
You rewrote the script of darkness to throw at the dismal
light of day
The red wreath of your laughter
the black flowers of your scorn

FRANKLIN ROSEMONT

From Vol. 2, No. 5 (Sept.-Oct. 1968)
The Past & Future of Workers' Control

David Montgomery

In the late nineteenth century American industry contained pockets of extensive control over productive processes exercised by groups of skilled workers. It is important to speak precisely here, so as not to give the impression that in some "good old days" the two basic attributes of industrial capitalism did not apply. That is not the point. The point is that even within that system, numerous and important groups of skilled workers were able to assert their collective control over those portions of the production process that fell within their domain.

Skilled craftsmen then brought into the workplace characteristics which enabled them to challenge their employers, often successfully, for control over the direction of their own work and that of their helpers, and to some extent over what was being made. The first of these characteristics was simply their knowledge of the production processes. The puddling of iron, the blowing of window glass, the cutting of garments, or the rolling of steel was not learned in school or taught to the workers by their employers. It was rather learned on the job in ways which gave the craftsmen a knowledge of what they were doing that was far superior to that of their employers. No one was more keenly aware of this relationship than the "father of scientific management," Frederick Winslow Taylor. He believed that the first step in systematizing management was for the employers to learn what their skilled workers knew and did, in other words, to study the skilled tradesmen and expropriate their knowledge.

But the control struggles of the late nineteenth century cannot be explained by craft workers' knowledge alone. That technical knowledge was embedded in a moral code governing behavior on the job, a code which was not individualistic, but one of mutuality, of the collective good. Part of this code on all but the most highly seasonal jobs was a clearly determined stint, or level of output, that any decent member of the trade would not exceed. The violator of that code was condemned as a hog, a runner, a chaser, a job wrecker, or some other such choice epithet. To go flat for oneself was simply dishonorable behavior. So was any action by which one worker connived against or "undermined" a fellow worker on the job. This code of mutuality was as important to the collective direction of the job as was the craftsmen's knowledge, and it was often embodied in the work rules of unions. In fact, it is in those union rules that the most explicit formulations of the craftsmen's ethic are to be found.

* * *

Two aspects of this late-nineteenth-century experience should be emphasized. First, even in the setting of modern technology and large-scale production it was possible to have collective direction of the way in which jobs were performed. Moreover, such direction required not only a struggle against management's efforts to control the work, but also a rejection of individualistic, acquisitive behavior. The practical and ideological aspects of this contest were inseparable from each other.

Second, this control by the crafts was the primary target of attack for managerial reformers in the early twentieth century. Scientific management, which might properly be described by paraphrasing today's language, as a systematic job-improverization program, emerged out of a drive — evident in every advanced industrial country as corporate enterprise waxed larger and international competition grew more intense at the turn of the century — to increase labor productivity. In England, France, Germany, and this country there were innumerable experiments with incentive pay schemes, designed to entice workers into going flat-out for the almighty dollar, or
mark, or franc. Frederick Winslow Taylor entered the debate at precisely that level with his paper “A Piecework System.” Taylor’s message, however, was that tinkering with pay systems would not solve the problem. It was necessary, he argued, to go to the root of the problem: to expropriate the worker’s knowledge and to support his moral code. Only then could pay schemes serve as incentives to higher output. The instrument which he and his fellow engineers devised for acquiring mastery over the craftsmen’s skills was time and motion study. Through such studies, methods of working could be standardized and presented to the workers as orders from the engineering and planning departments.

* * *

Many struggles of the World War I epoch, however, involved more than just resistance to management’s new techniques. As union strength grew and workers became more aware of their ability to manipulate government war agencies, workers began advancing their own plans for reorganization of work relations. These plans differed significantly from the familiar craft techniques of the late nineteenth century. Because the erosion of the position of skilled workers was clearly irreversible, workers had to come to grips with the new way in which factories operated. To be sure, some crafts in the building trades and many tool and die makers could simply demand standard craft rates and craft rules of the old form. But others, among whom scientific management had already wrought extensive changes, developed novel sets of demands and new forms of self-organization.

Consider the machinists, helpers, and toolmakers at the vast Mesta Machine Company near Pittsburgh. They struck in 1917 and again in 1918 for the abolition of time-study and premium-pay schemes, the establishment of three or four standard wage rates, the eight-hour day, and recognition by the company of a shop committee to deal with all grievances from the plant. This pattern of demands was commonplace by the end of the war, and it deserves attention. First of all, a demand for standardization was arising in this instance not from the managers, but from the workers. The new payment plans had generated a proliferation of individual wage rates, and employers openly defended having “as many hourly rates as there are human beings” in the factory as necessary for the efficient operation of the works. The workers realized that the old standard craft rate was now hopelessly obsolete, but they did try to create a determinate set of classifications to cover everyone, and one with a narrow spread between the highest and the lowest rates.

Second, strikers virtually everywhere demanded the standard workday of eight hours, and they enjoyed considerable success on this front. The struggle for a shorter workweek made more headway between 1910 and 1920 than in any other decade of this century, despite adamant employer resistance. Third, new forms for organizing the collective power of workers were developed. Sometimes craft unions were coordinated through metal trades councils, and many unions opened their doors to unskilled workers, but virtually everywhere some form of shop committee or stewards’ body assumed the task of directly representing the rank and file. Workers of this epoch were keenly aware that to speak of “workers’ control” without effectively organizing workers’ power is to drift into fantasy land.

Finally, as these struggles became more intense, they were increasingly often linked to far-reaching political demands. The munitions workers of Bridgeport, who had been seasoned by four years of chronic industrial battle by 1919, for example, held huge rallies to protest postwar layoffs. From these rallies they petitioned the president of the United States for
the “creation of National Labor Agencies to assure in all industries a living wage and every right to union organization; collective bargaining and collective participation of the workers in control of industry”; a reduction of hours; “extensive necessary public works” to create jobs; and finally, the “abolition of competition, criminal waste and profiteering in industry and substituting co-operative ownership and democratic management of industry and the securing to each of the full product of his toil.”

* * *

Of all workers’ control issues, the one which has assumed special prominence in our own times is that of preventing plant closings. Here the problem is not how the job is performed, but whether there will be a job at all. Since the workers of American Safety Razor sat down in its Brooklyn plant in 1954, American workers have often declared that they have a right to a voice in corporate decisions about where work is to be carried on. Most such struggles since that time have employed political strategies: the workers have mobilized their communities to demand that their congressional representatives or the Department of Defense force the company to continue operating at the old site. A few have used the pressure of strikes and boycotts. In every case the objective has been to force management to bargain over what it always claimed as its exclusive and ultimate authority under “free enterprise,” to decide what it wanted to produce where.

In some recent instances workers have sought ways to reopen a plant, which has been abandoned by a multiplant corporation, under their own management, or some sort of community ownership. For example, when Youngstown Sheet and Tube announced that it would close its Campbell Works, local union members enlisted the aid of a ministers’ council to promote a movement for acquisition of the plant by the community. The implications of this effort are profound. As the project’s economic consultant, Gar Alperowitz, has made clear, community ownership of the mill cannot succeed without new governmental purchasing policies for steel wares that are directed primarily at the needs of urban America, in mass transit, housing development, etc. In other words, if a community-operated plant with any degree of workers’ control is going to function, it must have its output determined by the nation’s need for use values — by the real and sorely neglected needs of the American people — not by the rule of maximum profitability in the marketplace.

The Youngstown idea has not been carried to fruition, but it has caught on elsewhere. In Buffalo, when the Heat Transfer Division of American Standard threatened to close down, the Buffalo AFL-CIO Council voted to take over the plant, if necessary, and operate it under union direction. Several plants in Jamestown and Dunkirk, New York, have already been kept alive by their workers’ assuming ownership.

This is the setting of the most important dis-
cussions of workers’ control today. An outstanding example of what is now possible has been provided by the birth and survival of Wisconsin’s worker-controlled newspaper, The Madison Press Connection. Its origins lie in a long strike of the employees of Madison’s major newspapers, provoked when their owners undertook to cripple or destroy their craft unions. Having gone on strike and realizing that all the skills needed to put out a newspaper were to be found among the people walking the picket line, these workers decided to start their own newspaper as a rival to their scab-operated former employers. The Press Connection soon developed a network of readers such as few papers could boast, because in order to get subscriptions and operating funds, newspaper workers had to solicit support from unions and farmers’ organizations all over Wisconsin. As they did so, the people with whom they talked told them what they thought of and wanted from the newspaper. Responding to readers’ suggestions and criticisms (that is, creating something useful for the people of Wisconsin) became essential to the survival of the paper.

Moreover, on my own first visit to the Press Connection’s offices and composing room, I saw a workplace that looked more business-like — in the true sense of the term — than anything I had seen before in my life. Each department had been physically designed by the people who worked in it, to make their work as efficient, easy, and accurate as they could make it, while it was also equipped with the flowers, pictures, etc., necessary to make the setting congenial. These journalists, bookkeepers, layout artists and printers were not socializing: they were putting out a newspaper of value to the local residents. And they were running it by their own collective decisions.

A group of these workers told me that they had gone to a seminar held by industrial relations experts on the question of workers’ participation in management. They had listened to all the projects and experiments described there, saying nothing until close to the end of the day, when one of them put up his hand. He said: “I’m sorry. We can’t quite relate to this discussion. You see, we found in the Press Connection that we don’t need management’s participation.”

From “The Past and Future of Workers’ Control,” Vol. 13, No. 6 (Nov.-Dec. 1979)

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Workers’ Control on a Strike Paper

Dave Wagner

There is absolutely no doubt that without the twin principles of workers’ control and pay parity the Press Connection would never have lasted the twenty-seven months from October ’77 to January ’80.

But first let me give you a picture of how it worked. When we began as a strike weekly, the presidents of the five unions appointed workers in each of their ranks who had the widest respect as skilled and diligent craftspersons (as opposed to political officers in the leadership who were often better talkers than workers). These production leaders were pulled together into a production council which I was asked to chair (because of experience in the ’60s in production problems when I worked in the underground press). Once a week, sometimes twice, we met and hammered out logistical problems. For the most part, no one in the council had the slightest idea of the
mysteries of the other crafts, and so democratic decisionmaking was absolutely unavoidable — it was the only process that could possibly have worked under the circumstances. These weekly meetings, for me, were the most exciting part of the strike. The mutual respect, the rounds of congratulation to individual workers and crafts for difficult jobs well done under impossible circumstances, the unquestioning trust in each other as skilled workers — here was the culmination of years of dreams and theories. Hell yes, it worked, and it continued to work all through the paper's history. Over the months the walls of mystery were gradually battered down until workers in each department had fairly clear ideas of the problems and work temps of adjacent departments; this was invaluable for the larger meetings involving all the workers, where political discussions were not allowed to become abstracted too much from the practical limitations of production.

Pay parity was the complement to workers' control. All through the paper's history, the weekly paycheck (except, later on, those of the advertising reps who worked on commission) remained the same for each worker. It avoided the resentments that could have torn the paper apart within six months. (Of course, the size of the paycheck was so small that it more or less guaranteed equality in self-exploitation. As the old strikers left us one by one, we became more familiar with the external demands of the labor market on the pay scales. I doubt that the principle could have held forever. Yet without it, we never could have lasted twenty-seven months.)

* * *

Our effort to build a “counter-economy” in Madison got nowhere (except in our help to the worker-owned cab company); many more building blocks will have to be in place for that to appear on the scale we imagined. Even then we will all have to be particularly careful that we are not simply creating an economy of the poor and for the poor, relieving in the process a considerable social burden from the corporations and the government.

As for the actual work and the production schedules, I am satisfied that the actual work and the production schedules remained firmly in the hands of workers in each department, though the direction of that work was usually in the hands of the production council. That body, after the paper was sold by the unions to the workers and then to cooperative shareholders (eventually about eight hundred of them), came to be made up of the elected heads of each department. They in turn were supervised by three assistant managers, who were elected by the workforce at large. The only member of management who was not elected was the general manager, who was appointed by the board of directors (they, of
course, were elected by the co-op members, or shareholders). It was a balance between workers’ control and community control; some of the ideas of Gar Alperovitz went into the board’s discussions about achieving that balance.

In an essay, historian David Montgomery refers to a PC worker who said, with regard to a seminar he attended on workers’ sharing in decisionmaking, that he found the seminar irrelevant because people at the PC saw no need for “management participation.” That remark came comparatively early in the experience. At that point “management” referred to the old bosses at the struck plant. Eventually we did develop a management of our own. By the end only one of the three elected managers remained; they were replaced by “acting” managers who, under the pressure of business, were clearly perceived as the only persons with the required specialized skills — particularly in the business office. We folded the paper shorty before the next round of elections, so the problem of succession was never met in practice.

