

RADICAL AMERICA

A black and white photograph of a large crowd of people at a protest or rally. Many individuals are holding hands in a circle, and a banner is visible in the lower right corner.

**SOUTHERN BLACK WORKERS & THE C.P.
TEAMSTERS FOR A DEMOCRATIC UNION**

With this issue we begin our new format. We have changed from the old style in an effort to make the magazine more readable and less formidable in appearance. However, our all-amateur lay-out crew requests that readers bear with us while we adjust to the new size and style. Please send us your comments and suggestions.

COVER PHOTO: Gay Pride March in Boston, 1977. Photo by Don C. Hanover, III. Courtesy of the Gay Community News.

Our apologies to Harvey Blume for misspelling his name in our last issue.

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INTRODUCTION

In this issue of *Radical America* we are publishing some articles that raise issues about the relation of the Left, both past and present, to important social and cultural struggles.

GAY RIGHTS

As everyone knows, we are in the opening stages of an attack on Gay rights. It has also become apparent that this attack is part of a broad-based movement, initiated by the organized Right and the Catholic Church establishment, which has as its target the rights of women as well as Gays. This attack has succeeded, along with the anti-busing movement, in mobilizing a relatively strong, popular base for the Right. At this time, then, it is particularly alarming that few socialist organizations have placed the defense of Gay rights and women's rights at the top of their own agendas.

Homosexual organizations in this country are of relatively recent origin. In this issue we are reprinting an excerpt from Jonathan Katz's excellent book, *Gay American History*, in which the founder of the Mattachine Society, one of the oldest homosexual organizations, describes the founding and early years of the society. What is striking is the extent to which the issues which have emerged within the Left today around Gay rights — and the issues which have emerged within the Gay movement around political activity — were present at the founding of the Mattachine Society.

The Mattachine Society was founded by Henry Hay in the late 1940s. Hay was a member of the Communist Party, and an activist in the Party's work. He was also an open homosexual in a period when such acknowledgement was dangerous and thus rare. Hay's conception of the Mattachine Society emerged

out of his plans for a "Bachelors for [Henry] Wallace" club in 1948. The idea soon evolved into a plan to organize homosexuals in defense of their rights as a minority. Though Hay was in good standing in the C.P., his decision to build the Mattachine Society led to his withdrawal from the Party as a potential "security risk" — ironically the same charge which was being leveled at Gays by the State Department. While Hay's sexual orientation and decision to form a Gay group led to a severing of his Party ties, however, his political leftism paradoxically led to a near split within the Mattachine Society. Organized in the midst of the McCarthy Period, the Society included many gays whose main goal, as Hay put it, was "respectability rather than self-respect." When the organization was red-baited, a substantial portion of the organization refused to make a principled defense against this attack, and to preserve unity Hay and others who held his views resigned.

It is clear that there are many parallels between the story of Hay and the Mattachine Society, and the emergence of today's Gay rights movement. Here we would like to underscore those that pertain to the relationship between the Gay movement and the Left. Among male Gays, who numerically dominate the Gay movement, there is no particular reason to regard the Left as it is today as a reliable ally; while the more socialistic movements of women and lesbians emerged in part out of actual conflicts with the organized Left. On the part of the Left, the last half decade has been dominated by the turn to the working class and economic issues on the part of the ex-student radicals who make up much of the leadership of the Left. While this turn was of crucial significance in the development of a broad-based socialist movement, it has unfortunately been very much at the expense of many insights that the New Left was beginning

to develop into the importance of issues of culture and sexuality.

In a sense, then, the Left today has abandoned the terrain of culture — of issues of the family, sexuality, the role of women, the socialization of children, etc. — to the organized Right. On these issues the Right has launched a multi-issue campaign, building bases in working-class neighborhoods by adopting a strategy of cultural politics. To be sure, the Right has drawn on the powerful and well-financed forces of white supremacy and male supremacy. Yet it is also clear that it is they who are on the offensive in these areas; while the Left has, through our weakness, relied on the strength of the Liberal coalition and the Supreme Court. With the collapse of the civil libertarian positions of these latter groups, we find ourselves suddenly defenseless, and largely unprepared intellectually to counterattack.

The importance of the interview with Henry Hay is that in many respects it returns us to some of the roots of our problem. Historically, the treatment of cultural problems has not been one of the strengths of the Left: it has taken the women's movement and the Gay rights movement to force the realization that cultural issues and problems of sexuality are *political*.

In our view, the lessons for today are straightforward: the attack on the Gay movement, the rollback of women's rights, and the growth of popular racism show that cultural and sexual issues must be addressed immediately, that they are *part* of our revolution, and cannot be deferred until some later time.

THE COMMUNIST PARTY AND THE BLACK SOUTH

We are publishing in this issue an excerpt from an oral history autobiography of Hosea Hudson, a black steelworker from Birmingham who has been an activist in the Communist

Party since the early 1930s. In the excerpt published here, Hudson describes how he joined the party, and recounts some of his activities during his first few years as an organizer.

The importance of Hudson's story lies in his descriptions of the daily life of the party at its base. In our last issue we printed an interview with long-time C.P. activist Dorothy Healey, in which she rightly criticized the many failures of the Party's leadership. Yet throughout much of its history, particularly in the early years, the party served as a vehicle through which thousands of people organized themselves for democratic rights and social equality, and gave many their first experiences in self-organization. This was especially so in the South, where the party was overwhelmingly black, and where it attempted to assert and defend the rights of black people.

Like many southern blacks, Hudson was first attracted to the C.P. by its defense of the Scottsboro Boys, the nine black teenagers who were accused of raping two white women. As a steelworker, however, Hudson was quickly drawn into the party's work among industrial workers, first in the steel mills, and then in the working-class communities of Birmingham among the unemployed. He tells here how he joined a party unit, became a leader and organizer, lost his job for political activity, and became involved in forming block and neighborhood clubs as part of the Party's strategy for the unemployed.

Though initially disappointed that his fellow party members were working class people such as himself, rather than whites or "better class" blacks, Hudson soon came to see the importance of united working class action. Hudson's account of the daily life of party activists, particularly of their attempts to circumvent repression and racial disunity, is especially important.

Hudson's account shows many of the strengths and weaknesses of the C.P., both at its base and among blacks in the South. The party, for example, taught him how to read, to organize, to conduct meetings and size up potential recruits. Hudson's story also shows how the party maintained a principled defense of racial equality in the teeth of heavy repression and jim-crow laws. Yet his story also shows that the C.P. fell into a kind of racial segregation of its own, with a largely white leadership directing an overwhelmingly black membership. The party leaders also encouraged Hudson to neglect his wife and home; and this account at least indicates that the C.P. did not make much effort to mobilize black women. Finally, as with many of the Marxist-Leninist organizations today, a kind of two-class system evolved within the Party itself; and base workers like Hudson were impressed with, rather than genuinely educated by, the apparently vast political knowledge of the (primarily white) party leaders. Yet it remains the case that, as with many Left organizations today, the practice at the base is of far more relevance than the interpretation of this practice by the leadership. For this reason, Hudson's story, a rare account of one who experienced the C.P. from within, is especially valuable.

Hudson's story takes place during the last years of the so-called Third Period of Communist Party activity. During this time, from the late 1920s to the emergence of the Popular Front, the reorientation of the Party towards New Deal liberalism, and the entry of party activists into the machinery building the CIO, the party largely worked underground. For the South, the chief importance of the Third Period was the party's advocacy of self-determination for the "black belt nation" in the South: a position that has been revived by Marxist-Leninist organizations today. In this excerpt, Hudson shows what self-determination for the

“black belt nation” meant in concrete terms; and his detailed descriptions of the work of the block and neighborhood clubs within the unemployed movement show how the C.P. fought for immediate demands in building a base in poor neighborhoods. By showing how the party worked at the base, in short, Hudson’s history helps us continue our re-evaluation of the history of the Communist Party and what it meant in the development of the American working class.

TRADE UNIONISM

A few years ago there were many sharp debates within the Left about the “trade union question”. The relative merits of union caucus work, extra-union organizing, and the possibilities of transforming trade unions into vehicles of progressive or even revolutionary activity were widely discussed. Today, these debates are less intense, if only because for radicals working in shops, the questions are more practical: How much can we talk about socialism on the job? How do we address problems of race and sex? And how can divisions among different kinds of workers be overcome?

In this issue we are publishing an article by Matthew Rinaldi about the experiences which he and many others have had in trying to organize within the Teamsters Union. This union is the largest in the nation: it has over 2 million members, and is rapidly growing. Its members are not confined to truck drivers; in fact, most of them are employed in warehouses, small sweatshops, and a wide variety of crafts and professions. Its numerical strength and the strategic location of truck drivers alone guarantees that the Teamsters Union is one of the most important unions within which socialists can work; yet its very size and diversity make this work very difficult. These problems are compounded by the nature of the Union’s bureaucracy, which includes more than 20,000 full-

time officials, who make up a well-paid bastion of the status quo. The size of the Union, too, means that the enormous wealth makes it an obvious target for organized crime. This in turn makes organizing more difficult and dangerous, while the corruption that envelops Union generates thousands of ‘sweetheart contracts’. In many ways, then, the Teamsters Union has the strengths of an industrial union and the practice of a company union. From this stems much of the Teamsters’ contribution to popular anti-unionism. Moreover, the Teamsters’ very size has enabled the leadership to play the members off against each other. Women and third world sweatshop workers get little representation in the union, while their dues help to support a bureaucracy that paralyzes the truck drivers, the segment of the union whose work gives them the power to bring American industry virtually to a halt.

All of these features of the Teamsters Union are made clear in Rinaldi’s article. Yet his purpose is to describe the work of insurgent groups within the Union — particularly the Teamsters for a Decent Contract and its successor, the Teamsters for a Democratic Union. Beginning with his own experiences within the Union, and then broadening out into the Union’s history and the experiences of other groups on the Left who have tried to work within the Union, Rinaldi shows some of the strengths and weaknesses of different strategies used by the Left. Rinaldi’s essay supports the view, we believe, that it is very doubtful to what extent trade unions can be transformed into vehicles of the left; and it underlines, in our mind, that even successful drives to alter the Union’s structures do not guarantee that the Union’s functioning in support of capitalism will be significantly changed. The experience of the TDC and TDU do show, however, that organized socialist groups can have an impact in mobilizing workers around particular issues.



Steel Trust Coal Miners in Alabama, around 1928.



Hosea Hudson in November, 1976

HOSEA HUDSON

A Negro Communist in the Deep South

Nell Painter & Hosea Hudson

Hosea Hudson is nearly eighty years old. A retired steelworker and unionist, he has belonged to the Communist Party for over forty-five years. He still travels across the country, speaking against the oppression of the workers, white and Negro.

Hudson attended school for less than a term in his native rural Georgia, before becoming a plow hand at the age of ten. When he left Wilkes County for Atlanta in 1923, he was still illiterate. He soon moved to Birmingham, where he found his vocation as an industrial worker in the Stockham Pipe and Fittings Company. Hudson worked at Stockham, quit to find a better-paying job, then returned when the job paid less. He returned to Stockham in 1927 but changed his name to Will Holton before he knew anything of the Communist Party. He wanted to transfer from the malleable department at Stockham to the gray (cast) iron section.

Communists became active in Birmingham in 1930, with Angelo Herndon a prominent organizer. But Hudson paid attention to C.P. leaflets only after the original conviction of the Scottsboro boys in March 1931. About the same time a young Negro communist, here called "Amos Murray," invited Hudson and several of his fellow workers to a unit meeting. Hudson and his friends all joined that first night, September 8, 1931. They elected Hudson unit organizer (chairman).

During this early period, an itinerant Party representative based in Chattanooga connected organizers like Murray to the national Party structure. In the late spring of 1932, "Hal Watt," Birmingham's first District Organizer (D.O.) came from New York to give permanent leadership to what soon became District 17. In theory, District 17 took in all of Alabama, but practically speaking, it was Birmingham, from which came all the members of the district bureau. Hudson was a member of the bureau during his year in Birmingham. During 1932 and '33, he coordinated the unemployed block committees among Negroes in Birmingham. A white counterpart handled white unemployed block committees, but the whites were much weaker than the blacks in organized strength and numbers.

Hudson began to grow intellectually from the time he joined the Party, but his ten-week stay in 1934 at the Party's National Training School, in New York, tremendously increased his confidence. There he learned the basics of Marxism-Leninism, and a southern white comrade taught him to read. Hudson returned to a strike-ridden Birmingham, but he soon was sent to Atlanta. His task was reorganizing the scattered members of the Party and International Labor Defense, weakened by Justice Department attacks.

Hudson returned to Birmingham late in 1936. He used his own name for the first time in ten years, and joined a steelworkers local (C.I.O.) as soon as he found work. He filled the office of recording secretary until he lost his job in 1938. But he continued his union work in the Workers Alliance, the union for W.P.A. workers. He also brought together Negroes from all walks of life in a Right to Vote Club and helped hundreds of blacks register to vote for the first time.

During the Second World War, Hudson worked in a foundry once again. He started a

new steelworkers local, of which he became president and chairman of the grievance committee. He sat on the Birmingham Industrial Council (C.I.O.) until he was red-baited out of the union late in 1947. Shortly afterwards he lost his membership in his local and job in the foundry. During the early 1950s he was O.B.U. (operative but unavailable), attempting to maintain contact with scattered Party members in the Gulf States. He left the South for New York in the mid-1950s, then Atlantic City, where he lives now. He envisions a return to Birmingham, where his friends assure him a great need exists for his organizational skills and political acumen.

I met Hudson almost by accident, thanks to Mark Solomon. Mark mentioned an interesting old man who lived not far from me — I live in Philadelphia — and suggested that a visit to him would prove well worth while. I met Hudson in June '76 for the first time and am still working with him on a book-length oral history of his experience as a communist, unionist, and southern industrial worker. Hudson originally proposed that we write a book together.

Hudson has already published one book, *Black Worker in the Deep South*, in 1972 through International Publishers. That book differs in scope and intent from ours, however. Our work is a synthetic autobiography. Nearly all the words are Hudson's, but I have shaped the content with my questions. I have edited myself out and pruned Hudson's spoken language, aiming for a narrative which is easily legible yet reasonably true to his speech. I am not sure that I have succeeded in realizing both aims; perhaps they are mutually exclusive. But the attempt is worth the try, I think, for Hudson's speech, formed in rural Georgia in the turn of the century, perishes with his generation.

Nell Irvin Painter

ORGANIZING IN STEEL

In the late '20s I didn't have any mind about racial issues, but I always did resent injustices and the way they used to treat Negroes, whip them and mob them up and run them with hounds. I came up to that from a kid. I always did feel that if the older people got together, we could stop that kind of stuff. My grandmother used to talk about these things. She was very militant herself, you know. I didn't have no understanding on the race question, but I did wonder why the Negroes were doing the same work as the white and yet the whites getting more pay than the Negroes. I couldn't understand that.

You see, all of '25, '26, '27, in that gray iron department at Stockham, we was working what you call the "stagger system." You work two days this week, three days next week, maybe one day the next week, and maybe the next week, not nary a day at all, year in and year out. The malleable department was running six days a week, but the gray iron department was working that two days, three days a week. I don't know myself how I lived. We done just that work, nothing else. When we was off, we'd walk around the street, talking to each other. We wasn't doing anything. Maybe the other guys was working, but I didn't try to find anything. There wasn't much there to be found.

You see, the Depression — people talk about the '29 Depression — but that Depression was all the way up through the years after World War I. And I didn't go into the shop, really, until 1925. And that gray iron department was working the stagger system until along about when they put that conveyer in. They took most of these jobs off the ground and put them on the conveyer. And they put in the bonus system. In other words, they time you — how many molds you make an hour, how long it took you to go to the toilet, and everything.

When they got through toting the watch on you for a day or two, they'd average how many molds you'd make an hour, say about 25 an hour, that would be about 200 molds, that meant 200 *good* molds, a day. Say for an instance that job I tell you about 11¢, the L. They took that job and put it on the conveyer. They put the two men on the job and cut that job from 11¢ down to 4¢ a mold. Then they came around again, they taken it off the 4¢ and put it on what you call "the Bs," and you got to average so many good molds an hour for the eight hours, and if you have them good molds go over, say, eight or ten, you making 18¢ "Bs", call that premium, as your percentage. But you wasn't making but 32¢ an hour. That was the base rate. Now wasn't that going some? You was really taken. You wasn't making nothing. Just rob you, work you to death.

The first thing I tried to set up, twas somewhere along in the '20s, '26, '27, '28, somewhere long in there. There was a Negro there, call hisself from Washington. I don't remember if he contacted me or somebody told me that he told them that he wanted to see somebody from Stockham. I got three, four guys I thought was dependable and went and seen him one night, and he talked to us and talked to us. He explained to us and told us to go back to the shop, "just get you together a little social club, where you have some representation." And he was going to take it up in Washington about what they's paying us on the job. And I went back out there, took them three, four guys back out there in the shop and went and built a club, a social club in the shop, about 30-some members. We was meeting on Saturday. Now all of this was under my influence, and they was doing just what I said. But after we got organized, some of them wanted to turn it into a business club, wanted to go into business. The guys wanted to build a

store. I wasn't interested in no store, and I quit meeting. I seen where it wasn't getting nowhere. It was a waste of time. So I quit. Then that dissolved, and I went back to my singing* for several years.

The Communist Party was putting out leaflets, but I didn't know nothing about the Party. I'd pick up the leaflets, but I didn't pay them much attention, cause I was only interested in singing. Several leaflets came by. The people were always putting them around the community, but I didn't know who they was. They'd drop by at night and you'd pick them up in the morning — there'd be a leaflet on your porch. Sometimes I'd get my wife to read it, because at that time I couldn't read. But she never was too interested in politics, even when I got real all out into it.

The Party people, when they first came into Birmingham, I think it was along about in 1930 when they had the first meeting. They went to the officials of the city for a permit to hold a meeting in the park, and told them what they planned, what everything was, and they gave them a permit to hold the meeting. The whites was ignorant about it too. So when these Party guys got out, right in the Depression, and started speaking about the unemployed conditions, talking about the bosses and the capitalist system, and Negro-white unity and the rights of the Negro people, the officials told thm, "Now you all leave these niggers off," they said. "You all get the white folks together, we'll take care of the niggers."

So the Party people said, "No, we have to organize the Negroes too."

The city officials wouldn't give in on that question. They said, "well, now if you won't leave the niggers off, we going to fight you."

