

THE FISCAL CRISIS OF THE CITIES

# RADICAL AMERICA

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Cover Photograph: Kazimierz Podsiadecki, *Modern City: melting pot of life*, 1928. This picture and the photo-montage on page 8 are taken from Dawn Ades, *Photomontage*, Pantheon Books, 1976.

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# **RADICAL AMERICA**

**January-February 1977**

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*Lewis W. Hine, Climbing into the Land of Promise, Ellis Island, 1905.*

## Introduction

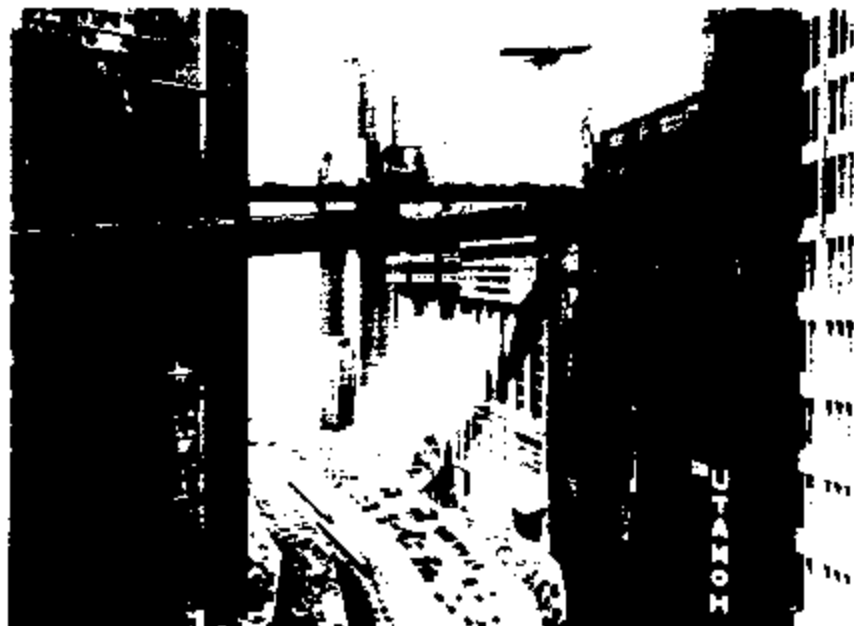
The financial collapse of New York City is one of the most striking examples of the fiscal crisis of the state. Other cities are now facing a similar crisis. As major city administrations institute sharp cutbacks in employment, welfare, and social services, socialist activists find their work increasingly centered on trying to combat these cuts. Most of these struggles have been unsuccessful; and we have lost many of the real gains made during the 1960s. Understanding the crisis of the cities, and finding ways to successfully combat it, are therefore of major concern to socialists throughout the country.

The crisis of the cities cannot be understood solely in terms of economic contradictions. The expansion of the urban welfare and service budgets during the 1960s was the direct result of pressure applied by mass movements of urban blacks, welfare mothers, and others. The upheaval created by these mass movements was similar to the crisis of the 1930s, when the foundations of the modern "welfare state," the New Deal programs, were instituted in response to massive popular insurgency. During the 1930s violent demonstrations of the unemployed, evicted tenants, and striking workers forced the state to provide relief. Once established, these institutions and programs functioned to diffuse and channel the threat of violence. As the authors of our lead article, Richard Cloward and Frances Piven, have shown elsewhere, these programs were used to "regulate the poor." As the threat of violence receded in the late 1930s, welfare programs were cut back, forcing people once again into the labor market at unacceptably low wages. Today, the cycle of the 1930s is repeating itself. With the decline of ghetto insurgency, and the end of the turmoil caused by the war, welfare institutions and city services are again tightening up, cutting welfare rolls while poverty grows, and laying off workers despite grossly inadequate services.

How can these cutbacks be fought? Piven and Cloward argue that once the full dimensions of the fiscal crisis are understood, mass mobilizations of the poor emerge as the only strategy with an possibility of

success. They show that the fiscal crisis of the cities is essentially a "counter-revolution" of the banking community and the urban-based corporations to regain control of the cities. By their concerted action they have placed a strange hold on state and municipal government, tying future loans to cutbacks in municipal spending. Lobbying efforts by social service bureaucracies or negotiations by municipal workers' unions have been generally limited to attempting to preserve the privileged positions of the leadership. The targets of the fiscal crisis are thus the poorest city residents, and those women and minority workers who benefited from the gains of the 1960s were the first to be laid off.

Piven and Cloward argue that traditional lobbying, legislative, or trade union strategies will not be able to divert the attack of the banks. Just as the mass mobilization of the poor initiated the welfare and employment gains of the 1960s, so today mass mobilization provides the only hope to stem the cutbacks. How feasible is such a strategy? Can the sit-ins, occupations, mass demonstrations and confrontations proposed by the authors be made a reality? The authors suggest that, on a small scale, significant examples of successful resistance have already taken place in New York and other cities. Information about these struggles, however, seldom spreads to other cities, or even other parts of the same city. Where they exist, accounts of these struggles are found in the back pages of the newspapers, or in the tenant newsletters and community papers. Yet the sense of isolation is in itself a contribution to the demoralization of community activists. In forthcoming issues of *Radical America*, therefore, we would like to publish critical comments on the Piven-Cloward article, and to print as many short comments as possible illustrating successful (or unsuccessful) strategies against cutbacks and layoffs. We urge community activists, social service workers, and others to send us comments, articles, or newsletters that might aid brothers and sisters in other cities to organize their struggles more successfully.



Fritz Lang, still from the film, *Metropolis* (1926).



*Photo by Sue Meiselas*

Linda Alband and Steve Rees report on the growth of women in the U.S. military, and discuss some of the organizing taking place among these women, and among servicemen's wives. Clearly the growing numbers of working-class women in the military present a contradictory situation for socialists. For the mass of women, the military represents an opportunity for job training and self-assertion not available in civilian life, and the growth of women's consciousness among military women presents additional opportunities for agitation within the ranks. Clearly, too, the fights for lesbian rights and equal rights for women within the military are important struggles and must be won. Yet the integration of women into the military also represents an important new source of recruits, and to the extent that such integration increases the strength of the American military, it strengthens the hand of the capitalist state against working people in this country and throughout the world. The contradictory nature of the growth of women in the military cannot be merely wished away, however, and the authors outline the possibilities and limitations for socialist organizing among military women.

Television, and mass culture generally, has transformed our lives. Yet socialists, including us, have not made much progress in understanding how mass culture affects class consciousness. This is particularly true with forms of mass culture which socialists generally treat with disdain or are simply not interested in. One such example is daytime television, the subject of Carol Lopate's article. Watched (or at least turned on) by millions of women each day, usually while alone in the home, daytime television presents a succession of endlessly-complex soap operas and shrieking game shows, sandwiched between ads for household products. What effect does all this have on its audience? What do women find in these shows that make them so popular? Will Mary Hartman become a socialist? As a step toward answering these questions,

Carol Lopate analyzes the content of the soaps and game shows, forms of entertainment which are increasingly penetrating nighttime television as well. We hope to publish more articles about mass culture, so tune in tomorrow for.



Photo by Phyllis Euen.

Television is one way of seeing the world. Documentary photography is another. How has the "way of seeing" of documentary photography shaped our consciousness of the world? Photographs showing working-class people to be — not passive victims — but active, joyful, struggling and creative people, are seldom printed in anthologies or "coffee table" books. In his article on documentary photography, Sam Walker shows that the mainstream documentary tradition in the U.S. has its origins in liberal reform movements; and that it has for the most part remained paternalistic towards its "subjects." He also argues that the context in which photographs are viewed and reproduced contributes to a passive voyeurism on the part of their non-working class audience, and serves as a means to lessen rather than heighten social tensions. In addition to pointing out the limitations of the documentary tradition, *Radical America* would like to provide more counter-examples, and we take this opportunity to urge photographers among our readers to contribute pictures for publication.

Two short pieces conclude this issue of *Radical America*. In the first, Ernie Mkalimoto Allen reviews *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying*. This popular book by Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin, surveys the history of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. This revolutionary organization, which grew up in Detroit in the late 1960s, had an important influence on black auto workers in Detroit, and on the New Left generally. Allen, who



was closely involved with the League, gives a critical account of both the League and the book, outlining some of the internal difficulties which contributed to the League's eventual collapse. Finally, a *Radical America* correspondent analyzes some of the long-term consequences of the Sadlowski campaign for the presidency of the United Steelworkers of America. Contrasting this campaign with that in 1972 by the Miners for Democracy, the author outlines some of the limitations of the Sadlowski campaign, and points out opportunities that will open up for activists should his campaign be successful.

*The Radical America Editors*





*Paul Citroen, Metropolis, 1923.*

# **The Urban Crisis as an Arena for Class Mobilization**

*Frances Fox Piven  
Richard A. Cloward*

A great political drama is now being played out in the United States; its title is "the urban fiscal crisis." Official definitions locate the causes of the crisis in inexorable and neutral economic processes. What is being said by various elites is that there simply is not enough money, and thus public expenditures must be reduced. The truth, of course, is somewhat different. The so-called "fiscal crisis" is in fact a camouflage for large-scale changes in domestic politics and policies whose overall effect is to reduce the real income of the working class, and especially the income of the bottom stratum of the working class, which includes the bulk of the black and Hispanic minorities. In this brief article, it is our purpose to sketch out some of the possible options for resistance to this new assault on the quality of life of the poor. But before reviewing these options, it is necessary to give some explanation of the nature of the fiscal crisis.

## **THE URBAN FISCAL CRISIS**

The events of the urban fiscal crisis are taking place in the older cities of the United States that were based on manufacturing.

In the years since the Second World War, however, the economy of these cities was transformed: the manufacturing base eroded and, in some of these cities, corporate headquarters operations, together with the services required by headquarters offices, expanded. The decline in manufacturing resulted in part from the movement of both older plants and new capital to the South and abroad in search of cheaper labor. In part, it was the result of the movement of plants to the suburban rings, where labor costs were not necessarily cheaper, but where federal investments in highways, housing, and other service systems reduced the costs of doing business in various other ways. In part, it was the result of the pattern of federal investments in defense and space exploration which bypassed the older manufacturing cities for the new cities of the South and West. These trends in manufacturing were intertwined with the flight of commerce and of the more affluent classes from the older central cities to the suburban rings and to the "southern rim" of the nation. Meanwhile, with the aid of federal urban-renewal subsidies, the downtown areas of many of these cities were being redeveloped with huge office towers and luxury apartment complexes to house the increasingly complex administrative apparatus and the managerial personnel of national and international corporations whose plants were now located elsewhere.

During this same period, large numbers of displaced agricultural workers who were being deprived of a livelihood by technological advances or by the growth of labor surpluses in the countryside migrated to the cities. Many of these displaced workers were blacks and Latins; all were deeply impoverished. Under the best of circumstances, such large numbers of rural workers could not have been easily or rapidly absorbed into the urban economy. Given the decline in manufacturing in the older cities to which so many of the migrants moved, large numbers of them could not be absorbed at all, and under-employment and unemployment levels remained high. By the mid-1960's, these displaced and chronically impoverished people became rebellious; protests and riots marked the decade. Angry groups demanded housing, jobs, and the wide range of services — including education — for which municipal governments in the United States are responsible.

Rebelliousness and escalating demands were by no means confined to the minority poor. Other and better-organized groups who had large stakes in the benefits of the municipal sector also became militant, incited both by the turbulence of the times and by the competitive threat which the minority poor posed. Municipal workers were foremost among them. Under the impact of these pressures, municipal governments in the older manufacturing cities were forced to make concessions in the form of enlarged payrolls, higher salaries and fringe benefits, and new services. Most of these gains were won by the better-organized municipal workers, who had the power to shut down the services and facilities on

which the municipalities depended. However, the minority poor also made gains : they got enlarged welfare benefits, a larger share of municipal jobs, and some new services in the ghettos.

As mayors struggled to appease the demands of a variety of insurgent urban groups with jobs, benefits, and services, municipal budgets rose precipitously. But so long as the cities were in turmoil, the political price exacted by the insurgents had to be paid in order to restore order. Accordingly, municipalities raised their tax rates despite their weakening economies, and state governments and the federal government increased grants-in-aid to municipalities. By these means, the cities stayed afloat fiscally, and they stayed afloat politically as well. Overall, the share of the American national product channeled into the public sector rose dramatically in the 1960's, and most of that rise was due to enlarging municipal and state budgets.

By the early 1970's, urban strife had subsided; a degree of political stability had been restored, in no small part as a result of the concessions granted in the 1960's. At the same time, however, the disparity between expenditures and revenues in the older cities widened dramatically, for the long-term economic trends that were eroding the manufacturing base of these cities accelerated rapidly under the impact of the recessionary policies of the Nixon-Ford administrations. As unemployment rose precipitously in the central cities, they experienced sharply declining municipal revenues, for much of these revenues is earned through sales and income taxes. Moreover, once the turmoil of the 1960's ebbed, the federal and state governments could reduce their grants-in-aid to the older central cities, thereby worsening the disparities in city budgets even more. The situation thus became ripe for a mobilization of national and local business interests to force expenditures into line with revenues by cutting the cost of the populist politics in the cities.

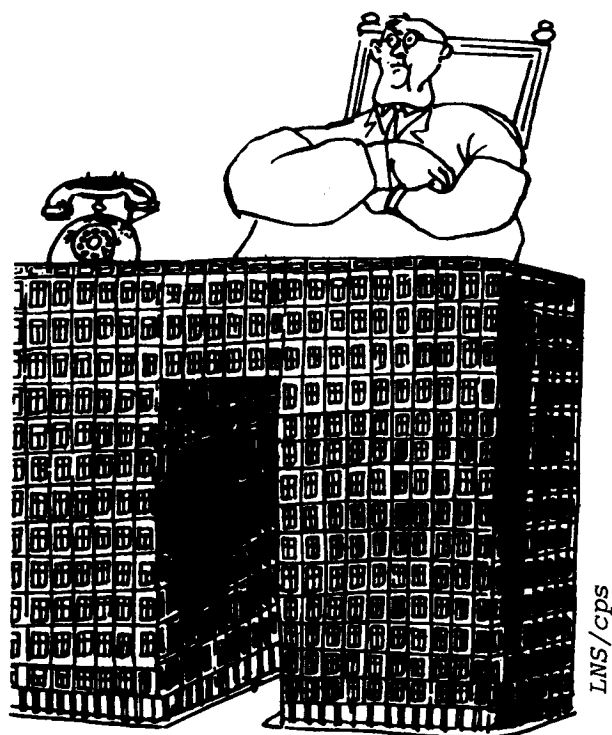
The trigger for this mobilization was the threat of a bankruptcy by New York City in 1975. Banks with large holdings of New York City securities became unnerved over the rapid increase in short-term borrowing, and refused to float loans until the City "put its house in order." Whatever the bankers intended, their action precipitated the theatrical spectacular of the Empire City in bankruptcy. The City did not of course go bankrupt; nor is it likely that it would have been permitted to, in view of the instabilities this would threaten to financial markets. But the drama has made it possible to impose entirely new definitions of the urban fiscal situation upon the populations of the cities. There simply is no money, it is said; municipal budgets have to be balanced (as if cities were households or small businesses). In the face of that definition, urban pressure groups have become frightened, confused, and helpless; they have been rendered silent and passive witnesses to a municipal politics in which they had been active participants only a short time earlier.