Some workers felt that workers’ control had become something of a charade. That feeling ranged from a few disciplined workers who saw no need for department heads, elected or not, to the group of marginal workers that continually lost political struggles because of naiveté or lack of organizing experience.

Similarly, among the old guard of original strikers, particularly in the production crafts, workers’ control was felt to be too “ideological” and unnecessary; the printers (International Typographical Union) clung to their union control of production to the end.

Each department had a workers’ council for matters of discipline, hiring and firing. In the craft departments they remained largely unused because union committees had identical functions; some departments were too small to need them. Only the editorial department really made use of it, and it proved to be particularly valuable; we found that elected workers took their tasks very seriously and had a moral authority, particularly in matters of discipline, that often allowed them to be more stringent in their decisions than the elected management could afford to be.

It’s true that workers’ control is not always efficient, at least in the short run. Internal political questions seemed to erupt from time to time into a crisis in which the various elected bodies and leaders would redefine their roles and authority to achieve every imaginable parliamentary advantage. Periodic resentments and latent struggles, often around a symbolic issue, would come to a real boil. For days production efficiency would be compromised by caucuses, organizing, and lobbying as the lines of the various splits formed. But once the issue was resolved there was a general feeling that the unspoken had been uttered and that deep-seated wounds which in other work circumstances would have been allowed to fester had been revealed in what some of us came to call “labor theater” — and production would then return to a higher level of efficiency than before. In the long run, I am convinced, these political passion plays — in which everyone had lines to deliver, poses to strike, and quite often sound arguments to make — are inextricable parts of the way workers’ control will look in the future. Once these rain storms passed, the air in the office was usually remarkably invigorating. I only wish we had had many more years to see how the process developed. If the form was theatrical, the content, until the end, remained rational; I was never disappointed by it, anxieties of the moment aside.

The Reproduction of Daily Life
Fredy Perlman

Capital wears the mask of a natural force; it seems as solid as the earth itself; its movements appear as irreversible as tides; its crises seem as unavoidable as earthquakes and floods. Even when it is admitted that the power of Capital is created by men, this admission may merely be the occasion for the invention of an even more imposing mask, the mask of a man-made force, a Frankenstein monster, whose power inspires more awe than that of any natural force.

However, Capital is neither a natural force nor a man-made monster which was created sometime in the past and which dominated human life ever since.

The power of Capital does not reside in money, since money is a social convention which has no more “power” than men are willing to grant it; when men refuse to sell their labor, money cannot perform even the simplest tasks, because money does not “work.”

Nor does the power of Capital reside in the material receptacles in which the labor of past generations is stored, since the potential energy stored in these receptacles can be liberated by the activity of living people whether or not the receptacles are Capital, namely alien “property.” Without living activity, the collection of objects which constitute society’s Capital would merely be a scattered heap of assorted artifacts with no life of their own, and the “owners” of Capital would merely be a scattered assortment of uncommonly uncreative people (by training) who surround themselves with bits of paper in a vain attempt to resuscitate memories of past grandeur. The only “power” of Capital resides in the daily activities of living people; this “power” consists of the disposition of people to sell their daily activities in exchange for money, and to give up control over the products of their own activity and of the activity of earlier generations.

As soon as a person sells his labor to a capitalist and accepts only a part of his product as payment for that labor, he creates conditions for the purchase and exploitation of other people. No man would willingly give his arm or his child in exchange for money; yet when a man deliberately and consciously sells his working life in order to acquire the necessities for life, he not only reproduces the conditions which continue to make the sale of his life a necessity for its preservation; he also creates conditions which make the sale of life a necessity for other people. Later generations may of course refuse to sell their working lives for the same reason that he refused to sell his arm; however each failure to refuse alienated and forced labor enlarges the stock of stored labor with which Capital can buy working lives.

In order to transform surplus labor into Capital, the capitalist has to find a way to store it in material receptacles, in new means of production, and he must hire new laborers to activate the new means of production. In other words, he must enlarge his enterprise, or start a new enterprise in a different branch of production. This presupposes or requires the existence of materials that can be shaped into new salable commodities, the existence of buyers of the new products, and the existence of people who are poor enough to be willing to sell their labor. These requirements are themselves created by capitalist activity, and capitalists recognize no limits or obstacles to their activity; the democracy of Capital demands absolute freedom.

Imperialism is not merely the “last stage” of Capitalism; it is also the first.


The ALIENATION of the worker in his product means not only that his labor becomes an object, an EXTERNAL EXISTENCE, but that it exists OUTSIDE HIM, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own confronting him. It means that the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien.

However, this contradictory form is transitory; it creates real conditions for its own abolition...

It creates the basis for the universal development of the individual. The real development of individuals in a context where every BARRIER is abolished gives them the awareness that no limits are sacred.
Counter-Planning on the Factory Floor

Bill Watson

It is difficult to judge just when working-class practice at the point of production learned to bypass the union structure in dealing with its problems, and to substitute (in bits and pieces) a new organizational form. It was clear to me, with my year stay in an auto motor plant (Detroit area 1968), that the process had been long under way. . . . The activities and the new relationships which I record here are glimpses of a new social form we are yet to see full-blown, perhaps American workers' councils.

Planning and counter-planning are terms which flow from actual examples. The most flagrant case in my experience involved the sabotaging of a six-cylinder model. The model, intended as a large, fast "6," was hastily planned by the company, without any interest in the life or the precision of the motor. It ran rough with a very sloppy cam. The motor became an issue first with complaints emanating from the motor-test area along with dozens of suggestions for improving the motor and modifying its design (all ignored). From this level, activities eventually arose to counter-plan the production of the motor.

The interest in the motor had grown plantwide. The general opinion among workers was that certain strategic modifications could be made in the assembly and that workers had suggestions which could well be utilized. This interest was flaunted, and the contradictions of planning and producing poor quality, beginning as the stuff of jokes, eventually became a source of anger. . . .

Temporary deals unfolded between inspection and assembly and between assembly and trim, each with planned sabotage. Such things were done as neglecting to weld unmachined spots on motor heads; leaving out gaskets to create a loss of compression; putting in bad or wrong-size spark plugs; leaving bolts loose in the motor assembly; or, for example, assembling the plug wires in the wrong firing order so that the motor appeared to be off balance during inspection. Rejected motors accumulated.

In inspection, the systematic cracking of oil-filter pins, rocker-arm covers, or distributor caps with a blow from a timing wrench allowed the rejection of motors in cases in which no defect had been built in earlier along the line. In some cases, motors were simply rejected for their rough running.

There was a general atmosphere of hassling and arguing for several weeks as foremen and workers haggled over particular motors. The situation was tense, with no admission of sabotage by workers and a cautious fear of escalating it among management personnel.

Varying in degrees of intensity, these conflicts continued for several months. In the weeks just preceding a change-over period, a struggle against the V-8s (which will be discussed later) combined with the campaign against the "6s" to create a shortage of motors. At the same time management's headaches were increased by the absolute ultimate in auto-plant disasters — the discovery of a barrage of motors that had to be painstakingly removed from their bodies so that defects that had slipped through could be repaired.

Workers returning from a six-week change-over layoff discovered an interesting outcome of the previous conflict. The entire six-cylinder assembly and inspection operation had been moved away from the V-8s — undoubtedly at great cost — to an area at the other end of the plant where new workers were brought in to man it. In the most dramatic way, the necessity of taking the production out of the hands of laborers who insisted on planning the product became overwhelming. There was hardly a doubt in the minds of the men — in a plant teeming with discussion about the move for days — that the act had countered their activities.

A parallel situation arose in the weeks just preceding that year's change-over, when the company attempted to build the last V-8s using parts which had been rejected during the year. The hope of management was that the foundry could close early and that there would be minimal waste. The fact, however, was that the motors were running extremely rough; the crankshafts were particularly shoddy; and the pistons had been formerly rejected, mostly because of omitted oil holes or rough surfaces.
The first protest came from the motor-test area, where the motors were being rejected. It was quickly checked, however, by management, which sent down personnel to hound the inspectors and to insist on acceptance of the motors. It was after this that a series of contacts, initiated by the motor-test men, took place between areas during breaks and lunch periods. Planning at these innumerable meetings ultimately led to plantwide sabotage of the V-8s. As with the six-cylinder-motor sabotage, the V-8s were defectively assembled or damaged en route so that they would be rejected. In addition to that, the inspectors agreed to reject something like three out of every four or five motors.

The result was stacks upon stacks of motors awaiting repair, piled up and down the aisles of the plant. This continued at an accelerating pace up to a night when the plant was forced to shut down, losing more than 10 hours of production time. At that point there were so many defective motors piled around the plant that it was almost impossible to move from one area to another.

The work force was sent home in this unusually climactic shutdown, while the inspectors were summoned to the head supervisor’s office, where a long interrogation began. Without any confession of foul play from the men, the supervisor was forced into a tortuous display which obviously troubled even his senses, trying to tell the men they should not reject motors which were clearly of poor quality without actually being able to say that. With tongue in cheek, the inspectors thwarted his attempts by asserting again and again that their interests were as one with the company’s in getting out the best possible product.

In both the case of the “6s” and the case of the V-8s, there was an organized struggle for control over the planning of the product of labor; its manifestation through sabotage was only secondarily important. A distinct feature of this struggle is that its focus is not on negotiating a higher price at which wage labor is to be bought, but rather on making the working day more palatable. The use of sabotage in the instances cited above is a means of reaching out for control over one’s own work. In the following we can see it extended as a means of controlling one’s working “time.”

The shutdown is radically different from the strike; its focus is on the actual working day. It is not, as popularly thought, a rare conflict. It is a regular occurrence, and, depending on the time of year, even an hourly occurrence. The time lost from these shutdowns poses a real threat to capital through both increased costs and loss of output. Most of these shutdowns are the result of planned sabotage by workers in certain areas, and often of plantwide organization.

The shutdown is nothing more than a device for controlling the rationalization of time by curtailing overtime planned by management. It is a regular device in the hot summer months. Sabotage is also exerted to shut down the process to gain extra time before lunch and, in some areas, to lengthen group breaks or allow friends to break at the same time. In the especially hot months of June and July, when the temperature rises to 115 degrees in the plant and remains there for hours, such sabotage is used to gain free time to sit with friends in front of a fan or simply away from the machinery.

A plantwide rotating sabotage program was planned in the summer to gain free time. At one meeting, workers counted off numbers from 1 to 50 or more. Reportedly, similar meetings took place in other areas. Each man took a period of about twenty minutes during the next two weeks, and when his period arrived he did something to sabotage the production process in his area, hopefully shutting down the entire line. No sooner would the management wheel in a crew to repair or correct the problem area than it would go off in another key area. Thus the entire plant usually sat out anywhere from five to twenty minutes of each hour for a number of weeks, due to either a stopped line or a line passing by with no units on it. The techniques for this sabotage are many and varied, going well beyond my understanding in most areas.

The “sabotage of the rationalization of time” is not some foolery of men. In its own context it appears as nothing more than the forcing of more free time into existence; any worker would tell you as much. Yet as an activity which counteracts capital’s prerogative of ordering labor’s time, it is a profound organized effort by labor to undermine its own existence as “abstract labor power.” The seizing of quantities of time for getting together with friends and the amusement of activities ranging from card games to reading or walking around the plant to see what other areas are doing is an im-

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T.L. KRYSS

From New Majicks: Poems and Rabbits of T.L. Kryss, Radical America pamphlet, 1970
portant achievement for laborers. Not only does it demonstrate the feeling that much of the time should be organized by the workers themselves, but it also demonstrates an existing animosity toward the practice of constantly postponing all of one's desires and inclinations so the rational process of production can go on uninterrupted.

From “Counter-Planning on the Shop Floor,” Vol. 5, No. 3 (May-June 1971)

My Father

My father was four years in the war, and afterwards, according to my mother, had nothing to say. She says he trembled in his sleep the next four. My father was twice the father of sons miscarried, and afterwards, had nothing to say. My mother has been silent about this also. Four times my father was on strike, and according to my mother, had nothing to say. She says the company didn't understand, nor can her son, the meaning of an extra 15c an hour in 1956 to a man tending a glass furnace in August.

I have always remembered him a tired man. I have respected him like a guest and expected nothing. It is April now. My life lies before me enticing as the woman beside me. Now, in April, I want him to speak. I want to stand against the worn body of his pain. I want to try it on like a coat that does not fit.

Peter Oresick

From Vol. 11, No. 4 (July-August 1977)

The Ceremony

dearly beloved, we are gathered here today in . . .