"You'll just have to fight, cause that's our Party policy. We can't go back on the policy." Then the police broke up the meeting, run them out the park. They went to hounding them and trying to arrest them. Then the Party went to going underground, to stay in Birmingham. All that was before my time.

I didn't pay no attention to any leaflets till the Scottsboro case, when they took the boys off the train, and then the sharecroppers' struggle in Camp Hill. Those two was about the first thing that claimed my interest.

The first break I know about the Scottsboro boys was in the *Birmingham News* on Sunday morning, had big, black headlines, saying nine nigger hoboes had raped two white women on the freight train, and Attorney General Knight said he was going to ask for the death penalty for eight of them. The boy twelve years old, he was going to turn him over to the juveniles, and when he come of age, 18, then he'd try him for his life. That was the first of my knowing about it. I began to buy the papers then, so my wife could read the paper and see what was going on — the *Birmingham News*, I hadn't seen any other newspapers.

Whenever Negroes was frame-up, I always would look for somebody else to say something about it. I wouldn't say nothing because I didn't think there was nothing I could say. I'd look to some of the better class white folks. Dr. Edmundson, he was the leading white minister in Birmingham, he'd always come out with some nice statement about race relations, so I didn't figure the better class of whites as being the enemies of Negroes. I thought it was the poor whites, and that was the regular stand. "It ain't these better class of people," you hear it even now every once in awhile, "it's this here poor class of whites doing things." I didn't see the hidden hand was doing the devilment. So I was looking to the whites. Sometimes it was

* Hudson led a male quartet.

some white woman would come out and make a statement. But it wouldn't amount to nothing, because they would continue to do the same things they was doing, until the Scottsboro case, when these people from all over the world began to talk. Then I could see some hope.

And then more and more I was trying to keep up the best I could. There was a fellow there by the name of Tommy Clark, he run a little grocery store that sell sandwiches right down outside the shop down there. (Clark had been selling his sandwiches in the shop, but a fellow bought a sandwich for a dime and wouldn't pay him. Clark shot the fellow about the dime. And that's what broke him about selling inside the shop.) The boys would come out and go down there and buy a sandwich. When the telegrams was really pouring in, that place was where we'd go down and congregate and talk about the Scottsboro case and the telegrams, down there in that little shop. We wanted to see what the outcome was going to be.

Then they had this gun battle, these Negroes down there had that shoot-out at Camp Hill. The papers came out about it, and about fifteen of the leading Negroes, preachers and some businessmen in it, issued a statement in the paper condemning the action of the sharecroppers' union down there in Camp Hill. They put up a \$1500 cash award for the capture and conviction of the guilty party who was down there "agitating and misleading our poor, ignorant niggers." (Later I learnt that Matt Cole was the man who was down there, that they put up the \$1500 reward for, and he was a Negro from the country just like me, couldn't read and write.) I thought the better class ought to be putting up money trying to help the Negroes who's trying to help themselves. I had some wonders about it. I couldn't understand it.

They had filled the jails at Camp Hill full of these Negroes, and telegrams began to come in

from all over, demanding they not be hung. I wanted to know what's happening to them, what's going to happen to them, what's going to be done? It was the first time I ever known where Negroes had tried to stand up together in the South. I tried to keep up with it, asking people about it, and "what you think about it?" getting other people's opinions among my friends and people of my stature, all working people. I didn't have no contact with no better class of Negroes. A whole lot of them was sympathetic to the sharecroppers. They wanted to see something done, too, to break up the persecution against the Negro people.

Everybody in the community had seen the Party leaflets, but nobody was much involved. The general word was that it was "these Reds." It was the Reds' leaflets. We'd pick them up and try to read them. They'd sound good, but so far as I was concerned, it didn't never jell in my mind. I was sympathetic to the Scottsboro boys, but I still didn't grapple with it to try to find out, cause, as I say, I'm concerned about singing. "Where we going to sing at tonight," or "where we going to sing at tomorrow," and all week long. We had went on the radio in 1927, and this here was in '31. And I was very popular and having fun with the girls. I had to push them off.

At first I just look at the leaflets and keep going. I wasn't scared of the Reds, never was scared of the Reds, but I just wasn't interested. Other people were scared, said, "better not fool with that mess, you'll lose your job." But I never was scared of losing a job. I lost five jobs.

Somebody approached me, that's how I became interested. I met a guy who had been working in the shop, Amos Murray. I think he was about 26 years old. He was slender, not skinny, but slender, and about 5½ feet tall. Somewhere along the line before I met him he had got a pretty good education. I don't know whether he got his like I got mine, in the Party,

but I think he had more schooling than me. Murray was with Herndon and them at one time in Birmingham. They got arrested once in a meeting. Now that was along there in 1930, but I didn't know nothing about the Party then.

The first time I met him to come to know him was somewhere along about 1930 or '31, there in the shop. He wasn't a molder. He worked in the coal room. You know if you be around a long time, you see a guy, you "hello, hello." You don't know his name, but you know his face. So I had done knowing him long enough to recognize him when I met him in the street. Whether I knowed his name then or not, I don't remember. I hadn't seen him in a good while and I ran into him, asked him, "You ain't working in the shop now?"

"No, they fired me."

"Fired you, what they fire you for?"

He said, "They fired me because I was participating in that organization for the defense of the Scottsboro boys." He said, "I just came from New York."

I said, "Yeah? What is they saying?" Now I'm looking for somebody to say something. I'm looking to see what is going to be said out of all these telegrams. "What is they saying about us?"

Murray said, "They asking why Negroes won't organize. I told them they wasn't organized because they don't have nothing to fight with. So they asked me which is it easier to do, organize or fight, and I told them it was easier to organize. They said, 'Well, you go back down there and organize, and then if you get when you need guns, we'll see what we can do about helping you to get some guns.'"

When he said that, I said, "You all got an organization here?" Up until then, so far as organization, I never heard anything about no organization. No NAACP, no nothing, no union. I only know I had heard them talk about the railroad union in Atlanta when the railroad

workers went on strike and I heard them talk about the coal miners' union when the coal miners went on strike along about '22 in Birmingham. I said, "You all got something here?"

He said, "Yeah, we have meeting here in Birmingham."

"Is that what you a member of?"

He said yeah.

I said, "When you going to have another meeting?"

He said, "I'll let you know." Then he became suspicious of me. Everytime I'd see him, I'd say, "When you going to have the meeting?"

"I'll let you know." He became suspicious, and he shunned me a good while. He told me years after that he thought I was one of the company stoolpigeons.

Finally he came by and left word, came by my house. He done got fired, now, and I'm living in the company house. That shows you how much damage people who's inexperienced in the Party can do to a person who has a job. Now here I'm living in Stockham row, and all the company stoolpigeons on here too.

Here's Tom Truss, the guy in the dispenser's office, call himself "Dr. Truss." On the same row is George Smiley, the custodian around the office. And here is John Mitchell, he's on the head of the ball club and the YMCA at the shop. All these are stoolpigeons. This here is just one block. It wasn't no long neighborhood, just one block and all these houses on one side the street. Out here is the ball diamond, over here the houses. And here come this guy Murray they done fired out the shop. He know he been spotted, they know who he is. And he come busting up to my house and yard with an armful of papers in broad daylight. Now he brought me papers, come strutting up the street, everybody know him, ain't nowhere to hide, and he come there, leave me a paper. So I

take the paper, try to read it. It was called the *Liberator*, on the right of self-determination for the Negro people in the Black Belt of the South.

Then he told me there was a meeting that night and I went on to the meeting. It was just over there across the shop. I'm living on this side the shop, and you go around one block, turn over there, come right down over on that side. That's where we had our meeting. We went to a small house of the man who had the meeting, and he was working at the shop. When I got there, it was two guys I didn't know, and the rest of them, like Josh Brewer and Ted Higgins, all the others I knowed. They was working there in the shop with me. I didn't say anything, but I'm a little let down, cause I'm looking for a big something, important people. And here's the guys working in the shop with me, regular guys. Those other two were working in the U.S. Pipe Shop, up there in the same community.

We was sitting there, and Murray got to outlining about the role of the Party and the program of the Party — the Scottsboro case and the unemployed and the Depression and the imperialist war. You had all that he was talking about that night. In the biggest part, I didn't know what he was saying, all I know is about the Scottsboro case. He was explaining about how the Scottsboro case is a part of the whole frame-up of the Negro people in the South — jim crow, frame-up, lynching, all that was part of the system. So I could understand that all right, and how speed-up, the unemployment, and how the unemployed people wouldn't be able to buy back what they make, that they was consumers and that it would put more people in the street. He went through all that kind of stuff, and I understood it. I understood that part. He took the conveyer up there where we mold, took that and made a pattern, said, "How many men been kicked out

in the street after they put that conveyer machine in there?" I could see that.

That was the beginning. I didn't do much thinking about it, when it come ready to join, I join, that night. Everybody there that night signed up, right there that night, the 8th of September, 1931. I don't know how it came to be, but I didn't never kick against nothing. They elected me as organizer, they didn't call it chairman — they elected me as organizer of the unit. They elected a guy named Gene Cooper as literature agent. His job was to get the literature and see to everybody have his own literature to put out among their friends. That was the main two jobs. We didn't have a treasurer or nothing. If I had of kicked, I wouldn't have gotten so deep into it. But I didn't kick, I accepted, and they told me I'd have to go to the unit organizers' meeting on Friday night. I was told by Amos Murray, that it would be my task to meet with all of the unit organizers of the city of Birmingham each Friday night, to make reports on our unit and its work in the shop. My job was to see Murray. He'd tell me where the meeting's going to be at, and Friday night I'd go there.

At that unit organizers' meeting it was myself, from Stockham, a fellow by the name of Nat Knight, out of North Birmingham, worked among the coal miners, and a fellow named Burrows — I never did know anything about Burrows — and an old man from down the southside named Mr. Harris, and they had another guy, I think his name was Phillips, and they had another guy from out there from what you call East Thomas, I forgot what his name was, and a fellow named Frank Waters, and a Negro woman by the name of Ida Akins. Her house was nearabouts the headquarters for all the meeting, Ida Akins and Frank Waters. We did all the meeting at her house and at Frank Waters's house.

The first unit organizers' meeting that I

attended, where I was looking to meet with a large group of people on the southside of Birmingham, I met with seven other people, all Negroes. I did not know of any white member of the Party then. (The first one that I met was Harry Sims, the young white comrade that was murdered up in Kentucky early in 1932, in the coal miners' strike.) I was somewhat surprised, to see such a small group of people. I was looking for a large group of people.

At these unit organizers' meetings we all would make reports on our unit activities as to what been achieve by our unit members' work among the workers and community people since our last meeting, such as passing out our pamphlets, *The Daily Worker*, putting out leaflets on the success of the Scottsboro boys' case, and recruiting new members, or making new contacts for the ILD branch or to become a member of the Party, and checking up on things that we had reported on in previous meetings.

Then we would have a discussion on some issue, or some new developments that had arisen since our last meeting, and the new tasks that we had to tackle in the coming period, such as leaflets, sending in post cards to the judge or governor on the Scottsboro case, or some case of police arrests or brutality against some Negro or raiding of an ILD branch. This was how we was able to get all of our members to become active one way or the other in Party assignments, by a strict check-up and also collective criticism, where everybody had to take a part. Everybody had to say something on the subject.

At that first unit organizers' meeting, I wondered why they made such a miration over me that night. I'm an industrial worker, from Stockham. Well, they was concentrating on industrial workers, and they didn't have any. Of all these people, weren't none of them

industrial workers. All of them was people from community units. Wasn't none of them from a shop.

We done all right. We decided we wasn't going to have over five or six in one unit, and we got to where we had about six units in the Stockham foundry. I was only responsible for one. Murray was getting the others together.

There was also a young Negro fellow, we called him Jack Berry. He was a YCL* guy. Berry and Murray was the onliest two guys I knew and looked upon as kind of special. People like Burrows and Knight and them never talked about nothing but just something around they area in Birmingham. That made me look upon Berry and Murray as knowing a little more than Burrows and them cause they met different people. They could always talk about a certain meeting over yonder, "We went to a certain meeting in Chattanooga," like that. Murray always left you with the impression that he was meeting with somebody from New York, somebody coming through. At that time we didn't have no district leadership in Birmingham. We only had a guy, Henry Johnson, from New York was assigned to work in the South. The headquarters, as I understood it, was in Chattanooga, Tennessee. And this guy went from Chattanooga, Tennessee, through Georgia, Atlanta, down to Florida, Tampa, and Miami, Florida. And he took in Mobile and New Orleans and Birmingham. He just took his rounds. He didn't have no organization, just had little contacts.

Before we was able to get the representatives from the different units in the Stockham foundry together to set up the leading committee, we all commenced to getting fired. We put out a leaflet there in Stockham what stirred up the whole thing. We give Murray a whole lot of in-

* [Young Communist League]

formation about what happening in the shop: the foreman's cussing men, make one man do two or three men's work in the heat, didn't have no relief to cool off, all the grievances. The leaflet said, "Herb," — didn't call him Herbert (Herbert Stockham was the big chief of the plant) — "we going to hit the first lick, you can hit the second." We went on down talking about these conditions. We put the leaflets in the shop, put them all around, put them in the toilets. And I talked a lot, I done a lot of talking. I guess it was easy for them to know who I was. I'd go around to the toilet and have a leaflet in my pocket. I'd drop a leaflet between the toilets.

The toilet had about eight or nine stools, right down the side of the wall, cause you had a lot of men there. It was the kind of toilet, you sit on the stool and the tank fill up. You get up, they flush themselves. And I'd go in and drop one there, you know, between the toilets. I'd go back later and say, "You all seen that leaflet them folks been putting out here?"

"Yeah, I seen it. Somebody going to get fired about that mess."

Everybody who changed the pattern on the machine, they go out to the assistant superintendent's desk, and they had a wrench. You go out there and get the wrench, change the pattern, and put it back. I went to that desk and got a wrench, and to show you how big a fool I was, I puts a leaflet in the desk, in the assistant superintendent's desk. Went on, got my wrench, put it back there. So I goes down, and then I make like my pattern had got loose, I goes back to the desk to see had anybody got the leaflet, like I'm looking for a wrench. When I pulled the drawer open, this foreman walked up and asked me, "What you looking for?"

I said, "I'm looking for a wrench to fix my pattern, my pattern done got loose."

He said, "So-and-so has done got the wrench." But now I figure maybe he might

have seen me put that leaflet in there and might have knowed I'd go back there and see had it been got. The leaflet was gone. That was the kind of chances I took.

I'd say, "I wonder who putting them papers around here? I seen papers around here this morning." I just want to see what they going to say, get a conversation about it. That was the way we'd do it. If the guy said, "Yeah, I seen it. That leaflet was talking all right." Well, then I know I can give the guy my opinion. That's what we were told to do and that's what I did, but I overdone the thing.

One day we was all sitting down talking on a little platform in the shop, eating dinner. One of these same guys was in the unit with me the night they made me chairman. I don't remember what I was saying, but he said, "You going to run your mouth round here till you get everybody fired out of this shop yet." That's the way I was, I was over-ambitious. When I did get into it, I went on into it.

ORGANIZING THE UNEMPLOYED

The main thing that attracted people was unemployed relief. That was the main thing we talked about in the units. Unemployed relief didn't just mean food. It meant getting some coal, it meant also paying the rent, cause a lot of people couldn't pay the rent, and the landlords would be threatening to put them out-doors. We'd get us a post card, get the landlord's name, go to writing down, demanding not to put the people out of the room.

Now I never did burn any houses as lumber, but other people did. Most houses were wooden, and the people was tearing up houses so bad. When they'd put a family out, the people's like eating them up, just like a fire, eating them up. They tear them down so fast, to make fire wood out of them that the landlords got scared to put people out. That's how I got a house over in Collegeville to stay in from April

'33 to July of '34 for \$2, just to keep the house from getting tore up.

We got started with the Party units the second time, we began to move out among other people, all Negroes again. We had several people around us, reading the *Sunday Worker* and the *Southern Worker* about what was happening around the Scottsboro boy's case, which was the hot issue at that time. This was our main activity, getting these papers and leaflets out among the people in our communities. Some of the leaflets we would pass out of our hands, some of them we drop them on people's porches at night or stick them in their gates. Many times we would put them on the various church steps on Saturday nights before the Sunday service. We would go back in the communities and see what the people had to say about them. This was how we could know the people that we could make friends with, for new recruits. We would not try to recruit people right at one talk, because police pimps was also very active trying to find out just who was a member of the Party for the Birmingham police. So we had to know just who we was talking with. We didn't tell no one that we didn't know to be a Party member that we was members. We also didn't tell a member of another Party unit any other member's name.

Our struggle was around many outstanding issues in our Party program in the whole South: 1) full economic, political and social equality to the Negro people and the right of self-determination to the Negro people in the Black Belt of the South, and the outlawing of the jim crow laws in the South that was on the statute books that prevent the Negro and whites from meeting together to discuss their daily problems together; 2) was for the freedom of the nine Scottsboro boys; 3) the right for the Negro and white workers to organize and meet together without being arrested by the police (That was a

big issue.); 4) the right to vote for the Negro people and to hold elected public offices; 5) the right for the Negro people to serve on the jury roll; 6) no discrimination against the Negro people and women on all public jobs; 7) unemployed cash relief for all unemployed workers and part-time workers and separate demands for each dependent and whoever could not find suitable work; 8) direct cash relief with a certain amount to all youth who could not find suitable jobs; 9) free government housing; 10) unemployed and social insurance for the old people who were too old to work; 11) death to lynchers; 12) equalization of education for the Negro youth in the South; 13) against police brutality against the Negro people and the white workers who attempted to organize a union; 14) the right for the sharecroppers in the rural areas to sell their farm products after they had raise their crops; 15) union wages on all public jobs.

In every leaflet that was issued by our Party, these basic demands was raise. Among the "lower class of niggers," as we were called in those days — and many of the "better class" ones and some of the whites also would whisper to our people — they were saying, "we are with you all," or "I am in favor of what you all are working for, but you know I cannot stick my neck out, but I am with you. Here is my little donation, but just keep what I say and do to yourself, and don't ever call my name to anyone."

When we got together, we discussed and we read the *Liberator*. The Party put out this newspaper, the *Liberator*. It carried news items on the whole question of the oppressed people, like Africa — this George Padmore, that was where I learned of him, the first I hear about George Padmore was in this *Liberator*. Also William L. Patterson, who was the Executive Director of the International Labor Defense in the early period of the Scottsboro case. It

always was carrying something about the liberation of the Black people, something about Africa, something about the South, Scottsboro, etc., etc.