With the threat of bankruptcy as the justification, locally-based business interests, who often operate under the aegis of municipal reform groups, have moved in to restructure city policies. On the one hand, they are insisting upon slashes in payrolls, wages, and benefits, and in services to neighborhoods. On the other hand, they are arguing that to bolster declining city revenues, new and larger concessions will have to be made to business by states and municipalities: reduced taxes, improved services, enlarged subsidies, and a relaxation of public regulation in matters such as environmental pollution. In the words of Mayor Beame of New York City, "This is a Republican pincer movement responsible not to the people but to financial interests using cash as a weapon in an attempt to direct the social and economic policies of our city." And while New York City's plight has captured the headlines, it is only the exemplary case, the lesson that is being used to instruct working-class groups in other cities not to resist similar and even more drastic cost-cutting campaigns by local elites.

In other words, the urban fiscal crisis has provided legitimation for the imposition of a national economic policy to reduce public-sector expenditures in the United States, an economic policy in which national corporate interests have large stakes. The gradual reduction of federal grants-in-aid to the older central cities in the last few years, combined with the federal government's refusal to aid cities on the verge of bankruptcy, are in combination bringing about a sharp shift in the balance between public and private sectors in the United States, where state and local budgets in fact account for two-thirds of total government expenditures. As BUSINESS WEEK explained: "The growth of government spending must be curbed so that surpluses emerge in the federal budget.... Private investment cannot increase as a share of GNP unless government spending declines." Whatever position one takes on the seriousness of the capital crisis in the United States, there is not much question that this method for solving the problems of capital formation will place the heaviest burden on the lowest income stratum of the population, the very groups that are also least likely to benefit if the position of American capital subsequently strengthens and a period of prosperity ensues. Under the guise of the urban fiscal crisis, in short, local and national business interests have joined to reassert total control over the municipal level of the state apparatus, because it is on the municipal level that popular struggles by poor and working-class groups had forced some concessions in the 1960's.

The impact of these political developments on working-class groups, and especially on lower-stratum minorities, is already baldly apparent. All municipal workers are suffering reductions in real wages and benefits, and many workers are being laid off. But the overwhelming brunt of these layoffs is being felt by the minority people who were hired during and after the turmoil of the 1960's.

In New York City, for example, half of the Hispanics and two-fifths of the blacks on the city's work force have been fired. And all of this is happening at a time when unemployment in the older central cities remains at near-depression levels. Both those who become unemployed, and those who never found regular employment in the first place, are already being forced to turn to the public-welfare system for sustenance; but welfare policies are becoming much more restrictive, as evidenced by the fact that the welfare rolls have not risen in response to rising unemployment. Meanwhile, services to neighborhoods have been cut back, and much more so in impoverished neighborhoods than in better-off areas. Housing construction in the cities has come to a dead halt, while the neglect and abandonment of existing slums accelerates. Unemployment and bad housing have, of course, been a serious problem in the central-city slums for some time, and the concessions won in the 1960's did not go far toward removing either condition. Now, however, high unemployment has become official national and municipal policy, and some urban experts are relinquishing traditional proposals for rehabilitating the slums in favor of new proposals to black-top them and convert them into industrial parks.



## THE FAILURE TO RESIST THE CUTS

The possibilities for reversing this campaign against the urban poor through ordinary political processes are not bright. Efforts by neighborhood and workplace groups to lobby with city and state officials to save their services or their jobs are fatuous, if only because the key decisions are no longer being made by city and state politicians, but are now being made by the banking and business interests on whom the fiscally-strained cities and states have become so blatantly dependent. It is also wishful thinking to imagine that a Democratic President will make a large difference. Carter's campaign promises to the older cities were muted, and there is surely no reason to hope that his policies will be more egalitarian than his rhetoric.

Organized labor, even though its members are suffering under the impact of the new fiscal-crisis policies, is also demonstrating that it will not provide a political vehicle for resistance. Indeed, the leaders of the municipal unions have become so cowed by the crisis that they have not acted forcefully to protect their own members. There has been talk of strikes, even of a general strike, but none of it very serious. Although municipal and state politics is an arena with which union leaders are intimately familiar, and one in which they had considerable influence until a short time ago, the cast of characters has changed dramatically. Local and national economic elites are now clearly dictating municipal policy decisions, and rebellious municipal unions run the risk of being smashed. Under these circumstances, union leaders apparently believe that it is the wiser course, if they are to save their leadership positions and their unions, to play the role of statesmen in cooperating with municipal and state officials in making the inevitable budget cuts. In any case, even if the municipal unions and their AFL-CIO allies were to mobilize, it would be to insure the maintenance of their leadership and their organizations in the face of budget slashes. They would not be likely to resist service and welfare cuts, or even to resist job cuts; instead, they would bargain to hold the line against attacks on their remaining members. This amounts to saying that if organized workers were to mobilize, it would be to save what they could for themselves, leaving the newly unemployed and the older unemployed to fend for themselves. This is essentially the course which established union leadership followed during the 1930's; the unemployed and the unorganized won what they did by insurgency and through the development of new organizational vehicles, notably industrial unions. The established union leadership, based in the older crafts, fought these developments each step of the way. In the present situation, the divisiveness between the organized and the unorganized is worsened because the one group is overwhelmingly white, while the other is preponderantly black and Latin.



## CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE AS A RESISTANCE STRATEGY

What recourse is left, then, to the impoverished working-class groups of the city? What kind of power do they have to retaliate against local business interests allied with national political and corporate elites? In our opinion, their only power is in the disturbances they can create by non-cooperation, by civil disobedience. The actions that come to mind ascend in importance from those that embarrass municipal politicians to those that disrupt the urban economy.

At the outset it should be clear that most of the groups that are hardest hit by the fiscal crisis do not have the classical disruptive leverage of workers. They do not have the power of the strike because for the most part they are unemployed or do not work in significant enterprises. Accordingly, forms of collective disobedience would have to be used that are in fact available to the most impoverished workers of the cities, and that might be capable of exerting significant pressure on political and business elites.

The most self-evident actions are sit-ins in neighborhood facilities — schools, firehouses, libraries, day-care centers, senior-citizen centers — which are being closed as a result of budget cuts. Some action of this kind is already occurring in New York City, in part because sit-ins are simple to stage, and in part because people feel they have a clear right to these facilities. These actions may therefore be an important stage in the development of indignation. Their impact by themselves, however, is probably limited to the embarrassment of local political officials who are at this point quite helpless to do much to reverse the cuts and to restore services. Heightened neighborhood agitation might, however, force local politicians to become less cooperative in implementing cuts, thus adding legitimacy to more serious forms of popular resistance.

Another form of resistance could be borrowed from the *autoriduzione* ("self-reduction") campaigns which have enjoyed some success in Italy. In these campaigns, people simply refuse to pay all or part of the charge for some service. Fare collection in the subways and buses, for example, obviously depends on the cooperation of passengers. If campaigns were launched to induce people to pay only half the fare on the grounds that half was a reasonable rate and within the reach of what people could afford, and if large numbers of people joined, it would be at the very least difficult to enforce full fares in the crowded subways, buses, and trolleys of most cities.

Similar campaigns for *autoriduzione* could be launched against the telephone and utility companies. Since these bills are paid privately, such campaigns would not of themselves have the galvanizing effect of popular mass actions. But the impact on the telephone and utility companies would be severe, and if such campaigns were backed up by organized squads who turned on disconnected gas and

electric lines — a type of guerrilla action very difficult to curb in the urban slums — the companies would lose much of their ability to enforce rates.

A more serious form of defiance would be rent strikes in the slums of the cities — strikes consisting of the mass refusal to pay rent, backed up by cadres prepared to mobilize crowds to resist any effort by marshals to evict tenants. The slum-housing market is already precarious, and in some places it is teetering toward collapse, as evidenced by the extraordinary rate at which landlords are voluntarily abandoning their buildings. Under these conditions, widespread rent strikes would surely accelerate the abandonment of buildings, and very likely on so massive a scale as to threaten unprecedented chaos: huge areas of the city would become occupied by impoverished squatters; the real-estate industry would reel from the breakdown of property norms; and the city's property-tax base would be rendered null and void. Because massive rent strikes of this kind would have such a disruptive impact, the actions themselves would have to be defended. Large numbers of tenants must be mobilized, stirred to indignation, and prepared for the risks that must be taken in confrontations with police and even with the national guard in order to prevent evictions.

The greatest impact on economic and political elites would result if the working-class people in the cities mobilized to interfere with the movement of commuters and freight by blocking highways, bridges, and bus and railroad lines. Direct action of this kind could strike an immediate and crippling blow to economic enterprises, but precisely for this reason the danger of reprisals is large. Such actions, therefore, would have to be undertaken by very large numbers if they were to succeed, and, even so, people would have to be prepared for beatings, jailings, and even killings — just as strikers were prepared in the 1930's, and civil-rights demonstrators were prepared in the 1960's.

## EDUCATION, INDIGNATION, AND DEFIANCE

It is only under extraordinary conditions that people are so stirred by a sense of injustice that they willingly defy the rules of property and the rules of civil order, and willingly brave the coercive power of the state. Such defiance becomes possible not simply when people suffer assaults on their standard of living, but when they become convinced that those assaults are unjust and unnecessary. Certain features of the current crisis in American cities are working to curb the emergence of that sense of outrage among the people who are suffering the most. In particular, the crisis has so far been defined with great success as the result of inevitable economic processes rather than as the deliberate policies of ruling elites; consequently, people have tended to feel impotent rather than indignant. They have been led to believe that the

crisis is simply inevitable. The implementation of budget cuts bit by bit, the use of apparently even-handed "across the board" formulas for cutting services and jobs, and the delegation of specific budget-cutting decisions to local politicians and bureaucrats are all devices that help to reinforce this sense of the inexorable. One important role for organizers and leaders of any protests, therefore, is to counter these definitions and to expose the assault for what it is.

We understand that the actions discussed here entail large risks for the people who undertake them. No organizer or agitator is capable of leading people to confront the police if the people themselves are not ready. But no one can be sure when people are ready, and organizers often underrate the courage and solidarity of which people are sometimes capable. In any case, there are no other options for resistance. In the absence of massive disturbances of the kind suggested here, local and national business elites will succeed — as they are already succeeding — in stripping away the gains that the impoverished working-class people of the American cities were able to win in the 1960's.

**FRANCES FOX PIVEN and RICHARD A. CLOWARD** are the co-authors of *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare (1971)*, and of *The Politics of Turmoil: Poverty, Race and the Urban Crisis (1974)*.

### **ERRATUM**

We were responsible for several errors in the article by Ellen Cantarow, "Abortion and Feminism in Italy: Women Against Church and State," which appeared in the November-December 1976 issue.

On page 11, the phrase, "This is progress: for example the ruling class has made it theoretically possible for women to have abortions in Seveso..." *should have read*, "This is progress: for example the ruling class has made it theoretically possible for women to have abortions in Seveso..."

On page 25, the sentence, "In January, 1975, when the new left organized rallies to protest the police attack on the Florence abortion center, the women carried banners whose slogans were signed 'Women's Commission of... (ex-new left party),' " *should have read*, "In January, 1975, when the new left organized rallies to protest the police attack on the Florence abortion center, the women carried banners whose slogans were signed, 'Women's Commission of... (new left party X).' "

The photograph on page 2 was an Italian counter-mothers' day demonstration, rather than an abortion demonstration, as stated in the caption. Finally, the photograph on page 19 should have been credited to Daniela Colombo. It is a picture of an abortion demonstration in Rome in December, 1975.



# **Women and the Volunteer Armed Forces: First Report on a Rocky Romance**

*Linda Alband  
Steve Rees*

Former Army Secretary Howard Callaway announced in 1975, with all due authority and a straight lip, the Army's latest scientific discovery: "a woman could do about anything a man could." Young women recruits are now trained in rifle marksmanship and defense combat tactics, and trudge on night marches evading simulated rifle fire and real tear-gas cannisters. WAC First Lieutenant Andrea Kapolka boasts that "The Army's where it's happening for women." Her enthusiasm is shared by her 18-year-old trainee Jean Mehoczky, who testified at her basic-training graduation, "It's the greatest thing that's ever happened to me." Female non-commissioned officers now exercise immediate authority over hundreds of enlisted men. Of the few dissenting female voices within the ranks, most belong to lesbians who are battling, not to leave the institution, but to stay in.

Are these changes to be celebrated as the gains of the women's movement, dreaded as dangerous signs of the military's new-found legitimacy, or dismissed as token concessions but nothing more? Let's not be too hasty in choosing. Our intent here is not to prove once again beyond the shadow of a doubt that despite these reforms the military remains a bastion of anti-feminism. Nor are we intent

on proving that these internal reforms, or any other reforms for that matter, do not alter the basic function of the institution. While believing that both assertions are true, we're not interested in reducing these or any other of the left's commonly-held ideas about the military to a catechism. Rather, we intend to test those ideas against the reality of a military which is breaking with many of its anachronistic traditions. If the left refuses to examine these changes, its understanding of the U.S. military, not to mention its attempts to change it, will become equally outmoded.

## THE CONTEXT

After being defeated in Indochina and humiliated at home, the military had to either adapt or die. The Nixon doctrine of Vietnamization on a global scale made a change in the military's function possible. The Indochinese Revolution and the antiwar movement made it necessary. The all-volunteer-force concept soon followed. What resulted was an overhaul from top to bottom: an end to the draft, a 40% reduction in force, and hundreds of internal reforms, not the least of which was the attempt to make soldiering a job just like any other. In fact, the relation between GIs and the command soon came to resemble that between labor and management. For motivation, patriotism was replaced by a paycheck. When discipline failed, the command tried rap groups, borrowing freely from the arsenal of modern management techniques. The movement in the ranks, which during the war had often made an issue of the war itself, was turning more toward a critique of the conditions of work, grieving many of the same issues as the movements of young workers elsewhere. The unthinkable soon became not only thinkable, but possible: a trade union for soldiers.

This trend toward a more modern, streamlined armed forces made it easier for the Department of Defense (DoD) to bring its attitudes and treatment of women more up-to-date. But it was the women's movement that set the standard against which the military's progress would be measured. Not only did the women's movement begin to influence masses of working-class women, but it also spread from one generation to the next. Ten years ago, teenage girls were considered daring if they dreamt of the independent life of an actress or stewardess. Today, many of those teenage girls shudder at the thought of marriage and kids, a dull job, or living with parents, and strike out on their own by turning to soldiering. Ten years ago, women shouting insults at gentlemanly military officers would have been considered unseemly and unfeminine. Today, the women's movement has helped remove these obstacles to action. Enlisted men's wives have, in the last three years, shouted, picketed, petitioned, and press-conferenced their way into many a confrontation with the command. The battered post-war military is in no position to do battle with a trend

as compelling as this. Unable to lick 'em, the military has, in a sense, joined 'em. The military has been changed in the process, but not without turning some aspects of the women's movement to its own advantage.

## ENLISTED WOMEN

In the midst of this flurry of reform activity characteristic of an enormous bureaucracy scrambling for its survival, one factor more than any other determined the military's new turn toward women: the demand for labor. Stripped in mid-1973 of its power to conscript, the military was forced to compete on the open market for the recruits it needed. In addition, it had to improve the quality of military life to encourage its career soldiers to stay. Even after the unemployment and inflation percentages climbed into double digits, the military still had profound "manpower recruitment" difficulties. It faced the unprecedented task of recruiting one out of every three available and qualified non-college males. And all this even after a 40% reduction in the number of DoD employees in uniform, and the civilianization of many jobs traditionally held by soldiers. As recruiters fell further behind their quotas (even in the first year of the volunteer armed forces), and as the enticing enlistment bonuses and benefits became too expensive to maintain, the DoD began to realize how important women could be in fulfilling its "manpower" requirements. Former Secretary of Defense Elliot Richardson said, "An important consideration in implementing the all-volunteer force is the potential trade-off between men and women. By enlisting more women, fewer men have to be enlisted." A General Accounting Office study also noted that the all-volunteer force would not be realized without a large increase in the use of women.