...detroit, michigan: home of the “motown sound”/gm/ford/chrysler/rats in the kitchen and roaches in the bathroom/no heat in winter & nothing cool when the summer comes/pistons pounding out a DRUM beat...“do you take”...“to love and cherish”...woodward avenue/junkies, whores & little kids on the way up to take their places/a dime bag to get the day over with...“and do you take”...“to have and to hold”...the day shift, afternoons, midnights — at least 8 hrs. with the devil in hell/rouge, chevy, fisherbody (makes dead bodies), budd, eldon gear & axel, dodge main, jefferson, iron foundries & specialty forge foundries/monsters that eat alive & spit out bloody hands/feet pieces of skin and bone/amply with regularity — A DEAD BODY!!!...friday nite...get that check/carry it on home to the crib (with wife & kids), then get out on the street: get fucked up/(reefer, jones, coke, ups & downs, johnnie walker black & red) try to freeze your head/can’t think about the shit starting all over again on monday./...“and now a message from our sponsor” watch tv/listen to the radio/read papers/they all say: “buy this, get that & YOU TWO can be a success.”/damn, brother, sister, a success in this motorized, computerized, iron & steel jungle is just staying alive!!!

“in sickness and in health” detroit, michigan/any city/for better or for worse/my/our home

“until DEATH

do us part.”

b. p. Flanigan

From Vol. 9, No. 1 (Jan.-Feb. 1975)
Episode

Stan Weir

The local union officials told us later that the regional director of the International Union had a fit when they told him we had a sit-down strike. He wanted to know all our names when he found out the issue was cotton gloves. The nature of the work in our department required that we wear them. Each of us wore out a pair every two days. Until we quit having to buy them ourselves, it was our constant gripe.

After I was elected steward, I went to the foreman and asked him to get gloves for us. I had no official power to bargain with him; that was the committeeman’s job. But I argued hard. He didn’t take the opportunity that I offered him to do something for the men. “I’ll tell you the same thing I told the last steward: The company’s protective-clothing program does not include gloves.”

I knew this was a lie and that there were exceptions. I remembered that gloves were supplied to the utility men in the department I had transferred out of the year before. During my relief break that afternoon, I returned there long enough to pocket a new pair of gloves that luckily lay unattended on the utility men’s bench. They were worth far more than the cup of coffee I had sacrificed to obtain them. I told the story to my friend who worked next to me and gave him the gloves. He passed them to the next man and repeated the story. Soon the entire group knew about the foreman’s lie.

Instructions were sent back to me: I should ask the committeeman and file a grievance; I should be backed all the way. The next time the foreman passed within calling distance I made the formal request. He took his time, but finally made the necessary phone call to the department where the committeeman worked.

Two hours later the committeeman casually walked into our work area. After a chat with the foreman he got to me: “I hear you guys want gloves. Gloves have never been supplied to anyone who worked in this department.” After some discussion he was still hesitant. Finally he agreed to file a grievance, but only if I wrote it up. He handed me his book full of forms, and I complied. While I was doing this the line stopped suddenly. At the same instant most of the men were gathered around us. The tall skinny kid who had just gotten back from the Army, but was always letting you know he was from Maud, Oklahoma, was the only one who spoke: “We don’t intend that this should take long to iron out.” The committeeman started to say something, but thought better of it. They had made their point. They dispersed. In a moment the line was moving again. I never learned who had hit the switch.

The next morning a Kentuckian with five years in the department came in with four dozen pairs of new gloves in all sizes which he offered for sale. Several of us gathered around him. There was mention of trouble in the parking lot “come quitting time,” but mainly we shamed him into withdrawing his wares.

The shop committee met with management every Thursday. On Friday the foreman issued gloves to us while we got into our coveralls. We were jubilant. The old Portuguese who the other old-timers said was one of the best stewards they ever had in the early days of the union came to me and confided: “You’re doing all right, Red. It’s a job for a young man. I’m going to retire soon. The men are all behind you. Now they’re saying it’s okay that you got up at the union meeting the other night and spoke in favor of bringing Negroes into the plant. A few even say you’re right, there’s no other way.”

A week later the company began to renge on the gloves. Word had gotten around. Other departments wanted them. Our foreman was replacing ours every third or fourth day instead of every other day. He said the company was having trouble with the supplier. I called the committeeman again and filed a grievance against the tardiness. This time he did the writing.

A few mornings later several men came to me just as I was returning from my relief. They held out their hands. The gloves on them, like mine, were almost palmless. “We’ve had enough.” “We’re walking out.” “We shut off the line.” I looked down the aisle in the direction of the time clock. The rest of our group was about to punch out.

A runner was dispatched to retrieve them “on the double.” Three minutes later we held a meeting. The whole department gang was present. I opened the discussion: “Anyone who clocks out will at a minimum lose wages. Gloves are tools and if . . . .” They were already far ahead of my speech. At least four of them finished it for me:

“Can’t work without tools.”
“That’s right, but we’re available.”
“We’ll stay right here.”
“When they ask us, we’ll all say that we’re just waiting for tools.”

I was simply the first one in the group who had become objective.

It was agreed that we would all gather at the weakest spot in our line of unity, where Kentucky and his two partners worked. I left them there pitching pennies and laughing. The foreman wasn’t in his office. He had gone out of the department on an errand when he saw us gathering. The incident was still only minutes old.

I picked up the foreman’s phone and got our
committeeman. I explained our action. He answered that it couldn’t be done. I said that it had been done and that he should go direct to the plant manager and demand immediate satisfaction of our grievance. He said he would be right over to see us and hung up.

Our stoppage had to be spread to the other departments. It was our (and my) only protection. We couldn’t wait the thirty minutes we had calculated it would take for the shortage on the line that we were creating to shut down the assembly lines in other departments that were fed by ours. It had to be done sooner, before management could organize.

If we could just shut down the department that followed ours, the rest would go like dominoes. I told a forklift driver who was going in that direction to tell Luis Guido in the next department that I wanted to see him right away. I knew this man; among us he was a star. He had led the 1936 “sit-in,” asking the man who was plant superintendent in those days inside to negotiate and then holding him as hostage after ordering the plant gate welded shut. He had always refused to be local union president. He didn’t like high offices. He had many times been a steward and chairman of the grievance committee. But in or out of office he was our top leader.

I watched the forklift move down the aisle and finally turn in at the place where the old-timer worked. His short thick form appeared in the center of the aisle moments later. I made signs to tell him what had happened. From his long experience and my pantomime, he understood. I was sure of this five minutes later when he reappeared, swinging a large sledge hammer to signal me that they were shut down. They had somehow felt the shortage we had created in less than half the figured time.

I was free to return to the safety of the group. The penny pitching had stopped, the jokes were thin. Someone sighted the assistant plant manager with two men that none of us recognized. I walked part way out to meet them and waited. The gambling had started again, immediately behind me. The three visitors in suits nodded to me courteously, but didn’t stop. They passed me and the game, walked the full length of our line, and made their exit, chatting.

For the next hour and thirty-nine minutes we were entirely alone. Our isolation ended when the foreman returned for the first time. He carried a carton the size of an apple box, Christmas-wrapped, complete with ribbon and bow. Without looking at us he laid it on the concrete floor in the opening we made for him. He opened it carefully, removed a gross of new gloves bound in bundles of six, placed walking around

My leg asleep dreaming it is a white fish
the other twisting insomniac beneath the thigh
the one leg bulging thinking it is a root
the other shaking thinking it has been trapped
when the one leg is arrested it is demanded that the other leg
account for itself
it cannot account for itself it has been asleep
the legs are clapped in irons and sent to the tombs
there they grow very close feeling they know each other for
the first time
in prison they become thin and pale but very steady
at night they pace and plot or sleep dreamlessly
or dream they are transfixed inside a milky diamond
one day they escape disguised in plumber’s pants
the streets glow with fury but they are not found
police songs play on all the radios
they keep moving leaving no footprints
always the memory of silence inside the milky diamond
soon the authorities assume they are dead
after getting a good tan they move to Hoboken
they find work the one making slippers the other boots
by now they have hidden thoroughly they have changed their
names
the one is called Patience to Fight the other
Impatient to Win

From Vol. 6, No. 3 (May-June 1972)

Steve Torgoff

them in neat rows, and gestured for us to help ourselves. No one moved. He didn’t return our stares. We couldn’t hear exactly what he said when he turned to leave, but it was something about our being children and deserving to be treated as such.

Each man took one pair from the pile and then we went together to the coke machine. After we all drank we returned and took our places, someone hit the switch, and the line moved for the first time in two hours and eleven minutes. At lunch time in the cafeteria we all got hied about needing so much rest. We told them that they had got the benefit of it too, and that we bet none of them had turned it down.

From “Work in America: Encounters on the Job,” Vol. 8 No. 4 (July-August 1974)
WORLD CAPITALIST CRISIS AND THE RISE OF THE RIGHT

Edited by Marlene Dixon, Susanne Jonas & Tony Platt

A powerful analysis of the Right, which takes into account the deepening crisis in the U.S. economy and the threat of growing militarism and Reagan's repressive policies. Theoretical essays by Marlene Dixon, Immanuel Wallerstein, Andre Gunder Frank and Rod Bush provide new insights into the growing dangers of neofascism. Other essays also examine this subject in relation to racism, the attack on women, and corporate ties to the religious Right. Related works by Bertram Gross, Victor Navasky and Manning Marable are also reviewed in this 160-page volume.

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by Marlene Dixon

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The New Left Assessed

Jim O'Brien

It was in its connection of personal to social issues that the New Left’s claim to originality lay. The New Left took students, as such, very seriously. It felt no embarrassment in raising demands for changes in the universities themselves, rather than simply using the campus as a recruitment center for outside struggles. It drew the proper conclusion from the ever-growing proportion of young people going to college, which was that higher education had become crucial to the operation of American capitalism. The New Left, moreover, reached for a total critique of what it meant to live in American society. It did this in relation to such issues as the draft and manpower channeling, the use of universities to produce skilled and pliable workers for corporations, women’s oppression, and the view of consumption as “domestic imperialism” which some people in SDS raised. The New Left saw that capitalism meant not simply dollars-and-cents exploitation, but powerlessness, indignity, and drabness. Lives were at stake, and not merely checkpoints. All this was tentative, and it never crystallized into a coherent overview; but it nevertheless was a real advance in left-wing thought in the US. It amounted to an assertion that revolution might be possible even without an economic breakdown of the capitalist system: that even when it functioned most smoothly the system placed intolerable obstacles in the way of human fulfillment, and for that reason had to be replaced.

* * *

The most obvious and perhaps most basic limitation of the New Left was its confinement to a campus milieu. This is not to say that there was not a great deal of ferment among working-class youth in the army, in factories, on street corners, and in high schools in the late 1960s, but it is to say that there was scarcely any direct organizational connection between these rebellions and the college-based New Left. On the whole, Old Left youth groups such as the YSA were much quicker and more systematic than SDS about organizing GIs. While SDS groups in a number of cities worked creatively with high-school students, there was a tendency for them to reach primarily young people from educated middle-class backgrounds similar to their own, rather than working-class youth. As for factory workers, it was Progressive Labor which lobbied within SDS for sending students into factories; for the most part, the SDS leadership resisted the idea. Essentially the New Left remained on campus and in campus-centered youth communities, not in the workplace. While, as we have suggested, this concentration had a natural limit to what the New Left could be expected to achieve. It could never have become a socialist movement. As its rhetoric suggested, it was antiimperialist, antimilitarist, and even anticapitalist; but the infrequency with which the word “socialist” was heard was indicative of the lack of a positive vision. Given its class setting and the nature of its radicalization, it would have been all but impossible for the New Left to develop a notion of working people taking control of the means of production and of the society. It had no real sense of how work is carried on at present, not to speak of how it might be carried on under a new social system. The vague concept of participatory democracy did not survive long after 1965 as a generally accepted slogan within the New Left, and in any case it was never fleshed out by a vision of how it might make life different for the majority of Americans.

A second weakness of the New Left had to do not so much with its class composition as with the particular historical epoch in which it had emerged. The New Left was the creation of people who had gone through high school in the years before 1965, or in some cases a year or two beyond that. At its core the movement retained this generational stamp. Even as tens of thousands of younger students joined SDS, for example, the proportion which really became absorbed into the movement and developed a permanent identification with it was very small. The New Left, as we have said, formed and developed through a series of discoveries about the inequity of American society — discoveries which had as their initial starting point the relative tranquility of the interwar era. But in the late 1960s young people were coming of age in a world that was far from tranquil — with a festering war in Indochina, with black militants condemning white society as bankrupt, and with a spreading youth culture that seemed to offer a direct challenge to accepted patterns of living. There were obvious social crises in the US, and revolutionary rhetoric was already very much a part of the social environment. These young people came to the movement already believing that society was sick and needed a revolution. The question for them was: What do we do on the basis of this understanding? If collective action seemed to show promise, it would be adopted; otherwise, some kind of individual adjustment to a bad society would have to be made. And the New Left, which was at its strongest in its critique of the existing society, was unequipped to furnish them with any sort of “revolutionary script” by which today’s meetings and demonstrations might reasonably be expected to lead to tomorrow’s revolution. The transition from revolutionary fervor to cynicism has always been an easy one to make, and it is understandable that so many young people have made it during the last few years.