We'd compare, we'd talk about the right of self-determination. We discussed the whole question of if we established a government, what role we comrades would play, then about the relationship of the white, of the poor white, of the farmers, etc., in this area. If you had a government in the South — they'd give you the right of self-determination in the Black Belt — you got whites there. What would you do with the whites? We say the whites will be recognized on the basis of their percentage, represented on all bodies and all committees. But the Negroes at all times would be in the majority. All parties would be elected. We were talking about electing people to committees. Our position was that on committees, if you had a committee, the majority of that committee would be Negro. But you'd also have representatives in all committees by all factions, not exclusive Negro, see.

Back in those days, we felt and we discussed it from the point of view, and from our instructions, that setting up a Negro government, exclusive, there again, we would establish Negro capitalists. And Negro capitalists, number one, would be exploiting the Negro masses just like the white under such a system.

HUDSON BECOMES A PARTY LEADER IN BIRMINGHAM

Very shortly after our first meeting with Hal Watt, the District Organizer (a white guy from New York), we organized a one day conference on Sunday, and all of the unit organizers was asked to be there. That conference was attended by Otto Hall, from Atlanta, Georgia, and Angelo Herndon. Hall and Herndon had just led that unemployed march of Negroes and whites on the city hall, and they was all telling us what a great success that they had had. (We

got the news that next week that Angelo Herndon had been arrested at his mailbox picking up his mail.)

We had maybe ten or fifteen people there at that conference that Sunday when we organized the Southern Section Committee. We had people from Oxford, Mississippi, from Georgia, from Montgomery, from Reeltown, Camp Hill, and Walker County, Alabama, and then people from around Birmingham.

From Birmingham it was Burrows, Alvin Black, Knight, myself, Brewer, Manning, Jack Hooper, Waters, Murray, and Berry. All of them's Negroes.* Then there was maybe a couple of whites.

A little bit later on we elected a bureau for District 17.

The bureau met every week, *every* week. I was a member of the district bureau until the Party dissolved itself, when Browder liquidated the Party in 19 and 43. In order for us to meet, white and Negro Party bureau members together, we would have to meet all day long, mostly on Sundays, in private homes of Negroes.* In most cases they were not members of the Party, just good wishers in what we were trying to work for.

We would not tell all of the bureau members where the meeting was to be held, just some of us would know and have the other one to meet one of us who was responsible to get that person to the meeting. We'd meet on a certain corner of a street at a certain time, early in the morning in most cases, about 6:30, at a time we felt that the police were changing shifts. If the member was more than five minutes late, we would not wait, and that member did not get to the meeting that day. He or she would have to

* It was strictly forbidden by the jim crow laws in Birmingham, for Negroes and whites to meet together, except the better classes of Negroes to meet with their good white friends, such as the leading Negro ministers meeting with a few of the leading white ministers.

have a very good reason for now showing up on time as they was supposed to. If they didn't have a good reason, we all would give him hell, in a constructive discussion. That way we did not ever have too much trouble with members being late whenever they had to meet someone on an appointment.

We would go into a person's home early before their neighbors were getting up. We went in one by one, two by two, so no one could hardly tell that there was a meeting taking place there. We would stay in the house until dark where the neighbors could not see us leaving the house. We left there one by one, five or ten minutes apart, until we all finally gotten out.

We would have the Negroes all to leave the meeting first, because we thought that if the police happen to see the whites leaving out of a house in a Negro community they might become suspicious. If the whites had of left first and the police came in, they would pick up everybody left in there.

Because the bureau met only once a week you had to have somebody there would get with the D.O. between times, if you wanted to get out a leaflet or make a statement or something like that. You couldn't run around and get everybody on the bureau together just any time. So the bureau elected three people to be a political bureau. It was the D.O., Sy, a young white guy representing the young people, and then you had the guy from the ILD, Lew.

They was all three white, cause, these people, under the conditions, we had to practice segregation. We wasn't working under the best possible conditions. Sometimes it just meant the white meeting. Sometimes it was impossible for them to meet with a Negro, cause the police was watching. If the police see a white in the Negro community, the first thing, he going to stop and want to know what your business out here. Cause he's looking for Reds, you under-

stand. It was just difficult. It wasn't so easy to get by. It made it very difficult for whites and Negroes to meet together. It weren't because we weren't trying to do the best we could, but it was a question of saving hides. So the pol bureau was three white guys. Sometimes they have meeting, just the three together, and they come back and tell us what they took up and what they talked about. Nobody didn't kick about it, not in that period. It weren't much to kick about. Maybe it ought to been kicked, but look at what the conditions was — that was 1932, '33, '34.

They couldn't afford to make the whole bureau all-white. That was against Party policy. We had to have white and black on the bureau, regardless of what the cost had been. But we had quite a time having meetings together.

Up in the top years, in '33, '34, '35, the Party in Birmingham and Alabama was dominated by Negroes. At one time we had estimated around Birmingham about six or seven hundred members. And in the whole state of Alabama it was considered about 1000 members. We had only a few white, and I mean *a few* whites.

By the last of 1932 I had to go to bureau meetings once a week, unit meetings once a week, and Collegeville section committee meetings once a week. (We organized the neighborhood sections down towards the end of the year.) Then I was also active in the unemployed block committees and we also had other meetings to go to. I didn't have nothing to do, wasn't working, just going to meetings.

Plenty times my wife begged me, cried, asked me to stay home, "Please, please stay home tonight."

I'd say, "I got to go out. I be right back. I ain't going to stay long." That's right. She was, I guess, feeling romantic. (We wasn't so old then.) But I couldn't see.

M.C. [a party friend] said to her, "What do you want? Why you want him to stay with you?"

She said, "I'm in love!"

He said, "What is that? Ain't no such a thing as love." That's what he said. That's the kind of thing was going on. Well, I can see it now, but I couldn't see it then. I made my mistake. I was paying attention to what he was saying, and he didn't have no wife. And I had a wife.

I loved her. My love didn't change towards her. It's just a matter that I believed that I had a responsibility to carry out, to be at my post on time. When I get through that, I'd be ready to go back home, but she didn't see it like that. When I got home, it'd be 10 o'clock, 11 o'clock. She tell me many times, said, "I wanted you here, but I'm sleepy now. I don't feel like it. I don't feel like I was feeling." I was being busy, the Party keeping my mind occupied, and she couldn't see and feel like I was. By she not being politically developed, not being developed along with me, it just pulled us apart.

She'd sew sometimes, but mostly she didn't have nothing to do. That's one thing maybe I made a big mistake. I never did want her to do a lot of hard work for low wages like other women. I didn't let her work in white people's house for nothing like the other Negro men was letting they wives do. They weren't paying but 50¢, working all day long.

The first meeting we had was November the 7th, a unemployed meeting. We attempted to have it on the courthouse lawn. My part was just to put out the leaflets and be in the crowd. You just had certain people to play a certain part. Everybody didn't get exposed. The first speaker attempted to speak, his name was Russ Tower. He was a young white Birmingham-raised fellow. They arrested him. Then a young white woman went up to speak after they drug

him off the lawn, was named Annie, they drug her down. That meeting wasn't a success. They was able to break that down.

We didn't put no Negro up to speak, because it was felt that a Negro, right at that time, it was too dangerous for a Negro to speak. They whup him. If he get in the jail, they might beat him to death. The speakers take a chance of getting arrested, so put the whites up there. They's the ones got arrested.

We always had some whites, but they was just in a small minority. The D.O. was white, but he didn't speak. You don't get your leader in jail. The leader don't jump up in the front. You have other people to take the positions, because if the leader in, you got nobody to see about getting the others out. That's the way we were operating then, cause we knowed somebody would get arrested.

That same year, in '32, the ILD had a open meeting in the Negro Masonic Temple, auditorium department. We got a contract from the Masonic Temple people, paid them for their auditorium. Then after we paid them for the auditorium, we put out the leaflets announcing the meeting. The city officials went there and tried to make the masonics cancel the meeting, but they couldn't cancel because we had a contract.

After they couldn't stop the meeting from being there, the city officials then put out word that the Klu Klux was going to shoot up the meeting. The auditorium part of the Negro Masonic Temple, it was on 17th Street and 4th Avenue. It's on the second floor. When they got ready to have the meeting, they had police lying on the building across the street — the buildings weren't but two or three stories high — and they's up on top of the buildings, had sawed-off shotguns and rifles, going to "protect" the meeting from the Ku Klux. All that was to try to intimidate, to keep people from going to that meeting. The people went to

that meeting all was in overalls and half-raggedy. You couldn't get none of the big shots. Big shot Negroes didn't go to that meeting.

The police, then, couldn't intimidate — Negroes just walked all under them rifles, just went on in the door and on to the meeting — had them standing on the corner, too. People just walked on by. We had done instructed everybody in the units how to conduct themselves. We said, "If the police there, don't pay them no mind, just go on about your business, go on in the meeting." We packed that auditorium out. I'm sure we had three or four hundred people.

Annie spoke, this white girl spoke in the meeting. And Barry, he spoke also, as a leader. And they had Uncle Elias Flowers, he was a jackleg preacher, weren't no pastor, just a preacher. He was a member of the ILD branch over there in Greenwood. So they had Uncle Elias Flowers, he was the onliest one who would take the platform with these two whites and speak. The meetings weren't all blacks. There were some whites, like Margaret Lacy, and one or two others like that, five or six. They was working-class whites, Margaret Lacy and them. (She was from Birmingham.) They weren't no big class. We had her and one or two others. Hal's wife was there, like that. At least it weren't a solid black meeting.

The police came in and stood around the walls inside the building, "guarding." We just went on. They had to set there and take what the speakers had to say like everybody else. That was the first meeting, first successful Scottsboro defense meeting, was held in Birmingham. After that you had several meetings and some in the churches. Some of the churches would open their doors and ministers would allow speakers, like the Negro Congregational Church and the church down in what they called Greymount, on 8th Avenue.

We had a meeting down there once. Three or four places had mass meetings. That was just about what went on that was public in '32, excluding regular putting out leaflets and attending unit meetings.

* * * *

Deep in the winter of 1932 we Party members organized a unemployed mass meeting to be held on the old courthouse steps, on 3rd Avenue, North Birmingham. It was for the purpose of raising to a high the demands for more relief for the unemployed people around Birmingham. It was about 7,000 or more people turned out to the courthouse steps and on the sidewalk in front of the courthouse that afternoon, Negroes and whites.

We had a committee of nine to go up to talk to Jimmie Jones, the mayor of Birmingham. Margaret Lacy was the spokesman for that committee. She was the onliest woman, and Joe Collins, Sr. was the onliest Negro on that committee of nine. The rest of them was white, because we didn't expose too many Negroes.

It was reported at our bureau meeting afterwards that Jimmie Jones asked Margaret in the course of his remarks to her after she had opened up their case to him, he asked her, "Do you believe in social equality for niggers?"

She told Jimmie Jones, "Yes, why not? They are just as good as you and I are. Why not?"

Jimmie Jones stopped her and told Margaret Lucy that he didn't want to hear any more from her. "That's enough from you," and he told his police and plain-clothesmen to go up there and get all of these people from the courthouse steps. These big strong-arm-men rushed up there ahead of Margaret and the committee and made the announcement to the crowd that there would not be any meeting here this afternoon. When they said that, the police who was standing among the people in the crowd began

to shove and push the whites who was a little stubborn about moving, because this was the first time that many of them had ever been pushed around like that by the police. They had always been made to believe that they were better than the niggers was, because they were white people. that was a great eye-opening for a many of them that afternoon. When the police went in and commenced trying to drive the whites, they had some pretty good scruffles between the whites standing there and the police. They were just ordinary white people, some of them, didn't know what was going on, they weren't involved, they just there, standing, they just on-lookers. The police pushing them took so you had quite a little hassle there. That's where they learnt their lesson. They learning, many of them, that they were no more than the Negroes in the eyes of the ruling class of Birmingham and their police.

After that meeting, we called a Party bureau meeting, led by Hal, the D.O., to make an assessment of that meeting and to lay plans to keep the spirit high among our Party units and members of the unemployed block committees and the ILD branches. At that meeting, it was a great discussion about the success of that meeting that afternoon after the people was push and shove by the police. We took the position that these whites being pushed around in the streets and having no employment and no food, when the Party was coming out demanding these things for them and they was being pushed away from the meeting of good and peaceful speaking, we thought that wouldn't drive the people farther back. It would build up more fighting spirit in these people. They want to seek out in order to find out more about the Party, more about the ILD, more about the unemployed block committees, ask, "What do they stand for? What is this thing for?" That was how we came out about that big meeting on the courthouse steps.

In 1932 and '33 we began to organize these unemployed block committees in the various communities of Birmingham in a big way. We set up section committees, and from these various section committees, we set up a city committee. That city committee came to be known as the unemployed council of Birmingham. We had a network of organized leadership among the unemployed people. All unemployed Party members who was not members of a shop or mine unit was eager to belong to a unemployed block committee, but everybody who was a member of a unemployed block committee was not automatically a member of a Party unit.

We Negroes who was members of the Party was fair in advance in an understanding of how to organize the people more than the rest of the Negroes or whites. We was able to meet among ourselves in the Party and discuss the problems and plan out our tactical approach, utilizing our Marxist and Leninist understanding on how to go about trying to bring the people together. We was always busybodies. We didn't wait for people to come to get us when they didn't get their grocery order or they coal order from the welfare. We would go around to see what the conditions was.

If someone get out of food and been down to the welfare two or three times and still ain't got no grocery order, quite naturally, the people talk about it. We wouldn't go around and just say, "That's too bad." We make it our business to go see this person, find out what the conditions was. And if the person was willing for the unemployed block committee person or the Party person to work with them and help them get something, we'd work with them.

Some people wouldn't want us to do nothing, "No, I'd rather handle it myself." We had a lot of people didn't want us to help them, think they could get by better by theyself. They figure we's the Reds and don't want nothing to do

with us, afraid we might hurt their chances. If they want to go by themselves, we'd hands off. We wouldn't bother them. But people who were cooperating with us, we'd help them. We get the neighbors rounded up and try to have a little meeting on this, not no whole big lot of people. Sometime it would only be one or two of us Party members would get together 4 or 5 or 7 or 8 people, enough for a committee. It would be some of the neighbors, maybe the people next door, the people right around the person can't get no food delivered.

We'd go to the house of the person that's involved, the victim, let her tell her story. Then we'd ask all the people, "What do you all think could be done about it?" We wouldn't just jump up and say what to do. We let the neighbors talk about it for a while, and then it would be some of us in the crowd, we going say, "If the lady wants to go back down to the welfare, if she wants, I suggest we have a little committee to go with her and find out what the conditions is.

If she say, "I would appreciate it," then we ask who would volunteer. We don't just up and say we'll go, we ask, first for volunteers. We'd try to get some non-Party members, then we try to have a Party person to go too. It would be say three, four people. We ain't going out with a great big crowd.

Now when we get this committee set up, maybe one or two persons there we think we can depend on that we take aside, because you can't just walk out and go down there. You got to know what you want to do when you get down there. You have a discussion not everybody, it's a discussion with just the best people on the committee. We always taught our Party members and people who went on these committees to keep a calm head when they talk to these welfare officials, but at the same time let the welfare officials know that the neighbors in the community was waiting back there to see what

the results that the committee should have in getting the person some food or coal. In the private discussion, we tell the best people, "When you get down there, you all try to find out if the welfare agent say she can't get a grocery order, find out why she can't get it. Don't just take that and come back. Find out, ask questions, and then let them know that the people in the community, the neighbors, elected you to come down and find out why Miss Jane — don't say 'Miss,' — why Jane can't get no food."

When the committee get down there, the welfare official might say, "But I done sent her grocery order out." Sometimes they tell them that.

So the committee say, "She said she was told last week the food order was in the mail, but she hasn't got it. We been trying to help her along, we can't continue to feed her. We want to find out why can't she get it now." All such discussions in there. We didn't go out there "We demand this! We demand that!" We talk with them like people, and in most cases we'd be able to get results. We seen the welfare agents as tools of the bosses because they doing the bosses' work, doing what the officials want them to do, but they wouldn't tell the people "I can't" or "The white officials is trying to give you all the run-around." Usually we was able to get results, because the agent, Negro or white, he know he still got to come back in that community out there. He wouldn't want too bad a black eye out there among the other people. So that was the results of mass pressure.

After the committee go down to the welfare office, we come back to the neighborhood, pass the word around that this committee done gone downtown. Everybody wants to know what happen. But now we weren't going walk around tell everybody what's happened. We call a meeting. Sometimes we'd have 25-30 people in a room — weren't no hall, we didn't have

meetings in a hall, we had meetings in a room. We'd sort of have to raise the meeting kind of careful, because we didn't want the police to run in and break it up. Irregardless of what you was, they'd call you Red. But people's condition would force them to want to come in to get the report about the results. They'd take a chance of getting arrested cause they know that they time maybe next.

We would conduct the meetings in a businesslike way. We would have one in the committee to make a report on what happened at the welfare office. The person who'd been the victim would explain the best they could. People was very bashful in talking back in those days. Then after that, the floor be open for the people to ask questions or anything they wanted to ask, the people that didn't go down there. Then we'd throw the meeting open for discussion, let them say what they think. The purpose of it was to let them say they thought it was a good thing, that we ought to keep this up, all of us come together to be a regular organization. If there wasn't already a neighborhood unemployed committee on that block, the floor would be open for membership. All they had to do was sign up, sign a card, and didn't pay no dues.

Block committees would meet every week, had a regular meeting. We talked about the welfare question, what was happening, we read the *Daily Worker* and the *Southern Worker* to see what was going on about unemployed relief, what people doing in Cleveland — you had regular struggles in Cleveland, struggles in Chicago. And we'd talk about what the workers up there was doing or we talk about the latest developments in the Scottsboro case. We kept up, we was on top, so people always wanted to come cause we had something different to tell them every time.

NELL IRVIN PAINTER is the author of Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction (Knopf, 1977). She is now working with Hosea Hudson on an oral history autobiography.