Even after the economic slump enabled recruiters to meet their quotas, and reenlistment officers to halt the mass exodus of experienced career personnel, several branches still faced personnel shortages. The Army was still short in the combat arms: artillery, infantry, and armor. The Navy lacked boiler techs, machinist mates, and nuclear engineers. If women could be recruited and trained for many of the non-critical slots, more men could be channeled into the critical specialties. Furthermore, the more far-sighted of the military's manpower managers knew that an economic upturn and a decline in the number of available male recruits due to the decline in the birth rate could eventually push the military's recruiting capabilities to their limits. The prestigious Defense Manpower Commission, in its April 1976 report, recommended that the military prepare to tap the pool of available female GIs-in-waiting as one of the least expensive and least disruptive responses to this dilemma.

The military's need for women recruits is only half the story. Why do these women need the military? Every survey reveals the same collection of motivations: the desire for education, travel, and training, and the lack of other opportunities. Recruiting ads echo these sentiments: "Who says men don't listen when a woman talks?" "A new life and a new world of travel." "Making her own way." "You can find yourself." Women from poor families, from racial and ethnic minorities in the US, or from smaller, rural towns have even fewer economic options than do their male peers. Unlike men their age, they are not encouraged to strike out on their own. The military offers a package deal within an authoritarian structure that leaves little risk of having to make choices about one's life. Some of the recruitment propaganda plays up to this family-substitute angle, stressing "something different, but not so really different" and "It's more like what you're used to."

In an article in MS, several years ago, B. J. Phillips assembled a composite of the typical WAC she met during her week at Ft. McClellan. "She had been out of high school for a year, and in a recession economy, found jobs non-existent or dull and low-paid. Unable, for financial reasons, to go on to college or into some type of vocational training program, she chose the army because it offered her both job training and GI Bill benefits for further education after she leaves." In a word, these young women, like their male counterparts, enlist because they lack options elsewhere.

Ultimately, the desires of these recruits and the requirements of the military in time of war will clash. As last year's top WAC, Brigadier General Mildred C. Bailey, remarked, "The Army's mission is national defense, not to create job opportunities or help people out in civilian life." But so long as the defense of the nation requires no extraordinary sacrifices by those in the ranks, that clash may be postponed.

Although the impact of these women on the military has been significant, this is not mainly because of their numbers. Enlisted women make up only slightly more than 5% of the total DoD active-duty force. But even that modest figure is a threefold increase over its 1971 level. And when measured as a percentage of new recruits, women figure more prominently: 9.2% for the Army, 11.4% for the Air Force, and an average of 7.7% for the entire DoD. By 1978, women are supposed to make up over 6% of the DoD active-duty force.

These enlisted women have insisted that the military no longer restrict them to "women's work". The military's need for women was so critical that it had to accommodate the demands that women were making both inside and outside its ranks. In the last two years, the military has announced new plans to provide women with equal opportunity, and has authorized the following changes:

\* Rules banning mothers from military service were lifted. The military had reserved the right to judge whether a woman could



adequately perform her duties and cope with motherhood, but this reservation was dropped as of July 1975.

- \* Women can adopt children.

- \* Women can get married after enlistment, and still stay in.

- \* Married women can enlist both in the regular service and in the reserves.

- \* Women are now eligible for the same family benefits as men.

- \* Women are now full-fledged members of promotion boards, no longer confined to evaluating women only.

- \* Pay is the same for men and women of the same pay grade.

- \* Job restrictions have been lifted. Women were previously restricted to 39% of the Army's job categories, but are now eligible for 94% — all but the combat arms.

- \* College ROTC programs are open to women. One school commandant remarked, "We are finding that competition between the sexes is a good motivator."

- \* Military academies, such as West Point with its 173-year all-male tradition, are opening their doors to female cadets.

- \* Policy has changed to permit women to command men, except in the combat units. Several WAC officers have been selected for colonel-level commands.

- \* All enlisted women in the Army are now required to take defensive weapons training. Captain James Weaver, a 31-year-old combat veteran in charge of the women's rifle training at Ft. McClellan, said, "When it comes right down to it, girls with guns are just like boys with guns. It's a matter of hand-eye coordination."

- \* Separate detachments for women are being gradually eliminated, with the result that women are now assigned to duty wherever job vacancies exist. And, in mid-September of 1976 the WAC (Women's Army Corps) was eliminated — now both women and men enlist in the Army.

Two items from this list of reforms are worth examining in more detail: basic training and the opening of non-traditional jobs to women. These are the two most troublesome changes for the Pentagon, and the most fascinating for the young women who join.

Beginning in basic, the Army vacillates between training its women recruits to be soldiers and training them to be ladies. True, fatigue-clad, booted women recruits march, jump, climb, and hurdle their way through an "unladylike" and rigorous physical-training program — a program not always equal in intensity to that of the men, but demanding nonetheless. They drill in formation, dig foxholes, bivouac, and range-fire the M-16 rifle. The content of the 13-week basic-training program has remained essentially what it was during the Vietnam era: physical-fitness training, marching, warfare-technique classes, and instruction in the use of hand grenades, the M-60 machine gun, and the M-16.

There are, however, two major differences in the training programs for men and for women. One of the two is in the area of

tactical-weapons training. Men receive 143 hours of rifle marksmanship and defensive tactics, while women receive 72 hours. The other difference is in the "feminine" arts. Women sit through mandatory classroom instruction in hair care, skin care, weight control, rape prevention, and "family planning" (birth control). The closest equivalent on the male side of the balance sheet is venereal-disease prevention — in itself an interesting comment on the Army's notion of who's responsible for what.

Despite these differences, and despite the Army's admittedly inadequate preparation of these women trainees for combat situations, the camaraderie of a shared ordeal and the pride of discovering previously untapped abilities is the core of basic training for women. They don't leave basic any more patriotic, war-hungry, or infatuated with the military than when they went in. Doctrinal training, or motivational training, is not stressed.

Equal opportunity in the military, as elsewhere, has its limits. Admiral Holloway, Chief of Naval Operations, explained the Navy's limitations in an interview in *US NEWS AND WORLD REPORT*: "ship billets must by law be filled with men, and secondly, we must preserve some billets for those men at sea to rotate to. Otherwise we would be putting our men on open-ended sea duty." In the Army, women are still unable to join combat-arms specialties. The Air Force prohibits women from flying. And these are only the more visible limits.

More to the point is to ask what happened when the Army suddenly opened up 415 of its 451 occupational fields to women? According to the Defense Manpower Commission, not much. Their report claims, "Women entering the services are opting for the more traditional female jobs. Many have not had the background or exposure to nontraditional areas. Two-thirds of the military women still work in the traditional medical and administrative fields, with no significant concentration in any of the mechanical or electronic career fields."

This picture should come as no surprise. Recruits have to qualify for the job they request by passing a battery of tests. Even if everyone has an equal opportunity to take the same tests, everyone is not equally prepared to take them. Like other equal-opportunity employers, the military can do no more than reproduce the same division of labor which is already present in this society.

Since the institution of the All-Volunteer Military, lesbians have been one of the most coherent forces which have put pressure on the Pentagon to make good its claims of being an equal-opportunity employer. Some of these lesbian enlisted women are the victims of witch-hunt-like sweeps of the women's barracks by military-intelligence officers who grill the women on the details of their barracks-mates' private lives. The military conducts these witch hunts to purge itself of its "undesirable elements." They usually begin when the authorities select one woman they suspect — or say

they suspect — of being a lesbian. They threaten her with a less-than-honorable discharge. Then they offer to either let her out with a better discharge, or let her stay in if she gives them the names of other lesbians. This tactic is repeated with subsequent victims, so that the investigation might grow to include dozens or even hundreds of women. Interestingly enough, one lesbian ex-WAVE told us that it is more often the case that straight women get busted in these purges. She went on to say that most lesbians knew how to "cover their ass" and were real good at projecting the "proper military image." Another lesbian WAVE who knew that she was going to be called before a Naval Intelligence Service (NIS) investigation board, prepared herself in this way: "I went into the ladies' room, took off my butch watch with the wide strap, put on my lipstick and mascara, and I was ready for 'em."

Still other enlisted women openly defy the military by announcing their lesbian preference. In the past, both men and women have admitted to being homosexual to get out of the military, whether or not they actually were. But today, the armed-forces code is being challenged from within by individuals who have stood up and declared themselves to be gay and have demanded that the military change its treatment of homosexuals.

The military's response in both cases is invariably to initiate discharge proceedings. The soldiers who are targeted for this treatment range from model soldiers-of-the-month to feminists and the disaffected. Of the many who fight to stay in, not all do so out of any love for the military. As Army Reserve Sergeant Miriam Ben Shalom remarked, "I am defending my basic constitutional rights to work, to privacy, and to the freedom of my lifestyle." Whatever their reasons, the consequences of their actions are questioning the line between the citizen and the soldier. They are challenging the military's determination of what they do after work. Having taken to heart the military's own message that it's a job like any other, they are now setting about to make it just that.

It is not as if the handful of lesbians who are now fighting the military for the right to stay in, or even those 2,000 others booted out every year in semi-secret shame, constitute the entire homosexual population in the military. Two Kinsey Institute scholars estimated in 1971 that the percentage of homosexuals in the military hardly differed from their percentage in civilian society — 10%. The various defense lawyers and experts in the current cases use this standard estimate of 10%. Others believe this is an extremely conservative estimate, and point to the massive network of bars, clubs, and newspapers which make up the ghettoized gay military.

While the movement of lesbians in uniform has been a reflection of the larger movement for equal rights for homosexuals, it may soon become its test case. The ACLU lawyer who defended two gay WACs at Ft. Devens last year speculated, "Sooner or later, one of

these cases will produce a court decision declaring discrimination against homosexuals unconstitutional. The military is the key institution. Just as the racial integration of the military in the late 40's set the stage for a national social policy of integration, the critical sexual battles are going to be fought here."

## ENLISTED MEN'S WIVES

The recent leap into the twentieth century of the military's treatment of enlisted women has only underlined the medieval status of those nearly one million women whose husbands are soldiers. The Army has an orientation pamphlet for the "Army Wife" (Does the woman marry her husband or the Army?) which best articulates the contrast. "Although no serviceman's career was ever made by his wife, many have been hindered or helped by the social skills of their wives, their flexibility, and their loyalty toward the Army and its customs.... As an Army wife, never forget that you are the 'silent member' of the team, but a key 'man'.... A wife should try to keep her husband from feeling bitter about the system. If she feels the system isn't too bad, he'll probably agree.... Your whole scheme of life revolves around your husband, your children, and a happy home." Captured here is the tension between the military's genuine dependence on its "military wives" and its simultaneous denial of the wives' existence independent of their husbands. When, for instance, an enlisted man's wife steps out of line, the woman's husband is reprimanded by his commanding officer. In fact, the wife is formally outside the jurisdiction of military law. Furthermore, the contribution of the "silent member of the team" is rewarded, not in the form of wages to the women, but as a dependent's allowance attached to the husband's paycheck.

The young working women who settle with their husbands in the trailer parks and stucco apartments of stateside base towns face a tougher ordeal than most non-military wives. These women experience divorce, alcoholism, and stress at rates far above the national average. With most of their husbands working irregular shifts and logging fifty or sixty hours a week, more and more of the work at home falls to them by default. Women whose husbands are ship-stationed have to reckon with six-month cruises when their husbands are on sea duty, and week-long sea trials and irregular, often very long duty shifts even when their husbands' ships are in port. If a woman's husband is assigned to an overseas base, the military will help her move and cover the moving expenses only if her husband's rank is sergeant (E-5) or up. If not, she can come along only if she can afford the move on her own. A skimming of the conservative bi-weekly women's supplement to the ARMY TIMES reveals more trials and tribulations than we have room to list here: an entire issue on rape — one of the fastest-

growing crimes in the military community; boredom and its remedies — service clubs, volunteer work for the Red Cross, and wives' clubs; how to cope with waiting; and base-town crime.

Any institution which, in the 1970's, produces this quality of life and then insists on a woman's total identification with her husband and his job is asking for trouble. In the last three years, the military's found plenty of it! Not uncommon is the following letter from a Norfolk, Virginia woman whose husband was in the Navy: "A free test of a good marriage is about the only benefit enlisted people are given during their struggle to get by. Up to this point I've tried with difficulty to accept the way things are and the fact that the Navy and the system will always run my life for me. I really don't think it's selfish to say I'd like some control over the situation." Another Norfolk woman described the 16-hour days and seven-day weeks of the months-long nuclear-power training program in an article addressed to sailors entitled "Ten Easy Lessons to Instant Insanity." ("Now that your working time is driving you crazy, it's time to go home and face the personal problems caused by the extra duty.")

In at least two recent instances, this sentiment has been translated into collective action. In San Diego, enlisted men and their wives organized a group to contest the Navy's illegal nonpayment of reenlistment bonuses. (See the May/June 1976 issue of RADICAL AMERICA.) For almost two years, the group — VRB/OUT (meaning, give us our variable reenlistment bonuses or let us out) — fought the Navy in the courts and in the papers. The enlisted men in the group, though, were often at sea, leaving the bulk of the responsibility for the organization with their women. The women leafleted the bases, planned legal strategy, and picketed recruiting stations — actions which tarnished the Navy's public image and hurt recruiting. Their public statements were confined to the issue, but off the record the women explained that much more was at stake than the loss of a several-thousand-dollar bonus: forced six-month separations, notoriously inadequate on-base medical care, flimsy funding of family services.

In Alameda, California, women whose husbands were crewmen on the aircraft carrier USS Coral Sea publicly charged the ship's captain (at a well-attended press conference) with a long list of health-and-safety-regulation violations. They petitioned Congress requesting that the ship be put in drydock for an overhaul, and not be allowed to sail on a six-month Western Pacific cruise. Working night and day, they circulated their petition on base until they were banned by security police, and then moved to the shopping centers and apartments where the enlisted men and their wives could be found. The women gathered 1500 signatures, and found that nine out of every ten people they approached signed. Their main opposition was from a group of officers' wives whose members argued that this was all a deceptive maneuver to keep their men home, and

an unspeakable assault on Navy tradition. Rather than risk so direct a confrontation, the Navy dodged the women's charges. In a press release, they credited the women with being well intended but slightly misinformed. After a quick cosmetic clean-up, the ship's captain escorted select news crews through the more modern and least critical parts of the ship. And when the women raised hell on the pier the morning of the Coral Sea's departure, they were gently and tactfully escorted off-base. What would the Navy gain, after all, by calling attention to a group of enlisted men's wives who dared to challenge the Navy's judgment of a ship's seaworthiness, and who refused to suffer the anxiety, hard work, and loneliness customarily expected of a dutiful Navy wife?

## CONCLUSION

Having described these relatively new trends toward reform, we can venture an interpretation of our own, and a brief critique of mainstream feminist and pacifist views about women in the military. What makes any interpretation difficult, however, is the momentary coincidence of interests between the volunteer military's insatiable demand for qualified labor, and the women's movement's demand for equal access to, and equal rights within, public and private institutions. This convergence has meant that the reforms in the military related to equal rights and access for women were established at the top, without much agitation or direct action by women in the ranks below. The challenges to which the military responded took place, for the most part, outside the military itself. One cannot simply argue, then, that these reforms in the military were merely cooptive measures designed to head off rabble rousing in the ranks, or alternatively that the reforms were concessions squeezed from a weak bureaucracy through the dynamics of class struggle. Like all half-truths, both observations accurately describe two parts of a much more complex totality.