A third inherent weakness of the New Left was the position of women within it. In a number of ways, the growth and development of the movement after 1965 led to a heightened oppression of women. The mere fact of the movement’s rapid growth, for example, meant that rallies...
and marches became much larger; there was a resultant premium on assertive public speaking, a trait on which men in the movement had a virtual monopoly. Beyond that, certain political trends within the movement from 1967 on had the effect of glamorizing political activities associated primarily with men. This was true, paradoxically, both in the sector of the movement that tended toward pacifism (for only men could become draft refusers) and in the sector that moved in the direction of greater militancy and violence (for men were the historic implementers of violence). The New Left’s partial fusion with youth culture also had its damaging aspects: there was a strong thread of male assertiveness running through rock music and youth culture generally, with “liberated women” being merely those who had lost their sexual inhibitions. In all these ways the problem of male supremacy was exacerbated in the New Left in the late 1960s. At the same time, it was all but inevitable — given the movement’s developing critique of non-economic oppression in American society — that a strong reaction would develop against male dominance within the New Left. Within SDS the issue was first raised publicly as early as December 1965, when a special workshop for women was held at a national SDS conference at the University of Illinois. At the 1967 SDS convention a women’s caucus pushed a resolution on women’s oppression in society and refused to let male delegates participate in amending the resolution. Over the next two years a growing number of women who considered themselves part of the New Left helped to form women’s groups both inside and outside the New Left. It would be an exaggeration to say that this activity, which sharpened the women’s sense of their oppression within the movement, was a major factor in the climactic SDS split in the summer of 1969. It was, however, an extremely important factor in the movement’s inability to reconstitute itself on a national level after the split. By that time the accumulated experience of frustration within SDS left very little taste among most women for trying to create a new SDS. Once the New Left’s momentum as a coherent movement had been destroyed, the growth in women’s consciousness formed an impassable barrier to its reconstitution.

The New Left naively but nonetheless genuinely expressed this new society in its self-understanding and its expectations of revolutionary possibility. Each historic phase of the modern US Left provides a glimpse of the emerging order, even as the radical movement succumbs to the pressures of capitalism. The movements of the pre-World War I years offered an evangelical vision of socialism as a real social possibility, and a conception of workers’ control on a plant-by-plant basis. The movements of the 1960s added a social conception of the workings of modern society immeasurably richer, filling in earlier abstractions with a concrete depiction of the mass worker in organized motion. The intervening period has contributed a black challenge to the entire civilization which has not yet abated. And the New Left brought a sense of its own personal transformation. The women’s movement, above all, clarified that the revolutionary process depended on the success of a pre-revolutionary “cultural” evolution. In this way, the New Left signified that the revolutionary process was continuous, and the insurrectionary act only the defense and extension of the new society against its enemies. Previously, the IWW and anarchist groups had expressed similar beliefs. But the New Left rendered these visions full by adding a cultural dimension, and no longer utopian by making them the implicit principles through which mass politics was conducted.

Paul Buhle

From “The Eclipse of the New Left,” Vol. 6, No. 4 (July-August 1972)

Weatherman

I remember ted gold best riding to connecticut
in a car with six
young kids from the
ghetto
to a conference on the war
Five congressmen spoke
and we played
smoky and the miracles on
the portable record player
and went swimming
The kids have grown
STUDENT
PUSHER
PANTHER
Ted liked to go
to the Knick games
He had season tickets
last year
This year,
he is dead
Of a bomb meant for better targets
There will be no processions
and the articles in the
Times will have no quotes
For those who lost before the battle
Who found a battle
they never really sought

Norman Temple [Mark Naison]
Rebel GIs

The morale, discipline, and battle-worthiness of the U.S. Armed Forces are, with a few salient exceptions, lower and worse than at any time in this century and possibly in the history of the United States.

By every conceivable indicator, our army that now remains in Vietnam is in a state approaching collapse, with individual units avoiding or having refused combat, murdering their officers and non-commissioned officers, drug-ridden, and dispirited where not near mutinous.

Elsewhere than Vietnam, the situation is nearly as serious.

So wrote Col. Robert D. Heinl in June of 1971. In an article entitled "The Collapse of the Armed Forces," written for the eyes of the military leadership and published in the Armed Forces Journal, Heinl also stated, "Sedition, coupled with disaffection within the ranks, and externally fomented with an audacity and intensity previously inconceivable, infests the Armed Services." This frank statement accurately reflects the tremendous upheaval which occurred among rank-and-file GIs during the era of the Vietnam war. Covered up whenever possible and frequently denied by the military brass, this upheaval was nevertheless a significant factor in the termination of the ground war, and helped to imbue a generation of working-class youth with a deep-rooted contempt for America's authority structure.

* * *

This situation led to the rapid decay of the US military's fighting ability in Vietnam. The catchword was CYA ("cover your ass"); as one GI expressed it, "You owe it to your body to get out of here alive." Low morale, hatred for the Army, and huge quantities of dope all contributed to the general desire to avoid combat. One platoon sergeant stated, "Almost to a man, the members of my platoon oppose the war.... The result is a general malaise which pervades the entire company. There is a great deal of pressure on leaders at the small unit level, such as myself, to conduct what are popularly referred to as 'search and avoid' missions, and to do so as safely and cautiously as possible." The brass watched these developments with general helplessness. As a brigade commander in the 25th Division put it, "Back in 1967, officers gave orders and didn't have to worry about the sensitivities of the men. Today, we have to explain things to the men and find new ways of doing the job. Otherwise, you can send the men on a search mission, but they won't search."

While this malaise seriously affected the war effort, the spectre of open mutiny was even more startling. In 1968 there were 68 recorded incidents of combat refusal in Vietnam. By 1969 entire units were refusing orders. Company A of the 21st Infantry Division and units of the 1st Air Cavalry Division refused to move into battle. By 1970 there were 35 separate combat refusals in the Air Cavalry Division alone. At the same time, physical attacks on officers, known as "fraggings," became widespread, 126 incidents in 1969 and 271 in 1970. Clearly, this army did not want to fight.

The situation stateside was less intense but no less disturbing to the military brass. Desertion and AWOL became absolutely epidemic. In 1966 the desertion rate was 14.7 per thousand, in 1968 it was 26.2 per thousand, and by 1970 it had risen to 52.3 per thousand; AWOL was so common that by the height of the war one GI went AWOL every three minutes. From January of '67 to January of '72 a total of 354,112 GIs left their posts without permission, and at the time of the signing of the peace accords 98,324 were still missing. Yet these figures represent only the most disaffected; had the risks not been so great, the vast majority of Vietnam-era GIs would have left their uniforms behind.

MATT RINALDI

From "The Olive-Drab Rebels: Military Organizing During the Vietnam Era," Vol. 8, No. 3 (May-June 1974)
The Antiwar Movement

We can find both limitations and accomplishments in the work of the antiwar movement. It is clear that, had American intervention in Vietnam been brief and relatively inexpensive (as was the Dominican Republic invasion of April 1965, for example), there would have been no antiwar movement capable of affecting the outcome. The movement built itself up over a period of years, and only the tenacious resistance of the Vietnamese created a situation in which the domestic antiwar movement was able to have an effect. Even as it was, the movement was never able to mobilize enough people behind its banner to force an end to the war. What it did accomplish was more modest, though nonetheless real. These achievements can be listed somewhat schematically, as follows:

First, both through its constantly reiterated arguments and through its very existence over a period of years, it weakened the government’s ability to mobilize the American people behind the war. The movement affected not only those people who considered it part of the solution to the war, but also those people who saw the movement as part of the problem created by the war. In both instances, the movement helped to create a domestic political climate in which, from 1968 on, the government had to give at least the appearance of moving toward an end to American participation in the war.

Second, the antiwar movement helped to weaken the American military. It helped to foment dissension in the armed forces and thereby make the military a less reliable instrument in the hands of American policy makers. It provoked the elimination, at least temporarily, of the military draft for the first time in a quarter-century. It brought the ROTC program under attack and thereby threatened the military’s primary source of junior officers. In general, by being proved right about the prospects for an American triumph in Vietnam, while the military was proved wrong, the movement helped to bring the military into discredit — if not with Congress, which still rubber-stamps military appropriations, at least with a large portion of the public.

Third, the movement helped to weaken the pervasive ideology of anticommunism as a justification for all sorts of interventions in the internal affairs of foreign countries. Large sectors of the antiwar movement, especially among the younger participants, openly identified with the Vietnamese who were fighting the American government. In doing so they helped to break down the stereotyped Cold War image of “the Free World” versus “the Communists.” The Nixon administration’s partial rapprochement with China, whatever it may have shown about Chi-

e nese foreign policy, reflected a realization by the US government that anticommunism had lost much of its domestic appeal.

Fourth, in a number of intangible ways the antiwar movement, by maintaining its presence for so long, helped to radicalize a great many of the people who took part in it or were touched by it. An understanding that the war was part of a pattern of US imperialism was widespread in the movement by the late 1960s. So was an understanding that the needs of a militarized corporate economy require the imposition of severe constraints on individual lives, as in the channeling built into the selective service system. And so was the broader understanding that there is no “national interest” of all Americans, but rather there are contending interests of different segments of the population. This radicalization may have been the main difference in the domestic aspects of the Korean and Indochina wars: there was much resentment at the Korean war, but with no self-conscious movement opposing it, the experience of the war moved few people to the left. Through its protracted confrontation with the makers of American foreign policy, the antiwar movement played a vital educational role, both for itself and for millions of people outside it.

JIM O’BRIEN

From “The Anti-War Movement and the War,” Vol. 8, No. 3 (May-June 1974)

When you seize Columbia, when you seize Paris, take the media, tell the people what you’re doing what you’re up to and why and how you mean to do it, how they can help, keep the news coming, steady, you have 70 years of media conditioning to combat, it is a wall you must get through, somehow, to reach the instinctive man, who is struggling like a plant for light, for air

when you seize a town, a campus, get hold of the power stations, the water, the transportation, forget to negotiate, forget how to negotiate, don’t wait for De Gaulle or Kirk to abdicate, they won’t, you are not “demonstrating” you are fighting a war, fight to win, don’t wait for Johnson or Humphrey or Rockefeller, to agree to your terms take what you need, “it’s free because it’s yours”

Diane DiPrima May, 1968

From Vol. 2, No. 4 (March-April 1968)
Leninism in the 1970s

Jim O’Brien

A balance sheet on the efforts of American Leninist groups in the 1970s has to take account of both their practical work and the persistent hope that the vanguard of the working class will emerge through the strivings of the various Leninist parties and pre-party formations. It is hard to separate these two areas, since they are firmly linked together in the ideology of the Leninist groups themselves; in strategic discussions virtually every description of concrete work is seen as being related to the need for a vanguard party. But for our purposes it is necessary to separate the concrete work from the party-building aspirations.

In their concrete work, the Leninist groups have often come out looking quite well. In particular, the “colonization” of ex-students in blue-collar jobs has been anything but a fiasco. Like CP militants in previous decades, these people have generally been able to develop roots in their new surroundings and have been able to take an active role in workplace and union politics. Growing numbers of ex-student leftists (party members as well as independents) are being elected to lower-level trade union offices, especially as shop stewards, after a few years on the job. Whatever the dilemmas they will encounter once in office, their election is a sign that they are accepted as workers and not as exotic intruders in the workplace. To be sure, it is by focusing on immediate issues that they are generally entrusted with formal or informal leadership; the one Leninist group which maintains the purest and most uncompromising stance in its trade-union work, the Spartacist League, has achieved near-total isolation for the union caucuses it has established. When groups like the October League and Progressive Labor periodically take on aggressive all-or-nothing postures in their leaflets and demands, the same isolation awaits those of their members who faithfully carry out the organizational line. But the general picture remains a positive one: a high proportion of the members of the left-Leninist groups are in working-class jobs and are able to participate, often influentially, in the life and struggles of their workplaces.