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2 POEMS

Sonia Saxon

GOING DOWN DYING

Don't tell me old age is calm
I know old women who swear blue streaks
when their fingers ache and they drop things
and they can't turn the knobs on their stoves
I know old women who can't chew their food
or are paper thin because food's too expensive
I know old women who rage at Boston Gas
when they turn off the heat
and at Boston Ed. when they turn off the light
I know old women who have to give up their cats

I know old women who can't shuffle around to clean their kitchens
Who can't read the Globe because they broke their glasses
Whose hearts give out before they reach the subway
Who never go to the theatre or have lunch with friends
I know old women who fall in love and no one loves them back
Who betray themselves by their voices catching in their throats
and their old hearts beating fast when someone enters the room
I know old women who cry because no one will ever see them naked

GOING DOWN FIGHTING

Old age isn't calm
Fires burn in bodies of old women
Flutes sing in their ears and they fall in love now and then
Old women dream of dancing in moonlight and of being held
Old women want you to hug them
to feel your warmth

I will not speak to you in platitudes
words of wisdom
"be like me"
I do not have a rocking chair
I have no pattern for younger women

I don't have a richer outlook on life
(life is always confusing)
except there is joy in struggle
and in leaping from change to change
But let the struggle be your own
and let the changes be your own

Resist compromise
Don't take anything lying down

Fight death when it comes
holding my hand
holding on to my hand

SONIA SAXON lives in Newton, Massachusetts and has been active in the civil rights, anti-war and women's movements. She is a member of the Women's Cooperative in Auburndale and of the Boston Chapter of N.O.W. This year she worked on legislation concerning older women. Her poems have been published in West End, Sojourner and other magazines



Gay activists celebrate at "non-victory" party in Dade County, Florida. Photograph by Bettye Lane, courtesy of Gay Community News.

THE FOUNDING OF THE MATTACHINE SOCIETY

An Interview With Henry Hay

Jonathan Katz

American Gay history includes a long and little-known tradition of resistance. This resistance has taken varied forms, from the isolated acts of lone individuals, from the writing of letters, poems, essays, book-length treatises defending homosexuality, or novels presenting homosexuals as human beings — to the consciously “political” organizing of a group united for action against homosexual bigots and institutionalized persecution. In its more individualistic forms, this resistance may today not always be immediately recognizable as such. From the perspective of a Gay liberation or Lesbian-feminist consciousness, some acts and writings which in their own time constituted resistance may now appear to be reactionary and oppressive. An early novel appealing to the sympathy of heterosexuals may have been a daring act in its day, while to a contemporary Gay liberationist it appears useless and even repugnant. Thus, it is important to study each act of resistance in the context of its time. A “Cercle Hermaphrodites” appears to have been founded by homosexuals about 1895, “to unite for defence against the world’s bitter persecution,” and the Chicago Society for Human Rights had been chartered in 1924 “to combat the public prejudices.” The Mattachine Society, founded about 1950, became the major homosexual rights organization in the United States until the birth of the mass, militant Gay movement in 1969.

The man who conceived and was a principal figure in the founding of the first Mattachine Society, Henry Hay, here for the first time details the early history of that homosexual emancipation organization. Because of Hay's eighteen-year Communist party membership and activity, his role as a founding father of the American homosexual liberation movement has not before been told. In an interview recorded by the present author on March 31, 1974, and in a long correspondence referring to original documents of the period, Henry Hay recounted his version of the conception and founding of the Los Angeles Mattachine.

Hay was born on April 7, 1912, at Worthing, in Sussex, England. His father managed gold mines in West Africa, then worked for the Anaconda Copper Company in Chile. His parents returned with their children to their native America in 1917; Hay grew up in Los Angeles, graduating with honors from Los Angeles High School in the summer of 1929. He studied in a Los Angeles lawyer's office for a year, witnessing the stock market crash of October, which wiped out his father and many others. In February 1930, at age seventeen, Hay reports "I enticed an 'older' gentleman (he must have been at least 33) to 'bring me out' by finagling his picking me up on Los Angeles's notorious Pershing Square. Poor guy — he was appalled to discover, subsequently, that I was both a virgin and jail-bait! Champ Simmons didn't really turn me on, but he was a very decent human being; he was gentle and kind and taught me a great deal."

A link of a kind perhaps peculiar to Gay male history connects the abortive Chicago Society for Human Rights (1924-25) and Henry Hay, the founder of the Mattachine Society. Hay says that "Champ, the guy I seduced into picking me up and bringing me out into the Gay world, had himself been brought out by a guy who was a member of that Chicago group. So I

first heard about that group only a few years after its sad end. My impression was that the society was primarily a social thing. But just the idea of Gay people getting together at all, in more than a daisy chain, was an eye-opener of an idea. Champ passed it on to me as if it were too dangerous; the failure of the Chicago group should be a direct warning to anybody trying to do anything like that again.

J.K.: Do you think your knowledge of that 1920's organizing attempt played any role in your later conceiving and starting a Gay organization?

H.H.: Only indirectly. It was one of the things that sank into my memory. In my own life, in the following year, in the fall of 1930, I went to Stanford University. In the fall of 1931, I decided, on the basis of not a great deal of information and not too much experience, that I didn't want to live the life of a lie, so I declared myself on campus to all the people that I knew: to the eating club I belonged to, to the fraternities who were rushing me —

J.K.: You declared yourself as Gay?

H.H.: Yes. I said I would understand perfectly if they all felt they had to stay away for their own security and position — and most of the people I knew did stay away, but the people I loved best said, "Okay, what else is new?"

I first conceived of a Gay group in August 1948, in Los Angeles. What happened was this: I went to a beer bust in the University of Southern California, run by some Gay guys I knew. Half the people there were students — one or two were theology students, some legal students — and we got to talking about the Henry Wallace

presidential campaign. Wallace was running on the Progressive party ticket. I came up with the idea that we should start a group called "Bachelors for Wallace." With the help of a couple of quarts of beer, we worked up quite a case for what the Bachelors for Wallace would do, what we would ask for — constitutional amendments, etc. It sounded like a great idea.

J.K.: This was to be an openly Gay group?

H.H.: Yes. We didn't have the words in those days, but that was what we were going to be. I went home and was all excited and sat up all night, writing out the original prospectus for the group. The next day I called up the guy who had given the party and asked for the addresses and telephone numbers of all the people there. I called up all these guys and said, "Look, we can get this whole thing going." They said, "What thing?" I found out that the only one who remembered anything except his hangover was me. Well, I thought it wastoo good an idea to drop, so I started putting it in some kind of order. I said, "Let's see, to get started I'll get in touch with all the other homosexuals I can." They said, "You're mad! You're out of your mind! We can't do anything like this!" Then I said, "Wait a minute. Supposing we got some really influential people, like ministers and sympathetic sociologists, and psychologists to condone it, to sponsor it. Then what?" "Well," they said, "well — yes, it's possible. get 'em, and we'll think about it."

So I went around to a couple of ministers I knew — Unitarians — and some sociologists from UCLA, and a

couple of psychologists who were around the progressive movement who were sort of open-minded. One minister, one sociologist, and one psychologist said, "That's not bad; that might be a very useful new idea. You get one of these groups started, and we'll come and visit it. If it's going in the right direction, we'll consider offering our names." This went on for quite a while.

J.K. Can you say why you conceived of a Gay organization at the time you did?

H.H. The anti-Communist witch-hunts were very much in operation; the House Un-American Activities Committee had investigated Communist "subversion" in Hollywood. The purge of homosexuals from the State Department took place. The country, it seemed to me, was beginning to move toward fascism and McCarthyism; the Jews wouldn't be used as a scapegoat this time — the painful example of Germany was still too clear to us. The Black organizations were already pretty successfully looking out for their interests. It was obvious McCarthy was setting up the pattern for a new scapegoat, and it was going to be us — Gays. We had to organize, we had to move, we had to get started.

I was going back and forth, back and forth, trying to get homosexuals interested and to get the sponsors to lend their names — I was caught in the middle, because one group wouldn't move without the other. What I needed was some other person's point of view, and I wasn't getting that. Then, in July 1950, I met "X." He was on the fringe of the old left, but he wasn't a practicing member of anything. He was a

refugee from Auschwitz; he and his family had come through some horrible experiences, and he was rather badly hurt as a child. He thought the group was a great idea, but he had a number of other people he wanted to go to. That's why I rewrote the prospectus.

Hay's original prospectus for a Gay organization was written in August 1948; he prepared a second version in 1949; a third version was written in July 1950, soon after Hay met "X," his first "recruit." The group is described as "a service and welfare organization devoted to the protection and improvement of Society's Androgynous Minority."

The group's service function is compared to Alcoholics Anonymous; among its aims are adjustment of members to the "enlightened.... ethics of the standard community"; "to understand ourselves and then demonstrate this knowledge to the community"; "to regulate the social conduct of our minority" (promiscuity, "violation of public decency," etc.); "to dispel the fears and antagonisms of the community..."; "to present to the community a...social analysis upon which...progressive sexual legislation" can be based; to make "common cause with other minorities in contributing to the reform of judicial, police, and penal practices..."; and to provide "a collective outlet for political, cultural and social expression to some 10% of the world's population."

The prospectus goes on for four more pages to detail the group's proposed work for law reform, against "police brutality" and blackmail, for "self-determination of nations and national minorities," and to provide legal services and bail money, study groups, forums, cultural and recreational activities, group discussions, therapeutic groups, and first-aid squads. Participants are to remain anonymous;

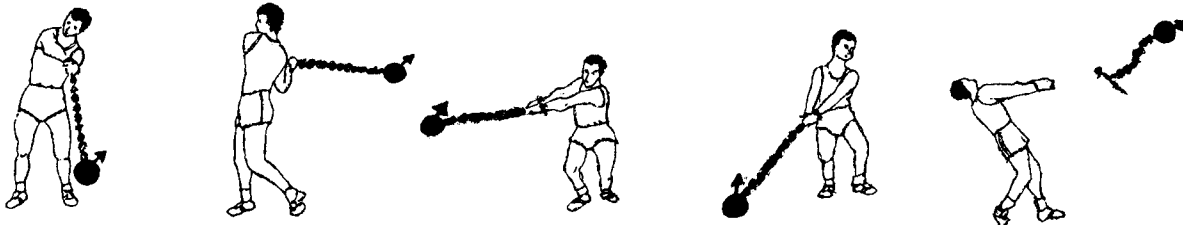
membership is to be nondiscriminatory as to race and political affiliation, and a complex membership classification system is outlined. Groups are to be "mainly geographical." "Supplementary subsidiaries" are envisioned, such as "International Spinsters' Orders," and "Well-Wishers Auxiliaries." The group's decision-making process was not spelled out; a small governing committee would make policy and run the organization.

J.K.: How did your original 1948 prospectus differ from that 1950 version?

H.H.: At first I had not been so concerned with planting the organization underground. The goals and ideology never changed particularly; I felt that what we had to do was to find out who we were, and that what we were for would follow. I realized that we had been very contributive in various ways over the millenia, and I felt we could return to being contributive again. Then we could be respected for our differences not for our samenesses to heterosexuals. Our organization would renegotiate the place of our minority into the majority. To a large extent that's what the whole movement was about. I was thinking of an amendment to the United States Constitution.

J.K.: What kind of actions and tactics were envisioned?

H.H.: I didn't know at that time. We would have to move with what the times would allow. The 1948 prospectus outlined the basic idea. The 1949 version described how we would set up the guilds, how we would keep them underground and separated so that no one group could ever know who all the other members were and their anonymity would be secured. The 1950 pro-



Preliminary Concepts ... copyrighted by Eann MacDonald* July 7th, 1950

**International Bachelors Fraternal Orders for Peace and Social Dignity
sometimes referred to as Bachelors Anonymous**

[The reasons for the group's formation are listed as follows:]

encroaching American Fascism...seeks to bend unorganized and unpopular minorities into isolated fragments....

...the Androgynous Minority was...stampeded into serving as hoodlums, stool pigeons...hangmen, before it was ruthlessly exterminated [a reference to the Nazi extermination of homosexuals];

...government indictment of Androgynous Civil Servants...[legally establishes] GUILT BY ASSOCIATION;

...under the Government's announced plans for eventual 100% war production all commerce...would be conducted under government contract...making it impossible for Androgynes to secure employment;

...Guilt of Androgyny BY ASSOCIATION, equally with Guilt of Communist sympathy,...can be employed as a threat against...every man and woman in our country...to insure thought control and political regimentation;

...in order to earn for ourselves any place in the sun, we must...work collectively on the side of peace,...in the spirit...of the United Nations Charter, for the full-class citizenship participation of Minorities everywhere, including ourselves;

We, the Androgynes of the world, have formed this responsible corporate body to demonstrate by our efforts that our physiological and psychological handicaps need be no deterrent in integrating 10% of the world's population towards the constructive social progress of mankind.

* Eann MacDonald was Hay's pseudonym.

pectus is basically like the 1949 one.

J.K.: Where did your idea of this type of secret organization originate?

H.H.: In July 1950, I was still a well-sought-after teacher of Marxist principles, both in the Communist party and the California Labor School. I was teaching a course in music history at the Labor School, and was dealing with the Guild System and the Freemasonry movement, particularly at the time of Maria Theresa, when to be a member of the Freemasonry was to court the death sentence. Both Mozart and Haydn had been Freemasons, courting punishment. This was also the way the Communist party had moved as a political organization in 1930-37, when it had been truly underground. I thought of the Freemason movement and the type of Communist underground organization that had existed in the 1930s, which I had known and been part of. So I began to work up the structure specified in the prospectus of 1950. The whole organizational setup was based on what I had learned from the old left and, interestingly, was not too different from that structure employed by Algeria in its successful liberation struggle with France in the sixties. At this time, incidentally, I was married and had two children, but I felt I had to move back into my own Gay part of the world again. I felt I should bring the best from the heterosexual side to contribute to my side of the fence — to bring all I had learned in terms of organizational principles in moving back to my own.

The Korean War had broken out just ten days before my meeting "X," in July 1950. At that time, all over the

country there was a movement, sponsored by progressives to get as many signatures as possible for the Stockholm Peace Petition against the war. From August through October 1950, "X" and I undertook to get five hundred of these petitions signed on the Gay beach in Los Angeles, in Santa Monica. And we got them, too, by God! We went down to the Gay beach and got them *filled!* And the Korean War was going full blast! We also used this petition activity as a way of talking about our prospectus. We'd go up to them on the beach — of course, this is an entirely different period, you understand, so when people went to the Gay beach then they'd talk about everything else except being Gay. We would tell them what we knew about the war, about the story of North Korea attacking South Korea being a fake. Then we'd get into the Gay purges in U.S. government agencies of the year before and what a fraud that was. Then we'd ask, "Isn't it high time we all got together to do something about it?" Everybody agreed, but nobody could think of anything to do without committing themselves. But at least they signed the petition, and some of the guys gave us their names and addresses — in case we ever got a Gay organization going. They were some of the people we eventually contacted for our discussion groups.

Despite the success of this initial action, "X" and I worked from August to October 1950, but basically we were getting nowhere. Finally, in November 1950 I said, "There's a guy in my Labor School class, Bob Hull, and he has a friend; I think they might

be interested." I didn't know for sure if they were Gay or not. I think these guys were Gay, but whether they would want to reveal themselves to me I didn't know. So I swallow hard, and clench my fists, and on Thursday night at the class I hand out a prospectus in an envelope to Hull. On the following Saturday afternoon he calls up and asks whether he could come over. He sounds kind of distant. Well, Bob Hull, Chuck Rowland, and Dale Jennings come flying into my yard waving the prospectus saying, "We would have written this ourselves — when do we begin?" So we sat down and we began.

The first thing we did was set up a semi-public-type discussion group, so you didn't have to reveal yourself if you didn't want to. Only certain persons would be invited at first, but later they'd be invited to ask some friends.

J.K.: These were to be discussions of Gayness?

H.H.: Yes.

Three surviving discussion group reports from a slightly later date (September-October 1951) describe the group's consensus, as recorded by the chairman. The subject of two discussions is "Sense of Value," the third is "Social Directions of the Homosexual." The chairman for this last group is Henry Hay, and his report contains a variety of conclusions, among them:

Sexual energy not used by homosexuals for procreation, as it is by heterosexuals, "should be channelized elsewhere where its end can be creativity."

"Homosexuals are 'lone wolves' through

fear" of heterosexual society; they "understandably retreat more within themselves."

"A homosexual has no one to whom he must account, and in the end...he must decide everything for himself."

"Those in greatest need are sometimes the most reluctant to help each other or themselves, tending to think of personal experiences as things apart from the mutual effort towards betterment."

"Some glad day there shall be a body of knowledge which would...show that homosexuals...have much in common."

Society's attack on homosexuals would lessen if society realized homosexuals' "potential ability to offer a worth-while contribution."

In April 1951, the "Missions and Purposes" of the Mattachine Society, a California corporation, were written; they were ratified on July 20. The first stated purpose is "TO UNIFY" those homosexuals "isolated from their own kind," to provide a principle from which "all of our people can...derive a feeling of 'belonging,'" The second principle is "TO EDUCATE" homosexuals and heterosexuals. In reference to education, the society is said to be developing an "ethical homosexual culture...paralleling the emerging cultures of our fellow-minorities — the Negro, Mexican, and Jewish Peoples." The third purpose is "TO LEAD"; the "more...socially conscious homosexuals [are to] provide leadership to the whole mass of social deviates." An additional "imperative" need is for "political action" against "discriminatory and oppressive legislation." The society is said to assist "our people who are victimized daily as the result of our oppression," and who constitute "one of the largest minorities in America today."

H.H.: We didn't start calling ourselves the

Mattachine Society until the spring of 1951.

J.K.: What was the origin of the name "Mattachine"?

H.H.: One of the cultural developments I had discussed and illustrated in my Labor School class on "Historical Materialist Development of Music" was the function of the medieval-Renaissance French *Sociétés Joyeux*. One was known as the Société Mattachine. These societies, lifelong secret fraternities of unmarried townsmen who never performed in public unmasked, were dedicated to going out into the countryside and conducting dances and rituals during the Feast of Fools, at the Vernal Equinox. Sometimes these dance rituals, or masques, were peasant protests against oppression — with the maskers, in the people's name, receiving the brunt of a given lord's vicious retaliation. So we took the name Mattachine because we felt that we 1950s Gays were also a masked people, unknown and anonymous, who might become engaged in morale building and helping ourselves and others, through struggle, to move towards *total* redress and change.

About the fall of 1951 I decided that organizing the Mattachine was a call to me deeper than the innermost reaches of spirit, a vision-quest more important than life. I went to the Communist party and discussed this "total call" upon me, recommending to them my expulsion. They rejected "expulsion," and, in honor of my eighteen years as a member and ten years as a teacher and cultural innovator dropped me as "a security risk but as a life-long friend of the people."