Some radicals, especially within the anti-imperialist and pacifist trends, have decried the recent influx of large numbers of women into the armed forces, and their integration into a more accommodating and up-to-date institution, as signs of the militarization of women. Ultimately, they argue, no one, man or woman, should submit to or volunteer for the profession of soldiering. In the short run, their political activity is geared toward discouraging women from enlisting at all. So reforms which make military life more attractive to potential recruits can only serve to make these radicals' tasks more difficult to realize. In fact, the more just the reform, the more they dread it. These radicals resemble those who believed that the way to abolish capitalism was to dissuade people from working. Those who worked were considered bourgeoisified, and reforms which improved the lot of those

who worked were considered sops, crumbs, which could only make the ultimate revolutionary act more remote. During times of revolutionary upsurge, they may have commanded some following. But in times of relative stability, they can do little more than soapbox to uninterested passers-by. Our disagreement with these radical soapboxers today is not that we would encourage young working-class women to join up, but that it is through their joining that the stability of the all-volunteer, peacetime military might be undermined. The pacifist perspective is more suited to wartime anti-military work with soldiers, and does not grapple with the possibilities of the present period. Furthermore, they consider the military's women-related reforms statically, fixed in their present scope and form, and ignore the opportunity to drive these reforms beyond their intended limits.

At another extreme, the National Organization of Women (NOW) pose sexual equality as an absolute principle which determines their relationship to the military. Consider these remarks of Pat Leeper, a lobbyist for NOW and a coordinator of their Committee for Women in the Military, offered to the Department of the Army in the first months of 1976: "Should women go into combat? To us the question is completely irrelevant. We only need to know that there are capable women who want jobs." Her recommendations included accelerated entry programs and assertiveness training for women, lifting quotas which limit the number of women re-



cruits, and the use of physical (not gender) standards for every job. If NOW holds any position critical of the military's mission, it is not apparent from Pat Leeper's policy paper.

NOW and the Pentagon's more radical critics certainly have conflicting concerns. NOW's advocates are cheering on the waves of female recruits who appear to them to be successfully assaulting one of the last great bastions of male power: soldiering. And the radicals who fear the imminent militarization of women do what they can to head it off. But neither group's perspective focuses on women in the ranks. Our balance sheet, drawn up after a three-year accounting of the all-volunteer, peacetime force experiment, finds the new situation something to be welcomed, not dreaded.

1. At least in the area of women's rights and sexual equality, the military has been compelled to get in step with the rest of society. This goes directly against the grain of traditional military thinking which insists upon the institution's separateness from the rest of society. The old-time military moguls argue that separate courts, laws, prisons, hospitals, schools, and codes of conduct are made necessary by the military mission. They justify distinct social relations within the institution on the same grounds: laws against fraternization between enlisted men and women; separate quarters, dining halls, and bathrooms for officers; saluting and "yes, sir"-ing; grooming and appearance regulations; an enlistment agreement between the GI and the government that saddles the soldier with the obligations of an indentured servant and gives him or her none of the protections of a contractual agreement. Even during wartime, these habits, rules, and regulations are questionable. But during peacetime, they seem even less justifiable to the enlisted men and women who are degraded by these customs daily. So when the ways of the civilian world begin to intrude on the military's erstwhile separate society, it is often to the advantage of the soldier in the ranks, and rarely to the advantage of the command. If one distinction between the civilian and military worlds can be dispensed with, why not the rest? (This is as true in the area of soldiers' First Amendment rights as it is in the area of sex discrimination.) The military's recent opposition to formal sex discrimination, however limited, is one step away from an army of professional legionnaires, and one step toward an army of citizen-soldiers. If there are to be any soldiers at all, better that they march in step with the hesitating syncopation of popular music than the goose-stepping four-four time of John Phillip Sousa.

2. These reforms in the military may have a ripple effect, encouraging similar reforms in institutions outside the military. It's still too early to point to any proof, but there is a strong historical precedent. The military's desegregation program after World War II, and its insistence since 1967 on open-occupancy



housing agreements from civilian landlords, contributed to the attack on segregation in some of the regions and institutions most resistant to change. The military has at times been not just a reflection of social movements, but also their dynamo.

3. As young women recruits are called upon to do the work of soldiers, their conception of their own capabilities can only expand and improve. And hopefully, after having discovered the social restrictions on the development of their abilities up till then, they will be even quicker to challenge those restrictions next time they encounter them, and not mistake them for natural ones. In addition, the demand for equal rights and access is on the face of it a just demand, although by no means a revolutionary one at this time and place.

4. As long as these women continue to question the remaining obstacles to equality, the reforms which initially encouraged their questioning can have a destabilizing effect, creating new tensions even while resolving old ones. First, once the catechism of female equality is officially attacked, even ridiculed, then why restrict the percentage of women in the military to 6% or even 10%, as Pentagon planners do? Why shouldn't women have 50% representation? Second, if equal rights implies equal obligations, shouldn't women be assigned to the combat specialties if they meet the physical requirements? Military planners are not opposed to this in principle, but oppose its implementation on the grounds that the country isn't ready for it yet. Third, the institutionalization of all these reforms concerning enlisted women has only made "dependent" status less excusable than before. In fact, a recent article in ARMY TIMES, headlined "Professor Expects Surge of Feminism by Service Wives," summarized the findings of a Mills College sociologist, Dr. Lynne Dobrofsky, who predicted that military wives will become radicalized as they realize that they have no status or identity other than their husbands'. Enlisted men's wives have already shown signs of independence in two significant campaigns — the movement to stop deployment of the attack carrier USS Coral Sea over health and safety hazards in November-December 1974, and the variable-reenlistment-bonus suits — and will probably continue to be a thorn in the Pentagon's side.

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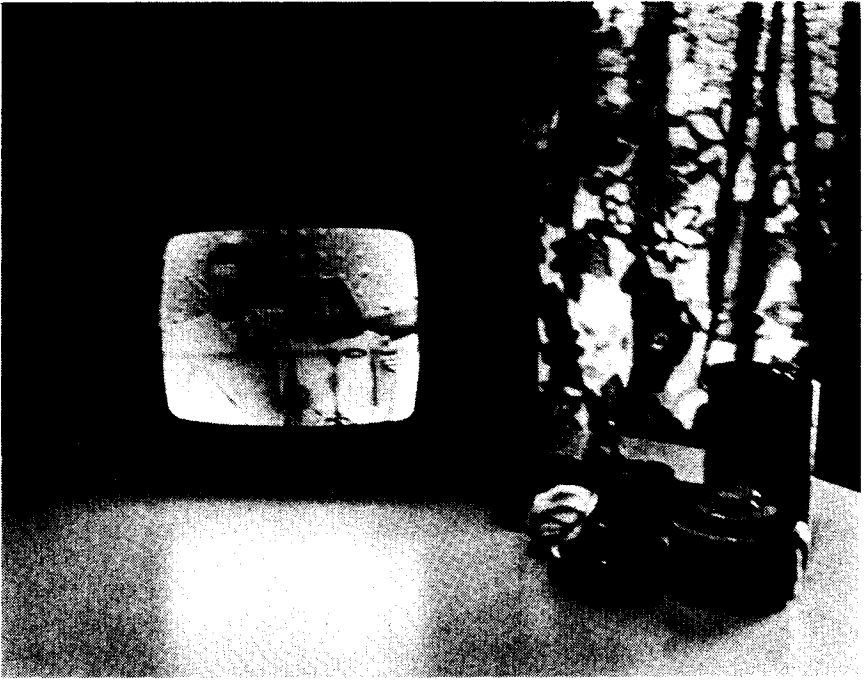
## **Daytime Television: You'll Never Want to Leave Home**

*Carol Lopate*

It is late August. Today I bought a half-bushel of tomatoes and canned tomato sauce. A friend came into the room to watch awhile. He told me that the two aunts in Tennessee who reared him spend almost all of every August canning. He said as they work they drink cups of coffee and watch daytime television. For him, that is August: canning, the pots of coffee, and daytime TV.

In a college where I taught, students scheduled their classes and other activities around the daytime serials. They all had their favorites and would rush home to watch them. They talked about the serials with each other as if the people in them were common friends. When a friend had been away awhile, she or he was brought up to date on the long, complicated plots.

A woman I know who had a second child in her late thirties stopped watching the daytime serials shortly after its birth. She said they made her too depressed. She would be weeping all afternoon, scarcely able to care for either of her children. A year ago she converted to a pentecostal sect. Now she watches the game shows in the morning, which she believes are often educational, and tries to get herself out of the house as much as possible in the afternoon. Much of her emotional life is taken up with prayer.



It is difficult to talk about daytime television. Those who know it are experts who cannot be surprised by new bits of information, and only nod with a knowing look at any insight or analysis. On the other side are the people who have never turned on the television before the six o'clock news, or who only switch channels rapidly in disgust when searching for their children's daytime programs. For them, daytime television is a world of screaming women and M.C.s or murky family scenes. That is all they want to know.

Daytime television consists of talk shows, old movies, comedy serials reruns, children's cartoons and educational programs, game shows and soap operas (also called "daytime serials"). But the two kinds of programs that are both most characteristic of daytime TV and most often watched by women are the game shows and the soaps. There are over a dozen game shows and nearly as many serials or soap operas on television between nine in the morning and five in the afternoon. Most of the game shows are on before noon, while all but one of the daytime serials appear after twelve o'clock.

The tone and format of the game shows and serials fit the daily rhythm of the housewife. The noise of the game shows' shrieks and laughter injects the home with the needed adrenaline for getting up in the morning and doing the heavy chores. The heartbreak confusion, restrained passion, and romance of families in the soaps provides the anesthesia to fill out the hollows of long afternoons when children are napping and there is ironing or nothing at all



to be done. The morning is geared for energy and hard work, at the same time offering women release through the fantasy of possible TV appearances and free washer-dryers, automobiles, and vacations in Hawaii; the afternoon reminds us that the real adventures and romances take place inside our families. And all the way through the day, time is dotted by enticements of food, laundry soaps, cleansers, toiletries, and shampoos. The synthesis of adventure, love, and security inside the family is to be had through cleaning shirts whiter, preparing glistening foods, and staying young and lovely with stockings, makeup, and shampoo.

Some of the game shows are several decades old. Ones like "The Price Is Right" I remember from my own childhood, when I spent hot summer afternoons in the darkened living room with the lady next door because we had no TV. "Queen for a Day" was our favorite game show during that period of the early fifties. Women were chosen to be queen for a day because of their heartbreaking stories. When they were given the little item that they themselves had asked for to lighten their load, they swooned, screamed, and cried. But that was always only the beginning, because then came the truckloads of large and small gifts that were part of everyday life on the program. Like Miss America, the women were always presented longstem roses and were draped in a velvet robe at the end of the program. "Queen for a Day" is off the air now. Its maudlin stories of diligence and need probably had too much of a "Poor Little Match Girl" quality for today's anti-work ethic.

The contemporary game shows vary in their format from a casino to a quiz show to a combination bingo-shopping mart. Some are geared to the viewer who wants adventure and escape, others to a more familial mode. "Wheel of Fortune" and "High Rollers" ("where every decision is a gamble, and every move can be your last") bring the viewer the sophisticated aura of a Las Vegas gambling table. Although these are mid-morning shows, the women who assist the M.C.s with the wheel of fortune or at the pool table are always dressed in formal nightclub gowns. "Hollywood Squares" combines encounters with entertainment celebrities and verbal gags before every question, making the show more comedy than quiz. There are minute, but real, facts to be learned on "Jackpot," "Musical Chairs," and "Split Second." ("Jackpot": "Yes or no, for \$120, according to MIDNIGHT magazine, the color yellow is supposed to relieve heartburn." "Split Second": "Which of these women—Mary Tyler Moore, Katherine Hepburn, or Kathleen Tate—never appeared in a show with Elvis Presley?") "The Price Is Right" shows women winning prizes by demonstrating their shopper's sense of the correct price of items and incidentally provides commercial messages for these products throughout the show. "Password" and "The Newlywed Game" use the misunderstandings and foolishness of young couples as a basis for setting up competition among pairs for prizes. "Let's Make a Deal," the most popular show in the '74-'75 season, grounds itself in people being willing to dress kooky, act confused and silly and, in return for a modicum of lucky guessing, be given prizes and wads of money out of the M.C.'s pocket.

But all the shows, whatever their script, combine "brains" and luck, and most put luck in the driver's seat. On most shows, the contestant is ultimately not in control of her (sometimes his) own fate. She is a powerless receiver, and sometimes loser, of the wonderful world of money and commodities that the show can bestow. Some programs, like "Concentration," combine brains and luck in complicated ways. "Concentration" is a several-stage game in which the contestants use luck, memory, and the capacity to guess a hieroglyph, as they work for the commodities shown behind numbers on a number board, plus others awaiting them behind a curtain.

Couple games such as "The Newlywed Game" present themselves as if their point was to gauge the couples' knowledge of each other, but luck, not mutual understanding or intimacy, generally enables couples to guess each other's answers. The emphasis on getting a laugh from the M.C. and the audience distorts the kinds of things the contestants say, at the same time as it renders them "laughable." The M.C. may ask the husband about his wife, "What is the last thing that she did that proves she's not a liberated woman?" The husband, working for a laugh, reports that his wife picks up his socks in the morning. But when the wife is asked

how her husband would answer the question, she responds with self-mockery that she waited for him with dinner until 8:30 last night. In this case, the couple lose, not because they do not agree on the kinds of things that are unliberated and humiliating to a woman, but because they have come up with different ideas about how best to get a laugh.

"Let's Make a Deal" stands at the pure luck end of the spectrum. The costumed contestants merely choose between the cash the M.C. offers them outright and the unseen goodies behind a closed curtain. Sometimes they unhappily give up several hundred dollars for four hot water bottles. "Boy is she in hot water," laughs the M.C. Sometimes they decide on \$500 and avoid a room full of tumble-down furniture. But more often, a few bills are given up for a motor boat, an electric range, an automobile. Often, too, once the curtain opens, more and more goods start appearing. When the audience screams at the contestant who is choosing between money and goods, "Take it! Take it!" or "Curtain!" they, too, have no basis for choice and are only offering the persuasiveness of a mob reaction. There is no skill to the guessing, because there is no information from which to choose. Sometimes one is lucky; sometimes one isn't.

The stage sets and scenarios of the game shows emphasize the ultimate powerlessness of the contestants. The game shows that combine gambling with one-line quizzes or other forms of mental skill nevertheless take place in elaborate networks of booths, cages, stairways, and pedestals, all defined and decorated by flashing-light systems. The blinking lights give the aura of casinos, but they also accentuate the narrow limits of the booths in which the contestants are confined. When the camera pulls back for a long-shot of the entire stage, the segregation and isolation of the contestants in these shows make them look like caged rabbits.

In the shows that ground their scenario in couple behavior or shopping, the staging is less flashy and isolating, but also more infantilizing. Here, the M.C. has the range of his audience. Sometimes he moves about the audience or the contestants joking, and, if they are women, touching them. Contestant couples sit together, or several contestants may line up side-by-side facing the M.C. Kooky costuming, jokes, self-mockery, and public embarrassments give these shows their "human" quality. But they also enforce the child-like state of the contestants.