Leninist organization has affected the concrete work of individual members in different, sometimes contradictory ways. It seems clear that the democratic-centralist structure, with constant criticism and self-criticism, draws from many individual members a far greater commitment of time and energy than they would otherwise make to their political work. At the same time, membership in a group (especially the smaller and more impatient left-Leninist groups) can diminish the chance of friendships with other workers. The party member has little free time and has to justify virtually any socializing to himself or herself in terms of the political uses that may come of it. Where the other worker happens to be a member of a different Leninist organization, the problem is compounded. This worker, rather than being a potential recruit, is an obstacle to recruitment. Depending on the flexibility of the individuals involved, squabbling between rival vanguards can often cause wonderment and contempt toward the Left in general among the uninvolved people who witness it. It can also severely hamper the concrete work that the members of any one group want to do. Even at best, a tremendous amount of time, for members of nearly all the Leninist groups, is spent in activities whose chief purpose is to build the organization itself rather than to spur working-class activity more directly.

As for the “science of Marxism-Leninism” that some groups claim to be bringing to the class struggle, it is clear that the science is very often a matter of guesswork. The best discussions I have seen in a recent Leninist publication of this topic were in the RCP’s Revolution in 1976, in a series of discussions of the “mass line.” The articles were good in that they recognized the immense problems that face a would-be vanguard group in trying to gauge the mood of a group of workers and decide how to try to intervene in a fluid situation. As one of the articles said, in a convoluted analysis of one particular action, “While,
on the one hand, communists couldn’t have led the masses unless they were sticking close by them and coming from within their ranks, on the other hand, once communists and advanced forces were within the ranks of the broad masses of workers and, to whatever extent they were within, there still remained the question of what they were going to do.” The Communist Party has long accorded its members a very broad leeway in how they will act in concrete circumstances, having learned from experience the difficulties in setting national policies and programs that are too specific. Even the Socialist Workers Party, which in the ’60s and ’70s has concentrated its members’ energies on campaigns set by the national SWP leadership, has generally stayed away from pre-

to predict the results of its intervention in a particular field of activity, and all of these groups have been markedly unable to make predictions of that sort.

When we move on to the question of party building, and the goal of creating a hegemonic party to the left of the CP, the prospects of the left-Leninist groups seem much more cloudy than in the realm of concrete activity. This is seen most obviously in the matter of size. The CP is by far the largest Leninist organization, and it also appears to be taking on new members faster than any other group. The left-Leninist groups, unlike the CP, are heirs of the student movement of the 1960s. But none of them was able to recruit enough survivors of that movement to create a critical mass of members for the forging of a strong party. And none of them has achieved a self-sustaining recruitment of working-class members in recent years. The Socialist Workers Party, much the largest of the groups other than the CP, had ideal conditions in the sectoral movements of the late ’60s and early ’70s to draw even with the CP, but it failed to do it.

Aggravating the problem of size is the problem of organizational proliferation. If everyone who wants a Leninist party to the left of the CP were to unite, they might have a large one, but that is not within the realm of possibility. The growth of competing organizations is not simply the result of certain people being obsessively sectarian. Even where two groups might be fairly close politically, there is a built-in logic in the Leninist form of centralized organization that leads to the formation of new groups by those who cannot win the old groups to their positions. The fact that the CP has enjoyed a relatively large membership without any recent splits is due to the fact that the CP is a special case. First, it attained its position on the left during the Stalin era, when the Soviet Union’s position as the single pole of attraction for Communists abroad offered a “franchise” to one Leninist group in every other country. Second, as we have seen, the CP does not operate as a Leninist cadre organization in nearly so disciplined a fashion as its smaller rivals; within the CP there is room for a far greater variety of viewpoints and activities than in the smaller groups.

Even if we leave aside the question of numbers, the experience of recent years casts doubt on the left-Leninist vision of a vanguard party to the left of the CP. For its rivals, the CP is a hopelessly compromised reformist organization, part of the problem and not a solution. The left-Leninist groups, especially the newer ones forged in the 1970s, have tasted neither the carrot of mass influence nor the stick of repression that are part of the CP’s heritage. But even in the ’70s the experience of these groups offers signs that the necessities of organizational survival bring with them
Interview with Dorothy Healey

Q: You've said you thought today's Left was reiterating the development of the CP. What did you mean?

A: That's particularly true with the groups that call themselves the New Communist Movement. They consider the heroic period of the Party to be the period up to 1935, up to the 7th World Congress and the United Front. They totally ignore the world situation of that period, and the doctrine of social fascism; they take the organizational forms of 1930-35 as the ones to emulate. They take what was our most sectarian period, and glorify it.

Today I read policy statements of groups that pledge always to be antirevisionist, as if you can erect a force field around your organization that will guard against this terrible sin. It's just nonsense. Most of the groups that proclaim this will never have to worry, because they will never be in enough contact with large groups of people where the pressure arises to accommodate their long-term position to their short-term needs.

Another thing these groups do, which is equally devastating, is to take the concepts of that period as their bible, as universally applicable. For example, democratic centralism: this phrase is used by OL and RU in a more politically deceptive way than we ever used it in the thirties. They have a preposterous amount of secrecy, which is a great way to cloak bureaucracy. I have a copy of OL's manual on illegal work that forbids a member of OL in one district from writing to a member of OL in another district without the permission of the district organizer, in the guise of security. If people can't contact other members, then there's no way to fight what's going on in the party.

More basically what they do is to take Lenin's concept of what is to be done, written for a particular country under particular conditions of illegality, and make that their handbook, totally ignoring first his statements within that book that what he is writing has nothing to do, for instance, with the German party, where there are legal trade unions, where the party can operate legally, where the party leadership can be judged publicly and elected publicly; they totally ignore his statements in his 1907 article, "Preface to 12 Years," where he reexamines "What Is to Be Done" and says it was written for a particular period, to deal with a particular phenomenon; it's not intended to be for all time. That is just ignored by all of them.

My sorrow is that, not just with the CP, but with all of the organizations - SWP, RU, OL - you get dedicated young people who are going to be taken down a dead-end street. I don't believe you can build a relevant revolutionary movement on old dogma.

Survival: The Social-Service Worker in the 1970s

There are four major tasks which face radical service workers today — either those few of us involved in movement-provided services or the rest who work in more or less established service jobs. By examining the practice of service workers who are free, at least, from the constraints of bureaucratic mandates, we can begin to have a clearer understanding of how to accomplish these tasks and perhaps how to formulate more creative service activities today.

Our first task as radical service workers is to do what amounts to “consciousness raising” in regard to the personal reasons why we are providing services. As daycare workers, community-residence staff, or social workers we need to explore the personal rewards and conflicts of our jobs. What do we like about working with children, old people, women on welfare? We need to carefully explore the legitimate personal satisfaction which arises out of helping other people and from engaging in more meaningful work as well as the class benefits we may derive from our jobs and the political functions of our “service.”

These are very difficult issues. It is sometimes too easy to accept the rewards of the human contact which can come from our work without examining the class, sexual, or racial politics underlying our activities. On the other hand, we can be so self-critical of our role as “professionals” or even “paraprofessionals” that we deny any of the immediate usefulness of our work.

Second, no matter what our jobs, as leftists we need to increase our understanding of the contradictory functions of the social services in the capitalists’ welfare state. The reason for doing this is not in order to create a new Marxist theory of the state, but because the agencies we work in and the programs we carry out are so thoroughly influenced by such issues. We cannot begin to create a radical strategy for change unless we understand the social and economic constraints on our work as well as the links between our activity and other aspects of capitalism. As with any socialist theory, such questions are not easy; all too often our own agencies and public programs appear to be limited more by bureaucratic incompetence and inept political personalities than by systematic forces. The task is to look for the underlying reasons why the bureaucracies stay incompetent and fools remain in power, so that we may maintain our sanity, better explain the system to our coworkers and service users, and even suggest means for protest and change.

Third, we need to examine as many ways as possible to combine our socialist and feminist political vision with the day-to-day work we do. Ideals must be explored and tested — how much hierarchy can we eliminate? How overtly can we discuss political goals with service users or with our coworkers? Radical and feminist therapists have suggested some important strategies here, but more need to be developed. Especially, we must learn the limits of “radical practice” within traditional agencies. And we must not forget that there are few if any good, comprehensive definitions of radical practice around.

Finally, we need to develop a clearer sense of how our service activity — as individual workers and in groups — is connected to broader social and political movements in the society. This is obviously a more clear-cut task when large-scale mass movements are active, but even in times like today it is critical. How do we relate as service workers to the efforts of women and gays to fight the New Right? or to the Mineworkers strike? or even to the struggles against imperialism in Africa or nuclear power? It is exactly our support of such movements which most often distinguishes us from liberal “concerned” service workers in everyday situations, yet we often find it difficult to do more than wear the relevant buttons as an indication of our links to a broader left tradition.

* * *

Just as with other political work, we need to consider our goals in providing services, the needs of the people we are serving, and the reasonable expectations we can have regarding our activity. Often, especially in the Unemployed Councils, the ERAP projects, or in the Black Panther Party, organizers would spend weeks planning a demonstration, but would allow extensive service work to go unchecked, unplanned, and unevaluated. Even the UFW will cut its service centers when other priorities arise, in spite of Chavez’s awareness that it takes time and care to build a responsible service center.

Finally, however, movement services can only be as useful as the political and social analysis which underlies them. ERAP services were confused because the New Left itself was confused; on the one hand it stressed the political nature of everyday life, on the other, the men who led the movement were not readily willing to acknowledge the personal implications of their ideology. So the “New Era” could not be brought about by men unwilling to see children, old people, or women as equally worthy with men as “targets” for political activity.*

*There were conscious efforts in some ERAP projects to limit the number of housewives and older people who came to meetings, for example.
The women’s movement, tattered and torn as it is today, can still continue to sustain feminist service activity exactly because of the breadth of its analysis. Yet the problem of linkage to a less vital broader movement remains critical. The plight of feminist service workers today highlights another requirement for successful service work — that services need to be delivered within the context of a healthy active movement beyond themselves. In order to keep their political vision, radicals in services need specific movement activity to point to. It is no surprise that UFW services and CIO services could maintain themselves more easily than service efforts less attached to movement organization. Today, with few active multi-issue left organizations around, and no mass movement, it is objectively much harder to support radical service activity.

There is no need for us to aim for comprehensiveness; we are trying to build a movement, not create the ideal social-service system. Indeed, movement services are generally most successful when they are small, when they provide almost pre-services such as connecting people to other services, assisting them in attaining welfare or food stamps. Basic counseling and advocacy services can be helpful and mind-opening. Radicals do not have to open large childcare centers, clinics, or “full-service” centers, especially if we do not have the workforce to staff them adequately. As leftists, we do not have to provide service to everyone. We are not likely to provide services to the terminally ill or severely retarded, so we should feel comfortable in focusing our service work on those we feel are most likely to attract our analysis.

Furthermore, we need not strive for unnecessary longevity. There may simply be a “half-life” to movement service efforts, after which time burnout, cooptation (a good example here may occur soon with the homes for battered women), or institutionalization take place. We need to recognize and acknowledge the successes without expecting them to be total.

Our politics assume this. We know that no women’s clinic can end patriarchy, no housing service can stop capitalist landlords. But we often forget these realities because we have worked so hard. A final lesson for movement service work, then, must be our recognition that services do not fail because they end. They cease, sometimes at least, because for them to continue would mean the abandonment of original political goals. Our job is to learn from the experiences and move on.

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From “Surviving as a Radical Service Worker,” Vol. 12, No. 4 (July-August 1978)

Fighting Back on Gay Rights

Michael Ward and Mark Freeman

The feminist network which over the years had succeeded in establishing some kind of women’s group in nearly every California community, including small towns, provided much of the leadership, energy and organizing skills all over the state. To a lesser extent a community of radicals active around gay issues over the years provided an informal network of communication. Together these two groups prodded the campaign continually to the left. After the electoral crisis was over, few ongoing groups emerged from the campaign. The temporary marriage of convenience between separate lesbian and gay male activists, however, demonstrated to many that such cooperation was now feasible and could count on support in many independent progressive organizations.

The only explanation the media could find for the upset vote was the opposition by conservative leaders like Ronald Reagan, Hayakawa, and Jarvis, as well as President Carter. But such endorsements came only at the eleventh hour and were pragmatic. Carter, on a stage with Jerry Brown a few days before the election, was overheard on a microphone he didn’t know was on when he asked Brown if he should say anything about Proposition 6. It was perfectly safe now, Brown told him. Reagan’s cautiously worded proposition was that there were already sufficient laws on the books to handle the problem. By election time a stand against Briggs was almost mandatory for politicians looking toward 1980.

Here was the explanation for the defeat of the Briggs Initiative that the media could not see — a massive mobilization by those who felt directly threatened. The results of this activism were concrete; in the end virtually every public figure, every newspaper, most trade unions, community groups, political and educational bodies had been lobbied to take a stand. Most passed a No on 6 endorsement on to their constituencies.