At the start of our organizing, "X" and others felt that if we made bad mistakes and ruined the thing it might be many, many years before the attempt to organize Gay people would be tried again. So we had to do it right, if possible. That's why we operated by unanimity and were very slow moving. We talked about the prospectus of the foundation, made our contacts with a fighting lawyer, who had defended one of us in court on a Gay charge, applied for a preliminary charter for a nonprofit corporation, and began (as of late November 1950) to have our discussion groups.

J.K.: Did any women come to the early meetings?

H.H.: The meetings were mostly male. A few women came and protested that they were not included, and after that more women came.

J.K.: What about the "two mothers" and a "sister" I've read were involved in the original Mattachine?

H.H.: When my wife decided that we had to go through a divorce because of my activity in the new society — which she felt was inimical as far as the children were concerned — I told my mother about it. About then we were beginning to think in terms of a foundation, and I asked my mother, "Would you act as one of the directors?" She said, "Yes."

J.K.: What kind of a woman was your mother that in the early 1950s she would be that positive about Gays?

H.H.: She wasn't. That wasn't the point at all. She was a very well-developed Edwardian lady, and anything that her older son did was bound to be good. I don't think the sexual part of it ever

crossed her mind. Homosexuality meant that I was in love with men, not with women. She had nothing more than an understanding of "homophile" — don't you see? The sex part of it never occurred to her. When she met the men and women of our original organizing committee, they were all very sweet, nice people; as far as she was concerned, that was it.

J.K.: Who was the Romaine Cox reportedly associated with the original Mattachine?

H.H.: "X" was number two. Bob Hull, Chuck Rowland, and Dale Jennings were three, four, and five. Then came Konrad Stevens and James Gruber, a couple. Stevens's sister was named Romaine Cox. And Stevens's mother was named Mrs. D.T. Campbell, Helen Campbell — they're the women you asked about. Stevens's mother knew he was Gay, and knew about his partnership with Jim. Stevens's sister thought they were both fine people, and he had a good relationship with her children. So their support was natural.

J.K.: What kind of role did these women play in the organization?

H.H.: I think both Helen Campbell and Romaine attended a couple of discussion groups; one discussion was held at their house. It was kind of constrained as far as the fellows were concerned, but it passed off OK. The address of the foundation was my mother's home. She was at all the foundation meetings, but she never attended a discussion group. All the guys loved her; she was a sweet, warm sort of lady of the manor; she had that presence, which made the Mattachine people feel that they were something fine, special.

In the spring of 1952, Dale Jennings, one of the original Mattachine members, was arrested by the Los Angeles vice squad on the charge of soliciting an officer to commit a homosexual act. Jennings denied the charge, but, as he later said, "Even if I had done all the things which the prosecution claimed... I would have been guilty of no unusual act, only an illegal one in this society." The Mattachine Foundation took over Jennings's defense; Jennings publicly admitted his homosexuality but claimed himself innocent of the specific charges. The Mattachine Society of Los Angeles Citizens' Committee to Outlaw Entrapment issued leaflets, one headed "Now is the Time to Fight," and another "Anonymous Call to Arms," proclaiming:

Now Is the Time to Reveal... the Full Threat to the Entire Community of the Special Police Brutality Against the Homosexual Minority.

"THE ISSUE," said the committee, "IS CIVIL RIGHTS." The public was invited to be present when the case of *Los Angeles versus William Dale Jennings* was called to trial on May 19, 1952. A 2¼-page, single-spaced letter to media representatives invited their attendance. Hay recalls that not one of them came.

In *ONE Magazine*, soon after the event, Jennings described his hearing:

"The trial was a surprise. The attorney, engaged by the Mattachine Foundation, made a brilliant opening statement to the jury....

"His client was admittedly homosexual, the lawyer said, but the only true pervert in the court room was the arresting officer. He asked... that the jury feel no prejudice merely because I'd been arrested; these two officers weren't necessarily guilty of the charges of beating another prisoner merely because they were so accused; it would take a trial to do that and theirs was coming the next day. The jury

deliberated for forty hours and asked to be dismissed when one of their number said he'd hold out for guilty till hell froze over. The rest voted straight acquittal. Later, the city moved for dismissal of the case and it was granted....

"Actually I have had very little to do with this victory. Yes, I gave my name and publicly declared myself to be a homosexual, but the moment I was arrested my name was no longer "good" and this incident will stand on record for all to see for the rest of my life. In a situation where to be accused is to be guilty, a person's good name is worthless and meaningless. Further, without the interest of the Citizens' Committee to Outlaw Entrapment and their support which gathered funds from all over the country, I would have been forced to resort to the mild enthusiasm of the Public Defender. Chances are I'd have been found guilty and now be either still gathering funds to pay the fine or writing this in jail.

"Yet I am not abjectly grateful. All of the hundreds who helped push this case to a successful conclusion, were not interested in me personally. They were being intelligently practical and helping establish a precedent that will perhaps help themselves if the time comes. In this sense, a bond of brotherhood is not mere blind generosity. It is unification for self-protection. Were all homosexuals and bisexuals to unite militantly, unjust laws and corruption would crumble in short order and we, as a nation, could go on to meet the really important problems which face us. Were heterosexuals to realize that these violations of our rights threaten theirs equally, a vast reform might even come within our lifetime. This is no more a dream than trying to win a case after admitting homosexuality."

In July 1952, the Citizens' Committee to Outlaw Entrapment issued a leaflet headed:

Victory!

"You didn't see it in the papers, but it... did happen in L.A." For the "first time in California history an admitted homosexual was freed on a vag-lewd [vagrancy-lewdness] charge." The victory was "the result of organized work," the contributions of time, effort and money by "people who believe in justice for... the homosexual." The victory publicized and brought new recruits into the Mattachine Society.

Rumors of "subversive" Communist influence among the Mattachine leadership were already circulating. George Shibley, the lawyer who had won Dale Jennings's case, was said to have left-wing connections (he was later called before the House Un-American Activities Committee). Henry Hay reports that he himself was "fingered and quoted as a prominent Marxist teacher" when a Congressional committee investigated Communist activity in Los Angeles in March 1952. In February 1952, a Mattachine "Official Statement of Policy on Political Questions..." emphasized that the organization took no stand on political matters, except those related to "sexual deviation." The group "has never been, is not now, and must never be identified with any 'ism'."

In the fall of 1952, Mattachine questionnaires were sent to candidates in the upcoming Los Angeles City election. Board of Education candidates were asked if they supported "a non-partisan psycho-medical presentation of homosexuality" in required senior high school hygiene courses. They were also asked if they favored a guidance program for young people beginning "to manifest subconscious aspects of social variance." Finally, candidates were asked if they favored high-school counselors' being trained to guide "young people manifesting such problems." The questionnaire sent to city council candidates asked their positions

on Los Angeles vice squad behavior and on entrapment.

On March 12, 1953, Paul Coates, a columnist for the *Los Angeles Mirror*, reported that "a strange new pressure group" claiming "to represent the homosexual voters of Los Angeles is vigorously shopping for campaign promises." Coates mentioned that the Mattachine articles of incorporation were drawn up by an attorney named Fred M. Snider, who was an unfriendly witness at the Un-American Activities Committee hearings. Snider is the legal adviser for Mattachine, Inc.

Coates's column ends: "It is not inconceivable" that homosexuals, "scorned" by the community," might band together for their own protection. Eventually they might swing tremendous political power.

"A well-trained subversive could move in and forge that power into a dangerous political weapon.

"To damn this organization, before its aims and directions are more clearly established, would be vicious and irresponsible.

"Maybe the people who founded it are sincere.

"It will be interesting to see."

Henry Hay reports the Mattachine reaction to the Coates column.

H.H.: We all thought it was pretty good, and so we ran off twenty thousand copies to send out to our mailing list and to be distributed city- and statewide. Wow! *Whammo!* We'd forgotten what the detail about Fred Snider's being unfriendly to the House Un-American Activities Committee would do to the middle-class Gays in Mattachine. We had been getting in this status-quo crowd; the discussion groups had been growing by leaps and bounds. When

Paul Coates's article appeared, all the status-quo types in the discussion groups were *up in arms*; they had to get control of that damn Mattachine Foundation, which was tarnishing their image, giving them a bad name. This is when the real dissension began between the founders and the middle-class crowd.

J.K.: Can you describe the history of the 1953 split between the Mattachine founders and their opponents?

H.H.: What the opposition wanted was an open, democratic organization. In order to be such an organization, all the idealism that we held while we were a private organization would have to go. In 1953, Joe McCarthy was still around, and we would have to become respectable. "All we want to do is to have a little law changed, and otherwise we are exactly the same as everybody else, except in bed." That position — "we're exactly the same" — characterized the whole Mattachine Society from 1953 to 1969.

In 1953 we had a convention. It was to meet at the little First Universalist Church at Ninth and Crenshaw in Los Angeles. The minister, Wallace Maxey, was on the foundation's board. On the second weekend in April 1953, on April 11, the convention was called — and five hundred people showed up. Now, mind you, this was 1953, and five hundred Gay people show up in one place, as representatives of Gay organizations, each delegate presumably representing up to ten people. Can you imagine what that was like? This is the first time it's ever happened in the history of the United States. There we were, and you looked up and all of a

sudden the room became vast — well, you know, *was there anybody in Los Angeles who wasn't Gay?* We'd never seen so many people. And in each other's presence you can't shut 'em up. This isn't the period when you hugged much yet — but nevertheless there was an awful lot of hugging going on during those two days.

That Saturday, April 11, 1953, Hay addressed the convention. His speech was published the following month in *ONE Magazine*, anonymously, under the title, "Are You Now or Have You Ever Been a Homosexual?" It was designed to answer charges of Communist influence over the Mattachine Society. In this long, wide-ranging talk Hay reiterates that the Mattachine Foundation "chooses to consider itself strictly non-partisan and non-political in its objective and in its operations." Its goal is to stir up debate about the place of homosexuals in American society:

"But in the very raising of the need for such debate, The Mattachine Foundation deliberately put itself squarely in opposition to a dominant section of the status quo, and elects to become a victim of the myriad implications and slanders derivative of that opposition."

Hay recalls the then recent homosexual purges of United States government agencies, based on the principle that the susceptibility of homosexuals to blackmail by a foreign power makes them security risks. "It is notable," says Hay, "that not one single political or pressure group among the liberals, let alone the left wing, lifted either voice or finger to protest the monstrous social and civil injustice and sweeping slander of this dictum. The complete hostility with which the [homosexual] Minority was surrounded by this indictment was a clear barometer of the outright antipathy unitedly maintained by every color of political opinion. It is significant to note that no alarm was raised

then...or since...and no purge directed, at married [male] heterosexuals with a weakness for bulging busts, blonde secretaries, or National Hop-Week Queens."

The government purges, and later those of state and private employers, had included not only those who were themselves allegedly homosexual, but also their friends, says Hays. As he points out, any group that "sets itself up as a vehicle by [which] the articulate homosexual minority can at least be heard...in effect sets itself up in opposition to a majority opinion held equally by the right wing, the liberals, and the left. The Foundation has known from the beginning that it could expect support *only* from those non-prejudiced people who could recognize the enormous potential of the Minority even in the face of the social struggle that would be required. It should be stated here that the left was the first political grouping to deny any social potential to the Minority by going on public record with the opinion that the perverts (note the term) were socially degenerate and to be avoided as one avoids the scum of the earth. The Foundation idea was conceived only when the Right, in the substance of the State Department actions, followed suit some ten years later."

Hay defends the refusal of the Mattachine's lawyer, Fred M. Snider, to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee, based on his Fifth Amendment right not to be forced to testify against himself. Hay continues:

"The Foundation, in a modest way, constitutes itself a guardian of the homosexual minority's right to keep its own counsel and social conscience. To do this, the Foundation must deliberately oppose the present status quo policy of our National Administration concerning homosexuals... In order to guarantee that it will be able to do this, the Foundation must keep itself clear as a body to be able to invoke

the safeguards of the 1st, 5th, 9th, and 10th amendments. . . .

"In taking such a stand as a body, and by simultaneously re-affirming its basic principle of aligning itself with, and participating in, *no* partisan political action whatsoever at any time, the Foundation is declaring that it hereby reserves the right to advance suggestions, to criticise, and to evaluate at any and at all times the status quo between the begrudging community majority and the contending coalition of the homosexual minority. . . . The Foundation is acutely aware that such a declared role invalidates it completely as a fountain-head of leadership. But, in truth, it must be recorded that the Foundation never conceived of its contribution as more than that of a modest fountain-head of inspiration and encouragement."

Hay closes by affirming the Mattachine leaders' determination to protect the anonymity of members by refusing to testify before governmental investigating agencies — even if this refusal should lose the Mattachine the support of prominent professional people. "It would be pleasant," Hay continues, "If the social and legal recommendations of the foundation could be found impeccable both to the tastes of the most conservative community as well as to the best interests of the homosexual community. But since there must be a choice. . . the securities and protections of the homosexual minorities must come first."

On Sunday, the second day of the Mattachine convention, Hay recalls,

about ten o'clock in the morning, the other members of the original board showed up at my house. Bob Hull reported that a congressional investigating committee was coming out West to look into nonprofit foundations

which were feeding the left, part of the whole Red-baiting campaign. We realized that we couldn't bear investigation. We original Mattachine founders and our lawyer would all show up as either having been "fellow travelers" or actual Communist party members. None of us were party members any longer, but some had been. We couldn't answer that "Have you ever been?" question without taking the Fifth Amendment against self-incrimination. Bob Hull said to me, "Look, we can't hold this thing. That speech you made yesterday, that was a disaster." The middle-class groups were all for pulling out, the whole society seemed to be falling apart — it looked like the *Titanic* going down.

At that moment I suddenly realized for the first time that *we weren't unanimous any more*. Our original dream was gone. I thought, "We'll have to dissolve anyway, because of this investigating committee. What we'll do is I'll make an announcement to the convention that the original board has decided to dissolve itself — and we will give the convention the Mattachine name." They were already having committee meetings to find new names. So at the convention that afternoon I made the announcement that the foundation, for reasons important to itself, had decided to dissolve.

J.K.: You decided to pull out because of the Red-baiting, because of the investigation coming up?

H.H.: That was one reason. Also, several of the guys on the steering committee were saying, "The convention's running in this direction, and we have to

run with it.” They were being opportunistic. It was more important to them to run with the crowd than oppose it.

J.K.: Do you think you may have withdrawn at the wrong time, that you should have stayed and fought?

H.H.: I didn’t feel I had the forces to withstand the investigation, the Red-baiting. I was pretty sure we couldn’t — that we would go under.

J.K.: What were the basic ideological differences between the original Mattachine and the group after 1953?

H.H.: The original society was based upon this feeling of idealism, a great transcendent dream of what being Gay was all about. I had proposed from the very beginning that it would be Mattachine’s job to find out who we Gays were (and had been over the millennia) and what we were for, and, on such bases, to find ways to make our contributions to our parent hetero society. It would be upon such contributions that we would renegotiate the relationships of Gays to the hetero majority. But such bargaining was always to be between Gays and straights as *groups*, never as individual Gays making deals behind the scenes. The Mattachine after 1953 was primarily concerned with legal change, with being seen as respectable — rather than self-respecting. They wanted to be dignified by professional “authorities” and prestigious people, rather than by the more compelling dignity of group worth.

The meeting that ended Henry Hay’s principal involvement in the emancipation organization he had conceived and founded was a major event at the start of Jim Kepner’s long activity in the homosexual movement. Although just

one of those involved in homosexual emancipation, Kepner is mentioned here to emphasize the continuity within this movement — that an ending for one man was a beginning for another. Kepner’s account, in a letter to the present author, of the 1953 Mattachine convention differs somewhat from Hay’s; the exact details and implications of this historic turning point in the American Gay Liberation movement will no doubt be modified and amplified by others who were present, and by future researchers. Jim Kepner sums up his recollections of the Mattachine convention of 1953:

“Starting with boundless optimism, we bogged down hopelessly in organizational details. The antagonisms between the conservatives and the founders were bubbling to the fore. Still, I don’t think the optimism was quite shattered. In spite of the loss of a good many people, the needless and endless fights on constitutional amendments, the whole thing remained an exhilarating experience. At least those of us who knew that new organizations are not easy to build from the ground up retained the feeling that we at last had a viable homophile movement that was organized, however badly, and that we were on our way. That was really big news, setbacks notwithstanding, and we were determined to make good on the setbacks.”

JONATHAN KATZ is the author of Gay American History, in which this interview first appeared. He is a member of the Gay Activist Alliance and a founding member of the Gay Academic Union. He is the author of Resistance at Christiana (1974), a documentary account of a major fugitive slave rebellion.

POEMS

Peter Oresick

Family Portrait 1933

In the center my grandfather sits
a patriarch, a boy on his knee
and progeny surrounding. His face says
this is my contribution, but the lips wanting
reassurance. My grandmother is a trunk
of a woman three children wide,
her face stern and unfathomable.

While they are stiff and attentive,
I would like to speak.
Father, I'd say, you are twenty
now, but will lease your body out
to machines like the man did
on whose shoulder you rest your hand.
And after forty years you'll say
"I'm just an old man smoking cigarettes
in the cellar, fixing radios."
Uncles, aunts, I cannot keep track
of you. Live.
Grandfather, grandmother, don't worry.
I'll be born in twenty-two years
and grow strong and bury you.
Uncle Mike, old mole,
you will bury yourself
in the anthracite fields of Pennsylvania.
Please resume now. Come unfrozen,
quickly; do what you must do.

My Father

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

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

PETER ORESICK is a young Ukrainian-American whose poems come from his experience in growing up and working in Ford City, Pennsylvania. Ford City is dominated by the Pittsburgh Plate Glass plant; and these poems are reprinted from the author's book, The Story of Glass (West End Press, 1977).



A "mass rally" of 2000 local officials in Washington, D.C., April, 1977, as seen by Teamster Information Network, a publication of Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU). TIN is available from PO Box 3321, Madison, WI 53704.

DISSENT IN THE BROTHERHOOD

Organizing in the Teamsters Union

Matthew Rinaldi

“One UFW picket was killed and several were seriously injured as club-wielding members of the rival Teamsters Union attacked a U.F.W. picket line.”

“Five Teamster Local 626 officials were sentenced today for labor racketeering. Court testimony revealed that the Pronto Company, which has a Teamster contract, hires mostly illegal aliens, and was not required by the union to pay any benefits to its employees.”

“An official of Teamster Local 299 was convicted today of bribery, having accepted a free automobile while negotiating a new contract with auto retail outlets. The conviction came amid new violence as rival factions battled for control of the powerful Detroit local.”