Insofar as the contestants are women their relationship to the inevitable male M.C. has an avuncular dynamic. The M.C. is the sexy, rich uncle, the women, preadolescent Lolitas. It is a world where love is shown through money, and money buys love. On "Let's Make a Deal," the M.C. greets two young women with a \$50 bill apiece. "How do you feel?" he asks, stuffing the money in their hands. "Great," says one. "Betty, how do you feel?" he asks the other. "Excited!" "Ah ha! Suddenly the two girls are the best of

friends," he laughs, reiterating his daily insight that money leads women by the nose. Even when the contestant is with her husband, the M.C. holds special privileges with her. The man must release his wife to the special attractions of the rich uncle. Whenever and whatever she wins, the M.C. is kissed and hugged. The women jump up and down, shriek, and rub up against him. He holds them off, but not before he has gotten his pleasure; then, "You know how women are!" Since the women's success clearly is not the result of skill, their luck is easily converted into gratefulness for his "generosity." And when the curtain reveals more and more good-ies, of course the M.C. benefits from the women's increased sexual enthusiasm. (1)

The game shows present a world in which it does not matter that most things are beyond one's control, because it is a world of bountifulness. After all, when one is being given everything one wants — really, much more than one wants! — of what consequence is one's own power or will to choose? It is a world where it pays to be cute and childish, because there is always a rich uncle to provide to the point where even greed is overawed. It is a world where the self-respect and dignity of an autonomous adult is a clear deterrent. It is a world where luck is mostly good luck, even great luck, and skill or intelligence only a small component of winning.

Yet one kind of skill (other than knowledge of minutiae) is directly rewarded on the game shows: this is the skill of choosing commodities and pricing their value. When the shows include shop-



*Photo by Gail Le Boff*



ping or pricing, women are directly rewarded for being "smart," and luck only brings the excess, above and beyond the direct reward. "Sweepstake" has two parts to the show: in the first part, the contestants gamble for spending money through a word game; in the second part, they "shop" with their winnings. A contestant who has won, say, \$1000, may spend it as she pleases among the variously priced items revealed when the curtain is drawn open. On "The Price Is Right," skill as a shopper is the very basis for the show. A sewing machine or vacuum sweeper is presented to several women, all of whom must try to guess its exact retail price. The woman whose answer comes closest to the alleged retail price wins the item.

In "The Price Is Right," the bonuses at the end of the show of waffle irons, color TVs, pingpong tables, and automobiles take the contestants' winnings beyond their control. The initial reward is still based directly on correct pricing. But in both "The Price Is Right" and "Sweepstake," the audience tries to scream its assistance as the women make their choices. It is shopping and pricing amid mob coercion, and even the women themselves appear to influence each other's decisions. There is rarely a bid that is much out of the general range, and the items that are chosen are done so amid screamed promptings by the audience. Individual choice, and thus real control, is still only a distant possibility.

The game shows recreate and transform women's general economic powerlessness as well as their role as consumers. Money comes from the male world, spending power comes from men. But



*Photo by Gail Le Boff*

it is women's role to acquire the commodities, whether as gifts, prizes, or purchases. To the extent that they have the power of decision-making, it is the power of a consumer. That is, they can choose (amid influence and coercion) whether they shall spend their credits on an outdoor barbecue or an automatic ice-cream maker; they can decide how much a stereo set or an air conditioner is worth. For the privileges of this power, however, they must always be grateful. And, as in all our history, the most common way of showing their gratefulness is through a child-like sexuality.

In case the lesson on women's and men's respective roles is not well enough put forward in the structure of the game shows, the interactions inside the shows often make the point still further. One day, in "Let's Make a Deal," two women were told to choose between a washer-dryer and garbage disposal and some unknown items behind the curtain, which they were told would be for their husbands. Both women made it clear that they wanted the washer-dryer and garbage disposal, items that would be for "themselves," but then both chose to take a chance on what was behind the curtain. When the curtain opened, a pool table and paneling for a recreation room were revealed. Somewhat surprisingly, since the items were for men, the women squealed with pleasure. Then they were told that they would also get the washer-dryer and garbage disposal. Why? "Treat your husband right, and it all comes back," said the M.C. On "The Newlyweds," a woman complained that her husband was a spendthrift and gave as an example that he owned three motorcycles and still wanted to win another on the show. When the couple won two Hondas, the husband smiled, but the woman jumped up and down hysterically, as if the Hondas were exactly what she always wanted.

There are two messages in these kinds of interactions. One is that women love new things. They are excited by acquisitions per se — the specifics of the items are only of secondary importance. The second is that "whatever is good for the goose is good for the gander." When husbands are made happy, women are rewarded (psychologically, in real life; with more acquisitions, on the show). Thus the commodity that pleases the husband is good for the wife and ultimately good for the unity of the family. While at one level there is a complementarity between men's money and women's capacity to acquire, at another level both women and men are consumers. Whether as gifts, prizes, or purchases, acquiring is a function that holds the family together.

But the family as it appears on the game show is a family of infantilized adults. Husband, wife; mother, father — both are as child-like on the show as their children are outside it. The real power, the real father in the family, is the uncle who can provide the commodities. For it is the commodities that hold the family together and offer it its escape.

The morning of television has come to an end. The sound of the

television has been loud, decibels louder than in the afternoon. The shrieks of the women, the urgent voice of the M.C., can ring out over the vacuum cleaner or call the woman in from her scrubbing in the next room. On days when I have tried to sit through morning television, I got a splitting headache. It is not meant to be sat with.

The bits are short and neat, so that one can grasp what is going on as one passes through the room. But while the television blares from close up, it fills in the empty spaces of the morning as one goes about one's chores. It reminds one that there is protection as well as escape through a world of acquisitions, and offers suggestions, small and large, for afternoon shopping.

The daytime serials start off with "Love of Life" at 11:30 in the morning and continue through the afternoon until nearly five o'clock. Women can stay with the game shows most of the afternoon, or they can switch back and forth between game shows and soaps, or spend the afternoon with a series of soap operas. One of the remarkable things about the daytime serials to a new viewer is their similarity of tone and the lack of real demarcation between them. Until I got to know the stories, the afternoon felt like one long, complicated saga of family tragedy and romance, punctuated, of course, by frequent and repetitive advertisements.

The soaps are one of the few genres that have carried over from radio, and there is still one serial, "The Guiding Light," whose stories and characters stem from the 1930s radio show. While the daytime serials rarely reflect specific current events, their content is a good indicator of social changes that are affecting American family life. In the last few years, Chris Brooks, on "The Young and the Restless," was raped, and brought (but lost) her case before the court. Cathy Craig, on "One Life to Live," became a drug addict and was rehabilitated at Odyssey House. A couple living out of wedlock and the question of abortion were part of "Somerset"'s story. There are female doctors and lawyers on the new serial, "Ryan's Hope." As separation and divorce have increased among American families, so too they have become more prevalent in the soap operas, and are instigated by women of all ages as well as men.

Yet for all the soaps' apparent realism in reflecting changes in such areas as drugs, sexuality, and sex roles, they are consistent and mythmaking in their presentation of both the home and the workday world. The soap operas, whatever their specific stories, celebrate two of the most important and popular of American myths; two myths that are also internalized as the dreams of most Americans. The first is the idea of America as the land of opportunity—a country where almost everyone is middle class, and certainly anyone who tries hard can move into the lap of comfort. The second is the idea that the family can be, and is, the sole repository of love, understanding, compassion, respect, and sexuality. Love lasts forever when it is with the right person. If it is



with the wrong one, people may change their mates. But the structure of the family remains inviolate.

The daytime serials portray the idealized lives of families economically headed by professional men — lawyers, doctors, architects. Most programs contain either doctors or lawyers on the show, and some contain both. As an early study of the soaps has pointed out, professionals may play a “wish-dream” function, but equally important, “physicians and lawyers are indispensable in the troubles which are characteristic of the plots.” (2) There are a modicum of well-to-do businessmen, and some wage-earners, such as a police lieutenant on “All My Children.” But there are few truly poor or working-class characters. In “Ryan’s Hope,” there are men who work for the mob, but this holds the romance of the underworld, and not the dreariness of the wage-earner, the common plight of American men and women in real life. (3)

Most women in the soap operas are housewives; however, the women who work do so out of professional commitment, not out of necessity. They are doctors and lawyers in the newer soaps, and nurses more often in the older ones. When they are not professionals, they earn money in genteel ways, such as modeling or running a boutique (“All My Children”), or being a writer or concert pianist (“The Young and the Restless”), or owning a bookshop (“As the World Turns”). But whatever their designated occupations, they are rarely shown doing work. In one study of 129 female soap opera characters, the 44 who were depicted as full-time white collar workers differed “in neither speech, dress, appearance nor be-

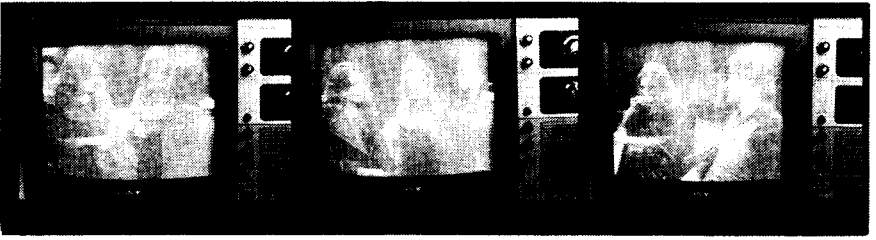
havior" from housewives or lower-level employed persons. "Only in emergency situations central to the plot were they shown performing actual work." (3)

Even when the female characters are housewives, they are rarely shown doing anything more exerting or tedious than serving drinks. The one scene I saw of a woman doing housework in several months of viewing was on "The Guiding Light." Peggy Fletcher, a nurse, was making a bed. But her son, on his way off to camp, soon came in to say goodbye. Peggy got him to help with pulling up a cover, but then bedmaking was suspended as the two talked. Housewives, as well as working women and men, always drop whatever they're doing for a personal conversation.

And yet the soaps skirt total fantasy by providing characters who seem to have poor and working-class roots. In "Love Is a Many Splendored Thing" (now off the air), a mother and father were Polish immigrants, but both their son and daughter became doctors. The famous poor family among soap lovers in 1975 was the Fosters of "The Young and the Restless." The older Fosters look like classic 1930s portraits of working people: Mr. Foster is coarse, and Mrs. Foster always appears worn and tired in her loose but neat dresses. There was a time in the prehistory of the less than three-year-old soap when Mr. Foster deserted his wife, and she went to work in a factory to support their children. But of the Fosters' three children, one son is a doctor, another a lawyer, and their only daughter spent the spring and summer of 1975 trying to secure the inheritance to a rich man to whom she was briefly married (literally, a few minutes, before he died!). In other words, the exceptional poor or working family on the daytime serials proves the American myth that being working-class is at most a problem of one generation. By then the sons (and daughters) will have become professionals, or the daughters will have been able to marry into wealth.



At least as mythic as their depiction of the work lives of their characters, are the soaps' portrayals of family life. It has been pointed out that in "The Guiding Light," "tragedies and love entanglements are always presented within the context of unbreakable family ties." (4) Despite new sexual freedoms, the accessibility of divorce, and so on, the same may be said of the soaps in general. The family of origin holds solid when the children's marriages break. When trouble arises between parents, the children gather together. A breakup in a marriage is never definitive or



permanent. Sisters and brothers, in-laws and ex-mates, are continually involved in each other's lives. Ties of kinship and affinity are the determining structures.

Some of the strength of kinship emanates from the necessities of designing continuity into a soap opera. There can only be a limited number of characters, if the soap is to hold together dramatically over time. Characters who go off to work or marry someone outside the primary network would either be lost to the story or would create an ever increasing addition of new characters. When a new character does enter the soap, it is often as a primary character's new romance, ward, or mate. Thus, the soap opera as a genre is based on the lives of two or three families. Their members interact, connect up and form new families, and break up and go back to their families of origin. Inside the soaps, there is no way to be outside a family.

Typical of the soaps, family closeness and proximity in "The Guiding Light" brings with it sexual attraction and love between in-laws, but it also creates barriers against the fulfillment of this love and attraction. One of the main story lines in recent years has been the tortuous triangle of two brothers, Ed and Michael, and Leslie. Michael, who was secretly in love with Leslie for years, had been married twice before marrying her, while Ed, who was the first to marry Leslie, has since had two affairs. For years, marriage between Michael and Leslie remained impossible; either he or she would be involved with someone else. Even when Michael was finally divorced from his second wife and was free to marry, the illness of Leslie's father held up their marriage for months of serial time.

"The Young and the Restless," despite its short history, also includes several relationships complicated by family connections. There has been a competition between the two Brooks sisters over one man, as well as the involvement of a third sister with the two Foster brothers. More dramatic, Jill Foster was briefly married first to Brock Chandler, although the marriage was never consummated, and then to his father, Phil Chandler.

The closeness of families and the interconnections between them make the theme of symbolic incest a common one. Sometimes it is the daughter's love for her father, which makes her unable to accept, and actually try to destroy her father's marriage ("Another World"). Other times, the theme is drawn to the point where two people who are related have sex with each other. In the summer of



1975, on "The Young and the Restless," Mrs. Brooks, who had just left her husband, was having an affair with Bruce Henderson, a man she had once slept with twenty-five years earlier during a break in her marriage. Meanwhile, her daughter Lore was trying to help Bruce's son, Mark Henderson, with a problem of impotence caused by the death of his wife (also a "Lore") on their wedding night six years earlier. Unbeknown to Mark and Lore, Lore was the fruit of her mother's one night with Mark's father. That is, the two are half-brother and sister.

In a world in which everyone is somehow related, the theme of incest is a logical consequence. From the point of view of the screenwriters, working with a limited number of characters, incest — symbolic and real — must seem almost inevitable. But incest is not really a problem of limited numbers. It is also the electricity that holds the family in suspended equilibrium. It is the warmth between father and daughter, between mother and son, between sister and brother, and between siblings for their respective spouses. It is at once the tension of the family and the solution to ever having to leave it.

Another consequence of the importance of family in the world of the soaps is that people cannot be involved with each other unless they are somehow related. Affection, friendship, or commonality of work are simply insufficient to be the basis for a relationship. When an emotional connection exists between two people, a familial relationship is sure to follow if the characters and the relationship are trustworthy. Two examples from "The Secret Storm" (no longer on the air) serve to make the point. Amy was married to Kevin Kincaid, and Kevin's close friend, Dr. Brian Neeves, was secretly in love with her. Amy and Kevin were expecting a child when Kevin had an accident and became a paraplegic. Only then did Amy discover that she wasn't pregnant. Since Kevin was terribly depressed and living for the birth of the child, Amy finally went to Brian Neeves and convinced him to give her artificial insemination. Unknown to her, however, because he was in love with her Brian used his own sperm. While Amy's child would formally be Kevin's, Brian's relationship to Amy would now be more than friendship — they would be related through the child. (The elasticity of soap opera time makes all this plausible.)

Similarly, Belle Clements, another character on "The Secret Storm," took on a young ward, Joanna Morrison. The girl fell in

love with a mysterious man, Robert Londero, who had come to town. When Belle's own husband was in jail, Belle also had an affair with Robert. Most interesting, however, was the fact that after many months Robert turned out to be Belle's husband's illegitimate son. Thus not only were a symbolic mother and daughter relating to the same man, but the man turned out to be a symbolic son for Belle and a symbolic brother for Joanna. Moreover, since the triangular affair involved a new character brought into the plot, the symbolic incest was clearly not caused by a limited number of characters, but rather by the larger goal of eroticizing the family.

If sexual interest is the positive force that holds characters inside the family, fear and the possibilities of destruction are the negative ones. For outside the family one cannot know or trust anyone, just as inside the family everyone is ultimately knowable and trustworthy, even if there may be secrets for a time. For example, in "The Edge of Night," Laurie, wanting to live alone, left home to go to college. While at college, Laurie fell in love with a man who turned out to be a psychopathic killer. After the man murdered her roommate and tried to kill her, dying in the process, Laurie finally moved back home.