The campaign clarified long-debated arguments about the potential of the gay community for being organized. One source of strength was reflected in the gay liberation adage “We are everywhere.” Contrary to many assumptions, little organizing was to grow out of the bar scene — bars by their nature are places to get away from reality. The breakthrough trend in gay activism of this campaign was for gays to reach out to non-gays in all the areas where being gay was not the central focus. Faced with the material threat that jobs could be lost by being “out,” large numbers of gay people who had formerly kept their private lives separate from their public lives reached out in their neighborhoods, their places of work, their
Proposition 6 would give everyone a lot to do—other than learning or teaching. Witch hunts are expensive, destroy lives, and teach cowardice, hatred, and fear.

NO/6

churches or community organizations.

The diversity of the gay community which cuts across race, class, and gender lines also worked to the advantage of the campaign effort. It made for a myriad of anti-6 organizations that specialized, but cooperated. Physicians’ organizations, shopkeepers, lesbians in blue collar trades, and gay men in the service sector worked toward the same end, but in very different ways.

Such diversity may not always play such a positive role in the long run. It is unlikely that the same intensity of effort could be mobilized to save abortion rights or the ERA. And the campaign showed up class differences within the gay male community that can become antagonistic when there is no common enemy. For instance, a gay caucus of the Restaurant, Hotel and Bartenders Union which evolved out of workplace campaigning is not welcomed by non-unionized gay businesses. There are gay bourgeois "power brokers" and gay real-estate speculators whose interests are ultimately antithetical to the interests of most gay people. Continued cross-class alliance with bourgeois elements within the gay community would cut gays off from mutual support with minorities and other working people.

California’s Proposition 6 was not the only example that year of people mobilizing a broadly based coalition to defend themselves against an attack from the right. In Missouri rank-and-file labor activism succeeded in defeating a “Right to Work” ballot proposition. In Michigan voters were offered two Prop 13-like “tax relief measures.” Third World community groups and others protective of the social services which were threatened organized a grassroots campaign based on exposing the measures as frauds which gave their biggest breaks to big business. They defeated one and came close to dumping the other. These three are all instances of broad alliances winning populist victories around issues important to the Left. The likelihood of mass gay participation in similar struggles in the future depends partly on how clearly they perceive themselves threatened and partly on the growing openness of non-gays toward them.

From “Defending Gay Rights: The Campaign Against the Briggs Initiative in California,” Vol. 13, No. 4 (July-August 1979)
Organizing: The Prospect for Office Workers

Jean Tepperman

Changing clerical consciousness has produced organized groups, and the existence of organizing groups in turn affects people's consciousness, and helps move them toward action. The groups raise issues and help change the way people think about problems. If a group's existence suggests the possibility of change, a problem or hassle or misery can crystallize into a grievance.

Several union organizers described this process to me: Workers became more militant because organizers educated them about the rights they had on paper, or could have with better contract. Union activity also brought clerks into confrontations with management which made it clear that management's job was to oppose their interests.

Even when groups inside a particular workplace are weak or nonexistent, organized group activity from outside changes consciousness. An insurance employee told me that since Nine to Five began an active campaign to leaflet insurance companies, the tone on her floor has changed — people make a lot more "liberation comments." A group organizing at MIT said that the very existence of Nine to Five helped give their efforts "legitimacy." And a clerical committee at Syracuse University got its start by seeing a notice in MS. about a New York City office workers' conference. A few went to the conference, came back, and organized their own group on campus.

Many little incidents like these showed me the crucial role organizing projects can have in crystallizing grievances and moving people to action, in a time when there is widespread, unfocused discontent. My experiences doing research and working in offices have made me feel strongly that right now is a time like that for office workers.

In general, I was very impressed with the work of the organizers I met in doing the book, and of Nine to Five, with which I am more familiar. These organizers are working carefully and I think successfully to build a movement that the mass of office workers can identify with. From this basis, all these groups — unions, Nine to Five, Women Employed — also move and change the people involved and, to a lesser extent, other office workers who are aware of their activities. These organizations teach people a few important lessons: Change is possible. Workers only win by organization, unity, and struggle. Management is the enemy. Clerical work is dignified and valuable. You can feel proud and strong as a woman and a worker.

Active participants in these groups described personal changes — they have learned skills, gained self-confidence, and been turned on by the possibility of change. "It's really exciting," one person said, "to realize that the efforts I am making now will make a difference."

The international unions office workers are joining are, among others, the Office & Professional Employees' Union (OPEIU); the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME); the Service Employees International Union (SEIU); the Distributive Workers of America ("District 65"); and the Teamsters. Except for District 65, they are standard bureaucratic American unions, or worse. But clerical groups organizing new offices, or building caucuses within their unions, are making real gains in educating people to a rank-and-file-oriented, militant concept of unionism. The most developed example I encountered was "Clerks' County," a caucus within the Alameda County employees' union. This caucus has been going for several years, putting out a newsletter, arranging meetings of rank-and-file groups, and pushing more militant approaches within the union.

But many of the clerical organizing groups I met were conscious of the goal of building a different kind of union. One organizer said: "If you want people to take responsibility for negotiations and for running their own union, you really have to start before you have the union. We're trying to transfer the responsibility for the campaign from the organizing committee to the membership. The membership now meets every three weeks, and all major policy decisions now are made by the membership."

A bank employee described conflicts between her organizing committee and the union's staff organizers: "They felt that they were professionals and they knew more about organizing. ... I'm not doubting that they might be able to pull a fast one, faster than we could. But we weren't out to pull a fast one. What we wanted to do was organize the workers, consciously organize the workers so we can actually struggle together — you know, everyone struggling together to get what we want."

All of these developments in people's consciousness and self-confidence are exciting. But there are limitations and problems, too. Any union campaign faces strong pressures to become like most other American unions. Union organizers I spoke to were quite anxious to concentrate on unionism and avoid being "sidetracked" by other radical or women's issues. An organizer who had been involved in an unsuccessful union drive at Yale in 1971 recalled: "When women's liberation was in the forefront we demanded childcare. Then we went on to the next issue. We talked about wanting an efficient, low-cost mass transit system, we objected to Yale's contributing to air pollution, we objected to their unchecked expansion in the city. All very fine things, but clearly off the wall for a group that's trying to organize a bunch of employees. It's taking on so much ... you had to get people to care about something, to get them started somewhere. And we were asking them to start everywhere at one time." I felt her concern was valid. But because of this real problem, radicals involved in union efforts face a constant danger of forgetting their larger goals.

Direct action organizations like Nine to Five and Women Employed face similar pressures to stick to the lowest common denominator. In addition, their activities sometimes reinforce misconceptions the members have. Their programs to demand better legislation and state regulations are valuable because they provide a way to take militant action for people whose coworkers are not ready to unionize. But these struggles tend to lead people into an attitude of relying on liberal government officials, and a view of the government as neutral or even friendly. This problem could be reduced by making an effort to point out to people constantly that it is their own militancy and organization that forces liberal officials to be cooperative. But these groups' long-range strategy for dealing with this difficulty is to develop groups within each workplace, strong enough to struggle directly against their employers.

Struggles against sex discrimination
often encourage women’s desires to move up into management, without leading them to question management itself. One activist told me she had become disillusioned with banking as a career, but her reason was only that it was so sexist she didn’t have a chance of getting anywhere. Nine to Five is beginning to deal with this problem, partly by offering a course on the insurance industry for active insurance employees. The course will give activists a chance to examine insurance companies as whole capitalist institutions, not just in relation to specific grievances.

Organizing that is mainly focused on sexism does not necessarily teach people to see things in class terms. This was made startlingly clear to me when I had the following exchange with a veteran Nine to Five activist:

**Me:** If there were no sex discrimination, would that solve the problem? Would that be all you’d want?

**She:** If there were no sex discrimination, then as a result we’d get all that we are after. Promotions, benefits, pay.

**Me:** But what if the insurance companies were set up as they are now, except that there were an equal number of men and women in every position?

**She:** That would be fine.

**Me:** But the typists and file clerks are still getting underpaid, aren’t they?

**She:** I see what you mean, but we really haven’t gotten into that yet. This particular action is focused on sex discrimination. I just never even thought of it that way. It’s true.

The problems raised by this conversation are not easy to solve. An emphasis on fighting sexism is necessary and important, especially in offices, where it is so extreme that people actually use “women” and “workers” as interchangeable terms, and do the same with “men” and “bosses.” Partly because of this pattern, and partly because of the women’s movement, most women office workers seem already more conscious of sexism than of class exploitation.

I don’t know how much effort is made by organizers who are socialists, who work in groups like Nine to Five, to deepen the class analysis of activists. I feel they could probably do more of this without damaging the work they are already doing. But it’s easy for people outside the situation to underestimate the problems of combining mass organizing with socialist education.


Jerry Berndt
The Hungarian Revolution

Ferenc Feher and Agnes Heller

The Hungarian Revolution as a classic political revolution has not lost its relevance, and its lessons are especially important for socialists. Certain of these lessons can only be drawn when people on the radical Left no longer idolize political revolution.

How can it be maintained, without gross exaggeration and national bias, that in the century which spawned 1905, the February and October revolutions, and the Chinese Revolution, this uproar in a small country was a classic political revolution? There is only one reason: since the cataclysms of 1848, the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 has been the only pure political revolution. It did not spring from a crisis triggered by war (mostly by a lost war) — as did the Paris Commune, the Russian 1905 and 1917 revolutions, and the Hungarian and German revolutions of 1918-19 — but from a crisis caused by the loss of legitimacy of a tyrannical regime. A “pure revolution” means that the only considerations motivating its protagonists are related to the structure of the social order and not to external factors, and that as a result the mechanism of social revolution becomes visible.

Hungary in 1956 is a case study of a pure political revolution because the ruling stratum totally lost its legitimacy. In all aspects of social life, Hungary was the most crushed and humiliated, the least free country of Eastern Europe. Civil society in its entirety was subjugated to the political state: no relations — neither contractual nor personal — remained unaffected by the tyrannical caprices of the state.

* * *

No wonder, then, that when this people revolted it revolted totally, and as is usual in case of total revolutions, it found symbols for its rebellious spirit. The destruction of Stalin’s statue had the same symbolic meaning as the storming of the Bastille. Indeed, the famous photos of jubilant demonstrators carrying pieces of the statue of the tyrant mark the end of a historical period. Politically, Stalin did not die in 1953, but in 1956 in the room where Khrushchev gave his “secret speech,” and on the streets of Budapest.

Yet all the characteristics of oppression evident in Hungary were also present in other “people’s democracies,” some perhaps even more conspicuously. Elsewhere, however, they did not produce revolution. A mechanical view of history, totaling up the causal factors, will not explain events. The revolution broke out because of the simultaneous presence of many “accidental” historical factors: an opportunity for the rebellious mood of the country to be expressed publicly; a language in which complaints and demands could be articulated; an opposition able to articulate the outrage of the population and formulate a program without being outlawed in the very first moments; a moral crisis in the tyrannical ruling stratum which paralyzed vital power centers; a feeling of false confidence on the part of the masses, especially regarding the organs of coercion; and a leader. All these factors were present in Hungary between 1953-56, mostly because of historical chance.

* * *

We must analyze separately the resistance of the Hungarian population after the Soviet invasion. That there was practically no pillage, in spite of the fact that the city was without proper police or other authority for weeks, in itself showed the political consciousness of the population. Furthermore, people spontaneously found a more effective means of resistance than armed urban guerrilla warfare, a tactic doomed to failure against the strongest army of the world, and one which could only have resulted in the total destruction of the major Hungarian cities. The more effective strategy was a general political strike, to our knowledge the first one since the Russian Revolution of 1905 (with the possible exception of Spanish mass demonstrations against the monarchy), and a unique achievement of the Hungarian working class. For seven weeks the strikes continued, sometimes dwindling into a partial paralysis of a few branches of industry, then enlarging again into a universal work stoppage.

The strikes, which paralyzed Hungarian economic and social life (the government centers could only operate by being based directly on the Soviet Army’s sources of supply), were not aimed at the disruption of civil society as such. They were not suicidal actions directed against the population — for example, social-service workers never ceased work. They
had well-defined political objectives: the withdrawal of the Soviet Army and the return of the arrested Nagy government. Later they had more restricted aims: an act of solidarity with their imprisoned leaders, Racz and Bali. Needless to say, all this was a hopeless rearguard action; nevertheless it is a good feeling for Hungarian socialists that while no single Russian factory went on strike for the exiled Leon Trotsky, the Hungarian workers proclaimed a general strike for two workers who appeared on the historical scene only for a moment, but who were elected by them and served them loyally.