Such stories have been regular fare in the American media for years. While on the one hand they help to reveal the widespread thuggery and corruption within the Teamsters Union, they also perpetuate the stereotypical image of the rank-and-file Teamster as a redneck mobster.

In actual fact, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) is a multi-racial cross-craft industrial union with 2.2 million working members. It is, however, ruled by a bureaucratic strata of over 20,000 full time paid officials. The average rank and file member is extremely cynical about the union and fearful of its leadership. The IBT members are also increasingly aware that in a time of economic offensive by the employers the ranks lack an effective organization committed to their interests.

The confidence of these attitudes has created fertile ground for the development of a left-led opposition within the IBT. The following is an account by a participant in this opposition work. It is not written to encourage any illusions about imminent change in the direction of the trade unions, for the obstacles to class consciousness and class action are immense. There are, however, new trends developing within the working class and it is again possible for revolutionaries to play an important and open role in rank and file organizations.

THE SHOP

The first day of work I stood at a table for eight hours and I ripped the covers off paperback books.

I had been hired by a distributor of magazines, newspapers, and books, and I was doing a routine return. Millions of mass market paperbacks are printed each year, and those which do not sell are "valueless" to both publisher and distributor. The covers are ripped off, sent to the publisher for a refund, and the books are then relegated to the garbage bins.¹

The warehouse was a relatively small shop. At the time there were eight warehousemen, six delivery drivers, three office workers, one manager, and one boss. The atmosphere was dusty, the work was endless, and the overlying feeling was just slightly on the edge of terror.

All the employees were male except for two of the office workers. Among the warehousemen there were three older workers (all anti-communist Chinese refugees) and five younger workers (all of us white). We shared assigned responsibilities and integrated our work with relatively little direct supervision. We received truckloads of printed goods, sorted and shelved them, pulled orders and prepared outgoing shipments. From publisher to distributor to retail outlet.

In our shop, instead of foremen or im-

mediate supervisors there was unpredictable direct intervention by the boss. We had a loudspeaker system which reached every corner of the warehouse, and which he used to issue orders and maintain control. If he simply broadcast your name you were required to report immediately to the front office, sometimes to be told to do a specific task, oftentimes to berated for errors real or imagined. He ruled by a very traditional method; the attitude was that greater fear among the employees created greater productivity.

My starting salary was \$2.50 an hour. As I got to know my fellow employees we slowly talked about our wages. It soon became evident that there was a distinct hierarchy. The drivers and the three older warehousemen were all making almost \$6.00 an hour; the five younger warehousemen, doing essentially the same work, were making \$3.25 an hour.

As I posed the question "why?" it became clear that none of us actually knew. The clearest understanding that anyone had was that the other workers were in "the union," and as we talked about it over lunch it became evident that the general notion was "you got into the union if the boss let you in." Had anyone gotten into the union recently? No, not in anyone's memory.

The warehouse was actually under a closed shop contract with the Teamsters Union. Somehow we were excluded. As the lunchtime raps continued I argued, first, that legally we should already be in the union, and second that we had the right to organize. Conditions were obviously ripe. The crew was not only harassed and underpaid, but we worked extremely hard and knew that something had to change. The most common method for creating change was simple: people quit. Turnover was very rapid. The individuals in the lunch circle changed every few months, and that made it difficult to cohere into a group. But it also meant that since

our jobs weren't highly valued we could more easily conceive of risking them in a struggle for unionization.

The energy for these raps remained fairly constant, partly because they served as an outlet for the frustration we experienced daily. When the group finally stabilized we talked seriously of approaching a union. It seemed out of the question to approach the Teamsters, given the attitude of our shop steward, so we approached another warehouse union.

This union put us in touch with an organizer who provided our key to victory. We now had secret meetings after work, leaving separately but gathering with the union organizer at a restaurant blocks away. He researched the situation and concluded that a deal had been made years ago when the shop had first been unionized. The IBT had apparently agreed to allow new-hires to be non-union in exchange for some gratuity. After a few discussions we decided to sign white cards for the other union, thus declaring our desire to have it as our collective bargaining agent, and most importantly giving us a measure of legal protection under the NLRA.

In organizing situations the first requirement is that over fifty per cent of the employees sign white union authorization cards. You are not protected from arbitrary dismissal until the NLRB receives these cards. Security was obviously essential at this stage. In due time the union organizer appeared at the warehouse and presented his identification card to the boss. The boss handed the card back with the comment, "I don't need to talk to you, I already have a union here." The organizer responded by presenting our white cards, showing there were non-union workers in the shop. The boss began to reply, "Yes, but I have an arrangement with..." at which point the organizer interjected that discretion might be prudent at the moment since there was a clear violation of

the law involved. Apparently, "the boss almost swallowed his teeth."

Next morning there was a huddle between the owner, the manager, and the secretary-treasurer of IBT Local 12. They apparently decided to cover themselves by accepting our strength and complying with the contract. The Teamster official called us together in the back of the warehouse, declared lamely that "we didn't know you guys were here," and handed out membership cards. We were in.

Our wages more than doubled; current scale is \$6.44 an hour. We now had sick pay, vacation schedules, health and welfare benefits, and some measure of job security. We had clearly and profoundly changed our financial conditions.

Yet for all of us the victory had a bitter taste. The energy for our organizing drive had come from a whole range of dissatisfactions and angers, but given the limits of trade unionism money was the one winable demand. After being signed up into the IBT we were called before the boss, who vented his anger on us with a stinging harangue. We returned to work with the clear understanding that the daily pressure on the job would not change, that the "prerogatives of management" were to be untouched. And through our struggle we had become Teamsters, a personal identification that was slightly onerous to each of us.

Nevertheless, we were to find that the union and the contract were our primary "legal" protectors, and that our only real strength was to be our continued collective unity. Each succeeding struggle in the warehouse has been waged simply to require enforcement of the contract. We found that we now had the facade of union protection, and that we had to be constantly alert to ensure that our newly won "rights" were respected.

Let me offer two examples. Within seven months of our entry into the IBT two of us got

sick and both missed two days of work. The contract stated that you were covered by sick leave after one year on the job, which we both had. The company refused sick leave on the grounds that we hadn't been in the union for a year. But, we complained, the only reason we weren't in the union was because we were illegally excluded. The shop steward shrugged his shoulders. Again, we talked at lunch, decided to circumvent the steward, and directly protested to the union business agent. We received trade union justice and the wages were paid.

In a second case we had to confront the hiring of a new non-union warehouseman and the shifting of one union job to "clerical" status. A woman was then hired to do this formerly union work at half union pay. Now we met again after work, with the woman involved, talked about the risks, and decided as a first step to demand intervention by the union. But again, the union made a deal allowing the new warehouseman to be unionized, thus enforcing the closed shop, but continuing the women's "clerical" status.

We met the same union official in the back of the warehouse and argued. "What does the woman get?" we insisted. The reply was, "She gets shit." Our group met again and talked of another level of struggle, but the woman involved decided to cool things. The economic crunch was on, and she didn't want to risk losing her job. Financial insecurity prevented us from fighting this clear example of continued discrimination against women.

Two aspects of the union became clear. On certain trade union issues it could be our ally against the constant pressures of the company. But it had a dual character. If we were to struggle against sexism or broader questions of company policy the bureaucracy would no longer be our ally. We would have to struggle against both the company and the union leadership.

In the course of these events I was elected shop steward. In Local 12 all shop stewards were *appointed* unless the workers collectively requested an election. I ran with the clear message that I would use the position to aid opposition work in the union. While no one else in the warehouse wanted to become directly involved in political work against the IBT bureaucracy, a majority wanted to give passive support to that effort.

So it stands in the warehouse, and in many corners of the Teamster empire. There is the potential for motion, and a general attitude of antagonism toward the leadership. The next phase of the saga involves the development of union-wide dissident activity.

A necessary prelude to a discussion of this activity is a brief perspective on the nature of trade unions in capitalist society. It is important to acknowledge that trade unions are an intricate and complex part of the social structure. Nevertheless, one basic element must be emphasized. Trade unions are the clearest, most significant organizations of the working class in industrial society. They embody the self-organization of the class and reveal its spontaneous resistance to workplace oppression. As capitalist society has evolved the bureaucratic leadership of the trade unions has been incorporated into the managerial strata, at times even into the ruling class, and this has tremendously distorted the nature of the unions. But despite internal contradictions, they remain the main combative organizations of the class.

This dual character of the unions is perhaps inevitable in a non-revolutionary period. The very process of negotiating and hence enforcing contracts leads the bureaucracy to play a policing role among the membership; they become in C. Wright Mills's phrase "the managers of discontent." Even well-intentioned reformers must face these realities once they achieve union leadership, and such

leaders, lacking a revolutionary program, would regardless of personal intentions be forced to perform as functioning integrative bureaucrats. Our task, then, is not to advance a new layer of liberal bureaucrats, but rather to work on the shop floor and in the trade unions to build consciousness and organization of the class itself.

Such a perspective must, of course, start from current realities. To analyze the potential for such work and the current level of activity in the Teamsters it is necessary to first present a short overview of the union in question.

THE INTERNATIONAL BROTHERHOOD OF TEAMSTERS

The origins of the IBT date back to 1867, when the first local of "team drivers" was organized. In 1899 the A.F.L. chartered the Team Drivers International Union, which in 1903 became the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. In 1907 Dan Tobin was elected International President, a post he held until 1952.

It was Dan Tobin and his associates who guided the transformation of the IBT. Since the union could organize those workers involved in essential transportation, it soon found that its critical position at the heart of the movement of goods allowed it to branch into all sectors of the economy. It easily reached out to organize warehouses which received and shipped goods by Teamster drivers, and the union soon became the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Chauffeurs, Warehousemen and Helpers. Since virtually all industrial workers at some point handle goods which have been moved by Teamsters, the category of "helpers" becomes broad indeed, and has allowed the IBT the potential for great horizontal expansion.

The organizing wars and jurisdictional battles of the first part of the century invited the intervention of armed assistance. Both

unions and companies resorted to hired thugs when necessary. This led to various kinds of bonds with the mobsters themselves. In the case of the IBT, the early relationship with the mob grew dramatically. To some degree this was a side product of prohibition. Transportation of "goods" being a Teamster specialty, integration of union bureaucrats with the Mafia's supply lines was a natural development.

The mob was also interested in the IBT for the prospect of theft it offered. "Inventory shrinkage" is an accepted aspect of American business, but in the transportation and storage of goods lies the possibility of truly enormous pilferage. Again, there was a natural alliance of organized crime and the greed of bureaucrats on the make. This alliance became a marriage as interpenetration reached the pension monies and slush funds.

Yet the dual character of the IBT as both corrupt stratum and genuine trade union remained. In the thirties many sectors of the working class turned to the Teamsters for organizational help. This opportunity was welcomed by Trotskyist cadre in Minneapolis, who already had a base in the local IBT. While most local delivery drivers within Minneapolis were Teamsters, the Trotskyists initiated a drive to expand this organizing to over-the-road drivers and trucking related workers.

Led by Farrell Dobbs and the Dunne brothers, the drive was enormously successful. Truckers were firmly unionized, and work began among minority and women workers. The International was both enthused by this success and wary of the Trotskyists; they sent one James R. Hoffa, novitiate from Detroit, to oversee matters.

The process soon peaked. Dobbs and Hoffa collaborated on whirlwind, no-holds-barred organizing. The Minneapolis group pioneered the concept of area-wide class organization, establishing District Drivers Councils which

stimulated rank and file participation. But the cold hand of union repression and government intervention soon moved in. In 1940 Dobbs and the Dunne brothers went to federal prison for violation of the anti-communist Smith Act, and the IBT bureaucracy consolidated its hold on Minneapolis. Left influence in the local was broken. Though the forms thrown up in the tumultuous struggles remained intact, their content was changed, and they were integrated into the existing IBT structure. Dave Beck, Teamster leader in Seattle, created the Western Conference of Teamsters, and this simply absorbed the now-bureaucratized District Drivers Councils.

The thirties, forties, and early fifties represented a period of gradual growth for the IBT nationally. The Conference structure divided the nation into four distinct zones, and Joint Councils operated on an area-wide level. Thus all locals were at the bottom of a pyramid which led to the International President. Here all power ultimately rested.² When Tobin retired in 1952 his place was taken by Dave Beck, but it was really a new International Vice-President, Jimmy Hoffa, who was on his way up. By 1957 Hoffa had consolidated his hold on the national apparatus; he served as International President from 1958 until 1966, when he was jailed for jury tampering.

Any recent history of the IBT must cope with the incredible figure of Jimmy Hoffa. He began his working life as a "lumper" or dock loader in Detroit. He led a shop floor union battle which earned him a reputation for strength and the ability to use it. He rose in official circles, proved to be a tough and effective organizer, and gained the respect of the ranks. Though he became one of labor's most important national leaders, he never lost the attitude or bearing of the street-wise lumper from Detroit.

Under Hoffa's regime the IBT grew dramatically while maintaining and developing

its ties with the Mafia. New organizational drives were initiated, and membership climbed well over a million. Hoffa pioneered the concept of nationwide contracts, creating the first Master Freight Agreement in 1964.³ And he had the good fortune to head the union during a period of expanding U.S. imperialism and economic growth. The real wages of most workers were on the rise, and Hoffa's militant tactics secured large wage gains for most working Teamsters, particularly truckers. Everyone knew he was involved in shady dealings, but as one driver put it, "Jimmy got it for us, why shouldn't he get it for himself as well?"

But Hoffa's power was limited. Pursued by Bobby Kennedy for reasons both personal and political, Hoffa was finally caught in a net of federal charges and jailed. If tangling with Kennedy was Hoffa's greatest error, his self-admitted second greatest error "was choosing Frank Fitzsimmons as my successor."⁴

Fitz was presumed to be a not-too-bright underling who would easily return power to Hoffa upon his release. Power, however, is amazingly addictive. Fitz not only decided he liked his new privileges, but he managed to turn his inadequacies to his own advantage. Hoffa was the tough national leader who centralized power and kept tight control of all IBT activities. His vigilance and authority commanded respect, but also crimped the autonomy of other officials. Fitzsimmons avoided responsibility by easily delegating authority to his vice-presidents and the leaders of regional Conferences and craft divisions. Though Hoffa remained a hero to the ranks, Fitzsimmons became the ally of the top layer of the bureaucracy.

The early seventies brought tremendous change to the IBT. One major development was that the bureaucracy made a firm alliance with the Nixon wing of the ruling class. When other labor bureaucrats walked off the Wage Price

Control Board, Fitzsimmons remained. And there were certain interconnections with the mob, which was by now draining large sums of money out of the pension funds. Some well-intentioned souls in the Justice Department were pursuing an investigation of Mafia-IBT relations, but Nixon easily quashed the probe. It was hardly a gratuitous act. In return he asked a favor for his friends, the California growers. Perhaps the IBT could organize some field workers? This created the infamous UFW-IBT duel.⁵

Another major development was Nixon's "pardon" of Hoffa. Hoffa was still part of the inner circle, and it was only natural for the IBT to seek some level of immunity for its leadership. Hence freeing Hoffa was seen as a precedent for future government-IBT relations. But those responsible for the pardon were careful enough to ensure a clause which prohibited Hoffa from engaging in "union activities" until 1980.

James Riddle Hoffa had other ideas. A born fighter, he had come to assume a somewhat unrealistic view of his omnipotence. He lost little time in launching a campaign against Fitzsimmons. His reputation as a fighter remained strong among the ranks, particularly among truckers, and many looked to him as a figure who could stem the decay of the union. But structural power rests right now with the bureaucracy. A national convention elects the top leadership, but under the current procedures virtually all the delegates are drawn from among the more than 20,000 full-time officials in the IBT, who thus constitute the true battleground for any struggles in the ruling circles.

Here Hoffa had some real strength, and he set out to woo the old guard of the IBT. While Fitzsimmons maintained the support of most regional leaders, Hoffa could count on support from numerous local leaders and middle level

bureaucrats. In June of 1975 he came to San Francisco for the "non-political" purpose of being the keynote speaker at the retirement dinner of one Mervyn Dymally. He came with the blessings of Jack Goldberger, head of the Bay Area's Joint Council 7 and a powerful old Hoffa man. Over one thousand Teamsters, both official and ranks, paid \$25 a ticket to hear the returning warrior.

We were not disappointed. Jimmy Hoffa's personal presence was electric, and his speaking style was nothing short of charismatic. He spoke unreservedly of his drive to regain leadership, and beyond predicting success assured the assembled members that he would return a "fighting spirit" to the IBT. He spoke of "the rich bosses against the working people" and "class struggle," and had a thousand Teamsters on their feet cheering. It was trade union militancy in the service of mobocracy.

One month later he was assassinated. Officially he "disappeared," and the case remains unsolved. But the day after his abduction it was hard to find a single Teamster who didn't already know that Hoffa was dead. After all, he had begun attacking Fitzsimmons for his connections with the Mafia, and was threatening further revelations. Only Hoffa's ego prevented him from seeing plainly that he was going too far. "He was spilling the beans," commented one driver. "What could he expect?"

Indeed.

Hoffa's killing swiftly altered the balance of forces within the IBT. West coast officials who in June had openly proclaimed themselves "Hoffa men" by July seemed to have forgotten the man's name. More significantly, the symbol of salvation from above was gone.

Discontent over wages and conditions was growing within the Teamsters. Until 1975 various pockets of resistance existed, but much disillusionment was channelled into fantasies

about Hoffa. This was no longer possible. The ranks were on the move, and the assassins had ironically removed the one bureaucrat who might have "managed" that discontent.

ENTER THE LEFT

The upsurge of the sixties created a new generation of revolutionaries in the U.S. As the movement declined most people drifted out of politics. But simultaneously a few thousand dedicated radicals swelled the ranks of the various socialist organizations, a few thousand continued independent activity, and a sizeable percentage of both categories industrialized themselves. With little publicity these leftists entered the work force and began efforts to build socialist consciousness within the class.

Much of this work was relatively fruitless. But of the efforts undertaken, one of the most productive was the decision made by the International Socialists to choose the IBT as a focus for the concentration of its forces.⁶ In the early seventies a number of its cadre entered the Teamsters, and this was paralleled by the entrance of other groups and independents on a smaller scale.