The story of Laurie's experiences in her own apartment exposes another component of what makes life outside the family so dangerous. Not only was Laurie's judgment of human personality faulty enough to fall in love with a psychopathic killer, but the man turned out to be the missing youngest son of Senator Whitney — that is, a character known inside the soap, and only disguised by a beard. It is the setting, not the person, that makes for the possibility, or impossibility, of trust. Inside the family, a person is known through her or his familial aspect. Personality or character in the soaps is so plastic that people cannot have a sense of each other. In a sense, all characters within a context are interchangeable, none have a real individual self. Outside the family, with only the surface presentation available, no one can be known.

The family asserts its importance in a world where no one can leave the family or be alone long enough to develop a real self and thus have a personality that can be known. The structure, as well as the moral, of the plots is antithetical to solitude. A vicious cycle has been created in which, although one would have to leave the family in order to become a self, and thus be knowable, one cannot leave it because no one is knowable on the outside. The message is clear: Stay within the enclosed world of the family. It may offer conflict and heartbreak. But it can also offer sexuality, love, and protection. Most important, it will never thrust you out into a world where you are defenseless. It will never leave you alone.

Inside the family romances and affairs, which provide much of the structure of the daytime serials, the contents of the daily shows convey the details of what family life and the relationships between women and men can be.





Most important, time in the soap operas is very slow. A greeting at the door will take as long as it does in actuality. A look between two people is drawn out to the end of its romantic rope. This expansion of time has several functions. First, it enables the viewer to miss sequences for a day or even a week at a time and still keep in touch with the story line. Within one half-hour or hour show, a phone call, a crying baby, a visit from the electrician, can be taken care of without destroying the continuity.

But the drawing out of time also has important functions for the serials themselves. In contrast to time in the game shows or on the evening serials, which is speeded up to collapse the dull moments of everyday life, time in the soap operas is expanded to let loose its potential richness. Everyday life, which often induces boredom and restlessness when taken in its own time, becomes filled with poignancy when the moment can be languished upon. The drawing out of time when characters are talking to each other allows them (and the viewer) to grasp fully the meanings and nuances of what is being said and not said. Although talking and expressing oneself is difficult for soap opera characters, they are given the time they need to try to get it all out, as well as the time necessary for the viewer to see what is difficult and to ferret out what is left unsaid.

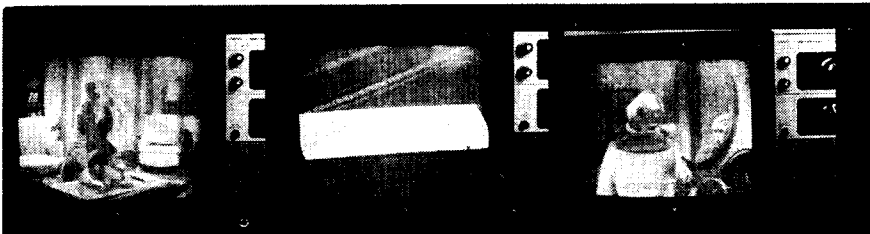
The daytime serials present a world where everyone — not just women — has time to deal with the personal and emotional problems of those who are dear to them. When one character calls on another, whether at home or at the shop or office, there is always time to talk, to get things straight. I have never seen a soap opera character say she or he was too busy to talk. Saying something like that would mean that the character was afraid of the conversation, and the fear would have to be dealt with at that level.

The extension and open-endedness of time in the soaps goes side by side with the containment of space. Most of the daytime serials take place in small towns or suburban areas, and even those that are urban dramas present their characters as being within close proximity of one another. Dropping in on a friend, relative, or lover is always possible — just as it is almost always impossible in real life.

The expansion of time and contraction of space in the soaps allows for the world of personal communication to bloom in all its fullness. Inside the soaps is a world where husbands and wives

still talk to each other after years of marriage, where brothers care for sisters, and where children concern themselves with the lives of their parents. The main concern of people's lives — whether they are women or men — is their relationships with those who are dear to them.

This is not to say that deep honesty and openness is always easy for soap opera characters. In fact, a primary conflict on the serials is the tension between openness and secrecy. Characters keep secrets from each other for months — out of fear, or because they believe it is in someone else's best interest. But in the end, no secret is left uncovered.



The time between the onset of a secret and the telling of it provides the space inside the family for being separate or alone. Characters become separate from each other for a time through retaining their secrets, but such a state is neither possible nor desirable over the long run. It is not just that the soaps herald honesty over other forms of communication, or noncommunication. Rather, they present a world in which there is ultimately no reason to be alone. It is an infantile world, a world before the child has learned that she doesn't have to blurt out everything. It is a world in which the individual ultimately believes that everything can and should be said.

Within the tension of secrecy/honesty and separateness/merging, the specific content of relationships is highly ritualized according to whether the characters are couples, friends, or family. Lovers, for example, talk about their love for each other, or the difficulty they are having; they talk about their relationship. Married couples may also discuss their relationships, but they do so less often. Once a couple are stable, the husband and wife are much more likely to spend their time talking about the happiness or troubles of their children or another couple.

Two women or two men rarely work on their relationship with each other. (An interesting exception are two sisters on "Love Is a Many Splendored Thing.") They never talk about how close they have become, and they never discuss their expectations of each other or work out tensions. When two people of the same sex talk about their relationship at all, it is usually indirectly, in terms of a third person for whom they are both fighting. Women do this more rarely than men. Most often, when women are in love with the same man they try to avoid each other or any discussion of the

subject. Men sometimes confront each other, but it is with a cliché such as "If I catch you here again, I'm gonna kick you out!"

On the other hand, both women and men commiserate with each other or help each other out in times of stress. Both may have intimate talks with someone of the same sex about how much they care for a lover or spouse. These scenes are particularly stirring when two men are having such a talk. Such talks occurred, for example, several times on "Somerset" in the summer of '75 when two men whose wives had left them talked about how they had been wrong and how much they missed their women. Fulfilling the wishes of most female viewers, the men may discuss how much they love their wives, or how much they miss them if they're gone.

A family is where one goes in times of trouble within the couple relationship. But one does not spill one's troubles even to one's family until the couple relationship has lost its force. Severe standards of privacy keep women, and men, from really talking about what is going on within the relationships. When talk occurs, it is highly standardized in terms of drinking problems, affairs, illegitimate children, and work. When intimate discussions occur about a couple relationship, it is most often between two sisters, a brother and sister, or a mother and daughter. (When Holly on "The Guiding Light" had a child by Roger while married to Ed, it was her brother who knew and who consoled her as she tried to adjust to the new baby. But it was not so much that there was explicit talk about the problem of the child, as that the brother knew, and his knowing was supportive.) Information, when it leaks from a couple, stays in the family. If the couple breaks up, its members return to their respective families.

While the soaps do not shiver or turn away at the idea of "incest," they take a hard line on any forms of communication that might break down the primacy of heterosexual couple love and the family. Real trust and protection goes on only in the couple relationship or the family. It is most complete between a couple, given that there is true love. It is second best between brothers and sisters, sisters themselves, or fathers and daughters (or, less often, mothers and sons). To the viewer at home, the message reiterates the closed-in sensibility of traditional family morality. The family, whether it is one's family of marriage, or one's family of origin, is the only place where one will be understood and trusted and where one can try to understand and trust.

The soaps, like the game shows, are broken by frequent and repeated commercials. Sometimes the commercials seem to disappear in the face of the family dramas of the daytime serials. Yet they too have their own dramas of discovered love, romance revitalized inside the marriage, and family happiness. If the message of the soap operas is that the most important things in the world are the intimate relationships of couples and the family, the commercials agree with this view, but posit the commodities they

advertise as necessary or helpful in maintaining these intimate ties.

The game shows, the serials, and the commercials that interrupt them, eroticize the family and everyday life at the same time as they infantilize family members, taking away their capacity to be separate and to choose. For the game shows, the focus of both the eroticism and the infantilization is the M.C., with his power to bestow goods. In a world which can grant more (commodities) than one could ever want, the response of childlike sexual excitement is the signal that the contestants willingly give up their autonomy, isolation, and potential power, for the privilege of being taken care of. The soaps, on the other hand, eroticize and infantilize with the intervention of commodities at only a background level. Family life that holds the possibilities for sexuality leaves little reason for trying to break out. The world presented by the soaps offers the intimacy, protection, and lack of separateness that most of us missed as children—with the added plum of also stirring up and meeting sexual desire. While the soap operas are clearly peopled by adults, the characters do not have to suffer the isolation and aloneness that is part of the adult state as we know it. But they also do not gain the power and autonomy that are its rewards. Finally, the commercials stand midway between the game shows and the serials. Here the romantic dramas are played out, but the solution to the sexual or familial plot is through accepting the suggestions for food or soap of the “voice over.” Like the M.C., the “voice over” turns the characters into children. But the “voice over” is less uncle than father—for it is actually telling them what to do.

What is played down in both the game shows and the serials (and, increasingly, in the commercials too) is the nonbenign aspect of the power that men hold over women. As uncle, the M.C. can give gifts and extract his sexual pleasure, but he does not lay down correct behavior or chastise for incorrect actions. He does not have the severe power of a father, or even a husband. Men in the soaps also have the capacity to assist, protect, and give, without retaining the power to dominate that most men potentially have over most women. No soap opera father is a disciplinarian; no husband a wife-beater. Despite differences in career trajectories, women and men in the soap operas are probably more equal than in any other form of art or drama or in any area of real life.

By playing down men's domination over women (and children) through their roles of father and husband, the soaps and the game shows make the family palatable. On daytime TV, a family is not a hierarchy, starting with the father and ending with the youngest girl, but an intimate group of people, connected to each other equally through ties of love and kinship. The television family may not allow any of its members to become real adults, but it

also does not let any one member dominate any other in the ways of which we have become most wary.

Daytime television creates the eroticized family and offers its romances as the solution to the life journey. It promises that the family can be everything, if only one is willing to stay inside it. For the woman confined to her house, daytime television fills out the empty spaces of the long day when she is home alone, channels her fantasies toward love and family dramas, and promises her that the life she is in can fulfill her needs. But it does not call to her attention her aloneness and isolation, and it does not suggest to her that it is precisely in her solitude that she has the possibility for gaining a self.

#### NOTES

1. An August 1975 issue of TV GUIDE reported that, although a woman had been turned down for an M.C. position on a game show, in about three years "the country would be ready for a female M.C." Obviously, a female M.C. would completely alter the sexual if not the power dynamic between the M.C. and the contestants, giving it a sado-masochistic lesbian tilt. Perhaps the country will be "ready" for that in three years time, or perhaps another kind of dynamic can be introduced. Certainly women already play the role of selling commodities and are used to advise other women in the advertisements.

2. Rudolph Arnheim, "The World of the Daytime Serial," in MASS COMMUNICATIONS, ed., Wilbur Schramm (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois, 1949), p. 394.

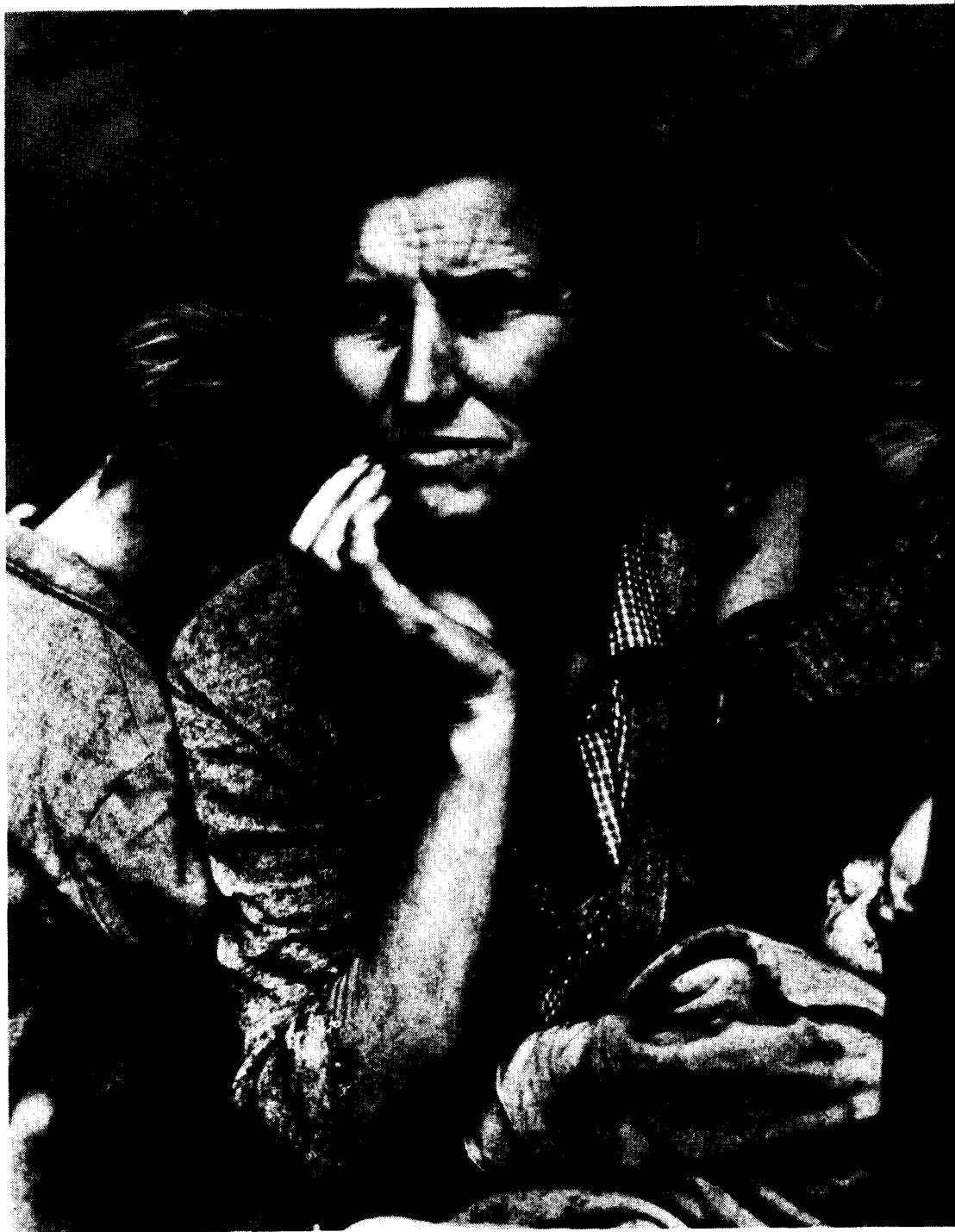
3. Mildred Downing, "Heroines of the Daytime Serial," JOURNAL OF COMMUNICATIONS 24, no. 2 (Spring 1974): 133.

4. Robert LaGuardia, THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF TV SOAP OPERAS (New York: Ballantine Books, 1974), p. 41.

I would like to thank Irena Klenbort, whose insights were invaluable in helping me develop some of the ideas in this paper, and who furnished me with examples from her more extensive soap opera watching.

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*Dorothea Lange, Migrant Mother; Nipomo, California, 1936.*

# **Documentary Photography in America:**

## **The Political Dimensions of an Art Form**

*Sam Walker*

Certain photographic images are commonly used as documents, as records of the objective reality of particular times and places. Pick up any illustrated work on American history — a textbook or scholarly monograph — and one will find many of the same images: the Progressive Era illustrated by photographs of Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine; the great depression illustrated by the Farm Security Administration photographs of Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, and others. Since the 1930's the work of these photographers has been termed "documentary." (1)

The documentary tradition, far from being an objective record, represents a specific political interpretation of modern American history, bound up with the tradition of liberal reform. The repeated use of these images in historical works has had an enormous impact on the political consciousness of generations of history students. As a result, the liberal political tradition has received a subtle but powerful validation.