There were two remarkable features in this use of the general strike. The first was that it channeled the political dynamism from a suicidal armed resistance inspired by indignation and despair into a peaceful but active force. We emphasize both adjectives. It was actually the "mutinous" workers, and not the government speaking constantly about moderation, who saved Budapest and other Hungarian cities by inventing an active but peaceful method of resistance, and by demonstrating their fighting spirit without guiding the population into self-destruction in the face of an adversary that was determined to do anything in order to put down the resistance. These workers saved Hungary from mass deportations and mass exterminations, and they concluded its revolution at the same time. The latter act was acknowledged, in a curious way, by the government itself. Later it was vigorous in the cynically enlightened circles of Kadarism to speak ironically about the "only strike of world history that was remunerated by the employer," that is to say, the Kadarist government. Kadarists did not realize, however, that the state's allegedly generous remuneration itself demonstrated the extent to which that state had been crushed by the striking workers. The state had had to acknowledge the workers' political authority, and to conduct open negotiations with the delegations of the workers' councils.

The workers' resistance was a demonstration of the irresistible force of a general strike. The fantastic sight invoked so often by mystical socialists like Sorel and so much resembling the Apocalypse in their imaginations in actuality had a much more prosaic but just as powerful dynamic. Either the workers were paid by a central authority, for there was no other source that could have materially sustained a whole population, in which case the material resources of the state would have run out in a few weeks; or the salary was refused them, in which case plundering would have been the only way the population could have provided for itself, and the central authority would have been confronted once again by an unresolvable dilemma.

No government on its own could solve this problem. The Shah of Iran was expelled by his people using similar methods; De Gaulle could not have resisted the wave of demonstrations in 1968 had they actually come to a lasting general strike. The reason the Hungarian government succeeded is obvious: the Soviet Union, with its inexhaustible resources (inexhaustible at least for this purpose) and its well-known and grim reputation for going to any lengths to crush the resistance of the population of small nations. The Kadar government correctly localized the center of political resistance in the Budapest Workers' Council, which unified the most variegated forces, views, and layers of the country's "war of independence" and political revolution. When after six to seven weeks of strike the government arrested the Council's leaders, issued emergency punitive decrees which punished even inciting to strike by the death penalty, and when the authorities enforced their decrees partly by Soviet soldiers, partly by the one percent we mentioned above who were not part of the Hungarian consensus, then the backbone of the Hungarian resistance was broken and the revolution collapsed.
If we try to draw a balance sheet of the Hungarian Revolution, there is one crucial negative factor: the Hungarian "test" meant the end of the experimenting spirit on the part of the leading bureaucracy. Even if the bureaucrats once had a sincere inclination for the socially honest, that is the radical and practical self-criticism of bolshevism, no serious social experiment has been launched or tolerated ever since. The reaction to Hungary also showed the ultimate unity of interests of the East European countries. Not only were arch-conservative regimes such as Ulbricht's East Germany and Novotny's Czechoslovakia ready to participate in Hungary's repression, but also Gomulka's sulking Poland, with its half-baked rebellion, kept dutifully in line (and not only because of the presence of the Soviet Army). When Hungary "went beyond what was tolerable," Tito not only gave his at that time very important consent to the Soviet intervention, but also helped select an adequate leader of Hungary and even offered to join the intervention. (The last offer was, however, turned down by the cautious Khrushchev, who did not want untrustworthy allies in close quarters.)

On the other hand, the Twentieth Party Congress and the Hungarian Revolution have been inseparable phenomena in the process of understanding "really existing socialism" for Western leftist parties and Western radical intellectuals. The later Eurocommunist parties were still totally Stalinist at that time (like the French or Spanish), or, if on the way to a political awakening, were still very wary of open conflict with the Soviets on such a crucial matter (like the Italian). None were able to recognize or admit that in the politics of Imre Nagy and the Hungarian Revolution lay the forerunner of something they wanted to become: a social-pluralist democracy. It is a very complex question, so far unanalyzed, to what extent and through what channels the Hungarian Revolution and its proto-Eurocommunism influenced their policy. Obviously they had to wait for the second drastic shock of Prague in 1968. But for the socialist-communist-Marxist intelligentsia a personal way out, compatible with retaining their radical ideas, was open for the first time since bolshevism conquered a considerable part of the radical Western intelligentsia. The mass exodus from their parties of communist intellectuals who remained leftists, sometimes even Marxists, and who could no longer be simply declared agents of the capitalist secret services, changed the leftist ideological map of the Western economies. This was a direct result of the Hungarian Revolution.

Was Hungary in 1956 "the second revolution" Trotsky was so eagerly awaiting? We do not think so. The distinction seems to be more than mere theoretical hair-splitting. For Trotsky, the "second revolution" was the "genuinely proletarian, genuinely socialist one," resulting in "authentic" socialism. We have tried to point out, however, that the "toiling masses" participating in the Hungarian Revolution were not involved with any doctrinaire preconceptions. Although they created institutions which pointed toward a possible socialist future, and meant at least a safeguard against a conservative dictatorship, they simply did what every political revolution is destined to do and did no more: they destroyed a political tyranny. The Hungarian Revolution did not fight out any specific social formation and this socially neutral character was part of its greatness. Revolutions, which are legitimate weapons against every tyranny and every conservative rigidification of an originally democratic system, have only two alternatives. Either they are without any definite social model, although they may include the spontaneous creation of organizations and institutions — soviets, workers' councils, etc. — which act in the present to circumscribe the future, or they carry one doctrine and exclude all others. In the latter case they usually end, as they have from Robespierre to Lenin, in a new dictatorship of the political state over civil society. Despite the fact that radical socialists are often the forerunners and protagonists of political revolutions, there is no such thing as "genuinely socialist" political revolution. Either the forces realizing the revolution leave open the field of alternatives for the emancipated society, in which case the outcome may or may not be a socialist one, or they impose their particular doctrine on the population, and in that case it is at best "despotic communism," as Marx put it.

Thus we formulated the alternatives of the Hungarian Revolution in terms of democracy or conservative dictatorship and not, as the Kadarist "White Papers on the Counterrevolution" did, in terms of capitalist dictatorship or socialism. Indeed, precisely as socialists — for whom else would it have been a problem at all? — we were not indifferent to the outcome of the Hungarian events. However, we did not and do not identify their dictatorship with socialism as such. With the exception of the social conditions prevailing in Greece, Portugal, and Spain at that time, there was no situation worse for the Hungarian working class than it had before or immediately after 1956, a situation of poverty and oppression, absence of trade unions and the elementary rights of coalition and organization. The real alternatives were democracy or conservative dictatorship.

The hundred thousands of anonymous Hungarian militants who made the revolution were neither doctrinaire nor interested in a genuine socialist revolution. Their interest was in democracy, whose "classless" character was a source of ridicule for all the high priests of various socialist doctrines. It was precisely through this democratic goal that the Hungarian Revolution did its duty toward a nation and, at the same time, kept the door open for a genuinely socialist transformation, which is the most one could say about any radical political transformation in this century. It was not only an anti-Leninist political revolution, but also one which through practice criticized all other forms of socialist ideas which retain important elements of bolshevism.

Introduction

This issue of Radical America is devoted to an analysis of the Quebec general strike of last spring, and to its roots in Quebec history. Virtually blacked out by the US press, the Quebec strike was the largest general strike in North America in this century. Quebec workers seized control of several key industrial towns, and dominated their daily life. More than a dozen radio and TV stations were taken over, for a few hours or several days, in order to broadcast everywhere the message of workers’ power. Their language was that of national liberation, class struggle, and socialism.

Triggered by a dispute over the contracts for public employees, the wildcat walkout cut across all divisions within the work force. The highest paid were drawn into a Common Front around the needs of the lowest paid. Private-sector workers saw the state repression of public-sector workers as an attack on the whole working class — and were the first to walk out in May. Men struck in support of demands — equal pay for equal work, and a guaranteed minimum income — whose primary beneficiaries were women. And against the expectations of the Montreal Left, it was the workers of the smaller cities in the Quebec countryside who most solidly supported the strike. The establishment of a Common Front, made up of previously rival union confederations, was simply the formal representation of this class solidarity.

From Introduction to Vol. 6, No. 5 (Sept.-Oct. 1972)

Struggle of the Common Front

One of the first impressions given by the general strike was that workers from provincial towns set the pace for the great centers of Quebec and Montreal. How can one explain that the strike began in, and mainly concerned, the medium-sized towns of Quebec like Sept-Iles, Thetford Mines, or Saint Jerome? The most immediate answer lies with the size of these towns and with the leadership given by the workers’ organizations. Let’s take Saint Jerome as an example.

The workers of Saint Jerome succeeded in closing down almost all the main businesses of the area. This was in great part the work of the natural leaders of the town. They are well-known, respected, and admired by their fellow citizens. So it is not surprising that their comrades from work followed their lead. Helped by the local union leadership, they turned immediately to an objective — the local radio station.

By their example, and by using the media, these natural leaders of the town sparked a great wave of work stoppages. Among those who quickly followed their lead were the construction workers. They were fed up with being bossed by government decree. Their fighting spirit encouraged others to do the same. It is a relatively homogeneous population, which comes together at the pub, at meetings, or at a factory occupation. In fact, as the workers themselves explain the situation in their journal: “It is in the last analysis that this workers’ vanguard acted in such a way as to have the movement snowballing by the next morning. Most of the industries in the industrial park and in certain public services were closed in order to protest against the jailings of the presidents of the three unions, and against the application of Bill 19 against government employees.” More than 7,500 workers from the immediate area, out of a total population of 35,000, participated in the protest movement.

The North Coast has undoubtedly been the area most affected by these movements and work stoppages. All the major towns were affected: Sept-Iles, Hauerive, Bale Comeau, Forestville, Gagnonville, and so on. More than 40,000 workers paralyzed all activity in this area. It is strange to note that Sept-Iles pays the highest wages in all Canada. Yet the town belonged to the workers for several long days.

Here again, rank-and-file leaders, local militants, and construction workers played an important part in this period. If “Iron Ore,” a company that is very powerful in this area, gives such “good salaries,” the cost of living, the distance, the brutality of the climate and of the work have soon reduced these extra few dollars to very little. This situation helped to strengthen the popular movement.

The quiet and determination of these people from the coast is remarkable. People know how to get organized. Sept-Iles, the most important town, was blockaded and isolated from the rest of the country. The Common Front, bringing together local union leaders, held the town under its control. The restaurants, department stores, and liquor shops were closed except by order of the Front. The workers put a price freeze into operation to prevent fraud. The occupied radio station broadcast news for the workers or appropriate music. While the local establishment hid out, the workers seized control. Air traffic was stopped, while candy shops and florists opened their doors for Mother’s Day.

Workers have an innate sense of organization. Workers’ meetings establish orders, rules, and communal organization. Disorders are nonexistent, apart from a few isolated cases of reprisals against one’s old boss. Montreal’s leading daily, La Presse, put out a front-page headline about disorder and violence, along with the picture of a burning car. In fact, this was propaganda by the ruling class. The car belonged to a Liberal organizer who drove it into a crowd of peaceful workers. The dead man and the 20 people wounded were the work of a member of the local establishment, an employer in the construction industry. In fact, compared to the local club wielders the population of Sept-Iles was hardly violent at all, showing its great maturity.

In the mines of Matagami or Asbestos, in the ports of Saint Laurent, in the
Gaspé radio or in the GM plant of Sainte Therese, workers have joined their voices in order to be heard. The "ordinary world" showed a remarkable energy and quiet determination. The May strike marked the victory of hundreds of local leaders, whether in the factories or in the offices.

It is true that these people are not revolutionaries, nor even always fierce militants; but for the most part they expressed quite well the workers' feelings. Drugged by radio, TV, and newspapers, workers are beginning to throw off their burdens of deprivation and frustration.

RICHARD THEORET

Liberating the Media

Perhaps during the Common Front walkout it was a case of the media being so bad that the workers felt compelled to take them over to give the Quebecois a more accurate picture of what was going on.

Interpretations of the action by the commercial press went to the extreme of implying that 150 thugs with baseball bats were closing down the whole province. But more usual was endless criticism of the work force for creating "anarchy" in face of the anti-strike legislation.

First to act were the workers in the distant North Shore town of Sept-Îles.

Suddenly, the morning musak of the Top Forty, mixed with the usual babble of the local radio, was interrupted. "This station is now in the hands of the workers. From now on we'll be broadcasting union bulletins from across Quebec and playing the music of the resistance," said a voice coming over the waves.

"There were about 40 of them," said an announcer in an interview later. "They gave me a paper with a message on it and said: 'Put it on the air.'"

One thing the occupiers were adamant about was commercials. There were to be none. Instead there were union messages. One was to workers at the airport of the occupied town calling on them to walk out briefly.

By Friday, the station was still broadcasting, but the takeover petered out as police regained control of the town.