Simultaneously, indigenous oppositionists were initiating organizational efforts. The early seventies witnessed the rise and collapse of TURF, an acronym for Teamsters United Rank and File. TURF accurately exposed the corruption within the union and grew to national stature. But it lacked any cohesive program, had almost no leftists in its leadership, and soon became a vehicle for the personal advancement of local out-bureaucrats. Under these handicaps it experienced financial misappropriation, thuggery, bitter factional splits, and eventual disintegration. At this point there still exists a layer of militant Teamsters who worked in TURF and carry from it a real cynicism about opposition movements. Past errors leave scars.

But while TURF failed badly on the national level, a number of groupings put down roots in local areas. This can be illustrated by events in the San Francisco Bay Area. In 1971 a disgruntled trucker began a newspaper called *The Fifth Wheel*. The paper passed to a small group of Teamsters who continued somewhat regular publication. This group was strongly influenced by the I.S.

In the years that followed *The Fifth Wheel* published accounts of workplace problems and local union struggles. It supported and at times worked with small spontaneous insurgencies within the numerous Bay Area IBT locals. A number of seeds were growing. Organizing began among cannery workers, and a militant shop stewards council was built in Local 853. New hiring policy was slowly increasing the number of women working at U.P.S.; as a new woman walked in one morning another commented, "Well, six women! It's about time we had a meeting." And a women's group cohered at U.P.S.

This period also witnessed the important struggle of Local 888. This beer drivers' local was excessively corrupt and Jack Goldberger, the aforementioned Hoffa loyalist, placed it in receivership. He ousted the existing officials and handpicked two ruling trustees. At this same time Adolf Coors Company was actively trying to rid its distributing centers of the IBT, and a strike developed.

A number of rank and filers had been building a militant struggle against the Coors maneuver. The Goldberger men aided and expanded this effort. The Coors boycott was born, and Local 888 launched an impressive effort. It worked with Chicano groups, who were fighting against Coors's racist hiring policies, it gave and received aid from the U.F.W., and it worked with the Bay Area Gay Liberation, which successfully removed Coors from virtually all gay bars in San Francisco.

Teamster solidarity with other struggling groups was exceptional at this point. Too exceptional. Fitzsimmons moved in, ousted the Goldberger men, and appointed his own trustees. The Coors boycott was squelched and all local meetings were cancelled. But the preceding struggle had built a real spirit among the beer drivers, and they began to call meetings of Local 888 on their own, independent of the trustees. This could not be tolerated. Fitzsimmons moved in again, officially terminated Local 888, and dispersed its dismembered parts among five other Bay Area locals.

But if this was a period of seeds growing, it was also a period of cross-pollination. Beer drivers who had been particularly active remained in touch, small groups meeting in the new locals. And as one group of drivers went to their first meeting at Local 278, they encountered the women's group from U.P.S.

New unity.

Put concretely, this period represents a time when the proletarianization of a layer of radicals was intersecting with a developing spontaneous movement within the class. This is an essential prerequisite for the development of any conscious political movement in the class. The subjective conditions were there as the objective conditions began to change.

And change they have. The developing economic crisis brought with it not only underemployment and a drop in real wages, but also a widespread anti-union offensive by many companies., U.P.S. is a notorious example, with its ever-tightening time rules and its constant replacement of full-time union workers with part-time casuals. Similar examples abound, such as Loomis Courier Service in San Francisco, which is sub-contracting its delivery work to non-union firms and laying off union drivers. Such experiences are forcing many workers to turn to the union for help, but the

union is ossified, and a new generation of workers is being forced to re-learn the trade union militancy of past generations.

A word of caution, however. As we chronicle the continuing growth of dissent in the IBT, the limitations and problems in such work must be kept in mind. First, most working people are extremely alienated from both their jobs and their union, and they want to escape these realities as quickly as possible. "Real life" for most people is the time spent off the job. Second, everyone is afraid of losing their livelihood. This fear of unemployment is expressed in the attitude, "Look, you'll never change anything anyway, and you'll just wind up losing your job." It is only under the pressure of larger events that these fears and alienations can be transcended. As that pressure slowly grows, it is only the more dedicated who will give the time and energy required for dissident organizing.

In addition, the undemocratic internal structure of the IBT makes opposition work extremely difficult. All Teamsters who step forward at this point risk their jobs and their union status. If they are successful they risk seeing their leaders removed and their locals dismantled. And the street wisdom is that if "they" can disappear Jimmy Hoffa, "they" can certainly disappear you.

It is within such a framework that the following events must be viewed.

THE ORIGINS OF T.D.U.

Events in the Bay Area had been paralleled elsewhere. Other papers existed, such as *Teamster Network* and *Seattle Semi*. And other local insurgencies had developed. Local 695 in Madison elected a militant leadership which opposed the war in Vietnam and allied with local radicals in its organizing drives. Fitzsimmons put it, too, in trusteeship.

But it wasn't until 1975-76 that these groups began to unify. The contract battles of 1976

proved to be the turning point. The national Master Freight Agreement, regional U.P.S. contracts, and local Master Warehouse Agreements were all due to expire. Beginning in late 1975 various dissident groups, with the I.S. as the spine, coalesced into two national contract organizations, Teamsters for a Decent Contract (TDC) and UPSurge. Both tapped deep reserves of anger among working Teamsters and both quickly expanded to fill the vacuum in opposition leadership.

TDC bears specific discussion. It was formed with militant trade union politics; the leading socialists in it struggled explicitly to exclude left politics which might alienate the ranks. An example of this approach is revealed in the following I.S. statement:

A shorter work week would make things easier on us all. It would give us all more leisure to spend with our friends and family, to relax, to study, for whatever we wish. It would create more jobs. At this time many Teamsters are not convinced of the necessity and practicality of this idea. For that reason we who organized the Teamsters for a Decent Contract did not include it in our demands.⁷

This method did allow TDC to become larger more quickly. It held meetings which attracted hundreds of IBT members; it called a conference of Teamsters in Burlingame which drew over 400 rank and filers, and it built such massive energy that it undeniably contributed to the International's decision to call a three day national strike. And when the bureaucracy began to order drivers back to work Detroit TDC was able to initiate a two day wildcat.

But the minimal demands created limits to the effect of this work. TDC might move some workers into motion, but it did little to develop consciousness. It did no work around the question of the U.F.W., and it broached no demands which might raise questions of class

politics.

At this juncture the I.S. made a curious error. Although TDC had done virtually no groundwork for left politics, I.S. moved with almost no transition to make public the role of socialists in TDC.⁸ The quantum leap scared people. At the Burlingame rally the editor of *The Fifth Wheel* was booed when he described himself as a socialist, and some rank and filers attacked sellers of left-wing papers. In Local 70 in Oakland issues of the I.S. paper *Workers Power* detailing the I.S. role in TDC were used to red-bait shop floor militants. Given the lack of a politically conscious base, this attack was extremely effective, though nationally both TDC and UPSurge remained strong.

The contract work done by TDC and UPSurge didn't develop ongoing structures, but it did create a network and a sense of motion within the union. After the contract battles were over the networks joined to call for a national rank and file convention. In September of 1976 over 250 Teamsters from throughout the country met in Ohio and created TDU — Teamsters for a Democratic Union.

TDU AND BAY AREA ACTIVITIES

The politics embodied in TDU are similar to those espoused in TDC. The aim is to rekindle militant trade unionism within the ranks, and the official goal is "to bring the Teamsters Union back to the membership."⁹ The organization is continuing to grow through 1977 and local activities are developing on a variety of levels.

But the political framework within TDU has changed. While the I.S. certainly maintains an important role, it does not control TDU nor does it have hegemony.¹⁰ In the context of party-class relations the I.S. has moved from being a fraction within the union having alliances with other small groups to being an integral part of a larger reform movement.

They do not seek to make TDU socialist, but TDU officially supports the right of socialists to be active in Teamster affairs. A recent editorial in *Convoy*, the national TDU paper, acknowledged the "presence" of socialists in TDU,¹¹ and the TDU constitution states, "Members shall at all times retain their individual right to speak out publicly as an individual in support of their own political beliefs."¹²

The opportunity now exists for a more transitional approach to developing socialist consciousness. The democratic structure of TDU allows for input from the ranks and from other socialist tendencies, an unusual and extremely healthy development within the trade union movement. The potential now exists for developing a groundwork of consciousness within which can be developed a class and socialist analysis.

In addition to raising transitional demands, it is also possible to develop transitional forms of struggle. In the Teamsters Union the fight for democracy is essential on the local level, but can obviously be easily crushed if efforts are made to actually take local control. At this phase in the IBT, the threat of trusteeship is ever present. But it is possible to circumvent this trap by developing indigenous rank and file organizational structures.

This can occur on many levels. In the workplace, employee groups can be formed to ensure election of shop stewards, maintain enforcement of the contract, and act as a unit within the local. At one warehouse in San Francisco the ballot box in a shop steward election was vandalized and the angry ranks selected a workers group to supervise a new election. Specific crafts are being organized cross-shop, as among the cannery workers and among drivers and warehousemen at U.P.S. And on the local level it is essential to create and maintain shop stewards councils. These

councils can function as the directly elected representatives of workers on the shop floor, and as such can begin to be an alternative pole to the leadership of the entrenched bureaucrats. This can create a form of dual power within the local which can allow for the stimulation of rank and file participation.

This is not meant to make a fetish of forms. We need to be clear that structures and organizational forms are a fluid reflection of struggle and emptied of consciousness can become rigidified and incorporated into the bureaucratic apparatus. This was the fate of the District Drivers Councils; it could become the fate of some shop stewards councils. But in this phase such a form allows us to stimulate militancy, and it points the way to the self-organization of the class.

The creation of national TDU obviously expanded the potential for organizing, and in the Bay Area it provided us with a tremendous energy boost. It helped to fuse the various groupings from different locals and workplaces into a cohesive whole. The structure of *The Fifth Wheel* was instrumental in this fusion, and the paper became the official organ of Northern California TDU.

In the first year of its existence Bay Area TDU has been involved in many levels of activity, as is apparently true of TDU chapters throughout the country. We hold monthly membership meetings, have an elected steering committee, and are active in over ten locals. *The Fifth Wheel* has a press run of 3,000 copies. Simply to maintain the organization and protect its militants requires constant work. A few developments are important to scrutinize.

In our area, in distinction to cities like Cleveland and Detroit, the backbone of TDU has not been truckers. Of the 2.2 million Teamsters about 450,000 are covered by the Master Freight Agreement, and perhaps another few

hundred thousand are drivers covered under other contracts. These drivers are certainly feeling the economic crunch and have been instrumental in TDU in major shipping centers. But vast numbers of Teamsters are warehousemen or lumpers, and hundreds of thousands are women and third world workers laboring under "sub-standard" contracts. These are independent contracts in which the IBT allows a substantial reduction in union scale and benefits. Bay Area TDU has drawn strength from all elements of the Teamsters Union.

One clear example is Montgomery Wards. This retail department store chain is under contract with the Teamsters. It is also partly owned by the IBT, which has large amounts invested in the chain. Predictably, the workers at Montgomery Wards have a substandard contract. For years there has been an active shop floor grouping, and rank and filers from Montgomery Wards were instrumental in creating the shop stewards council in Local 853.

TDU now has an active presence in the shop. The national contract is due for expiration and it has been possible to link Montgomery Ward employees in different cities together through the vehicle of TDU. In this way the existence of a national organization becomes invaluable for the development of local rank-and-file organization.

In addition, the stewards council remains active in Local 853, and a new one was recently formed in Local 278. Both councils have been active in developing greater workers participation in the locals, and at times have been forced to circumvent the official bureaucracies in order to initiate struggles against employer contract violations.

That the ranks are in turmoil should now be obvious. but the current opposition is small because of fear, apathy, alienation, for all the reasons that the working class remains divided,

for all the reasons that make most people simply disinterested in politics. Given the absence of a larger insurgent movement of the class as a whole, there can be no mass movement in the Teamsters. Its internal structure is too authoritarian, and its ties to organized crime and the ruling class too intimate, to allow an isolated left-led movement a realistic chance of gaining control of the union.

But "control of the union" is not a necessary step in the revolutionary process. Through a transitional program we need to build consciousness in the class and gradually create the possibility of transcending both trade union consciousness and trade union structures. We need to avoid both the easy growth that comes from a minimal program and the moral purity that comes from ultimatic calls for socialism. There exists the probability of prolonged struggle in the IBT, and all efforts must be made to link this struggle to other activities in the class in order to point the way toward common action on an industrial-wide basis.

The current situation is fluid, and there are no guarantees of success. But the framework exists for extensive organizing, and the ranks are in a state of disillusionment and disorientation. If parallel developments occur in the class as a whole and the political climate shifts, it may be possible for TDU to become a major force in the union.

FOOTNOTES

¹The books cannot be given away because of strict rules by the publishers, and they cannot be recycled under present methods because they are bound with glue. The books from our shop are used as land fill.

²For a thorough analysis of IBT internal structure, see *Teamster Democracy and Financial Responsibility*. Available from PROD, P.O. Box 69, Washington, D.C. 20044.

³There are problems, however. While the agreement sets national standards, each local or joint council negotiates "supplements" to the master contract. These supplements are increasingly undermining the national nature of the contract by allowing the creation of significantly different conditions in different locales.

⁴Jimmy Hoffa, *Hoffa: The Real Story*, Stein and Day, 1976.

⁵The passing of the Nixon era allowed the potential for the resolution of this duel.

⁶The I.S. also entered five other unions in this period. See *Tasks and Perspectives*, the convention document adopted by the I.S. in July, 1972.

⁷From *Conspiracy In The Trucking Industry*, published by the I.S., February, 1976, page 44.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 52

⁹TDU National Constitution, Article 2.

¹⁰In the early months of 1977 an organization called PROD, based in Washington, D.C., began attacking TDU for being "controlled" by socialists. PROD is a lobby group run by non-Teamsters but claiming dues-paying Teamster members. It is attempting to become a significant reform element in the IBT, and as such its red-baiting approach is particularly ominous.

¹¹*Convoy*, lead editorial, issue #13.

¹²TDU National Constitution, Article 13.

MATTHEW RINALDI is an active member of Teamsters for a Democratic Union. His article on "Military Organizing During the Vietnam Era" appeared in *Radical America* in 1974.



photo by Madelyn Katzman

LETTER FROM BRITAIN

David Widgery

Well, only a couple of months ago, the Left seemed in the doldrums. The resentful passivity engendered by the Social Contract (a wage-price agreement between labour unions and the government), now a Europe-wide conception, refused to disperse. Although it was clear that the annual union conferences were about to reject the Concrick, there was no action yet. The social service cuts ploughed on. The air was sticky with rhetoric and indignation, but we just weren't stopping them. The strike rate was going up, with important rank-and-file-led official actions by skilled workers in Welsh refineries and the London airport, but national strike action against the Social Contract called by Midlands car workers floundered. Unemployment refused to budge from the 1.5 million mark, about a million higher than the maximum politically tolerable level of only four years ago. You could feel the tension in the air but it refused to break. And in the meantime, we were being strangled in red, white and blue bunting and the simpering of Her Majesty during the Queen's 25th Jubilee. "London's burning with boredom now", sang The Clash and the new wave rock bands seemed the most alive thing around.

Now it's pandemonium. The main gay newspaper has just gone down for "blasphemy", a charge not heard in court for fifty years; a High Court judge has freed a convicted rapist so that he can continue his "promising" army career and feminists have been invading the law courts and spraying up the military statues; the fascist National Front, after their recent effort at respectability, have taken to daylight street attacks on black defense group meetings; and Johnny Rotten's republican ode "God Save the Queen (She Ain't No Human Being)" made Number One in the national singles charts while being completely banned from airplay and from sale in most retail outlets. And last week 18,000 of the cream of British rank-and-file labour movement descended on a seedy suburb of North London to stage the biggest

picket in British labour history outside a tiny film processing plant called Grunwicks. Such is the level of industrial tension that a tiny dispute over union recognition has transmogrified into a massive set-to which the Callaghan coalition and their allies in labour officialdom just can't find a way out of. They fear an explosion and give it a name. And the name is Grunwicks.

The dispute started in last year's sweltering summer. Grunwicks offers a postal developing service for holiday snaps and the pressure on its mainly female, largely Asian and West Indian production workers built up beyond bearing by the height of the summer season. Unions were banned and the factory owner who learnt his management techniques in Bombay and perfected them in Brazil had twice sacked people who even asked about one. Talking was forbidden too, wages low, overtime compulsory and conditions deliberately humiliating. When she was asked if she had "permission" to leave, five minutes after her shift had finished, Mrs. Jayaben Desai exploded into an angry speech and led yet another walk-out: "I told them the only answer to the treatment we were getting was to start a union", and she marched off to the local Citizens Advice Bureau to find out which one to join.

Suddenly they were outside the gate and on strike. Throughout last winter this handful of women, mainly Gujaratis from East Anglia (i.e., Indians who had been living in a region in the east of England), stuck at it, sustained by their own quiet determination, the white collar union APEX which had got itself rather reluctantly involved, and the informal networks of the rank-and-file labour movement. Grunwicks became a good cause on the Left. Its delegations were given standing ovations and collections but the industrial muscle to decide the dispute just wasn't forthcoming. Ward, the factory boss of the old-fashioned hard-nosed school, was getting direct backing from the local police, private security teams who periodically roughed up the pickets and National Association for Freedom (NAFF), the first successful attempt to group the right of the Tory Party with large business and police and army officers in a coherent and active organisation. Ward is a member of NAFF, whose leaders provide an industrial counter-insurgency advice

service to, among others, Margaret Thatcher, Tory leader. NAFF's solicitors had successfully forced the local postal workers to lift their ban on Grunwicks' mail deliveries and refused to cooperate with the Government's own trouble-shooting conciliation service, designed to save the face of employers in situations like this.

After ten months the strikers called for a solidarity mass picket this past June, trying to break out of the depressing impasse as much out of desperation as hope. They got about the 200 or so expected there at a cold 7:00 a.m. on the first day, mostly committed socialists. Then the police, who have throughout found it hard to conceal their partisanship, saved the day by wading into the line and arresting 84 people. The political balloon went up and since then it has been a strange time-warpy mixture of the 1968 battles at the height of Vietnam Solidarity movement and the 1972 miners' strike mixed into one. The line has swelled and the coppers have got more and more brutal. The postmen replied by re-imposing their ban, in defiance of the court and union brass, and have got locked out for it. The NAFF have taken to smuggling the mail out. Street fighting continued and Sir Keith Joseph, a central figure of any future Tory government, has told the world Grunwicks "representations make or break point for British democracy."