The process by which photographic images are produced and disseminated, and the economic arrangements underlying that process, exert a powerful influence over the type of images that are made available to the public. The photographer consciously

selects a given aspect of society to photograph. Writers, editors, and publishers then select certain works and disseminate them in a particular manner. Finally, historians apply the official stamp of approval when they confirm the idea that certain images indeed provide documentation of a given time and place in history. At each stage in the process, the "meaning" of the image is supplied by those involved in the production and dissemination.

## PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE PROGRESSIVE ERA

The photographs of Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine offer considerable insight into the political meaning of documentary photography in modern America. The work of these two photographers is widely available. Riis' 1890 book, *HOW THE OTHER HALF LIVES*, has been reprinted innumerable times, while standard American history textbooks often use the Riis and Hine images to document chapters on the Progressive Era. Indeed, for generations of students these images provide a visual shorthand for the problems of immigration, urbanization, urban poverty, and child labor in America around the turn of the century. Let us consider the implicit political message contained in these images.

The career of Jacob Riis as a social reformer illustrates the direct connection between documentary photography and liberal political reform. Born in Denmark, Riis came to the United States in 1870. Seven years later he became a police reporter for the New York *TRIBUNE*, and in that capacity he gained an intimate knowledge of conditions on the lower east side of New York City. Riis soon became a reformer, and in the mid-1880's helped to create the Tenement House Commission in New York. In the late 1880's he began to photograph the slums, and a few of his early images were published in the New York *SUN*. Then, in 1890, he published *HOW THE OTHER HALF LIVES*, the book that won him a national reputation and eventually became an American classic. (2)

Riis did not attempt to present a well-rounded view of life in New York City in the late 1880's. Rather, he offers a glimpse of the "other half," by which he meant the foreign-born immigrants on the lower east side. Implicit in this approach is the recognition of a specific audience for the images. Riis intended them for the middle and upper-middle classes, largely Protestant and native-born.

The images convey a powerful impression of people who are victims of circumstance. Riis was particularly concerned about the squalid tenement houses, the overcrowding, the absence of any niceties of middle-class life, and the conditions of work in the sweated trades. Riis portrays people who simply endure, without complaint, without protest. The images do not convey any sense of the vitality of working-class and ethnic-group culture. An otherwise uninformed viewer would never sense that there was any po-



litical activity among the working class, or that there was any organic culture that might sustain such activity. Most middle-class viewers of these images were, and are, uninformed. The photographs provided the only information about working-class life, and, as such, presented an extremely one-sided view.

Riis sought to arouse the conscience of those who held political power. Photographic images of appalling conditions in the slums were, he believed, a means to that end. Once again, the title of his famous work tells us a great deal. Political action would be initiated by that "half" of society which composed his audience. He called upon business to take responsible leadership. The poor were seen not as part of the system, but rather as victims of irresponsible individual landlords and ethnic politicians. Riis was closely connected throughout his life with the efforts of business elites to wrest power from neighborhood ward politicians and, through reform, to centralize it in their own hands. His images support his notion that social change must be initiated from above. The poor were assumed to be incapable of political action; or worse, might be dangerous if they did try to change their situation themselves.

In his desire to portray members of the working class as victims, Riis left certain things out of his photographs. He did not choose, for example, to heighten the sense of injustice by juxtaposing images of the poor with images of the wealthy. Such an approach might raise disturbing questions about the economic arrangements that allowed some people to benefit so grandly while others suffered. In this respect, Riis helped to establish one of the central motifs of the documentary tradition: the focus of attention remains solidly fixed on the victims. (Much the same criticism can be leveled at social-science research, with its disproportionate emphasis on such themes as the black family and working-class "authoritarianism" at the expense of the structural conditions of the American economy.)

Riis' choice of subjects reflected his own understanding of the political economy of documentary photography. He understood that his images and his book were products to be consumed by a middle class with the money and leisure time to permit such consumption. This too represents one of the basic elements of the documentary tradition: the photograph as bourgeois consumer item. The images are not addressed to the members of the working class.

As a consumer product, documentary images have reinforced the passivity of the consumers themselves. A certain element of voyeurism has been a major ingredient in the documentary tradition. Riis' images allowed the well-to-do to look in on the lives of the poor without having to endure the unpleasantness of doing it in person. The images fed upon and reinforced middle-class stereotypes of immigrants: their strange appearance, "foreign" dress, and "unbelievable" working and living conditions.

The documentary style developed by Riis was carried forward in the early years of the twentieth century by Lewis W. Hine. Hine had an even more profound impact on the world of photography than Riis. Because of the primitive technology of the times, the 1890 edition of *HOW THE OTHER HALF LIVES* contained only a few images, reproduced in a fashion that robbed them of much of their impact. The quality of Riis' photographic work, in fact, was not appreciated until long after his death when his negatives were reprinted. By the time Hine enlisted in the crusade against child labor, technology made possible high-quality reproduction in books and magazines. (3)

Although the immigrant families and workers in Hine's photographs have more strength and dignity than those portrayed by Riis, they also seem remote from participating in any struggle on their own behalf, even though this was a time of increasing working-class militance.

Hine's photographs conveyed the same political message as had Riis' images. His subjects, principally working children, were presented as victims. In this case the pathos was increased by Hine's playing to the sentimental image of the child being in need of protection (a point of view that animated the entire child-labor reform movement). The captions to the photographs leave little to the visual imagination: "Leo, 48 inches high, 8 years old, picks up bobbins at 15 cents a day;" or, "Neil Gallagher, worked two years in breaker, leg crushed between cars." Another group of Hine photographs were of recent immigrants, carrying forth Riis' emphasis on their "foreignness."

The photographs of Riis and Hine were more accurate as documents of a political movement (or movements) than as documents of social reality. As it developed in the twentieth century, the so-called documentary tradition became inextricably associated with liberal reform, rising and falling in marketability according to the fortunes of liberalism. Thus, documentary photography is said to have flourished in the Progressive Era, nearly vanished in the 1920's, experienced a dramatic resurgence in the 1930's with the New Deal, lost its sense of direction in the 1950's, and then reappeared again in the 1960's. (4)

## THE NEW DEAL

The Farm Security Administration photography project in the 1930's clearly demonstrates the intimate relationship between political liberalism and documentary photography. The F.S.A. project is justly famous in the history of photography. Staff members included some of the most distinguished American photographers, who produced some of the most memorable images in all of American photography. These images have also been extensively used as documents of the great depression. For subsequent generations

of Americans, Dorothea Lange's "Migrant Woman" and Arthur Rothstein's "Dust Storm" serve as convenient visual shorthand references to the 1930's. (5) But in spite of their power, these photographs of the F.S.A. project present a partial view of the depression as they emphasize rural subjects.

The F.S.A. project, over the course of its existence from 1935 to 1941, also reflected the changing currents of liberal reform thought. The early and most famous images presented destitute farmers, sharecroppers, and migrant "okies" as passive victims. This approach was consistent with the canons of the documentary tradition established by Riis and Hine, and supported the politics of New Deal reform. By the late 1930's a quite different tone began to creep into the images, one of conservative nationalism. This trend is particularly evident in the photographs of Arthur Rothstein and Marion Post Wolcott. Rothstein's images are of good simple folk — healthy, happy, and productive. Wolcott's images, meanwhile, convey a sense of reverence for the beauty of the American landscape. The sense of human suffering and of the rape of the land, so strong in earlier F.S.A. images, was definitely muted. (6) This shift reflected a changing political mood. The New Deal itself abandoned domestic reform by the late 1930's and began to concentrate on foreign affairs. The Popular Front, meanwhile, also began to stress national unity and the strength of American institutions at the expense of radical social criticism.

In contrast to the work of the F.S.A. photographers are the images made by a younger generation of urban photographers who were connected to the Photo League in New York. Formed in 1928 by film makers and still photographers, its members sought to record the life of the city and to document social events not found in the commercial press. They photographed strikes, demonstrations, and police confrontations. Much of their work was commissioned by labor unions. The League were committed to spreading photographic skills, and through a school they ran for many years, taught over 1,500 people. Scholarships were available for those who couldn't afford to pay, and the League members shared communal darkroom space and exhibition room.

The shifting political concerns of the Left are reflected in the work of the Photo League members in the late 1930's and through the 1940's. The League closed in 1951 after suffering from the anti-communist hysteria in the McCarthy years. It was repeatedly attacked for the alleged political beliefs of its members and was eventually placed on the notorious Attorney General's list of subversive organizations. (7)

The work of the League is significant among other things because it marks the first appearance of black Americans as major subjects in the history of documentary photography. League photographers, most of them urban-born, emphasized the variety and excitement of urban life (mainly in New York City). To a great ex-

tent their vision was far broader than the narrow "problem-oriented" approach of Rils and Hine. Blacks appeared in the photographs of League members simply as one facet of the urban scene. The black dancers at the Savoy Ballroom are as much a part of city life as the white children playing chalk games in the street.

## POST - WORLD WAR II

In the post - World War II years the documentary tradition split into a number of different camps, representing distinct political points of view.

On the one hand, the increasingly conservative outlook of establishment liberalism found its most significant photographic expression in the famous "Family of Man" exhibit. Drawing upon images from many different countries, the exhibit emphasized an abstract view of "mankind." Thematically the exhibit was organized around the life cycle: birth, childhood, work, marriage, and death. There was no hint whatsoever of the political and economic realities that distinguished one society from another. The overall tone was definitely upbeat: the family of man was a happy family. The bland and universalistic outlook of the exhibit undoubtedly contributed to its popularity and to the enormous sales of the book version, (8)

A darker view of society in the 1950's appears in the photographs of an emerging underground movement best represented by the work of Robert Frank. Publication of Frank's *THE AMERICANS* in 1959 was greeted by extreme hostility from the critics and profound apathy from the public. Frank seemed to have violated the canons of the documentary tradition. His gritty images of the American scene — with their emphasis on the grim, often odd, and always joyless routine of daily life — identified no social problems and presented no victims. Beaumont Newhall, the voice of the photographic establishment, accused Frank of lacking the "compassion" of the F.S.A. photographers. (9)

If anything, Frank seemed to be indicting an entire way of life. His attitude was cynical and detached rather than partisan and committed. This posture aroused the hostility of the establishment critics, but won him a loyal following among a younger generation. His photographs first appeared in literary magazines that also published the Beat poets, and Jack Kerouac wrote the introduction to *THE AMERICANS*. Frank's attention to the crass commerciality of American life and his gentle mocking of official politics secured his following among anti-establishment groups.

By the 1960's, Robert Frank had emerged from underground hero to become a dominant influence on contemporary photography (even though he himself soon abandoned still photography). A new generation of documentary photographers — Bruce Davidson, Lee Friedlander, Diane Arbus, and many others — continued both his

lack of concern for fine prints and his cynical and detached view of American life. Diane Arbus carried his point of view to its logical extreme by presenting an America that was an endless freak show. In the end, however, these photographers preserved much of the approach of Jacob Riis decades earlier. Arbus' collection of freaks offered an opportunity for the middle class to see "how the other half lives." The other half, in this case, was defined more in terms of cultural lifestyle than in terms of economic class. The political economy of the photographic industry changed not at all. The images were produced for and consumed by a middle-class public as simply one more leisure-time activity. (10)

The cynical and detached view of the "underground photographers" appealed to an important segment of the educated and affluent middle class. It allowed for a smug sense of superiority to the "materialism" of the American people. This approach had a profound impact on the image of the working class held by members of the middle class. The working class was perceived and put down largely in terms of its "lack of taste." Photographers concentrated not on the realities of work, but rather on members of the lower-middle and working classes as consumers.

A third trend in post-World War II documentary photography, which flourished in the 1960's, represented a more direct return to the tradition of Riis and Hine. The various political struggles of the decade — the civil-rights and black-power movements, the anti-war and New Left movements — produced an outpouring of partisan and committed documentary photography. (11)

But much of this work was aimed at people who did not participate in the struggles directly. It became, in a sense, documentation of "how the other half protests." The publishing industry removed the images from the context of struggle and collected them into art books for the affluent. The middle class might be moved to contribute to a "safe" cause. As before, the subjects of these photographs were objectified in the process, and the audience could view the colorful and eccentric antics vicariously from a distance.

Pictures do not speak for themselves, and the "meaning" of particular images depends on the context in which they appear. Nowhere is this better illustrated than by the cover photograph of a collection of images by a politically committed New Left photographer. The cover of Benedict J. Fernandez' *IN OPPOSITION: IMAGES OF AMERICAN DISSENT IN THE SIXTIES* shows a group of angry young protesters. But the full uncropped version of the photograph inside reveals that these are pro-war demonstrators, evidently protesting an anti-war march. The irony of this reversal demonstrates the point that the meaning of an image is what an audience is prepared to see in it, and that this is often shaped by the circumstances in which it is presented.



*Jacob Rüs, Baxter Street Court, New York, 1888.*



*Lewis W. Hine, Young Russian Jew, Ellis Island, 1905.*



Arthur Rothstein, "Farm Family: St. Charles County, Missouri, 1939."





*Aaron Siskind, Photo League, Dancers at the Savoy Ballroom. 1937.*



(Top):

Lester Tarkington, Photo League,  
Skipping Rope, 1950.

(Bottom):

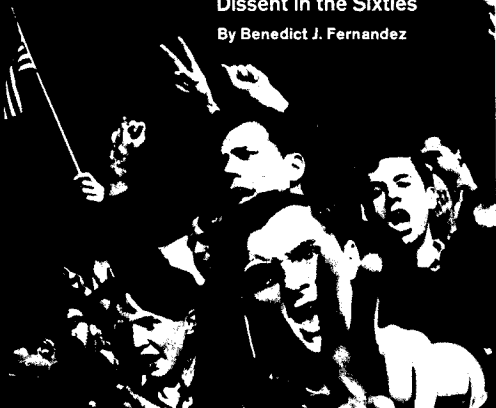
Robert Frank,  
Ranch Market, Hollywood, 1956.



# in opposition

Images of American  
Dissent in the Sixties

By Benedict J. Fernandez



*From Benedict Fernandez, In Opposition, Images of American Dissent in the 1960s.*



## NOTES

1. Beaumont Newhall, *THE HISTORY OF PHOTOGRAPHY: FROM 1839 TO THE PRESENT DAY* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1964); Time-Life Books, *DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY* (New York: Time-Life Books, 1972).
2. Jacob A. Riis, *HOW THE OTHER HALF LIVES* (New York: Dover Books, 1971); Alexander Alland, *JACOB RIIS: PHOTOGRAPHER AND CITIZEN* (Millerton, NY: Aperture, 1974).
3. Hine's images began appearing regularly in the *CHARITIES AND COMMONS* (and later in *THE SURVEY*) in 1908, and continued for many years. Judith Mara Gutman, *LEWIS W. HINE AND THE AMERICAN SOCIAL CONSCIENCE* (New York: Walker & Co., 1967).
4. See especially Newhall, *op. cit.*, pp. 135-152.
5. F. Jack Hurley, *PORTRAIT OF A DECADE: ROY STRYKER AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE THIRTIES* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1972); Roy E. Stryker and Nancy Wood, *IN THIS PROUD LAND* (New York: Galahad Books, 1973).
6. Hurley, *op. cit.*, p. 110.
7. Time-Life Books, *op. cit.*, pp. 88-118.
8. *THE FAMILY OF MAN* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1955).
9. Robert Frank, *THE AMERICANS* (New York: Grossman, 1969); Newhall, *op. cit.*, p. 200.
10. Nathan Lyons, ed., *CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHERS: TOWARD A SOCIAL LANDSCAPE* (New York: Horizon Press, 1966); Diane Arbus (Millerton, NY: Aperture, 1972).
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From the film, *Finally Got the News*

## **Detroit: I Do Mind Dying:**

### **A Review**

***ERNEST MKALIMOTO ALLEN***

DETROIT: I DO MIND DYING is a highly readable and accessible book, available in both hardcover and paperback editions. It should be considered imperative reading for anyone wishing to acquire an understanding of the radicalization of Detroit's black production workers in the late 1960's and early 1970's. A little more than half the book is devoted to the organizing efforts of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, which was born from the ashes of the 1967 Detroit rebellion, and passed from the scene in late 1971. (1) The remainder of the study touches upon such diverse topics as the Black Workers Congress, one of the direct (and now defunct) political successors of the LRBW; Detroit's police decoy squad, STRESS, subsequently disbanded under Mayor Coleman Young's administration; the radical judge, Justin Ravitz, of Records Court; and, finally, a brief overview of the political and social situation of black workers in 1973 Detroit.