In the meantime, other towns around the province were benefiting from a temporary lull in the usual diet of bad music and commercials as workers took over station after station: Sorel, Thetford Mines, Haultrive Gaspé, Matane, Carleton sur Mer, Saint Georges de Beauce, New Carlisle, Amos, Val d'Or, Lasarre, Rouyn, and Chibougamau.

Sometimes the local television station was also besieged. Workers were occasionally able to negotiate with management for union broadcasts at regular intervals until the end of the strike.

In Saint Jerome, a Laurentian town about 40 miles north of Montreal, listeners were treated to live coverage of the police breaking down the studio doors while the occupants chanted "Solidarity, Solidarity."

The police were acting on the orders of station owner Jean Lalonde who, none too pleased, vowed he was "going to get those bastards out of there." Lalonde, after the eviction 5 p.m. Wednesday afternoon, tried to keep the station going by himself, playing records all night long. The next morning he locked the doors and went home to bed....

At CKVL in suburban Verdun, youthful workers and students managed only 20 minutes of broadcasting before their program was blacked out and police arrived. But they were greeted by well-wishers with stacks of records at the door in response to a call they had made for revolutionary music to replace the musak in the studio.

Some people were getting the message.

There were moments of high humor: During a three-hour takeover of the peace-love station CHOM, occupants dutifully played the commercials — and then beseeched their radio audience to boycott the products in question.

And there were disappointments: A carefully planned occupation of a French-language CBC studio in Montreal was foiled by police who were waiting for militants at the door.

In the long term, the takeovers stand as a heady turning point in mass media history. Quebec's population experienced an unprecedented bath of information regarding the profound changes taking place. The lies, distortions, and omissions of the commercial press went rudely flying in their teeth.

"This time we only closed the papers for a day. We only seized the radio stations for, in some cases, a few minutes," said a Common Front spokesman.

He added: "For now."

LAST POST
From "Liberating the Media," Vol. 6, No. 5 (Sept.-Oct. 1972)
Poland, 1980-81

Daniel Singer and Marta Petruwicz

How would you compare the strike movement in July and August of 1980 with the uprisings in 1970 and 1976?

DS: When I went to Poland my purpose was to see as many people as possible who were participants in the events of the summer. I wanted to meet with both the workers' leaders in various places and the "experts" who were helping the workers in negotiations, so that I could get as much information as I could about the strikes.

What was most striking was the quiet self-assurance of the workers, and what I would call the ripening of the movement compared to 1970 and 1976. In the earlier uprisings, people responded to increased food prices by burning Party headquarters or, in 1976, stopping the railways. In 1978 people stayed in their factories and avoided a provocation.

One revealing example is the non-drying. Now, Poland is not the most sober of countries. Since the events my friends tell me that they drink less, now that they have a more hopeful perspective. Whereas in the past, during general strikes, there was drunkenness, this time around the strike committees banned the sale of alcohol — not just in the factories, but throughout the town.

Another example. In Poland dislike of the Russians is by now something phenomenal. Yet in July and August there were no anti-Soviet speeches in public. There was no scribbling on the walls, no "Russians go home."

A third example is what happened in Gdansk itself between the first and second weeks of the strike. On the first day of the strike, a Thursday, the only demands were the reinstatement of Anna Walentynowicz and some other people who were fired for political reasons, and 1,000 zlotys. That escalated very quickly; but there was no question at the time of asking for independent trade unions, except for a handful of people who belonged to the Committee for Free Trade Unions. Ten days later, when the so-called experts were coming from Warsaw to partake in the negotiations, it didn't cross their minds that you could have independent unions. They were all coming with the idea that on this issue of free unions, one would have to look for a compromise. But as soon as they arrived, the reaction they had, from the first workers they saw up to the presidium of the strike committee, was that everything else was negotiable but the independent unions were not.

What I found fascinating was that this evolution happened in ten days. On one side it shows the importance of active minorities. But I don't think this is sufficient to explain it; there must have been something in the back of people's minds. It shows how quickly ideas change in a social movement; and for us I think one of the lessons is that one shouldn't say, "It's impossible."

I was also struck by the youth of the working class. If you take the strike committee in Gdansk, Walesa, its chairman, was a relatively old man at thirty-seven. His two vice presidents were twenty-eight and twenty at the time of the events. The numerical strength of the movement was also striking, as well as the shoestring budget on which it was run.

MP: I would like to say something about the rapid development of the workers' demands. What struck me was that in a very short time there was an incredibly rapid learning process. The workers involved had never had an independent union and were not used to the process of bargaining. They are too young to remember the union struggles before the war, and don't have many ways of learning the prewar traditions of the unions. It's like a new working class.

The articulation of the union's basic structure was incredibly rapid. Workers quickly learned the language of bargaining: making demands, distinguishing between political and immediate demands, and organizing the broadcasting of news. This network, of course, was helped by the independent press, in existence since 1976, and the networks of individuals exchanging information, though I wouldn't want to overemphasize the importance of independent papers like Robotnik or organizations like KOR.

The leadership of Solidarity feels that these strikes are dangerous and provocative. But while the government seems to get wiser in some ways, they continue to make stupid moves. For example, they fire five people from a hospital in Lodz. And Solidarity has to go on strike, because they know that if they start accepting the firing of people, that's it, so they know that they can't give in.

From "Understanding the Polish Revolt: An Interview with Daniel Singer and Marta Petruwicz," Vol. 15, No. 3 (May-June 1981)
Solidarity Strike Bulletin

10. No one denies that the aim of socialism is the transformation of social relations, but the results accomplished up to now in this sphere have been greatly reduced by the appearance of unjustly privileged groups, by the inequality of rights and obligations, by the gulf which exists between the extent of power and the limits placed on its utilization.

Among other things, we cannot accept the present state of human relations and the way in which superiors treat their subordinates. We cannot tolerate the attitude of certain employees nor even that of shop assistants tired out by the bad working conditions in badly stocked shops.

We cannot accept the scorn with which those who owe their positions solely to the labor of the workers and the efforts of the whole society often show toward the workers.

It is because of this and solely because of this that our essential demand is the creation of free trade unions, for we have to start with them. All the rest will be achieved through the efforts of a well-meaning people, through true knowledge and hard work. By guaranteeing our right to a dialogue, and the conditions for it, we want the government to hear the authentic voice of the working class, and not just the echo of its own words. We are the true representatives of the coastal workers, and we think that the workers of the whole country share our views. We are ready to discuss all problems and to ensure all our responsibilities in undertaking joint actions, but we can do this only if we have the confidence of the workers, a confidence that the present trade unions have lost. (August 28, 1980)

From Vol. 15, No. 3 (May-June 1981)

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Youngstown and the Sit-Down

Staughton Lynd

I raised a sensitive subject: What did Bob now feel about having called off the sit-in of January 28? Once again, in more detail than ever before, Bob went over the evidence that had persuaded him the sit-in was getting out of control. A grievance representative whom we both considered solid and reliable had reported the presence of guns in the building and talk of burning the place down after dark. Drinking, and the effect of drinking on young members of the local from the 45-inch mill, Bob had seen for himself.

Yet if he had to do it again, feeling as he now did that fairness didn't matter to a company like US Steel, he would have kept the occupation going forever.* I asked about the responsibility I knew Bob had felt about the likelihood that anyone who was arrested would also be fired, and thereby lose unemployment compensation, Supplementary Unemployment Benefits (SUB), and the possibility of transfer to another US Steel plant. If Bob were to plan another sit-in, would he try to have only young single men with relatively little to lose exposed to arrest and discharge?

No, Bob Vasquez said at once. He had thought too much in that way the first time. Another time he would ask all thirty-five hundred workers and their families to join in, and see if the company would be prepared to fire them all. Once people began comparing who had most to lose, Bob said with conviction, you were beaten. Instead, there had to be a spirit of one for all, and all for one.

That, I have come to believe, is what the shutdown struggle in Youngstown, Pittsburgh, and elsewhere, is really about. A sit-in can only be successful if partici-

pants act in the spirit that “an injury to one is an injury to all.” Employee or community ownership, as through the exercise of the eminent domain power, ultimately articulates the concept that all those affected by a decision must have a hand in making it, so that, when the entire public is affected, an injury to one is an injury to all. The vision of “brownfield” modernization, in which technology is made to serve family and community integrity, and economic development strengthens rather than destroys the social capital created over decades, again is finally grounded in the sense of human connectedness. An injury to one is an injury to all.

*Ed Mann concurs. He feels that if energy had been directed to controlling the drinking, rather than to the question of whether to leave, the occupation could have been successfully continued.

World Revolution: The Way Out

This is an analysis.

Three things are requisite for Marxists to understand:

The national state must be destroyed and the only way in which that can be done is the breakup of all bourgeois institutions and their replacement by socialist institutions.

The French Revolution of 1968 showed that the mass of the population was ready to take over society and to form new institutions. The late DeGaulle recognized that, and that was the basis of his insistence on "participation." The decay of France’s bourgeois institutions was proved not only by the tremendous outburst of the great body of the nation — an outburst comprehensive as no previous revolutionary outburst had been — but also by the fact that the bourgeoisie and the middle classes were quite powerless before the strength and the desire to break up the old state. They had very little to say, and, so far as could have been judged, were paralyzed by the decay and rottenness of the capitalistic regime and the power and range of the revolt against it.

The first concrete enemy is the bourgeois national state. It is absolutely impossible for a national state of any kind at this stage of the twentieth century to develop and even to maintain itself, even the most revolutionary and proletarian of governments. Therefore Marxists must know and seek every possible means of making it clear that the national quality of the state must be destroyed; that is to say, the revolution has got to be an international socialist revolution: to put it crudely: appeal to masses of the people in all countries to make their own, the fate of World Revolution. This appeal is not now being made by any section of revolutionary leadership, the world over. The national state cannot function today. And not to know that, not to make that clear means the destruction of the revolution.

The safety of any revolution, its completion, its ability to fight against the enormous pressures which will be placed upon it, the questions of food, finance, and possible military intervention of the counter-revolution of a certain kind, these are not questions removed from the day-to-day struggle. From the very beginning it has to be made clear that the economic relations, political relations, the safeguarding of any revolution against daily and political life now depends on the transformation of the bourgeois institutions into socialist institutions, the unleashing of the strength of the working class first of all. We do not make the revolution to achieve the socialist society. The socialist society makes the revolution. Today there is no period of transition from one regime to another. The establishment of the socialist regime, the power of the working class and those substantial elements in the nation who are ready to go with it, that is not something which one must look for to be achieved in the future. That is absolutely necessary now, not only for the socialist society but to maintain the ordinary necessities of life and to defend the elementary rights of all society.

What are the new socialist institutions? Marxists do not know, nobody knows. The working class and the general mass of the population are creating them in action. Marxists are to be aware of that and to let the working class know that they alone can create the new institutions.

The highest revolutionary peak so far reached is the instinctive action of the working class in the Hungarian Revolution.

Vanguard party, social-democratic party, trade-union leadership, all are bourgeois institutions. The revolution which was begun in France of 1968 and which we shall see continuing everywhere over the
next period will save itself delay and temporary defeats if only from the very beginning it recognizes that all negotiations and arrangements about wages or anything else that the revolution has to undertake are to be undertaken by its own independent organizations. It may take some time before the 1968 French Revolution establishes this. But outside of France we can learn this. None of the regular institutions must be allowed to enter into negotiations on behalf of any section of the revolution. Over the next period new upheavals must understand this from the very beginning. Students will represent students and discuss with university staffs. Workers will represent workers, peasants will represent peasants, blacks will represent blacks, women will represent women. No kind of established organization which has been functioning in the bourgeois regime is to be accepted as a representative. This will be difficult to establish, particularly in regard to the trade-union leadership especially where it represents a majority of the organized workers. But that for the revolution of 1968 was the key point at issue. No question of anarchism arises here. The very structure of modern society prepares the working class and sections of society to undertake immediately the creation of socialist institutions.

We must point out the stages of the Marxist movement. Marx put forward the basic ideas in the Communist Manifesto after profound studies in philosophy, and revolutionary history, and the watching of a movement of the workers in some insignificant part of France. Then followed the Commune in 1871. It was the Commune in 1871 which gave to Lenin and the Bolsheviks indications as to be able to understand what took place in 1905. 1905 was the dress rehearsal for 1917. We have to be able first for our own benefit to understand what has taken place between 1917 and 1968. We need not go preaching this to the working class, but Marxists have to be quite clear as to the stage of development so as to be able to recognize, welcome, and intensify the advances that are taking place instinctively in the nation and in the world at large. This work has to be done. The greatest mistake would be not to do it at all. Equally mischievous would be the idea that it can be done apart from the concrete struggles that are taking place everywhere. The World Revolution has entered in what could be a decisive and final stage.

C. L. R. JAMES

From Vol. 5, No. 6 (Nov.-Dec. 1971)
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