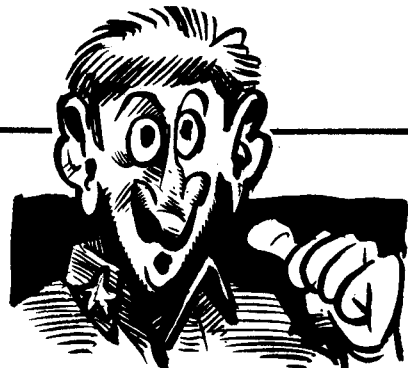
Finally, in response to the Yorkshire miners' call for national action, the 18,000 arrived on July 11. There were London and Liverpool dockers, the Midlands car-workers, the Scottish, Welsh and Yorkshire miners and thousands of others, all in compact formation grouped for business under their banners. No pussyfooting this time: the miners lead repeated successful charges on the police lines, turning the tables by snatching coppers who misbehaved with much singing of "Scargill walks on water" (Scargill — the Yorkshire secretary of the National Union of Miners), and the old rugby chant of "Easy, Easy, Easy." The slogan "The united people will never be defeated", which had sounded so feeble when sung by a couple of hundred to the back of the scabs' bus after it had been successfully driven through behind a police wedge, sounded a great deal more inspiring from the throats of thousands. The Special Patrol Group police, an elite crowd-bashing corps who specialise in mass arrests of black kids and who had

taken visible delight in bashing women and older men pickets earlier in the week, were a sight less brave that day; 18 police were injured. It has been called the Ascot of the Left and it is socially delightful in a socialist sense to see the sisters from "Lesbian Left" arm-in-arm with Kent National Union of Miners in the thick of the scrum, and the tenderness with which the Asian women, several now late in pregnancy, have received the burly male delegations. On Monday it was more like Eisenstein in Suburbia with the entire Special Patrol Group round the scab buses, led by mounted police and backed by over two thousand police faced up to the sea of union banners and 18,000 trade unionists. The only way to force a way through would have been a baton charge and dead demonstrators and it's not quite come to that.

At the time of writing (late July), the picket continues with APEX doing its best to restrict its size in view of the judicial inquiry in progress. But it's already clear why Keith Joseph is right to see this trial of strength as "a litmus test, perhaps a turning point in our political and constitutional life." The apparent calm of the last two years has concealed rather than solved the problems of British capitalism. Grunwicks, and there are hundreds of similar sweatshops, shows quite how feeble the labour legislation, the icing on the Social Contract cake, is, in the face of the new militancy and coordination of the bosses. At Grunwicks the revolutionary left, though still small if clear-sighted, has demonstrated that it can have a critical leverage in industry. And the larger labour movement has shown that its apparent docility conceals a deeper determination. The postal workers, eventually, defied the courts; the print workers stopped the Fleet Street presses in protest against the bosses' lies about Grunwicks; thousands found their way to North London at the crack of dawn and joined the picket; millions saw British bobbies not helping old ladies across the road but battering an opening for the scabs. At last British labour has gone on the line for a women's dispute and a black dispute rolled into one. And underneath it all, both sides know that Grunwicks is just a taste of what is to come with the next Tory government. That sooner or later one side or the other has to inflict a decisive victory.

All of a sudden it's not boring anymore.

*"Me Start a Vanguard Party to
Lead the Working Class to Revolution?
You Must Be Kidding!!"*



Over the past few years, Party Builders Associates has aided countless individuals and groups to form vanguard parties intelligently tailored to their own needs. These people are now leading creative, happy lives fighting one another. What we've done for others, we can do for you.

A few minutes spent in filling out the following questionnaire may be the best investment you will ever make. Your answers will enable Party Builders Associates, preserving strict confidentiality, to work out a party program that is JUST RIGHT for you and your friends. Our fee for this service is so minimal that you would laugh at us if we printed it in this ad. Just send us the most ridiculously small amount that you can think of, and we'll send your change when we send your new platform.

And now, here's the questionnaire. We advise using a pencil, since these are by no means easy questions, and your party will not be able to alter the positions taken here without seriously damaging your credibility among the workers.

1. The Russian Revolution turned away from socialism in:

- ☐ (a) 1917
- ☐ (b) 1927
- ☐ (c) 1953
- ☐ (d) 1957
- ☐ (e) It hasn't yet, but my group will be the first to denounce it when it does.
- ☐ (f) Other (please specify):

2. Black people are:

- ☐ (a) A nation
- ☐ (b) A nation of a new type
- ☐ (c) A superexploited sector of the working class
- ☐ (d) Petit-bourgeois
- ☐ (e) A colony
- ☐ (f) Please send me more information about this controversial group.

3. The main danger facing the workers' vanguard in the present epoch is:

- ☐ (a) right opportunism
- ☐ (b) "left" sectarianism
- ☐ (c) right opportunism masking as "left" sectarianism
- ☐ (d) my parents
- ☐ (e) Other (please specify):

4. Rather than focusing only on narrow economic issues, my party will also offer a cultural critique of life in advanced capitalist civilization. The following are symptoms of capitalist decadence:

- ☐ (a) homosexuality
- ☐ (b) Trotskyism
- ☐ (c) pornographic movies
- ☐ (d) recent price increases in pornographic movies
- ☐ (e) Other (please specify):

5. I would like to include the following in the title of my party:

- ☐ (a) Labor
- ☐ (b) Workers
- ☐ (c) Revolutionary
- ☐ (d) Socialist
- ☐ (e) Communist
- ☐ (f) Vanguard
- ☐ (g) Progressive
- ☐ (h) October (November)
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LETTERS

To the Editors:

I'm writing in response to Sam Walker's article, "Documentary Photography in America," published in *Radical America*, Vol. 11, No. 1. Although I agree with Mr. Walker's basic premise that documentary photography can and should be subject to a radical political-economic analysis, I think there are serious problems in his discussion which materially detract from the validity of his analysis.

In the first instance, Walker does not make clear the distinction between treating specific photographs as "documents" and the idea of a "documentary tradition" in photography. Individual photographs are often treated as documents insofar as they present the viewer with "information." A photograph, in this sense, is similar to a land deed, a social-security card or any other document. A photograph can present a viewer with deliberately falsified "information" just as a land-title can. Despite the fact that all photographs can be defined as documents, not all photographs are documentary.

Documentary photography implies a certain relationship between the photographer and his expected audience. More than any other kind of photographs, documentary images are purposefully manipulative in intent. The photographer seeks a specific response from the audience — anger or shame at a particular situation, joy or acceptance of another. In Lewis Hine's words, "I wanted to show the things that had to be changed; I wanted to show the things that had to be appreciated."

It is this failure to appreciate the intent of the photographer to influence the audience that perhaps accounts for the emphasis Walker places upon the production and distribution of documentary images and the corresponding lack of emphasis on their consumption.

Viewed from the perspective of production and distribution, documentary photographs are very much "bound up with the tradition of liberal reform," as Walker says. Of course Jacob Riis made his photographs and published his books to influence the liberal reform movement against tenement

housing, just as Lewis Hine documented child labor for the anti-child-labor lobby, and just as the Farm Security Administration photographers (Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, Ben Shahn and others) created images which would justify Roosevelt-administration programs. Having made this clear does not, as Walker assumes, forever doom the images to be mere artifacts of liberal political ideology. To do so is both to place an unwarranted burden on the photographs and to seriously underestimate the creativity of radical publicists.

Those political forces which have conditioned the production and part of the distribution of documentary photographs have never been able to restrict their use and extended distribution to groups of consumers other than those originally intended. It is true that Lewis Hine's images have been used in liberal reform efforts, but it is also true that they have been used by radicals as an organizing tool. Far from reinforcing "the passivity of the consumers themselves," as Walker opines, they have been used to stir consumers out of that passivity and toward action. To a liberal reformer, a Hine photograph of a small child at work in the breaker box of a coal mine may address the rapaciousness of particular capitalists or the need for a new law within the system. However, the very same photograph can be interpreted as a graphic example of systemic problems that only the overthrow of the system can alleviate. To assume, as Walker does, that a photograph can reflect only one of these analyses and not the other is to confuse a "document" with an "analysis." No photograph, no matter how eloquent, is in and of itself an analysis of the situation it portrays. At best, a documentary image is a piece of evidence, nothing more (the question of such images as works of art is not under discussion here).

It is only through crediting photographs with more power than they possess that Walker can maintain his basic argument. It is a circular argument which defines the meaning of the image forever in terms of "who foots the bill." In a curious way, the argument is a product of the very system it indicts. It accepts the premise of the industry that has produced and distributed documentary images and their contention that those photographs reflect only one reality. We know enough of the "psychology of vision" at this

point to understand that the reality of an image is in large part conditioned by the attitude of the viewer. How else can we account for the reaction of a general to a photograph of defoliation in Vietnam and the very different reactions of anti-war activists?

Walker's article contains a variety of factual errors as well as those errors of analysis described above. Documentary photography did not begin in the United States, nor was Jacob Riis the first such imagemaker. The discussion of the Farm Security Administration photography project is similarly incorrect in a number of specifics as well as its general tone. It is the errors of analysis that are most unfortunate. Despite these, Sam Walker has pointed to a potentially fruitful road of inquiry, even if he has not progressed very far down the path.

Stu Cohen

To the Editors:

We feel that much of Piven and Cloward's analysis of the fiscal crisis of the cities is correct, clearly expressed, and helpful to our understanding. However, we think they reach conclusions that are wrong and that are based on a dangerous approach to the problem. We will divide our criticisms into three parts: of the assumptions behind the strategy, of the tactics themselves, and of the underlying reformist outlook.

The main argument for the proposed strategy of disruptive chaos is that "in any case there are no other means for resistance." The basis of this argument is the powerless position of the urban poor. Despite being subjected to fluctuations in employment and "last hired, first laid off" kinds of discrimination, the urban poor, consisting in large part of women and Third World people, do work in large numbers. They are concentrated in clerical work and in the state and service sectors of the economy. These are seen by Piven and Cloward as not "significant enterprises". This assumption is based on a narrow class analysis that sees only industrial production workers as "significant".

The clerical, service and state sectors are growing quickly, both absolutely and relatively. Moreover, they are significant in terms of their revolutionary potential. Clerical workers play a key role in the accounting and transfer of capital. This sector is just now coming more and more under the domination of monopoly capital with its consequent socialization, rationalization, and atomization of work. Experience has shown that that is the time resistance is highest to capitalist organization. The service and state sectors, besides also being in similar transition, are areas where the services provided — health care, basic city services, etc. — are considered essential. Besides thus being in a strategic position, these industries generate more potential unity and ties between workers' struggles and community issues. This makes the question of who controls the "product" a more obvious one to raise. We see these areas, therefore, as places where socialist alternatives can be more easily raised. So, even though an individual worker in the service or state sector may not have as much relative economic power as an industrial worker, these are sectors where class struggle is clearly going on and where an organized force would have a lot of power in a potentially revolutionary direction.

The tactics the authors borrow from Italy are valuable models for an industrial society. Tactics, however, must relate to where people are at, and Italy has a mass working class movement with a consciousness that is not widespread here. In the '60's, "disruptive chaos" was already being used spontaneously in poor communities when Piven and Cloward called for tying it to specific demands. Today the poor are not in the streets — who is there to listen to the authors? If the suggested tactic is to be implemented, it requires prior organization.

We are in a period that calls for the consolidation and organization of the working class. It is only when the class is a much more coherent and conscious social force that we can confront the capitalists head on. Our reform struggles now must have an approach that sees uniting the class by breaking down the divisions within it and that sees raising socialism as an alternative as its primary objectives. We need to attack the material conditions that separate white and Third World people and men and

women. We must be organizing in the clerical, service, and state sectors of the economy, developing links between workplace and community groups and issues, raising socialism when we can, and organizing the unorganized in places like the South.

Finally and most importantly, tactics need to be developed within the context of a longer range strategy. The authors never once mention socialism. The lack of such a long term outlook is a *part* of the explanation why the gains won in the '60's have not lasted. Without a socialist outlook and subsequent analysis, organization, and strategy, the leadership and organizations of the '60's could more easily be either destroyed or bought off. We don't need merely a rerun of the '60's as the authors imply. We need a movement that will last and be able to hold onto its gains even when the economy is in a slump, and in fact to push forward. Such a movement will not develop out of the tactics proposed, even if they could be pulled off. These tactics of desperation come from a reformism that is blinded by its short term approach.

To conclude, we feel that there are alternatives. They must initially involve the consolidation of socialist and progressive working class people into organizations that are capable of developing a theory strategy, and forces for an explicitly socialist working class movement.

A group of Boston-area hospital workers.

To the Editors:

The absence of significant resistance from the working class and minorities to the New York City fiscal crisis stems in part from the failure of the left in the 1960's to bequeath a large national political organization whose purpose is to make the system of corporate capitalism the major issue in American politics and whose program will challenge the corporate ruling class on its own ground. The failure to build such an organization results, in part, from certain strategic illusions. People like Cloward and Piven believed that radical change could develop without this type of an ideological political force.

Others on the left advocated building a socialist organization that would develop outside trade union struggles, everyday activity of reform organizations and electoral battles.

Moreover, the left has failed to engage in activity within the framework of traditional neighborhood institutions like churches, libraries, parks, bars and even block clubs where anti-capitalist culture could flourish in non-revolutionary periods. Accompanying these mistakes has been the left's inability to develop standards or criteria for deciding whether specific reforms, strategies and tactics move us toward socialist organization and goals. I would like to elaborate on these points.

NEED FOR NATIONAL ORGANIZATION

Whatever strategy is urged for specific struggles it must also be connected to the building of a national organization with roots in diverse sections of the working class. The organizational aim ought to be the growth of a mass-based united movement that can challenge monopoly capitalism in its totality: its ideology, its institutions and its state — in the streets and in the electoral process.

A resistance strategy to the urban crisis must be tied to a larger vision of protracted struggle leading to a new system. Large-scale, democratic organization, though difficult to achieve, is necessary. If the response to the urban crisis demonstrated anything, it is the impotence of the organized left. The support of spontaneous struggles does not undermine bourgeois ideology. Only a broad-based socialist organization is capable of countering capitalist ideology. Yet we cannot build a national organization overnight. The conscious left is too small. Therefore local tactics and strategies to resist budget cuts in cities must also be geared to the building of a national organization. Because the type of socialist organization Shelterforce envisions is decentralized and anti-bureaucratic our strategy directs us toward the building of local popular-based organizations. We in Shelterforce focus on the tenants movement because (1) it's a potent resource that trains people to organize themselves to use their own power; (2) there are groups cutting across racial and class lines compelled by the conditions of their existence, spontaneously organizing themselves to struggle to solve

their housing problems; and (3) reforms needed to solve the housing problem necessarily expose other needed structural changes (in addition to the need to nationalize the housing industry).

Only by engaging in bread and butter issues like the lack of decent housing, tenants' rights and building popular organizations with people affected, can we build a larger organized democratic left.

LABOR UNIONS, REFORM GROUPS

Given the low level of mass activity, no organized left, few conscious leftists, the increased organization of the capitalist class and its ability to inflict financial burdens, the left must work within progressive reform groups. Radicals must lead or engage in these organizations to encourage people doing different work to discover common needs. So, even though organized labor may not provide a political vehicle for resistance, that doesn't mean we should write them off. Certain trade union leaders are more militant than others. Not all rank and filers in "elite" unions have been "bought off." Radicals should be working in those unions and trying to advocate direct action and to politically move union members to the left. Similarly, women's groups like NOW, reformist tenant organizations and Alinsky-type community organizations often have significantly working class membership, advocate anti-corporate and anti-capitalist solutions; the left cannot write off the people in these organizations.

STRATEGY AND TACTICS

Generally, our strategy is to demonstrate the inherent inability of the welfare state based on a capitalist economy and social structure to deal with problems that demand a socialist or democratic allocation of resources. This is a slow undramatic building process. But it is the only workable strategy for America.

If Americans are to become socialists, they will do so in the struggle to make life better and more appealing. In the course of struggling to make the welfare state respond to their immediate needs, like decent housing and fair treatment from landlords, socialists must play leading or influencing roles so people will go beyond the welfare state and seek "socialist" solutions.

What tactics will build a socialist organization? Tactics that do not change people's consciousness about equality and democracy should not be pursued. Events that do not alter people's hearts and minds will not transform society in any fundamental way. We must change people's attitudes — the way they see and feel about the government, private corporations and justice so that they come to believe more deeply in the values of equality and democracy.

Regarding future tactics we must ask: Does it dramatize the grievances of the poor in such a way that it emphasizes people's rights to basic necessities and more power? Does the demand put the blame on the class enemy? Does the strategy blame the victim or does it focus on class and racism — on the very structures of the society?

In Shelterforce, for example, we support anti-redlining struggles, but we also point out that banks seek profit and security for their loans and prefer to lend to large corporations and wealthy financiers. We suggest that red-lining is a logical practice for banks in the business to make a profit; we argue that high interest as well as red-lining is unfair. The real answer, we continue, is massive redistribution of income, full employment and government banks democratically controlled by the people. As community activists increase their militancy we will urge such tactics as defaulting on loans or withholding rent to fight bank control of neighborhoods.

Any viable movement for socialism must raise these larger issues and also arise out of the needs, aspirations and struggles of the working class. Tactics must be geared to aiding and stimulating working class organization. To the extent that it does this effectively it gains credibility among workers as well as respect for its total program and outlook. If it fails to do this it remains isolated from the working class and sterile as a revolutionary force.

CREDIBILITY OF RADICALS

But to be effective, activists can't organize from ivory tower universities, act as an elite vanguard or move from city to city as itinerant radicals looking for political action. Community organizers must establish their roots in the community where they live. They must struggle where people are and nurture traditional neighborhood institutions so that

they flourish as anti-establishment cultural centers.

We must be active in the community centers, library groups and PTA's. In my community, the tenant union meets in an "establishment" church. Shelterforce organizers help people in the nitty gritty problems, organizing tenant unions, teaching at the People's Law School, always trying to raise people's consciousness.

Although many in the community think we are "too radical," none of us are mistrusted, because we live in the same community, eat in the same restaurants, work in the same neighborhoods and party together.

We have been successful because as Staughton Lynd says, we have proven ourselves as "good neighbors, good citizens, and reliable leaders on smaller stages available to us."

The short run strategy suggested by Cloward and Pivin is myopic. Our primary task is to reorganize people in the city to win small victories and to build popular organizations and indigenous leadership. Not just to disrupt, but to build a more permanent democratic organization rooted in anti-capitalist struggles aimed at changing the state must be our current task.

John Atlas

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

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