Many an observer of the 1960's noted with surprise and approval the remarkable surfacing of the Civil Rights, Black Power, and New Left movements so soon after the stench of McCarthyism. Within this context, equally remarkable was the fact that an organization such as the League, with a leadership in its twenties and

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*Detroit: I Do Mind Dying. A Study in Urban Revolution*, by Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin. St. Martin's Press, 1975.

thirties, could have emerged with such a relatively coherent political line and practice. To the extent that such coherence existed, it seems to me, credit should be given in part to the presence in Detroit of a number of older and more experienced individuals and organizations. One could mention, for example, the Socialist Workers Party and its "spinoffs": the "Facing Reality" group of C.L.R. James and Martin Glaberman; the discussion circles organized by Grace and James Boggs; as well as present and past members or fellow travelers of the Communist Party. Whether one disagrees either partially or substantially with the politics of these organizations or individuals is quite beside the point; what should not be overlooked is that collectively they functioned as ongoing radical institutions which preserved and transmitted historical information and revolutionary values to a fresh generation of Detroit activists. And this, I would affirm, is what helped to make the ideology and practical activities of the League so radically different from other black political organizations of the period — League leadership did not have to start from scratch.

Obviously all the credit should not be attributed to Detroit's relatively unique political climate. If LRBW leadership had merely replicated that climate organizationally, there would be little else to discuss here. What made the LRBW different from most other radical organizations was that it moved beyond the stage of leaf-letting at plant gates, and actually organized black workers to oppose exploitative conditions inside the plant. Its vision and internal structure were decidedly not those of an opposition "caucus" within existing unions, but were those of an independent organization dedicated to the fundamental transformation of social relations in the United States.

At their height in the 1968-69 period, the in-plant organizations which composed the LRBW were able to organize hundreds of black workers and command the respect of thousands more. The League's political influence spread far beyond the geographical confines of metropolitan Detroit. The LRBW itself became involved in a number of community-organizing projects, owned and operated a modest printing plant, set up an independent legal-defense operation, and was in the process of developing a revolutionary alternative to the United Fund — the International Black Appeal — on the eve of its demise in the early 1970's. Ultimately, it is true, the LRBW succumbed to the same critical deficiencies characteristic of other political organizations of the period. The details of that story, unfortunately, are not revealed in the Surkin/Georgakas book, and will have to await another format.

In the introduction to the book, the authors' purpose is stated succinctly:

At various moments in this effort by working people to gain control of their own lives, different individuals and organizations became more important than others. Our



purpose has been to follow the motion of the class which supported them rather than to trace particular destinies or to speculate on the possible future importance of specific individuals, ideologies, or organizations. (p. 5)

It must be said, however, that *DETROIT: I DO MIND DYING* is more an account of the actions and ideas of leading individuals within a specific organization — the LRBW — than one of "the motion of the class which supported them...." Moreover, though speculation with regard to the future of individuals is wisely avoided by Georgakas and Surkin, by means of a process of omission, surface description, and relativism, greater weight is subtly lent to the actions and ideas of specific individuals within the League as it then existed. That the viewpoints of the book in many instances one-sidedly reflect the outlooks of Executive Board members John Watson, Ken Cockrel, and Mike Hamlin will not be immediately apparent to those readers who had no first-hand experience with the organization. We shall return to that point shortly.

The authors are essentially correct when they characterize the primary concern of General Baker and Chuck Wooten as that of plant organizing; that of Watson/Cockrel/Hamlin as more visionary, in the sense of advocating a greater political involvement of the LRBW in the larger Detroit community as well as beyond; and that of Luke Tripp and John Williams as steering a cautious middle course between these two positions (pp. 85-94). Surkin and Georgakas fail to take into account two critical points, however. Although aside from one or two exceptions one can present solid political justification for supportive and other organizational activities carried on outside the plants, the truth is that the League's Executive Board failed to integrate such activities into any comprehensive and centralized developmental plan. In other words, the proliferation of offices and activities of the LRBW throughout the Detroit metropolitan area, while no doubt illustrating "the depth and vision of the League's approach," (p. 93) as Surkin and Georgakas would have it, was, at the same time, a series of helter-skelter operations which often drained the organization of precious human and financial resources. In the worst of cases, such activities assumed the form of purely personal projects, where individual Executive Board members appeared to be carving out semi-independent organizational fiefdoms. For example, there was the "Cortland office," main center for worker organizing; the "Linwood office," where Parents and Students for Community Control as well as the International Black Appeal were housed; the "Dequindre office," where the Black Star Bookstore and an abortive community-organizing project were launched; the "Fenkell office," headquarters for the Black Star Printing operation. There were

also geographically separate offices for Black Star Film Productions, the Labor Defense Coalition, and UNICOM, a community-organizing center. To outsiders the operation appeared quite impressive; rank-and-file insiders often saw it as an organizational and bureaucratic nightmare.

Second point: by the time of the first general meeting of the LRBW in July, 1970, the workers' components (DRUM, ELRUM, etc.) had literally ceased to exist; at the very most only a handful of members remained in each. This latter revelation, especially, places in appropriate perspective the essential character of a key division within the League's Executive Board — that between plant organizers and those who pushed for wider community and national involvement. In reading Georgakas and Surkin, one is left with the impression that Baker and Wooten were hopeless provincials incapable of extending their vision beyond the biggates of Chrysler's Hamtramck plantation. The point, however, is that they were attempting to regain lost terrain. By mid-1970, when the LRBW was becoming increasingly well known among radical black workers throughout the United States, as well as in domestic and international Left circles, it had also lost its working-class base at home. Hence by glossing over the substantive underlying realities confronting the LRBW, Surkin and Georgakas lend greater credence to the Hamlin/Watson/Cockrel position that the principal task of the League in the 1970-71 period was that of expansion rather than consolidation. Quite obviously I take the directly opposite view.

Let us now concentrate on what I consider to be another of the book's major shortcomings: its generally negative treatment of Afroamerican nationalism. The League itself (more precisely, its predecessor, the Revolutionary Union movement) was launched on the crest of a mass nationalism unleashed during the July, 1967 Detroit Rebellion. It should not be too surprising to learn, then, that nationalist sentiment in one form or another thoroughly pervaded the organization from bottom to top. Ironically, though the LRBW (through its top leadership) widely projected itself as a Marxist organization, such categorizing had little to do with the concrete political sentiments of its rank and file. Aside from its leading body, the Executive Board, all sorts of ideological eclecticism prevailed within the League, from nationalist distrust of all whites, to Christianity, astrology, pro-socialist sentiment, and even anti-Marxist sentiment. Here is reason enough why the LRBW as a whole could not be justifiably characterized as a Marxist-Leninist organization at any single stage of its development. On the other hand, an apparent majority of the membership at least nominally accepted the proposition that Marxist theory and practice were vital to the liberation of Afroamerican workers, but most seem to have done so more out of faith in the political correctness of the Executive Board than out of any deep ideological conviction rooted in study. (The political gulf between the top leadership and

the membership is manifestly evident in the League film "Finally Got the News." On one hand there is John Watson lecturing on the question of surplus value and of the need for socialist revolution; on the other there is Ron March, one of the many dedicated in-plant leaders of DRUM, who states, "We of the League organized to show management and the union that the workers will not tolerate these type of conditions.")

Surkin and Georgakas completely underplay the positive role of nationalism in the formation of the LRBW, mention only its negative aspects, and correspondingly overstress its Marxist-Leninist side — which, as we signaled above, remained mostly the "property" of its leading body. In this way the authors' analysis lacks comprehension of one of the principal "fueling sources" of Afro-american political movements of the past decade — and that of the League in particular.

The League of Revolutionary Black Workers was undoubtedly the most coherent and capable black political organization of the late 1960's, this in spite of its tremendous internal problems and leadership deficiencies. Shortcomings aside, DETROIT: I DO MIND DYING is the most comprehensive attempt thus far to place the activities of the League in perspective. If only for this reason it deserves serious consideration.

#### NOTES

1. One section of the LRBW merged with the Communist League, founded in 1969 in southern California; the CL subsequently became the Communist Labor Party. Another section became the Black Workers Congress. Both are highly-sectarian organizations.

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## **The Sadlowski Campaign**

### *Rusticus*

Edward Sadlowski's campaign for President of the United Steelworkers of America presents rank-and-file steelworkers with the dilemma experienced by peace activists in the 1960s when an anti-war Congressman ran for office.

On the one hand, it is self-isolating to pretend that the campaign does not exist or to ignore the hopes stirred among fellow workers by Sadlowski's candidacy. This is especially so since Sadlowski has become somewhat more specific in talking about issues. He has always espoused changing the union constitution so that contracts will be ratified by the rank and file. He now also advocates (as he did not in his campaign for director of District 31) doing away with the Experimental Negotiating Agreement, or no-strike agreement.

On the other hand, to tie one's wagon altogether to Sadlowski's star is to risk the disintegration of independent rank-and-file groupings painfully built up over many years. With this in mind, experienced activists remind each other that I. W. Abel, too, ran for President with promises to preserve the right to strike, get away from "tuxedo unionism", and give the union back to the members.

Fears as to Sadlowski's demagoguery and reformism were reinforced by his performance at the union convention in Las Vegas last August. Because of his impending candidacy, other rank-and-file groupings deferred to Sadlowski and looked to him for tactical leadership. His response was to counsel supporters not to hit the mikes. It was explained that a few spokesmen from the Chicago area would present the issues in the proper way. Only when it was too late did Sadlowski pass the word that supporters should go all out against the least controversial of convention targets: the union dues structure.

The upshot was that Sadlowski acted like a man scared of his own supporters, and delegates went away demoralized.

Rank-and-file organizing in support of the Sadlowski campaign has developed slowly. There is no national rank-and-file network in steel comparable to the Black Lung Association which supported Arnold Miller in the United Mine Workers election in 1972. Nor is there, in steel, a tradition of local direct action like the miners' tradition of wildcat strikes.

Moreover, for reasons not entirely clear to anyone, the Sadlowski people in Chicago have been reluctant to let rank-and-filers elsewhere take initiative. There has been a desire that no literature be used in the campaign except literature prepared at the Chicago headquarters. In one district, three rank-and-file caucuses agreed that all the rank-and-file caucuses should meet in convention and choose one candidate to oppose the incumbent District Director. The plan was seen as a way of transcending politics built around personalities, and aroused genuine enthusiasm. It was torpedoed by Sadlowski's representatives in the district, who packed the convention to ensure the selection of a previously-designated candidate.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, the campaign is unusual in that both candidates have put forward radical new ideas. Lloyd McBride, the Abel-backed candidate, has endorsed the concept that a steelworker charged with violating a shop rule should be "innocent until proven guilty." In other words, instead of first disciplining the worker and putting on him or her the burden of proving innocence, McBride would leave the accused at work with full pay until the grievance-arbitration procedure had run its course. It need hardly be said that McBride borrowed this idea from rank-and-filers.

The Steelworkers Establishment has also let it be known that job security will be the union's leading contract demand this year. The idea can be dangerous: it can be used as a quid pro quo for a "productivity" agreement whereby, in exchange for assuring job security to the existing work force, management is given a free hand in combining jobs, using workers outside their job classifications, and the like. (Agreements along these lines were negotiated by John L. Lewis in coal and Harry Bridges in longshore during the

post-World War II decades.) Job security can also take the form of more fringe benefits, like health and pension benefits, which tie workers to their existing employers and make them more hesitant to challenge the boss.

Yet job security, like the concept of innocence until proven guilty, is a deeply-felt issue. Especially in older steel areas like Pittsburgh and northeastern Ohio, it is probably the Number 1 issue.

Sadlowski, ironically in view of his refusal to take a stand on the issue in 1973, finds himself putting major emphasis on opposition to the Experimental Negotiating Agreement (ENA). In fairness, there is a reason why Sadlowski feels free to take a strong stand now on the ENA, whereas he did not three years ago. The ENA was promoted by I. W. Abel as a means of ending layoffs in steel caused by steel imports. When the ENA was first negotiated, no one could be certain whether it might have this result. In an industry where the last national strike occurred in 1959, and strikes have in any case been rigidly controlled from the top, many if not most union members might have been willing to trade the right to strike for an end to layoffs.

As it has worked out, the right to strike is gone but the layoffs continue. One steelworker put the matter thus in writing to his local paper:

In the past week most of the major steel producers, reacting to a continuing lull in orders, have announced further cutbacks in operations resulting in more layoffs.

Operations at steel plants have been reduced and the tone of the future seems to be of a pessimistic nature. For example, a spokesman for U.S. Steel said, "The anticipated upturn in business just simply hasn't occurred."

A spokesman for Bethlehem Steel: "The fact is that fourth-quarter steel demand is disappointing. These facilities will be down until there is an upturn in steel demand." And you reported, "Armco Steel has 1,600 production workers laid off with an additional 500 on short work weeks." And so it goes throughout the steel industry.

I know of young people with two and three years' service who have worked only four months out of the last 16. People with 10 years' employment at Youngstown Sheet & Tube are on layoff, and, as the industry spokesmen say, "Things are disappointing, but they could get worse."

At the same time "Industry Week" reports that 90 million tons of steel poured last year will be equaled or surpassed.

Now this sounds like a real increase in productivity in view of the layoffs.

Back in March 1973, the United Steelworkers of America signed a contract agreeing to the Experimental Negotiating Agreement (E.N.A.), or "no-strike agreement."

This was I. W. Abel's grand new innovation in bargaining. He issued a statement to the membership that said, "Unlike 1971, you are not today facing or experiencing layoffs, downgrading or the closing of your department or plant because steel was stockpiled in anticipation of a strike.

"On the contrary, the Steel Industry is operating at capacity and expects to continue at this level for the foreseeable future. You have already benefited from this high level of operation and shall continue to do so."

Mr. Abel spends a lot of his time and our money going around the country telling the Chamber of Commerce how his grand idea has worked. Unfortunately he won't visit the mills or the unemployment offices to tell the laid-off worker the same story.

At least in 1971 we could count on a year's work right prior to the end of an agreement.

To this trenchant analysis one might add that after the recent increase in steel prices, General Motors announced that because of the higher cost of American Steel it might switch to imported steel from Japan. Thus the steel industry creates the import problem by its greed for high profits. The answer to foreign imports remains what it was in 1973: require American steelmakers to take a rate of profit no higher than that received in Japan.

Should Sadlowski win in February, the meaning of his victory will at once be put to the test. A new Basic Steel Contract will be negotiated and ratified by April. Sadlowski, should he be elected, will not take office till June. Formally, therefore, nothing that happens before June is his responsibility. The reality is that Sadlowski's posture between February and June can very much influence the content of the new contract. In particular, were he to speak out forcefully against the Experimental Negotiating Agreement, the local union presidents who make up the Basic Steel Industry Conference might well refuse to include it in the next contract.



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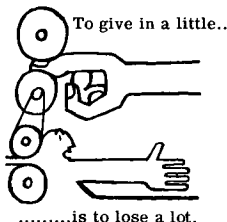


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